

Games

Alison Luhrs

From set *Shadows Over Innistrad*

During the time of Avacyn's disappearance, two crazed and sinister siblings unleashed their greatest achievement. The necromancer Gisa raised a horde of undead ghouls, and her brother GERALF, an expert skaaberen, created a similar army of skaabs—shambling corpses stitched together from disparate body parts. Each hoping to outdo the other in their mad sibling rivalry, Gisa and GERALF besieged the city of Thraben with their zombie armies, sending wave after wave of unhallowed creatures at the holy city. Scores of civilians and cathars fell in Thraben's defense, and the head of the church of Avacyn—Lunarch Mikaeus—was killed in the assault before Thalia, Guardian of Thraben, drove the monsters back. Odrick, a champion of the church, captured Gisa and held her imprisoned in Rider's Lock. But the rivalry between Gisa and GERALF will not easily be put to rest.

Ludevic of Ulm,

I hope this letter reaches you safely—skaabs make better bodyguards than couriers, after all. I believe the last time we saw each other was years ago at one of my parents' parties. I have so many boring memories of being forced to joylessly play the harpsichord for the adults while my awful sister sang to impress the guests. How many dinners did I spend wishing I were seated with the greatest mages of our time rather than atop a creaky child-size music bench! You always held such high renown in my mother's social circle, and your talents and notoriety made you the teacher I always craved as a child. That was many years ago, and I have grown into a well-admired and popular stitcher in the years since!

I am now quite famous, and you have no doubt heard of my brave and mostly successful invasion of Thraben. I was able to evade capture thanks to my quick thinking and small stature, and have returned to my laboratory in what is left of Trostad. Upon my return, I have begun a new endeavor to expand my knowledge and skill. As a practitioner of the art of alchemy, I was hoping you would be able to provide some much-needed insight as I delve deeper into the art of necromantic fabrication than anyone has before.

Would it trouble you to pass along any alchemical texts you believe would help further my studies? I am in need of a mentor, and I cannot think of anyone who would be better suited to assist me for the sake of invention and innovation. What is your preferred method of avoiding decay or further necrosis once a body has been revived? Would the addition of a second liver assist with toxin control in the metabolic system? What is your preferred method of animation via elemental transmutation? How familiar are you with Delia Davison's methods for brain extractions on living patients? I'm giddy with anticipation of your response!

Sincerely,

GERALF Cecani



Stitcher Geraff | Art by Karla Ortiz

Commander Odric,

I write to you in great distress. The transport caravan departing Rider's Lock was attacked this morning by a wave of rogue skaabs.

The guards under my command were transporting the prisoner Gisa Cecani to Thraben for punishment. The road between the prison and the city is usually well-trod and safe for passage, but as per your orders I tripled the guard that would travel along with the caravan. The weather was misty and gray—nothing out of the ordinary for this part of Gavony. As the light was beginning to come over the horizon, we were overcome by a sudden attack of ghastly, violent, misshapen skaabs. We defended the caravan valiantly, but the malice and will of these creatures was too great to overcome. One-quarter of the procession is dead despite our additional reinforcements, and the prisoner seems to have escaped in the chaos.

These skaabs seemed different from ones I have seen in the past. Quick, many-limbed, as if their maker is testing a new formula for their sick development. My forces stood little chance.

I write to you from a safe haven in Merwald Downs. I received little injury in the attack, but I believe the prisoner may be heading toward the coast. She is a half-day's travel ahead of me, but I am in pursuit.

I will write when I know more.

—Executive Officer Grete



Zombie Apocalypse | Art by Peter Mohrbacher

Geralf,

GUESS WHO JUST BROKE OUT OF PRISON!

Your ever-loving sister,

Gisa

Gisa,

You don't just say "guess who" and then answer it in the signature, moron.

Why are you writing me from the old family house? I thought it was destroyed—surely there isn't anything left after the accident. I had thought once free you would go back to your own territory.

—Geralf



Ghoulcaller Gisa | Art by Karla Ortiz

Geraff,

I may have my freedom now, but there are no words to express the embarrassment and anger I felt when I was first captured, brother. I was foolish to try and go along with your dumb plan, and I was a failure for getting caught by the guard.

It seems fate itself had a hand in my release and I escaped my transport caravan while en route to Thraben from Rider's Lock. I was shackled up in the back of a covered carriage (with a muzzle and everything) and heard a dreadful commotion outside. Never one to ignore an opportunity, I swept my feet over my chains and rammed the door, escaping into the fog with the little dignity I had left in the midst of the attack. What do you think of that? I escaped all on my own! My joy was brief, and the malaise I feel now has overtaken the thrill of escape.

I abandoned my old territory before our pathetic attempt to raze Thraben and knew there would be nothing left for me there. After I got the muzzle and chains off, I thought it might be best if I returned to the old family home in Nephalia. The rubble is all falling apart now, and it all still smells vaguely of smoke, dust, and preserving fluids. Some rooms are still habitable, but I couldn't stand to go into Father's study. The evidence of our parents' last scuffle still lines the walls.

The weight of guilt hangs on me still after all this time. In an attempt to purge this feeling from myself, I raised Mummy and Father to apologize for what we did to the house. I felt such relief to tell them how sorry I was for the fire, and how neither you nor I intended to inherit our parents' loathing of each other. I spoke of my failure in Thraben, of how distant you and I have grown over the years, my humiliation at being chained and muzzled while you gleefully escaped. Of course they couldn't respond, but the experience was quite therapeutic for me.

Given these recent happenings, I wish to add an addendum to the laws of necromantic warfare to exclude use of relations or family pets in battle (I *know* you still have what is left of Spot). Respond with your desired time and location of our next duel.

Your loving sister,

Gisa



Ever After | Art by Ryan Alexander Lee

Gisa,

You are being *incredibly* irresponsible. Put Mummy and Father back in the ground *where they belong* .

I am doing things far more important than necrowarfare now. I am pleased you are out of prison, but clearly you are too stupid to recognize my help when I give it to you. Please do not contact me again.

—Geralf

Geralf,

I've returned your skaab along with a number of alchemic texts. I believe you should find the answers you are looking for within.

If you are amenable, I am more than happy to take you under my proverbial wing. Your mother was a talented necromancer, and she clearly raised a brilliant heir. Please do not hesitate to contact me in the future. Any son of Gretchen Cecani is a son of mine.

Your family has always been so playful in their love of the dark arts. Let us enjoy our brilliance and embark on the greatest game of all!

—Ludevic



Geralf's Masterpiece | Art by Daarken

Ludevic,

Thank you for your response, I look forward to poring through the annotated text you sent over.

But please, let us not be flippant when talking about our craft.

I am absolutely *sick* of games.

—Geralf

Dear Cable Knit Jerky,

Irresponsible?! Don't you bark at me like a child! I am one of the most talented ghoullcallers of our time—I am capable of feats you only *dream* you could do. (I've heard you try to whistle—it's pathetic!) You may think you're too good for necrowarfare, but I know it's really because you don't think I can function without having to rely on *you*.

—Gisa

P.S. I am going to do my best to remember all my favorite nicknames for you. We are Officially Fighting.

Commander Odric,

After some time in pursuit, I have caught up with Gisa in Nephalia. She is currently residing in the remains of an old manor. I am watching from afar and awaiting backup to make the capture.

I grow ever more uneasy with regard to my current position. My compass has suddenly begun to act oddly: the needle will spin on its own, regularly jolting and stopping in a direction completely opposite to where it had been moments before. The air feels charged as if a thunderstorm were near, but the

skies betray no signs of activity. I do not know why these oddities have been increasing, but it is unlike anything I have encountered before.

Something far more dangerous dominates my attention. I believe Gisa is calling again. Ghoul activity is very high, and I've nearly tripped into many empty graves as I travel near the coast of Nephalia. I have never personally seen a necromancer at work, but I can now say with certainty I have heard one. Unearthly whistles fill the fog of the night, light trills that send my stomach to my knees and raise the hair on my neck. She creates no lights nor flashes; instead her magic is a manic song that weaves with the sound of the coastal waves, penetrating the cold sand and lifting the dead from sleep. I understand now why you requested we muzzle her for captivity.

What is most unsettling is the calm of the ghouls themselves. Those undead who hear this song do not fight, shamble, or violently lash out. They simply walk toward their conductor. She seems purposeful in her calling, as if these monsters were tools for a task unknown to me.

The situation grows more unsteady as each night passes. I will await further instruction before pursuing the ghoulcaller.

—Executive Officer Grete



Gisa's Bidding | Art by Jason Felix

Dear Sausage Tailor,

I MADE A FRIEND! And she's my age! I think!

She looks like she needs some leafy greens and red meat, but I think she will do fine for my first friend. I met her while taking Mummy for a walk (Father is back in the ground now)—the woman simply walked up to us without any sort of fear. She looked Mummy up and down and asked if I was the one who raised her from the dead. I proudly said I did, to which the woman smiled politely and asked if I could repeat the process easily. How droll! I politely nodded, then called five ghouls and a half of a horse from under her feet.

As soon as they were out of the ground, the woman unsheathed a tremendous sword and severed each of my ghouls on the spot. She smiled from ear to ear. I knew at once that we were destined to be the best of friends.

The woman introduced herself as Nahiri, and she is clever and quite interested in my work. I showed her how to whistle just the right way to make the dead do as they're told. Nahiri was very amused by my talent and said she probably wouldn't be very good at it, but seemed very interested in seeing the extents of my abilities. I've been calling again, and it feels ever so wonderful!

So there you have it. Go back to your backstitching and needlepoint—I have a new companion and I don't need you at all!

—Gisa

Dear Meat Embroiderer,

Why aren't you answering my letters. It's because you have a *girlfriend*, isn't it.

—Gisa

Gisa,

Please do not bring that up. Lili was never my girlfriend! She took Mikaeus's body back in Thraben and absconded. I never saw her again after our brief acquaintance. She is terrible and I hate her.

I also hate you. Stop calling me by your old awful nicknames and thank me for helping you escape, already.

Here is a foot covered in gout. It reminded me of your personality.

—Gerald

Executive Officer Grete,

I have others stationed in Nephalia reporting an odd structure being built off the coast. There may be too many undead for you to handle on your own—pull out NOW.

—Commander Odric



Drownyard Temple | Art by John Avon

Dear Squishy Quilter,

Nahiri has left me for a bit. My work continues. Isn't that wonderful? I'm a working woman now!

When I pause to reflect on my current situation, I couldn't be luckier to have found this new friend. Without Nahiri I would be ruined. I sold my old property by the old necrowarfare grounds, and all former resources I had have been poured into my new career.

My new friend asked for an army of builders, and I have raised her one! She was quite mum about what the zombies were for, but when I asked if they were to build a monument of stone to celebrate our talents she raised her eyebrows and nodded with great enthusiasm.

Hear *that* ? We are making a monument to our greatness!

Nahiri is magnificently supportive. She adores my ghouls, and I think if I do good enough she'll even build me a weapon to eviscerate you with. I've seen her work—she is very good with rocks.

I have no clue what you mean by “thank you for helping me escape,” but I'm certain it is just you trying to get inside my brain *as per usual* . Your silly tricks won't work on me!

—Gisa

Gisa,

This has gone far enough.

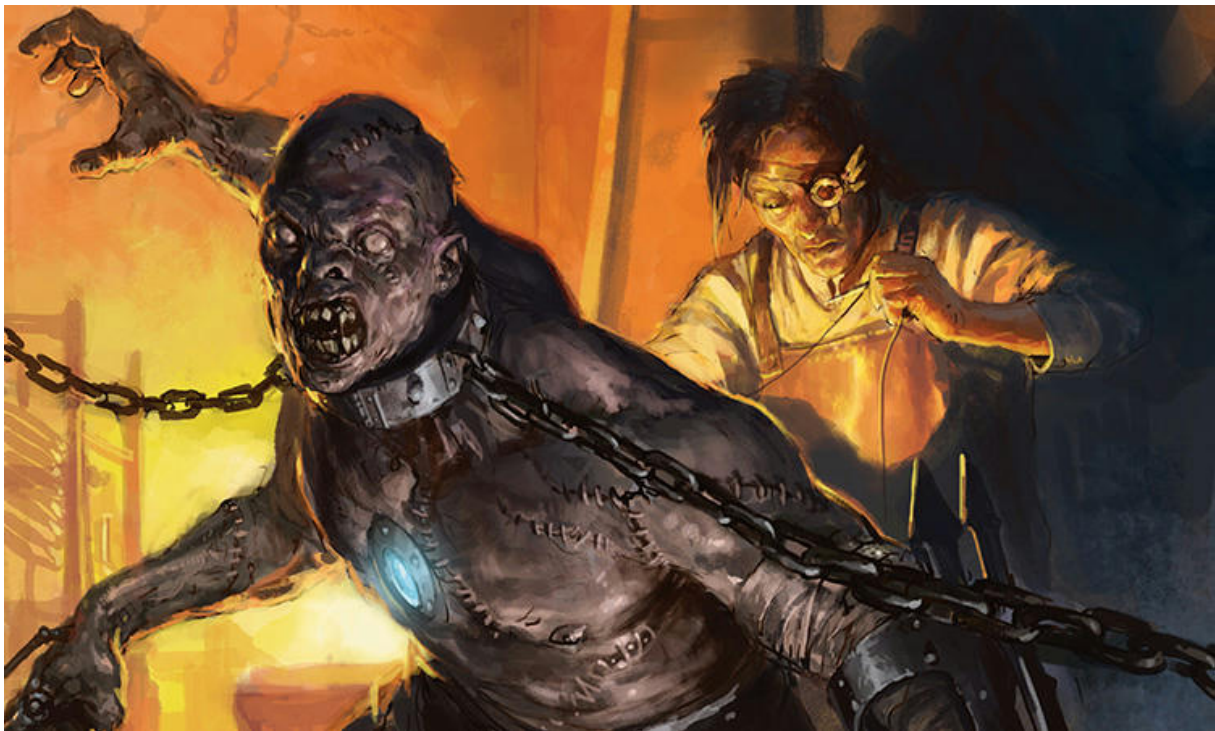
I don't want to play anymore. I am nearly finished with my greatest creation and all I want is for you to let this go.

I was the one who sent the skaabs to free you from the prison caravan. I went through the trouble of building an attack force to overtake your captors and not *once* have you thanked me for your release.

Who else in this bloody hellhole of a parish has the capability to raise dozens of skaabs?! Did you think you were *lucky* enough to just *happen across* the very creatures I have made my name creating?!

Your ignorance is insulting, and your insistence on clinging to our childish past is pathetic. Grow up as I have, dear sister. I just wanted to help you.

—Geralf



Prized Amalgam | Art by Karl Kopinski

Commander Odric,

Departing immediately. Ms. Cecani has erupted into a most violent rage. Safety of my patrol is in jeopardy. I write from Merwald Downs but intend to return to Thraben at once. Pray for our deliverance and safe return—she is not following us yet, but I fear Ms. Cecani is capable of nearly anything in her current state.

—Executive Officer Grete

Geralf,

You are an arrogant, hubristic, *feculent* bastard. How dare you naively assume I could not free myself?!

I am an idiot for not seeing the truth sooner and recognizing those skaabs for what they were. Keep your presumptuous morality to your own damn self. I have *never* needed your help, and I will *never* be dependent on you for rescue.

My name will forever belong in the history books of our land. Tales of the mightiness of me and Nahiri will last as long as our monument stands tall and firm in the sea! Our physical legacy will stand forever unchallenged, and our glory will transform all of Innistrad!

All of that, of course, will happen in the fullness of time. As you can see, I chose a very special courier for this letter—I hope you don't mind I sent Mummy to deliver it to you. You always took *her* side in

things, after all. I've given the creature instructions to assist you in whatever task you ask of her—every task other than leaving.

Do you like how it feels when I help you? Don't you feel *thankful* for me stepping in and assuming you cannot do things on your own?! I have greater things to do with my time than continue to entertain *you*. Look your mother in the eye and think of me. If you treat your own sister like a toddler who can't stand on her own feet, I will send you the one person who will always remind you that *you are a child*.

May you find pity in the embrace of whatever is left of your mother's arms.

—Gisa