

THE INCESTUOUS VICES OF SASHA TATLAVICA

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PROLOGUE: NOTES ON OLKVAR SOCIETY

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Olkvarskali is a region of Ithenor; a subcontinental region in eastern Doregal, a continent of the fictional world of Asantrea. Ithenorian cultural influences broadly are taken from Balkan states, Imperial Russia and similar regions. Ithenor consists of a collection of Oblasts, each of which is independently governed and answerable to an autocratic ruler based in the city of Hordifell. Over its history, Ithenor has undergone much change, which this story does not attempt to unpack—it would be easy, though, to imagine a tenuous empire built on economic collectivism and shared political philosophy—an approach which in the real world often results in the erasure of cultural diversity. Across Ithenor, this collectivism has its origin in the region's conversion to the Arahanic faith, and the establishment of the Ithenorian Arahanic Orthodoxy. This Orthodoxy underpins many Ithenorian cultural and social customs and practices, and is inextricably entwined with the State.

The people of Ithenor are varied, similar to other parts of Asantrea. All peoples of Asantrea are anthropomorphic animals. Fundamentally human in their posture, sapience and cognition, there are nonetheless no humans anywhere on Asantrea.

Across Ithenor, there are native populations of Lupa, Urssa and Cervid in the frozen north, and greater concentrations of Laska, Mus and Fel peoples in the warmer south. Equid and Caprin peoples, among the most numerous across Asantrea, can be found throughout Ithenor, although they are typically not native.

Olkvarskali's native populace is predominantly of the Laska *taxa*; comprising martens, ermines and sables, with smaller native populations of Sargon deer, fallow deer, and elk. Importantly, though,

Olkvarskali in particular is a melting pot; situated at the crossroads of the hot south and the frozen north, meaning that travellers as varied as dragons and lions from the Nabu-Shar, are not uncommon.

This means that the shared identity of native Olkvars is something they hold with great pride. All Olkvars are part of one people; one great living machine. Children are raised communally from around the age of 8 years (or equivalent), in boarding schools called *Vospitanye*. This isn't a terrible arrangement, broadly; not much different from boarding schools in our world, except that it is universal. The raising of children is the shared duty of all Olkvars, a philosophy intended to create a uniform society focused on the collective good. *It takes a village*, to refer to an old adage—family and child rearing is approached very differently to 'normal' practices of our world. This social collectivism is philosophically intended to create a society which prioritises the common good and the advancement of Olkvar scientific and rational discovery over frivolities like art and music—and, importantly, to educationally 'eliminate' vice and hedonism.

As such; artists, writers, actors, sculptors and their ilk are considered to be dreamers and layabouts by the majority of Olkvars, unless their creations are directly in support of the ambitions of Olkvarskali.

These are, mostly, concepts which can be found in our own real world history.

So, perhaps the most alien of concepts common to Olkvarskali is that of the *Dosvakny'a* – a concept which forms the backbone of this story.

Olkvar society is deeply repressive, and sexually denialistic—outwardly, at least—largely due to the influence of Arahamic Orthodoxy, which preaches that sex should be only for procreation, and that all of an Olkvar's energies should elsewhere be committed to advancing the common cause of the people. Marriage in Olkvarskali is nearly always by arrangement, and an important engine of social mobility.

Prior to an arranged marriage, usually for a period of one to three years after graduation from the *Vospitanye*, young Olkvars are permitted to enter a contractual arrangement called *Dosvakny'a* (literally 'before marriage'), a pre-marital monogamous partnership which is intended to be the vehicle for the young adults to learn sexual, social and marital etiquette. This is based on Ursula K Le Guin's concept of a "kemmering" partner, which she describes in her classic novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. *Dosvakny'y* can be anyone, married or otherwise, of any age group equal to or greater than the graduate. *Dosvakny'a* is a legally binding arrangement; a sort of concession to the sexual and romantic urges of youth that doesn't offend the Arahamic church. Often, the arrangement is, like marriages, driven by social status and expectation, although often it is also driven purely by lust and desire, or in response to an irrepressible urge.

Olkvars who have graduated the *Vospitanye* and not entered into *Dosvakny'a* or a marriage can be somewhat ostracised from society; the assumption being, that their urges are being channelled somewhere unclean, or (perhaps worse) that they are not appropriately chaste and Arahamic in their lifestyle.

Dosvakny'a is broken through 'unclean' sex (sex outside of marriage or *Dosvakny'a*), which if discovered or suspected, can lead to the dissolution of the contract and the affected parties being forced

into marriages to absolve the sin. Casual sex, flirtation, multiple partners are thought of as dirty and undignified, and the social consequences of such can be severe. Pregnancy is strictly prohibited as a product of *Dosvakny'y*, although of course it happens.

Thus, in a society which is outwardly staid and repressive, *Dosvakny'a* exists as a compromise; an outlet for the sexual desires of young Olkvars, thinly veiled as an instrument of social education and propriety. Curiously, against the backdrop of such sexual repressiveness, non-heterosexual relationships of all kinds (including marriage) are perfectly acceptable, and are commonly endorsed as partnerships well-suited to the raising of children born from *Dosvakny'y*.

It is against this backdrop that we find Sasha Tatlavica; a young Olkvar pine marten, the son of an influential and wealthy professor of physics. Social expectation is that a son typically follows his father's footsteps, building on the achievements of his career.

But Sasha has other ideas.