

Journal 1 - 23rd December 1793

Montsorbier finally caught up; he shot my horse dead and forced me to flee on foot, carrying my saddlebags. When all seemed lost, I found a well-provisioned horse on the far side of a snowdrift and made off on it. I eventually escaped my pursuers by jumping over a broken bridge, a remarkable feat for a remarkable horse.

Stayed a few nights at a coaching inn over the Swiss border. I checked through the bags on the horse I had found (to find some way of determining it's owner or owner's relatives) and discovered some clothing; fine if oddly packaged foodstuffs; some books in some foreign tongue; a small curio box containing a deck of portrait cards (owner's family?) with a design on the back (white unicorn on black); and a rather old-fashioned but well-used longsword.

Woke on third day to find myself hanging upside down from a tree close to a cave, confronted with a large, muscular fellow with dark hair marked with a lighter shock, and a sun-darkened complexion – a tan in winter? He wore some form of archaic leather armour and kept a blade close. It transpired that I had stolen his horse and left him to the mercy of his own pack of assailants, taking a few minor if painful injuries as a result. He called me horsethief, I protested my need of a horse was as much as his, considering our similar situations. He did not seem entirely serious in his threats. Eventually he appeared to relent and let me down; we moved into the cave where he had set up camp, complete with small fire. My saddlebags were at the back, but my sword and pistols were amongst my host's bags, now reclaimed.

We talked for a time; at this juncture he made a passing comment about 'another world'. Fearing he may somehow know the von Bek legends, I mentioned the Mittelmarch, but he asserted his innocence on that subject. There was, he told me, a place that acts as a pebble dropped in a pond, forming worlds in the ripples it created in the metaphysical water. He also claimed there was a second pebble, somehow producing a cosmological system of sorts. Very mystical, and certainly deranged.

My host then made use of some glass cylinder containing some medicinal liquid, apparently inserting part of it under the skin of his arm and squirting the liquid into him. Before long he slept.

In the interest of curiosity and safety (know thine acquaintance, as well as enemy) I checked his bags again and examined his books. Taking more time over them, they appeared to be written in a seamless if strange mixture of English and Latin, just barely comprehensible. One appeared to detail medical techniques of an odd nature, as well as what appeared to be a list of drugs and their effects. Another, smaller bag he must have been carrying himself contained a leather case that held within it several more of the glass devices, apparently called 'syringes'.

Woke next morning to find another in the cave with us; a friend it seemed. A pale man, swaying slightly as if under the effects of opium; he wore a large black cloak over some sort of black leathers consisting of lots of straps. He spoke as if he answered questions asked minutes before; this proved to be the case. The strangest thing about him was his eyes; they were all red, and by that I mean no pupils or iris or white part, just pure red. He appeared to have no problem seeing though, despite the fact that it was hard to tell if he could see at all.

When he eventually got around to asking my question regarding his name, he said it was Intruder; yet another peculiarity. A name or a title? He also told me (before I asked) that my host was called Andreas; could be Greek or Italian, or of course neither.

At this juncture Andreas told me that Intruder was disjointed because he was 'lost in time' as some form of price for a mystical art he practices. Very curious.

Andreas decided at this point to confuse things even more by declaring that I claimed the same heritage as they; one (or even both) of my parents are not who I think they are, but actually someone of their (and thus my) family, heralding from a place known as 'Amber', the pebble in the pond from our previous discussion. Not too likely I would have thought; how did he know this 'fact' to be true?

I began to think that I had fallen in with escaped lunatics, or drug-fogged mystics.

At this point we were interrupted by Andreas reaching for his sword and stepping outside the cave. I followed and saw he was preparing to engage more of his assailants; strangely formed, hairy creatures, beast-men wielding oddly shaped blades. I shook my head with despair at how the world had gone mad overnight, claimed my sword from amongst Andreas' baggage and stepped down to help.

Where as I was almost totally overwhelmed, Andreas had no problem holding off and despatching his opponents, but then his sword burned with blue fire and cut beast-man flesh like paper, so this is not altogether surprising. Just as I was about to be sent to the hereafter I caught a glimpse of Intruder coming out of the cave, accompanied by a tall, slim woman. She raised her hands and balls of green fire struck down my foes. Actual magic? Who would believe me, even in Vienna?

Lord only knows whom I have fallen in with; warriors of Heaven or Hell, or perhaps of that place called Amber? And am I truly related to them as Andreas claimed?

At some point I must have fallen unconscious; I awoke in the cave with my wounds bound up. The woman, introduced to me as Guinevere, was there, as were the other two. Intruder, it seemed, had reclaimed his sanity, at least for now.

Guinevere was an attractive woman, slim but full-figured, with brown hair tinged with red and soft hazel eyes. Alluringly dressed in a tight-fitting dress, she was (knowingly?) provocative. She would turn any man's head. I wondered what she was doing with the peculiar gentlemen talking quietly behind us.

Noticing I was awake, Andreas announced we would be going elsewhere so I could recover better. At that point a kind of black doorway appeared, just larger than a common door and apparently paper thin, surrounded by a faint rainbow corona. By the expression of concentration on his face I would say Intruder was responsible for this wonder. Andreas, carrying our bags, walked into it and vanished; Guinevere helped me up to it and then into it; after a brief moment of cold and dizziness the black of the door (portal?) gave way to a glass-walled corridor. Through the glass I could not see much beyond dark shapes suggesting hills, or perhaps a forest; however, the 'forest' seemed to move in an unusual way. Andreas was waiting for us and Intruder appeared soon after.

Andreas then led us through a large set of doors into what was certainly a throne room. I noticed then that Guinevere had somehow changed clothing! She now wore a formal gown of dark green, more suitable to the situation. The king (or whatever) greeted us as 'children of Amber' and gave us leave to stay within his citadel. Thanking him, we were led to private chambers.

Along the way we encountered a particularly startling sight, at last for me; a winged and horned lizard the size of a large dog. A miniature dragon! This, I was told, was the king's youngest son. I wonder if I am mad now, rather than my compatriots.

The chambers were luxurious and I carefully collapsed on the couch found there. Apparently finally taking notice of my interest in her, Guinevere (or 'Guin') informed me that she was not what she seemed. Rather she was some form of artificial construct, living and intelligent but not natural; capable of all biological activity but not quite the same in the head, as it were. She did not think or feel the same as us, or so she claimed, being artificial in nature. She enjoyed the same things as we do, just not in the same way or for the same reasons.

All of this was delivered in a totally frank way, using language I would expect from a doctor who was also a gutter prostitute. Or just not genteel.

Evidently this revelation and the language used were intended to dissuade me from any designs upon her; in fact, it just intrigued me more.

We stayed in the glass palace for three days (?). I was informed that it was 'far from Amber' in a way that suggested I was expected to understand. I slowly recovered enough to walk around, but I doubted I would be running, riding or fighting any time soon.

Andreas took it upon himself to teach me 'the Trumps', the portrait cards I had found in his bags. They were, he said a means of communication and transportation. All one had to do was concentrate on the image on the card for long enough and a link would be formed between you and the individual or the place on the card. One could then talk with that person, go to them, bring them to you, or go the place on the card. I tried it a few times, to

practice, and it worked (in the end). However, I was told to cease any further trials so as not to attract the beast-men and their allies.

He also puts names to the faces on the cards. Benedict, Corwin, Random, Fiona, Julian, and so many more. Are they really all one family?

Andreas came to the decision that I needed to be fully on my feet sooner rather than later, so he transported the two of us, using a Trump card, to what appeared to be some form of hospital. There the doctors and nurses made use of an impressive array of inexplicable devices, so that a month or more of slow, natural healing was accomplished in mere hours. Andreas told me this was the product of advanced technology rather than magic as it seemed. There were not even any scars.

Taking me down the corridor, Andreas slowly increased our pace up to a lope, then a slow run. As he did so I began to notice a strange occurrence; as we went the world around us began to change outside what one would expect for a person running down corridors. Before long everything was changing faster than I could follow, a blur of images flickering like a candle in a breeze.

When we stopped I asked Andreas what it meant; he said we were moving through many worlds to return to the glass palace, while also avoiding pursuit. He referred to this multitude of worlds as 'Shadow', in that they were Shadow to Amber's Substance.

I told him I needed a weapon to defend myself, however uselessly, against our pursuers, having left my sabre at the palace. He proceeded to concentrate mightily upon something and somehow used his will upon mine to make a sword appear behind a tree beside me; a copy, of sorts, of my Samarkand sabre but with an engraving upon the blade.

Fearing our pursuers were close, Andreas bade me to use the Trumps to contact the tall, thin man known as Benedict. I did so; he seemed irate to have me contact him, and proceeded to in some way reach into my mind and interrogate what he found there. When he was satisfied, he commanded that I 'pull him through'. He materialised beside me in a rainbow-like flickering and told the two of us to continue on while he waylaid our pursuers.

Oddly, unlike his Trump portrait, he was missing his left hand.

We continued on through 'Shadow' until we arrived within the glass corridors of the Glass Palace. I found the king wished to speak to me, so finding my way to the throne room I stood before him again. He asked me some questions about my activities and I answered as best I could. As I left his presence I passed by Intruder, who appeared to be raving again as his mystical affliction affected him once more.

When I found Andreas at our chambers he told me I had to go to Amber and from there to a place by the south-east coast called 'Rebma', which was 'under the sea', and ask to be taught about 'the Pattern', the source of the powers of 'our' family. I was to take a letter to his wife there, the lady Yvonne, or to the green-haired woman from the cards called Llewella. Giving the letter to either would suffice as proof of who sent me and of my alleged heritage.

The opportunity to get there would arrive soon, he said. He then left to do other things, which he claimed might have been imposed upon him by 'mental imperatives' of some hypnotic or magical nature.

Later that 'day' a robed individual delivered another of those portrait Trump cards. He declined to tell me if Andreas had sent it; in fact, he did not speak at all. The card depicted a forest scene of some sort, complete with pond and waterfall; presumably it was in Amber someplace, though I had no idea for sure. I hoped I would receive some assistance there, since I was a stranger, or that it was close to this Rebma place.

After gathering together what I could in my saddlebags and strapping on my new sword, I mentally strained at the card to achieve the necessary contact and passed through.

The clearing was pleasant, complete with the promised pool and waterfall; the only problem was the huge dog with its jaws clamped around my knee. About waist high, it had black-brown fur, vicious teeth and curiously reddened eyes intent upon my throat. It looked like some kind of cross between a Doberman and a wolf. Then I noticed the man across the pool.

Huge would be an accurate description; black hair, square jaw, massive build, tall, and dressed in some form of battered uniform under a gold (or just golden) corselet, with a clawed gauntlet on one hand and large sword in the other. Then a woman came out of the

cave behind the waterfall; slim, with black hair in a long, single plait, dressed in black leather armour, also carrying a sword. A curious couple.

She called the dog off, calling him 'Bernard'. A strangely tame name for such a beast.

Directing me into the cave, my 'captors' introduced themselves. The giant was Victor, the woman Morianna. I introduced myself but was reticent about my purpose in what' clearly, was the land known as Amber. I merely told them we should seek Rebma.

Over the course of the conversation I noticed my sword was somehow becoming hotter, and upon checking it I found it was even glowing slightly. At this point the hound stood at the cave mouth and began barking.

Looking outside we found ourselves approached by over a half-dozen strange, semi-fluid, black creatures with blades jutting from where their hands should have been. As we advanced upon them I drew my sword only to find it burning blue like Andreas' did before. Again as before it cleaved through the creatures almost without resistance. The three of us, plus dog, dealt with them rather well. I tried to capture one, but the sword itself seemed intent on killing rather than wounding.

No sooner had we returned to the cave than there was a splash outside. Fearing another attack we went back outside, only to find an injured man had fallen in the pond. He was rather average in appearance, with brown hair and dressed in a torn shirt and tight hose. He had a bandage on his head, one on his left arm and another on his left leg.

Morianna and Victor identified him as Tim, another of 'us'.

Over the next two hours Tim was administered what medical aid we could manage. During this interval, Victor had an odd fainting episode; when he recovered he complained of having gained knowledge he did not have before and apparently did not really want. When I asked about Bernard Morianna said he was a Hellhound, an appropriate breed name if ever there was one.

When he finally awoke, Tim told us he had been dumped in the pond by some form of animate, intelligent tree-creature called an 'Ent'. Nothing really surprises me anymore.

As time passed I became agitated and edgy, due to the influence of 'my' sword. I should have guessed it was trying to tell me something, but I was preoccupied and not fully comfortable or aware of all this additional mystical/magical business.

Just at the height of what I finally began to recognise as the influence of the sword I stepped outside in time to see the huge, winged form of a dragon stooping above us like a mighty, scaled hawk. Leaping into sudden, fear-spiced action, we quickly gathered our gear and Victor lead us away on that kaleidoscopic dash through the worlds they call Shadow.

It was only after we paused to catch our breath that we realised we had abandoned Tim in he cave to face the dragon alone. Maybe he had survived; but if so, what would he eat? Would someone find him and aid him?

The world shifting halted in a desert, just in the shade of a large collection of boulders. As Victor returned from a brief visit into a 'nearby Shadow' carrying a small cask of cool water, Tim stumbled around the rocks to join us, slightly singed but all the better for his enforced activity.

Moving further through the worlds we came to a place apparently quite technologically advanced. Calling upon a 'taxi', Morianna hailed a metallic, yellow coach with four small wheels, like a small carriage for a steam locomotive. This conveyance was self-propelled, by a small, efficient steam engine I thought, yet it needed no fuel as far as I could tell.

We travelled in this marvellous contraption, apparently called an automobile, to what looked like a hospital. There we had doctors look over Tim. This place was not so advanced as the place Andreas took me. Waiting outside Tim's room we were met by a rather concerned doctor who claimed that Tim had a multitude of incredibly small machines in his body that were 'repairing his damaged tissues'. His manner suggested that this was unusual; he was both excited and agitated.

We went into Tim's room to wait, and after a short time we saw some men dressed in dark topcoats and trousers arrive, where upon they talked to the doctors. The way Victor and Morianna acted suggested that these men were to be avoided, but I could see no easy way by them.

At this point another man entered, dressed as a doctor but something told me he was not. It was partly his appearance; under his white coat he wore some dark coloured robes, and he was also very short, barely coming up to my chin, with a long, grey beard and a hunchback. It was also his manner; he acted like an old man who has lost some or all of his wits, but the look in his eyes said otherwise. He gave out orders like a general, telling Victor (by name) that he should get us all out of here; he would stall the black-clothed men.

So Victor made use of his world-shifting power again, this time pushing Tim before us still on his metal frame, wheeled bed.

Over the next day or so (hard to tell the way we were moving between worlds) Tim did not awaken, but I suffered strange dreams; I could not remember what they were, but they were not good.

Tim finally woke, only to say he had been plagued by a nightmare of some sort. By his somewhat vague description it appeared to match mine. I have no idea what this could mean.

As we travelled we talked a little. It transpired that Tim knew of some other Ulrich von Bek from some other world, similar to mine. That von Bek was more, well, scandalous. It is said, according to Tim, that he was involved with Queen Marie Antoinette during her confinement, and was executed not long after her on some false charge manufactured by a Colonel Montsorbier, who was himself executed some years later by someone called Napoleon. He also went on to say that 'his' von Bek was something of a hero to him in his youth; something about lust over revolutionary fervour probably.

I can understand this other von Bek's interest in the queen, though; she was a powerful and interesting woman. It was a shame that we could not convince the newly fledged government of France to exile her rather than execute her.

Eventually we decided upon a plan. We would travel to some world where we could hire or buy a suitable ship upon which we could travel to Amber, and thus to Rebma. The cost of the ship (hire or purchase) was of no real consequence, since Victor claimed he could use his power over the worlds known as Shadow to gain all the wealth we needed.