

Obok, my cousin,

I have always criticized you as a pessimist. I am right -- and on this occasion, so were you.

The tourmalines and commissions here could only keep me so busy. My timepieces are finer than ever, and I take great pride in my progress, but my own proficiency in arms has caught up with me. Last year, I was selected to make up the main body of the camp's standing forces. I had imagined my time here would remain relatively quiet, remaining in fringe supply, but (as Commander Asobbab puts it) jewelery is not exactly an essential profession.

The timing is all the more unfortunate with this new piece of news: As of this year, I am a mother twice over! A new baby boy joins our household; I have named him Thikut. Ordinarily, I would be overjoyed. In fact, I feel guilty for being anything else. But when I took him to the surface, letting him peer with his little eyes beyond the gate at the great snowy hell beyond, I could not help but feel guilt. This camp is no place for a child, especially with the snatchers.

We knew it was a risk, coming here with family. Both Rigoth and I are in agreement. We also knew that we had no choice. I feel fear regularly, now. In the mornings, I sip at rum to warm myself and watch the blizzards pass, and I rub my thumb over the slim glass of grandma's timepiece. I worry about Thikut, and Bomrek, and Rigoth. I worry about the snatchers. Already, three have been stolen away.

The worst part is that I also know, in my heart of hearts, that this is in some ways safer than they would be in the mountainhomes. The Commander is vague about issues at home, but news filters through. We know that things are only getting worse. Raids on the mountainhomes themselves! Sometimes I wonder if our mission here is to strike down the goblins, or to simply provide a better bastion for survival. Or if, rather, one mission has turned into the other.

The plot thickens. A few months ago, the new officer from the mountainhomes arrived. A waspish, nagging fellow, he almost immediately oversaw the digging and smoothing of several new chambers, adjacent to the living quarters. At least one of them appears to be devoted to massing huge amounts of wealth, and I know this because, despite considerable secrecy surrounding the chambers, almost all of my gems were requisitioned overnight, and I must now manually request access to the components for my timepieces. I cannot imagine a chamber so large holds my gems alone, either.

But I am no master strategist, and (much to Thikut's chagrin) I am yet a soldier. Already, I have participated in limited skirmishes with snatchers, as well as a few cavern beasts. Combat is a curious thing. As the hands of each and every dwarf's life-clock tick forward, we all wind to our own mechanism, but each one of us appears to have in-built cogs for the love of a fight. In my private life, I haven't risen a hand to another since roughhousing as a child. As a soldier, I cannot help but thrill in the mayhem of a fight.

Many thoughts. I wish I could become one of my timepieces, some days. Ticking along, no thinking, following my mechanism. Should I grow tourmalines for eyes and have my arms turn to wristbands, you will be the first to know.

Love,  
Sigun

253 Common Era  
Camp Twilight Diamond