

Journal 18 - the Royal Stag, in Shadow

Once we had set out, we realised that Zatharuss was, perhaps stupidly, unarmed. Since it would have been too complicated to acquire firearms, and since I still had my sword, I took a short detour into a Shadow where we found a blacksmith. Since I had not provided myself with enough money to buy the fine swords Zatharuss wanted he had to be satisfied with more common blades.

Once we arrived back at the coachhouse we had our horses stabled by the grooms, and while I looked around the ground floor for the others Zatharuss went upstairs to look for our compatriots. Neither of us found them there, but looking outside we saw Victor and Morianna coming across the fields towards the Royal Stag. Going out to meet them we joined them as they went up to Andreas' rooms.

Zatharuss stayed outside; I suppose he still held Andreas' curt words of the previous day against him. Noting this, Andreas made what in political circles would be a full apology, blaming the medicines he was on for his rash words; anywhere else it would appear to lack such deep conviction. I beckoned Zatharuss in with a surreptitious motion of one hand, and he came in.

Morianna had already begun to remove the stitches from a long wound up his left side when Victor suddenly left, only to return in a few minutes. During this time Andreas told me that I was due for another Pattern lesson 'before we left'. When Zatharuss asked, he said we would be leaving tomorrow morning. At this Zatharuss said he would be gone for a time, as he needed to get his ring back; he then left.

I still do not know why he gave it away in the first place. I had still not worked out the point he was trying to make.

Her task finished, Morianna then handed me a note that turned out to be from Intruder. In essence it said that he was concerned about Zatharuss; it was odd for a mercenary not to take more money when offered. He directed me to find where his loyalties lay.

I thought Zatharuss had already answered that question; once part of 'the army' he expected that army to pay for all his needs, and so did not require any more beyond the 'hiring fee' I had paid him. That was what he had said earlier that day, but I supposed I had to ask him eventually for the sake of form.

At that point Andreas perked up as if he had heard a noise; he then informed us that Zatharuss had left the coachhouse on a horse and passed through a 'ward' he had set up around the coachhouse, and was headed for the city to the southeast. I presumed this ward was some sort of magical barrier that told him of the comings and goings around the coachhouse.

The possibility that he was heading away to report to our enemies was raised, not as unlikely a possibility as one might think. Victor said he would follow him, and deal with him in an appropriate manner if required. I would have gone with him, but I had to have another lesson with Andreas.

Once Victor had left, Andreas led Morianna and I downstairs for dinner.

Just as we were finishing I felt the now familiar cold touch of a Trump contact. I excused myself and went into the hallway to accept it. It was Intruder, but the contact was not with him; he was somehow monitoring every contact that we got. He told me Zatharuss wanted to talk to me so I asked Intruder to let me take it. When he did, I would guess that Intruder was probably listening in, if such a thing were possible.

Zatharuss informed me that he had discovered a newly opened 'Shadow gate' close to the city he was headed towards. He then ended the contact to continue on his way.

Who had taught him to use the cards? It was most likely to be Victor, though Intruder remained a possibility, however unlikely. It certainly was not Andreas.

I returned to the dining room where I told Andreas what Zatharuss had just told me. He suggested that he and I investigate it during my lesson, and perhaps even as part of it, so we bid farewell to Morianna and headed out.

Once we were a few hundred yards up the road towards the city Andreas stopped and made another semi-apology; since he was still not feeling well he had no time for

questions, so he would have to probe my memories to find out what I had learned of the Pattern skills so far. I was none too overjoyed by this, but I had no real choice.

With a feeling like ice in my head he rummaged around in my head until he had learnt what he needed. He then directed me to find the path and follow it.

It was a cold night for walking around in the middle of nowhere. It did not help my concentration, but I found the gate despite it. It manifested as a tingling and a lesser version of the feeling one gets when being moved through Shadow by someone else. I concentrated on the gate, commanding it to open, and it did so, though the action was only discernible as a change in the sense of the substance of Shadow in front of me. I walked forward into it and after a moment found myself somewhere that seemed much the same as the place I had left, only (possibly) on another road.

Andreas, who followed me through, told me that Victor had created it in his attempt to catch up with Zatharuss. He had used it as a form of shortcut. We would have to go through the other end to arrive back where we wanted to be. Once I located the end, we stepped through to find ourselves overlooking the city, an average sort of city situated beside a group of hills and standing astride a river.

It was time for the next part of the lesson. Andreas led us through Shadow for perhaps an hour until I had no real idea where we were; not that I would have anyway, but it was for long enough that we were somewhere different enough that the journey back to the Royal Stag was a long and complicated one (at least for me). We were still in the countryside, but this time we overlooked a massive gorge with a tall waterfall at the far end.

Andreas then gave me what amounts to a description of part of a world. A small corner of it, to be sure, but I was given enough information to find it in the whole of Shadow. He then sent me on my way.

The journey took perhaps another hour, or maybe longer, until I finalised all the details and was sure I was where I was supposed to be. This is a harder task than it sounds, but it was made easier by the fact that at the last I passed a gate that brought me right where I needed to be. Andreas was nowhere to be seen, though he may have been taking an easier route, having had more practice with these things. I tried 'feeling around' for another gate, reaching out with some Pattern-tuned sense, but to no avail.

Just when I had given up I felt one ahead of me, but I lost it when Dworkin appeared in front of me, having just come through it. He announced that he had been sent to give me my final lesson; all that was left after this were lessons that could only be learned from experience.

He directed me to reach out as I had for the Shadow gates to try and find something that seemed 'important'. I did so, and once I put more effort into it I found that a nearby boulder somehow stood out from the others. Dworkin instructed me to 'think in Thari' and I did so; I was surprised to encounter a rush of knowledge that seemed to emanate from the boulder. It told me that the 'next' Shadow was home to some dangerous flora and fauna, let alone that the weather was very harsh and changeable. Dworkin told me that these 'warning signs' could be set by one proficient in Pattern skills, using and somehow 'in' the Pattern, to warn others of dangerous Shadows. I should always be on the lookout for these warnings.

The lesson complete, Dworkin announced me adequately skilled in Pattern; for a moment I expected him to hand me a certificate to that effect, but he turned instead to the subject of Zatharuss.

He said I should question him closely, citing the same reasons Intruder gave me. With the suggestion coming from a person of such high standing, I decided that I really should ask him, though perhaps more politely than Intruder or Dworkin might have thought necessary.

Then he surprised me again with the knowledge that Benedict was my father. It would seem that little gets past Dworkin. He advised me to call him only when most needed, and went on to tell me that Andreas did not know that I knew who my father was, so perhaps the mighty Dworkin is not as well informed as I thought he was. Or perhaps I was missing some deep complexity in the situation I was totally unaware of.

Dworkin then bid me to return to the coachhouse, to prepare to leave.