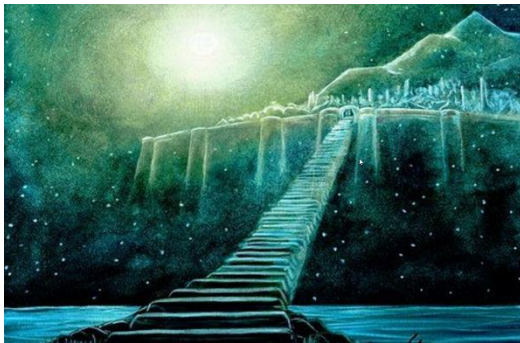


20 – Visions

Our heroes were getting some rest in Amber after their flight from the Abyssal Horror in Texicanna. Gerard (who seems to have taken charge of the Defence of the Realm with Random's disappearance and Benedict's apparent death) allows them to sleep the day away.



They requisition a couple of guards from a harried Sergeant Pearce (Massius and Hennion) to accompany them out to the Stairs of Tir Na'Nogth and Aleyn waited with the guardsmen at the bottom while Cassie ascended alone. The guardsmen have heard news from nearby Rebma where strange discharges from Rebma's Pattern have shattered sections of the Wards and the Dome partially collapsed, crushing a neighbourhood beneath the pressure of the deep before Llewella could stabilise it.



As Cassie climbed the first few stone stairs, the misty steps above grew more solid and the shimmering shadows of the floating city came into view. To Aleyn it seemed that Cassie grew fainter as she rose. The moon should be up for about 5 hours but he was ready to contact her via Trump if she stayed too long – it seemed that on her previous visit, her sense of time passing had been affected.

On that previous visit, only six months or so before, Yosef had been frantically trying to call her but struggled to reach her (possibly due to the time-difference). Unlike the tales she'd heard from other family members, Cassie had actually interacted with the inhabitants of the vision! She had been seen by them and was even attacked and scratched by the gorilla-like beasts she'd met there. Few of her family even believed her.

Cassie's Vision

As before, the city of Amber was in ruins. Buildings broken, dark weeds breaking through the flagstones. Skeletal remains were scattered everywhere, wrapped in their faded clothing. Slits in the cloth indicated they had mostly died to sword and spear thrusts or crushed by falling masonry. The bodies around one tavern seemed to almost match what she'd seen there earlier that night – so whatever had happened wasn't too far in her future!

The main sign of explosion came from the base of Amber Castle – actually from below, so Cassie descended the rubble-choked steps down to The Pattern. The blast appeared to have originated here and the Pattern itself was dark with cracks in the stones, apart from a twinkle of light near the centre.

With a shudder, she turned away from the broken Pattern and climbed into the ruined towers looking for Gerard or Vialle or Caine (the only other Elders currently in Amber). From a suite of rooms in one tower she heard a woman weeping and went to investigate.

It was Deidre (she recognised the woman from her Trump). Deidre was still beautiful but haggard and gaunt like a long-time junkie and eyes red and sunken from sorrow.



*"Gods... what have I done! Oh Amber...
How could I have let this happen!"*

The woman became aware of Cassie, seeming to see her as a ghostly image. *"Who are you? You seem familiar... so familiar"* She staggered towards Cassie, raising a hand gently to her face. *"You look a bit like my brother..."*. Attempting to hold her hand, their fingers passed through each other with a strange tingle.



Cassie explained she was in Tir Na'Nogth and Deirdre seemed to understand.

"I had dwelt in Darkness for so long, it filled me, overwhelmed me. I led its armies here.... to Amber. The Rat Men, thousands of them. The Castle had already been breached by the breaking of the Pattern.

The Darkness had waited... so long... until the Pattern become unstable because of my brother's curse. Other Patterns were created – one was tiny, drawn with blood and filled with Rage, but it was OTHER and its existence seeped out through cracks and interfered with the Pattern of Amber along with its reflections in the Sky and in the Water. The Patterns began to diverge, and each was weakened. There should have been only ONE."

She seemed to realise that this was an opportunity to speak to the past, to give a warning.

"Then my brother, Corwin – do you know him? He thought all was lost. Bearing the Jewel, he created his own Pattern, to hold back the Chaos – his dream of a place and time without care – a place he'd known before his memories of Amber returned. Beautiful, but fragile like a Rose.

This too was OTHER and the Shadowstorms that followed further weakened and diverged the Patterns. The Darkness sensed the weakness and struck.

You must FIX the patterns. Patch them, mend the differences... quickly! And you must stop me. Stop me from doing all THIS!" she gestured to the ruins around her.

Then she began to fade and Cassie had to be Trumped out of the fading city.

They rode back to Amber as the sun was rising.

Another Night, Another Vision

[GM: I don't think they described Cassie's visions to anyone else. There was talk of calling Fiona, but I don't think it was actually done]



They slept through most of another day. They paid a call to Vialle to speak with the Blind Queen. Still no news about Random but Vialle had faith. They enquired about The Jewel of Judgement and were assured it was safely locked up in the Royal Chambers. Vialle would have let Cassie examine it if she had wanted to, but not take it away as Random believes it is dangerous.



When Cassie said they needed Random to come back soon and use the Jewel to repair the Pattern, she admitted that, although Random is a good man, resourceful and cunning... he's no magician and doesn't have the sheer strength of Will that some of the others have. Besides, Fiona understands the Pattern a lot better.

Aleyn wanted to try visiting the family's personal prophecy machine himself. He rode out alone that night and ascended the stairs.

[GM: There are parts of Aleyn's experience and back-story that haven't been shared, so some of what follows may seem a bit cryptic! Hopefully it will all make sense one day.]

The City in the Sky seemed to be a bustling place – no ruins or dark weeds. The inhabitants seemed unaware of him as he moved unseen through the gates.

Then there was a strange rumbling earthquake – unnoticed by the citizens.

There were words in the rumbles. Words that Aleyn slowly understood!



Then, one by one, the eyes of the citizens turned to him and they began to charge towards him!

He backed away, parrying a hundred spears and swords, broken bottles and clawing nails.

Their thrusts passed harmlessly through his body but clanged against his Soulblade. The blade alone seemed to be real to them and a few of the guardsmen struck at it trying to knock it from his grasp.

He hung on with grim determination and backed out of the gates and down the stairs. The citizens did not (or could not) leave the city and Aleyn returned to earth after only 10 minutes in Tir Na'Nogth. He was shocked and dismayed by his experience and refused to talk about it. Cassie spotted his reluctance and careful dodging of certain questions. She got some of the story out of him, but some things remain unspoken and unexplained.

To Shadow Earth

Next day Gerard had run out of patience with them "goofing off" during Amber's greatest crisis. They were needed to strengthen the Shadow Paths between the Golden Circle realms and Amber. These appear to be crumbling. Or perhaps they could join Julian in the Forest of Arden to defend the Realm against Skaven attacks. Or maybe (as Aleyn is the King's Agent) they could go in search of King Random?

They opt to go searching for Random and decide that heading for Shadow Earth via Trump will get them quickly close to Texicanna so they can try to follow the trail. Aleyn is keen to visit Shadow Earth for reasons of his own – pursuing Setep's agent.

They could either have Trumped Florimel or used their new card for James (Fiona's agent in London).



They contacted Florimel who allowed them to travel here. She was annoyed as Shadow Earth has had incursions from Skaven – troubles in France, in Texas and in Egypt. Fortunately the local troops in all three locations have been able to handle the troubles, but the age-old question about "Are we alone in the universe" has now been answered by the existence of these technology-disrupting "aliens".

She's happy for them to be searching for Random but becomes even more annoyed when they ask her for more favours...

She was apparently unaware of Fiona's agreement with Setep and the presence of an agent of a Lord of Chaos in HER Shadow and without HER permission, does not sit well with her. She reluctantly agrees to look into it and kill the agent if she can find him. She doesn't want a Lord of Chaos (particularly one as dangerous as Setep of House Amon, Setep the Destroyer of Worlds) running free on Shadow Earth. Aleyn hands over the Trump for James (Fiona's London Agent).

They explain that they left some of Benedict's men behind in a ranch in Wyoming and ask if she can send them home or keep them safe.

[GM: It seems that, because of other Amber games they've played, the players assumed there was a Time Differential in Shadow Earth (with time passing at 2.5 times speed here compared to Amber). I wasn't intending for that to be the case, but have decided to accept it as it doesn't affect the wider plot too much – it means that for Setep it's only been about 350 years since he created the SoulBlades experiment and if Corwin came to Earth in 1350 (Black Death) he was only gone for about 270 years Amber Time]

So the Time Differential here means that Capt Crabbe and his men were holed-up in the Wyoming Ranch for about 5 days... Florimel hadn't realised that the "Wyoming Seige" that ended just yesterday was Amber-related. It seems a bunch of Renaissance-fair fanatics had killed some ranchers and occupied the ranch. When the men's absence was noted the local police (and then the National Guard) moved in and the 30 "ren-fair freaks" were finally taken into custody. As these were Benedict's personal guard, Florimel reluctantly adds them to her to-do list. She will provide lawyers, but it seems they are accused of murder, so can't promise anything.

Aleyn and Cassie plan to rest and then take off back to Texicanna to try and pick up Random's Shadow Trail.