

Journal 42 - in Shadow

Escaping from Ansalom and a good night's rest must have jiggled some pieces into place, because I finally got the link between the robed figure in the mirror vision and Intruder. I tried his Trump to no avail; either he was too busy or somehow out of contact. Guin was similarly out of reach.

With no way of following up that possible lead I got back to tracing Zatharuss' path through Shadow. I moved at a leisurely pace for the first week or so, stopping at the hostels that presented themselves to me at opportune moments. I picked up the pace somewhat on the second week, moving faster than I might have along the paths between gates had I not exerted myself. I asked my questions in every tavern I found that was not too far off the path and was rewarded with the occasional piece of news regarding a dark haired mercenary who rode escort with a trade caravan. It appeared that he had thrown in his lot with a group of caravan guards; they were probably just heading in his direction.

The third week was harder; I forced myself to hellride in an attempt to make up the prodigious distance he had travelled, across land as well as through Shadow. The trail led into the wilder areas of the countryside, so I was forced to camp under trees and in copses to escape the vagaries of the weather. I prefer such outdoor travel in more pleasant climes.

Eventually I took shelter in a small valley sheltered from the snowstorms by the mountains and the trees on their lower slopes. In that valley I found two large stone huts, each capable of providing shelter and beds for maybe a dozen close friends apiece. A track wound its way up the side of the valley on one side, and in response to the weather conditions the chimneys were bent to the side.

I carefully checked for previous or current occupants to find one smelt quite strongly of horse dung while the other had a half-depleted wood store. Naturally my horse and I took ourselves to our respective huts to wait out the blizzard. The afternoon passed, as did the night, with the howling winds blowing around our sturdy little sanctuaries.

The next morning the storm had abated enough that I could go up the track without being blown off it. My informant had told me that Zatharuss had been seen taking the road that goes over the mountains not long ago, so I was not too far behind him. I tried to shift through Shadow to gain some distance on him and found that little or nothing happened. Wherever he was, he was close, the same world in fact.

I walked carefully up the track, leading my horse, twisting around corners and over the (minor) precipice. I rounded one corner to see a cave mouth ahead of me; the wind had picked up so I was considering seeking some shelter.

Instead I found my quarry; a fur-wrapped Zatharuss came out of the cave as I approached the entrance. He seemed a little put out that I had found him in his self-imposed exile of sorts, but when I inanely greeted him and asked if I could come in he just shrugged and led the way. I told him I had some questions I wanted to put to him, and he said he would answer them if he were not offended by the questions. I had almost forgotten how prickly he could be.

The cave mouth opened up and I found myself being led past the enormous skeleton of some giant, winged beast. It looked rather like a dragon; its head was the size of a large horse. Beyond it were two big eggs, each about the height of a man and wide enough that one's arms would not reach halfway around them. He stopped next to them and I tied my horse to the nearest rib of the skeleton. He seemed rather perturbed by that.

I looked around and saw another chamber off from that one through some sort of heavy door. Beyond I could make out what looked like some damaged furniture. I asked Zatharuss why he had chosen to come here, and instead of an answer he gave me a question; what questions did I want to ask him? Well, I told him, everybody wants to know the answer to the big question. He looked confused; Andreas, I told him. He mumbled something to himself before asking exactly who 'everybody' was.

I just said, well, everybody to begin with but I eventually threw in names like Yvonne and Llewella as emotional blackmail (hopefully, anyway). When that did not seem to satisfy him I tried what amounted to a sort of threat by saying Benedict was interested too. He sighed and told me his story.

Andreas had taken to some island compound somewhere to have him trained in the use of firearms. By the sound of it, he did not get on with the woman who was his trainer, though he did not say why. Once he was deemed proficient in the required weapons and strategies the two of them had then travelled to a place that sounded very similar to the city where Bleys had taken us before we returned to Amber to join the final push. Once there he had got into some sort of trouble; he glossed over the details, saying only that (somehow) Andreas had forced him to go out and harass some bodyguards. I never quite figured out how or in what way.

Eventually it came to the day. Zatharuss was given a rifle and sent to the roof of one building while Andreas was on another. They were to shoot some person who was in some way important to (presumably) Eric and his military. Zatharuss had been provided with a means of escape in an emergency, a "Trump gate" which sounded suspiciously like one of those black portals both Intruder and Dworkin use.

Zatharuss was watching the target through the telescopic sights of his rifle when there was a large detonation of some variety of magic. It threw him back, rolling him across the roof. He presumed the 'hit' had been completed and dived through the portal. He was injured at some point (he was unclear as to how) and was rescued by Bethal. Later he heard that Andreas had not returned, and that was the last of it.

He told me he did not like the fact that I had come to see him on 'official business'; I protested that I was on holiday but I do not think he really believed it. I then asked him if he had been fully paid for his services in the war; he said he had. Then I reminded him that in our agreement I had offered him the opportunity to take the Pattern, or that I would at least ask if he could do so. The only problem with that, he said, was that it meant returning to Amber. The obvious method of him asking publicly if he would be permitted to take the Pattern was out, of course; it meant talking to them.

The only member of the family it seemed he did not have a problem talking to was Bethal, but I think that he was not thinking with his head in that regard.

I suggested the (possibly treasonous) course of going to the chamber where the Pattern was and having him Trump me so I could bring him through to walk it, but he just did not want to return to Amber at that time; he was waiting for the eggs to hatch. A rather weak excuse, really. I tried to sell him the line that allowing him to walk the Pattern meant that he could help me locate Andreas, but he was not interested in that idea either. Not surprising.

He finally held up a hand and announced that he would return to Amber when he wanted to and felt ready to do so. He said that he would only talk to me or Morianna; Victor was too headstrong and needed to mature a little. The matter was resolved, as far as he was concerned; so I had no choice. I was rather put out that I could not completely fulfil my part of our bargain, but then there was every chance that I could do so at some point in the future.

He then said that if I was still on "official business" I would now have to leave; if not, I could stay as a friend for as long as I wanted. In the end I stayed for dinner (roast pork, I think it was), slept the night under a blanket on the remains of a thick wooded tabletop and left in the morning, after an extended and relaxing breakfast. He seemed pleased that I left as soon as I did; I suppose he was entitled to his own life, but at least he could have not looked so pleased to see me go as I headed back out into the snow.