

[Letter Written in the Cornario Family Cipher]

The Twenty-seventh of September
In the Year of Our Lord 1530
Barony of Cornario
Morea

To Antonio Cornario
Cornario Manor
City of Venice

My dear father –

I trust this letter finds you and mother in good health. My apologies for not writing to you as frequently as I should, especially given the fact that you are reporting to the Doge upon conditions here in Morea.

Regarding the political situation – I am sure that you are aware that the split of the Hapsburg "empire" has become official. The Eastern dominions have adopted a policy officially embracing the return of magic and acceptance towards the old religions. In truth, they are actively encouraging the old religions.

You know more than I on how the Western dominions are reacting. I know the Spanish Habsburgs and the Church have come out against magic. Rumors have reached us that the Spanish Inquisition has stepped up its activities.

I do not know how this will affect the family. What is the situation in Venice and the rest of the Italy? The Republic often ignores papal edicts, so I am guessing that any oppression of magic and exotics is probably done only if they are blatant. Still, feel free to forward on to me anyone with "unusual" talents or abilities who find life becoming intolerable in the western half of Europe. I can find a use for them.

The local situation here is vastly improved. Euryale has not bothered us in some months. I have scried upon her and believe her to be on an island in the Mediterranean.

The population of the County of Salem is swelling, due in great part to refugees from north of the great canal. My Barony is receiving a lot of these refugees, as they are blocked from using the two bridges that transverse the canal. This causes them to flee by sea, using anything that can float and they end up on Christshon's, Sigurd's or my shores.

As for why they are fleeing; it seems that the Turk has not adapted well to the return of magic. From what our intelligence can gather, the Ottomans have decided to depopulate the region south of the Kithairon mountain range. They are driving (or attempting to) drive all of the returning exotics into this region. Considering the relatively safety of our domains, many of the inhabitants are fleeing into Morea as opposed to deeper into Ottoman territory.

I have finished my roadway and have constructed the building for the library I mentioned to you in the past. After the events with Euryale, I asked my architect Andrea to locate a genuine priest of Athena. He has spent some time in Athens, studying the architecture and has/had many contacts in the area. Anyway, he may have already succeeded. One of the refugees is a woman he knew quite well when studying the remains of the Parthenon in Athens. Ariadne claims to be a priestess of the old religion and she has some provenance, unlike my librarian.

Why am I looking for a priest/priestess of Athena? Self-defense, for the most part. While I like Haldar, his proselytizing is rather vigorous (and somewhat annoying). I think it unwise to have all of the inhabitants of my land worship a god whose chief priest is only a few miles away. I believe that building a Temple of Athena on my lands will attract her followers and give an alternative to the local inhabitants. Many of them had only the most cursory allegiance to the Mohammedan god or to the church. With the presence of priests who can create actual miracles upon command, many of the peasants are becoming devout worshippers of the old gods.

Caliph, the mysterious man of Turkish origin, seems to have similar thoughts, although I have not discussed it with him. He has built a temple to Pluto, god of the underworld, upon his lands. Haldar does not appear fantastically pleased.

Sigurd, my neighbor to the south, has set up his lands as a monster preserve. I am in the process of building a large stone wall along the border to between our lands. The local peasants have been volunteering in droves to help out in this endeavor.

Wulfgar has been investing a great deal of capital in his lands. Just recently, he has had some of his extended family move into his lands. Also, a small clan of dwarves, led by Wulfgar's old friend Rurik, have moved into his Barony. Four-fifths of Greece is mountainous and they wish to begin prospecting for ores.

Other than the tasks necessary to the running of my lands, I have done little of note. The arcane arts are an expensive endeavor, so I have made several mechanical steeds that I have sold. Many people among the wealthy find a tireless warhorse that needs no food or sleep and that responds to voice commands as something of a status symbol.

Please give my love and affection to mother and the rest of the family. As I mentioned previously, anyone who finds the climate in the western lands to be oppressive may wish to relocate here. Also, does Julio have an apprentice or two that he can spare? While I acquired clerks and such with the barony, their bookkeeping and accounting skills are primitive compared to a modern country like Venice. I definitely could use an accountant with Julio's "creativity" with numbers.

Your son,
Magnus, Baron of Cornario

[Excerpts from the Personal Journal of Magnus Cornario]

The Eleventh of October, in the Year of our Lord 1530

David's Keep, County Seat of Salem

We were summoned to a meeting at David's keep early this morning by Prince Roger. Prince Rupert had gone missing. Apparently, he lead a group of cavalry north of the great canal

yesterday, in order to investigate what the Turk was doing. One of the cavalymen returned this morning, severely wounded.

The cavalryman said that they were ambushed by large vulture-headed humanoids with feathered wings. He said that their screeches stunned him and several members of the group. He was knocked unconscious and fell into a group of bushes. When he came to, there was evidence of a great battle and everyone was gone.

Prince Roger asked us to rescue Prince Rupert or at least recover his body. We set off an hour before noon. Our group consisted of several of our regulars: Wulfgar, Caliph, Sigurd, David and myself. We were joined by several new people as well, whom we had met over the past couple of weeks:

- Brittany is a human woman, with red-hair and few brain cells. She claims to be a druid and does show some magics of that nature.
- Lysandros is Greek who has been working for David's intelligence network.
- Bindle is a gnome from the city of Zurich, in the Swiss alps. He is a wizard who has been studying at the library.

North of the canal, both Sigurd and Wulfgar found the tracks of the Prince's party. I sent Celeris up several hundred feet to act as a scout. Instead of the vulture-men, we encountered a party of ten ogres. I killed four of them with a Ball of Abysmal Flame and the party dispatched the rest, although we kept one alive for questioning. Lysandros was sorely wounded by an ogre, but David healed him with a wand before his wounds turned fatal. David also played a harp created by Sarah. A most unusual device – all of us who were wounded healed incredibly fast under the influence of its music.

The ogre captive told us that the vulture-men were the allies of the ogres and that they had a screech that could strike fear into their opponents hearts or even kill. The captive said the vulture-men's lair was about a mile past that of the ogre's. He also said that there were twelve ogres in the lair. We decided to deal with the ogres first.

I called forth two lions from the Celestial realms and sent them in first, to draw the ogres fire. Turns out two of the ogres were shamans or some such. They had blue skin and magical

abilities as they could turn invisible and shot cones of bitter frost from their hands. We managed to dispatch them without much difficulty, although Lysandros was nearly slain by one of their cones of cold.

We searched the lair and found the bodies of Prince Rupert and seven other men. In addition, we found the following:

- A skull mask worn by one of the blue-skinned ogres. This artifact is enchanted with a powerful necromantic dweomer. It flew off the face of the ogre wearing it and attempted to strike Caliph. I believe that if it had succeeded that he would have been struck dead.
- A wooden box that unfolds into a boat. The boat can be two sizes – ten feet long or twenty-four feet long, depending upon how it is unfolded.
- A magical feather that can create a wind (once).
- 26,000 gold pieces, mostly Turkish.

We took the bodies back to David's keep. Haldar will try resurrecting Rupert tomorrow. We are donating 2,000 of the gold we liberated to defray the expense of resurrecting Rupert.

The Twelfth of October, in the Year of our Lord 1530

My house, Barony of Cornario

Haldar resurrected Prince Rupert, who told us what happened. Apparently, they encountered ten of the vulture-men. The cavalymen's weapons were useless against them, and their screeching stunned many of the men. Prince Rupert says that they formed a circle outside of his troupe and did a weird dance. They screeched and that was the last thing he remembers.

I believe that we need to research these creatures before proceeding further.