

Friends,

You may have noticed I've not been around for a while - I am once again undercover for the Thane and I'd appreciate your expert help, could you lend your considerable talents to digging around for some info in Swarkstone for me? At this stage of the investigation I can't raise my profile without blowing my cover so some "official" snooping by you guys on behalf of the Thane might help me fill in a few blanks?

You may have heard that the churches in Swarkstone have been a little more militant of late, arguing amongst themselves and being more strident than is normal - well that seems to be the tip of an iceberg of unrest. Fistfights between religious practitioners breaking out in keynote square, odd suicides amongst the churchmen, graverobbing and desecration, it's all a little unsavoury and fractious and with the Thane and his bride planning a visit to next years Swarkstone carnival this perilous of unrest needs to be laid to rest.

The leaders of some of religious groups might have an interesting take on recent events; and frankly I'm curious to see if they sweat a little when approached. If you were to go to them as representatives of the Thane under the official guise of concern that the city will be a well behaved place for the royal couple to visit it would at least give you a chance to dig around. We can't threaten to take away any licence to hold congregation without a damn good reason, but you can leverage their access to the Book treasury as a stick to beat them with if needs be. Just a thought...

I've got people working on this in the city already, I've been getting magical advice from Sanguines edible pupil at the Mage school and have a contact in the City Watch who has been a real source of some juicy info. Don't want to put any names in this letter but I've left a file for you at the Red Pig Inn on the Swarkstone road.

Scry

PS: My main man Monty is retired from active criminality now but still has a few feelers out in the less than reputable side of the city: if you call in on him via the Hidalgo he will give you the word on the underground. Tell him to submit an invoice via the usual channels.

PPS: Speaking of invoices, I've arranged for you to pick up City Ward seals making you Proctor Octavo Legerdemain of the Book treasury to give credence to your cover story for investigating the recent upsets: you can use this seal to bill expenses to the Thane. Keep the receipts, his accountant is a cunt.

Covering note from Scry–

Friends,

I've been digging around in the underbelly of the city to see if there is a common thread behind the rash of troubles that have been escalating over the last 18 months or so. Out of the city there have been highwaymen active on the roads for the first time in a decade and pirates are being reported on the seas interrupting the new trade routes. In the city and surrounds there's been a notable increase in suicides, grave robbing and aggressive murder. The strangest and potentially most worrying thing of all is that a good deal of the corpses go inexplicably missing very soon after they turn up dead – the churches are particularly sensitive to this as they seem to think it's some sort of plot to stop the "victims" from receiving a suitable religious ceremony. However it's not just church members this affects as many non religiously affiliated corpses go bye-bye also. Any immediate thoughts I had of strange Frankenstein like golems being made or a potential undead army being created fell flat – these corpses then sometimes *show up again* having been mutilated, maimed, washing up bloated on the shore or (in once case) in the woods half eaten by boars. A big old slice of WTF pie.

A lot of the Militia reports and fragments of death certificates (the latest of which I will include here) were forwarded to me by **Officer Mihalis Of Gauner District**. He's a decent and dependable bloke – and good cops working Gaunier are bloody rare I can assure you - Not only feeding me police reports about the corpse disappearances but also as a source of info from out of Gaunier. He has noted that there had been a much higher influx of "hired help" (muscle for hire) into Gauner over the last year or so. They show up, then vanish again just as quickly, no idea where or who (if anyone) is hiring them. Those that we have managed to track are those that ended up in jail – the others are off the map.

He's keeping a watchful eye open for movements of any more hired help, and thinks he might have another lead about vanishing corpses via some resurrection men (grave robbers) but is under direction to move carefully with that line of enquiry. Don't want to tip our hand. Mihalis should be very high on your list of people to make contact with, but be unobtrusive – I haven't managed to get word to him recently so he won't be expecting you, but he knows who you all are so shouldn't be too suspicious if you come knocking.

In here is a list of the Church leads that I've been mostly unable to make any sneaky inroads with, looks like the direct approach is the only option there – **Council Chairman Saffit** has sent official requests for interviews on behalf of the Thane under Ballantines name. Saff is aware of my role in all this and will have your City Seals and any current info for you when you hit town. Gwens been my go-to for doing the magical jiggery pokery and has been "on call" with the militia (via Saff) seeing if she can discern any ritualistic magical themes or influence when a new case pops up. So far nada.

If you come up with anything juicy you can drop me a line via the Hidalgo, and I'll send word to you the same way if I get the chance.

*Scry*

## Newspaper scraps

*11 November 1375*

Thomas Winter, who was on Monday last committed to the new Jail for a robbery, was examined before a Justice, and on his examination, which lasted three hours, he confessed 6 robberies on the highway and several counts of piracy on the sea ; he impeached by name 30 of his accomplices, and proper warrants are granted against them: We convey here that he was done to death by inmates of the jail who he fought with, the reports reaching us that he was beaten to death by a small mob of his fellows and reduced to such a state that his remains could not be carried or properly buried.

*27 December. Comment.*

John Sculth, executed last Saturday, had confessed that he had been concerned in 12 instances of piracy, and never got more than 20g/d. by them all, tho' above 300g/d. was taken at one Job; but he was cheated of his Share, as well as of his Life, by his Accomplices, and declared one of them was his Master, a Barber of the old city whom he refused to name further. Your editor draws your note to the rise in piracy in these days and delivers a warning thus, unless the Thane brings the navy back to Swarkstone we will soon be cut adrift from the trade of the land and left to starve or fend for our owne devices.

January 5. MarshlandTheatre - The "Late Unfortunate"

- Yesterday morning, at quarter before 4 o'clock, some person passing the marshland Theatre, on the corner of 640 and Broad streets, saw flames issuing from that building and gave the alarm of fire. In a very short time the whole structure was enveloped in a sheet of flame, and when the pump engines arrived upon the ground it was found impossible to do much else than endeavor to save the adjoining property. Thoe no party has come forward with informations it was noted by locals that the theatre had been accused several times of producing shows which were "lavicious and ungodly in nature" and in the neighborhood it is spoken that retrubution from one or more churches might be the cause.

Extracts from City Militia reports and death notices of the last 2 months

**Militia report march 1884H:**

Abrah Randall, senoir partner at lawfirm Hiram, Randal and Gibbs.... the deceased was found to have imbibed a life ending quantity of a biological nerve toxin – some remaining quantity of which was spilled down his dinner shirt and coat.

**Militia report January 14733B**

... the prisoner John Sculth was found poisoned in his cell prior to execution – the warder attempted to avoid a scandal and said the man had fainted and he was brought insensible to the gallows and hung.

**Death Notice submission February 19**

... Mrs Gald died of her self inflicted injuries, witness said she walked calmly into the mill house and thrust her arms into the millwheel where she then bled to death from her wounds. It was later discovered that she showed visible signs of poisoning...

**Militia report 15545S**

It was first presumed that the deceased has died from shock, having been found in his garden where he had crushed his left hand with a stonemasons mallet so severly that it was reduced to a smear. A search of his house found several documents and a vial had been burned in the grate, the documents were beyond recovery – the vial seems to have contained a toxin which on further investigation the deceased was found to have taken in large quantities.

**Official requests for council meeting appointments have been sent out to the following – full on fancy gold trimmed goatskin parchment with big old official wax seals and all.**

**Blackcoat Barbarin** – The New Church of the Atheistic; anything which is not pretty is evil. Ugly people are damned for all time. This is one of the older more established churches in Swark, and seems to have some \$ behind it.

**Montario Vallini** – The 8 faces. Another fairly well established church. Everyone is descended from 4 families created by god – the purer the bloodline the more sacred you are. Vallini is “just” a high priest “The Right Reverend Lord Montario Vallini” – (Bishop Vallini). The archbishop Jakab Essian resides near the borders.

**Sister Ildephonsus** – the new nation of duality – non believers are all devils. Literally – they believe you are possessed from puberty unless saved. They have closed ranks in the last year or so and I couldn’t find out a single other thing about them or where they come from. Been in Swark for just over 10 years.

**Oswald Lubomyr** – people of light. They believe in direct telepathic contact from otherworldly beings. One follower did tell me “Sadly yes sometimes we are told to comit crimes for the greater good...” apparently not too often; but they do have a few followers in jail for larceny no murders attributable to the church on record. New in town, 2 years or so.

**Allencherry** – The church of mercy. The mercy in this case being “mercy killing” – all adherents are encouraged to kill themselves as they believe that people are ruining the planet. Not a hugely popular church, and the problem being that you’re only allowed to kill yourself once you have converted two other people. Despite them being an obvious mark for the spate of suicides no member of the church has died?

**Filoni Barragan** – All Souls - All living things have souls and all are equal. Luckily the offshoot of this church that also believes that **Non** living things have souls hasn’t taken off in Swarkstone yet. The church is like a zoo.

**Theodore Sarr** – Only women have souls. A very poor church “but on the up” an adherent told me. Mostly seems to be popular with weird old perverted men. I got into the church after attending a lecture and it’s dank and gloomy: smells of sweat, pee and despair.