

Episode Six – New Friends & Old Enemies

25th February 2018

Everyone arrived back on Terra Prime at broadly the same times, and in varying states of frustration. After gathering in one of Kyle's meeting rooms, in his base of operations, they discussed what had happened to each group and then fell silent to contemplate what had happened. William spent his time musing over what had happened, spinning his sword on its point on the ground, digging a small inverted cone into the floor. Until he noticed and stopped, looking a touch guilty.

Then Kyle received Trump contact from Benedict. They greeted each other, and Benedict immediately passed through Martin (son of Random) and Bannoq (Benedict's own son, of whom nothing was known, and probably few in the family even knew existed). Benedict explained how he was still preparing for the retaking of Amber, but that he would be back soon, with almost completed plans and designs of the weaponry he intended to use in the conflict. Until then Bannoq would act as his eyes and ears. Benedict then broke Trump contact and Kyle immediately set about drawing a Trump of Bannoq.

Corin wanted to know more of the place she and William had just be banished from by William's father Bennu, so she sent her Logrus tendrils wandering, find Ygg, and then trying to replicate the Shadow walk William took her on which ended up in an audience with his father. After a short time after having left Ygg, she was unable to proceed along the path, her tendrils just slipped off the shadows she was trying to move her tendrils through.

William, seeing Bannoq as somewhat of a kindred spirit, asked him if he wanted a bit of a work out, to which Bannoq agreed. They departed the meeting room and found a sports hall, where they acquired some wooden blades and sparred. They quickly found that they were very evenly matched. It seemed that Bannoq might have the smallest of edges with the blade, and was probably stronger than William, but William was sufficiently close to be able to hold Bannoq off, for the most part, flexible enough to close off openings that he may not have been initially aware of, and clearly had sufficient stamina to keep going, and going, and going. Bannoq learned a lot from the combat, enough to know that unless a real combat between the two was over very quickly (which itself was hard to see how that might be achieved as William was very nearly Bannoq's equal with the blade), then William's stamina would result in a protracted combat, which would almost certainly turn in William's favour eventually.

Joshua was musing over the attack on him, by the demon, on Trebernaxus, and he conceived that he would summon a minor demon lord to question about this attack, but more so, about what the attacking demon had said, that the demons were gathering, and that war was coming. Joshua, departed the room and made for the roof of the building,

which was conveniently flat. He spent some time preparing the necessary summoning circle and protective magics to ensure the demon could not escape from his control, but summoning a demon lord, however minor, is a dangerous venture, and Joshua knew that the demon lord wouldn't simply answer his questions without resistance.

Kyle, having finished his Trump of Bannoq, went to the Infirmary to check on Random, and had the radical idea of trying to pour energy from the JoJ into random to try and help with the healing process. The reaction was near instant. The dagger wound reopened and green ichor started pouring out; green and black veins erupted from the wound spreading up and down Random's body, rippling, as though fluid was being forced down them in waves; and Random flatlined. Kyle stopped as his doctors rushed in to try to save the King's life. They managed to get a heart beat back, but it was faint, the Kings blood pressure was low, and he was obviously worse than before Kyle's intervention.

Meanwhile on the roof, Joshua completed his summoning preparations, and called forth the demon. This sent emanations of power across the aether of Terra Prime, as the demon solidified into existence. Ash like leaves floated in the air within the circle, coalescing into the outer skin of a demonic form, until the demon fully solidified, its skin as dark as midnight.

Kyle felt this power wash across Terra Prime, and given his stewardship of the Shadow, he set about closing it off to external interference, but he knew that a summoning had already taken place and could not be taken back. After closing off his Shadow, he set about using his Pattern Lens to identify what had happened and where, and his eyes were drawn to the roof of his building. He also used his magics to gather clouds overhead, to be ready to bring down lightning if necessary.

Joshua started questioning the demon lord about what was meant by his attacker's comments about the gathering of his kin and the coming demon war. The demon lord, refused to speak of such things, and so Joshua tortured it with mind bombs, causing the demon incredible pain. Eventually the demon spoke of a command from within the Abyss, a calling of major demons to return home. It also made mention of the coming war, and how the Courts would pay, etc.

Kyle rushed to the roof, but on his way he Trumped Bannoq and William, rapidly explaining that there was an intrusion into the Shadow and he needed assistance. Bannoq and William came to him. Kyle tried to supercharge their weapons, given his power over magic in his own Shadow, and tried to use the power within the JoJ to help. Bannoq's weapon seemed to gratefully receive the power, but William jumped, as though shocked, at the infusion, so Kyle didn't give him any. They achieved the roof, but nothing was to be seen.

Kyle used his Pattern Lens, and it allowed him to narrow down where the power was being hidden to a smaller area. He considered trying to eject the area from his Shadow but could think of no real way of doing this.

Whilst Kyle was searching, Joshua's mighty arts entered the demon's mind to search for more, as the demon lord, even after several mind bombs, would speak no more. Joshua found little, other than inky blackness, and out of the blackness, two baleful red eyes appeared. No words were spoken, but fear flowed from the eyes, and before Joshua could react, there was a denotation of power. It shredded his summoning protections, and his invisibility, throwing him many yards across the building top. The others on the roof now saw all, and Kyle felt a power shatter the blocks he had put on Terra Prime, and they all saw the demon lord pumped full of power. It expanded, it grew, its hide became huge plates of armour, its talons elongated, now as deadly as lances, and its voice became thunder.

Bannoq and William moved to assault the demon. Kyle released lightning from above, striking the demon twice. The first bolt floored it. The second struck as it arose, but to a much lesser effect. Bannoq put on a burst of speed at the last minute, moving past the demon lord, and strike at its thigh. A large wound was rent in its armour and black ichor erupted. The demon lord fell to the ground, and William jumped onto its back striking it with his own blade, but his assault was ineffectual, and so he jumped away before the demon could recover.

The demon lord turned to Bannoq, who successfully repeated his move, but this time the demon was ready, and less effect by the move and made an unsuccessful swipe at Bannoq. Kyle struck the demon again with lightning, but this time the power seemed to be drawn into the demon and earthed. Joshua, mostly recovered, hurled a Chaos Bomb at the demon, but this too seems to be absorbed into the demon as though its energies were earthed upon striking the demon.

Bannoq attempts a third strike, but wary that the demon is learning, side steps at the last second and scores a strike on its other leg, not as effect, but he wounds it none the less. At the same time, almost, Joshua release a mind attack, that causes the demon to grasp the sides of its head and howl in agony. Bannoq swift leaps upwards, hammering his blade under the chin of the demon, through into its brain. Black fluids erupt from the demon, covering Bannoq's arms, as it falls backwards, dead.

Unsatisfied with Joshua's efforts to take down the demon he had summoned, Kyle angrily strikes the unprepared Joshua with more lightning, causing a damaging wound across Joshua's front, and blasting him into insensitivity. Uncertain as to why they have turned

on each other, the ever-helpful William, picks up Joshua and takes him to the Infirmary to be looked after, and everyone else descends to the Infirmary too, to check on Random, except Kyle to go to his study, to analyse the JoJ. Random is unchanged. Bannoq asks Martin if he wants to question Annael, and Martin enthusiastically agrees. They depart the Infirmary to seek Kyle. Around this time Corin comes out of her Logrus search of Shadow and seeks out Kyle too.

Bannoq, Martin, William and Corin all arrive at Kyle's study, but they find him deep in study of the JoJ, and so leaving a note of where they are going, they depart for the penitentiary where Annael is being held. Whilst back in the Infirmary, Joshua manages to regain full consciousness, but rather than wake up, he sends out his mind to seek out Random. Finding Random, he enters the King's mind, but all he finds is delirium.

At the penitentiary, the four of them arrive at Annael's cell and are joined by Kyle, who has just teleported in. Annael's cell is a square room with opaque sides, other than one, which is made of a thick clear material. Annael is not helpful at all, and threats pass between Bannoq and the prisoner. Annael believes he is as good as dead, and so he maintains his arsey attitude. Kyle attempts to use Annael's Trump to access Annael's mind and overwhelm him, but Annael disrupts the contact with a Power Word. Kyle attempts Trump contact with Joshua, but he can tell he is being actively blocked, so he calls the Infirmary by commlink and asks they put Joshua on. Joshua initially feigns unconsciousness but is told they know he is conscience. Kyle asks him to come to them and is brought through by Trump.

It is explained that Annael is being unhelpful and that Joshua might be able to encourage cooperation. After Joshua drops the oxygen dropped in the cell a few times Annael becomes more cooperative. They ask where the dagger came from, and Annael explains how it was a gift from his sister. Alesha is Trumped through and questioned, and she explains how she bought the dagger years ago on Malkeeva from a travelling salesman, and gifted it to Annael, knowing his love of weapons and of emeralds, one of which is fixed in the pommel.

Annael is questioned further about the Blood Droids and their means of power. He explains how he tested many items of technology, unsuccessfully, on the outskirts of Amber, to try and find something that worked there. All failed. He then, in a moment of inspiration, thought that if only something could use the Blood of Amber as its fuel, maybe it would work. And so, he set on a process of developing generators that used the power within the Blood of Amber as its fuel, and after long years of testing, he developed a generator that worked. It didn't take long, then, to fuse this generator with some combat

droids. With a Blood Generator, the droids gained the added benefit of becoming highly resistant to magic and Chaos.

Annael was also questioned about his hatred of Amber, and his eyes settled on Bannoq, as though to remind of someone he once knew. He explained how the three elder sons of Oberon were responsible for his hatred. Finndo and Osric for their active torture of him and his mother, which ultimately led to his mother's death around the same time that Osric killed three members of the House of Karm, to whom his mother was related, and Benedict for his apparent indifference to the actions of Osric and Finndo, that is whenever he could be bothered to take the time to visit Amber at that time, so long ago.

Kyle then received Trump contact from Benedict and was brought through. Annael's reaction was instant. He slammed against the wall nearest to Benedict and started hammering into it. His knuckles split, and blood started to flow. Joshua took the oxygen down again, and Annael was soon unconscious. Benedict, if he might ever be classified as such, appeared somewhat surprised. Joshua took the opportunity to read Annael's mind and confirmed he had been telling the truth, from his perspective.

Benedict recovered his composure and explained they needed a conference, which they had. Benedict explained the time when Annael was born, the first of King Oberon's dalliances outside of marriage. Benedict didn't care for Oberon's behaviour, but he didn't let it bother him, and chose to remove himself from Amber for the most part, instead of allowing himself to be a pawn in some kind of emotional power play. Finndo and Osric were more troubled by the affair. Osric, in particular, chose to take exception to the relatives of the women with whom Oberon was having fun. He spent a lot of time in the Shadow and made many enemies, as well as making life for Annael's mother and Annael himself hell. It all came out later, that both Finndo and Osric were caught several times physically and emotionally abusing the young boy Annael, but the Shadow authorities could do little, as they were princes of Amber. Benedict rarely saw the boy, and to his admitted shame, even though Benedict knew what his brother were like and capable of, this was at a time when Benedict was only interested in military things and personal improvement. He thought his father would ultimately intervene.

Eventually the House of Karm had had enough of Finndo and Osric's behaviour, leading to a conflict where Osric killed three of its noble members. At the same time, they chose to take out their anger on Annael's mother and she suffered grievously, but not before she was able to secret Annael away (now about 14), apparently with his newly born sister (whose existence Benedict knew nothing about). Everyone thought Annael had been killed by Finndo and Osric, and the body tossed somewhere. And since they were later killed, whilst in the defence of Amber elsewhere in Shadow, they are no longer around to

question. It is a matter of lasting regret for Benedict, and one that maybe providence has now given him the opportunity to make right.

Benedict also explained that he had spent his time developing the Jeweller's Rouge, and its explosive properties. Refining it further than Corwin ever had and developing it for the purposes of some fearsome weaponry. These weapons he expects to be all destroyed, although some in the group suggest that once the genie is out of the box, then was it not best to keep some. Benedict seemed open to that, but also that they cannot be used to threaten Amber again, and that he can always make more. He also explains that the Shadow he had the Rouge refined, he has destroyed. It was populated by soulless beings anyway. But Avalon, where the Rouge came from, he asked Kyle to investigate how it can be totally cut off from all other Shadow, to isolate it from anyone else who might seek to get the Rouge. Kyle confirmed this could be done.

Benedict then explained how he would want to speak to Annael alone, and asked Kyle to arrange for Annael to be brought a private meeting room, where they might talk. Kyle organises, and Benedict departs. Bannoq asked Benedict if he needed company, which Benedict declined.

The party talked of how Annael may have been set up, with the supply of the dagger, etc. And that such a plan was clearly one that had been planned across generations. But by whom?

The returned to the Infirmary to check on Random, who had not changed. Corin decided, as one who now had a "close" relationship with the Unicorn, to try and reach the Unicorn's mind. Her magics were simply incapable of gaining any purchase on the Unicorn's mind, siding off every time, until a slight crack opened, and she was able to see in. The Unicorn was dreaming of what must have been ancient, ancient times. An amazing beautiful, slender woman, with an Alicorn, clearly the Unicorn herself in human form, strode happily with a tall, serpent eyed human, with a high, long black pony tail. They were obviously lovers.

Then, both in the dream, and in reality, there came a shudder through Shadow, as though extreme powers had been released and were contending with each other. Corin withdrew from the mind of the Unicorn, and explained to the others what she had felt, and continued to feel. They all took to their horses, and hell-rode through Shadow, with Corin leading them.

Eventually they reach Shadows where huge scars rent the landscape, and Corin felt they were getting near, and everyone else felt disturbances too. They also realised that this

battle of the Powers was not only damaging Shadows but destroying them. Finally, they reached the Shadow where the main battle was taking place, and after making some defensive magical preparations, they reached the top of a hill, beyond which was a long deep valley.

Below the devastation was complete. And at its centre, battling as no two beings had ever battle before, was the Serpent and the Black Unicorn, now grown to a monstrous size, larger than any draft horse that had ever lived. The Black Unicorn skewered the Serpent with its Alicorn, but the Serpent brought its greater size and weight to bear, smashing the Black Unicorn away with its tail. The Serpents blood burned as it flowed, but it seemed no worse for wear, and the battle continued.