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March 2nd, 502

Dear Sergei,

Thank you for your kind letter. It is so nice to receive an actual letter rather than a telemark slip. It was nice of you to go to the extra expense to have it posted so far. I know the Teamster's ask quite the bounty for delivery of any letter through five connections. I am sorry that I do not have the means to return the favor. Things are well here on Intrepid, and the sun is beginning to shine again. The gophers are out and about as they should be this time of year, and planting season is just beginning. My sister is well, thank you for asking about her. Her treatments take a great deal from her stamina, but her recovery progresses onward, slowly and surely.

To answer your questions about schools (and thank you kindly for the information you have offered about schools on Schastye), it seems that our system is, perhaps, more complex than yours. Maybe a better way to say it is that we are less organized. Your town circle idea seems a grand way to teach your children, and it does seem fair. Our own system is somewhat less egalitarian.

For the children of nobles, those who lead or are near the tops of the Houses, especially the Great Houses, education usually is handled first by nannies, then by tutors. They do have schools, where the children of the rich are gathered together to be taught by the best teachers, especially in cities such as here in Blue Sky. Sometimes the very best of these institutions will have doctors on their faculty. One in the Summit, called Albrecht Academy, is even rumored to have a professor emeritus, but their campus is closed and you cannot get information about it. Children usually start classes there when they turn four, and continue until they are sixteen. For humans, four is about the time we begin to communicate easily and have basic knowledge of how to take care of our own bodies. I understand this threshold comes somewhat sooner for Arkturri, does it not?

For these noble children, sixteen is a time of great celebration, of becoming a man or a woman. For all of us, this is the time when we are recognized by law and given our personas. For them, this allows them to strike out on their own, but the more ambitious of them will use their new personas to apply to the Imperial Guild Colleges or even the Imperial University at Valiant, where they will study with the professors. Even the doctors of the Imperial Colleges each probably have more knowledge about magic or the sciences than we have in this entire village! The few with whom I have had the opportunity of conversation were gentle and learned people beyond my own abilities to even plumb. I can scarce imagine what depth of

wisdom and intellect a professor can bring to bear on her or his field. Those who study at the Colleges usually finish in six years. Those who go for professional studies at the University do as well, but those who seek to earn the rank of doctor usually must work for eight or ten years. I was told by one of them once that becoming a doctor is a lifelong process, but I observed to her that they are given the certificate fairly early. She found that very amusing.

For those like me, children of those who are sworn to a noble house but not in their own right nobility, most houses will allow the young to listen to the tutoring that our betters receive. Many will provide teachers for the basic skills that those of our class need to contribute to Imperial society when we are mature, but this does not often extend beyond the basics, what we lovingly call "the three Rs": Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. (I trust your grasp of our language is sufficient to see the joke here.) Some houses go a little further, especially those like my own House Maney who depend on their rank and file to have extensive clerical skills, and set up more extensive training for their children. This training usually costs the parents part of their salary, but few complain about it. After all, they can simply withdraw their lazier or slower children from the school and save the fee.

Children usually finish with whatever the houses offer by the time they turn twelve. By this time, they have usually been working with their parents for many years, especially those who fill more physical roles in our society. Children do not do the work their parents do, but they will carry materials and fetch tools. When they come of age, they will usually take an apprenticeship within the house. Those who will apprentice outside the house usually will trade with a child related to their new master. This other child will apprentice with their parents. Children with particular talents may seek to apprentice with famous masters. They will meet with the masters and, if accepted, their parents will pay hefty bounties for the training they will receive over the coming years. In some cases, a house will recognize the young person's talent and pay for the apprenticeship. Children commonly finish their apprenticeships in five or ten years or sometimes up to twenty, depending on the trade.

The Imperial Guilds each provide schools for the children of their guilders. These are more rigid and standard, beginning at age six and ending at age 12. Especially in smaller towns, the children of several guilds will attend the same school, but they will always be in classes with children of the same guild. These schools meet every morning for a few hours, leaving children free to help their parents after lunch.

Those talented enough will proceed from their apprenticeships on to a trade school. These guild schools are free for guild members, as most children of guilders have become by the time they finish their apprenticeships, but they can come at a steep cost to the children of house sworn. Trade schools advance the knowledge of journeymen, updating them on the new techniques of their trade and preparing them to supervise work crews. Most trade schools last two to three years. Those at the top of their classes in the trade schools will be invited to attend

the guild colleges. These programs last two years and are focused on students innovating new solutions with the help of the doctors.

Those unfortunate enough to have parents who are not part of a house or guild generally do not receive any education at all, and are often relegated to unskilled labor, though some will save enough for an apprenticeship later in life.

Do you have trade schools in the Sovereignty? I looked up your colleges in the encyclopedia, and I saw that the Cooks Guild College on Sehastye is quite famous for cataloguing recipes from across your end of the Empire. Of course, everyone knows about the Imperial University at Velikiy Medved.

I hope this has answered your questions, and I hope you will visit me next time you are on world. Please write soon and tell me how you are doing and all of the details of life in the perfume business. Please be careful: I know firsthand how dangerous the frontiers can be, and I could not bear to lose my good friend.

Yours Truly,

Iris