

XXIX Lunardus, MCCXLII

Arrived at the new Place of Refuge three days ago, and am very pleased with the results. Silvia and Beltran have done a marvelous job of selecting and developing the site into a place of peace and rest, which we certainly need after our recent troubles. I was especially delighted to see the private quarters Silvia has designed for me. She knows me so very well, and I love her for it. Perhaps we shall have a few decades of quiet now that things are finally settled in the north.

Eusebius joined us this evening, the last of his tasks finally turned over to those we can trust, and it was very pleasant to have all five of us together again at last. Knowing that I share his passion for journaling, he has presented me with this very fine volume, which I intend to put to use at once. It shall be my record of what transpires in this place. I will not carry it to our strongholds elsewhere—it is far too bulky—but I have other journals in most of them already. I am grateful to Eusebius for anticipating this most basic of my needs before I had thought to address it myself. I must find a proper way to thank him.

Silvia too, has given me a splendid gift—a large crystal sphere filled with water, various plants and fish. The by-products of each of these flora and fauna provide some element that others within the sphere need to survive, and the whole exists in such perfect balance that it could easily sustain itself for generations. I was amazed to learn that she used no magic to create it.

Beltran has amused himself by assigning each of us one of the five symbols for the techniques of arcane magic, incorporating them as thematic elements throughout this place. He's used them everywhere, from our chairs in council to the doors of our quarters. He even plans to incorporate them into paintings he intends to do of each of us now that the construction work is nearly complete.

Naturally he has chosen the symbol of Change for himself, though I suppose he has earned it after a year of carving half this place out of stone. The others have been aptly assigned—Creation for Silvia, Destruction for Patricus, Perception for Eusebius. That leaves Control for me, which is all very well, though I think it was granted me merely because it was the last remaining once the obvious choices had been made.

But I will not dispute Beltran's whimsy, for indeed it is rare to see him amused by anything of late. Even Hamlin has difficulty cheering him. Verai grows old, and it will not be much longer before she leaves us. Beltran continues to plead with her but she will not relent. I take it as a portent of his resignation that his architectural jest makes no allowances for a sixth Elder. It is a pity. We will all feel the loss, but none so deeply as he. I dare not contemplate my own existence without Silvia. Eusebius, with his many transient lovers, does not understand this. As for Patricus, there are days when I wonder if he loves anything save his grand designs and his books.

Enough of this brooding. Our darkest hour is now behind us, and it is time to enjoy the rewards of our labors.

VI Vardus, MCCXLII

We held our first meeting in the new council chamber yesterday, primarily to hear news from Eusebius on the latest developments in the north. The truce between the factions appears to be holding, largely as a result of the new trade agreements. There are early signs that poverty is already on the decline among the Commons, and Eusebius is confident that renewed prosperity will erode the old hatreds in time. A great deal of bloodshed has been spared. A marriage alliance may even be possible in one or two generations—Patricus is to consult me for details of the key families and draft a timetable. Everything seems to be well in hand, and apart from advice in council it looks as though I shan't be needed for at least a year.

Settling in quickly, discovering all the nooks and crannies of the stronghold. I have been familiar with its design for years, but it is delightful to see it fully realized in this tropical paradise. The view from the Orb Tower is breathtaking. I have never seen such life and vitality concentrated in one location. Lines on parchment couldn't prepare me for this—the charts revealed nothing of the beauty of this place, and gave no hint of how Silvia incorporated it into the surrounding landscape. The weather is delightful as well. I can hardly believe that it is now winter in the north. I do not miss the cold.

How pleasant it is to be idle for a time, knowing that loyal custodes will see to our every need. It is far too long since I have been untroubled by affairs of state. Eusebius and Patricus cannot let such things be, but for my own part I am weary, and glad to have a place where I may retreat for a time. I need not even see the guards or the kitchen staff if I choose to remain in the Sanctum, so cleverly have Beltran and Silvia designed this place. It would be easy to lose touch with the outside world here. I must take care not to become too complacent.

XXVII Vardus, MCCXLII

Spending most of my days with Silvia. We have been apart far too long. She first showed me all about the conservatory, where she has created a private retreat—a kind of second sanctuary. We spent nearly a week there shortly after my arrival, and she set Wisgarus on watch with instructions to admit no one. Patricus was furious, but there will be plenty of time for such work later. More recently we have made excursions into the jungle surrounding the stronghold. We plan to visit the Emerald Mountain for a while in the near future.

I find that I have missed Silvia's music most of all, and she has obliged me by playing many of my favorites of late. She has had a little time to compose new works now that her role in the construction is complete.

I have had an inspiration about the gift I owe Eusebius, and will spend a few weeks crafting it while Silvia is away next month.

XXX Harmonia, MCCXLIII

Council today. Patricus laid out plans for the summer, concise and efficient as always. Now that order has been restored, Eusebius wants to stimulate trade by any means we can influence. We agreed that one of the best ways to accomplish this will be to rebuild the merchant

fleets as quickly as possible. Patricus suggested that this may provide a solution to the refugee problem on Suthius. There is more than sufficient timber there, and it is centrally located to the areas that sustained the greatest losses. He envisions a permanent shipyard and trading community at Coralus Bay that will serve the needs of several nations more efficiently than the present system. The plan is ambitious, but I think it will work.

For all his skill on the battlefield, I have always felt Patricus is at his best when dealing with the administrative challenges of peacetime. It never ceases to amaze me how he can turn Eusebius' ethereal dreams into practical realities. This solution is a masterstroke. No doubt I will have to negotiate with the *ordinis nobilis* to convince them that the change will benefit their harbors, but that will be no great matter.

Silvia predicts better harvests this year, especially in the west. That is reassuring news... the more so if the first new ships can be ready by Recondo.

Excellent supper tonight, the first meal all five of us have taken together since my arrival. Patricus seems to forget that he must still eat once in a while, even if he doesn't need to as often as before. I suspect Beltran would be the same way were it not for Verai.

VIII Solaris, MCCXLIII

Presented the new mirror to Eusebius today, and was very pleased with his response. It is a fitting gift for him, and more than ample repayment for this fine journal. I cannot wait to see what he does with it. No doubt his vanity will amuse us all.

XV Solaris, MCCXLIII

The mirror has been a spectacular success, both with Eusebius and the rest of us. He has spent this first week pushing it to its limits, becoming more ridiculously elaborate every day. Surely this can not go on indefinitely? It would not be well for the custodes to see him so foppishly attired. Thus far, at least, he has confined his experiments to the Sanctum. How strange that a man so wise in guiding others can indulge in such foolishness. Alas, I can not complain, for I knew full well he might do something of this sort when I made the thing for him.

XXVIII Recondo, MCCXLIII

Spent the last few months with Silvia on the Emerald Mountain. Feeling refreshed but also a little melancholy. Now more than ever I regret that we chose to delay having children. We always thought there would be plenty of time, never suspecting what we would unwittingly sacrifice. Now it is too late. How ironic it seems that with all our power, this alone is denied to us?

There is nothing to be gained by dwelling upon this again. We shall always have each other, and that will have to be enough.

Patricus and Eusebius have been busy in our absence. There are many custodes and *ordinis nobilis* they want me to visit next year. In the meantime, Eusebius and I have much to do preparing a place for the four sisters. He has completed his preparations, but it will take both

of us to summon and persuade them, and he is eager to begin. We start tomorrow, and I expect it will take most of the winter.

XVII Vernus, MCCXLIV

At long last it is done. Soluma proved the most difficult to convince of our benevolent intent, which we expected, but I had not anticipated such a battle of wills. Thankfully the others took our part and helped to persuade her. Ardora was by far the most willing, but negotiating her terms tested my diplomatic skills to the limit.

Very tired. Can barely write. Hardly had energy enough to visit Silvia, who I haven't seen for months. Must meditate now, recover strength. Have to return to diplomatic work in the north in a week or so. Would to the gods I could still sleep.

XI Fortuna, MCCXLVI

Faith, has it truly been nearly two and a half years since I last sat in this beloved sanctuary? How poor my sensation of time has become! The months away have been well spent, however. New mercantile alliances are starting to solidify throughout the north. I have just returned from Coralus, which is well on its way to becoming a thriving port city. Patricus has worked marvels there.

I had hoped to speak with Eusebius when I arrived, but he has been called away to deal with flooding in Tal. Silvia also away for a few days, but should return next week. I find that I am impatient for her return, even though it is just another week, and this amuses me—it is the first strong emotion I have felt for nearly a year.

XII Fortuna, MCCXLVI

Had a long, close talk with Patricus this afternoon. I could tell he was eager to speak with me yesterday, but he withheld his curiosity about all but the most pressing matters until I had the opportunity to rest. This was wise of him, for I was very weary, but I repaid his generosity by devoting most of the day to his questions.

I had thought that he was hungry for news of the alliances, and he was, but this proved to be the least of his concerns. In truth, he seemed far more eager for counsel about Beltran. It is unusual for Patricus to notice distress in others, and if he is disturbed by Beltran's melancholy then there may well be cause for alarm.

I have not seen the Old Man yet. He has not emerged from his quarters since my return, and I dare not enter without his invitation. Would that Silvia or Eusebius were here to lend me their insight!

XV Fortuna, MCCXLVI

Word got to Verai that I had returned, and she visited the common room to dine with me this evening. I was delighted to see her, and was further pleased that Beltran felt compelled to join us, for until now he has not answered my requests to see him. The source of Patricus'

concern is quite clear—the Old Man has declined to the border of twilight and was hardly aware of us. Hamlin trudged despondently in his wake, barely summoning enough enthusiasm to greet me.

Verai was cheerful, however, and slyly reminded the Old Man that he had not yet painted my portrait. I could see she was attempting to rouse his interest with this, so I made it clear that I would have the next few months free and could sit for him at any time. That seemed to get through to him, and he agreed that we should meet soon.

XXXI Fortuna, MCCXLVI

Silvia returned ten days ago. I gave the custodes strict instructions not to tell her of my return, and had the pleasure of surprising her in the conservatory. We retreated to our sanctuary until today, enjoying a blissful reunion.

XXIV Arcanus, MCCXLVI

Sat for Beltran today, and he looks much better than last month. He seemed more like his old self again, and I have hopes that the worst has been averted.

Whatever his current state, the Old Man certainly has not lost his touch with a brush. It was a pleasure to watch him at his craft. He did not really need me to pose for him after all—his memory is perfect, and he must surely know my features better than most. Still, it was a comfort to sit together in silence, two old friends with no need for words. Perhaps he wanted me there for my company. He paints in a trancelike state, his features more calm and relaxed than I have ever seen them away from his pigments. Is this how he meditates? I have seen the sanctuaries the others use, but never Beltran's. Could it actually be the limnery?

When at last he finished the day's work, he set down his brushes with a sigh. As he hung the thick leather apron on its peg, he turned to me with a weary countenance, and pressed me to speak with Verai again. I do not believe this will do any good, but I did not have the heart to tell him so. I sighed, and promised that I would try to persuade her at the next available opportunity.

XXXV Recondo, MCCXLVI

Haven't written for more than a month—when did I become so slothful? Something about this place makes me neglect my usual routine. Or is it the nearness of Silvia?

Spent the afternoon gaming with Verai. Old Rowan set up a table for us in the conservatory. Verai loves the conservatory—Beltran made sure that Silvia filled it with plants and birds from her homeland, the grapes especially. She often comes there to take the air, chat with Old Rowan and Marcella. Her energy astounds me. There are days when I think she has more joy and enthusiasm than the five of us combined.

Hamlin sat with us today, playing soft tunes on his fiddle, but he seemed subdued. He appears to be spending a lot of time with Verai lately, which explains why he did not join us the day I sat for Beltran.

Toward evening I decided that the time had come to raise the unspoken topic that had lingered between us throughout the day. She stopped me before I could begin, however, and assured me that her mind was quite made up. I have been a diplomat too long not to know an unmovable opponent, and it saddened me even as I accepted what I already knew. Still, I made one last effort, telling her of my love for Silvia and entreating her to wait. "Join us" I said. "You can always change your mind later. Give us a few more years. With your encouragement, perhaps Beltran can even find a way to give you a child." But she refused as always, and said she would not tempt fate. I told her I understood. I lied.

III Laudis, MCCXLVI

Received word today of unrest in the northwestern seas—remnants of the disaffected radicals are attacking the merchant fleets from island bases. Must return north to bolster the resistance and coordinate the search for their strongholds. The alliances are still young, and old wounds still fester. I have consulted Ardora, however, and as usual she sees a way of hope. She says they will need me. I leave for Coralus in the morning.

XXVII Vernus, MCCXLVIII

It is good to be home. This latest flare-up had me concerned for a while, but in the long run I think it will be beneficial for the north. The alliances held, and members of the old factions managed to stand by each other enough to develop some trust in one another. We even got a bit of intermarriage out of this crisis. Patricus will be well pleased.

Many congratulations from the others, most of them recently returned from their own tasks. Even the Old Man seems to be in a good mood.

XXXI Vernus, MCCXLVIII

Eusebius' clothing is more preposterous than ever since his return. I had no idea that my little gift would be the cause of such mirth! Today, however, was best of all. Hamlin slipped into Eusebius' quarters and found the mirror. The next thing we knew he was parading around in an even more outlandish imitation of Eusebius' garb, imitating his mannerisms with rapier-sharp mimicry during one of our few meals together. The priest turned beet red, causing Beltran and Verai to laugh uncontrollably. Even Patricus let out a hearty bellow the likes of which we haven't heard for years.

XXII Harmonia, MCCXLVIII

My heart is heavy, for Verai has finally left us. She died peacefully without pain during the night, but we had no warning, and the news has struck each of us like a blow to the heart. We are all here save for Eusebius—I have sent word to him to return at once.

This day have I lost a beloved friend. I can bear to write no more.

XXVIII Harmonia, MCCXLVIII

Eusebius returned yesterday and we held a memorial for Verai. Beltran is inconsolable and Hamlin is not much better. Poor creature—his kind does not understand death. Silvia and I clung tightly to one another through the long, horrible night.

Why did she insist on leaving us? This did not have to be.

XVII Fortuna, MCCXLIX

Haven't opened this book in more than a year. I have had no desire to chronicle the weary days. Still, I am coming to terms with our loss and it is time for us to move on with our own lives. Silvia and I depart tomorrow to get away from this melancholy place for a while. Beltran must face his grief in his own way. I cannot help him now. He's building a tomb for her, though he has not told us where. Perhaps when that is finished he will finally begin to heal. At least his mind is occupied.

Patricus gave me a hard look when I told him we were going, but said nothing more. Eusebius was more accepting, but I could tell that he too would prefer us to remain longer. I understand his reasoning but I have had quite enough of death for a while. I told him to look out for the Old Man and make sure he eats at least once a month.

XXXII Canto, MCCLXXXV

Stopping here for about a week to confer with Eusebius and Patricus. The Place of Refuge has been well-maintained, and still feels new even though the local plant life has long since accepted it as part of the landscape. I was disappointed to learn that Old Rowan died a few years ago. The new vintner is not bad, but his skill can not compare with hers. Eusebius slipped me a few bottles of the old vintage to take with me when I return to Silvia.

Beltran is still morose, but Eusebius says he's spending more time in the limnery. I take this as a hopeful sign, and am further encouraged that he's shown no further signs of twilight despite his grief.

XXVII Laudis, MCCXCVII

Met for council, the first we have held here in many years. Long years of work have finally paid off in the north. I have just returned from a wedding sealing the alliance of two merchant houses—grandchildren of rival leaders of the unrest of MCCXLII. I had hoped to achieve this earlier, but there were too many sons in the first generation. The bride was already with child by the time of my departure, though they won't know that themselves for a few weeks at least.

Beltran is much improved, painting regularly, and doing research again. He's taken a new apprentice for the first time in many years—an excellent sign. He discussed his current projects with me at length, and it was almost like the old days when we were unlocking the mysteries of the world together. There is a certain spark missing from his eyes, however, and I fear it will never return.

Lingering in the conservatory with Silvia, we realized how much we have missed this haven, even though we lived here for such a short time. Perhaps we can return when our work on Tal is complete.

XVI Solaris, MCCCXVIII

We have returned at last, and it is a comfort to take up residence in these quarters again.

Barely had we arrived when Patricus summoned a council to outline the latest project he has developed in conjunction with Beltran and Eusebius. It is ambitious beyond measure, even for Patricus, but the potential is staggering.

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do not believe that it poses any real threat to the plan. I assured him that this “Verita,” as she calls herself, is merely a symptom of the current unrest. We have weathered cycles of this kind many times in the past, and I have no doubt of our ability to do so again.

XXXVI Lunardus, MDXLV

Messengers arrived this evening with alarming news of strife in Farusia. We cannot wait until morning—Patricus and I will depart within the hour, as soon as enough custodes can be mustered.

VI Vardus, MDXLV

Heavy days are upon us. Farusia has been subdued for a time, but the price was too great. Patricus was a fool to make such a brutal example of their leaders, many of them scarcely old enough to understand what they were doing. If only he had given me a few more days—I am certain a more peaceful settlement might have been reached. He has lived sheltered in the Place of Refuge for so long that he does not understand. The young are angry, not content with the old ways as their forefathers were. This will not be the last of our troubles there. I must ask Eusebius to speak with him. Perhaps he can make the fool see reason.

But there is more behind this than a few churlish young upstarts—I have seen the man who calls himself the “cursed one” again. He came to my lodging in Farusia, just as he did in

Brudicus all those years ago. He doesn't appear to have aged a day, but there is something in his eyes that speaks of untold ages. Like Beltran's eyes, only harder, as if tempered in fire. I scoffed at his warnings before, but now I am not so certain. I am certain he was involved somehow, even though there is no proof. I have tried to locate him again without success.

XXXI Vernus, MDXLVI

Would that I could sleep—truly sleep. How long has it been? There are days when I can not even remember what it was like.

Patricus is making things worse, enacting new laws that are bound to be unpopular.

III Harmonia, MDXLVI

More trouble from Verita and her cultists in the north, but Ordo Marcellus has traced them to the Drantilum region. This nonsense has gone on long enough, and I mean to put an end to it at once. They will expect Patricus with a large force, but in his present rage he could upset the fragile alliances I worked so hard to rebuild there in MDXXXIV. No, I will take a small band of my own custodes and deal with this myself.

VI Harmonia, MDXLVI

Behold veritas! What majestic vista, what magnificent, dark radiance! The truth is dead—long live the truth! I danced upon the brink, risked halfworldly by arcane craft, fruit of noble truth! All should know such rapture! All must know! Nay, all shall know! I will show them, for I have beheld the flowing of the stones! Time will open li-

XV Harmonia, MDXLVI

Conscious again, and beginning to heal. First time I have been coherent and able to hold a pen since my narrow escape from death, though according to Silvia I was raving mad when my spells of recall drew me back to the Sanctum. Don't know what in the nine hells I was writing about last week.

I cannot rest for long. As soon as my recovery is complete I must return to the Drantilum and seek any custodes who may have survived. I would send one of the others, but I cannot trust this to any of them. I must also be certain that she is truly dead. I have thought of little but her final words these past few days. It was probably nothing more than the ravings of a madwoman, but what if it wasn't? I must be sure.

XIX Harmonia, MDXLVI

Still a little weak, but can wait no longer. I shall depart tomorrow despite Silvia's objections.

XXI Harmonia, MDXLVI

It is as I feared. All are dead, friend and foe alike. Silvia was troubled by my absence, even angry, which is unlike her. I did my best to reassure her that I am fine.

Feeling stronger today, but my thoughts are cloudy. Could it be the cursed priestess destroyed herself to convince me of the truth of her words? What a pity that her body was obliterated so completely. Eusebius could have summoned her for questioning, but she was careful to leave no arcane connection behind.

In one thing she was certainly correct—the time has come for us to re-think our grand designs. Not even stone endures forever unchanged. Who are we to think that we too must not evolve? We have become too set in our ways. It will be difficult to convince Patricus of this.

XIX Fortuna, MDXLVI

Consulted Flumena today. Of all the sisters, I have found that her council is usually best when new courses must be sought, but today she spoke nothing but disturbing paradoxes. She spoke of a rising tide of danger to our order, not only from without but within. I could not convince her to reveal which of us is the source of this threat, but given recent events I naturally suspect Patricus.

I must leave this beloved refuge for a while. Clearly we have become too complacent. It is time for me to be out in the world again, reestablish old ties with the ordinis nobilis. Many key followers of Verita are still at large as well. I must find them.

XXIII Vernus, MDXLVIII

So much has changed in so little time. Reading this journal is as painful as the others. What a fool I was for so very long!

But that is the past. Now there is much work to be done. I must distract the others, focus their attention on other things in order to give my custodes time to complete their work. I cannot act until it is ready, and in the meantime I can begin my search for the stones. It seems likely that one or more of the others may have concealed theirs here.

XIII Harmonia, MDXLVIII

I have solved the riddle of the IX. It was far simpler than I had expected. It was a trifling matter to sort the word of passage from the IX. Speaking its reverse seals the way.

While seeking in the caverns of the IX, I also discovered the place where Beltran entombed Verai at long last. I miss her but I also find myself feeling angry with her. Perhaps none of this would have been necessary if she had chosen to join us. Her good sense could have restrained Patricus.

At any rate, the next stage of the way is open to me, and I am certain I can overcome the guardian. It only remains to determine what lies beyond. Clearly this is a place of Beltran's making—it seems he did not reveal everything to us, but that was ever his way. Still, I do not think he is the one Flumena spoke of. It must be Patricus.

It disturbs me that after all this time I have been unable to divine the location of Beltran's sanctuary. I know exactly where the others go for their meditations, indeed, Eusebius and Silvia have often invited me to join them, and I know that Patricus spends his contemplative hours in the chamber of his precious Codex. Only Beltran keeps his sanctuary hidden from the rest of us, and though I have visited him often I am no closer to discovering its location. I dare not enter his quarters without his invitation, but even the charms I have laid upon his latest apprentice have availed me no information.

XXVII Solaris, MDXLIX

All is not well with Silvia. She mistrusts my current thoughts, and argued bitterly with me today. Can it be that she already suspects the change in me? I have tarried here too long. It is too soon for any hint of my plans to be uncovered. I must return to the Drantilum—tonight, if I can slip away unnoticed. It will soon be ready.

XXXV Laudis, MDLXXI

More than twenty years since last I sat here, but that could not be helped. Very little seems changed, though everyone is tense with the pressures of the present conflict. Alas that I cannot remain here for long. I have changed in too many ways, and the others will surely detect it if I linger here. Silvia may already suspect, but luckily Patricus has no notion of my role in his present woes. Beltran is away, which is as planned. I can not face Hamlin's scrutiny just now, for all his mirth.

There is a place below that I cannot see. It must be there. Everywhere else is solid stone, but there is one place beyond the guardian which is clearly protected from arcane sight. Beltran is a fool not to realize that such a void may reveal the very place he hopes to conceal.

XV Solaris, MDCXV

How strange is the unwelcome feeling of nostalgia for this place. It seems undisturbed despite the conflicts that rage around it. I will miss it when this is over.

Silvia greeted me with open arms, eager for all to be forgiven, almost desperate. She said: "Whatever darkness there is, we can face it together as we always have." We withdrew to our old sanctuary in the conservatory, and for a time it was as passionate as the early years, before we became masters of the world. I gave myself freely and willingly to those glorious hours, almost forgetting the old strife—and that which is to come.

Yet all is not as it was. When at last we emerged into the light of the luminary, Silvia was accosted with a complaint from her custodes. It seems an acolyte of the temple is smitten with one of the keepers, and though she cares for him well enough, she protested that he is distracting her from her duty. I could not believe that Silvia permitted this woman to involve her in such a petty dispute—the custodes of old were never so impertinent—and I had to leave the conservatory lest I explode in a rage there before her.

Does this fool of a keeper not know that she is casting aside simple joys that we can never have? This man would love her, war or no war, and perhaps give her children. How can she not understand what a precious thing this is? Nay, instead she sacrifices herself and her love to serve the mighty, omnipotent, impotent Elders. What is this madness we have spawned?

XXXII Solaris, MDCXV

It is nearly time. I consulted Ardora today, and am disturbed by her words. She told me our cause will succeed, but that I myself will not. Others will complete my work. "Am I to die then?" I asked her. She replied: "You have many years to live, but you will wish that you did not." I do not understand this, but my resolve is unshaken. What we have done must be undone, and if I must be a living sacrifice to the cause, so be it.

I was concerned that one of the others might have learned of my role in the unrest by consulting the sisters, but it appears that none of them have dared to do so. Good. It will be easier that way.

V Fortuna, MDCXV

The conservatory has a new vintner, almost as good as Old Rowan. Pity I have no more time for such simple pleasures.

VII Arcanus, MDCXV

I have narrowly averted a major catastrophe. One of the acolytes dared to brave the labyrinth in search of me, and it is fortunate that I found him before any of the others. He might have warned them, but luckily it was I he sought. The threat he posed has been eliminated but his absence will soon be noticed. I shall inform the high priest that I have sent him on a private errand, which will buy a little time, but it is clear that I must act earlier than I had hoped, before another member of his order reads the omens. It is fortunate that our work is nearly complete—there is still an excellent chance we will be ready in time, despite this crisis.

I have instructed my custodes to prepare the Orb. Patricus' mad scheme must be reversed, and we cannot permit it to happen again. I have destroyed the sections of my journal which speak of our folly, but the Codex remains and must be unmade. The challenge will be to find the rest of the stones, but there will be plenty of time when we are finished here.

XVI Arcanus, MDCXV

It has begun. I have made an end of Patricus, the instigator of this madness. The others do not understand, but that will not matter much longer. My legions will hold them at bay long enough for me to claim Beltran's stone. Success is within my grasp. Ardora must have been wrong for once.