

Journal 44 - in Magdeburg

I had just settled down to read a book I had acquired somewhere when I felt the sensation of a Trump contact coming on. I marked my page and headed up to my room before accepting it, for obvious reasons. It was Julian; he said he required a little information. I shrugged and asked what he wanted to know.

He said that he wanted to know about the place Morianna kept visiting. I asked him to tell me exactly where he was talking about and he told me he meant the place with some doctor who had cancer patients she was seeing; the place where we found the engineers. Suddenly all became clear, except why she was visiting the hospital in the first place. I suppose if she wished to spend her time healing the sick that was her decision to make, though once you start in one place you either had to go everywhere or stop. That was the reason I had definitely given up on any revolutionary ideals I still had left.

Though I suppose there was still Amber to reform....

Julian was specifically interested in the meeting I had had with the fellow who represented certain authorities, the man I had dubbed The Chief. He told me that he had arranged a meeting with The Chief himself and wished to know what kind of man he was and what my impression of him was. I said that he was a polite chap who was quite reserved and in control of his reactions, but with a distinct suspicious streak. Julian asked what theories he had come up with regarding our status, and I told him how he had thought it likely we were a powerful but small and unobtrusive corporation that was probably based off-world.

Julian then told me why he had arranged the meeting; The Chief's agents had been watching Morianna's movements and being generally intrusive. Naturally Julian was not going to stand for it; he was planning to be very stern with them. His plans regarding the meeting were all set in place, he told me. Of course, he did not tell me what they were. I was not sure I wanted to know.

Julian paused for a moment, and then asked if I usually had people listening in on my Trump conversations. I acted casually and stated that it did not happen very often. He looked around, as if expected to see something, and then said that if it was who he thought it was it made sense. He then nodded farewell and closed the contact.

I returned downstairs to find Johann waiting for me. He asked if everything was all right and I assured him all was well. Then I asked if he had any pistols I could borrow for the night. He said he had and went in search of them.

I took my seat at the fireside again and had just picked up my book again when Johann returned bearing two flintlock pistols. He put them down before me, saying they needed a little cleaning; he then put some oil and a couple of rags down beside them. He had some balls for them but had needed to send out a boy for some powder. As he returned to work I set about oiling and wiping the pistols.

Despite their rather dusty appearance they were in good shape and were soon in good working condition.

Between tasks I asked Johann a little more about Schmidt; he described him more completely and told me the places he frequented before saying that he had a tendency to look right through people as if they were not there. He sounded like a particularly complex gentleman and not the sort of man one would normally associate with the Revolutionary cause. But then, I would not really have thought of myself as the sort of person one would normally associate with the Revolutionary cause either.

Johann spent much of the afternoon visiting the family of the boy who had died, while I whiled away the hours reading. Eventually, around four, two burly fellows came in and spoke with Johann before coming over to see me. They were alike enough to be brothers; tall and brawny with rugged features and heavy hands. The more talkative one introduced the two of them; he was Axel and his companion was Konrad. They were there to provide me with the assistance I required.

An hour or so later I was prepared to leave. Over the average clothing I had purchased a day or so previously I wore a long riding coat to conceal the pistols in my belt. They also helped to hide my sword.

We walked across the city to his house only to find that no one was there. We waited around for a half hour before moving on to one of his regular haunts. We eventually found him in the second place we looked, a labourer's tavern going by the name of The Carpenter's Plane.

As we had done in the first tavern Axel went in first, followed closely by Konrad and then me a minute later. Axel took his place by the bar while Konrad took a table by the door. I went to the bar and ordered some wine. It was of fairly low quality but not that bad.

Schmidt sat at a table against one of the walls, near to the back of the main room. He sat with a smaller man who had the look of a clerk about him; they were examining a number of documents of some kind. Both were well dressed by comparison to the rest of the clientele, but then so was I.

I watched them for a few minutes before going over to their table. The smaller man looked up questioningly as I approached while Schmidt looked on impassively. I waved the bottle I held at the crowd around us and said that gentleman should stick together. The clerk stared while Schmidt made no particular response, so I took a seat on the opposite side of the table to Schmidt, beside the now rather concerned clerk.

Schmidt then nodded and said that I really was alive. He went on to say that the soldiers said that I had killed half their number before they had killed me; or so they had claimed at least. He then said that he had heard rumours that I had fallen in with thieves.

I glanced pointedly at the small man and said to Schmidt that he was being remiss in not introducing us. Schmidt waved a hand towards him and said his name was Pieter, a clerk. I asked Schmidt who he was, and he simply replied that he was a loyal servant of the Committee. He said that I had not attempted to conceal my return to Saxony; I shrugged and responded by asking why should I conceal my return home? He nodded and agreed.

I said to him that I was surprised that such a loyal servant would talk to a traitor such as me; he just shrugged noncommittally and said that since I was of no threat to him why would he? I tried to assure him that I no longer had any interest either way in the Revolution, but I do not think he really believed me.

But then he said that he had sent a message to Paris regarding my reappearance.

I stared at him for a moment as I digested this information. It was possible that they might send some agent or agents to apprehend me; the Committee did not look favourably on those who turned against it, and might well seek to return me to Paris for trial. This would not be a problem for me, but I was concerned for my friends and family; I did not know how far they would go to get me.

Schmidt then said it was time to get to the point; what did I want?

I told him in unequivocal terms that I wanted him to stop the message or send someone with another message saying he was mistaken, and to leave the country. He said that it was impossible for him to leave; he was acting as a representative for the Republic in making trade agreements, ensuring that as many as possible of the trade links France had before the Revolution were still extant. If he were to leave the Committee would be displeased and just send someone else anyway.

He was probably right, but I was not happy that anyone capable of calling down the violence of the Revolution on my friends and family was in residence in Magdeburg.

I asked about the message and he said that he would have to send a rider that very night in order to catch up with the messenger, but why should he do that? I mentioned the possibility of compensation to him, and he seemed pleased that it had finally been brought up. I asked what amount would be appropriate and he named a sum that was about equivalent to six months rent on a decent townhouse. When I asked how he wished to be paid he said that gold would be too obvious; gems was probably best.

He then asked if I could get hold of that quantity of gems at such short notice; I almost laughed out loud when he asked. He was (presumably) not to know that I could get ten times that amount in jewels the size of a fist in two or three hours with my Pattern abilities. He did look at me a little strangely when I casually said that it would be no problem.

He said that he would require a deposit to show that I was serious, but that he would require it in maybe two to three hours to ensure that he could send out a messenger in time. We haggled a little (I did not really put that much effort into the negotiations) before settling on a deposit of around forty percent of the total.

Schmidt said that we should not really meet again as it was possible that several of his associates might recognise me and send word back to Paris themselves. I glanced at Pieter (who did not react in the slightest) and Schmidt assured me that there was no danger of that happening with the clerk. Schmidt suggested that I have the deposit sent to him; since he was not expecting to have any other packages sent to him that night he would know it was from me.

He then suggested in a final kind of tone that I should leave and take my two friends with me; he said that he presumed they were with me as the one at the bar had been intently watching us through the whole conversation.

I did not say anything as I left the table and led Axel and Konrad out the door.

Outside Axel asked if I still required their services; I told them that it was very likely, though not just yet, probably later. He asked if I wished to be escorted back and I said I did, so we began to make our way back to the King's Arms.

It had occurred to me that Schmidt might well have not sent a message at all. But it was likely that he might later if he had not yet done so, so either way I was stopping an unwanted message from arriving in Paris. I was in no way sure if he was involved with 'them' either.

On the way back I set about slowly filling the purse that was very probably in the inner pocket of my topcoat with gems. I could have done it quite easily but instead took about twice as long to do it in an attempt to make less noise, metaphorically speaking, or so I hoped.

Back at the King's Arms I told Axel and Konrad to relax for an hour or two until I needed them again; they perked up when I said I was paying. They gleefully ordered couple of beers each and sat listening to the woman singing; she was quite good, if untutored.

I went into the back room behind the bar and looked around until I found what I was looking for: a small box about a hand's length long. Putting what I guessed was probably close to forty percent of the gems I had acquired in a small bag I placed the bag in the box and went up to my room to quickly pen a note. It said something to the effect of "first instalment; must meet to finalise last parts of deal".

Once both I and my hired help felt sufficiently rested (but not so rested that Axel and his friend could not walk) I sent the two of them out with the box, to take it to Schmidt. Then I sat back and really took it easy.

They returned back after perhaps two hours. They reported that they had met with no impediments but carried a note for me from "the blonde gentleman". It said that Schmidt would send his men to meet with mine. All was going well so far, and if it went badly there was always those other options.

A short while later I felt the coolness of a Trump contact coming on again, so I took myself upstairs (with my bottle of wine) and poured myself another glass before answering. Surprisingly it was Joe; he was looking well, even if his manner seemed a little uneasy. He said he wanted to have a word with me, and would prefer it to be face to face if possible. I asked if he could come to me where I was (since I had no easy way back, not that I told him that) and he said he could, so I pulled him through.

He was dressed in the casual yet durable garb I have come to consider Amber style; what the English call "Elizabethan", though of a distinctly 'modern' mode. The feeling that he had concerns of some sort remained with me.

He said that he had heard I had been investigating the gunman who had shot Eric's device; what had I found out? To "save time" I asked what he already knew, so he said that the gunman on the balcony had been a kind of illusion he called a hologram and that I had found evidence that the real shooter had been on a balcony high above the throne room; namely a used cartridge.

He knew little more than me on the subject, then.

I told him that his information was correct, that I had found the empty shell from some high-powered rifle in a gutter on an external balcony. He asked if I had the casing anymore and I told him I did not. When he asked who did I said it was someone eminently more capable of looking into that subject; I admitted eventually that I had given it to Dworkin. I did say that I had chosen not to investigate the matter further after that point because people better suited to the investigation had effectively taken over at that juncture.

Then he asked what I had heard about sightings of cloaked figures. I asked him which ones he meant (in case he did not mean the ones I had experienced) and he explained

that he had discovered six so far; four around Amber Castle and its environs, the distraction rifleman and the one who had returned Caine to the bosom of his family. I said that I had heard of another who had appeared and deposited a strange rock on someone.

When he asked where I had heard it I was deliberately vague about it. Not that I wanted to be difficult; it was just that there was a chance that if I came out with what I knew and told all I might well have ended up being dragged off somewhere to help Joe in his enquiries (hopefully not in a constabulary kind of way). I had important things to do in Magdeburg and did not want to be taken from them.

I told him that the matter of the stone was in the hands of people far more capable than I who were sure that it was part of some 'greater puzzle' they were investigating. I eventually 'admitted' that I had heard that Fiona had talked about the matter to someone, but that I was unaware as to the particulars.

He appeared satisfied with my answers and thanked me before taking his leave by Trump. I saluted him with my wine as he faded away.

The rest of the night was relaxing in a way that only wine, song and good company can be.

The next day passed without incident, something I was quite glad for. If I was not exploring the interesting underside of the city I was seeking out my old haunts. The place where I had met my fellow alchemists in the Rosey Cross was still there, but I could find none of the familiar signs that spoke of any meetings. I suppose that it was just as well.

The next morning began with a peculiar mystery. Johann wanted me to have a look at some vodka he had recently purchased; he described them as 'strange'. They certainly seemed out of place; the labels were printed (as in machine-printed rather than hand-written) and the dates on the label seemed to have been marked out with black ink. I tried some and it was not flavoured in any way; all the vodka I had drunk here before and in Russia had been flavoured by what it had been made from. It was as if this stuff was purer.

It was certainly of better quality than they were used to in those parts. And I did not mean geographically.

I suggested that he not sell it to anyone just yet. Johann was concerned for a moment, thinking that perhaps it was poisoned, but I assured him that it was not likely to be. Rather that it was 'strange' as he had said and that it warranted some looking into before he sold any.

After a slow day the evening was opened by the arrival of a missive saying that I was to meet with Schmidt in two days at midday by the fountain in the market square. Since that was market day we were both assured of a very public and thus safe meeting place. I arranged with Johann to hire Axel and Konrad again for the occasion; this time their task was to follow and keep me in sight, staying on guard in case something untoward did happen, however unlikely that probably was.

The two days passed very slowly. I took in a play on the first day and had dinner that same evening with a delightful young lady by the name of Kirsten that I had met there. Alas, I did not have the time to properly get to know her as her fiancé was arriving in the city the next day, but she was good company nonetheless.

The second day was much less interesting.

By eleven on the third day I had warned Axel and Konrad that they were to be ready for unexpected action on either side at the meeting before heading out. I was unsure as to what was going to happen, and if I tried to shake some trees to see what fell out of them I did not know how Schmidt would take it. I was going to have to improvise; no change there then.

The three of us were a little early and so arrived a few minutes before Schmidt and Pieter arrived. We both acted disinterested for a time while Schmidt fed the few remaining fish in the fountain with some bread. I was surprised they still bothered to put fish in; they usually vanished as soon as they were introduced. He offered me some of the bread after a short while, so I fed them too. It was probably a good idea to fatten them up for someone's table.

Schmidt then announced that the messenger had been stopped but that he was awaiting confirmation of payment in full before returning to Magdeburg. That was good news at least.

I asked him about his trade contacts, about what they actually delivered. He looked at me for a moment before asking why I wanted to know. I told him I had a friend who could be interested in what they had to offer (which was true). However, he said he could not really say for reasons of 'client confidentiality'. He did go on to say that for a small charge he could reveal the information; he quoted a figure roughly a quarter of the money I was paying him for stopping his probably bogus message.

I handed him the remainder of that fee in a heavily laden purse before asking what kind of goods his contacts supplied; I added that perhaps we could walk while we talked, so as not to attract attention. He agreed, and we set off on a stroll around the busy market.

He began to tell me about the wines and brandies his contacts provided, and placed special emphasis on the extremely fine Champaign they brought to him. It had no sediment in it, or so he said; I had drunk some of the best France had to offer and it had all contained some sediment. This surely suggested an *exterior* source. I was only half-listening though as I was concentrating on moving us ever so slightly into a very 'close' Shadow.

My intent was to see if finding himself somewhere *different* would shake him enough to somehow reveal his links with 'them', the outside influence, if he had any. As improvised plans go, it was not the best I could have come up with.

I saw that Axel and Konrad noticed almost immediately; their well-known landmarks had changed around, there were a few roads where there were none before and others had vanished. However, Schmidt only noticed when we arrived at the market square's second fountain; the square he was used to only had one. Pieter caught on almost as fast.

Schmidt asked in confusion where we were. I told him we were in Magdeburg. He looked very worried; scared was more like it. He said he did not like what he saw; he said it smacked of witchcraft. I was surprised that such a loyal disciple of Reason should fall back on such a superstition so quickly; I told him as much. He just glanced around some more. I told him that in this age of Reason witchcraft was revealed to be simple superstition and fear of the unknown that intelligent men such as ourselves did not fall back on. May be we had just got turned around in the crowds? He seemed unconvinced.

I broke in on his uneasiness and asked about his contacts; could I meet them? I think he was quite unsettled as he agreed very readily to arrange for me to meet them if I paid him a third of the total of the last payment (which would include the original quarter for the information). Then we walked a way to 'find our bearings' while I moved us back to correct world. Once the landmarks were back in place everyone relaxed, comparatively anyway. Pieter remained a little on edge, Axel and Konrad looked baffled and Schmidt was still wary; probably looking out for a devil somewhere.

He was composed enough to ask after his money, though. I told him I could have it ready in half an hour, and suggested we meet at the fountain again. He said no a little to fast before telling me to send it to the tavern where we had first talked. Then he bid us a quick farewell and beat a hasty retreat. I laughed quietly to myself as they vanished into the crowds as if pursued by the devil himself.

Axel and his friend came up to join me and asked what had happened; they seemed very concerned about it, as no doubt I would have been had I not known what had occurred. I pretended concern as well, but said that 'the clerk' had seen quite at ease, if not somewhat contented. I spread enough misinformation to definitely take away any thought that I might have been responsible. Blaming it on Pieter might cause him some grief, and thus Schmidt as well.

I led the way back to the King's Arms and saw about filling my pocket with gems again at the same time. When we arrived I told the two of them to relax; they immediately went on a direct course for the bar. As they ordered I waved at Johann and signalled that I was paying. He nodded and I gestured for a bottle of wine before taking a table.

A half hour later I returned to the Carpenter's Plane to find Schmidt and Pieter in what was probably their usual spot. Schmidt had regained his composure, but Pieter looked at me with a mixture of fear and reverence. He had probably guessed something was strange but was unsure as to what exactly it was. I bought a bottle of the Plane's best wine and joined them.

I threw the purse containing the gems on the table and he took it before telling me a consignment was coming in that very night; the meeting place was in the north-east corner of one of the largest fields to the north of the city, by the road that went north in the direction of Hamburg. I had only to meet them and pay; his men would come to collect the merchandise.

He then asked if I was going to replace or remove them; I told him I did not know yet. I was planning to improvise, as usual.

I nodded to them and took my leave.

That night I rode out to the designate spot armed with my utilitarian sword and two pistols. I wore a heavy coat and a hat, as the weather had turned quite cold. I rode there on my horse and furnished myself with some gold Marks; except that these ones looked like the dollar coins I had seen back in Mexico City. All part of my admittedly weak plan to catch those out of Shadow interlopers by surprise.

I had been waiting for maybe twenty minutes (by my watch they were a good ten minutes overdue) when the sound of a heavily laden wagon reached my ears. I say suddenly because it was sudden; normally one can hear them approaching for some time. It was as if this one just appeared on the road; which it probably did.

A wagon soon rounded the corner, four horses straining to pull it up the incline that had concealed it; the trees helped in that regard as well. It was carrying a number of barrels, several wooden cases of bottles and two men whose clothes did not look quite right. They might well have been bought from somewhere nearby, but not exactly close.

They pulled up beside the old tree next to the gate and climbed down. One asked if I had the money; they seemed unconcerned about who I was. The other began to unload the barrels; he seemed to lift the larger ones easier than I would have expected a normal man to. I asked if they wanted it in dollars, then immediately 'corrected myself' and changed to Marks. The one who had spoken did not react to this and just examined them, checking one or two closely and with his teeth before accepting their validity.

They were definitely not local boys.

Once the unloading was complete they climbed back atop the wagon and headed back the way they came. I mounted my horse and watched them depart. Before long they had rounded the corner and then the sound of the wagon suddenly ceased. I spurred my horse almost to a full gallop and headed after them.

Around the corner there was just a long stretch of road leading off down a long slope and into the distance. No wagon was in sight. I stretched my extra senses to the limit and rode at full speed down the road.

Like a bucket of icy water that familiar unsettling feeling of emptiness came over me, much stronger than I had ever felt before. It made me gag so much I almost fell off my horse. I think even he felt it because his ears went flat and he came to a rapid halt, eyes rolling.

I got out of the saddle and calmed myself with some deep breaths, shutting my mind up tight, before rubbing the horse's nose and soothing his stressed nerves too. Then I led him back towards where I guessed I had felt the 'feeling'.

I eventually found it and tied the horse to a wall before investigating it. I spent maybe a half hour assessing it's boundaries and the strength of it's presence; it was, unsurprisingly, roughly ovoid and the size of a four-horse wagon. Then a small flick of flame caught my attention; it appeared to run around part of the edge of the region at ground level. Then I saw another, and another. I began to get one of those feelings of impending doom and retreated to a dozen or so yards outside the region.

Suddenly there was some kind of detonation and cobblestones flew through the air. I ducked and they missed me, for a change. One got my horse, though, giving him a nasty gash on one foreleg. It left behind a fair-sized crater in the road, roughly the same volume as the amount of the 'emptiness sphere' that had been in the ground. I gingerly entered the area to find that no sense of emptiness remained; whatever it was had destroyed by the explosion. Which was probably the whole idea.

I had a look at the horse's leg, washing it a little and wiping it with my scarf before binding the wound with it. I then slowly led him back to where the barrels and cases were.

It was maybe twenty minutes before two carts came into view from the direction of the city, accompanied by two horsemen. When they arrived they asked if I was Ulrich; I said I was and they began to load the merchandise onto their carts. When they had finished they left without another word. I returned to the crater to consider my next move.

Since I had first encountered the emptiness feeling with the stone given to me by Fiona, it was logical to call on her help once again. I Trumped her and when she answered she was looking a little tired. She rubbed her eyes and asked what I wanted. I told her how someone I had met was involved with people who appeared to be supplying alcoholic drinks of superior quality that were almost certainly from another Shadow. She nodded and said she

would Trump me back in a few minutes, as she wanted to wake up and get dressed before joining me. Before I could even think who to respond to that she closed the contact.

A short time later the sensation of a Trump contact came over me and when I opened myself to it I found myself regarding a much more alert Fiona. I brought her through to find she was dressed in a frilly-fronted shirt and jodhpurs that definitely looked good on her. Concentrating on the reason I had called on her I told her the wagon had seemed to just appear and then come into view around the corner; then I told her how the men had not reacted to strange looking money; and how they had apparently vanished in the same manner they had arrived. Lastly I told her of the zone of emptiness and how it had exploded.

She looked around the area, staring intently in a way I had come to associate with using one's mental senses. The way she was dressed was definitely distracting. Then she closed her eyes in concentration for a while before opening them to stare at the crater again. She said that there was a distortion of some kind that was 'fresher' than the others she had seen before; one of which she had seen in Amber after Caine had been returned.

She came round to where I was standing and put her hand on the back of my neck. It was cool and made the hairs stand up. Then she seemed to stop herself a moment and said that she wanted to enter my mind so she could share what she was seeing with me. I thought for a moment and could see no real reason why I should not say yes, so I told her to go ahead. A sudden presence in my head heralded a clearing of my vision that was almost painful. Everything seemed brighter, more vivid. I could see an energy throbbing in the centre of the crater, and somewhere around me I could feel what was unmistakably the Pattern.

I suddenly remembered what Dworkin had said to me when he had given me some training in how to use my newfound Pattern abilities, right before he had been forced by circumstance to somehow implant the knowledge in my mind. He had told me to 'bring up a lens'; since a normal lens could be used to look closely at things normally too small to see, I guessed that this lens he spoke of was something similar for looking in a certain way to see the things hidden from normal sight.

All this went through my head in a flash and really just manifested as "LENS?" floating up like a bubble in Champaign. Fiona caught it, of course, and confirmed my guess with a mental "yes". Then she quickly apologised for being so intrusive. Suddenly my view of the world shifted upwards by ninety degrees to look at the stars above; then I seemed to fly up above the Earth at some immense speed towards one star until I seemed to float in the void close to it, where I could see a planet that was clearly in orbit around it. We looked at it a little closer, seeing land and cloud, before this vision of a distant world rapidly retreated and both my vision and body returned to Earth.

While I knew of the existence of other worlds and space travel through reading books, I had never actually seen it in person before then. It truly was breathtaking!

I shook myself out of my trance and smiled at Fiona, saying I do not often get so close to a lady. She smiled slightly in return but warned me to be fully aware of her reputation in the family before getting too close and being thought of as a fool.

She did not tell me to stop the near flirting, though.

She then told me her theories as to what the empty zone was. She was sure it was some method of travelling through Shadow, possibly involving Logrus and making use of some very powerful magic. She called it a "Logrus conduit", and said that whatever magic was used was partly intended to mask the traces of Logrus left behind when it was used. She was unsure as to the exact range of the technique, however, or whether it required someone to be at both 'ends' of the conduit or not. Logically, though, since the method utilised Logrus Chaos was involved in the matter somehow, possibly either directly or as a sponsor or employer.

She did add that she could do something similar herself using Pattern. Obviously she is better at it than me.

She finished by saying that she hoped it was not going to be another Black Road. When I asked what that was she told me that something called the Black Road had been used to attack Amber and that on the road it's own rules applied, irrespective of where in Shadow it was. That was dangerous, obviously, as the technology and/or magic that a Shadow's inhabitants would rely on to defend themselves from invaders using a Black Road could be rendered inactive when in it's domain.

She then asked me about the drinks the people who had used the conduit had brought. I told her it was apparently all of better quality than the stuff that was available

where we were, and that a friend of mine had some. She suggested that when I moved on from there I could use some of it to trace the source of the drink, and possibly the origin of the people moving it.

She told me that Ansalom had been spending some time investigating these people a little himself. I told her how I had met him on the way to finding Magdeburg, and that we had parted company on the way. She said that she knew about that; the Ranger (poor chap) had told her about it. The two of them had been investigating a “squib” apparently, which, she told me, was a term used to describe a creature native to one Shadow that somehow finds its way into another and causes havoc.

She then went to have a look at my horse; I was surprised she had noticed his injury amongst everything else. When she asked if it had been injured by the blast I told her it had, so she knelt down before concentrating, mumbling and waving her hands for about twenty minutes until the horse’s leg was sheathed in a soft green glow. As she held her hands over the wound she apologised for taking so long; it would have been quicker had the spell been ‘racked’ (whatever that meant). She said in a thoughtful tone that magic was useful occasionally; she said she might teach it to me sometime, once I was aware of what I could be getting myself into.

Obviously I had to follow up that line of enquiry at some point.

Standing up she rubbed her knees and stretched her back in an alluring way (or so I thought at least) before saying that she needed to speak to me a little more almost as much as she needed some coffee. I told her that I wanted to return to where we were and she said that it was not a problem. I firmly tied my horse to the tree by the road next to where I had met the two drink suppliers and then Fiona took my arm and concentrated.

After a short interval there was a brief flicker and we appeared outside a small street café. The street was quite quiet and it seemed to be quite late at night, but certainly before midnight. There were a few other customers, and a number of similar cafés and clubs along the length of the road we were on. Whatever it was she used to get us there felt like a Trump – only she had not used a card. More magic?

Fiona ordered two ‘expressos’ and we took a table outside. She asked me how my search for Andreas was going; I told her I had sought out Zatharuss as he had been there when he had last been seen. I told her what he had said about what he knew of the circumstances of his disappearance. I ended by saying that I was not sure what to do next once I had finished where I was.

Fiona suggested I ask her brother Bleys as he had dealt with the contingency plans for the mission they were on. She said she would let him know that I would be wanting to talk to him. I thanked her for all her help, now and before, but she said that now she owed me a favour; I thought about that but I could not quite see how that worked out. I suppose that in asking her for help I had also been providing answers to her own questions. I was lucky it had turned out in my favour.

Before she could say more I suggested that we have dinner together sometime; she smiled and said that perhaps we could.

She finished her drink and was about to leave when she remembered that I wanted to go back. I stood and she took a firm hold on my arm again before concentrating and transporting us back to the road beside my very surprised horse. This time it did not feel like Trump; it was more like Pattern. She rubbed her arms and said that it was quite cold; compared to where the café was it was cold. She waved farewell and began to walk off down the road; she soon went two dimensional and vanished.

I took the more mundane road back into Magdeburg.