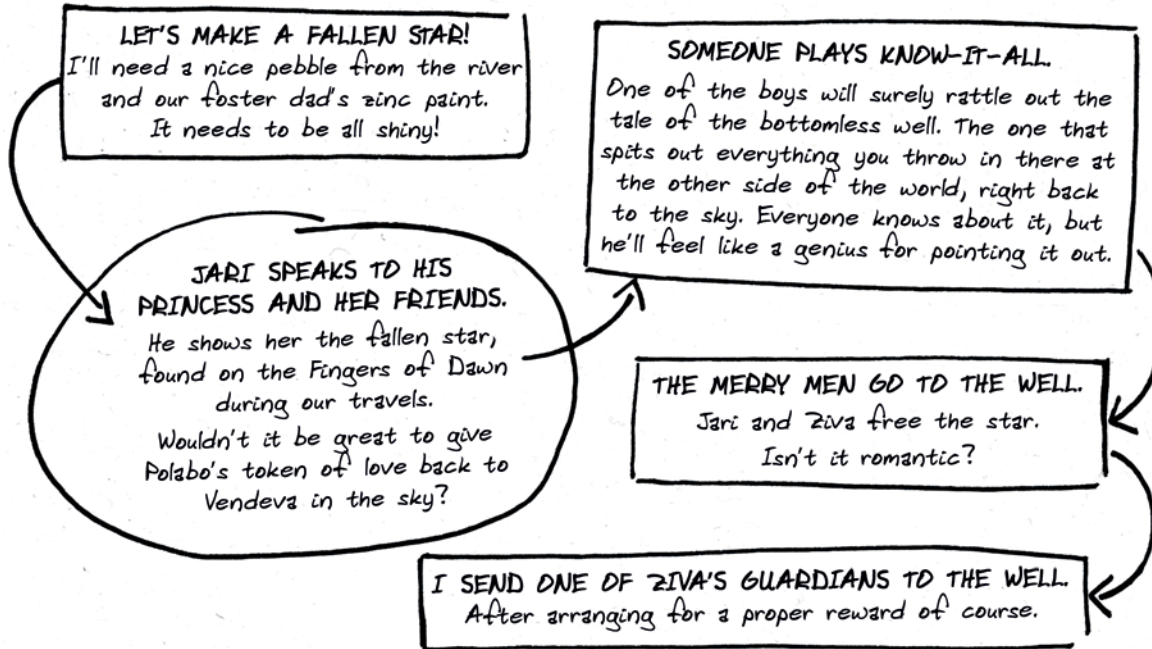


## Veles's Master Plan

Attached to the first page of his Memoirs



JARI MEETS HIS BELOVED + ZIVA GOES ON AN ADVENTURE  
+ HER FRIENDS LOOK GOOD  
and I get some money

**EVERYONE WINS**

NOTA BENE: The guardian must wait at the foot of the hill. I'll go warn Ziva that they're looking for her, and Jari will heroically offer to help her escape. I'll send them straight to the guardian, of course, but he'll look absolutely dashing. **JARI CAN'T KNOW ABOUT THIS!** He's an awful liar, he needs to believe he really can save her.

# VELES

15 years old

*Enter the scene after the others have reached the well. End the scene at the right moment.*

*Black band around your neck, like a scarf.*

Listen well, diary. 'Cause these news will blow your mind. My little brother Jari has a crush on a girl. That's right, it sounds crazy! Don't let your imagination run too wild, though: He can't even open his mouth around her, but every day after school he insists on taking the long route home. The one that runs by the biggest mansion in the Maw of Dusk. And there she is, a princess in her tower. I just saw her at her window. I found out her name: Ziva. It has a nice ring to it. Jarilo and Ziva.

Dur new foster parents don't have the slightest idea, obviously. We've been with them for a couple of months now and I can tell they aren't going to last long. Having them around is almost worse than the orphanage. Almost. He thinks he can teach us how to live, while she's too... That guy in school, I think his name is Kresnik, would call her bourgeois. I still haven't figured out whether he's the kind of guy that would call me a filthy Polabian, but we'll see soon enough. Yes, 'cause here comes the juicy part. I have a plan. It was like seeing the future in my mind and now I know how to make it happen. The best thing is that everyone is going to win. Yeah, yeah, let me explain.

Ziva never gets out of the house. Tawals told me, he's the Polabian boy who's friends with everyone. Some people really can't keep their mouth shut. Ziva actually does sneak out from time to time, right under the nose of her mother's guardians. I think her father is dead. Who cares? Anyway. The ones that smuggle her out are Borevit, the child prodigy with the violin, and Svetovit, the one that looks like the boss of the whole school. With them are Kresnik and Tawals... How else would I know about this?

Anyway, it's no use to repeat the whole thing: I have a chart ready.

I suppose this is a full-fledged con. But there's nothing wrong with it if everyone gets what they want, right? If there's a god somewhere, that's how he should write everyone's future. Without me having to step in and fix everything.

# VELES

## 22 years old

*Bring conflict to the scene. Pick a fight if you have the chance. Or just make up a reason to.*

*Black band under your chin, like a bandit.*

I guess you have no idea why my brother left, do you, diary? But even you, you dumb lump of paper, must have noticed his melancholy. He's been like this for years: Every time he asks me to promise him that this time will be the last, that this will be our last little show.

Then, when he steps into his role, he gets into it. But by the time we've claimed our spoils and left the country, he goes right back to his angst. And now this little escape. As if I couldn't imagine where he's run off to.

As if I've never heard him pine for the Maw of Dusk after a few too many drinks. I wonder what he sees in that place.

Yes, it's the town that had the undisputed privilege of hosting our first con, but since then we've done more than learn to fend for ourselves. We've taken the world in our hands and there's no better feeling than this.

Pity it doesn't seem to be enough for him.

I'm going to sleep for a while. The train is making me drowsy.

Diary, are you still there? Did you notice we've been in the Maw for a few days already? Good boy! I haven't found Jari yet, but I'm almost there.

Tawals works at an inn now and he invited me to Ziva's farewell party. Tomorrow. I'm curious to see whether my little brother has finally managed to woo her. I bet he has.

Tawals was incredibly happy to see me. He says he's heard about our dirty deeds around the world, that the Polabian brothers are the pride of our people. I can't say I care too much about that, but it's kind of gratifying.

I would've rather met Borevit, to hear him play again. He's the only true artist here, besides me and Jarilo. No wonder they call him mad.

I imagine Svetovit and trusty Kresnik will be at the party as well.

I hope those two haven't filled their heads with that Vendevian pride stuff... If they just dare to bully Jari around, I'll leave them no teeth to smile with.

# VELES

29 years old

*You want to keep a low profile. Stay out of the limelight, speak to one person at a time.*

*Black band on your sides, like a general's sash.*

I know what you're thinking, diary: You don't mess with War.

But I'm going to mess with her alright.

We've come back to the Maw of Dusk to dance the dance with the tall poppies of the Vendevidan army. And this time I'm not going to worry about getting everyone what they want. Is this my Polabian pride at work?

I don't think so.

I've never liked bullies. Is that the fault of too many bossy foster fathers? You don't mess with childhood trauma, either.

I thought my little brother would break into cartwheels at the thought of coming back home, and yet he seems darker than ever. I think he's suspicious of my motives, as if he didn't know I would die before betraying him.

What should I do with Jari?

He was magnificent in the last con I wrote, you should've seen him play the foreign investor reconnecting with his Vendevidan roots. Of course, now that half the world is lined up at the eastern border to invade, the Dragon goons have abandoned all caution when it comes to acquiring new armaments, but this does not mean we can lose our focus, not if we want to be able to leave and toast to the party with its own money.

The plan is complex, I won't bother explaining it to you, but the true problem is how close he is to Ziva and the others. We can slip in and out of our covers, of course, but it's not like we're just changing socks.

I risked a lot too. I went to see Tawals. He said that Kresnik has climbed his way up the Dragon's hierarchy (how can they still be friends?), that Svetovit is at the front (always the good little soldier) and that Borevit is home. He plays under the airstrikes. The damn, wonderful madman.

Jari found out Ziva never left, that she was chained here by her mother's illness. Now the old woman is dead and he wants to go to her funeral.

In the Polabian cemetery, where the Dragon's pilots do their target practice.

Idiots, the both of them... If only I could be the one to write their story, instead of watching them stumble around each other like this.

# VELES

36 years old

*You're ready for the grand finale. No half measures, it must be your greatest exit.*

*Black band around your right arm.*

*White around your left.*

War seems set on taking her revenge on us, my dear, foolish, useless diary. Of course, she'll have to really roll up her sleeves, since we've been leading her little Vendevidan soldiers around by the nose for years now - but she's holding on. I thought this would be over sooner, I must admit.

With the damn international coalition at the eastern borders, I didn't think these Dragons would be so... Well, so... They look more like bloodhounds now.

Lately I've changed more passports than socks.

Jari isn't enjoying our long stay home any more than me, the air feels heavier than ever and the old sleepy Maw of Dusk is seriously shaping up to be the last stronghold of the Vendevidan government.

I'm going to Borevit's tonight, he says he has a letter from Tawals to give me. Right from the eastern border, where they rounded up unruly Polabians.

If he managed to write home, it means he's made it, he was freed by the foreign armies. A good fellow, that Tawals.

... Dear diary, that was not a letter.

It went around like wastepaper in the wind, like trash.

It travelled for years, it should have got to one of our hideouts...

It should have warned us, and now it has. Tawals is dead.

It's not written in there, but I feel it, nobody writes like that if they aren't staring death in the face. He says we can never let them get their hands on us, that I'm Polabo, come back to free us all...

What bullshit, my crazy friend.

He writes that he's scribbled his memoirs on a roll of toilet paper.

That he fought to have it. I wonder who wiped their ass with his tears.

Enough playing around with the Vendevidans, we need to leave, I need to get Jari away from this. And Ziva. And Borevit as well.

We'll cross the border and we'll leave the Maw of Dusk forever.

I won't let my little brother's story end here. And whatever comes to pass, happy ending or great tragedy, I'll be the one to write my own finale.