

29. S02E04- Art for Art's Sake

Aleyn and Cassie entered the fang-mouthed cave at the top of the steep, winding track.

The tunnels were dark and the sense of foreboding and horror continued to mount. With lanterns, they explored until they reached a few larger caverns where water seemed to have recently broken through one of the walls.



A monstrous creature of rock – a strange magical construct of eye-less stone (apparently using echo-location) – lurched out from the cave wall to attack them. It was surprisingly tough, but Aleyn managed to slip past it into a narrow tunnel where it had restricted movement. Eventually, they managed to smash it to pieces.

A rockfall (or perhaps the creature) had blocked the way. They smashed through into a cavern that had a central shallow lake and then the most beautiful cluster of colourful crystals they'd ever seen.

The cavern had clearly been flooded but the water had burst the northern wall and seeped away until there was only about a foot of water, slowly trickling north.

The crystals were a Work of Art. As they looked more carefully, it seemed they were a sort of hologram drawn in the air and hovered a few inches above the water, with a shimmering reflection. They started to realise that the image in the air was also rippling, as though it was the reflection and the painting itself was drawn on the surface of the lake!

Aleyn thought it was a transcendent triumph of Trump Art. He remembered why they were here and contacted Kato Jen. The old man allowed himself to be brought through. Cassie thought it was beautiful too but wasn't as fascinated as the other two (perhaps you had to have Trump Artistry to REALLY appreciate it). Kato Jen and Aleyn stepped into the image, to view it from the inside, and both of them disappeared!





Aleyn must have blacked-out. When he came to, he, Kato and Cassie were standing outside the Temple of the Logrus in the Courts of Chaos. Inside they were attacked by demons in the form of gargoyles and then by BRAND – wreathed in twisting tendrils of dark flame! Brand blamed Aleyn for the death of his son – Marque. He promised to destroy everyone and everything that Aleyn loved! Brand teleported away and the Temple collapsed and Aleyn watched in horror as Kato Jen was crushed beneath boulders. He tried in vain to rescue the old man but failed and was also buried.

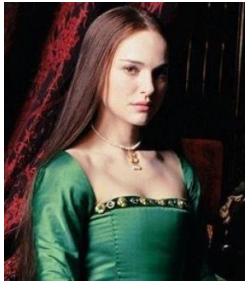
When he came to again, he and Cassie were in one of the outer caverns of the Crystal Cave. There were people chained to iron posts in front of a wall of flame that was gradually pushing towards them.

Manacled to iron posts were Aleyn’s most recent romantic partners Isolde and Trellys, Trakka (his current manservant) and a woman he’d never expected to see again – Bloddwyne – his first and probably greatest Love – from the early years of his life.

He had left Bloddwyne to train with Setep and hone his craft. She had begged him not to go and, while he was gone for almost two years, raiders had come. His home was burned and the charred remains of a woman and a child of about 18 months lay in the rubble. All that deeply-buried guilt and grief welled-up inside him. It seemed she had been resurrected. Her spirit dragged back into a zombie-like body, just to torment him.

They each had to decide who to save and who would be swallowed by the swelling fire.





In his Dwarf form, Aleyrn was fire-resistant, but even so he couldn't save them. He decided to hack off Trellys' hands (softer than the steel anacles) but the Soulblade (out of his control) drank her spirit, and she died with a look of

betrayal on her pretty face. He managed to wrench up the iron post holding Isolde and swept her up in his arms, but his body had been super-heated by the fire, and she burned in his grasp and died screaming!



Cassie failed to rescue Bloddwyne from the flames and was then killed by a second Stone Golem. Only Aleyrn survived. The crushing realisation that it was ALL HIS FAULT overwhelmed him!

Back in the real world (for the events Aleyrn had experienced were illusions sent by Brand), Cassie sensed that Aleyrn was now Trump-trapped. She pulled out her own Trumps and managed (with great effort) to contact Aleyrn, through his despair and grief, and pull him out.

When he had recovered and understood what was happening, he managed to Trumps and extract Kato Jen too. Both of them were still drawn by the Artistic Perfection of the image but Cassie convinced them to leave it behind and return to Amber.

The thing was a trap. Meant to lure and contain Trump Artists and somehow transfer their power to Brand (possibly the source of his Living Trump ability to teleport without needing an actual Trump).

Brand was still alive (in the Abyss) and still connected/controlling the Crystal Trap. He had used his control to torment Aleyrn driving him to despair and grief and eventual madness. Kato had only experienced an out-of-body imprisonment inside one of the crystals. It might have driven him mad in a few weeks or months, but otherwise was nowhere near the horror Aleyrn had been subjected to.

