

# 17. Of Dwarves and Duels



After Benedict had returned to his camp, Aleyn chatted to Vincenzo Jeseby about arranging a parlay with House Hellibore to allow him to make peace with them after his execution of their Duke – Gareck. They would be coming to Jeseby Hall the next day.



Vincenzo also offered some criticism of the result of Aleyn's first 3D Trump. Grudging admiration but recommended using more of the subject's alternate Form in future works. There is only the hint of "weasel" in the statuette of Trellys.

Cassie decided to ask Aleyn about his previous relationship with Setep. Aleyn claims to have been at the Battle of Hastings! And then to have lived on Earth from then to the end of the first world war when he trailed Florimel to Amber (recognising her as another Immortal and feeling his blade hunger to kill her). It was Setep (some time in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century) who had taught the blacksmith about Trump Sketches and helped him etch the markings onto his sword, creating the SoulBlade.

It appears that Shadow Earth (at least the area around Egypt) had been the private domain of House Amon and they were remembered there as gods and goddesses. When Earth had drifted further towards Pattern, it had become out of reach for them. This seems to have happened some time around the Battle of Hastings. [Aleyn later thinks that the presence of some Scion of Amber in the world at that time may have contributed to the change in the nature of the Shadow.]



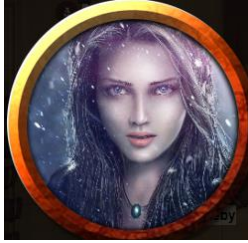
Cassie has some speculation about possible parents for Aleyn – given Aleyn's extreme age the likely options would appear to be Dworkin, Oberon, Osric, Finndo or perhaps Benedict? [Aleyn is perhaps keeping some elements of his origin secret]



The SoulBlade appears to have been one of (maybe) 9 weapons created with Setep's assistance for warriors all over Earth and the warriors were able to absorb some life-energy from their victims and particularly from each other. It seems Aleyn got dragged into battles and had to

improve or die. Over the centuries his combat skills, strength and speed improved and as the SoulBlade fed him the spirits of a few more of Setep's chosen champions (and the blade itself absorbed their weapons), he grew ever more powerful.

Now it seems Setep wants him to fight the descendant and current holder of the remaining weapon in order to complete whatever scheme the ancient Chaos Lord had set in motion.



In a sort of tit-for-tat exchange, they spoke briefly about Cassie's origins. She revealed only that she too had come from Shadow Earth and that it was "the result of some meddling" (by Florimel?). She provided no details of who her Amber parent might have been. [Cassie is keeping some elements of her history secret].

They contacted Benedict again (as he had invited them to do) and travelled to his Camp to get instruction in the use of Trisp and Fandon – the official Duelling weapons of the Courts. Aleyn gave a shortened explanation to Benedict of why Setep is after his Blade and insisted he was unwilling to give it up.

They were given advice on duelling by Benedict himself, but then sparred with two of Benedict's captains – Captains Forniss and Crabbe.

Both Cassie and Aleyn did well in the sparring, impressing the Captains and even getting a nod of approval from Benedict himself.



Next day, Cassie stayed at the Camp while Aleyn Trumped back to Trellys at Jeseby Hall for his meeting with House Hellibore's representatives.



Duke Skorian Hellibore



Kresk Hellibore (Logrus)



Norkratte Hellibore

Skorian was Duke Gareck's brother and had been Regent of the House for the last 20 years and is now Duke. Norkratte was Gareck's son and was especially tense at the start of the meeting – clearly intending to Challenge and Duel his father's "murderer". Kresk was tattooed all over with swirling designs and was introduced as the House's Logrus Master. All were squat and powerfully built – bent with the distinctive Hellibore curved spine.

Aleyn explained the full details of the Execution of Gareck, including the light banter exchanged with Gareck and they decided that the extravagant light-show provided by the SoulBlade was a testament to Gareck's own power and glory. When Aleyn revealed his new Demon Form (which looks remarkably like Gareck's own) they interpreted it that Gareck had somehow bestowed this gift on Aleyn. Skorian was even concerned that Aleyn might have designs on the Ducal Title and was relieved when he said he wasn't going to press a claim for it.

The "dwarves" seemed to decide that Gareck's death was entirely Dara's fault, not Aleyn's at all. They loudly (and at some risk!) proclaimed their view that she had murdered her own husband and probably the previous Queen, as well as being the prime suspect for the death of King Fantos! The members of House Jeseby who were present pretended to not have heard this "treason" and probably quietly agree.

There is now only two days left before the Funeral of King Fantos.