

# Easterners

Part Three of The Compass Quartet

by

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Visible Sound

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Characters in the story

**Letocetum: in the land of the Corieltauvi**

Sowena	thirteen-year-old girl from Tintagel
Arthur	one-year-old boy from Tintagel; son of Uther Pendragon and Ygraine
Marcán	a Setantii slave; now at Letocetum
Ector	ruler at Letocetum and one of the main Corieltauvi leaders
Sefin	wife to Ector; from Aquae Arnemetiae

Caius	six-year-old son to Sefin and Ector
Aemilia	twelve-year-old girl of Letocetum
Nuamh	woman of Letocetum; mother of Corin
Saen	soldier; husband to Nuamh; father of Corin
Riestor	soldier
Weaven	soldier; older man
Etta	Riestor's Grandmother; watches over the children of Letocetum
Lilless	keeps hens and geese; of Cornovii descent
Borsarius	Ector's general
Theoran	healer; of Cornovii descent
Torman	farmer at Letocetum

### **Aquae Arnemetiae: in the land of the Cornovii**

Coel	Lord of Aquae Arnemetiae; brother of Sefin; a Cornovii leader
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### **Derbentio: in the land of the Corieltauvi**

Loric	master trader
Corin	potter; son of Saen and Nuamh
Moira	works with Corin
Wulfric	Saxon traveller
Basor	boatman
Yann	boatman

### **Settlement on the Soar: in the land of the Corieltauvi**

Loria	cousin of Loric
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### **Ratae: in the land of the Corieltauvi**

Lord Durstan	a lord and a Corieltauvi leader
Aletia	wife to Durstan
Volisio	his son
Batreus	a servant
Risco	a soldier in the service of Durstan
Thadeh	a soldier in the service of Durstan

### **Viroconium (Wroxter): in the land of the Cornovii**

Roxian	a lord and Cornovii leader
Leria + Treanda	traders from Virconium

### **Tintagel: in the land of the Dumnoni**

Ygraine	Queen of Pendragon
Jowan	father to Sowena
Owen	commander of the guard
Kenan	page to Ygraine
Kensa	maid to Ygraine

### **Gwashford (Great Casterton); in the land of the Corieltauvi**

Laurien	leader of the settlement
Mesyan	farmer
Ulsta	farmer

**Verulamium: in the land of the Catuvellauni**

Iovanus leader of the Catuvellauni Tribe  
Aldan Iovanus' messenger to Letocetum

**Gariannum: in the land of the Iceni**

Oadacer Iceni leader at Gariannum  
Tarian Iceni sailor; fair haired  
Herlja a refugee

**Chichester, capital of the Regnenses**

Meranis Queen of the Regnenses

**Durovernum, capital of the Cantii**

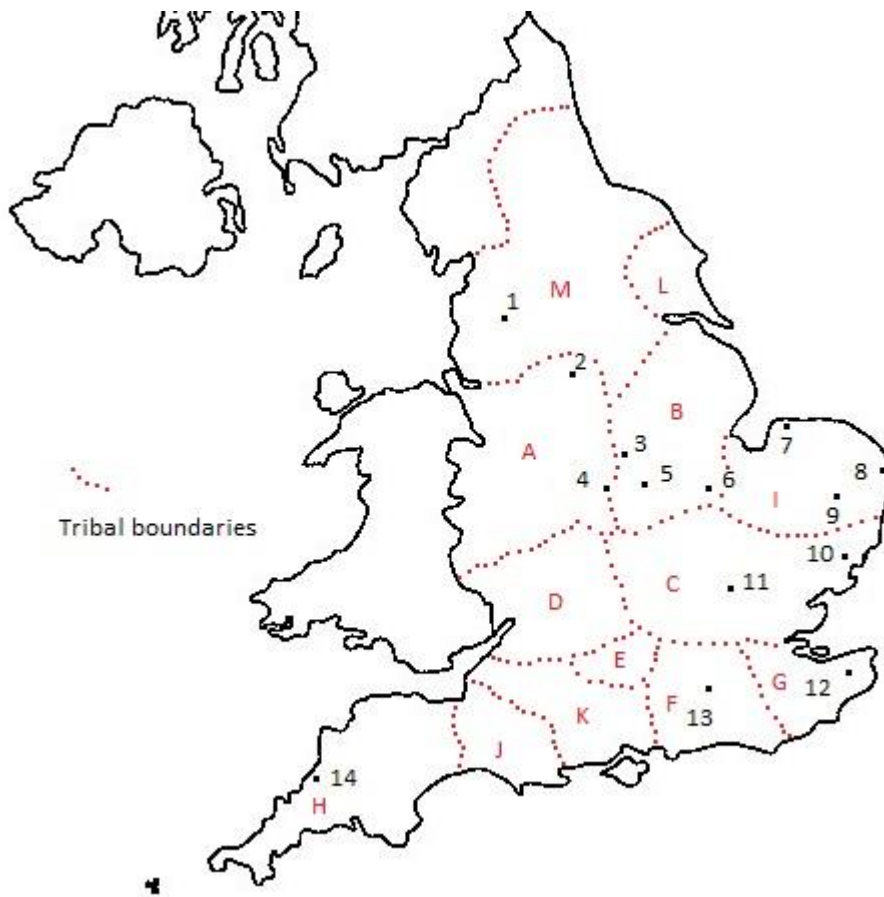
King Hlranus Leader of the Cantii

**Flevum, on the Frisian coast**

Marja skill with languages

**Others:**

Heradus sailor on the *Martes*



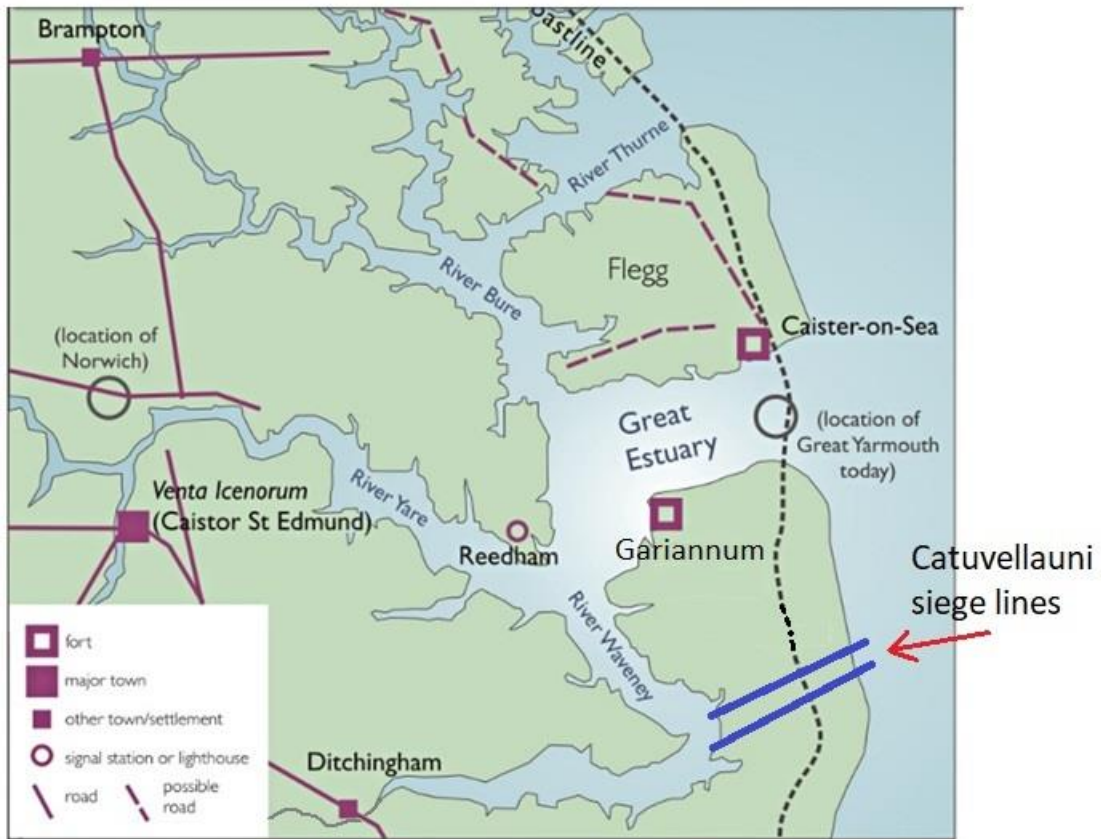
#### Tribal areas

A	Cornovii
B	Corieltavi
C	Catuvellauni
D	Dobunni
E	Atrebates
F	Regnanses
G	Cantii
H	Dumnoni
I	Iceni
J	Drurotriges
K	Belgae
L	Parisii
M	Brigantes

#### Locations

1	Chipping
2	Aquae Arnemetiae
3	Derbentio
4	Letocetum
5	Ratae
6	Gwashford
7	Branodunum
8	Gariannum
9	Scole Bridge
10	Gippeswic
11	Verulamium
12	Durovernum
13	Chichester

Flevum is a settlement on the coast of what is now called The Netherlands and Treva is the old name of what has now become Hamburg in Germany.



Gariannum and its surroundings, showing the modern coastline and the locations of Norwich and Great Yarmouth

*Arise, sun in the west  
 Rise from a dragon  
 Threads pull together  
 Until there is peace*

*The story so far...*

*A deadly plague has killed Uther Pendragon. Merlin has taken the young Arthur north, against the wishes of Ygraine, and has enlisted Sowena to help. On their voyage they pick up Marcan, a young slave boy. Eventually Merlin arranges for Lord Ector to look after Arthur, Sowena and Marcan and they all travel to Ector's hall at Letocetum.*

*Sowena begins to settle into her new home and Ector formally adopts her as his daughter. Arthur is looked after with the other small children, including Caius, Ector's son.*

*But Ector's lands are threatened from the south by the Catuvellauni tribe who are using Saxon mercenaries to strengthen their army. Merlin gathers many troops to defend Letocetum and the Catuvellauni are forced to retreat. In the confusion Volisio, a young man from Ratae, manages to allow Wulfric, a Saxon, to get away and flees east with him. Merlin knows that the future of Britannia is with these two men. Sowena must find them...*

### Letocetum and Ratae

Sowena strapped the second pack of food on to the flank of her horse and then checked the pouch that she wore round her waist. Inside the pouch was one third of the coins that she, Marcan and Moira were carrying. They represented a considerable value and Sowena felt uncomfortable that Ector had given her so much.

In truth, some of the coins had come from Durstan and Aletia. They were both desperately worried about where their son Volisio had gone. Sowena guessed that Durstan was torn between his desire to find his son and his responsibility to his tribe and town.

The information gathered by Ector's scouts the previous day had not amounted to much. The lands to the east and south of Letocetum were almost deserted. Closely shadowed by riders from Letocetum, the Catuvellauni army and its Saxon allies were retreating south towards their own lands. There had been no fighting, but the leaders gathered for the Solstice feast were in no doubt that the threat remained real.

Merlin hurried to where Sowena stood with Marcan and Moira. "Go now," he urged them in a low voice. "It is a day since Wulfric and Volisio disappeared. See if you can find news of them in Ratae first. You must retrieve the Pendant."

"Will Volisio want to go Ratae?" asked Sowena. "People there will know him."

"I don't think you will find many people at Ratae," replied Merlin. "The threat from the south has emptied these lands. But some may have remained or be thinking of returning."

With the early morning sun in their eyes, the three riders galloped away and headed east across farmland dotted with small stands of trees.

After a few miles they encountered two of Ector's scouts. The scouts had not seen Volisio and Wulfric nor, more importantly for them, was there any sign of the retreating Catuvellaunian army. One of the scouts, Torman, was known to Marcan and Sowena.

He had been with Volisio two days earlier as they ranged north of the Burg in case the enemy had attempted to attack from that direction.

"I don't remember anything odd about Volisio that day," said Torman. "But remember, I'd only met him the day before. I have seen him at Letocetum before, but never spoken to him. There were about ten of us working together. He seemed young, but he was a good rider."

"When did you last see him?" asked Marcan.

"That's the question everyone has been asking," smiled Torman, as his fellow scout snorted in derision. "Just after mid-day. Just as the enemy got close enough for things to get serious. It all got a bit... exciting just then, didn't it?" There was humour in his answer. Clearly, he was relieved that there had been no fighting, but Sowena could tell he was amused that they were asking the same questions that he'd already heard many times.

"Ector told us yesterday to keep an eye out for Volisio and that Saxon fellow, but they will be well away by now - especially if he's stolen stuff from his father."

Sowena winced. She knew, as Torman did not, that the only thing missing was not Durstan's, but obviously a rumour had spread around that Volisio had taken something from his father and disappeared with it.

"Volisio never took much notice of his father," said the other scout, whose name was Risco. "I live just outside Ratae, and it was well known in the town that Volisio didn't see eye to eye with Lord Durstan."

"What do you mean?" asked Moira. She'd been in Ratae on that day when the people of that town had attacked the tavern where the Saxon singers were performing. Then she'd travelled for weeks with Merlin as he recruited men to come to Letocetum. Sowena was aware that Moira knew all about Volisio already but was asking just to see if there was something more to be discovered - something that might give a clue as to where Volisio was headed.

"Well, when those Saxons started trading over to Ratae from the Wash, Volisio was one of the first to wear some of the clothes they brought. And he used to listen to their music as well, but after that raid earlier this year, we saw them out of the town for good."

Sowena shivered. She'd been in the tavern that night, with Volisio and Wulfric, and only just escaped the riot. She was haunted still by both the fear of being taken and by the music she'd heard.

"He wasn't the only one who traded with the Saxons, though," said Moira. "We even had some of their goods up at Derbentio."

"Ah, well, that's just along the river, isn't it?" the scout went on. "It was always those river-folk who brought trouble into the town. And Volisio was thick with them. Always spending time on the riverbank. If you want to know where he's gone, ask them."

"Will they still be in the town?" said Marcan. "Maybe they've fled like the rest."

"Maybe they have. But they can always sail back quickly if they want."

Moira smiled at Sowena. "We can check when we get to Ratae. We'd better push on if we're going to get there before nightfall." She swung herself back onto her horse. "Come on, you two."

"Tell Ector you've seen us," said Marcan to Torman. "Tell him we're heading to Ratae."



"I don't suppose we'll be able to get any other messages back home after this," said Sowena. "There will be nobody to tell."

"You never know," said Marcan.

## Ratae

They rode further east. There were no people to be seen. Settlements, never very numerous in this area, were deserted. The travellers paused at several and called out to see if anyone would emerge from hiding. No one did, and, by midday, they had given up on expecting to meet anyone.

Late in the afternoon the land began to slope down towards Ratae and for the first time they saw a sign of other people. A thin wisp of smoke was rising from one of the buildings on the riverbank. Marcan looked at the other two. "Someone's there," he said.

"Yes," said Moira. "I wonder who."

"Let's go and see," said Sowena and she pushed her horse on. As they came into the first few houses Sowena began to recognise the place and before long they came to Lord Durstan's house, where she had stayed on her visit.

Inside the courtyard there was the remains of a fire, but it hadn't been alight recently. Marcan, spear in hand, went into the building to look around while Moira and Sowena examined the courtyard.

"This fire is all burned down," said Moira, "And there's no other wood nearby. I don't think whoever lit it planned to come back."

"No," agreed Sowena. "Listen. Can you hear any sounds at all?"

"None. And I don't suppose Marcan will find anything, either."

"Hey," called Marcan. "Come and look at this!"

"Ah," said Sowena.

She and Moira went into Lord Durstan's house and found Marcan in one of the larger rooms. The furniture was as Sowena remembered it. But none of the small or decorative items were there. It looked as though things had been tidied away, probably for fear the Catuvellauni might come. Marcan was over in one of the corners of the room and pointing to the floor.

"Look," he said, pointing down with his spear. It seemed like a chest had been dragged away from the corner and the hard earth beneath it had been dug into. A cloth, with dirt clinging to it, lay on the floor nearby.

"That's been done very recently," he said. "And where have we seen something like this before?"

Sowena nodded. When she'd arrived at Letocetum all those months ago she had hidden the Pendragon Pendant under the floor of her room in Ector's hall. Now the Pendant was missing, and it was clear that Volisio had taken it. Apart from Marcan, no one else in Letocetum knew about the Pendant because it was a secret which Merlin had asked her to keep.

Moira knew about the Pendant because she'd been told by Merlin. It was one of the main reasons they were following Volisio and Wulfric.

"And now Volisio has returned to his own home and found something else that was buried," said Sowena. "I guess he had hidden some valuable things here before he left to come to Letocetum. Now he's got them back - maybe to help him on his journey with Wulfric."

"Have any of the other rooms been disturbed?" asked Moira. They scouted round the building but could find nothing else out of place.

"I wonder," said Moira, as they made their way back outside. "If it *was* Volisio who dug up that floor and if he *did* take something away, did it belong to him or to his father?"

"Yes," answered Marcan. "People were saying at Letocetum that Volisio had taken something of his father's."

"That was just rumour," said Sowena. "We don't even know if he's come this way." She had liked Volisio when she first met him and shared the experience of hearing the Saxon music. She was distressed to think he could have been the one to attack her and steal the Pendant. She ached to find out the truth.

"We shouldn't stay long," said Sowena. "We need to keep going if we're to catch up with Volisio and Wulfric."

"We'll need somewhere to spend the night. Even if whoever lit this fire didn't plan to return, I don't feel comfortable about staying here." Moira looked around. "It's some time since I last came to Ratae. But I'd feel safer in the centre of the town. I think the road we came in on leads down to a bridge."

"That's what I remember," said Sowena. "Marcan! We're leaving!"

Marcan emerged from the building. "OK," he said. "Let's find somewhere to sleep."

They walked their horses through the silent houses and came to the bridge across the river. As they looked down over the water, they noticed that a small boat had just set off and was heading downstream towards them.

"Hey!" shouted Marcan. "Stop!" He ran forward across the bridge and began to scramble down to the bank.

Moira gave her reins to Sowena. "There's something about that boat... Stay here with the horses," she said and set off to follow Marcan.

The boat slowed and Marcan stepped forward.

"Greetings," said Marcan. "I've come from Letocetum with my companions and hoped to find shelter in the town overnight. You are the only people we have seen so far."

The man at the front of the boat backed his oars and, not looking up from his work, said "You're not going to see anybody here. The town's deserted."

Sowena stared. That voice was familiar. She wished she could see the man's face.

"Why are you here then?" asked Marcan

“That’s our own business, young lad,” said the second man, at the tiller. He glared at the two on the bank and then looked up at Sowena on the bridge.

“Yann?” said Sowena uncertainly. “Is that you?”

“Aye, it is,” replied Yann. “You’re the lass that came from Derbentio a few months back. With Ector.”

“That’s right,” said Sowena. “And Moira was with me too. And a load of Corin’s pottery.”

“Moira!” cried the first man. “I didn’t see you. What are you doing here?”

He pulled hard on the oars as Yann put the tiller over and steered for the bank.

“Basor, you rogue. I’ve loaded more pots on to this boat than I can remember!” exclaimed Moira.

“That you have, but you’ve changed somehow since we put you ashore back then. Where have you been these weeks?” asked Basor.

“I’ve travelled to Aquae Arnemetiae and Virconium. With Merlin,” she replied.

Basor nodded appreciatively.

Marcan was looking from Moira to the men on the boat and then to Sowena. “You know these men?”

Sowena called down, “Yes. We sailed with them when we got all that pottery.”

Yann spoke to Moira. “We heard that Merlin was in these parts, but we never saw him. Then the news came of the attack from the south, those Catuvellauni, and the town emptied. Not that it’s got many people in it at the best of times.”

“We’re heading back to Derbentio,” said Basor. “We just came down here to see if it was worth bringing any pottery down yet.”

“The Catuvellauni have retreated,” said Marcan. “People will return soon.”

“Speaking of people returning,” said Basor, “We saw that Saxon of yours this morning.”

“He’s not my Saxon,” said Sowena, automatically, at the same time as Moira said, “Wulfric?”

“Oh, yes, that was his name, wasn’t it?” said Yann. “I remember. Yes, him and another man, well, a lad really.”

“Where did they go?” asked Marcan.

“It was quite early,” said Yann, pointing up at Sowena. “We were in the centre of town and they galloped into the marketplace from this direction, had a quick look round and galloped off east.”

“I don’t know if they saw us though,” said Basor. “We were in one of the taverns looking for things to trade. But it was him alright.”

“Let’s go, then,” said Marcan. “We’re not far behind.”

“We can’t travel in the dark,” said Moira. “It wouldn’t be safe for the horses.”

“No,” said Sowena, “You’re right.”

“We just have to follow the river,” said Yann. And he pushed the boat gently from the bank.

“Well, sleep well,” said Basor. “I’d find a room in a house somewhere out of the centre, if I were you. That’s where anyone coming to the town will head for and you might not want to meet just anyone.”

“I hope we meet again,” called Yann, as the boat slid slowly under the bridge.

Up above, Sowena moved so she could see the two men again.

“Goodbye,” called Basor bending to the oars. “I hope you find your Saxon!”

“He’s not my Saxon!” shouted Sowena, but she was smiling as she did so.

Moira and Marcan joined her again on the bridge. “Let’s go back to Durstan’s house and sleep there,” said Sowena. “Maybe Volisio will come back.”

“Mmm,” said Marcan. “I’m not sure. It could have been Volisio who lit that fire. But it could have been someone else.”

“Yes,” said Moira. “I think it’s better we head across the town and find somewhere on the east side. That way, we’re on the right side of town to start tomorrow.”

“But Yann and Basor said they haven’t seen anyone else,” said Sowena.

“They haven’t seen anyone else. That doesn’t mean there *isn’t* anyone else,” said Marcan. “I agree with Moira.”

Moira nodded. “And anyway, wherever we stay, it won’t be for long. We’ll be up early to get a good start on catching up with Volisio and your Saxon.”

“He’s not...” began Sowena and then stopped. Moira was grinning and Sowena realised that Marcan was teasing her. She smiled and was happy that she had such companions on this journey. She’d known Marcan for less than a year, and Moira for hardly any time but she felt close to them

Feeling outvoted on the decision about where they would stay, but not unhappy, Sowena led the three forwards, off the bridge and into the town. She saw the tavern where she and Volisio and Wulfric had gone to hear the Saxon music, and where they had nearly been trapped in a riot.

Across the marketplace they went and out of the town through the Fosse Way gate. As on the west side of town, there were several buildings outside the walls, but these had a more dilapidated look. After a few minutes’ walk they selected a small building set back from the road. They saw to their horses and shared out some food.

They lit no fire because they were anxious not to draw attention to their presence. It was arranged that Sowena would watch first, then Moira and then Marcan. He promised to wake them at dawn so they could set off at first light.

## Letocetum

Merlin looked up from the map he had spread out on the table in front of him. "It is only a guess that they've gone east, Ector. But I spoke a great deal with Wulfric over the last few weeks. He spoke about trying to cross the sea again."

Ector sighed. "I know you expect me to say "good" to that."

Merlin was sitting with Ector and Loria in the hall at Letocetum. The crowds of people who had gathered at Letocetum had not dispersed. They were waiting for news that the Catuvellauni army had really returned into their own lands.

"I know you won't," said Merlin. "I know you realise that the Saxons, and the Jutes, and the Angles will continue to come to this land. Some of our people are inviting them here and some are just coming anyway. One individual is not going to make any difference."

"Why are they coming?" asked Loria. "What is happening in their own lands?"

"There are great movements of people in the lands over the sea these days. Men from the uttermost east are heading towards the ocean and changing the lands as they come. I have heard the word Huns used to describe them and they are driving the Saxons and others before them."

Ector shook his head. "I am only just learning the names Saxon and Jute, and now you tell me about the Huns. Another name to learn."

"But learn them we must," said Merlin.

"I wonder where Sowena is," said Loria. "And Moira and Marcan. Have they found Volisio?"

"All we have is Torman's news of them," said Merlin.

"And we won't get any more than that," said Ector. "Who will they meet who can keep us in touch?"

"Merlin, will they find Volisio and Wulfric?" asked Loria.

"I don't know the answer to either of those questions," said Merlin. "However, I am sure they will meet people on their journey that they do not expect. And I have a high expectation of Moira's need to find Corin." He smiled. "She will get them to Gippeswic, I've no doubt, because that's where Corin went! I spoke a great deal to her as well in these last weeks. She is determined to find her master potter."

Ector smiled. His settlement was overflowing with refugees and organising the provisions for so great a number went far beyond what had been planned for the Solstice feast. It was true that the Catuvellaunian assault had been deterred, but the cost of that victory to Letocetum was the presence of so many people from both Ector's own Corieltauvi tribe, and from Sefin's Cornovii people and the need to feed them all.

"Well," said Ector. "It's no good wondering where they are and what they are doing. We have quite enough to be doing here."

