

Journal 58 - in Amber

Finally getting a real opportunity to do so, I spent much of the rest of the day exploring the castle. Between a luxurious lunch and a fine dinner I made myself familiar with the ancestral home, taking a look in all the dining rooms, smoking rooms, lounges, reception rooms, offices, meeting rooms, conference rooms and game rooms as well as looking in on the main library, the Great Hall and the infirmary. On top of all that I did my best to find the official apartments of all the Family members, simultaneously discovering that I was the only member of the Family currently in the castle, other than Random, who was entertaining some foreign visitors.

Before retiring for the night I made use of the smoking room nearest to my rooms, having a few leisurely drinks and one of Dworkin's cigars before approaching (with not a little trepidation) the small piano in the corner.

It had been a few years since I had played; mournful tunes had been my only bill of fare during the days of the Terror, only, what, three years before? Even with the distractions I had managed to divert myself with I had not felt it was somehow appropriate to play anything more cheerful. Besides, was the piano in Amber going to sound the same as the ones I played in Magdeburg and Paris?

It did, as it turned out. It was perfectly in tune, and there were even some books of music in the stool. Perhaps even more remarkably, it was sheet music in a form I could read. The more things change and so forth, I suppose.

I practiced my scales a little first, to familiarise myself with playing again. Then I played a few simple tunes from memory, a bad idea as it turned out; I could barely recall them. So I turned to the sheet music instead and found myself playing through "Greensleeves" and some pieces the Mozart I knew had never written with increasing confidence.

After maybe an hour the yawning began and I sent myself off to bed.

The next day I packed the clothing and gear I wanted to take into my carry bag and saddlebags. I was dressed in rugged clothing of a cut and style similar enough to what was worn in my home, accompanied by a wide-brimmed hat and a long, canvas riding coat split long up the back. Leather gloves, tough knee boots and my sabre finished the ensemble.

Suitably prepared I left coat and hat behind and went in search of my father. I finally tracked him down in a conference room that looked ready to be used as a command post for a war. Big maps were hung on the walls and smaller ones festooned the large table in the centre of the room; the curtains were all pulled shut. Benedict sat at the head of the table, opposite the door, reading a solid-looking book that bore the mark of a bronze eagle on the spine.

When he saw me enter he greeted me with a simple "afternoon" but when I told him it was morning he got up and opened the curtains behind him. "So it is" he replied. I asked if he had been caught up planning something important but he just told me that it was a good book. Had I come for the presents? he asked me. I told him that was so and he led the way to his rooms, which were just down the corridor.

He went in first and fetched three parcels wrapped in dark paper from off the desk. They had cards attached to them, indicating who they were for in Benedict's careful, flowing script. The smallest was for my mother; the next, slightly larger, was for my father; the last was clearly the rapier intended for Manfred. He placed them in a leather sack he had acquired for the occasion and handed it to me; he glanced at my attire and asked if I was leaving soon. I said that I was and he inquired as to whether I was walking there or using Trump. Well, I said, since I don't *have* a Trump of Bek I would definitely be walking.

Benedict seemed a little surprised by this and commented that he used to have a Trump for Bek but he did not know where it had gone to. Dworkin, apparently, destroys those cards that remained in the library too long, or at least he says he does; they were always thought to be indestructible.

He finished our short conversation by saying that he should still be in Amber when I returned, as he did not think he was going anywhere any time soon, unless things changed. I told him I would seek him out when I got back, and he handed me a bottle of wine "for the journey". I thanked him and left.

Within two hours I had packed my things onto Charlemagne and ridden out into mighty Arden. Another hour passed before I had passed sufficiently far through that great forest to being shifting into Shadow towards alignment with Bek.

I moved at a good speed, certainly quicker than I had the last time I had made the journey, stopping off an inns most nights when doing so did not take me too far away from my desired destination. All in all it took me something like two weeks to make the journey through Shadow; the wine I saved until the night I knew I was close.

The next day, as expected, I found myself on the main road to where Bek lay.