

Dearest Regina,

You are in very grave danger right now, for reasons I have only recently learned. I have but a little time, so I must be brief.

A powerful evil stalks you all, seeking to make you its minion. I know, because until two weeks ago, I was one. I made a bargain, long ago, and traded my honor for the opportunity to advance my status — and the status of the House. I have long been allied with a group known to me as the Empty Circle, who had some very profitable — if legally and morally questionable — lines of trade. The profits realized on some of the deals struck with them have been great, and at nominal cost to me. Indeed, they have never asked of me anything.

Until recently.

A short while ago, they finally redeemed the debt I knew I owed them. I was to obtain for them a certain heirloom — an amulet of some middling magical power. They told me where and when it would be for sale, and how I was to pay for it.

Further, on their orders, I had my own boat sunk, and hired your friends to retrieve the amulet from it — taking them out of the city, and placing both amulets together. I then sent a group of mercenaries to attack you, under the name "the Amber Dragon". They were to kill or disable the whole group and take both amulets. I asked them to spare you if possible, but not make it obvious. Had they succeeded, they would have returned to me with both amulets, and any survivors of the attack would believe the Amber Dragon was stalking them. At the least, even if the mercenaries failed, I would have one of the amulets, courtesy of you and the Companions.

When my hired goons failed, I then — again on their instructions — provided you with the information that the Companions sought. This led them to believe that the Amber Dragon was connected with earlier events in which they were involved. Though the information presented there was true — the real Amber Dragon did possess that much power — it was incomplete, designed to make sure they drew that conclusion from the data.

I cannot say for certain, but I think the goals of the Empty Circle were two-fold. First, to dispose of the Companions and gain control of the amulets, and second, for reasons I cannot fathom, they wish to use them to find the Amber Dragon, if he still lives.

Their plan — ingenious though it was — failed. They did not count on my learning the nature of the amulets themselves. When you told me what that amulet actually was, I began to investigate this group I had sold myself to. And what I found chilled me to my bones, and the finding of it cost a number of very good men their lives — and possibly their souls.

I discovered that the Empty Circle is being run by my old master, and lover — a woman by the name of Simone Delcieus. I had thought her dead long ago, and best forgotten about. Though I loved her and learned my craft from her, she was an evil, manipulative woman, and I both wept and rejoiced at her death.

To say the least, it was immediately obvious to me that no good could come of her having the amulet. Either she was to hold it hostage, and sell it to the highest bidder — or what else I dare not imagine.

I determined, of course, that my only possible course of action was to keep it from her.

However, as you and I both well know, a powerful woman is not usually willing to be gainsaid in her desires. I knew I needed to act quickly, and set in motion an evacuation plan, making sure above all that our House records and the amulet were protected from the inevitable strike I knew was to come.

Thus far, I have been successful — our goods and our people are, for the most part, safe. However, all my plans will fail if I am forced to confront Simone herself — I fear the power she may yet exert over me, even after all these years. Even if I don't possess the amulet itself, she may well be able to force knowledge of its location from me.

Therefore, it is best if I do not know where it is. Take it, and run — run far, and run fast, and run to some safer place where they can protect you from evil better than I can. When this storm is weathered, and the sun rises again in peace, I hope we may all come together again. Should I fail to live out this night, I leave the care and keeping of the House to you. May you keep it more honorably than I.

With devotion

Dara Sunglimmer