

## Journal 21 - in Shadow

Our planning was interrupted by the arrival of Intruder, flickering into existence through a prismatic blur. He appeared irritated, and complained at having to meddle with a number of 'security cameras' that had seen us atop the roofs of the City. We would also have problems scanning the city with our scanners; the security scanners would be likely to detect the emissions of our scanners. However, it was possible that we could conceal our emissions within the emissions of the security sensors, but only in densely watched areas.

Intruder then informed us that the anti-gravity flying vehicles used in the City used a levitation system that disrupted the power conduction systems used in the city; thus their 'flight plans' were strictly controlled and watched.

After a brief, private discussion with Intruder Morianna said it was possible she could use her shapeshifting to accurately mimic not only the physical appearance of one of the residents of the City, but also the mind; in effect, she would become the person she was imitating. She would, however, not be herself; the imitated personality would be in control, though she would be able to change back if she stipulated certain circumstances under which she would revert to normal. It was even possible she could do the same to us, though we would have even less control over our reversion to our true selves.

While I asked Morianna a little about her ability, Zatharuss had a quiet conversation with Intruder. I saw Zatharuss fiddling with some thing at his waist, and then he jumped off the roof. Needless to say I was rather perturbed by this action and dashed to the side, only to see him slowly falling to the ground like a feather. Intruder explained that he was using a 'flying belt' that made use of a small anti-gravity unit to slow the fall of the wearer.

Intruder went on to explain the plan Zatharuss had suggested; he would ambush someone coming home from wherever they worked as they entered their residence. We would then take up residence there ourselves. It was also possible that Morianna could duplicate said individual. The people would be returning from work in a little under two hours.

Over the course of the next hour Intruder spent his time drawing in a small book he produced from under the long coat he wore over his strange and disturbing-looking leathers. He finally produced an incredibly accurate picture of Bernard. It looked like a Trump card done on paper. Another slow hour passed by before Intruder handed Morianna and myself one of his anti-gravity belts. We strapped them on and gently floated down to earth, rolling at the bottom to cushion the still quite jarring impact.

Zatharuss waited for us in the alley below, holding an unconscious Big-Head up against the wall. Intruder put his hand to the fellow's wide brow and concentrated a moment. He then directed us to follow him and activated his own holo unit, which seemed to produce a slightly better image than ours.

Intruder pushed our captive ahead of him as we followed him into the apartment building; the captive opened all the doors for us, activated the lift and led us straight to his home. Once inside, Intruder dropped our once again unconscious host to the floor beside the door and said he had some work to do on the internal security. He concentrated and vanished.

Zatharuss and I sat down for some rest while Morianna lifted our host onto the bed to perform what she called a 'mind rape', a detailed scan of the mind of our host. It took her about forty minutes in total, and not long after Intruder returned in his usual style. He handed Morianna the portrait of Bernard and suggested she bring Bernard down from the roof. She did so, and Bernard seemed very relieved.

The next morning, after breakfast, Intruder told us he would get to work on the apartment building security so that we could enter it and the apartment. Morianna left soon after we finished to attempt to enter the central spire by mimicking our host; she performed the transformation in the corridor outside to avoid confusing the 'mind' of the individual she would be duplicating. That did not make a great deal of sense to me, but she obviously knew what she was talking about.

Zatharuss and I left not long after, to probe the sensor defences of the Spire.

After close to two hours we had discovered no paths we could use even at reduced risk. On impulse we followed a three-man cleaning team back to their hut. We entered and talked to them for a brief time before finding it necessary to knock them unconscious; I got one while Zatharuss got the other two. Checking them over I was able to determine that we had hit them too hard; two were close to death, as far as I could make out. Our scanners finally confirmed my diagnosis.

We hurried back to 'our' apartment to retrieve a medical kit from our packs. We found that Intruder had done his work; we got in with no problems at all. Bernard looked a little distressed at being locked up in the room while we were all out, but there was nothing we could do for him.

Back at the hut, we found we were in trouble; the two cleaners had died in our absence. We considered our options; we could fake some sort of accident, a fire or explosion. It was likely, however, that such an accident could be as strange and suspicious an occurrence as the bodies. Left with no other ideas, we were forced to do the obvious; we Trumped Intruder for assistance.

He was a little put out with us for causing him difficulty, but said he would see to it.

Returning to our reconnaissance, Zatharuss and I discovered a number of alleys leading up the Spire where the buildings around us and the positions of the nearby scanners combined to produce a dead zone in the sensor net. The alleys took us almost to the walls of the Spire itself.

Returning to the apartment we found that Morianna had returned. Over dinner she examined the contents of a paper-filled case she had obviously brought back with her. Since it was very late, we all retired.

The next morning Morianna left early again, while Zatharuss and I returned to where we had found the sensor dead zone the previous day. Zatharuss stayed back while I scanned the Spire; it turned out that the middle areas of the Spire were less densely scanned by the security net than the upper and lower areas. Perhaps we could climb across from a nearby building?

Since I am no burglar that idea did not sound so stupid to me; of course, it was pathetic at best.

One good thing the trip produced was that I noticed that the sensor net began to change. The output from the various scanners altered and the origins of the sensor beams changed with them. In short, different groups of scanners worked at different times in a cycle; thus the position of the sensor-blind alleys altered with them.

We returned to our 'headquarters' to report our discovery. Intruder listened without a word, as if it was nothing he did not already know. Zatharuss left us to follow some of the flying vehicles to where they landed; soon after Intruder began to teach me the basics of computer use, probably with the intent of me using that knowledge soon. It was not too hard, since I had learnt the basics of simple interface use from using the scanner.

Later that evening Morianna returned again, this time returning to her normal form (presumably) under the cover of her holo unit. She told us that one of the high-level supervisors from the area she had spent the day in would be visiting us soon; she had planted some form of mental imperative in his mind, like a geas.

While we waited for him to arrive, Zatharuss returned; he had found what Intruder called a 'hanger' where a number of the power-disturbing flying vehicles were placed when not in use. Intruder then left on another of his private assignments.

Once we were in place we waited for perhaps twenty minutes before there was a small ringing noise coming from the door that indicated someone was waiting outside. Morianna, covered by her holo unit, answered the door and let in a Big-Head gentleman whose importance was plain in the slightly better quality of his (?) robes and the small metal brooch on his left breast.

Zatharuss and I were ready to take him down but Morianna dropped him herself with a single blow. While the rest of us prepared to leave Morianna applied herself to working on our original host's mind. Once ready, she primed our erstwhile host to come back to himself after we left. He would remember nothing of us, only that his day had passed uneventfully.

Our new landlord led us to his apartment, not much different from the previous one, though perhaps a little larger. Our landlord was summarily tied up on the bed and Morianna set to work plumbing the depths of his mind for information.

Her ability to scrutinise the minds of others and assimilate them into her own was worrying to say the least. How she could keep a hold on her own self was beyond me. On top of that the way she made almost casual use of mental commands and directives was chilling. I knew our family was capable of such things, but never to the extent that she demonstrated.

The next day Zatharuss left before Morianna to examine the flyer hanger. Morianna left in her guise as the supervisor, while I left a few hours later to take another look at the sensor-blind alleys around the Spire.