

To the Anvil Militia,

I write to you on the ever-recurring topic of Bite.

It's my understanding that you arrested a cambion mountebank named Tammen von Holberg at the Winter Solstice. You have my thanks and congratulations for pulling off such a delicate operation.

Tammen continues to insist that he is guilty of no further crimes, and has generally been very cooperative. Working from his contacts we have made progress in our ongoing efforts to strike at the heart of the bite supply.

We have uncovered a small operation calling themselves the Silver Stings, reputed to be responsible for a portion of the bite flowing into the city. Moving to arrest has proven... difficult. Every member appears to be under the enchantment "Secrets of the Empty Heart" and quite willing to die rather than face capture.

I believe the Spring Equinox brings an opportunity to resolve this, if you are willing. An operative has learned that Willem von Holberg, a key figure in the Silver Stings, will be visiting Anvil on Saturday night. He is a Changeling, anticipated to arrive around Nine in the evening and head straight for The Forge.

I cannot understate the importance of this: He must be made to lose his enchantment, or agree to replace it with another one, before any move is made. Otherwise we will just have another dead drug dealer on our hands.

For most of the Silver Stings this would likely be impossible, but I gather that Willem stands out. All the arrogance and vainglory of Summer runs through him and, I imagine chafes against his relatively low status in the criminal world. He spends what little coin he has spare on fine dining, gambling, training - presumably craving power and luxury. I would bet my last ring on Willem having a fragile ego, which could be inflated (or punctured) to push him into a more vulnerable position. He is no fool, and surely knows we are on to him, but may be less vigilant outside the walls of Holberg.

If I can provide any further information to assist with the operation I would happily correspond via Winged Messenger. Find my full name below. Please send any missives by midnight on Friday, to give us adequate time to gather information. In the case of a successful arrest and interrogation I would be keen to know the building the Silver Stings are using as their base of operations, and anything else you think pertinent.

Heike Baum von Holberg, Holberg Militia

The undersigned accepts the role and responsibility of "Imperial Representative of the City of Locks" (hereafter referred to as "the Representative") for the duration of the 384th Year of the Empire. This position draws its authority from beyond the Empire, and so ought not prevent the Representative from taking any Imperial Title

The Representative is invested with authority by, and will answer to, Basileus Flint, Sovereign Lord of Locks, Patron of Spies and Traitors, Prince of the Black Vaults, Keeper of the Weir (hereafter referred to as "Basileus")

Basileus agrees to provide the Representative with:

Item 1 - A seasonal allotment of 3 pouches of warm ashes (a total of 12 over the year's course)

Item 2 - A ritual focus to enhance the abilities of an Autumn ritualist

Item 3 - A scroll to deliver a message to Basileus, of no more than 200 words, once over the year's course

Items 1 & 2 are considered fully transferable. The Representative may use them personally, or sell or otherwise exchange them for personal benefit.

Item 3 must remain in the hands of the Representative and may be used by none other.

It is anticipated that Item 3 will be used to inform Basileus of conclusive progress on the matter of Task 3 below, but this is not a requirement.

Item 3 may additionally be used to solicit Basileus for assistance in a specific area of the Representative's choosing. Basileus does not commit to honour any requests that he considers beyond his remit, ability, or interests. Basileus reserves the right to ask something in return, and to more favourably view a request accompanied by good news in other areas.

This should not discourage or undervalue the greater power of Plenipotentiary, held by the Archmage of Autumn.

The Representative agrees to pursue the following tasks, in addition to any further reasonable requests, over the course of the year:

Task 1 - Extol and advance the values of Basileus and the City of Locks among the Empire. These include: ambition, control, espionage, intrigue, treachery, military & political might.

Task 2 - Maintain the Conclave Declaration of Enmity against the creatures of Night called The Whisper Gallery, and advance the cause for the removal of Amity from Toad-King Sadogua.

Task 3 - Ascertain what the Imperial Conclave would consider satisfactory incentive to bestow Basileus with a Declaration of Amity.

By these signatures, and by invocation of the Lictors, it is so.

Signature of Representative:

Signature of Basileus:

*The Sovereign Lady of the City of Gold and Lead,
High Merchant,
Accounter,
Prince of Scales,
Lady of the Counting House,
Invisible Hand,
Merchant Queen,
and Grand Plutocrat,*

EPHISIS

presents the following lots for auction:

Three doses of Warm Ashes

From the great forge of Estavus, each dose has thrice the potency of a mana crystal for any student of Autumn Lore.

A Mask of the High Merchant

*Also known as "Mercantilist's Mask," a ritual focus to aid in the performance of certain rituals that enhance the production of businesses and fleets.
Also bears a Hallowing of the Grateful Debtor.*

The Chalice of the Black Vaults

Careful handling advised.

Once a powerful piece of ritual paraphernalia, a rare and expensive "Spider's Web," this chalice has been cursed for reasons beyond the understanding or interest of the City of Gold and Lead.

The buyer may keep the chalice, which continues to function despite its cursed aura, or remove the curse and return it by Ephisis' Scale.

The Grand Plutocrat will return a number of measures equivalent to the usual value of a Spider's Web, with a 20 percent bonus for services rendered. (Note that the chalice's value will decrease markedly with each passing season!)

Lukash Biessek von Temeschwar,

We believe there is a problem at Drusilla's Obelus. A small group skimming off resources that could otherwise be coming into your supply. It should not be affecting your seasonal income, but you may wish to ensure that you can take hold of their ill-gotten gains yourself.

A changeling member of the group, who call themselves the Silver Stings, plans to visit the Forge at 9pm on Saturday night. I expect the militia will intercept if he is left to his own devices and I am certain that he knows nothing which could put you or I in danger.

However there could be something gained from aiding the militia in their enquiries, or simply doing their job for them. I would certainly be interested to know how this group has been operating under our noses.

A word to the wise: all members of the Silver Stings bear a "Secrets of the Empty Heart" enchantment and would sooner die than face arrest. But perhaps he can be convinced to lose or replace the enchantment?

To be clear: I am presenting this is an interesting-but-risky opportunity, in no way an obligation. If you choose to keep your distance and see how this plays out I am confident we will all remain clean as a cicisbeo's favourite mirror.

Warmest regards,
Your Uncle

P.S. How interesting that Ossium is now in Imperial hands, and that many now set their eyes on the Barrens. Of course once the borders of Holberg are secured, our access to the product will sadly dry up. A pity that the price of war is often paid by small enterprises like our own, but what can you do?

Anja,

I write with dire news

People of the Mark conspire to assassinate Empress Varkula

They claim their act of treason is righteous and heroic, with the backing of silent voices across the Empire

I am not so certain

They intend to strike late on Saturday, as she prepares to leave the Senate building

Please - warn her of the threat, and help bolster her guards against these traitors

Skein and virtue guide you,

Oswald of Edith's Hall