

June 2, 1955

Sheriff Crawford,

Yesterday, I promised you a gift and the story behind it. You now hold the gift. Here is the story. Learn well from it.

This great country that God has granted us was claimed by soldiers who came before we did, valiant men guided by a vision of Manifest Destiny. It was a vision brought to vivid life by artists worthy of being called prophets. Their paintings and photographs of the Western landscape captured our imagination for an American Canaan.

George Catlin was one such artist-prophet. During the early part of 19th century, he traveled across the plains and ventured into the Northwest with some of our greatest explorers and brought back thousands of drawings which he turned into paintings. One of the most memorable was a piece entitled "Comanche Feats of Martial Horsemanship." It's an image that shows just how formidable our savage enemies can be and how defeating them demands we match them in cunning, skill, and ingenuity.

The painting now in your care is not that painting.

You see, in the middle of his life, Catlin, to his shame, fell on hard times. To pay his debts, he had to sell his body of work. The collector who purchased the collection did not put Catlin's visions on display for the world to see. He locked them away, for reasons I do not know nor care to understand.

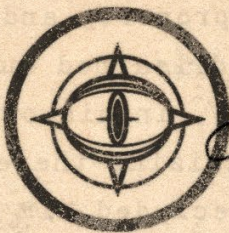
What happened to Catlin should never have occurred; he never should have had to part with the treasure of his property and the legacy of his immortality project. But Catlin had learned much from his years studying the savages; he had become, in his own way, exceedingly cunning, skillful, and ingenious. Realizing there was nothing in his arrangement with his buyer that precluded him from simply re-painting his oeuvre, Catlin did just that. He duplicated a majority of his work from outlines of the originals, in many cases improving upon them. These recreations — he called them his "cartoon collection" — did need new titles, of course. The painting in your

custody is one of those authentic replicas; it is called "Martial Feats of Comanche Horsemanship." A simple juxtaposition of words that allows for the immoral transgression of plagiarism, although the victim of this theft is the artist himself.

I use words like "custody" with sober deliberateness. This gift is not yours to keep. It is a totem of the responsibility that you inherited last night. Just as this painting was entrusted to me when the responsibility was mine, now, it is entrusted to you. And when the time comes for you to give up the mantle of our order to your replacement, we expect you to give him this painting, and with it, this story.

Until then, let "Martial Feats of Comanche Horsemanship" challenge you, comfort you, and inspire you. The challenge: to never betray your birthright. The comfort: should misfortune befall you, do not despair; as long as you breathe, there is hope. The inspiration: at every turn, execute your duties with the talents of our adversaries, and double them. Cunning. Skill. Ingeniousness. These are your powers of office. Use them well.

We are Achaians coming from Troy, beaten off our true course by winds from every direction across the great gulf of the open sea, making for home, by the wrong way, on the wrong courses. So we have come. So it has pleased Zeus to arrange it.



Akia,

*J. David Keene*

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