

Goden,

Excuse the water damage. I couldn't find anything better to write on.

Great news about your marriage. I understand things are difficult there right now, but the two of you will be OK. I remember when you two were little, I took you out for trips, taught you as much as I could. If anyone can survive out there, even if things go bad, you two should have pretty good odds. Don't forget what I said about non-perishable food.

Things are strange here. Stable, but violent. The snow provides. Not long after my arrival here, I was promoted to lead stalker; I flatter myself, but I think this was a good decision. We have some promising new stalkers, and I'll teach them well, but they need guidance. One lost a couple toes to frostbite last week.

Saying that I'm safe would be misleading, but I don't imminently fear for my life. Food supply is excellent. Command chose this spot well, and there's great migratory patterns, lots to eat. As I write, I'm tucking into a crab that wandered a little too far into the snow. Down below, we keep exceeding the food targets they set, which is great. Hunting is good, and stomachs are full.

Combat is a little more touch-and-go. We haven't lost anyone yet, but there've been some close calls. Apparently, I lead the camp for most goblins killed (seven). I doubt this will last long but it does make a kind of sense. They have to come in through the snow, after all, and the snow is where us stalkers are.

The cold makes things move slowly, a lot of times. It's not like the mountainhomes. Some clever tunnelling, or even just some rope and bravery, and you can cross a ton of ground. Here, it's too flat, too cold. Moving from one side of the ice to the other is a slow, careful process, even if you're not trying to sneak up on anything -- even slower if you are. Because of that, most stalkers tend to spend about 3 or 4 weeks out at a time. I lean towards four, and when I come back, I see snapshots of the camp, like an artist drawing impressions in several stages. It's a little different each time.

We have coins minted now. Ordinarily I'd turn my nose up; you can't eat copper. But they make them out of the holy metal, here, from deep in the earth, and I can hardly turn them down; they're wonderful. I'd send one, but I doubt it'd make it without some light-fingered intervention from a messenger. I'll try drawing one on the other side of this page.

Last month, I came in from the cold, just filling my wineskins mostly. There's always that weird distance: The ones from down below, especially the miners, and us, up above, in the cold. We keep our distance, most of the time, but it's odd how much we have in common. Cavern runners. They face different kinds of threats. Don't have to worry about hypothermia, at least, but unlike me, they can't see everything coming. I've never been down there for long, but I didn't like it. Claustrophobic, through the mushroom forests. Turn a corner, you don't know what's there. Up here, you can see it coming. Sometimes it's scary, but at least you can see it.

Anyway. All the food supply made someone down there happy. The head chef, actually, real larger-than-life guy. He supplied us with a gift in exchange for all the meat variety, and I must admit, it's pretty nice. He hooked us up with the brewery; they brew special high-percentage distillations of... I wasn't really listening. Something. Too foul to drink, but it makes a great firestarter. Keeping them going up here is tough.

Anyway. Hunt's on. Stay safe, kiddo.

- Ral