

## Journal 7 - in Shadow

I awoke late to find the light brighter than I expected. Looking out the window I found out why: it had snowed in the night and the weak sun was reflecting off the snow to double its brightness. Even more incredible was that I could reach out to touch the snow, and the room was on the second floor of our purloined apartment floors!

Morianna was already eating lunch downstairs, and Bernard was clearly much recovered, having spent the last few days in her room recovering from the wounds he had suffered. Tucking in, I was told we were eating bear (or something close) that Intruder had noticed passing in the early morning. Also, Victor was back from wherever he had been, and Dworkin was expected to reply about his attempts to contact Corwin at some point in the day. Andreas was feeling much better too, though how he could feel better with that gouge taken out of his side is beyond me.

Tristan and his wife had left us for an unknown period of time, ostensibly to aid Fiona in some semi-military action in Shadow; he probably went just to be near her. I wonder if his wife is jealous yet?

The remains of the day were spent relaxing with books until I retired, again to Guin's room, as she was still totally comatose in mine.

The next day I was woken by Dworkin, who bid me join him and the others downstairs, bringing Guin with me. This I did, and eventually we were all there, even Andreas, who appeared to have somehow regained his lost flesh and was looking much better for it.

Dworkin then announced that he had contacted Corwin and that we were to go with him to 'Corwin's Shadow', presumably a world that he had claimed for his own.

I helped Andreas carry down the various chests and cases from our rooms to the living room, at which point Dworkin conjured up another one of the portals Intruder makes such great use of.

Passing through it we arrived in a place that I almost immediately recognised as Paris. I say almost because it seemed different in a number of ways; cleaner, with a distinctly orderly air to it. Dworkin led us down several major thoroughfares I only just recognised until we reached a large but modest townhouse. Servants came out and carried our boxes and cases inside and we were shown into the living room.

The room was luxurious but unostentatious; no gold statuettes, deep, plush carpets or bejewelled lamps. It was, however, the sort of place a wealthy and educated person, still uncorrupted by that wealth, would live. There were several bookcases filled with books and something that resembled an old-fashioned woodcut on one wall.

Then the master of the house joined us. Tall (like all the 'elder' men of the family it would appear) with black hair and a face that looked as if it had seen a lot of trouble, Corwin wore black and silver like the portrait of him on the cards. He greeted us in a general sense then talked directly to me; both because I was the only one he had not met before (as far as I could tell) and because both of us had been in France (different ones apparently) during the Revolution.

He had been on the 'other side', fleeing from Paris and France to escape Madame Guillotine, despite his non-aristocratic heritage in that country; his breeding, manners and wealth had made him enough of a target without adding that in as well. This I could understand; well did I remember the watchmaker who had once repaired my watch being slain by the Mob simply because he had once made a large clock for an 'aristo'. It had a small portrait of the king and queen on the face, so his house put to the torch while he slept.

We agreed that the Revolution was admirable and understandable in principle, but that the ideal was tarnished and destroyed by its contact with the tyranny and greed of evil men. He then told the others that they were free to go as they wished within the city, but not to anger or aggravate 'the locals'.

We, however, were going out for wine, women, song and more women; we were going to the Moulin Rouge.

If it was the same as the Moulin Rouge I knew from my Paris it was a raucous place where the wine and beer were cheap and plentiful, and the women much the same. I decided

I could do with that sort of medical regimen just now and agreed, 'reluctantly', to accompany him.

As we walked and rode in a carriage through the city, the sense of newness struck me again. This Paris had a sense of freshness that the city I knew did not possess. It felt as if it had been built all at once, and recently, rather than developing and growing over time like most cities have. Even the winding back streets seemed to have a purpose to them, as if they were intended to wind the way they did, rather than do it out of the necessity of moving around and between the buildings.

The Moulin Rouge was much as I expected, only the quality of company was slightly better and marginally more expensive than I had expected. Corwin handed me a sheaf of bank notes before we entered, and judging by their denominations and the attention I received I was suddenly a very popular individual. Not that I complained; they were each lovelier than the last, dressed in what in other places might be considered underwear to be covered by more discreet clothing. Here, however, normal clothes appeared to be worn only by the customers; and as evening became night, even this 'rule' seemed to fall by the wayside in favour of various forms of entertainment.

I noticed (over the scantily covered bosom of a delightful blonde girl) that Andreas and Victor had found their way here as well, though Victor tended to repel the more intimate suggestions their collection of women made to him, preferring instead to consume a vast quantity of wine instead. He looked as if he was longing for someone special, in that he looked like a huge, drunk, pining puppy.

I however was in seventh heaven. Just the right collection of music, bawdy songs, wine and pretty girls to keep me happy for days.

I was naturally surprised to find the finely formed blonde who had been whispering in my ear was no longer blonde but a brown-eyed brunette whose tiring-sounding suggestions raised more than just my interest. I looked round to see a wickedly grinning Guin sitting on my knee. She handed me my glass and raised an eyebrow, holding up her own. I poured her a drink and she winked, upon which the loud, wench-filled room around us blurred to become a small, quiet and large-bedded room somewhere.

Suffice to say that one does not get much sleep when accompanied by an energetic and imaginative young woman.

The next morning we (or in truth she) decided our relationship would be a casual, semi-faithful thing. That was fine by me, but the suggestion that we would teach each other any 'new tricks' we discovered from anyone else seemed a bit too much. She was not much good at being faithful, she said; in a way, it was because of the fact that the only person she was really, deeply interested in was Intruder.

I must have as looked surprised as I felt because she went on to tell me that this was because he had created her, or at least the computer-like device she had been before that device was destroyed. She had been forced to flee into her 'current' body, which had been her 'manifestation' for a time, but retained some of the abilities the 'construct' had possessed. The attraction was due to the fact that Intruder had somehow used copies of parts of his own mind to form the 'matrix' through which the construct produced its 'Trump-like' powers. Like called like and all that.

Going downstairs for lunch in what I found to be a hotel, we then went out for a walk through the large park across from the hotel. I knew this park a little, but this one was unrecognisable. More trees than the other one, and the ponds had joined to become a lake. We strolled around the park for a couple of hours or so before Guin told me there was a meeting at Corwin's house. She then led me back there; most of the time we travelled in a coach, but I tried to get her to walk more than she might otherwise have done so. I had to talk her out of just transporting us there.

The whole party were there; Intruder and Andreas, Dworkin, Corwin, Victor, Morianna and Joe. Tristan was currently incommunicado; no attempt to contact him succeeded, though Dworkin did not try. He would probably have succeeded if he had bothered.

This time more definite plans were put in place. A group of us were going to travel to Amber with the intent of gathering concrete information about the state of the land and city. Victor would not be going, as his nature was suited more for violent confrontation than

sneaking around, which was what we would be doing. He would be making an attack upon one of Amber's new trade/supply routes.

Joe, at present, was not sure of what he would be doing, saying he required more thought first. Morianna said that before she could really commit herself she needed more information about the situation, and that she would go to Amber. I, of course, with my limited knowledge of things Amber, agreed to go with them, mostly because I would be no use anywhere else. Besides that, it would mean that I would get a better look at the place I was supposed to be fighting for.

After the 'intel raid', as Intruder called it, we would put more work to hitting more of Amber's new supply lines, as well as taking a sort of poll of the rulers of the 'golden circle Shadows', which I was told were nations and kingdoms in Shadows that were in 'close proximity' to Amber and had signed trade alliances with Amber. It was important to know which were now allied with Eric and which were not.

Victor, Joe and I were told by an apparently now fully recovered Andreas that we were in for some training before dinner, so he picked up a heavy-looking sack and led us off to one of the larger parks.

There I 'sparring' with Joe and Andreas, first with sabre and then with a basic pattern broadsword. I did not do too badly, except against Andreas, but I expected that. He proceeded to lecture me on relying too much on my newfound strength (something I had not noticed I was doing), and thus devised an entertaining exercise for me.

Taking several small but heavy weights out of his sack, he tied them around my shins and gave me a brief instruction through what he called a 'kata' with my sabre, essentially a set of fast and slow fencing and general sword moves combined into a flowing pattern. I was then told to run about a hundred yards at a time and then repeat the kata, and I was to repeat this procedure three times.

Victor, meanwhile, was sent running off around the whole of the park. It turned out to be an education against constantly charging into battle, though I wonder if it really sunk in. It certainly tired him out. From the way he complained when he (barely) got back to us I think a few traps had been set to catch him unawares and thus teach him that a careful approach to an unknown situation could be useful. Even that seemed just to irritate him rather than teach him anything new.

I returned to the starting point almost completely worn out, but as the weights had got heavier (or so it seemed) I had begun to rely on my natural speed (what was left of it) instead of my new strength. There endeth the lesson.

Andreas then dragged us to a Roman bath, or nearest equivalent. We soaked in hot water, ate filling and strength- and endurance-building food, and had a very welcome massage.

After resting for a good two hours or more we were told Guin was waiting for us in the entrance hall of the baths. Slowly readying ourselves we eventually made our way out to her, where we found she was accompanied by some sort of pageboy. He told us the name and address of the restaurant where we were to have dinner tonight, and we rode there in the coach provided.

The dinner was fine, the conversation generally about the Shadow we were in, with no particular conversation about 'what next'. The restaurant was empty except for us; clearly Corwin enjoys private parties.

We returned to Corwin's townhouse afterwards for brandy and the like. Conversation mellowed out into talk between those who knew Amber about what they liked about the place the most. When Bleys arrived an hour later, he, Andreas and Corwin left the room and went off, presumably to plan.

After another tiring night I had another fine massage to ease away the last of my aches from the previous day, this time from Guin. Such a greatly talented girl.

More training was on offer over lunch, but I said it would be of more benefit to me if I had some training in the Pattern skills than in fighting skills. Andreas agreed, and, surprising us all (or at least me), Dworkin stepped out from the kitchen and offered to take care of that matter for them.