

My dear *Alcuin* --

Thank you and well done for your victory over the Synod - I assume it was you. If it wasn't, then do show this letter to whoever it was, and consider stepping down in their favour!

My motherland may not thank you now, but history shall judge you kindly, I think - if you stay strong, never rest, keep building. More, my grandmother demands: more, my great-uncle recommends: more, I ask, in the knowledge we need none of us say a thing.

There's a second letter with this one, and a gift. Please see them into the hands of the new Empress.

The deeds of those who hallowed the world have borne fruit indeed: keep your eyes peeled, for if time has taught me anything it is the love of the Empire for stealing beauty and setting it on fire, and my mortal father wouldn't have recognised that as any kind of Virtue. Or if they do burn it, do at least breathe in the smoke. Someone should benefit from my good work.

You are formally invited to accompany the Imperial delegation to Tamarbode on Saturday afternoon, an hour or so before sunset. Check the Gate for the correct time. I shall know that it is peaceful if you or the Empress are with the group. Bring a couple of the talkative Navarri who wanted to talk business with the Great Fungus, so that they don't think you're lying about what my great-uncle wants. Do try and persuade the Empress she doesn't want too many bodyguards or we'll get a bit crowded: I don't think you'll be able to fit more than seven people in the vestibule all told.

My great-uncle remembers your Spire from when you pantomimed a struggle against those who would raise abominations to fight for the Empire. He remembers that you are building upon a great foundation indeed at the Spire of Bounteous Creation: may strong new shoots rise from that rotting corpse. He remembers that you have done His will before. He remembers that you have been host to His herald, and that you killed it. He remembers that Lulian was full of shit: good for you, deposing him. Drawing on your face with Winter doesn't impress Llofir. Bullshit tastes foul on an Archmage's tongue. Sitting on the fence is nothing but a pain in the backside. Llofir's attention is an honour. Don't waste it.

It is heard that one lives who claims she was Gilead of Nathan's Forge, and that she has continued the cycle of those who take my immortal father's bargain. To her I'd say: You're not my father. You're a whole new person, with a Legacy to use to build the future. Perhaps you might like to use words like 'Ambition'. If she wants to come to see what three centuries have made of me, I don't mind, provided that her vision of the past doesn't get in the way of matters of the present and future.

## *Gilean daughter of Gilead, of Tamarbode*

P.s. I have bugger all to do with the vallorn and that's the way I like it. I don't object to the Navarri talking about the bloody things, but if they use that word to refer to me then what happens next is your fault.