

IVY, Warden of the First Grove

(Written correspondence)

To: High Warden Naya

Battlemaster of Sanctuary, the First Grove

Warden Naya,

It has come to my attention that my charge, Ivy, is to be expelled from Sanctuary and the First Grove. I understand she has destroyed the Skybridge and disrupted the lives of those living in the First Grove, but even so, she is much too valuable an asset to throw away. Please reconsider.

I respectfully await your response.

Warden Kynd

To: Warden Kynd

Battlemaster of Valla, the Fifth Grove

Warden Kynd,

Well met, Warden. Regretfully, I must hold fast to my decision. She is powerful, but also angry and disruptive. I can no more contain her than I can a thunderstorm. Without discipline, she is not suited for the Calling. If her anger persists, she may very well be a danger not only to her fellow initiates but the citizens of the First Grove. As much as it pains me, as a Warden I cannot risk the safety of my people by keeping her here. Her expulsion from Sanctuary and the First Grove must stand.

May the Blessings of Our Lady Be with You,

High Warden Naya

To: High Warden Naya

Battlemaster of Sanctuary, the First Grove

Warden Naya,

I am a man of few words, High Warden. And I realize now that has created a barrier of misunderstanding between us. When I left Ivy in your charge, I was fresh off the battlefield and in no mood to talk. I should have told you the whole story.

Not only was I at the battle of Acacia, but so was Ivy. She stood with her parents as they defended their posts on Acacia's ramparts. When they fell, Ivy took their place; her fury willed the trees to hold fast the

orcs as she shot them down. She would have remained there until the end if Warden Talos hadn't knocked her senseless. Even then it took the both of us to drag her away.

Ivy's losses would have demented a lesser person. Her power is only overshadowed by her will. She can't be expelled. Someday, many seasons from now, those initiates she is "disrupting" may be alive only because she was there to lead them.

Warden Kynd

To Warden Kynd

Battlemaster of Valla, The Fifth Grove

Good Tidings Warden Kynd,

Bless you for bringing this to my attention. The poor child! She told me nothing of it. I understand her anger now. Perhaps more compassion in her tutelage is warranted. Ivy will stay in Sanctuary, and I will make her learn. A thunderstorm she may be, but a little rain never hurt anyone.

That being said, I counter your uncharacteristic optimism with my uncharacteristic cynicism. By "lead them" are you suggesting that she may one day be a Warden? I find that highly unlikely. A Warden must have an inner peace, a respect for nature, and a compulsion to protect life at the expense of her own. I only see the latter in Ivy--but she is young and perhaps you know something I don't.

I sense now your empathy for your fellow elves. The Meeting of the Groves is three days hence. You will be there, yes? There is another matter that I will bring up for a ruling; I'm sure you and I will see eye-to-eye on it!

Our Lady Guide You,

High Warden Naya

HOGARTH, Frozen Shield of Deg Itan

(Travelogue)

From the travel journal of Hieronyma, Anthropologist of the Order:

Day 22

Finally, after more than three weeks of caravanning, Rothbern, our forward scout, has signaled to me that he sees smoke from the fires of Deg Itan. I am glad. I tire of the cold and need a hot meal.

After searching fruitlessly in the desert for the elusive "Oasis," I thought Deg Itan would be a welcome change of clime. I take it back. It was a terrible idea. This place is as bitterly cold as the desert is swelteringly hot. At least finding water here is easy; too bad using the bathroom without getting frostbite on your backside is not. Hopefully, getting a glimpse into the lives of the reclusive Northmun of Deg Itan will be worth it.

I have heard much about the Northmun: that they are brutish, stubborn, fearless, and only appreciate humor if it involves bodily functions. But after spending so much time in this icy wilderness, I feel I must respect a culture that can withstand its fury.

Rothbern has informed us that we will not reach Deg Itan by nightfall, but we will surely reach there by tomorrow. Only one more night in the snow!

Day 23

Rothbern neglected to tell us the day's hike would be up the side of a mountain. I should have guessed as much. Warrior cultures like the Northmun tend to value strategic advantage over silly concerns like convenient access to resources.

But what they lacked in civic planning ability, they more than made up for in hospitality. Chieftain Beotharn arranged a glorious feast of mountain bison for us in his communal longhouse. I finally had the hot meal I so desperately wanted with the added pleasure of a crackling, friendly fire.

I did not expect them to be an egalitarian society, but there seemed to be little difference between men and women here. Their dress is similar--pelts and plate armor--and half of Beotharn's thanes are women.

They also seem to like to party, and we were happy to oblige them. After a few pints of mead, there was a bit of a food fight, but what's a little bison in your hair in the name of camaraderie?

The only one who seemed to be wary of us was Hogarth, Beotharn's highest-ranking thane. He was also much more disgusting than the rest of the group. Hogarth ate an entire bison's leg with his mouth open, leaving a ring of meaty destruction around him. When he finished, he belched loudly, and his compatriots laughed and made a toast.

I wonder why someone who seems like such a buffoon would be the thanes' leader, but I reserve judgement.

After the feast, the hall was cleaned and the fire tamed. They brought in bedding for us; we would be using the longhouse as our dormitory. I was glad to not have to wander back out into the snow, but then

realized that for all their civility, they had not mastered indoor plumbing. Once more a cold wind to the breech, I guess.

Day 24

Tragedy has struck our party. In the night, a mysterious monster attacked the longhouse, emboldened by the scraps of last night's feast. I was there, but I do not remember much except the creature's eyes glinting in the glow of the dying fire. Rothbern, I'm afraid, was eaten. Someone raised the alarm, and instantly Hogarth was there leading the thanes. They chased the creature into the mountains.

One thane did not return.

That night, we feasted again, but in the cold, mountain night. A great bonfire was lighted in honor of our dead.

Beotharn asked Hogarth to say a few words. It was clear the loss pained him, but he said nothing. At last, he raised the fallen thane's axe and unleashed the loudest, most pained roar I have ever heard. His thanes followed suit, yelling into the dark. The message was clear: they would have their revenge.

Hogarth, believing the longhouse too dangerous, split our party between his fellow thanes. Much to my dismay, the expedition's cook and I were to spend the night with Hogarth.

His small hut was not what I expected. Oddly, he had some talent for art; there were several carvings of wolves, bears, and other woodland creatures around his small home. And, in a place of honor, the lost thane's axe hung above the door.

Hogarth said very little, but he turned down our bedding, offered us a hot mead, and said "SLEEP WELL!" loudly but kindly to us as we went to bed.

Day 25

Our last night with the Northmun was one of both horror and victory. In the night, Hogarth awoke, startled by a noise neither of us could hear. He gathered his armor and his axe, shouting at us "HERE STAY!"

I'm not one to shy away from danger, so I set out after him. What I saw chilled me more than the ice and snow of Deg Itan. It was three meters tall and lithe like a snake. Smoke rose from its scaled body as it wormed through the village on all fours. It had massive claws and teeth and glowering eyes.

But like a flash of lightning, it vanished into the night. Hogarth ordered his thanes after it, staying behind to guard us and his chieftain. He gathered everyone into the longhouse and we waited.

We heard noises outside; the beast was back! Without hesitating, Hogarth sprang after the monster, shouting his attacks as he ran. For the first time, I saw Hogarth in his element. As he swung his axe, a toothy smile grew on his face. The beast clawed him again and again. It dawned on me that the man did not feel fear--or pain.

We barricaded the longhouse door behind him, but I kept my eye to the crack in the door. Hogarth was gaining ground, but then the beast reared up, grabbing his leg with one of its gigantic claws.

Hogarth instinctively threw his shield, bashing the creature's underbelly. To my surprise, the beast froze in place and fell forward, taking Hogarth with it. Its arm shattered as it met the ground, freeing Hogarth. He quickly severed its head from its body. The beast thawed and a fountain of blood showered from its neck. Hogarth danced in its rain. It was as impressive as it was disgusting.

There was another great feast that night when the thanes returned. At the end of the feast, Beotharn stood up and motioned for us all to be silent. He asked Hogarth to come forward. The Chieftain then named him "The Frozen Shield of Deg Itan" in honor of his great deed. Hogarth started blubbering in a most embarrassing way. More mead was poured and many raucous toasts were made in Hogarth's honor.

I realized then why he was their leader. He may get more of his dinner and mead in his beard than in his mouth, and he may not get even the simplest of jokes, but his prowess in battle was matched only by the care he had for his people.

Tomorrow we continue our trek north out of the mountains of Deg Itan and across the glacier to the Peaks of Arctos. There, we will meet with the ursine grizzly people, which will be another great chance for anthropological study. Unfortunately, it will be another few weeks in the ice and snow.

But if the grizzlies are half as welcoming as the Northmun, the journey will be worth it. I never thought I'd say it, but I will be sad to leave the heroic Hogarth and Deg Itan.

MAXMILIAN, the War Mage

(Student evaluation)

Master End Year Student Evaluation Form

Student Name: Maximilian

Professor Name: Tulania

Level: I

Age: 10

Student Aptitudes

Maximilian displays an innate facility with magic and a peculiar type of luck that can only be described as "dumb." He is also well-liked by his peers because of his easy-going demeanor. With the right teacher, Maximilian could be a talented War Mage. However, I'm not sure that "right teacher" is me. He needs someone with more ~~patience~~ experience.

Student Challenges

I feel that Maximilian's main challenge is ~~crassness ignorance inattention~~ himself. He has a, shall we say, "unique" way of practicing magic and an unconventional work ethic. Again, with a firm hand I'm sure he can be steered away from ~~leering at~~ socializing with the girls in class and back on track working hard and practicing magic the RIGHT way.

Please attach any Certificates of Merit to this form here:

Oh dear, there don't seem to be any in his file. I'm sure they've just been misplaced!

Please attach any Certificates of Demerit to this form here:

If I attached all of these certificates, this form would be 302 pages long! I'll just attach the "highlights."

CERTIFICATE OF DEMERIT

STUDENT NAME: Maximilian

DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS: Disrupting class by yelling "I don't HAVE the magic, I AM the magic" while flexing his prepubescent biceps is inappropriate.

NUMBER OF DEMERITS: 1

ACTION TAKEN: Student must spend one hour in quiet reflection in the library.

SIGNED: Tulania

CERTIFICATE OF DEMERIT

STUDENT NAME: Maximilian

DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS: Proper attire MUST be worn at all times during class. This includes shirts.

NUMBER OF DEMERITS: 1

ACTION TAKEN: Student must peel potatoes tonight in preparation for supper.

SIGNED: Rodergo

CERTIFICATE OF DEMERIT

STUDENT NAME: Maximilian

DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS: Pants and shoes must ALSO be worn at all times during class. Maximilian pointed out that "proper attire" is not defined in the *Order Student Handbook*. I told him that he was still disrupting class with his behavior.

NUMBER OF DEMERITS: 2

ACTION TAKEN: Student must clean up the men's dorm bathrooms to my satisfaction (taking at least two hours). I have also prepared an addendum for the *Order Student Handbook* to avoid similar situations. The addendum will be circulated to all students.

SIGNED: Rodergo

CERTIFICATE OF DEMERIT

STUDENT NAME: Maximilian

DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS: Footie pajamas do NOT count as a shirt AND pants, and they CERTAINLY do not count as pants AND shoes. I care NOT that they are printed with characters from his favorite puppet show. The boy is VERY trying.

NUMBER OF DEMERITS: 3

ACTION TAKEN: Student must muck out the school stables (this should take around three hours). I have made the *Student Handbook Addendum* clearer.

SIGNED: Rodergo

CERTIFICATE OF DEMERIT

STUDENT NAME: Maximilian

DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS: Maximilian loosed the chickens from their pens outside the communal kitchen, yelling "Let my feathered people go!" His actions prevented us from having the elaborate feast we had planned for the elf delegation from the First Grove.

NUMBER OF DEMERITS: 1

ACTION TAKEN: Maximilian must wash dishes after the feast. Thankfully, the meatless meal the chefs hastily prepared was seen as an act of great respect by the elves given that they are vegetarian. He is a lucky, lucky boy.

SIGNED: Finnregan

He's definitely a little rascal. Someone should get ahold of him and ~~strangle~~ give him the one-on-one attention he so needs.

RECOMMENDATION TO PASS/ FAIL

He definitely should be passed on to ~~another teacher~~ the next grade. Despite his numerous demerits, his infractions are admittedly minor, and he does have a certain wayward aptitude with magic. Maximilian has a future as a War Mage, though I have a hard time picturing it. Someone with more vision and experience--like Master Cygnus perhaps--would be a good fit for him.

I hereby formally recommend Maximilian for promotion to level II on the provision that he is moved to another instructor.

Signed,

Prof. Tulania