

*To my teachers at the Academy for Aspiring Champions,*

*You may not remember me, for I was an average and unremarkable student, but I remember my time at the Academy for Aspiring Champions very well indeed. The lessons I learned there kept me alive during my service with the Drakes, but these days I have retired from the military life to return to help run my parents' chandlery.*

*I would wish that it were only nostalgia I had to write to you about. However, as they say in these parts, "wishes don't clean out the cesspit".*

*You may not remember me, but you probably remember Thomas Hayward. Thomas was at the Academy the same time that I was. Thomas was the Changeling who always thought he knew better than the teachers, and acted like he should be the one teaching the class. There's no question that he was a fair enough fighter, but he was an arrogant and proud one to boot.*

*I don't rightly recall the details; only that Thomas stopped coming to the Academy one day. Some said that he'd been asked to leave, whilst others said that he had stormed out insisting that he would set up his own "better" Academy. You would know better than I. Either way, I had not expected to hear any more of Thomas Hayward.*

*Unfortunately for everyone, I have. My family and I have taken in some refugees from the Mourn. It's the least we can do. Only, on their way to safety in Mitwold, they were set upon by Marcher Bandits calling themselves "The Collecting Folk".*

Apparently, the Collecting Folk reckon they are following the path of Prosperity by using their skills to collect from folk they reckon are less skilled and less able to use it prosperously. I'm no priest, but that sounds like blasphemy and no mistake.

The bandits took what they wanted, and let their victims go. Speaking to the group, I got a fair description of the leader and I'll eat my boots if it wasn't Thomas Hayward. I knew he was a bad'un, but I never realised just how bad.

I should write to the militia, but it steams me right up that Hayward is out there misusing the skills he honed at the Academy for Aspiring Champions. I figure that if the Sentinel Gate opens at the Greensward in Mournwold, then you might be able to take matters into your own hands – with or without the approval of the militia – and protect the good reputation of the Swabian Academy.

May your minds be clearer than your cider,

Glenda Maidenstone