**RPG Crossroads** Amber (Phage Press) >> Blood Loyalties >> PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by SisyphusX on 05/08/2004 at 19:40:01 Bright and early on this new day, after gathering your things, you roll up your cloak and a blanket, and tuck your katana and wakizashi in your belt, and head for the stables. You ready Abyss, and ride out It's a warm, friendly day, but the scattered groups of people you pass are tight knots of tension. Every ranger knows of Julian's disappearance, and the rumors have started to spill out to the citizenry. Julian - the ceaseless sentinel of the borders of Amber - was one of the three pillars of Amber's security. Caine still aggressively patrols the seas, and Benedict is known to be here and there, but Julian has rarely absconded from his duties, if ever. A number of the citizenry you pass point and gesture to you, but if approached simply bow their head obediently and remain silent. It takes you some time, but you arrive at Julian's headquarters in Arden, close to Kolvir and on a high ridge overlooking the surrounding area. Not that you can see much of the terrain - it is a forest, after all - but it would be a good vantage point if there were activities to see and hear. But you can still make out some detail of Castle Amber, loftily perched atop nearby Kolvir. The forest rolls out lazily before you to the west, a sea of green. The sub-commanders of the rangers, having been informed of your visit, are waiting for you at the entrance to Julian's tent. One steps forward, hand outstretched. "Greetings, milord. My name is Dennison, and I am the Lieutenant for Arden's East Face, nearest the Castle. With me are the Lieutenants for the North, South and West Faces - Miller, Huntley and Garland. We have secured Julian's personal equipment and held it to his quarters in the castle, so the tent is available for your use. Please stow your gear, and then we will hold a council.' You step inside, and deposit your heavier gear appropriately. What remains of the furnishings are stark and simple. The floor is only recently marked - Julian doesn't appear to have spent much time here. You emerge to find the four lieutenants sitting around a worn wooden table with a map of Arden carved into in in bas-relief. They invite you to join them. Dennison speaks once again. "Arden is peaceful at the moment - far more peaceful than the city, I imagine." He frowns briefly. "The only source of trouble we have at the moment is Morgenstern. He would not heed any hand, once Julian had...left. He charges to and fro throughout Arden, and is greatly maddened. Twice our men have attempted to calm him and lead him back to the stables, and the rangers who made the second attempt are in the hospital in the city. The fear I have is that he might, in his seemingly blind rage, have some accident that would injure him. I would have no worry if he were ridden and directed, but his strength is mighty and he could well create a situation difficult for even him to handle.' After a brief discussion of how to handle further encounters with Morgenstern, they brief you on the current disposition of ranger forces in Arden. It is a familiar layout to them, and it serves well to make sure no large force can approach without being seen well in advance. They ask you for your advice, but they also seem reticent to adjust what Julian had developed and refined over so many years as the most effective deployment. After reviewing the forces, you spend the rest of the day becoming more acquainted with the regional commanders and the chiefs of the various districts therein. As some of the men come off duty, you gather a small number for a rousing night in the fine taverns of Amber City. Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 05/11/2004 at 05:24:48 Feeling comfortable with the years of stability Dennison and the others have given to the protection of Amber, I listen to their reports and approve of them. Julian has forgotten more than I will ever know about defending this forest, and I see no reason to change the wise defenses he has put in place. I invite Dennison and a number of other off duty rangers to accompany me for drinks to ease the tension on everyone, on me, of course. We'll go to my favored drinking establishment, a wonderful pub, filled mainly with working class people Upon arriving I order a round for the house, and run an open tab for my rangers. Invariably, I fall to the feminine charms of some lovely lady, as my bad stuff is mainly attributed to a weakness for women. Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by SisyphusX on 05/11/2004 at 11:02:13 You stride through the doorway of the Wayward Song, your potable vendor of choice in Amber's commercial district. Dennison and Huntley accepted your invitation, as did a few of the Rangers coming off shift. They graciously thanked you for your generosity, and have promised many stories of the years spent guarding Arden over a fine tankard of ale and mayhap a finishing glass of Bayle's Best, if you The heady scent of a fine meaty stew sloshes over you as you enter the tayern. Ordinarily, if a member of the Royal Family entered a tayern in the city, there would be a long pause and a reverent silence. However, given your familiarity with this establishment and your fellow Rangers (who are known and praised throughout the city), you and yours are treated to a hearty "Huzzah!" from the patrons. You step up to Slavicek, the burly owner of the Wayward Song. "Slav, good sir, I wish my Rangers to have what quenches their thirst and fills their bellies, and I'll gladly cover their tabs!" You shake his hand and cross a few coins to him in your palm. "Very well, good sir Prince - their meals will be charged to you. However, in that same regard, your own meal will be charged to my own purse, as I am glad to see you again. Please, take the table nearest the hearth - it's reserved for our special guests!" He shows you to a table, and the eight of you take seats around it. The musicians at the back are playing a light-hearted tune, and the patrons return to their conversations and revelry after having acknowledged your presence. A woman approaches your table with a platter of glasses, each frothing over with freshly-poured beer. She is young, thin, lithe and entrancing - your eyes meet briefly and she flutters her eyelids. She starts offering a tankard to Huntley, seated next to you, but then moves away and rotates opposite you at the table, but her eyes don't leave yours. She slowly saunters around the table, her movements languid and lyrical, in time to the song. She finishes her task by placing the last mug into your waiting hand. "Good Prince Orion, it is a pleasure for me to serve you. My name is Casselia, and I am at your beck and call this evening." She curtsies with a flourish of her apron, then blushes briefly. She returns to the bar to drop off the tray and to await the stew that the Rangers ordered. As you consider exactly what 'beck and call' could mean, you begin to hear a little commotion outside the tavern. Some sounds of surprise, but nothing threatening. Or, there is a gorgeous woman who appears to have much interest in your attention. Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 05/11/2004 at 14:20:53 I take Casselia's hand, pressing a gold coin into her open palm, and closing it with my other hand. I hold her gaze and tell her, "Thank you, maiden. We may get better acquainted as the evening goes on." I speak with a smile. Upon hearing the commotion outside, I look towards the door, and I'm torn. I have this lovely young woman commanding my attention, but it is my duty as a prince to protect the people and see that certain laws are followed. Damn, I hate being idealistic - I suppose it's a gene passed to me from my father. The dilemma is how to make sure everything is kosher in the street and bed the girl... Looking back to Casselia, I say, "Darling, I must check out the excitement in the street, but I will be back to pick up where we left off." I kiss her hand and add sincerely, "It will be worth the wait, I assure I then turn to the rangers, "Boys, if you'll excuse me for a moment." I then turn and walk to the door, opening it and checking out the commotion. Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by SisyphusX on 05/11/2004 at 15:29:46 Retroactive - Earlier Today Around mid-morning, a Ranger arrives back at Julian's Camp and asks to speak with Dennison during your meeting. Dennison briefly leaves the conference, and returns with a disturbed look on his face. "My lord, disturbing news has come to me. Just fifteen minutes ago, your cousin Killashandra was seen in Arden not too far from here. She had ridden for some time, and was observed entering an hour or two before, but her activity was routine, as she has a horse-like animal that she rides frequently. Regardless, one of our patrols encountered her later on in the forest. She was pained, and it seemed she was disoriented. There was some ash in the area, which the Ranger was unable to identify, which is curious enough given our expertise at tracking and material identification. But after she left, the Ranger noted that there was a circle of warm earth surrounding a hole in the ground. The hole is precisely the shape that a sword would leave if driven into the ground with great fury. And this object was recovered." Dennison hands you what is quite obviously a burned fragment of a Trump, although ridiculously tiny. You once more are impressed with the skill of the Rangers you now command. You can see nothing of the image the Trump might have contained. "Killashandra was seen leaving Arden soon after, heading for the Castle." He gives you the Trump fragment. Casselia blushes lightly as he takes your proffered tip. "You do me honor, good sir. I have seen you several times here, and I do hope to spend some time with you." She blushes as she walks back to the counter to get the stew As you move towards the door, you hear Dennison. "Sir, if you require assistance, we are at the ready for you." You gratefully acknowledge his offer, and step outside. The street is relatively busy for an early evening. The sun is still shining, but it is somewhat low on the horizon, and twilight is not that far off. Normally, the crowds would be bustling to and fro, moving about their business in this commercial district, but they have all paused, and are looking with respect and some degree of reverence down the street. You follow their gaze and you see Blevs, escorted by some of the palace guard. He is in royal finery, and is riding in a near-parade formation down the street. He is waving to the people on the street, occasionally pausing to shake the hand of someone he recognizes. He seems content enough, and smiles for the crowds. You guess that this is a parade into the city only to reassure the people that the presence of Amber is still strong and ready. Bleys looks ahead on the street, and sees you at the entrance to the Wayward Song. He guides his horse forward, and his escort moves with him. He appears to be coming directly towards you. Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 05/11/2004 at 18:46:49 I am troubled by the news of Killashandra's journey into Arden. What was she doing there? The most troubling thing was the business of the Trump that had been driven into the earth by a sword. Was it her whom had done this, or had someone else done it? And that been the cause for her less than healthy appearance? I turned to Dennison and ask him, "Can you have the ranger who saw her come see me?" When the ranger joins our council I ask him, "Was my cousin wearing a blade?" And if she was, I'll try to press for a little more. "Can you discribe the blade - the width, I mean?" I'll make sure to clap the man on his back and compliment him on the superb job he's done. If his CO will allow it, I'll take him, and his colleagues who made the Killishandra observation and the Trump find, with me to the Wayward Song to reward their fine performance. (I know I could overrule his CO, but I don't want to compromise the officers' authority and respect with the men.) I deposit the trump safely in my pocket, and return to the council, making a mental note to talk with my cousin after my investigation takes me as far as it can go without her. After debating on wether to report this to Bleys or not, I decide against it. You never know when you might need to play something close to the vest, but I was going to, for now. It may prove to make an ally or enemy, but I always went with my gut, and right now it warranted discretion, I felt. My tension eased a bit upon seeing my uncle. I smiled to myself - how his charisma and presence made people cheer him, fear him, and follow him, all at the same time. I loved Uncle Bleys! I saluted him as he approached, showing the respect that he not only deserved as my elder, but had due to my admiration as well. Although I thought it a brilliant move, him parading for the citizens, I wished I had stayed indoors with the beautiful Casselia. I was well on my way to taking her back to my apartment when this commotion had started. I awaited Bleys, unable to duck back inside now, as I was sure he had seen me . . . Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by SisyphusX on 05/11/2004 at 18:55:52 Dennison signals to a mounted Ranger at the edge of Julian's camp, and he rides off in all haste. After about ten minutes, another Ranger rides back, dismounts, and salutes the five of you. Dennison returns the salute and waves him in. "Officer Valerion, reporting as ordered." Dennison addresses the officer. "You observed an incident in Arden, Eastern Face. Please give a detailed report." Valerion steadies himself. "Very well, sir. I was on routine patrol, when I heard an indeterminate sound, possibly an explosion, from within the Forest. I rode to investigate. As I arrived, I found Princess Killashandra on her steed, named Sha'kar. It is a large animal with a single horn, similar to a unicorn, but this has a distinctive difference in horn structure, and the coloration is black and red. Unmistakable. Killashandra was mounted, and the steed was shifting stance as I arrived in the clearing. She said, 'Good day. You'll have to excuse me. I had a bit of bad luck with an experiment. I apologize for the damage this has caused Arden; it was not my intention.' She shifted in her saddle, very low, as if to take a sword from either her saddle sheath or the ground. I grew wary, but I saw her wince with pain at the movement, so I knew she was not a fit combatant at the moment. I replied, 'Are you all right, milady? Mayhap I can escort you back to the castle?' She replied, 'That is quite unnecessary. I will be fine on my journey back, with Sha'kar. If you will excuse me, noble sir.' She rode away. I signaled for a search team to investigate the clearing, then moved off to report the incident. I believe I heard the horse accelerate once at a distance - she seemed to be hurrying back to the castle with all speed." Valerion finishes and still stands at attention. "I regret that I did not actually see her sword - her steed was facing so that her saddle sheath was away from me. In addition, she faced that way during the entire time of our conversation. I had not made the observation at the time, but upon reflection, I believe she was keeping it away from me." He says with conviction, but he is a little nervous at the error he has made. Your slap on the back reassures him, however. "Thank you for your invitation, sir. I will make every effort to attend. At that moment, two more Rangers ride into the clearing with the six of you. They quickly dismount and present themselves to Dennison, who introduces them to you. "These are Amaldon and Pokkel the investigative team that searched the clearing after the incident." He turns to them. "Report." Amaldon steps forward. "We found a minor amount of burn damage to the plant life of the area, indicating a mild thermal discharge, but no actual fire. There was a minor amount of ash in the area, but it was already swirled by the winds and had no discernible pattern to it. The hole in the ground was approximately 4 inches deep, and bears the shape of the tip of a longsword. The trace amounts of sediment drawn up when the blade was removed indicates that it had some form of carving or rune on the blade surface. In addition, the entire area surrounding the hole was still quite warm, and became warmer the closer to the hole itself. I suspect that the sword itself may have been the source of the heat." Pokkel stepped forward. "I searched the surrounding area, and discovered the fragment of Trump that was to be delivered to you, sir. It rested far away from the hole itself - several yards, at least. I suspect it had been deposited there on a wind current. It was warm, and there was a minute amount of smoke coming from the burned edge. Pokkel, Amaldon and Valerion finish their reports, accept your invitation with Dennison's approval, and you return to the council. Bleys rides up to you, grinning broadly and waving to people on the street as he approaches. "Nephew! I had not thought to see you here, but it's good to know you are a friend of the regular folk of Amber, as well as their protector." You hear tones that might be more at home in a political speech but this subtlety escapes the onlookers, who cheer and wave gladly. "I am touring the city on this fine evening, and I would be glad for you to join me. We can talk and meet and have a fine time." He laughs, but you here an odd emphasis on the word talk. If you were a more suspicious person, you might suspect that Bleys is interested in a semi-private conversation with you amidst the hustle and bustle and anonymity of Amber's streets. A horse is brought up from behind his entourage - you're not exactly sure from where. But it is all saddled up and ready for you to ride. He reins in his horse and feeds him a sugar cube from his belt pouch as he awaits your answer. Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion I'm amazed by the rangers of Arden, truly. My questions answered, I dismiss the soldiers to return to what they were doing before I interrupted them. Killashandra was responsible for the burnt hole; that's odd, and will require some thought and observation. I listen to Bleys, while stroking the face of his horse and scratching behind its ear. I nod in thanks at his compliments - a bit disappointed by leaving the Wayward Song, but that's the price you pay for being a keeper of the paradise that is Amber. "Just a moment, uncle; I must tell my Officers", I tell Bleys. I disappear through the doors. A moment later, I return, after telling the bartender to keep it flowing for my men. I also find Casselia, and tell her, "Duty calls, m'dear. I wiil return shortly, though, so don't go too far." I wink at this last statement, kissing the back of her lovely hand before departing. I mount Abyss, who had been standing unrestrained in front of the bar, and pull him up alongside Bleys. I await our conversation... Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by SisyphusX on 05/12/2004 at 10:43:01 You swing up, and the two of you ride at the front of the troop of guards, waving to passersby and smiling readily. But Bleys is speaking with you at the same time, in a voice that you're sure is designed to "You're doing well by taking the men out to carouse with you, but don't get too carried away. Familiarity breeds contempt - there is a certain value to an aloofness. Julian always took that to the extreme, but that's the point - the men aren't all that used to being social with their commander. Perhaps run them through a drill or two tomorrow - that might help to take their minds off these situations." He accepts a rose from a young girl who impulsively runs up to his horse. Bleys shooes away the guard who started to move forward, and graciously accepts the proffered flower. He places it alongside the seam of his jacket, so that the rose is worn on his chest. "And another thing, Killashandra, your cousin, visited the Castle today. It turns out that she had something...something I wouldn't have thought she could acquire. I'll just say that you'll probably want to keep an eye on her, as I believe she has unusual capabilities. Her personality is harmless enough - she has not been around the Family long enough to acquire our unique set of reflexes and instincts. He smiles ruefully. "You know, sometimes I can appreciate the loss and agony of being in a family that is so dysfunctional that our first theory on why some of us have disappeared is that another of us is responsible. But then I wake up again." He sighs slowly, but is still smiling broadly for the crowds. "And I see that wonderful young thing you were with at the Wayward Song." He smiles knowingly. "Enjoy yourself, but be careful. You can just walk away from a Shadow woman and never see her again. Someone who lives here in the Golden City is somewhat harder to elude, as she is a real person..." He winks. "But you're young - have fun. Then, find a Shadow where everyone is dedicated to constant ecstasy. It's an experience to remember, if only to inure yourself to the wiles of feminine agents." He smiles wickedly. "I can give you some directions on where to go and what to look for." But he catches himself, even as he continues waving to the crowds. "But this is not the time for such pursuits - wait for happier times." You have both ridden a few blocks from the Wayward Song, and are starting to enter the district of the Church of the Unicorn. You can see the high spires of the Church more prominently now, and they're still breathtaking in their scope and detail. Gold leaf sculptures adorn the crowns of the towers, and the sun gleams prominently from the silver cones that form the roofs of them. Bleys stares up at them, briefly. "This is always the awkward part of the tour. You have no idea how difficult it is to have a normal conversation with someone who thinks you're a divinely-sent agent." He turns to a happy child to mask his laughter at his recent words, just in case anyone is listening closely. But they're not, and the remark goes unnoticed. "So tell me, Orion - where do you think your father has gone off to?" Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 05/13/2004 at 01:38:47 I ride with Bleys, listening with much attentiveness, to his advice. I know he is right about being stern with the men, but rightly or wrongly that has never been my style. I nod and agree with him about it, though. I smile to myself as I scratch behind the ear of the chestnut gelding I was brought, marveling at the way my uncle Bleys commands the masses around him without even a word. With a smile and a regal bearing the people would follow him like lemmings over the cliffs of Kolvir, if he bid them to. Hell, I might even follow him over the cliffs, thats how charismatic uncle Bleys is. He sticks the rose into his lapel, and the people eat it up, thats the kinda stuff Im talkin' about! Oh well, enough about that. My ears perk up upon mention of Killishandra. I listen until he finishes, and then ponder it for a bit. Not wanting to tip my hand as to what I already know, I fish carefully for more; " What is this aquisition that you speak of, uncle?" I say, trying to sound less interested than I am. I say nothing more, as Im fairly sure the abilities he speaks of are trump powers and knowledge of some kind, and I dont want to sound to greedy for information. When he remarks about the disfunctional family thing, I remark skeptically; "Sometimes ones best instincts are one first instincts." As we ride into the unicorn district I cringe. Ive never been fond of this neigborhood, people treat us like were better than anything, and even though we are better at most anything, that doesnt mean were better. I prefer the company of the sailors and woodsman, and the other common people to fanatics of any sort. I listen to his lecture about the birds and the bees. I know he means well, but Im a little uncomfortable talking about shadows of ecstacy with my uncle. YUK. I listen, not encouraging any dialogue about the shadow of ecstacy. Finally he ends the conversation about my extraciricular fornication. Random was much more hip, when it came to oat sewing conversations. I lit a cigarette with my Zippo, and drew deeply, causing the barrel of the cigarette to colapse a little under the soft pressure of my fingers. I pondered his question of my fathers whereabouts, but didnt answer. I too was troubled by his absence. I exhaled into the crowd nonchalantely. Maybe that would piss them off a bit, make them realise Im no god, or at least I dont think of myself as one. I ride on..... Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by SisyphusX on 05/15/2004 at 19:08:22 Bleys smiles thinly ask you ask about Killashandra. "Apparently, some of my family still retain their instincts." He waves to a priest, who clasps his hands together and bows deeply. Bleys retains his smile, but you can hear a sigh through his teeth. "No, I don't think I'll elaborate on her find - I think this will be a hard enough time on all of you without squabbling over trinkets. But I think she's a good fighter, and her horse rivals even your fine steed, both in power and in loyalty. Don't approach her as a neophyte, even though she really is in terms of our family relations." He looks into your eyes for a second as you ride onward. "And no, when I say abilities, I don't mean anything as paltry as sorcery or any of the other special powers we tend to wave around like banners - I mean the important things; resolve, courage, temperament and quick thinking. She's done all right so far - if she gets a few years up here under her belt, she'll be a force to be reckoned with." His eyes take on a somewhat sad tinge, and he looks down the street. You see, far on the left, a large stone building that looks somber and grim. There is an alcove in the front, but you can't see what's in it at this distance. "But then again, you never really met Deirdre, did you?' You continue the ride down the street, turning away from what you suspect is Deirdre's tomb. "Sheesh, kid - you spent the better part of your teenage years in a cell because of our 'instincts'. Sure, we could have protected you by shoving you off into Shadow somewhere - but then we couldn't have kept an eye on you. And since when has protective custody been in the solitary confinement wing, anyway? No, my friend - you got shafted, and I'd wager Eric was at the bottom of it somewhere. If he'd had a reasonable head on his shoulders, you probably would have spent those years in Rebma or something. Fully guarded, sure - but you'd have seen the sun a lot more often. Trust a man with both eyes over his shoulders when he tells you - suspicion eats away at your soul." He becomes a little irritated, and you notice his horse speed up a little. You and the escort quickly match him - but there is a slight intimation by the change that the tour is being...hurried. Bleys seems not to notice, but he still waves and smiles at the crowd. He watches you react as he talks about dalliances and Casselia. His eyes turn mocking as he notices your embarrassment, rather poorly disguised. "Oh, no! Did I go and open my big fat mouth and spoil the surprise? I forgot to tell you, kid - the stork brought you." He turns to the crowds and waves gaily, concealing the fact that he is laughing up a storm at your expense. You take out your Zippo and click it. Nothing. You click it again. Nothing. Bleys snaps his fingers, whispers a word in a language you don't know, and there is a small but sudden flash of heat in your face as the cigarette lights. "Okay, time for a reminder - the butane in that lighter isn't going to help here. It's not flammable; it just smells bad. Put the lighter away, you look silly." You awkwardly return the lighter to its' pocket as you draw in your first breath of the cigarette. Bleys watches you as you exhale smoke into the crowd, his face inscrutable. One of the more fervent people massed to watch the parade actually tries to breathe in as much as he can of the smoke. "You know, these types make me a little unsettled too - but try to stay on their good side, will you?" He turns in his saddle to face you, and his voice isn't so much of a whisper any more. "The Castle can hold out against an attack for a long time - but only if we've got the food to last." He looks around, and starts whispering again as the procession continues out of the Church district and into the boroughs And then Bleys is gone. No evanescent flare of a Trump, no feeling of Pattern energy wash over you. You were sitting less than a yard apart, and nothing happened to indicate that Bleys had any intention of leaving. But one second, he was talking to you, and the next - empty air hangs over his horse. You hear a gasp from both the crowds, and from the guards. In that second, all eyes are on you - the lone Royal in the parade now. You may respond to any of Bleys' statements as they happened, and then react to Bleys' disappearance Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 05/19/2004 at 03:30:04 I listen to Bleys talk about Killashandra, knowing it best to let the subject lie, but appreciative for the advice of Bleys on the matter. As we approach Deirdre's Tomb, I reflect on what my father has told me of her. She was his favorite sister, and he her favorite brother. Her passing troubled Corwin deeply. I know I'd have liked her. I lower my head and ride in silence, giving Bleys a chance to grieve - a moment where he can be a mourning brother, and not have to worry about the Stewardship of the One True World. On we ride... I know I can't guile my uncle, so I don't even insult his attention by trying, and come straight out with my question: "I know you've been in touch with Grandpa Dworkin; what's going on there? Can I help with something? I owe the old fart a lot, he taught me how to survive." I listen to Bleys talk about my imprisonment, also feeling it was Eric behind it; but hell, I'll probably never know for sure. "It's too late for me, Unc," I say, "I also am guility of casting backward glances constantly now!" A grin spreads across my face as I joke with my uncle. I get more serious as I ask him, "How will you deal with the Hendrakes, tomorrow?" I'm honestly curious how he'll deal with Random's absence. I listen as we ride, taking the diplomacy lesson from Bleys. Remembering him mentioning last night at the castle that he may need the assistance of several family members in contacting Talen, I ask him, "Can I see your Trump of Talen? I promise I won't try and contact him. Bleys knows I'm extremely interested in the artistry of Trump, and can often be found sketching in the library, but am a ways from being able to draw a real Trump. I study the picture as we ride looking to see if I recognise the artist (I'm familiar with Dworkin, Fiona, and Merlin's work). I break my gaze before any contact to Talen can be made, just studying my cousin and the beautiful artistry involved. As I am checking it out, I hear Bleys saying something about the importance of food and the people in maintaining a war or holding out against a siege. I know I've heard something important there, but can't quite equate it all right now. I hear him pause in his advice aimed at getting me do something and listen as the question hangs in the air, unresolved.. After a moment, I look. I have to fight off the instinct to look around for him - I know I've been the witness to another disappearance. HOLY SHEIST! I maintain my outward faculties, unless anyone in the immediate audience is ranked higher in Psyche, of course, and then they see me crappin' myself (not literally). I take advantage of the initial shocked silence by proclaiming to the masses at the top of my voice: "Bleys, son of Oberon, says to tell you all he's sorry, but he's been summoned away by one of his relatives. I am Orion, son of Corwin, and may the Unicorn bless you all, everyone!," I shout warmly, turning on the rogugish charm. I nod to the escort to proceed. A page undoubtedly comes forward to take his horse. We complete the parade, this being essential to the people believing my story. Upon completion of the parade, I ride as calmly as I can, until I'm out of sight of the last of the people, I then slap leather for the Castle on the mountain top. Upon coming through the gates, my horse clatters to a stop on the cobblestones. I dismount, sending the lathered horse to the stables. I grab the first two people I see, telling one to find Gerard, and one to locate Flora. I direct them to have them meet me in the Library. I then proceed at a fast walk to the Library. Upon entering the library, I look for occupants. If I find none, I sit at the table and withdraw Caine's Trump from my pack. I focus on it, letting my mind open up to the contact of my seafaring uncle...

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by SisyphusX on 05/27/2004 at 13:45:06

Bleys was wearing had little room for storage.)

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 05/28/2004 at 00:22:07

you to show him the way. If you would, I'd appreciate it.'

pour some on a wash cloth, wetting my brow and face. That's better.

I continue on to the library...

the desk as I read and study.

**Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion**Post by <u>SisyphusX</u> on 06/08/2004 at 11:50:59

made. This relates specifically to..."

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 06/11/2004 at 03:01:56

**Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion**Post by <u>SisyphusX</u> on 06/15/2004 at 13:03:16

wax. He sits up with a little consternation

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 06/21/2004 at 17:52:38

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by <u>SisyphusX</u> on 06/21/2004 at 18:23:59

Hendrakes will come at us?"

the future...one way or another.'

a pretty delicate dance I've been doing."

**Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion** Post by **Orion** on 06/23/2004 at 17:46:37

**Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion**Post by **SisyphusX** on 06/28/2004 at 19:43:12

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by Orion on 06/28/2004 at 21:40:40

has told me, wondering about dad, and Bleys.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Orion Post by <u>SisyphusX</u> on 06/29/2004 at 17:49:57

OOC: My trump of Falwur is on top, in case I need to make a hasty getaway.

trying to guess whether the batter will hit the ball as the pitcher is winding up, really.

oppressive with grim meaning.

So I sit and try to make trump contact, and wait for Shiro..

should feel lucky I'm not in Blevs' shoes!

either her or the sealed Trump.

believe he is well, but he won't be of much use to you right now." He shakes his head briefly, and his color returns.

what they thought. He was a good fighter for Amber - but a lousy King." He winks and rides on.

than any of them - make sure your perspective stays in play." He turns his horse down the street to the left.

You suddenly have a cold and painful knot in your stomach. You could probably throw up if you wanted to.

at the same time...and you feel nothing. Or rather, you feel the same as you have felt trying to talk to Benedict...or Fiona...or Random...or Julian...

couple hours max. I'm going to go in and check out the apartment. Your discretion is important - say nothing of this to anyone. Thank you."

Bleys looks at you - and he blanches, slightly. "Grandfather is...occupied now. I won't speak of it here; even in these noisy crowds, word could be heard. But go to his home later on, and you will see. I

Bleys smiles with grim cynicism at your confession of your paranoia. "We get everyone in the family...eventually. The good news for you is that the villain in this piece is one of the few family members that actually died." You look askance at Bleys' rather blase referral to Eric's death. "Hey, relax. He was a nice guy and all, and stood up for Amber - but he was arrogant to a fault and didn't tend to ask anyone

Bleys listens to your request with good humor. "Sorry, kid - I loaned it out to Caine. He's calling Talen in, not me - I got to talk to Tanda. We don't have many Trumps of the younger generation - but as the family has...shrunk, most of us have consolidated complete sets. Just not me." He smiles disarmingly. "But as to Tanda, she's going to be a good clear head around here, I think. It's pretty helpful that most of you don't hang around Amber much - we're probably too tied up in the perceptions that living here instills. But that's probably going to be your job coming up - you'll need to be the voice of the Family's experience here. Talen, Caliban and Tanda have been avoiding Amber on purpose, and Killashandra and Shiro were basically raised away and only just now returned. You've lived here longer

The crowd looks at you quizzically - this was clearly not what they expected. But in a few moments, they start nodding - the Princes are always fairly sudden about when they have to be elsewhere **now**. There's a little milling around, and a little of the crowd disperses, as the star of the show is no longer there. But you are still of the Blood, and the people of Amber respect that. The parade is completed rather perfunctorily, with an annoying amount of waving and smilling - as you are still so stunned from Bleys' disappearance that you are having a hard time putting words together. But it all concludes peaceably and as well as could be expected. As you deposit the borrowed horse in the stable, you hear a number of mutterings from the escort - they were not as fooled as the crowds in the city, and know something is wrong. But you pause long enough to hear that some items were found in the satchel on Bleys' horse - Bleys' Trump deck being the most important. (Apparently the formal uniform

You enter the Castle and hurry up to the gate Watchman, asking where Gerard is. "Milord, Gerard is down in the city now, and Flora has retired for the evening. I believe Gerard's intent was to take his mind off the troubles of the day, if you take my meaning." The guard nods as you nod with understanding - Gerard's apparently decided to go get drunk. You instruct the guard to wake Flora and dash off to the Library. It's empty at the moment, but there is a scattering of books relating to House Hendrake on the table, and you smell the faint aroma of cigar smoke on the air - distant, but still discernible.

You quickly fan through your deck, pulling the image of Caine, perched on the rail of a ship and looking out appraisingly upon the waters. You open your mind into the image, letting it lose and gain focus

Upon turning the horse over to the stable hands, I take the saddle bags, and speak to the attendants. "I'll take this to his quarters; thanks, guys," I say gratefully to the stable hands.

I sit back down at the desk, thinking I should try Flora or Gerard, but knowing it to be futile, I don't. What about Vialle, hmm... If Bleys had a Trump of her, Ill try her.

I walk towards the library, stopping by Bleys' room. I call to a member of the royal quard, and speak in hushed tones. "Let no one enter except Gerard, Caine, Flora, Vialle or myself. I'll be back, in a

I enter the apartment, feeling naked without my blade. Bleys' Trump deck is in my pockets, his saddle bag over my shoulder. I draw my dagger, wishing I at least had my wakizashi. I do a quick once-over, looking for any clues. I look through Bleys' trumps, adding any I don't have to my deck, fully intending to give them back when I see him next. I maintain possesion of his duplicates in their original package. I pocket both decks, and head for the library, if I find no useful clues. If Bleys has a blade in his apartment, I arm myself with it. If he doesn't, I stop by my apartment to get mine.

While walking to the library, I pass a servant and ask her, "Ma'am, would you find the newly arrived Prince Shiro, and ask him to meet me in the library as soon as he can manage? He'll probably need

After trying to get ahold of Caine, I feel sick to my stomach. Not that I don't posess some aspirations for leadership, but this is a lot earlier than anyone in my generation is ready for, except for Merlin, and my brother would rather hang out with guys with goat horns or some such nonsense. Merlin was a pretty good brother, though. Anyway, I'm not sure if I'm ready to save Amber, yet...uh-oh, here it comes.

I haul ass for the window and fling it open, launching vomit out the window of the castle. After retching for a few minutes, that seemed like an eternity, I feel better. I go to the vase and wash basin and

Next, I focus on the house Hendrake stuff, figuring that I will probably have a hand in dealing with them now. I study the material, hitting the subjects that I think to be important. I lean my blade up against

The stable hands look with a little surprise, but they relax quickly, with an obvious thought on their faces - *if he wants to lug the bags in, who are we to stop him?* They wave cheerfully as you depart.

Out of sight, you make a brief inventory of Bleys' trumps. It is apparently a consolidated deck to account for the state of emergency - the only Elders whose Trumps are included are Flora, Caine, Gerard and Vialle. There are a number of utility Trumps - the bottom of the stairway of Kolvir, the entryway to the Castle, and two palaces that you recognize from Shadows of the Golden Circle. There are two

As you arrive at Bleys' room, you stop yourself as you are about to call for a Castle guardsman, as you remember a security precaution that was instituted shortly after the Patternfall War was over, as the family was rightly concerned about intruders and secret assassins in their bedchambers. Sorcerous locking spells were woven on every private chamber that sealed the door unless the person who resided there touched the doorknob, suspending the lock while they were inside. It is a mild sorcery only, and easily broken by those with the proper skill (which you sadly lack), but the counterbalance is that the disruption of the spell causes a loud wailing that can be heard for a great distance, and will summon every available guard to the area, sword in hand. But the sorcerous warding will resist all

You walk briskly to the library, only pausing to ask a servant to find Prince Shiro. She agrees and heads off, her face somewhat uncertain as to where she should look. She heads down the passageway

You clean up after your hastily-eaten dinner leaves with equal haste. Your nerves are still quite on edge, but your stomach is a little more tranquil now. You return to a chair and somewhat gracelessly fall into it. After a moment, you rifle through Bleys' Trumps and select the picture of Vialle - calm, quiet, empathetic, and that strange otherworldliness to her eyes. You let your mind drift as you hold the cool card in your hand. It seems to brighten, to open as a Trump always does. But as it grows active - a fog emerges from inside the card, and begins to cover the image of Vialle. It starts to shut down, offering no resistance to your increased concentration, but offering no purchase for your mind to hold onto, either. The mist grows thick, but only inside the image, and soon, the face of Vialle is obscured in what would almost appear to be a sauna. You are initially taken aback - but you suddenly remember a moment in your training when Dworkin was explaining some of the more advanced techniques usable

"Now, my boy, there are security measures one can take if caution is needed. For one, There are ways, known only to some of my more successful students, in which a Trump can be **sealed**, so that the subject cannot be contacted by any Trump. The image will appear to distort and obscure, and actual contact or travel is impossible. The only two ways to end the sealing are to use an unsealed Trump of the subject to physically touch either the subject or the **sealed** Trump of the subject. Usually, the subject will carry the sealed Trump, so it's one and the same - but there is a theoretical distinction to be

The cry of a night bird in a tree outside the window startles you from your reverie. You look down to find a Trump of Vialle in your hand - but you know it to be useless now, except as a key should you find

You quickly shuffle it back into the deck and stand up again, invigorated with adrenalin from the surprise of the bird. You walk briskly around the library, scanning the shelves. You've been here many times, and you know the layout and the organization well. There is an extensive collection of Shadow literature, and then the treatises on Amber history (including Corwin's own recent narrative), and the geography of Amber, and... That's odd. As you come to the section on Chaos, you find that many of the volumes on the politics of the Courts, and on House Hendrake in particular, are missing. There is

"What the #\$@\*1", I exclaim out loud, upon finding the freshly empty space where the books should be. That is genuinely par for the course, by the way my day's luck is running - although I guess I

I decide to try my brother Merlin's trump, thinking it's probably useless; but he is a Lord of Chaos, and could probably tell me more important things about House Hendrake than those books, anyway.

You shift through your deck and find the image of your brother - smiling yet serious, casual yet formal, and the ultimate contradiction - Amber yet Chaos. Your eyes focus (with only a little difficulty due to the stress of today's events) and it finally behaves as most Trumps should, shimmering and animating and changing to reflect Merlin's current surroundings. He appears to be lying down on a leather couch in a cozy-looking living room, reading a book which is partially resting on his chest. He looks a little tired, and you can see the candles behind him are well on their way to becoming pools of useless

"For the Unicorn's sake, don't you ever sleep?!" Then he pauses a little to think, and his expression softens. "Well, I suppose you've got plenty of reason not to, given what's going on up there." You can feel a little mental pressure as Merlin becomes more conscious of your environment and your state of agitation. "Oh, man. I can see you've had a rough afternoon. And I know what I can do to help." He reaches into his vest pocket, pulls out a very fine-looking cigar, and lights it with one of the candletips. He reaches out with the cigar towards you, and you hear a slight humming as the cigar tip extrudes

"Hey, bro, how have ya been? I know you're not much for court politics, but I need a little of your knowledge. Myself and a couple of our cousins are going to have to host an official state visit by House Hendrake tomorrow. Bleys and the rest of the elders have disappeared, and I'm the ranking family member on hand, from a familiarity-of-Amber standpoint. Can you tell me anything useful about how the

"Oh, yeah. The Hendrake thing. They left for that a few days ago. I don't hang out at the Courts much, but even I picked that up as news. Quite the hoo-hah." He takes a puff of his cigar. "The word is that it is only a state visit as far as **Amber** is concerned. The Hendrake embassy is being sent entirely under their own power, not coordinated with anyone else at the Courts. The political front has been fairly chilly between the Courts and Amber since the Patternfall War, and this could be one of the first tentative steps towards normalizing relations. But Hendrake is still a rather odd choice to make it, as they weren't exactly friendly with Amber at **any** stage of the game." He sighs. "I'm afraid I have no idea what Hendrake is coming out to do, but on the bright side, nobody else in the Courts would have an idea,

He puts the cigar down on a coffee table next to the couch. "I'm doing okay. I've stepped away from both tables, diplomatically speaking. I'm taking a lesson from Benedict, and taking a few Shadows through diplomatic integration of foreign powers and negotiations of borders. I'm in a rather comfortable one now - 19th Century Earth equivalent, and I'm the Crown prince of one side and the King's Champion on the other." He looks up, and your view pans a little to reveal a rather hefty claymore mounted up on the wall. "It's a little grueling to run through this time and time again, but I think it'll help in

He stares at you again, and his eyes grow a little wide. "Am I seeing traces of today's lunch on your cuff? You the victim of food poisoning or just nerves? I've been catching whiffs of what's been going on in your neck of the woods. I'm acting as a stopgap to keep most of that information out of the hands of the Courts, but I don't know how long I can keep that up." He sighs and picks up the cigar again. "It's

I add, "I appreciate your help filtering out information, and will not mention our conversations to anyone at all. You might try and get in touch with Dad; I'm worried about him, but have my hands full here."

"I haven't talked to Dad in a while now, but I suppose I'll give him a poke tomorrow. Last time I checked, though, he wasn't exactly in a chatty mood. He wasn't exactly keen on Random's policy to wait for

He swings his legs around and picks the book back up, opening it to his bookmark and resting it on his chest. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to get this finished by tomorrow. It's a cultural history of

I wander towards my quarters, puffing on the cigar as I go. When I get there, I kick my feet up relaxing my feet and toes as I let the pungent aroma of cigar smoke swirl around me. I reflect on what Merlin

After I finish my cigar, I get a copy of dads books and read through them, trying to gain a better understanding of the Courts of Chaos, and any mention of house Hendrake. At some point I fall asleep while browsing through them, sitting on my couch in my sweats and old Stanford jersey top. Of course my blades are close by, as well as my trump decks in a satchel, ready for quick travel if need be.

Your mind sifts through Corwin's Chronicles, looking for important threads and facts. The problem, of course, is that it was so short a time ago, that a historical perspective is hard to come by. It's like

But you gradually drift off to sleep, as your nerves are finally settled to the point that they allow it. You dream of stilted images - Bleys, Arden, Caine, the City, the Castle...you see a flower slipped into

Bleys' jacket breast pocket, and you don't remember him having it on when you bumped into him. It roils a little in your mind, and then true sleep claims you in a dark and restful embrace.

Your mind returns to the library as the contact closes. It's guite late, and even with the stress of the day's events, your eyes are a little droopy. The silence of the room weighs a little heavily on you,

Merlin nods. "Yeah. With peace, it's tough all over for those of us who have links to both sides. But in war, it'd be even tougher." You get a brief sense, an intuition, that his words are chosen very

Bleys pulls another cigar out of his pocket and lights it while you take the first puff of yours. He closes his book and lands with a huff back on his couch. He leans back and crosses his legs.

people whom you don't recognize at all, and four places with which you are unfamiliar. You hear someone coming down the hall and quickly stow the deck, to be reviewed later.

You head to your own quarters, picking up your sword from where it had been deposited by one of your Rangers while you went to the bar to enjoy the evening.

with Trump. You can still hear his voice, both grizzled and lyrical in that disquieting combination that reminds you that once, Dworkin was a denizen of Chaos.

physical attempts to enter. You feel strangely vulnerable as you realize that such a warding has not been placed on your own quarters

through the surface of the Trump. The aroma is quite enticing. "I think you could use this. So, brother o'mine - why call on me at this hour?"

either. But you know the saying on Earth, 'Only Nixon could go to China.'? This is more like Reagan going to China."

"Brother, I don't envy you, being connected from both sides. I would probably stay away, too, if I were you."

Bleys and Caine to search Amber first." He takes a draw of the cigar, exhaling slowly. "Dad's a regular bundle of patience."

the kingdom I'm merging with here, and I don't want to get any subtle gestures wrong. Good luck, Orion. You take care of yourself."

I savor the taste of the fine cigar, and let the smoke drift about me as I puff a couple times to get the cherry glowing. I look toward Merlin and speak.

cautiously, but she sees a fellow servant and asks her a few questions, at which they move off at speed.

no dust in the gaps where the books should be - they have been removed very recently.