

*Dear Mr. Sommer,*

*The idea has come upon me that this letter might reach you if I address a copy to be despatched to Anwil, where I know you had planned to go.*

*I cannot conceal a very great concern at this stage - we are without any news from you despite several letters, and quite apart from the fact that the circle of curse-hunters and artefact investigators here at Chateau-Castel Castle are curious to learn of any progress you might have made in your own endeavours, I recall with a certain concern that you had mentioned something about Bregasland before leaving. Combined with this long absence, you will forgive me for conceiving a growing fear of what might have happened to you. If you receive this letter, please do let me know as soon as possible that you are well. We would greatly miss you were you to be absent at our entertainments greeting spring's glory in a few weeks.*

*My original letter begins from here:*

*I write to you as a curious matter has come to our attention at the castle. It is not directly connected to your own enquiries on the matter of winter and the thrice-cursed court, but perhaps there is still some residual similarity which might interest you, or at least perhaps the inquiry might allow you to make contacts with similar curse-hunters were you to have a look at it. We are sadly puzzled on our end, I am afraid.*

*Two months ago, a caravan of traders returned from the eastern marches, bearing a variety of goods. I believe you are familiar with the caravan, having been at a carnival with some of our relations in summer 381 if I recall? The one with the amusing marcher gentleman who set certain parts of himself on fire and started swearing colourfully. Very picturesque, it could only have been more marcher if he had then communicated the fire to a potato stall.*

*During the caravan's latest return to Dawn, however, they set up a (somewhat subdued, it being winter) return faire, trading all of the items they had recuperated. And a very curious article was acquired by our sharp-eyed friend Rideau de Fenestre. As always with him, it was an old sword, of course, but he perceived some kind of aura attached to it.*

*His initial examinations led him to conclude that there were no remaining magical enchantments on the weapon, though there had once been. Consulting then with Adair Gen, they were able to determine that it is of Dawnish make. And that it was very, very, very old. Pre-imperial. Potentially even conquest times, though*

they scarcely dare bring that into words. Much of it is rusted and destroyed – it is very fragile. There are traces of there having once been markings on the blade, but they are far too worn and rusted out to be legible.

Despite its lack of markings, however, the sword does have a marked effect on those who would hold it. A disagreeable feeling emanates from it, one of profound discomfort, even fear. One hears voices, feels it shake in hand as though it were receiving blows.

The blade was taken by Rideau and Adair to the Castle, where my colleagues and I have worked what rituals we could upon it in order to examine it further.

The skein of years reveals visions of various bearers of the swords. Scenes of battle can be seen, under blazing sunlight. Knights in gold armour, with the device of a lion engraved in relief upon it, and banners of yellow and white fluttering above them feature prominently. One particular vision seems to be connected with the results of our other rituals – the vision of an older knight, visibly a knight commander from the influence they exert upon those around them – leading a large party of knights into dark, foreboding forests, and battling the vallorn.

The hand of the maker reveals little of interest. The sword was made in pre-imperial times by a smith named Rovalle Sansfer – a skilled artisan, and one who was often commissioned to make swords commemorating the immediate aftermath of the conquest of our territories from the savage orcs, centuries ago. As for the special circumstances of crafting, it appears that the blade was made specifically for the person of the knight commander of the Lions Rampant, a knightly order which established itself in Astolat after the conquest, guarding against the vallorn.

We had fairly turned over our archives, seeking everywhere for some information about the Lions Rampant, and had given up when we encountered, by very good fortune, an educated marcher (yes, quite), who was itinerating through Astolat, perusing the local archival vaults. It appeared that he had been investigating events in Miaren centuries ago, and had in fact encountered some references to the Lions Rampant in texts relating to the original March.

Guided by this revelation, we and the marcher set about our archives once again, and even obtained access to ancient documentation at the Castle of Thorns. Information about the Lions is very fragmentary, but here is what we discerned:

At the time of the Marching, the Lions were an order numbering approximately 103. They were commanded by a knight named Blake Brobourg, or Blake-aux-grands-pas. They primarily concerned themselves with fighting the vallorn, and had some experience as well of exchanging with the Navarr, who pullulated around Miaren greatly in this period already. The Marching itself seems to have been a source of disagreement

amongst the order, as much of their land was impoverished when the yeofolk broke camp, and some of their artefacts were also stolen. A particular incident which is noted in the archives involves a demonstration of dissatisfaction taking place on the order's lands some time after the initial march, spurred on by a returning marcher who sought to incite further rebellion. The archive is not specific, but notes that there was some property either damaged or stolen, and that the order complained to higher authorities. At this juncture, a meeting of earls and commanders at the Castle of Thorns resolved that these late marchers should be stopped by those who could afford to outfit an expedition to halt them, and obtain either their returning to their duties, or compensation for their property.

The Lions were among those who went forth to stop these tardy marchers. They ventured deep into Miaren, and contact was lost with them - the vallorn, though weakened by the initial march, was still extant. It was assumed, at the time, that the entire order had been massacred - either by the Marchers, or by the vallorn. Had it been the latter of course, then their inexplicable disappearance would have been easy to explain. But if it were the former, then one would expect to recuperate artefacts.

And that is precisely why the reappearance of this sword is potentially problematic. It appears that there are some legal subtleties involved - questions of reparations for damages to connected orders, deep suspicion of the marchers engrained in some of the more rural orders and houses. This is at most a minor provincial complaint, but we did wonder, at the castle, whether with your skills, your magical knowledge - and perhaps the assistance of those at Anvil - you might not have been able to have a closer look at the matter.

I do not know whether the egregores might have some thoughts on that - perhaps asking them very specifically about the Tardy Marchers might yield something? Otherwise there is our Marcher contact, a man by the name of Thaddeus Grimm, who might be of assistance.

I close this letter, dear friend, with the expression of my most cordial salutations, and earnest hopes for a successful conclusion to your endeavours, as well as those of my colleagues here at the castle and in the wider circle of those with an interest in ancient and arcane items in Dawn.

Avery Bastide-Bastille de la Forteresse et Citadelle de Chateau-Castel, at Castle Chateau-Castel, The Chase, Astolat.

PS: I shall despatch to Anvil the sword in question, so that you might use it as a foci for your rituals if the need arise.