

## Journal 19 - in Shadow

Once Dworkin left me, I began to make my way back through Shadow to the coachhouse. But once I started, I had a better idea. Since I was still suffering in my hairless condition I decided that I would do something about, now that I had some free time in which to attend to the matter.

It took close to three hours, but I found the place I wanted. Essentially similar to 'my' world in the nineteenth century, with steam-powered locomotives and ocean liners and percussion weapons, the world had one difference; magic was as commonplace as science. There I hoped to find a chemical if not alchemical solution to my lack of head hair. Of course, since I had specified the nature of the Shadow I was assured of finding one, but the problem lay in how it work in other Shadows.

I bought three applications of 'hair inspirer' from a chemist, to be applied over the space of one week. Not having that much time available to me in this place, I used two right there, mixing the ashy powder with water from a fountain and applying the paste to my head and mouth area. I left the foul-smelling stuff on for most of an hour before washing it off and continuing back to the coachhouse. I got some rather odd looks from the other people visiting the park.

Another four hours later and I found myself once more on the road to the Royal Stag, in the early evening. I had a shower in my rooms, and found my hair had already begun to grow; it was about a quarter of an inch long by the time I had finished.

I went downstairs for dinner to find Victor there, eating with his usual gusto. I ordered something light, and noticed a short time later that Victor had begun to give me some odd looks. My head began to itch, and at this point Victor pointed out that my hair had become rather long and was still growing. Indeed, it had begun to get in my food.

I took the last of the pie I was eating upstairs with me, then spent the next three hours or so scratching at my head and cutting my rapidly-growing hair and beard off. When it finally stopped my beard had been trimmed down to about it's normal length while my hair was long enough to reach my thighs. This I roughly plaited before seeking my rest.

The next day I was woken by Andreas telling me we had somewhere to go. I got partly dressed before he stopped me to trim my hair to something closer to it's customary length. Packing my newest clothes into a small pack provided by Andreas I followed him downstairs whereupon he gave me a description of a Shadow he wanted me to take us to.

It did not take long, and the last steps were accompanied by a kind of stuttering motion. We had arrived in a place that seemed similar to the hotter, dryer parts of Italy. It appeared to be the height of summer, and a large villa could be seen at the far end of the long road we stood on. It was perhaps five miles away.

Andreas led the way towards it, and the heat was such to require me to remove both jacket and shirt. A side path took us to a big oak door in the outer wall, beyond which was a modest apple orchard. We each took an apple (they were very sweet) and continued further into the garden until we saw a number of men in the distance, standing on ladders and reaching up into the branches of the apple trees.

Here Andreas stopped and waved me on. Proceeding onwards, I found myself amongst the ladders until I stopped beside one of them. As I had begun to suspect, the gentleman upon the ladder was Benedict.

Climbing down the ladder he asked me how I was and how I was doing. I said that despite several small wounds and a few setbacks I was fine. He commented on how I had fought in Tristram, making numerous small critical observations as to my techniques. How he knew I chose not to ask.

He then asked me how I felt about the situation as it stood now; I told him we seemed to be holding trouble at bay for the moment, at least as far as I could tell. I had heard no word of any failures or disasters so far.

Over a glass or two of his cider and brandy he told me that this place was a home away from home for him, what was generally known as a 'home Shadow'. I do not know if this meant that this was the place he had actually come from originally; I thought the 'elders' had been raised in Amber.

He asked my permission to call Andreas over; I gave it and he joined us. We were served a breakfast of ham, bread and vegetables, after which Benedict bade us farewell and we returned to the Royal Stag.

There I showered while Andreas cooked me a light fried meal of sausages and bacon with bread. Then he showered while I cooked.

Downstairs we found Zatharuss and Victor in the dining room. They both made comments about my returned hair, mostly about its sudden spurt of growth the previous evening. I said I would furnish them with the mixture I had used if they wanted it.

Victor headed upstairs and returned soon after carrying a brown bag wrapped with string. When I opened it I found a set of fine garments similar in cut and style to the slightly tattered attire I had been wearing when I arrived in Arden. I thanked him, and went to my room after the last dose of 'hair inspirer', giving it and the instructions to him when I returned downstairs. He then went off in the direction of the baths to use it.

Zatharuss finished eating and left the room; only a short interval later Andreas left too. Finishing a piece of a sandwich I went upstairs to my room to find a large, metal-framed pack standing next to my table. The contents were spread across the table; food packets, 'survival knife', blankets and more. I returned the items (hopefully) to their correct positions.

Zatharuss knocked on my door; coming in when prompted, he asked if there was a backpack for him. I told him that there was probably one similar to mine in his room; he said there was but he preferred to have a smaller one. I handed him my spare one, the one Andreas had given me earlier.

No sooner had he left than a pageboy came to deliver a message: I was to join Andreas in the dining room as soon as possible.

Everyone was there, including Morianna (with Bernard) and Intruder. Intruder tried once more to present Zatharuss with one of his magic wallets but Zatharuss refused again. Intruder remonstrated him on always relying on me to pay for him, as I would not always be available. The wallet was for his personal needs and entertainment, and without it Zatharuss would find life boring. Zatharuss said he would survive.

We were told to be ready to leave in half an hour. We all ate light snacks (except Victor obviously), joined by Andreas just as I finished. I went to the strongroom to reclaim my money only to find the chest was empty! Zatharuss' pay was still there though, so I took it through into the dining room with me. I tried to give it to Zatharuss, but he said I might as well give it to Intruder, since it was now his.

My confusion prompted him into an explanation. To get his ring back from the sorcerous blacksmith the serving girl had sold the ring to Zatharuss had had to pay him over two million in gold. Since he only had two hundred thousand, and with it being back at the Royal Stag, he had been forced to call up Intruder for help, who had provided the amount in full, deducting his total fee for joining us from the debt, leaving him more than a million in debt to Intruder.

To an initiate in the Pattern skills this was no real problem, but to Zatharuss it was a serious burden. However, he soon found himself being paid incredibly well for a small mission of some sort; he did not tell me the nature of the mission. The pay was exactly enough to pay off his debt. I suppose it was all used as a sort of lesson, with several points to it.

When directed, Victor led us through Shadow for a time before Intruder summoned up another of his black portals; it took us to somewhere that had no particularly distinctive aspects as far as I could determine. Then I took us further into Shadow until we reached a fair-sized, if concealed, campfire.

Andreas went away for a time before returning with four impressive looking boards. After preparing all four he cooked one and stored the rest.

Then we were told what was ahead of us. Intruder and Andreas were going to be making another sortie into Amber. The rest of us had a choice of two missions: We could go to the home Shadow of the big-headed being Zatharuss killed in the castle is Tristram, or we could go to a Shadow populated by the Big-Heads and used by Eric as 'a nerve centre for the co-ordination of his assets in Shadow and for intelligence analysis', according to Intruder.

The first Shadow was of a low technology base, capable of sustaining higher technology, but it had an extremely fast time rate; a day where we were was equivalent to many years there. The second had extremely high technology in comparison, with energy weapons, force shielding and antigravity. It was here we would find the nerve centre.

Just as Andreas finished describing the two locales I heard a faint rustling behind me. I tensed as it came closer, as did the Zatharuss and Morianna, but before any of us acted two arms came around my neck and I was hugged from behind. It was Guin.

She asked me if I had thought about her, and (naturally) I told her I had. She then scolded me for thinking about her when with someone else. I guess it is just her way.

Victor was complaining about firearms and energy weapons, referring to them as dishonourable weapons; of course, I knew of several pistol duellists who would disagree. I for one know they can be useful at times.

I became distracted at this point by Guin determinedly nuzzling my left ear and whispering lewd comments and suggestions to me. Some of them sounded like fun, but Andreas put a stop to it. I do not think he actually heard her, but without doubt he knew her well enough to guess.

I suggested training Victor (and perhaps all of us) in the high technological devices we might end up using, and Andreas agreed, taking us by one of Intruder's portals to a very advanced place. The world looked alien, at least compared to the general forms of flora I was used to. Even the hills looked strange, and the sun seemed somehow whiter.

The oddly regular-looking, tall, blocky buildings sat beneath some sort of huge dome that looked only half completed. Numerous futuristic vehicles passed by us, on ground and in air. The people seemed more slender than I would have expected, but they all seemed very robust and had healthy tans.

Andreas and Intruder led Zatharuss, Morianna and Victor away to somewhere they could be trained in advanced weapons and something they called 'scanners'. I, on the other hand, had other things to attend to.