

Journal 2 - Seaport of Tarras, in Shadow

At the port of Tarras we located a suitable sailing ship, a cutter called the *Alicia*. Her captain, Morgan, had a slight reputation for risky ventures; also known as smuggling. As an explanation for our great wealth, we told Captain Morgan that Victor had recently come into an inheritance, which included the map to 'far-off lands across the ocean' that we were to navigate by – as soon as we had manufactured it.

Avoiding some soldiers, who were interested in the strange, foreign coinage we had been copiously spending, we set sail the day after we had hired the ship. No doubt Tim's use of magic bolts on them will be expanded into a fearful battle with Dark Powers before long.

When Morianna and I had drawn up a suitable looking map, showing the coast of Morgan's world and what she said was the coast of Amber across a dangerous, current-filled ocean, Victor used his power in a new way; he somehow caused it to become aged and more realistic looking. We gave it to Morgan as part of his payment as we had promised, and we set fully underway.

The journey took just over two weeks, as Victor slowly moved us through the worlds until we reached Amber. We tried to stay busy, playing various games such as chess (or some form of equivalent) and the like; Tim was seasick the whole journey, but helped Victor when he could, since he laid claim to the same power as Victor.

Over the journey it became clear that the armour, gauntlet and sword Victor wore were more than they appeared. All could somehow magically transform themselves into hawks, normal in most respects save their coloration matched that of the item they became and that they possessed reason and the ability to speak. Rather useful, I would think, save that they spent much of their free time (in other words, all their time) fluttering around the ship and complaining. The price you pay for intelligence, I suppose.

When Victor and Tim announced that we were in Amber, or at least very close, we sighted several warships on the horizon. Captain Morgan did his best to evade them, but ultimately to no avail. I was surprised to encounter picket ships, as, it seemed, were Victor and Morianna; clearly there was some struggle going on in Amber we, or at least I, were not aware of. We convinced Morgan to let us go ashore in his rowboat, convincing him that he could follow the map back to Tarras.

I do not know if this was possible; Tim seemed of the opinion that it was, but it seemed unlikely he would make it anyway. I hope that he did; Morgan was a good man, ready for adventure and a man with discerning tastes and interesting stories.

Leaving the rowboat to float away from shore with a hole in the bottom, we made our way along the beach in the direction where the others said Rebma lay. Despite moving carefully along the edge of the beach, mostly concealed by the woods, we eventually encountered troops. They reacted badly to us, calling on us to surrender, but we fought them instead, killing all but the one I captured; I received a moderately light leg wound as a result.

Victor carried our prisoner and we continued on to the large heap of stones that appeared to be our destination. We were attacked again as we neared them, this time by a group of crossbowmen. We dealt with them as well, though with greater cost than before; Victor was struck in the shoulder by a bolt, which apparently was not enough to slow him significantly, while Tim was downed but not killed by another bolt, having a slighter frame. Victor lifted the wounded Tim over his other shoulder and carrying our prisoner under the same arm, we continued on.

At the cairn of stones Morianna led the way into the sea. Needless to say I was worried about the prospect of protracted swimming but I was to be surprised even more than usual. Long, wide steps of white marble led down into the sea, lit at intervals by marble columns topped with fire, all underwater. We had no buoyancy; rather we walked down the steps as if we were above water.

When it came to breathing I noticed that Morianna appeared to breathe normally; intermittently she also seemed to breathe out bubbles of what was presumably air. When I tried it, as I had to when my held breath ran out, it felt normal enough, though when I

breathed out bubbles they tickled my nose. It usually occurred when I exerted myself beyond a certain degree; since we were running down the stairs it happened fairly often.

All movement was slightly slowed by the water, but that did not stop us or our pursuers running as fast as we could. I could just hear my allies panting as they ran, though the water rendered the sounds slightly hollow. Some strange set of physical laws existed in this place called Rebma, somehow existing alongside an apparently normal world (as far as I could tell).

We reached a barricade at the bottom of the stairs after close to about a quarter hour of gradually slowing running. Our pursuers gave up a short time before we neared it, and presumably returned back up the stairs. Stopped just before the barricade by a group of green-haired men in some form of scale armour and bearing short swords and spears, I announced that I had been sent by Andreas bearing messages for the Lady Yvonne and the Lady Llewella. At this, they let us through.

They escorted us for a short way across the ocean floor to a golden-gated city. Taken beyond the gates we were led to a great palace in the centre of the city, built of large stones with mirrors of various shapes and sizes either hung intermittently on the walls, or built into the walls themselves. Mirrors also hung inside the palace, mostly where paintings and tapestries would normally be set.

Taken to the infirmary, Victor and Tim were attended to while my leg was bandaged up. My prisoner was taken away, presumably to be interrogated. Morianna and I were then guided to a private dining room where we were served dinner. This dinner was interrupted by a woman who was obviously the Llewella from the cards; an attractive woman with what is clearly the characteristic green Rebma hair, dressed in a blue gown of some soft material. She asked after the messages, and I told her I had one for Yvonne that could be given to her if Andreas' wife was not here. Llewella then told us that Yvonne was here, so I could give it to her personally. She also somehow recognised 'my' sword as actually belonging to Andreas only in a different form, something I had guessed some time ago. This, she said, must mean he must like me as he would not give his sword to just anyone.

After dinner I went to the chambers that had been set aside for me and bathed (an extremely odd thing to contemplate when surrounded by water!) and then retired to bed.

After breakfast the next morning I sought out Llewella again. I had to wait to see her, so I sought out the library. There I sought out books on automobiles, and proceeded to study the basics processes of the internal combustion engine, which powered them. Remarkable technology, a kind of advanced steam engine only using a flammable liquid, ignited into a gas, to drive the pistons, as opposed to fire-heated steam. Incredible that it does not explode.

When I returned at the assigned time I found Morianna waiting also. Shown in we found Llewella was accompanied by a lovely lady with long, black hair and dark eyes, tall and well formed. Llewella introduced us (or at least me) to the lady Yvonne, Andreas' wife. Thus, the introductions made, I handed her the letter from her husband. She read it quietly and seemed slightly disturbed by what she read.

Llewella then told me I was to see the queen, Moire. Led to her throne room, a high-ceilinged affair with balconies and a dais upon which the throne stood, I beheld Moire. A woman of indeterminable age, but with silver streaks in her green hair, she was beautiful but distracting like many Rebma women, who seem to prefer to go around naked from the waist up except for jewellery. It took great concentration to talk to her without gaping or gawking. She had a powerful if gentle presence.

She asked me about my journey to her realm, and I told her without going into great detail. I then asked about the Pattern as Andreas suggested, and she said she would show it to me. She led me (and some of her entourage) down into the depths of the caves and dungeons below the palace, through winding tunnels to a large door, locked with a key carried by Moire.

The door opened onto a massive chamber whose only feature was the hug, glowing spiral-like design upon the floor, lighting up the whole room with it's blue light. It burned with some Power I could only barely comprehend. One with the 'blood of Amber', said Moire, can walk the line of the spiral; the experience is very draining, both mentally and physically, and anyone not possessing the Amber heritage would die before they took ten steps.

I would, she said, be able to attempt once I had rested and fully healed.

After arranging a dinner with Llewella later that day I met up with Morianna outside the throne room again and we went to visit Tim and Victor in the infirmary. Tim was slowly recovering while Victor, remarkably enough, was free to go, if he took it easy. When I asked about his recovery, the doctor told me that all those with the blood of Amber are stronger and tougher than most folk, and that they also heal faster than most too. If I possessed that heritage I too would display these attributes, apparently.

I can not remember having any of these attributes; does that mean I do not possess the 'blood of Amber'? In light of all that had happened it seemed unlikely now that I did not possess it, despite what my good sense and the belief that neither of my parents was unfaithful, or that I was fostered by people who were not my family. A hard blow to take to one's sense of identity.

A messenger arrived then for Morianna; I followed her down to the gate of the city where we found a battered but triumphant Bernard. He had fought his way from wherever we had lost him down into Rebma. Quite an achievement, even for a hound like Bernard.

Victor and Morianna had gone their own ways, so I returned to the library (after a few false starts) and perused some books on history, or, in my case, on the future of a number of worlds very similar to 'mine', but further advanced, into the third millennium. As I went as I obliged to consult various books to fathom the various technologies the histories described.

Such marvels! Flight, deep sea submersibles, telephones, devices orbiting in space above the planet, computers, television; so many miracles, yet considered so ordinary by the folk of the time.

And the books went much further, into incredible vehicular technologies, material sciences, weapons and travel through the depths of space from world to world, star to star.

Astounding.

The dinner with Llewella was pleasant, with excellent seafood (perhaps unsurprisingly) and simple conversation, free of talk of our troubles and journeys. No talk of politics, the current situation and such.

The next few days I spent resting and recuperating. Rumours of an attack by forces from above the sea began to circulate around the palace, probably coming within a few more days. Much of my time I spent studying more books and getting to know the palace and city.