

Journal 17 - the Royal Stag, in Shadow

Morianna and I returned to the coachhouse, where we had tea in the lounge and talked, mostly about inconsequential things. I also asked her about the Amber Castle and how the Rebman palace mirrored it. Apparently they were identical, only the Rebma palace was the true castle's mirror image, so what was on the right side of the Rebma palace was on the left of the Amber castle. At least this meant I would have a passing familiarity with the place, though I would no doubt often be confused.

Andreas interrupted us over the items we had brought with us from Tristram. Morianna went upstairs to get them. Andreas told us Intruder would be arriving tomorrow to take a look at them.

We then adjourned to the dining room for some light lunch, after which I acquired my clothing from the coachhouse tailor, something more to my tastes and fitting me better this time. Morianna too had some garments to collect.

The rest of the day was spent in idle pursuits; drinking (restrainedly), relaxing, playing cards with a couple of the guests who had not yet begun to shun us. We had a fine dinner in the evening, a slightly more refined affair than our first meal there.

The next day Intruder arrived, as Andreas predicted. He asked each of us about the items we had found; where we had found them, what else was there, what happened when we looked at or disassembled them.

He then asked Zatharuss if he was comfortable with the fee he had accepted. Zatharuss said he was. Then Intruder handed him a folding purse of leather that looked to be stuffed almost to overflowing with the local currency notes. He said the 'wallet' was a sort of 'loyalty payment', and would always contain an amount of money of value equal to one hundred thousand of the gold coins accepted in the coachhouse.

Zatharuss, however, handed it back, saying he did not require it; he had already been paid and had accepted the final part of his fee. He said he expected 'the army' to pay for his everyday needs. Intruder shrugged then handed him a small, soft, black case; when Zatharuss looked inside I could see the Trump cards within.

When Intruder had left I mentioned to Zatharuss that he (Intruder) seemed the most consistent member of the family, despite his somewhat blunt manner. Zatharuss just shrugged and said that since most of 'them' appeared to be at least slightly insane he would follow my lead, and even went as far as to name me his general. So, in a similar vein, I named him captain. I only hope that it does not really mean anything.

Over lunch the subject of language came up again. Despite the fact that Zatharuss was as inexplicably conversant with the language they used there as we were, he was in fact incapable of reading the menus, whereas we suffered no such problem. I suggested that perhaps exposure to the Pattern, anything written in Amber's language, Thari, or even Amber itself awakens in those of the line of Oberon the ability to speak, understand and read and write any language in Shadow.

After we had finished dinner I acquired a first aid manual, written in Thari, from my pack and asked Zatharuss to try to read it. Strangely, he could, and yet he still could not read the menus. When I quickly scrawled out a sort of letter of commission (starting again after writing, by habit, in French), concentrating somehow to write in Thari (and, incredibly, succeeding), I gave it to Zatharuss to read and he could read that too. He was still unable to read my half-completed French version though. I guess the process is more complicated; exposure to Amber or the Pattern was no doubt required.

The experiment over, Morianna went about her own business. Zatharuss and I sat in the lounge where I read a paper. I did not get that far into it though because I was distracted by Zatharuss fidgeting opposite me. I suppose a man of action like Zatharuss would chafe at enforced inactivity. So I suggested that we go out in search of some entertainment of the decidedly female variety. He agreed almost instantly.

At his suggestion we went to the stables for some horses; he and Victor had acquired some the previous day. On our way there we passed a small paddock, and in the centre sat Andreas. He looked as if he were meditating. He had also gained what looked to be about a

dozen new scars. Without opening his eyes he directed us to use the two finest horses in the stables. He then went on to tell Zatharuss that Victor had a surprise for him.

I stayed at the stables, saddling the horses, while Zatharuss went to look for Victor. He returned after perhaps ten minutes, having not found him, so we headed out down the road.

I took us a short way into Shadow until we 'found' a large establishment, somewhat like a giant cabin made of logs, hidden in a secluded clearing just a short way off the main road. It too was a hotel of sorts, but provided much more spirited and bawdy entertainment than the Royal Stag did. It had a far more interesting range of bed-warmers to choose from as well. Needless to say, it was expensive but very usefully distracting.

I was interrupted just before midday by a cold tingling at the back of my neck that, once I bothered to put my mind to it, I recognised as the feeling that heralded a Trump contact. Being in a non-caring frame of mind, I concentrated vaguely (an obscure technique) on the acceptance of the link to find it was Victor. He asked me where Zatharuss was, so I told him, and asked about the surprise he had arranged for him. He told me he had contrived to have six attractive women wait in Zatharuss' room for him to return; apparently it was as an apology for dragging him away from three others on a previous occasion.

Checking with him that we were both still at roughly the same time in the day, what with the time- distorting effect of travel between worlds, I told him we would try to return by mid afternoon at the earliest.

It was more like two past midday when yet another contact impinged on my consciousness. Accepting once again, I found myself faced (in a manner of speaking) by Intruder. He proceeded to get straight to the point; an automobile had turned up close to the coachhouse, somewhere it should not be because the local technology was not up to that level. It therefore had to have been brought in from Outside. Zatharuss and I were to 'report back to the coachhouse to provide assistance in dealing with any hostiles' (his words). Despite the low level of local technology firearms were viable; they just had not been invented yet. So we were capable of being armed with such if required.

So I got up and dressed (with a little interesting assistance) then knocked on Zatharuss' door. He came to the door wrapped in a blanket to ask what I wanted, and when I told him he apologised to the beauty in his bed and made a quick exit.