

Journal 8 - Corwin's Paris

Finishing my lunch, Dworkin created another black portal and we stepped through it to appear in a field somewhere. He asked me to 'bring up a lens'; when I looked confused at him he seemed exasperated to discover I was a total novice. He grumbled a little but proceeded with the lesson.

He recapped the basics I already knew, and then told me to just get on with it. I struggled well enough, managing to make a few changes and move us between worlds, though I think (by his standards if not anyone's) I was a trifle clumsy. Not bad for the first time though.

I had just managed a hellride when I found something in our destination Shadow I had not specified: a sizeable group of men of apparent Asian stock, wearing suits of some form of black plate armour with the unicorn design I had come to recognise from the backs of the Trump cards. Their golden swords were drawn.

Dworkin asked them after their origin and about their presence here, and they said they were soldiers of King Eric, and they wanted me. I was more than a little perturbed about that. However, Dworkin told them that as his student I was under his protection, so they had better just leave. Their leader refused, so Dworkin proceeded to slowly vaporise him before our eyes. His screams were not pleasant, and I could tell it worried the other men rather a lot.

Once the leader had gone, the others made off as quickly as they could, vanishing away like mist in the morning sun. Dworkin informed me that I was now his student full-time, asserting he had to make it so to avoid any claims by his opposite, whom he said was called 'Soo-He' (or something close), that he was choosing sides.

He then reached out and held my head in one gnarled hand, and with a stinging rush like diving into a pool of icy water a sudden flood of knowledge abruptly came into my head. All the basic details I knew about the Pattern skills were bolstered by more comprehensive background of knowledge. Nothing exceptional, he told me, and none of the experience to pull off the more obtuse tricks, but enough to be going along with.

I think this is what Victor had suddenly dropped on him back in the cave in the forest of Arden. I can understand his shock and surprise, but not his resentment; armed with this knowledge I could go to any place I could imagine. The wonders I could see, the places I could visit! Certainly the means were a little peremptory, but in the face of what was gained it seemed a small price to pay. It seems to me that Victor can be a little inflexible and narrow-minded in his views and opinions at times. But so can we all.

Dworkin told me Andreas wanted to see me, so he (presumably) Trumped Corwin and took us through the contact to him. It seemed he was not expecting us; he was in bed and had company, an attractive blonde (from what I could see of her anyway). I left the room and Dworkin vanished, off to meet with 'Soo-He'.

I found it was just short of midday and Andreas was downstairs; he told me he wanted me to back him up when we went looking for Victor's woman, a young lady from the castle called Julie, now probably in her family's mansion north of the city. He then said because of his relationship with Benedict (teacher and student), and because he had been sent to find and look after me, he had obligations to fulfil; not really to me, but to my father. He was much more beholden to me than I was to him, he said.

This was true, in a way. While he had, in effect, got me out of the trouble I had had escaping from Montsorbier, he had dropped me into a far larger predicament; Amber and its associated complications, both good and bad. Not bad for one week's work.

Passing through the kitchen for food we found Victor, who told us a final planning meeting was scheduled in the library a few minutes from now. We soon joined Joe there as well as the surprisingly returned Tristan. Morianna, Intruder and Corwin joined us soon after. Victor was elsewhere, so he would not know our plans in case he was captured.

Victor, accompanied by Guin, was prepared to take out their target, the trade route. I had not known Guin was going with him; I decided to ask her about it later, if the opportunity arose.

In the meantime, Tristan, Joe, Andreas, Intruder and myself would be going to Amber for the much-needed reconnaissance. We would check the city in person, examine the castle

from afar with telescopes, and attempt to have a look at Arden, to see how Julian's rangers (or perhaps Rangers) were faring. We would enter Amber by sea in a small sailboat, scupper it when we got within swimming distance of the shore and swim to the beach. We would get out, or 'exfiltrate' as Intruder called it, either in another sailboat or by using our various Shadow walking skills if split up.

We were to leave in the afternoon.

Morianna, meanwhile, had another task especially suited to her abilities, or at least that was what Andreas said; she just looked confused. Not very encouraging.

The meeting broke up and I went to see Guin upstairs. He forestalled any questions by announcing we were going out to dinner, and she transported us to just around the corner from a small bistro.

The dinner was excellent, and Guin spent most of her time worrying about Morianna of all people. She told me that she had known she was going with Victor only for a few hours, and had seen no reason to tell me. She seemed pleased that I was concerned though.

She was worried that Morianna may be being sent on some sort of diversionary action and ran the risk of being sacrificed as a distraction. She did not seem to have any real evidence of this, just what she called 'Trump intuition'. She thought it likely that such an idea might come from plans made by Andreas and Bleys.

After the meal I took her dancing, at a cosy little music hall where they played both simple and elaborate music for all styles of dancing. Fortunately the dances were similar enough to ones I knew, so I could keep up.

We returned after about two hours, so we would have time to prepare before leaving.

She suggested that I bring her a present next time we met; chocolates would be a good choice. I don't know where I was supposed to find time to get them.