

PROLOGUE – Whatever happened to Mr Joshua?

Joshua collapsed onto the steps of the Cathedral of the Serpent whilst still grappling Corwin's Pattern Ghost. Corwin seemed unfazed at having been transported to the centre of Chaos and gave Joshua his full attention. Corwin released a quick, sharp, and potent Power Word, and Joshua was suddenly and violently forced back into his normal humanoid form. A quick slice left Joshua with a severe cutting to his calf. Fortunately, Corwin's weapon was a mere simulacrum of Grayswandir. Nevertheless, the wound burned, and even Joshua's advanced ability to Shape Shift had trouble dampening the fire in his veins. Joshua instantly raised his Logrus defences to give him some protection from the pseudo-Pattern Blade.

There were many natives of Chaos in the wide-open plaza before the entrance to the Cathedral of the Serpent. Two were Chaosians of high status, who had only moments before departed the Cathedral itself. Lord Alkarmen (an ancient and powerful Sorcerer/Warrior) and Lord Malfleece (a High Lord from a younger generation, but still a powerful Sorcerer). Alkarmen seemed to absorb the situation and instantly recognised Joshua. Alkarmen let off his own potent Power Word directed at Joshua, and Joshua felt a powerful ethereal explosion of magic, and he knew that escape via Trump was now not an option.

Malfleece, only moments behind, moved to keep Alkarmen between himself and the combat. He began preparing magics that would end the combat, and maybe the combatants themselves. Corwin seemed to ignore the two Chaos Lords and was intent on trying to finish off Joshua. Any incarnation of Corwin was almost certainly skilful enough with a blade to kill Joshua in a melee combat, and with two powerful Chaos Lords about to join the battle, things did not look good for the second son of Dworkin.

But looking past Corwin (as the Pattern Ghost advanced), Joshua saw an armed woman slip behind Malfleece and hammer the pommel of a dagger into the back of his head. Malfleece crumpled to the ground, and his magics dissipated.

Moving as swiftly as his badly cut leg allowed him, Joshua kept Corwin between him and Alkarmen, and since Corwin was now taking note of the advancing Chaos Lord, Joshua was able to keep a good distance away from the Pattern Blade that might end his life. Alkarmen approached cautiously, seeing that Corwin wielded a blade of great power.

These moments of indecision were all that was needed for the woman who had felled Malfleece to rush around and over to Joshua to offer aid. She rapidly explained that if Joshua wanted to live he would leave now with her. It took no time for Joshua to agree, and showing strength that clearly marked her as warrior of note, she grabbed Joshua and jumped with him on to a rapidly passing Filmy, and they shot away over the towers of Chaos, leaving Alkarmen and Corwin to face off against each other. The last distant view Joshua caught of the Pattern Ghost, was it being surrounded by dozens of Cathedral acolytes, who had poured out of the building in support of Alkarmen, moments after the Filmy had left.

The woman answered no questions until they were far, far away from the Cathedral. During the trip Joshua took the opportunity to focus all his mental and physical resources on healing the wound to his leg, and by the time the Filmy slowed, its healing was well advanced, although still very tender. When the woman finally slowed the Filmy, she named herself Gilva, Lady of House Hendrake, and member of a secret cult who venerated Benedict of Amber.

The Filmy finally drew to a halt, hours of fast travel later, in an obviously scantily populated area of The Courts, at an apparently deserted Greek-like temple. Gilva and Joshua entered the temple, and then they passed down many levels down into the depths below.

There Joshua spoke with Gilva and others and learnt of the secret organisation of the Cabal of Benedict. This cult did indeed worship the Lord Benedict of Amber, given how comprehensively Benedict had defeated those of Chaos who had fought in Patternfall. Joshua also found out that the group has a deep dissatisfaction with the current Chaos leadership and were particularly at odds with the rise in the power of the Church of the Serpent.

Joshua explained how he needed to talk to Suhuy and was surprised to be told how the Cabal had direct links to Suhuy. It was arranged for Suhuy to visit Joshua in the depths below the temple, where they spoke of Joshua's need, and discussed his thoughts about recent events. Suhuy explained how he had studied demons and the Abyss for eons before Joshua was even born. And Suhuy knew of no way for anyone to survive a trip to the Abyss. Many had tried, and all have failed, no matter what protective magics were employed. A trip leaves its mark in the substance of the visitor, and they eventually sicken and die. The longer the trip, the quicker to death after their return. Suhuy admitted that someone of Joshua's potency would survive for longer, and maybe if the trip were not too long and not too deep then maybe no mark would be left. But a trip to the mid-levels of the Abyss was bound to leave its mark, and eventually even Joshua would succumb.

They spoke of ancient Chaosian libraries that might have texts from near the beginning of time, maybe even before the formation of the Courts, that might contain lost knowledge of that time and/or of the genesis of demon kind. Suhuy freely admitted that such libraries and texts may well exist that not even he knows about. Indeed, they almost certainly do exist, given the size of the Courts. Suhuy had just never had a need, as his library has more than he had ever read, on the topics that matter to him, and much of it remained a mystery to even him.

In order that Joshua could traverse the Courts without being recognised, he and Suhuy combined their power to lay potent enchantments on Joshua's aura, which combined with Joshua's existing powers of Shape Shifting would make detection of Joshua next to impossible, unless he were to visit somewhere like the Royal Court, or the Cathedral of the Serpent itself. Suhuy explained that this was not a permanent effect, and would need

renewing frequently, but at least Joshua would be able to avoid another confrontation like the one of the Plaza outside the Cathedral.

Joshua started to investigate the older families of Chaos, particularly those which were either long dead and forgotten, or those that were once great, but whose ancestral homes were now abandoned. He discovered tombs that describe ancient beings of vast power. Of two beings, much was written. A bright and fiery Phoenix and a dark, nihilistic, Scorpion, who fought long before the Courts existed, and who battled for an eternity on the edge of the Abyss. Eventually the Phoenix threw down the Scorpion, and cast him into the Abyss, where the Scorpion raged in his ruin, until he was consumed by the Abyss itself. Legend had it that all demon kind were formed from his essence, many eons later.

Joshua also learnt of the first encounters of inhabitants of the newly formed Courts of Chaos, and those of demon kind, and how the demons of that time were near mindless, and unable to defend themselves from the eager Lords of Chaos and their magics, which they used to bind the demons. And even though the demons evolved rapidly, so did the magic of the Courts, so that even the most powerful of known demon kind became subject to the rising power of the magicians of the Courts.

Joshua also uncovered references to a being called Huma or Garuda, whose description was remarkably like the Phoenix creature that threw down the Scorpion, and of a being called Corvus, the Raven, the Seeress of the "Gods". The research threw up tantalising slivers of knowledge of how the power of the Phoenix and the Raven might be proof against the poison of the Abyss.

SESSION 10 – Cracks in Reality

30th December 2018

Reeling from the volume of data The Patriarch had passed to them, the company considered the implications. Much of what they once knew of reality had changed, and to learn that eleven other beings had existed, coeval to The Serpent and The Unicorn, and had walked in Shadow and the real places of old, was a revelation. They continued questioning the Patriarch to gain as much as they might before having to return to reality:

What are the marks left on Corin by the Unicorn?

He could not confirm if the Unicorn foresaw her own fate at the time, only that the Unicorn had marked Corin in some special way, and that maybe the purpose of its mark may soon come to fruition. He could sense that a power had been imparted to Corin, even if Corin could not, but that he was unable to say any more, other than it felt transient, and therefore maybe the Unicorn had seen this infusion of power as a temporary arrangement. But he also remarked that the longer it was within Corin, the more difficult it would be to remove from her, if a time came that it needed to be, and that if another was in fact meant to be the true recipient, maybe an opportunity to see any designs that the Unicorn had for this power, would be lost. Kyle remarked that Corin was probably just a carrier, a statement with which the Patriarch agreed.

Can the assets gathered in the Realm of Knowledge be shared?

The Patriarch agreed to put his knowledge and that of his Realm at the disposal of the group, if necessary, but that there was so much of it, that sifting through it can often take a long time.

Where was Joshua and what has happened to him?

He was in The Courts of Chaos in hiding but doing a lot of research into demon kind and the Abyss. He has met with Suhuy at least once, but the Patriarch could not see into Joshua's mind, so he is unaware of what Joshua was planning to do.

What of the Old Gods, and what of the Realm of Prisons?

Cygnus, Fintan, Maahes, Watasumi and the Unicorn were dead. Centaurus, Hrolleif and Tauron are imprisoned. Artio and Macha have "faded" from reality. Abaddon is Master of the Abyss. Bennu is master of his own reality, Ea. The Serpent had departed for parts unknown. Possibly the only universality about the relationships between the Old Gods was their collective love of Cygnus, and their collective hatred of Abaddon (although their feelings for the Serpent seemed to come a close second, with the exception of the Unicorn).

It seemed that if more than one returned, it would not be as simple as one of the gods vs. another, as there were alliances within alliances, and treachery on multiple sides. The multiple factions would make any alliance that Amber or Chaos might try to form, complicated if recruitment of more than one god was attempted. Corin, in typical petulance, repeated her view that the whole lot of them were as bad as each other, and worse, even, than the friction between Amber and Chaos.

Corin believed that Abaddon posed the most immediate problem. Kyle expressed fear at one of the imprisoned gods escaping and how they might tackle such a being, when there is no being of equal potency around, or willing to confront such an escapee. Any escapee was unlikely to be friendly.

Of those imprisoned, it was felt that Hrolleif posed the most danger, given his madness. Bannoq asked if Abaddon's poison might have worn off, but the Patriarch reminded them he cannot see into the Realm of Prisons. Only the Gods themselves have the power to move between Realms at will. However, maybe The Logrus and The Pattern, certainly the equal of the Old Gods in many ways, may be able to aid in the penetration of the veils between the Realms, or help re-enforce them. The dangers if the Realms were to touch would be great.

The Realm of Prisons itself, he understood, to be much like Shadow, except that when imprisoned the prisoner cannot pass between the different worlds within that reality. Certainly, one of the beings held in that Realm might escape alone, whilst others remained secure in their personal goals.

Bannoq suggested from what they now know, that Tauron might be the most reasonable, given his apparent reluctance to enter the Old Gods war in the first place. Corin reiterated her feeling that they are all tossers. Bannoq also wondered what else might now happen due to the departure of the Serpent and the death of the Unicorn, and the removal of their "stabilising" presence. The Patriarch suggested that not much is likely to happen immediately, but as time passed, whatever the consequences were, were likely to accelerate. The Unicorn's power, for certain, was now dispersed throughout all of reality, and any being with sufficient knowledge might capture and utilise it.

They discussed whether it might be possible to identify the places where the barriers between Shadow and the Realm of Prisons might fail, but the Patriarch could not help. Only that when they did fail, it was likely to be explosive. He explained that the different plains of reality were like sheets of paper, and where they touched it would be like the paper reaching towards each other for a moment, where one might then cross between the realms. All these Realms were created prior to the Logrus and the Pattern, and therefore had no alliance to either Chaos or Order. The realms had touched in the past, when the three gods were imprisoned, and when the gods imprisoned the beasts from the beginning of time. But it was always the power of the gods that allowed this to happen. Kyle suggested that it was time to leave to prepare things for when such a confluence of the Realms happened.

They talked briefly of the other Realms. The Abyss was one. Bennu had created another. And the elder spawn of Oberon appears to inhabit yet another, The Realm of Mirrors, and they seemed to use any reflective surface to travel to and from the material Realm and their own. Kyle suggested that Tir Na'nog maybe another possible realm, and a place where one might cross over.

Of the elder spawn of Oberon, they debate whether or not the spawn were responsible for the current predicament. Maybe they were the masterminds behind things; maybe they were aware, not in control, but now taking advantage of the turmoil; or maybe they were innocent, and purely focused on their own plans. What they did know was that the Verdant Tree in Trebernaxus was connected to the elder spawn and needed further investigation. Corin believed them to be responsible, which in part Kyle agreed, due to the obvious connection between the elder spawn and the setting up of Annael. They all wondered what the Spawn's next move will be. The Patriarch repeated what he knew of the Spawn, which was based purely on their actions whilst in the main reality, for he could not see into the Mirror Realm. Even when the Spawn walked in Shadow, they always sought to cloak themselves. Corin expressed the view that trying to follow them maybe a fool's errand, as there was probably not the time to do so anyway.

Savik appeared to be a native of the Mirror Realm and appeared in the Courts to gain favour and integrate into society. She and Oberon become an item and she bore him two children, Darius and Marcus. But, despite breaking Oberon out of gaol, Oberon left her when summoned by Dworkin, after the creation of the Pattern. Savik returned to the Realm of Mirrors, where she must have given birth to two more children to her eldest son, Darius, if the conversations that have been observed when they returned periodically to the main reality, were to be believed. The last time the Spawn were seen was about a week ago (the most recent events that they had recorded and is the standard delay in the recording of events across reality), in Trebernaxus, where they seemed to kill the Verdant Tree, sending the local religion into chaos. Corin believed them to be behind some of the current issues, but that a clash of the realms was not their end game. Although she speculated as to whether Savik had any connection to the Abyss and Abaddon. Savik was looking to gain power in the main reality, not destroy it, or make it uninhabitable. If the Spawn are responsible, they probably do not realise it, and besides it does not really matter, as if the end result is the release of three gods from the Realm of Prisons, there would be more to worry about than some tetchy children of Oberon. The Spawn themselves may be releasing the old gods deliberately, or that might be a side effect of their plans and they may be in as much shit as the rest of reality, or maybe they are being controlled and are unwilling participants, or maybe willing participants?

Bannoq asked how the Patriarch could see into reality, and whether or not they could look for something specific. Acolytes would enter a trance for an indeterminate amount of time, and as one finished to record what had happened, another would take over the watching, which is why their knowledge is always out of phase with actual events. But Bannoq asked whether or not a few hours at a time could be observed so they can see what is happening in Trebernaxus now, which is the case, but the Patriarch said that the easier way to find that out would be simply to visit the Shadow.

Kyle asked how the Great Spikard featured in the wider equation, and the Patriarch explained that the Great Spikard is the power that fuels the Realm of Knowledge. With it the Patriarch can keep the Realm safe from anyone or anything, unless one of the Gods themselves, fully empowered, chose to try and break into the Realm. Certainly, the Spawn

would have no hope of breaking in, even if they knew of the Realm of Knowledge, and the Patriarch did not believe they did.

They prepare to leave, and the Patriarch sent for an escort. Corin announced that she planned to grab the Alicorn and walk the Pattern or the Logrus to see if that can give any insight into how one might utilise its power. Kyle suggested walking Corwin's Pattern to avoid adopting another Pattern imprint. He also told Corin to ask nicely when asking Benedict to give over the Alicorn. More accusations, or petulant behaviour, was unlikely to get her what she wanted. Corin had the good sense to look sheepish, and Kyle just reinforced that all she needed to do is be patient, there are bigger things at stake than cheap point scoring. Bannoq queried whether she needed the Alicorn, given she already carries some of the Unicorn's essence.

Corin believed that they need to start to marshal their forces for the coming war, and Kyle expressed the fear that the Spawn may try to recruit Stålmannen, the Chrome Droid. Corin suggested that Stålmannen is someone they should be looking to recruit themselves and asked who is best placed to convince him that they need to band together. She also wondered about Bennu and whether he will simply continue to ignore them or might be persuaded to get involved. Where was Fiona and what is her status?

Whatever the answers to these questions were, they all needed to get back to reality. But the Patriarch warned them that Chaos was in turmoil since the departure of the demon kind, even more so since Joshua dropped a Pattern Ghost on the steps of the Cathedral of the Serpent. The group discussed the need to work out where and when the Realm of Prisons was likely to touch Shadow and what they could do about it, and who of the three imprisoned Old Gods, would be more likely to be of help upon their release, and they agreed it was likely Tauron.

The Patriarch reminded them, that both the Unicorn and the Serpent were more powerful than they had been in days of old, when all thirteen Old Gods walked Shadow, and therefore more powerful, individually, than any of the Old Gods had been, as portions of their power had been gained as the other Old Gods were imprisoned, or faded, or were killed. But with the Unicorn also now dead, and the Serpent having departed this reality, such power that was now flowing through Reality was apt to be gathered by any being with sufficient knowledge to gather it. Had the Serpent stayed, then he might have become even more powerful than ever before and stabilised all of reality. And as the barriers that hold this Reality and the Realm of Prisons apart, gradually erode, maybe the same is true of the other Realms, and maybe even the Realm of knowledge will soon merge with Shadow. If this were to happen, then all the Knowledge it holds, and maybe the Great Spikard itself, might fall into the wrong hands.

A guard arrived to escort the group back to Reality, and the Patriarch last words were how when the time was right, then they might return, given the right guidance of someone like Delwin. And with that the group departs the Realm of Knowledge.

The company passed back out of the massive mesa and passed over the apparent barren wasteland. They soon arrived back at the entrance to Undershadow. Their guide led them without conversation or giving any indication that it was aware of them. As they travelled through the strange Realm, Bannoq attempted to memorize the route they were taking. Finally, they arrived back in the Realm of Chaos and Order, at the cave entrance that Delwin had used. Their shimmering guide, turned, half nodded/half bowed, and departed.

Meanwhile in the Courts, Joshua had to conclude that he had learnt as much as he might from ancient libraries about trying to endure the Abyss. There were secret societies, long dead, in Chaos, who believe in thirteen ancient beings, all believe long dead. These beings were identified by icons resembling animal-like beings.

The company agreed a plan of action; to return to Amber; to bring Benedict up to speed on recent events, and get the Alicorn and investigate it's power; to speak to Annael to explain to him how he has been conned and determine whether or not he might be open to help liaising with Stålmannen; to speak to Alesha and understand more about her power that drew William from Bennu's reality and whether or not it might help in shoring up the walls between the Realities; to set up monitoring stations across Shadow that might give them early notice of something crossing over from the Realm of Prisons (maybe with Alesha's help); and to contact Joshua and swap recent events, if possible.

Corin didn't want to wait any longer and she tried trump contact with Joshua. Joshua accepted and Corin brought Joshua up to speed on all the events he has missed, including the death of the Unicorn. Corin explain her plan to investigate the dispersed power of the Unicorn, the Alicorn and the mark the Unicorn has left on her, and how it might give her the knowledge to secure reality against a clash of the Realms. Then, maybe they will have the time to deal with the other issues they face, i.e.: try and recruit Stålmannen to their cause, deal with the Elder Spawn of Oberon, deal with any Prison escapees, and deal with Abaddon and demon kind.

Joshua in turn explained what he had been up to regards his investigations into the Abyss, and how one might survive down there. So far, he had come up with nothing certain, other than to descend too far into the Abyss leaves a permanent mark which will eventually kill the individual. Joshua wants to descend and gather intelligence as to what was going on so they can make better plans to deal with it. Until they have some solid evidence, then everything is guesswork.

Kyle attempted contact with his mother, but she fobbed him off, saying she is busy. So, he attempted contact with Corwin's Pattern Ghost, and as expected, he could not get through and was obviously being blocked by magical means. So finally, Kyle trumped Suhuy, and they spoke of the Pattern Ghost. Suhuy knew that it had been taken and imprisoned in the dungeons of the Cathedral, which had been re-enforced against escape given Corin's disappearance from the Abyssal dungeons. They briefly spoke of the demon issue, and

Suhuy seemed to know of the death of the Unicorn and the departure of the Serpent, but he did not think anyone else would have noticed yet.

Joshua and Corin discussed Abaddon and wondered why he was moving now and what were his objectives. Domination of reality? Is it because he has awoken, or escaped something? Either way, he was now active. Dropping in on the Abyss may not be best, but what else can they do? Bannoq asked about the demon Joshua lost control of on Terra Prime, and Joshua explained that control was taken from him, and whoever did that is someone to fear. Joshua saw himself as the only one who might survive a trip to the Abyss. But he could not do it right now.

Finally, Kyle trumped them all to Amber and they went in search of Benedict, who was at Court dealing with administrative issues. As they reach the throne room, they were passed by several guards who rush up to Benedict and tell of a monster Shadow Storm having appeared and was now treating through the outskirts of the Golden Circle. Benedict dismissed the court and hobbled over to the PC, still using a cane to walk after the fight to defeat Corwin. In the brief conversation that followed, Corin confirmed her parentage as being a descendant of Corwin before Benedict ordered Kyle to use the Jewel of Judgment to deal with the monster Shadow Storm.

They all went to Benedict's quarters where he handed the Jewel to Kyle, and Bannoq explained that Corin had need for the Alicorn. Corin, maybe a little too swiftly, denied actually knowing what she is doing. Causing Benedict to raise an eyebrow and asked Bannoq to keep an eye on her.

Taking the Jewel, Kyle used it to range out into the Golden Circle with his mind and evaluated the Shadow Storm from afar. It truly was the biggest storm he has ever witnessed, and so ferocious, that it felt almost Primal in nature. It was without question crossing between Shadows, and it had a long tail, causing great havoc in many places. Kyle felt rips and tears in the aether, as though the storm is clawing at the substance of Reality itself. He was unable to affect the storm from such a distance, but he was not so far that he did not feel a large aethereal snap, a detonation, and a rending of the fabric of Reality. Something tumbled through into the Shadows thereabouts. The storm continued to rage, moving swiftly on and continued to cause great damage.

Bannoq attempted to once again "feel" the Alicorn, but got nowhere, so he swiftly passed the Alicorn to Corin, who took a psychic impression of the artefact, but also had trouble feeling anything more of it. Corin took her leave and headed off into Shadow, finally breaking Trump contact with Joshua.

Kyle saw that the presence that appeared when reality was rent, seemed to be in an uncontrolled rage and is tearing up the Shadow it had fallen into. Benedict told them to get out there and deal with it. So, Kyle summoned William and the two of them, along with Bannoq, depart to the scene of destruction. Kyle drew a quick trump sketch of somewhere nearby, so they didn't drop straight into the area of destruction.

When they arrived Kyle requested to tap into William's raw power, who reluctantly agreed. Kyle then combined this with the power of the Jewel and worked on the storm. Being much closer he was able to have a marked effect on the storm, calming it considerably.

Back in the Courts Joshua conducted a Trump casting to see if he could gain any insight into which of the modern Houses of Chaos might still retain some connection to the worship of the 13. To his surprise, two names float to the top. House Hendrake and House Sawall.

Now Kyle, Bannoq and William turned their attention to the new being in Shadow. Raging in a field was a huge being, at least 20 feet tall, looking like it was made of glass or obsidian (probably weighing at least 13 tons), armed with an enormous double headed battle-axe, which it held in one hand. It seemed covered in mirrorlike plate armour, which looked like it was part of its being, rather than protecting an internal body. Hovering apparently in mid-air nearby but well out of arms reach, was a tear in what looks like the air itself. The being was bellowing and casting its axe about itself in frustration. Where the axe struck the ground, huge gouts of earth were thrown in all directions. Many of the Shadows inhabitants could be seen fleeing the scene.

William and Bannoq charge in. The being stopped setting about itself, seeing William first. It pointed at him and bellowed something in an unknown language. It repeated the shout, whilst Kyle moved closer and behind the golem. The being bellowed a third time, and William screamed back. The being's eyes begin to glow and suddenly two red hot beams erupted forth, exploding the earth where they struck. William dodged the attack and started running around the being. The beams follow William as the being turned its head, and they start to catch him, destroying the ground as they washed over it.

Bannoq charged and called forth words of power, giving him more speed and strength. He attempted to hamstring the golem with a strike to the backs of its legs, scarring the surface of its armour with a white-hot gash. But Bannoq's arms flared in pain as the vibrations of the strike pass down his blade into his flesh. The golem's fiery beams shut off, and it turned to try and strike at Bannoq. But all it struck was the ground where Bannoq had been. Bannoq kept moving, fighting fully defensively, whilst attempting to size up this opponent.

With the golem's attention on Bannoq, William returned to the combat, shouting words of thunder. He leapt high onto the golem, hammered his blazing sword into the golem's back. The blade entered up to the hilt, and William started furiously working his swords back and forth, causing a huge gapping white hot hole to form. But nothing seemed to slow the being. Reaching behind with surprising speed, the golem grabbed William by the arm and threw him far through the air. William landed some 50 feet away, hitting the ground hard. The substance of the golem, white hot, poured from the wound on its back.

Bannoq rushed in as William was thrown and stabbed his Pattern Sword up into the golem's belly, causing a similar wound as the one on its back, and then jumped back before the golem could grasp at him, but Bannoq's sword was torn from his hand. But Bannoq's blade

was part of him, more so than almost any other blade and swordsman. After a moment quivering in the wound, it shot out and returned to Bannoq's hand. At the same time, Bannoq noticed that the leg wound he had delivered seemed to be healing.

Kyle put forth his own power now and grabbed the substance of the beast's helmet and forced it to stretch over its eyes before it might release its fiery gaze again. Although this worked, the golem did not seem to slow down, and it did not seem like it actually needed its "eyes" to see, as it charged after Bannoq.

Bannoq drew it in, and release another power word, giving him the speed to dodge the golem's axe, which slammed into the ground where Bannoq had been standing. But this time, the golem was faster and closer than it had been before. It was learning Bannoq's strengths and weaknesses as they fought. With swift realisation, Bannoq knew that the combat needed to end before the golem was able to anticipate all three of them too quickly for them to damage it again. Shouting words of power that boosted his strength, he hammered his blade down on the golem's wrist that held its axe. There was an explosion of a white-hot glassy substance, as the golem's hand and axe was severed from its arm.

In apparent anger, the golem spoke, and power flowed from its words, striking at Bannoq, and slamming him to the ground. The golem then reached down and grabbed Bannoq by the throat and lifted him high, shaking him violently and began to squeeze. But William returned to the fray, and following Bannoq lead, chopped down at the arm holding Bannoq, at the elbow. There was another explosion of white-hot material, and Bannoq, along with half an arm fell to the floor, as the golem staggered back seeming looking down at its elbow stump. The material that now covered the golem's eyes began to glow, and quickly changed from red to yellow to white hot, and the beams of fire erupt out from the golem's eyes, streaking across the sky and then down towards the handicapped Bannoq, weighed down by half a ton of obsidian arm still attached to his neck.

Bannoq strained every sinew to break the thumb of the golem's severed arm as death approached. The thumb snapped, but not before the golem's fire washed across his legs, scarring him terribly. But even as it did, the golem's gaze ceased, and it fell to its knees.

Kyle released a spell of telekinesis, throwing the severed arm to smash the golem in the head, as both William and Bannoq (as fast as was able), rushed in, striking at the golem's neck from either side, severing the head from the body. The golem gave a single terrible shudder and did not move again. In the few moments afterwards, they could see energies emanating from the golem's gapping wounds, as it evaporated away from the golem. Kyle did his best to study the energies as they dissipated. However, Kyle's attention was caught by the tear in reality, and had to focus his energies there, using the Jewel to help mend the rend.

Simultaneously Kyle focused part of his mind on repairing the tear, whilst also sending a desperate plea to his mother to come through via trump to help with the golem and to learn as much as they might from it before its essence finally failed.

With the conflict finished, Bannoq studied the severed limbs and head of the golem but could discern no internal structure. It seemed to be solid throughout. Having been trumped in by Kyle, Fiona stepped closer to the golem, muttering some words and placed a hand on its chest. Smoke arose from the contact she made with her hand, which seemed to sink into the golem's chest by at least half a foot.

While William watched Fiona, Kyle finally managed to heal the rip, whilst trying to learn as much of it as he might, and about what was on the other side. However, the monster shadow storm that caused the rend was continuing, and Kyle felt unable to contend with it, even with the Jewel. So, Kyle asked William to help by allowing Kyle to tap William's raw power. William agreed, but informed Kyle that he now had complete control of its flow, and that Kyle should be cautious about the rate and volume of power he drew. Using the power lent by William, Kyle was able to master the shadow storm, and over several hours, he was able to calm it to merely a localised storm.

Corin, having realised that shadow-walking to Ygg would be a hugely length undertaking, decided instead to walk Corwin's Pattern. Having achieved that, she teleported herself as close to the barrier between the Realms of Chaos and Order, and the realm of Bennu, as possible and she then started shadow-walking towards the Olds Gods Realm of Ea.

Back in the hidden places of the Courts of Chaos, Joshua mused as to what to do. He considered leaving to walk through the Courts, but is advised against it by Gilva, for she feared that those with power have even now, set up watches and spells that might strip any masking away, that Joshua might cloak himself with, despite the additional help of Suhuy.

So, Joshua pulled out Suhuy's trump again and made contact. Joshua shared information and theorems to see what Suhuy thought. Suhuy decided to come to Joshua, as he made it clear he did not want Joshua in the inner sanctum of The Logrus. Joshua let Suhuy know what he has found out about the situation and about his ideas about what is going on in The Abyss and its connection to the Old Gods. They discussed whether any Chaos houses might be aligned to these beings. If Joshua could find anyone from these modern-day houses to talk to, if they retain any knowledge, this may help with working out how someone can go down into The Abyss to gather the data they all need. Suhuy suggested a couple of houses might fit the bill, but he would advise against approaching Hendrake. Sawall maybe? The Lady Dara might be reasonable, but Suhuy warned against taking her lightly. She was a powerful sorceress, with powerful relatives. Dara had also been a stellar student of Suhuy's herself. Suhuy also explained how Dara was part of the game of thrones in Chaos, and advised against contacting her, for fear that she might try to turn things to her advantage in the race for the next person to sit on the throne. They discussed others and agreed that maybe Merlin, child of Dara and Corwin of Amber might be a good bet. Suhuy knew that Merlin had no time for the politicking, that he was a young, but

competent sorcerer, and a very rational fellow. Certainly, a better bet than Despil, Jurt, let alone the stepson Mandor, who was at least as dangerous as Dara.

Suhuy explained he was happy to make the introduction, but nothing more than that. Also, given the long tradition in Chaos using kids against parents, and because Merlin is a bit of a favourite of Suhuy's, he asked Joshua to ensure that Merlin did not come to too any permanent harm, but realised that persuasion might be necessary. Suhuy believed that Dara was setting Merlin up to be the next King of Chaos, but he had no proof. If this ended up being the case, Suhuy is sure Merlin will be nothing but a puppet of Dara's. Joshua seemed to have no truck with the machinations of these younglings, stating that without solving the wider issues, there will be no throne in Chaos for anyone to sit on.

Before attempting to trump Merlin, Suhuy warned Joshua that his normal obnoxious attitude would not serve him well with the House of Sawall. They were power and potent in their own way, and Joshua was an exile. They would not just fall in line. Swayvill would not give up the Throne easily, and whilst Amblerash might currently be in the strongest position, it would not take much for Sawall to ascend, and they will see no benefit in allying themselves with a hated son of a traitor.

Suhuy passed a psychic impression of Merlin to Joshua, who drew a quick sketch trump and made contact. Merlin was initially extremely cautious but agreed to come through when he saw Suhuy was also there, who also confirmed it was safe to come through. Suhuy, using telepathy, quickly explained to Joshua that Merlin was probably not aware of Dara's aspirations, but Joshua did not seem to care whether it came out.

Joshua could see that Merlin was a being of both Order and Chaos and after some verbal sparring they both explained their lineages to each other, including the fact that Dara was the great-grand daughter of Benedict. In their discussion about demons and about the thirteen ancient beings, Merlin related that not all demons had actually disappeared, and Joshua became desperate to know which ones had not answered the call.

Merlin explained how some of his childhood friend heard the call, but were able to ignore it, despite feeling the irresistible nature the call must have had on their brethren. Merlin has, of course, already questioned them about why they had not departed, and was able to tell Joshua that they believe they had evolved beyond the normal confines of the inhabitants of the Abyss. Merlin's friends were powerful demons with unique skills, but far, far from the most powerful of demon kind. Now, even if they wished to, they fear returning to the Abyss, as the power emanating from it had become terrible indeed. Joshua was desperate to speak to Merlin's demon friends himself, and Merlin appeared to be prepared to make the introduction.

Joshua addressed the more delicate question of the religious beliefs of families, and related to Merlin some of what he knew of the worship of "divine beings", and how Merlin, being able to move more freely, and being closer to the big families, might help in unearthing more information, to help protect all, from what is likely to come.

Joshua conjures a mental image of the Demon he had a conversation with, whilst on Terra Prime so Merlin can discuss it with his childhood demon friends. But Merlin brought all discussion to a nervous halt, as he demanded to know why he should be bothering to help Joshua, who is a known criminal and a known enemy of the Crown. Merlin was clearly fishing for a reaction, because after Joshua dramatically and incredulously spoke of the threat to all creation, Merlin agreed to talk to his friends, conduct the necessary research, and get back to Joshua via Trump. Joshua expressed the urgency of the mission, and Merlin agreed to come back to Joshua as soon as possible.

Joshua's final words before Merlin departed were to ask Merlin whether or not he had any contact with the Amber side of his heritage, which Merlin denied, as Dara had put such contact under the strictest taboo. Merlin then departed, but not before Joshua took a psychic impression of him, and Joshua was pretty sure Merlin had returned the favour.

Corin arrived at Corwin's Pattern and walked it as swiftly as she was able. At its centre she focused her mind on the Alicorn but was unable to garner anything from it. She asked the Pattern to show her the planes of existence and was presented with abstract images of what looked like several leaves of endless paper hovering generally parallel with each other, and yet at the same time undulating. The main focus of the vision seemed to be, what she assumed was, the Primal Plane of Order and Chaos. She was unable to identify any of the other planes. When she tried to focus on any plane other than her own, they seemed to fade away to almost nothing, and her mind was unable to grasp their form, or any features within them. She tried unsuccessfully to gain some kind of psychic impression of these other planes, and in doing so realised that two stood out clearer than the others. Maybe Bennu's creation (which she recognised something like William within it), and maybe the Realm of Knowledge, but she was so unsure. Occasionally the planes arched toward each other, like a funnel of water going down a plug, and the reverse coming up from the other plane, but for all bar one of the planes, the occurrences were very rare and usually around Ygg. But one plane seemed to connect to the plane of Order and Chaos very frequently, possibly the Mirror Realm, and which seemed to happen all over the Primal Plane.

Corin absorbed as much of the Plane's structure and mapped as possible and the moments where the different planes connected. She then used her presence at the centre of Corwin's Pattern to teleport her to a point as close to being between Ygg and Bennu's Realm as possible. Once there she attempted to use the Alicorn, as she walked through Shadow, to split and cut her way into Bennu's Reality. As she wandered, trying to pierce her way into Bennu's Realm, she was distracted in many unnerving ways, but managed to refocus herself each time. Then, as she passed a lake made of what appears to be Mercury on which there is a ripple, there was a distraction sufficient to interrupt her Shadow walk and concentration. She studied the area for the effects of magic, and then she saw a humanoid form rise from the Mercury lake, crackling with small arcs of verdant green electricity.

Corin recognised the verdant energy and started to gather her own Primal power. As the humanoid form floated across the lake it gained form. As it approached, Corin recognised a simulacrum of herself. Corin attempted a psychic impression, and she felt an odd and distorted version of herself, without any emotional feeling, but with a concentrated degree of malevolence.

Corin slammed up her Logrus armour, and gathered some Logrus tendrils, infusing them with her Prime power, and hurled them at the mirror-being. Fractions of a second after, Corin sees the mirror-being take the same actions against her. With Corin's attack being first, the tendrils collided much closer to the mirror-being, and some struck the mirror-being itself, who also seemed to have Logrus armour. The mirror-being then hurled more tendrils at Corin, which she allowed to strike her, and which she absorbed and deflected using her peerless power over The Logrus. Green electricity crackled around her, which it was clear infused the mirror-beings attack, making it more potent than Corin anticipated. Corin empowered her defences with her peerless Prime, and she felt the mirror-being empower its own.

Corin pulled out the Alicorn and thrusts it at the mirror-being. The Alicorn struck an invisible shield on the mirror-beings arm, which flared into being. Corin knew the attack was effective, as the mirror-being suddenly backed away. She shredded some tendrils that the mirror-being had wrapped around her legs and in a fearful moment wondered what she could do against this entity. Corin applied her Forces and Matter magic, attempting to shake and shatter the mirror-being, as well as forcing it back towards the lake. The being erupted into flames, and formed a fiery sword in its hand, and Corin felt her spell lose its grasp on the being's physical form. Corin used a racked Fast Travel spell to "blink" away some distance away, but the now fiery mirror-being charged after her as she reappeared. With some distance initially between them, Corin formed a mono-filament net between her and the being, which sadly it seemed to pass through to no effect, as it had itself taken on a form of pure energy. In desperation Corin called forth a Logrus hand to grapple the mirror-being, and the being called up its pseudo-Logrus defence to stop the hand, but this successfully delayed the mirror-beings advance on Corin, and it tried to circle found the completing Logrus powers.

In what she feared might be a last-ditch effort, Corin funnelled a massive Disruption spell through the Alicorn at the mirror-being, in the hope that doing so meant her spells might take on properties that would not otherwise be available to her. She pours all the Prime magic she could muster into the spell too. The mirror-being, possibly sensing desperation in Corin, seems to exude feelings of victory, as it raised its Logrus shield to deflect the spell attack. But the Prime fuelled, Alicorn focused spell of Disruption instantly burnt through the Logrus shield, striking the being. It immediately and violently returned to its physical form, and it stumbled backwards. Corin followed up her attack with a flurry of bolts of lightning from her hands, empowered by her peerless Prime magics and Exalted Logrus powers. The mirror-being collapsed before Corin, and its physical form was shredded. Corin was exhausted from her labours.

Back in Chaos, Gilva approached Joshua and started chatting with him, complementing him on his age, his power, and ended up propositioning him. The ancient Joshua was somewhat stunned at Gilva's bluntness, and politely turned her down. He noticed her shining, polished banded armour, which looked like it had begun to shimmer in the light. Joshua attempted to take a psychic impression of the shimmering but was unable to. Gilva then shuddered, her eye's role into the back of her head and she collapsed backwards. Joshua quickly moved to her and placed his hand on her head in an effort to delve into her mind to find out what has happened. But instantly a hand erupted from the shimmering on Gilva's armour, grabbing Joshua by his forearm, and burning his flesh.

Joshua erupted into Chaos form to protect himself, but the hand did not let go. Joshua attempted to shake it loose by increasing his rate of transformation and turning gaseous, but the hand maintained its grip, no matter Joshua's substance and form. Joshua pulled back, and another arm pulled itself from the armour, then a head and a body. Green flashes of electricity arced from this new form and the shapes around it, which Joshua recognised as the same power as he saw on Trebernaxus, when he and Kyle faced the Tree Spirit which looked like it had wielded no fewer than three Spikards, and from which they both fled. The featureless mirrorlike being pulled itself fully out of Gilva's armour and began to morph into a mirror image of Joshua.

Joshua sent mental probes into the mirror-beings mind, but it did not appear to have anything he could cling onto. The mirror-being attacked, striking Joshua, who reacted by turning into gas, but somehow the strike still landed, and its power forced Joshua back into physical form. Joshua desperately used Logrus tendrils in an attempt to push and pull the mirror-being's arm out of its socket, but the mirror-being summoned its own Logrus tendrils to hold Joshua's at bay.

Joshua called forth his Logrus fuelled Prime and Matter magics, and let rip with a racked spell of Disintegration, and for added oomph, he channelled the magic through his Spikard. The spell shredded the mirror-beings grasp on Joshua, blasting its form, and threw the being many feet away. The being attempted to raise its own Logrus defence, successfully defending against Joshua's next spell of Implosion. But the mirror-beings defences were now badly damaged, and Joshua took the opportunity to strike out with Primal Chaos. Pure chaos erupted towards the mirror-being, and it tried to take control of it from Joshua, but Joshua employed the power of his Spikard once again and started to beat back the mirror-being with his Forces magic.

Gilva picked herself up and quickly evaluated the scene. She whipped out her sword and leapt towards the mirror-being. At the same time Joshua enclosed the being with his Forces magic, holding it in position. Gilva slashed at the mirror-beings neck with her Chaos powered blade, cleaving its head from its body. There was a huge eruption of green energies from the mirror-beings body, and it collapsed into nothingness.

Kyle finishes calming the storm and moves to be with his mother, Fiona, who is still absorbing the remnants of the golem's energies, for her own purposes. The skin of the golem is shiny and in places where Kyle, William and Bannoq are looking at the skin, it becomes mirror-like. Their reflections seem to grow and grow, and then an identical figure to each of them bursts from the mirror-like skin of the golem's flesh, covered in verdant green arcs of electricity.

Kyle steps back and draws Grayswandir and immediately attacks it before it can fully escape the Golem's skin. Grayswandir cleaves through the being, causing the escaping being to scream in apparent agony. Grayswandir cuts all the way through the being, and its top half drops to the ground and does not move, the bottom half remaining embedded in the golem.

Bannoq also attacks, seeking to impale the being opposite him. Bannoq's blade slides into the chest of the being but seems to have no effect on the creature. Bannoq's mirror-being tumbles out of the golem, gaining its feet. Having killed the mirror-being that was attacking him, Kyle casts a sorcery to hold Bannoq's mirror-being in place. Seeing how Kyle managed to swiftly defeat his opponent by doing something very out of character, Bannoq thinks to attack his opponent with Power Words. Bannoq releases a Magic Negation Power Word, but to little effect, because the mirror-being counters with its own. Bannoq's mirror-being whipped out its own blade and struck out which Bannoq is able to parry. Bannoq's second Power Word, Neural Disrupt, is similarly ineffective, but then the mirror-being seems to halt mid-swing and appeared to be frozen. Kyle's spell had worked. Kyle calmly stepped up and cut the being down with Grayswandir.

In the meantime, William was having significant issues with his mirror-being, with the fight having gone back and forth across the plains. William's strikes seemed to have no effect, whilst each of his doppelgangers' successful strikes burned. William cried for aid and started fighting fully defensively. Kyle attempted another hold, but for some reason, this time, it did not work. Bannoq jumped into the fray but is parried. William and Bannoq then work together and flank the attacker. Bannoq and the mirror-being trade Power Words, but the mirror-being seemed to have greater Psyche, and staggers Bannoq.

Kyle used a spell of Telekinesis to lift and hurl the severed golem arm at the doppelganger, which is distracted by this new attack, giving William a chance to grab the being's sword arm and start striking the being. Bannoq then rejoined the fight and with the mirror-being unable to dodge sliced it from shoulder to hip, damaging it badly. It had raised its sword to strike at William, so Bannoq reversed his swing and sliced off the enemy's arm at the elbow, before plunging his blade through its chest. William's opponent collapsed into nothingness.