

Rog in Rebma

Rog hit the gates, smashed them, and by the time the people started screaming, the first citizen of Rebma died. Simultaneously, above water, Spait crushed the walls of a townhouse and ripped Dracken's mad hatmaker neighbor limb from limb. The wyrm's presence infected his dogs with madness, and they leaped off the ledge behind the houses into a deep ravine. Their howls dwindled before vanishing in the rain.

In Rebma, chaos erupted. The Princess of Amber tried to call her brothers via trump and failed. The queen was calling for information and sending runners when the ceiling cracked, and all at once Rog broke through the ceiling. Its long body undulated, yet shattered walls and pillars as it came. The tip of the serpent's tail sheared through rock in a manner unnatural.

Llewella threw a pebble at it, blue with a stripe of green, about as big as a thumb, tip to knuckle. Rog attacked with an open mouth and the pebble flew right in.

The queen tackled Llewella and rolled under Rog's great jaws. It bit the throne in half, crushing ornate corral inlaid with gold. The serpentine body chased the head, and Rog smashed into a corner, breaking more pillars and walls while gold-cruled gravel fell from between long teeth. Moire and Llewella ran.

Rog chased them down the throne hall like a freight train bent on murder. They cut sideways through a stately line of pillars, and the huge beast slalomed. It moved terribly quick. They ran as if the water was ether, but it swam through the ocean that permeated the structure. When it was almost on them, Llewella gave Moire a shove and threw herself sideways. Rog missed the Amberite by a hair.

It moved ever so slightly slower than before. The long body wrapped the pillars, holding back its bullet-shaped head. It had to struggle to get beyond the stone, which did not break as effortlessly as moments ago. Coral fragments shot out its gills.

"Run!" yelled Llewella and she put her words to practice, dashing across the throne room to grab one of the ancestral spears from a wall. This weapon had killed the Boars of Sunrise, flame beasts that had attacked Amber itself centuries ago when Gerard had accidentally opened a way to their homeland expanding the trade lanes. The spear had a cross-brace up by the point, a brass beam a yard wide and verdigrised green as the deep sea. Llewella took it and waited, and Rog approached.

Serpentine, it coiled in the middle of the throne hall, and tapestries ruffled as if they were trying to flee. Some current pulled her hair, and it too waved. Like a banner the green-hair of the Princess of Amber flew behind her. The butt of the pole-arm slipped into a pocket between her back foot and the floor.

"You will die!" screamed Moire. The queen had run to the door, but halted when her half-sister had not joined her.

Rog vomited bits of broken throne and reared high. Llewella waited. The beast struck, and she drove the spear into its mouth. The crosspiece caught its jaws, and smashed the brass spearbutt through the stone, plowing a furrow in granite as if the throne-room was floored in loam. Llewella left it and ran. When she grabbed Moire and pulled her out a side door, the serpent had not yet crossed the central nave.

They shut the door and barred it, and Rog smashed twice against it. The impacts shattered rock. Then it paused and hit again, and this time the door only creaked. It hit again and again, and each time the impact weakened.

Moire's guards arrived. Llewella took another spear and told them, "Stay here." She unbarred the door and reentered the hall.

Rog was near dead and gasping. With a thrust through the gills she finished it, and the thing fell to ground.

Llewella opened the door for the others, and they clustered around the snake. She'd taken back her trumps, and organized and shuffled the cards to put them back in a small box.

"What was that thing you threw?" asked Moire. She spoke softly, somewhat overawed.

"The Sea of Geth. It's a freshwater ocean I keep, kept, in a pocket." Some of the cards lay face-up and some face-down, and she went through them card by card to get orientation and facing correct.

The Rebmen and their queen looked at her.

Llewella looked up. "Smell that? Or rather the absence of it? Freshwater. I imagine it will continue leaking for days. Try not to let anything in it, because until the plume mixes with the sea, it'll kill the fish."

"But if you had that, why attempt to contact Benedict?"

"Because I could fight a sea serpent with a personal ocean or with a personal ocean and Benedict," replied Llewella.

She finished her task and took out Random's card. Contact came slowly between Rebma and Amber. She had to stay focused and not let the frustration get to her, and even when contact did come, Random saw her through a skein like an aquarium wall.

"Sister," he said cautiously and suspiciously.

"A monster has attacked Rebma. Does a similar one attack Amber? Reflections of one are real in the other," she said, instantly disliking his tone.

"Thank you for telling me that. I wouldn't have known," he replied, equally annoyed. "I'll check."

"Do." She passed her hand over the card and broke contact. The gold ring glittered. The airless flames that lit the pathways to Rebma burned in the throne-hall, and watching them, Llewella saw a column of freshwater rising from dead Rog, visible in a diffraction gradient between them. Two sets of torches danced when she moved her head. Her ring itched, and she twisted it absently.

Moire also twisted her ring. "You brother? You warned him about Rog?" she said like a prompt.

"I did. Little ass. He never should have taken the throne." She shook her head. "Amber needs to know. What happens here is reflected there, so they're probably having, or will have, some problem. Hopefully not as bad as that." She indicated the dead serpent with her head.

Moire nodded.

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Random left the contact in an uncharacteristically foul mood, one strange enough he paused to examine it. Why was he so annoyed at Julian and now Llewella?

Because his relatives were infuriating.

He examined that and judged it to be objectively true. His relatives were infuriating.

King Random had left the library for the eastern terrace. A low round balcony of natural limestone jutted from the second floor, hanging out over one of Kolvir's cliff faces. A lip overhead kept the rain out, and that would be necessary, he thought, as the building rainstorm crept up the mountain's flanks. Night had fallen and the moon risen. Random thought of Tir-na Nog'th which would be visible right now, though not for long. That rainstorm had an oddly menacing air.

He'd taken Llewella's call, and thinking past his sudden frustration knew that she had a point. Events in Amber cast reflections into Rebma. He couldn't see the low city, but it was possible some minor problem was going on down there, one that could invoke a sea serpent in Rebma.

It was probably nothing.

He went looking for Vialle and told her his train of thought.

"You mean like the dragon that attacked earlier?" his wife asked.

He blinked at her repeatedly.

"You're not saying anything," said Vialle. "Does that mean you agree with me, or you disagree with me and are trying to let me down easily?"

"Neither. I'm trying something new. I've never swooned before and wanted to give it a shot."

They spoke in what Oberon had called his coffee room. Random had never felt quite comfortable in Oberon's quarters, an entire floor of the sweeping High Wing. Everything reminded him of his father, and those were memories Random did not always desire. He'd inspected the suite after returning from Choas, and moved into three small near the entrance. The coffee room was part foyer, a moderately sized drawing room with a few tables, chairs, and a coffee service. The water from the taps was shy of boiling but not by much, and one even spewed steam under pressure.

One became Vialle's studio. She inhabited it, and Random went in some times. He borrowed it occasionally. He didn't spend much time there. The pragmatic reason was this was Vialle's room, her personal area, and he had to be mindful not to move stuff around. There were other reasons he didn't think about.

Another became their bedroom. It was an unused study, initially filled with boxes, crates, and meaningless bric-a-brac. Random's father had muttered about cleaning it out since Random was born, never done so, and the room was mostly unused. It had no memories.

The rest of the suite remained as Oberon had left it, and the new king knew he had to clean it eventually, if only for therapeutic purposes. He had not yet done so, and wondered inwardly if it would become his own bric-a-brac room.

Now he and Vialle spoke in the coffee room, and somewhat by habit he touched her side. He liked the feel of her. She wore blue silk, and he felt her side, the curve of her back, the hint of ribs under skin. It also let her know where he was if he wasn't talking.

"Random, is something bothering you?" asked Vialle.

"A dragon, apparently," he replied.

"That's not what I mean. You're being sarcastic. You usually aren't, and just today you've gotten more and more sardonic. There's an edge in your voice I'm not used to. Is something bothering you?"

When he answered, he said something profoundly un-Amberish. "I'm sorry. I didn't notice. I'm not making fun of you."

"I'm not offended. You're just being different."

She felt his thumb touch her side, stroke her, and stop.

He sighed. "Be that as it may, there probably is something going on in the city. I should go down there. Can we talk later?"

"Of course."

Random took out his cards. Benedict didn't answer. Concerned, he took out a special trump he had of Port Amber. Vialle had put a hand on his side and felt him lift the card to obtain contact.

"Be careful," she urged him. "Don't leave for long."

He hesitated on the verge of making contact. "I won't," he said.

"Promise me."

Random cocked his head. "I promise. I won't leave for long. Not like the taking of the Courts of Chaos."

Vialle didn't see him, and her sightless eyes stared through to nothing. In old tongues chaos meant nothing, and Random wondered if that's what she saw. She was a very small person, dressed in silk befitting her, but Random didn't see it. He saw her worried mouth. He saw her nose that turned up just a little.

Unmajesticly he brushed her nose from forehead to tip. She let him without scrunching it up.

"I'll be back soon. It's probably nothing," he said.

Vialle nodded.

Random made contact with the lower city and stepped into a rainstorm.