

Journal 3 - Palace of Rebma, in Amber

The next day Morianna found me in the library. She warned me about an upcoming attack on Rebma and that we were required to join the defenders.

After arranging to have some books sent up to my room, I made my way to the throne room to see the queen. Finding her instead in an audience chamber, talking to her generals (presumably), I asked her about the Pattern; she said I could attempt it after the upcoming battle.

Retrieving 'my' sword from my room I went to the armoury, where I was furnished with a toughened leather jerkin and vambraces and greaves of even more rigid leather. A metal helmet, reminiscent of those worn by the Norsemen, completed the ensemble.

Joining up with some running soldiers, my group was assigned by a screaming sergeant to the defence of a ballista on the wall close to the main gate of the outer wall of the palace. Soon after Morianna was assigned the same post.

The battle was long and hard. Never have I done such long, painful work, such killing. Even the raids I had gone on with the Tartars did not compare with the butchery I saw and was part of.

We acted mostly to repel any who successfully scaled the walls; several times we were called to retake buildings captured by the enemy. I took a few minor wounds; leg and shoulder cuts and a couple of stomach swipes from the claws of the hairy allies of our human foes.

At the conclusion of the battle, we three met again; Victor, Morianna and myself. While being seen to by a physician and sharing a bottle of brandy we were approached by a weary Andreas. He had made it into Rebma during the fighting, from a place he called 'Tir-Na Nog'th'. This apparently meant more to the other two than it did to me.

He asked me for his sword back, and I returned it. When I asked if he had my sword, he said he had been using it but had broken it on some opponent. He said he would get a replacement blade before we left.

We were leaving?

Before long he left and I was helped up to my rooms to rest.

I spent the next week or so in bed, resting up and suffering occasional visits from a physician. Fortunately I had the books I had ordered, so I was not really bored.

Some days into the second week Queen Moire herself came to see me. Finding me in good health, she asked me if I was willing to walk the Pattern. I said yes, and she took me again to the depths beneath the palace, to the great room where the glowing design resided.

An incredible experience; so draining and yet empowering. On several occasions I was slowed almost to a stop, not a good thing to happen as, being unable to continue, I would have been destroyed. Fortunately I kept on through these barriers until, with the last of my strength, I made it to the centre. Unmistakably I was 'of Amber', marked forever.

Drained yet exhilarated, I concentrated on my room and was transported there as I was told I would be. One shoulder wound had come open again from the strain, so I just collapsed into a stupor.

The next day, after yet another visit from a physician, I received a message to meet Andreas at midday. I went there to find Victor and Morianna there as well. Andreas informed us we were to leave later that day and that we were to prepare ourselves.

Returning to my room I dressed in simple clothing from my wardrobe, completing the ensemble with a greatcoat and a tricorne hat, and joined the others in the courtyard. There Andreas handed me his replacement for my broken sword; it seemed to be of superior quality even to my original Samarkand blade.

Tim was not to come with us; he was still too injured to be safely moved.

Andreas then made use of a Trump card, and we were all transported (something I did not know was possible) to the deck of a small yacht. After several hours of straight sailing

the surroundings began to change as Andreas moved us through the worlds. This time I could feel something as it happened; was I now aware of the action of this power I too now possessed?

Maybe six hours after passing into Shadow Andreas used another card to some other place, from where we Shadow travelled again until we arrived in a place similar to where we had to flee from with Tim. We were led to some sort of large hotel building and went inside, using what Andreas called a 'lift' (a cubicle that carries people between the floors of tall buildings) to reach the top floor, where we entered the 'penthouse apartments'.

The rooms were spacious and well furnished, with several devices whose basic nature I could guess at from the books I had been reading. Guin was there, appealing as ever, as was a short man of rather average appearance, brown-haired, dressed in clothing of what I would call a rugged but clearly comfortable nature. He was introduced to me as Joe, another of our ilk; he was only a stranger to me as it was clear Victor and Morianna already knew him.

Settling into the various padded armchairs and settees, Andreas finally told us of the full situation in Amber. An 'elder' member of the family called Eric, believed dead some time ago, had returned and taken Amber by force. The way he said it suggested this was not easy, as thus that this Eric had some powerful forces or army at his disposal. The other elder members of the family, as far as was known, had fled Amber into Shadow, no doubt to plot and then move against him.

A possible threat in these circumstances was from some place called the Courts of Chaos, the kingdom/world that is the opposite of Amber. With Amber 'weakened' by struggle they would attempt to attack Amber, their goal to destroy it and the Pattern (how?), which would have the result of destroying us with it. Something to do with our link to the Pattern apparently.

As well as acting against Eric we would have to be ready to stall or stop any advances from Chaos against Amber.

However, there was a major impediment to movement into Amber: in some way Eric was blocking the use of the Trump cards in the vicinity of the palace of Amber, the original of which the palace of Rebma was 'just a reflection'. This blocking would prevent both communication and transportation in and out of the Amber palace, stopping any spies, assassins or surprise suicide attacks. It was possible the blocking was an ability of something he called the Jewel of Judgement, an ominous sort of name. Apparently this was a powerful artefact of strange powers normally held by the king, Random, but now seized by Eric.

Corwin, another member of the family whose name I recognised from the cards and brother to Eric, was locked behind some form of barrier in 'his Shadow', barriers that prevented movement into that world. The worlds that 'surrounded' his were also patrolled with vast numbers of soldiers, presumably Eric's. It was possible that some members of the family had sought refuge there. We would have to in some way avoid or distract the soldiers if we were to attempt to gain entry or in some way announce our presence and be let in.

Joe then distanced himself from us across the room to make a private Trump contact, apparently with a friend in Chaos. Surely that makes him a little untrustworthy? In any normal place some would consider him a possible spy, but it would seem this was not the case here. Those of Amber and Chaos are clearly not as naturally opposed, as black and white in outlook, as I was led to believe from our 'briefing'.

After a short time of quiet, one-sided conversation Joe informed us of what he had learned. The Chaos armies were beginning to mobilise, but it would take more than seven months to be fully ready and make their way across the apparently infinite reaches of Shadow to Amber. The largest of the 'mercenary houses', presumably groups who gather armies under their banner and hire them out to those who can afford their services, can muster *three million men*; an incredible but apparently possible number because of the immense population of the Courts.

There are eight mercenary houses in Chaos, according to Andreas, and sixteen other houses, more of the nature of clans than affiliated army groups I would think, and these houses were capable of raising a total force numbering a phenomenal *twenty million* troops.

Was it possible to raise an army to confront and even defeat such a multitude? Making good use of Shadow it was possible, according to Andreas. Fortunately their numbers would be depleted by the action of the Jewel of Judgement.

We broke up from our discussion and Andreas took me out into the town and instructed me on the basic skills one who has walked the Pattern possesses.

The main ability is movement through Shadow, achieved by willing changes in the surroundings while on the move; each change means one has moved into another Shadow. More and more changes are made until the surroundings, and thus the world, match your intended destination; then you are there.

A variant of this is the 'hellride': one concentrates on a single feature and rapidly changes all others until the destination is reached. Quicker, but harder and potentially more dangerous. Best done at high speed; horse or motor vehicle.

There is also the ability to mould and alter the 'stuff of Shadow', to change small things such as the currency from silver to gold.

Part of the ability to move through Shadow is the ability to summon an object in which one has 'invested a portion of one's life-force' through almost any distance of Shadow to oneself, like the way Andreas called forth his sword (albeit in another form) from the tree.

One can also defend oneself against mental intrusions by concentrating on a mental image of the Pattern. I thought it would be hard to remember every curve correctly, but it would seem that walking the Pattern makes it hard to forget those intricate curving lines.

The last and potentially most entertaining trick is the manipulation of probability. With a little concentration one can make the unlikely probable and the probable happen. Dice, cards, horse races; the possibilities are endless.

With Pattern, I was told, one can find any place, person or thing one can imagine. Your perfect holiday retreat, complete with women as beautiful and willing as required; the perfect soldiers you could envisage for a given task; your ideal horse, or automobile, or whatever; and all the gold and silver you could want, making most considerations of the monetary variety unimportant. When you can acquire a pile of gold Marks the size of a house, unattended and waiting just for you, you begin to not worry about how much things cost. A dangerous state of mind; such wealth can lead to decadence and a certain degree of moral decay. That is what caused the Revolution; and look what barbarity that resulted in.

After the tutorial, I left Andreas in search of a library. With so much to learn I felt I should make use of all my available time to learning what technologies were present in the infinitude of Shadow; all the better to make use of them.