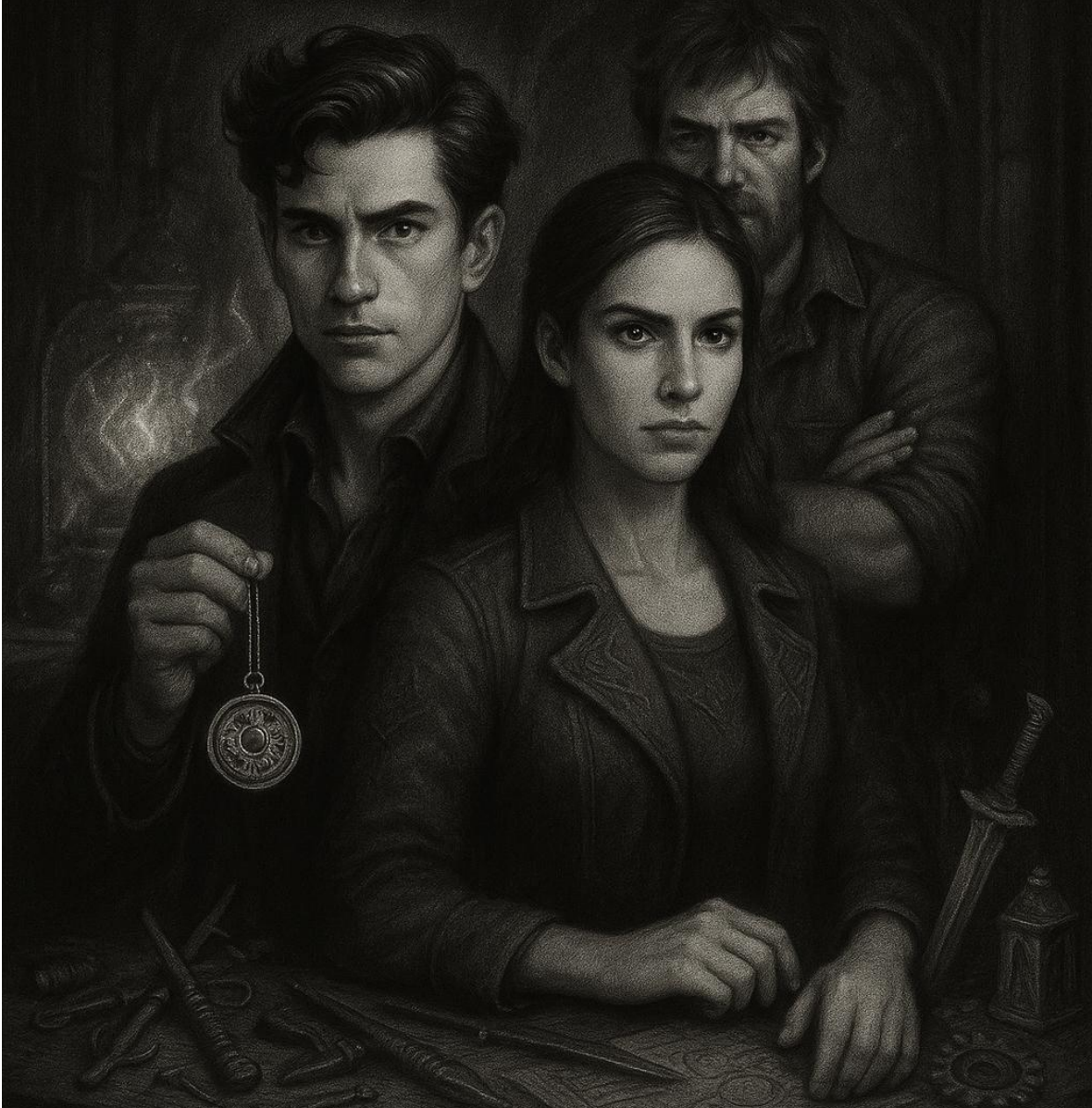


THE CHRONICLES OF DECLAN PIERCE

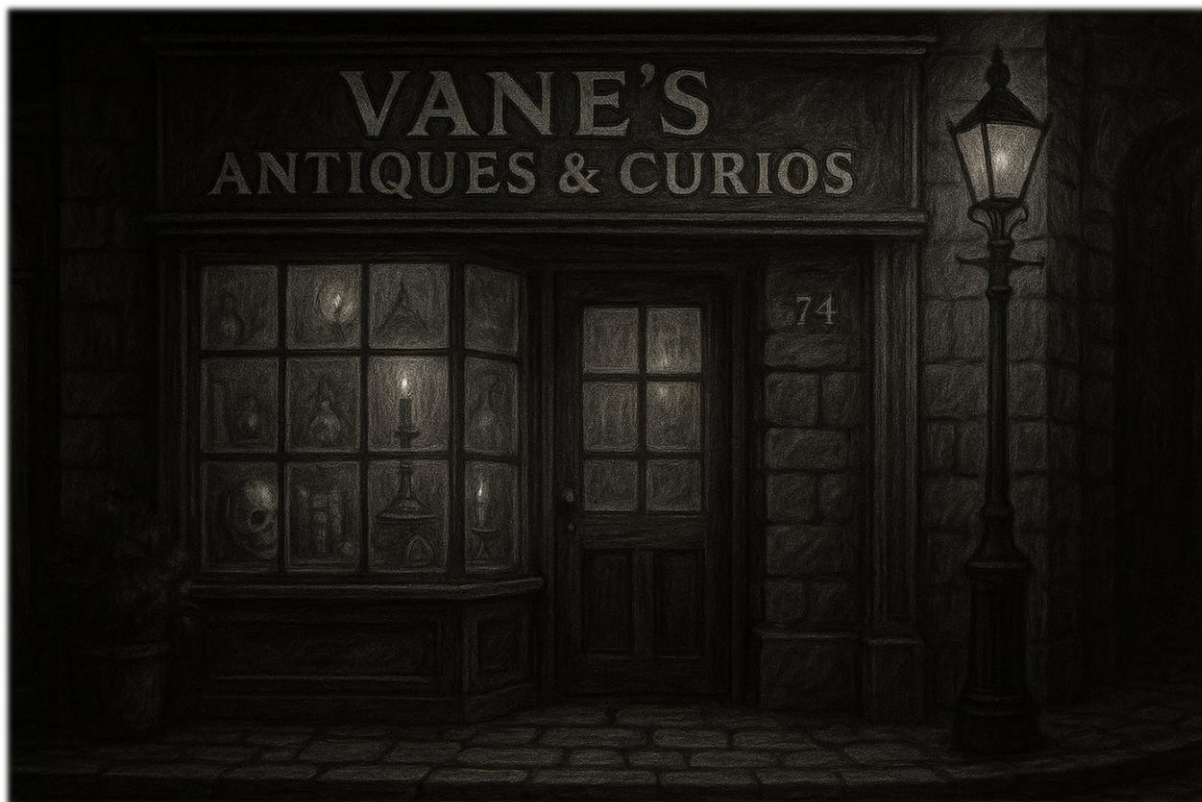


SMOKE & MIRRORS DECLAN PIERCE

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Chapter 1 – Vane’s Antiques and Curios



The bell over the shop door gave a dusty little jingle as Vivian and I stepped inside.

Vane's Antiques and Curios didn't look like the kind of place that trafficked in enchanted weapons or ancient magical relics. It looked like your eccentric uncle's attic: overstuffed shelves sagging under the weight of dusty tomes, tarnished silverware, faded maps, and mismatched porcelain dolls that stared far too knowingly.

But beneath the facade, this place was a crucible of arcane craftsmanship.

Vivian brushed a lock of hair from her eyes, eyes already scanning the shelves for signs of life – or danger. “Are you sure he’s here?”

“He’s here,” I said, shutting the door behind us.

A moment later, a low mechanical *click* echoed from the far end of the shop, followed by a familiar voice.

“Back room’s open,” came Garrick Vane’s gravelly tone, tinged with mild exasperation.

“Watch your step. Floorboards are as rickety as everything else in this beat up old shop.”

We walked past a stuffed owl that may or may not have been blinking and ducked through the hanging curtain of beads and iron charms that separated the storefront from the real workspace. The air changed instantly – hotter, humming, more alive.

The back room was the size of a two-car garage, its stone floor etched with chalk sigils, runes, and grease-stained footprints. Workbenches overflowed with half-carved staves, disassembled lockboxes, and tools enchanted to hum or twitch of their own accord. The scent of iron, ash, and spell-laced oils hung thick in the air.

Garrick looked up from his forge, where a sliver of blue flame danced unnaturally still. He wiped his hands on a dark cloth and nodded once, eyes flicking from me to Vivian, then to the amulet I pulled from my coat pocket.

“Well?” He said, walking over. “Let’s see what you got.”

I placed it on the worktable between us.

It pulsed faintly—a violet gemstone, dark as dusk, shot through with veins of deeper black and specks of something like starlight. The Fae symbols inscribed into the amber colored metal that encased the gemstone glistened in the orange light of Garrick’s forge room. Their curves danced in the light, unsettling, like something grown rather than carved.

Vivian crossed her arms. “We confirmed the Mist were behind the recent bank vault robbery.

Garrick’s eyes widened with intrigue “Really! It was them? Can’t say I’m all that surprised, but are you sure?”

Vivian continued “We’re sure alright. We tracked down the warehouse where they’re stashing all the loot, but it’s more than just the one vault robbery from here in the city. There have been several high-profile robberies in the greater metropolitan area that they’re behind as well. Declan got in and took photos of everything. They have gold bars, jewels, you name it. This thing, however, didn’t come from any vault or anyone’s private collection. Declan seems to think it’s from the Nether. Possibly enchanted. What do you think?”

Garrick leaned in, eyes narrowing. “Well, just at a quick glance, I’d say he’s got good reason to suspect that.”

I nodded in agreement. “There were many more where this came from back in the warehouse. They have them separated in specially marked crates away from all the other loot. I took this one, hoping we’d be able to determine what it is, but it looks like my shadow magic wasn’t enough to keep me from being discovered. Somehow, they knew I

was the one who took it. In retaliation, they've kidnapped my friends Simon and Nina. They're demanding an exchange – Simon and Nina for the amulet. We're on the clock.”

Garrick grunted. “Damn! That escalated fast. What's the deadline?”

“Tonight. They want to make the exchange at the old marina out towards the warehouse district.”

“Lovely.” He reached for a magnifying monocle embedded with some sort of scanning rune and studied the amulet. “Violet core. Fae inscriptions. Nether-crafted for sure. I think it may be a transportation amulet.”

Vivian's eyes lit up. “You sure?”

“Near enough. The etching here looks like a Fae Transport Glyph. I think I remember seeing it in some old manuscript of mine. I'll have to double check to be sure. It's definitely a Nether-fueled magical power source. That, I'm sure of.

I glanced at Vivian, then back at Garrick. “So how do you use it?”

“You gotta attune with it.”

“Of course you do.” I said, throwing my hands up in the air.

Garrick chuckled. “Calm down. It shouldn't be too much of a problem for you.

He tossed me the amulet. “Here, hold on to the amulet and just clear your head for second then bring your focus to the gemstone. When you’re ready, try to focus your shadow magic *through* the amulet. Not outside of it. Not around it. Through it.”

I turned the amulet over in my hand. The Fae symbols shimmered faintly. I could almost feel a hum underneath my skin.

“Just conjure any type of shadow magic while focusing *through* the gemstone?”

What should I do?” I asked.

Garrick grinned. “Ah, do that one where you conjure that silly looking shadow clone. I always liked that one. Looks like a black ghost trying to dance.”

“Fine,” I muttered, stepping back. “But if something explodes, It’s on you.”

Vivian gave me a quick glance. Her voice tinged with uncertainty. “Give it a try, I guess.”

I brought the amulet close to my chest, shut my eyes, and sank into the mental posture I’d practiced since I was a boy—quiet, deliberate, focused. Magic doesn’t work well in a noisy mind. It prefers silence, clarity, and intention.

I focused on trying to direct my magic through the amulet. I raised one hand, letting a pool of darkness gather in the air beside me. I pictured myself, as I always did – the shape, the form, the essence.

Normally, what emerged would be a black, smokey figure vaguely resembling my shape. A dark, wispy mimic that moved where I directed it with my mind.

But not this time.

When I opened my eyes, I gasped.

The clone standing beside me was not a shadowy blur.

It was *me*.

Identical.

Hair tousled the same. Jacket falling the same way. Same ring on the same hand.

It blinked, then smirked.

Vivian stepped back. "Holy shit!"

Garrick stared, for once completely silent. Then he gave a low whistle.

"Declan... that's not an illusion. That's a full-energy construct. Seamless projection. That thing could fool your own mother."

The clone raised a brow, mimicking me exactly. I willed it to speak, and it responded in my voice: "Is this what being handsome *really* feels like?"

Vivian burst out laughing.

Garrick leaned in, his tone shifting. "Well, I'll be. That amulet didn't just attune – it amplified your own bloodline magic."

I nodded slowly, watching the clone take a few steps, adjusting its jacket. It moved smoothly, naturally – like it had always belonged in the room.

“I didn’t feel any resistance,” I said. “It was like... the gemstone understood how I think.”

“It *resonates* with you,” Garrick said. “Which means you’re naturally compatible with it. Kudos man. You’ve unlocked augmentation without a manual. That’s rare even in the magical world. More than that, this amulet seems to be charged with more than just transportation energy.”

Vivian stepped forward, eyes now focused, and serious. “So now we have an edge, right? We’ve got a perfect decoy. It can talk, move, and respond. We just need to figure out how to use it.”

I looked down at the amulet again.

It was still humming – calmly, steadily, like a predator purring in the dark.

I slipped it into my coat pocket and extinguished the clone with a flick of my fingers. The magic collapsed back into shadow, silently evaporating.

Garrick scratched his beard, nodding to himself. “There may be more to this thing than we realize. First, I need to verify this thing is in fact equipped for teleportation. I’ve got some old volumes in the back room. Follow me.”

He led us through a narrow hallway past shelves of glowing jars and unfinished blade hilts into his study – a chamber lined floor to ceiling with hand-bound tomes, grimoires, and one particularly gruesome skull floating in a preservation jar.

He pulled a heavy leather-bound book from the shelf and dropped it onto the table with a thud.

“I’ll need to dig through this and a few others. Could take a bit. You two... I don’t know... try and figure out how you’re going to handle the exchange with the Mist.”

Vivian folded her arms. “Well, we got a shadow-magic man, some magic glasses and the perfect decoy. Shouldn’t be too hard to come up with something, right?”

I looked away. “Sure. No problem” I said, with a healthy dose of sarcasm.

Though I didn’t quite share Vivian’s optimism, we did have a couple things going for us.

Tonight, everything was coming to a head.

At least this time I wouldn’t be the only shadow in the dark.

Chapter 2 – The Jump



Garrick’s study smelled like dust, burnt sage, and the kind of paper that crumbles if you breathe too hard. Vivian perched on the armrest of a heavy leather chair, flipping through a nearby journal about glyph convergence, while I leaned over the main desk, watching Garrick skim through the volume he’d just unearthed.

“Maybe it was this one,” he muttered, running his soot-smudged finger down a column of handwritten Fae glyphs. “Looks like it’s cataloged by the activation symbol... This isn’t the volume I’m looking for, but this chart references the same glyph.” He jabbed the page with his thick finger. “That’s the inscription etched on your amulet. I knew I’d seen it before.”

“What does it say?” Vivian asked, putting back a random volume she was thumbing through.

“Literal translation?” Garrick squinted. “Something like ‘pass through the shadow and into the gate’ – but Fae idiom doesn’t always line up. Could also mean something like ‘pierce the darkness and into the threshold.’ Nether languages have an affinity for being poetic.”

I folded my arms. “So... teleportation confirmed?”

“Oh, absolutely,” he said, flipping another page of the book. “There’s a small section here that roughly details the workings of translocation. Seems like the gemstones in the amulet act as a kind of... mental hinge. Focus, intention, and resonance. If they can do that properly, and if the user’s attuned, they don’t need to channel their own magic – they just need to say or think the incantation.”

Vivian leaned in, brows raised. “Sounds simple enough, but hey, what do I know? How hard is it really to pull off?”

Garrick made a face. “Depends. For most people, nearly impossible without weeks of practice and a ritual anchor. You’re not channeling your own magic – you’re operating under someone else’s spell framework. That’s like trying to dance to music you’ve never heard in a language you don’t speak.”

“Sounds fun,” I said, deadpan.

“I’m serious, Declan. This isn’t shadow work. It’s not about creeping into corners and letting your instincts glide you forward. This is more... precision mechanics.”

I shrugged. “Okay... more precision then,” I said matter-of-factly.

Both of them stared at me.

“What, now?” Vivian said.

Garrick blinked. “You want to try teleportation now?”

“Look, we’ve got what, six hours until nightfall? It’s worth a shot, right?” I stepped into the center of the room and pulled the amulet from my coat pocket. “If I can do it, that’s another card we can potentially play tonight. And if I can’t—”

“—It’s dangerous, Declan. If you’re not careful, you could accidentally teleport yourself into a wall,” Garrick said in a calm but cautious tone.

I rolled my shoulders and exhaled, centering myself.

“Look, you said focus, intention and the incantation. No problem. What’s the incantation?”

“*Narwien Loth*,” Garrick said, stroking his beard.

I held the amulet in my palm and visualized the other side of the room. Just past Garrick’s tool rack. Empty space. Open. Safe.

I let my mind drift into the familiar stillness I use when stepping into shadows – silent, slow breathing, senses narrowing like the edges of a blade.

Then I imagined being there.

And said the words: "*Narwien Loth.*"

There was no pull. No swirling tunnel of light or rush of wind. No floating or soaring. Just—
—*snap.*

I was there.

Across the room.

Vivian let out a strangled gasp.

Garrick's eyebrows nearly jumped up into his hairline.

I turned back slowly, blinking.

"Huh, it worked," I said.

"'Huh,' he says," Vivian replied, standing up. "You just vanished and reappeared across the room out of thin air!"

Garrick stalked toward me, studying my skin, eyes, aura – as if he were looking to check to see if I was still in one piece.

"No tearing. No echo-signature. No lag." He stepped back, stroking his chin. "You sure you've never studied teleport spell matrices before?"

"Never even crossed my mind."

"Then how the hell did you do that?"

I gave a small shrug. “Honestly? My focus wasn’t all that different from my mental state in shadow form. They seem to operate on the same kind of mental gearshift. Usually, when I slip into shadow, I just focus my mind on where I want to go and let myself be pulled there – like flying through still water. This was similar, but much faster. Precise. Instant.”

Vivian’s face lit up. “Declan... this is a game changer.”

“We’ve got a solid clone,” I said. “And now, teleportation. Distraction and mobility could make for a winning combination.”

“But how exactly do we use them to our advantage?” Vivian said, now pacing back and forth. “We need more than just tricks – we need a plan. I’m betting the Mist have even more tricks that we’re not even aware of. Who knows what we’re really up against.”

Garrick cleared his throat.

“If you ask me,” he said, “we need to go see the drop site. With your new abilities, any plan we make will likely depend heavily on the terrain and visibility.”

I interjected, “He’s right. As a magician I can speak directly to the importance of being intimately aware of your angles, your lines of sight. We’re going to need places to hide, spots with shadow cover, and we’ll need to know how close I can get without breaking line-of-sight.”

Vivian nodded, already slinging her bag over her shoulder. “And I’ve got the glasses. If there are any illusion traps, I’ll see them and can communicate them directly to you through the rings.”

I looked to the window. Outside, the sun was still climbing. The day had barely begun, but we were already running out of time.

I slipped the amulet back into my coat pocket.

“Then let’s move.”

The abandoned marina sat like a ghost on the edge of the warehouse district – half-submerged docks, weather-worn shipping containers, and skeletal buildings long since claimed by moss and rust.

Garrick parked the car just off the gravel access road, and we stepped out. Wind rolled in off the water, cold and thick with the scent of sea salt, algae and oil.

“This place smells like disappointment,” Vivian said, scanning the horizon.

“Perfect staging ground,” Garrick replied. “Hard to surveil from the outside. Lots of choke points. Great for disappearing. Terrible for trust.”

I looked around. The main drop point was obvious: a wide concrete platform at the edge of the marina, flanked by two rusted-out cranes and a cargo hoist that hadn’t worked in ages.

I nodded toward it. “That’s where they’ll expect to meet.”

Vivian pulled on the glasses and scanned the area slowly, turning in tight arcs.

“I don’t see anything out of the ordinary,” she murmured. “No false structures. But I’m sure they’ll be bringing their own illusions with them.”

“Count on it,” I said.

Before moving on, I figured this was as good a place as any to test something else.

“How far do you think I can teleport with this?” I said, tapping the amulet through my coat.

Garrick raised a brow. “You want to test it *here*?”

“Seems like the perfect place to test it out,” I said. “If I don’t know the range, I can’t plan.”

I picked a target – an old lamppost at least 200 yards away, near the marina’s far boundary.

I narrowed my focus, steadied my breathing.

“Narwien Loth.”

The world snapped, and I was suddenly standing in front of the lamppost, gravel crunching under my boots. The distance was astronomical compared to what I’d done back at the forge – and I’d landed clean. You couldn’t even call it a landing – I was just... there.

I turned and waved toward the others. Garrick gave a high-pitched whistle.

Just as quickly and easily as I left, I teleported back to the group.

“Looks like your range is pretty substantial,” he said when I rejoined them.

Vivian gave me a wide-eyed look. “Remind me to *never* turn my back on you.”

"I'll put it in writing," I said, adjusting my coat.

Garrick wandered a few paces ahead, squinting up at a rusted stairwell leading to a second-level catwalk.

"This could be a solid lookout for Vivian," he said. "Gives her line-of-sight on the whole drop point. And distance to stay hidden."

Vivian squinted her eyes. "Yeah, it's a great lookout point but I won't be able to hear anything though. If Declan uses the clone as a decoy, how's he going to be able to know what they are saying?"

Garrick paused for a moment, rubbing his temple. "You know, I've got something back at the shop that just might help with that. A few years ago, I was experimenting with a new listening enhancement enchantment. Basically, it's a little device I enchanted to allow you to hear what is being said from quite a distance away. You just point and listen. I could of course just do this directly myself with my own enhancement magic, but you'll have the glasses and the mind connection with Declan. I think I'll be better served as the getaway driver."

Vivian nodded. "I see. So, you're saying I could hide out there and use this device of yours to hear what is being said at the drop point. I can then mind-relay what is being said to Declan so that he can respond with the decoy. That's a good start, but how exactly is that going to help us rescue Simon and Nina?"

I walked toward the hoist tower, eyes narrowing.

“One thing at a time,” I said, trying to concentrate. “We could have Garrick drive the car up just far enough to be visible, step out, and then send the clone forward to meet them.”

“Meanwhile, I’ll already be hidden up there, right?” Vivian asked.

I nodded. “Right. You’ll be able to communicate to me what is being said but I still won’t be able to see anything through my shadow clone. This could be a problem if we can’t verify they brought Simon and Nina with them. It’s not a wild idea to think that the Mist would try to trick us by presenting illusions of Simon and Nina.”

“Ah, there’s a lot of unknowns,” I said, kicking a small rock down the cracked weed-infested concrete slab we were standing on. “At least now I have a better idea of how far I can move.”

Garrick scratched his jaw, eyes distant. “Yeah, it’s risky. One wrong move and they’ll know something’s up. But still... this could work.”

Vivian placed her hand on my shoulder. “Right. But if not, and things turn bad, I guess you’ll just have to give up the amulet.”

“Yeah, that is what they want after all,” I said running my fingers through my hair, taking in a deep breath of sea salted air.

I looked around the marina again – at the water, the rust, the stillness.

Tonight, this place could potentially turn into a battlefield.

But for the first time since the Mist issued their ultimatum, I felt a glimmer of hope.

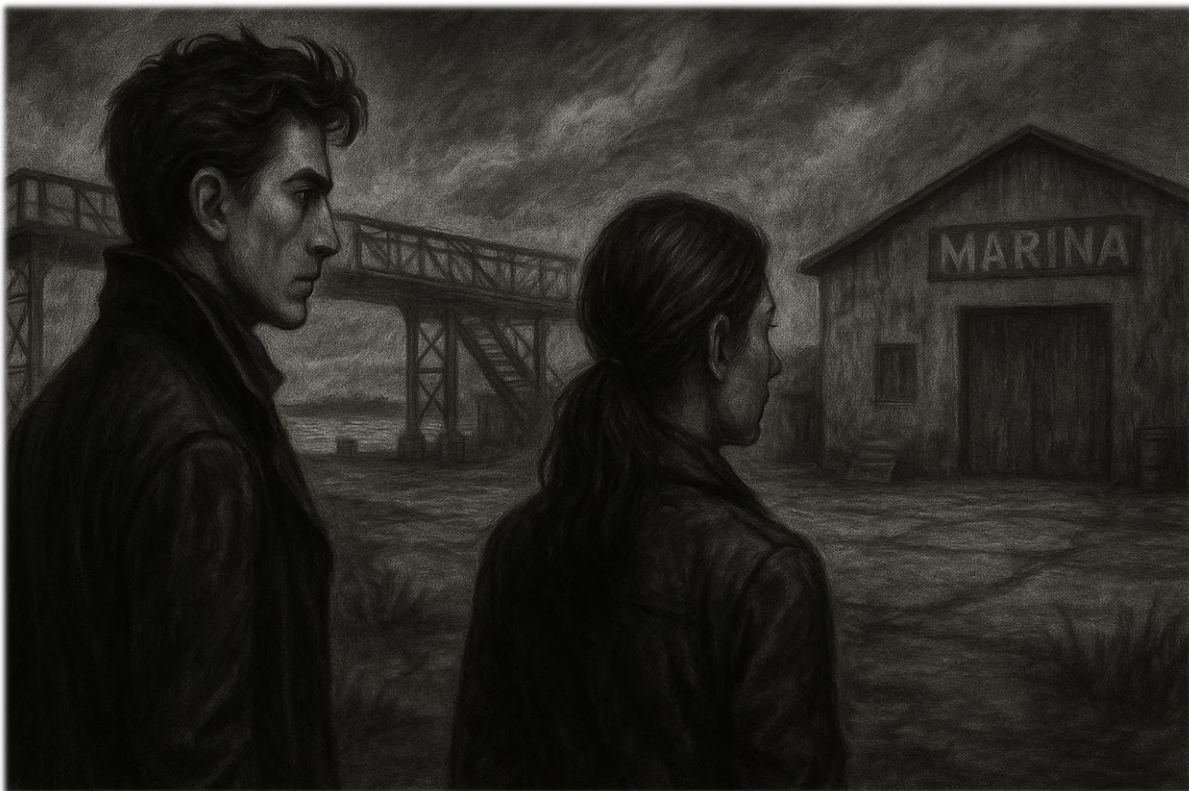
We had options.

We had weapons.

We had time – barely.

“Let’s go back,” I said. “We’ve got some planning to do.”

Chapter 3 – Lay of the Land



We didn’t speak much on the drive back from the marina.

There wasn't much to say. We'd walked the grounds, marked the drop point, confirmed the vantage, and – thanks to the amulet – discovered that I could teleport farther than any of us expected. This was way more than we had just a few hours prior. Still, knowing how far I could jump wasn't the same as knowing how many I could carry with me – or if I could carry anyone with me at all as I'm able to in the shadows.

That was the question I had to answer next, though I had not yet brought it up to the group.

By the time we pulled back into the gravel lot behind Vane's Antiques and Curios, the sky had lost its morning gold and taken on that flat, colorless hue that makes everything feel like it's holding its breath.

Garrick locked the car with a mechanical grunt and motioned for us to head inside through the back. I could see the lines forming at the corners of his eyes – not from age, but from focus. His mind was already dissecting every angle of tonight's encounter.

Inside, the warmth of the forge and the scent of burnt copper greeted us like old smoke.

"Alright," Garrick said, tossing his keys onto the workbench, "let's talk gear."

He marched to a shelf above a stack of scroll tubes and pulled down a small leather case, tossing it open on the bench.

"This," he said, with a little too much pride, "is the WhisperScope."

It looked like a steampunk pirate's spyglass – etched brass and lacquered wood, with a rune-carved earpiece trailing from the base.

Vivian leaned in, genuinely impressed. "This is it?"

"Directionally locked sound channeling," Garrick said, handing it to her. "You point it at someone, and the earpiece transmits exactly what they're saying, no matter the distance. As long as you've got line-of-sight, it's like standing right next to them."

"So, it just relays the sound of whatever I'm looking at?" She asked.

"In a nutshell... that's it. That's the enchantment." Garrick grinned. "Point, listen, relay. You'll be on the catwalk. This'll give you ears down below."

Vivian slung the strap over her shoulder and gave him an approving nod. "Wow. This'll do nicely."

"Still," she added, tapping the device, "I'd feel better having a backup way to talk to you in case something goes wrong."

Garrick reached under the bench and produced a dusty tin box. Inside were a pair of small walkie talkies. "Battery's good for a few hours. Nothing magical about em, but they'll get the job done."

Vivian took one, clipped it to her belt, and handed the other back. "Right, let's keep it simple. Channel one. Call signs?"

Garrick raised an eyebrow. "Call signs?"

"Of course," she said, half-smiling. "You're 'Forge.' I'm 'Lens.'"

She turned to me. "And you're 'Shade.'"

"Very dramatic Viv. But sure, call us whatever you'd like" I said.

"You're welcome."

While they finished syncing frequencies, I took a few steps back, drawing the amulet from my coat. I could feel it vibrating faintly – like a tuning fork.

Time to test the last piece of the puzzle.

I looked at Vivian. "We still don't know if I can bring anyone *with* me when I teleport."

She hesitated for half a second, then stepped forward. "Alright then. Take me away nightcrawler."

I raised an eyebrow. "No reservations?"

"Eh" she replied almost dismissively. "I've already survived your shadow warp thing and the Waypoint. How bad can teleportation be? Let's just get it over with."

I slipped the amulet into my palm and held out my free hand. She took it, gripping firmly, eyes already focused across the room. I matched her line of sight to an open spot by the vault of spell tomes near Garrick's desk.

"Alright," I said, drawing a breath. "Focus. Intent. Sync."

I steadied myself and whispered, "*Narwien Loth.*"

Snap.

Seamless landing.

I couldn't even feel a break in the weight under my feet.

Vivian paused and then looked around in mild disbelief. "Wooh, that was fast."

"You okay?"

"Yeah," she said, brushing her coat straight. "A little disoriented, but fine."

"Nothing torn, nothing twisted?" Garrick called from the far side.

"We're good," I said.

Garrick let out a long, thoughtful breath and then chuckled "You just jumped two people through a realm-bridging spell you only discovered this morning. Either you've got a gift, or that amulet likes you a little *too* much."

"It's probably just luck that the magic channeling for teleportation is similar to how I channel my shadow warp," I said, stepping away from Vivian and shaking out my hands.

"But this confirms what I needed. If I can get to Simon and Nina tonight without being discovered, I can get them out."

"Let's see - range, mobility, a voice at your back, and a perfect decoy," Garrick said, ticking them off with his fingers.

“Let’s not forget the wild card,” Vivian added, patting the WhisperScope. “I’ll be the eyes and ears from above. And if anything goes sideways, you’ll hear me in your head.”

I nodded. “Still a lot we don’t know though. We have to assume they’ll try using some type of illusion - possibly to fake Simon and Nina. We also don’t know what kind of backup they’ll bring. We don’t even know if the Mist wants to get revenge as much as they want the amulet back.”

“I’ll have the glasses. We’ll just have to adapt to what they throw at us,” she said.

“Usually, a magician takes comfort in having every minute detail of his performance under his control. Still, spectators have an uncanny tendency to throw you curve balls that you’ve never even considered. You have to be able to think fast and adapt – trust in your ability. I’ll do my best,” I replied.

Garrick rolled his eyes. “Please. Now that’s being dramatic. You’re Declan Pierce - the very embodiment of darkness itself wrapped in a fancy ass trench coat.”

I smiled faintly. “Then I’ll make sure to leave my coat unbuttoned.”

We gathered what we needed and left.

The sun was sliding down toward the horizon by the time we loaded up and climbed into Garrick’s car.

The old marina was waiting.

And this time, so were we.

Chapter 4 – Calibration



The abandoned marina sat in eerie silence, a stillness that buzzed just under the surface. Garrick had parked the car out of sight behind a line of rusted-out shipping containers, engine off, windows cracked. Vivian had already climbed the rusted stairwell to the second-level catwalk, positioning herself on a rusty section of grated walkway overlooking the drop site. From there, she had a clear view of the marina's center, the cracked concrete slab that jutted out toward the water like a forgotten altar.

I crouched beneath the skeletal remains of a loading platform, tucked in the deepest pocket of shadow I could find. The amulet hummed faintly beneath my coat, a steady throb like a second heartbeat.

We didn't speak – not with voices anyway. Our communication would come through the mind-link established by the Rings of Asha. Vivian had the WhisperScope slung across her chest, already adjusted and trained on the marina entrance.

Then, movement.

A sleek black van rolled into view, gliding down the gravel access road with the slow, measured confidence of someone who knew they weren't being followed. It stopped near the platform, the sliding-door angled away from the marina entrance. A single plume of cigarette smoke drifted lazily from the cracked driver's side window, curling into the cold evening air.

Vivian's voice pinged softly into my mind.

"They're here. No markings on the van. Can't see anyone but the driver yet."

She adjusted the WhisperScope, narrowing the lens and angling it at the window. Static crackled faintly in her earpiece as the scope picked up the sound from inside the van.

She was able to hear voices coming from inside the van. "He better come through with this" a voice muttered, low and gravelly. "I don't even want to think of how Syllas will respond if he doesn't."

A woman's voice answered, irritated. "I told you, he'll show. He's got no leverage and doesn't even know what he has. I'm not waiting all night though. If he doesn't show, we'll still get it back. We'll just need to be a little more forceful."

The first voice scoffed. "If this thing really is charged the way Sylas thinks, he may be able to bypass all this trade agreement nonsense with the Kretchin and go directly to the source. He'll be unstoppable."

Vivian relayed everything to me.

I froze momentarily pondering the implications of what that meant.

Vivian broke my thought when she relayed a third voice from the van.

"So, I'm just supposed to just stay here with these two while you guys make the exchange?"

"Don't let em out of your site" The woman responded forcefully. "If he tries anything, we'll be covered."

I could almost feel a hitch in Vivian's breath. She quickly continued with the mind-link.

"Declan. They're talking about the amulet – seems like Sylas is obsessed with it. One of them's staying in the van with Simon and Nina. The other two are going to handle the exchange. No names, but I'm sure that's who they meant."

I stayed still, muscles tensed. That meant the Mist knew exactly how valuable this amulet was – and they were playing cautious. Smart. But it also told me something else.

They didn't expect to lose.

"Understood," I thought back. "Keep your eyes on them. Let me know the moment anything shifts."

"Copy that, Shade."

I rolled my eyes and teleported instantly back to the car, emerging behind Garrick just as he was lighting a rune-stabilizer on the dashboard.

"Time?" He asked.

"They're waiting," I said. "Let's give them something to look at."

I summoned my clone. It peeled off my shadow like smoke off a blade, forming fully beside me with the same coat, same stance, same weight in the eyes. Perfect.

The clone climbed into the front passenger seat while I faded back into the shadows again.

Garrick drove forward slowly, pulling into view and stopping the car about a hundred yards from the Mist's van. The distance was enough to allow for caution, but close enough to force them to take the bait.

I wasn't able to have my shadow clone interact directly with real world objects. This meant that Garrick had to lean over and open the passenger-side door himself so that I could have the clone appear to step out of the car. I walked it slowly and steadily toward the waiting van.

Vivian tracked everything.

“The van door’s opening,” she whispered through the link.

The sliding door screeched slightly as it opened. Seven Mist agents emerged; all dressed in the standard dark gray overcoats and black gloves. They flanked two figures with black sacks pulled over their heads – Simon and Nina. The supposed Simon and Nina.

But Vivian saw through it instantly.

“They’re not real,” she said. *“Declan, listen. The ones they brought forward. Illusions. All but two of them. I can see them clearly through the glasses. The one out front and the one in the rear are real. The others – including Simon and Nina – are all magical projections. The real Simon and Nina are still in the van. But there’s one more agent still inside with them.”*

I kept my voice steady through the link. “Copy that.”

I had my clone pause roughly ten feet from the Mist agents. The closest of them – a tall woman with silver hair and an expression like frozen stone – stepped forward.

My clone slowly reached into its coat pocket and pulled out the amulet, letting it hang loosely from my hand.

It shimmered faintly in the low light, every detail mimicked perfectly.

The woman’s eyes locked onto it, predatory and hungry.

I held the clone’s gaze steady and finally spoke.

“Fine evening for an exchange, wouldn’t you say?”

Chapter 5 – Misdirection at the Marina



“Fine evening indeed,” the Mist agent said flatly.

“Great, we’re already starting on common ground,” I replied through the clone. “But you know how these things tend to go – rare items, bad blood, mutual distrust – it’s a whole thing.”

From her perch, Vivian kept the WhisperScope trained on the scene, her voice threading through the mental link. “She’s rolling her eyes,” she whispered. “Looks like she’s already regretting not bringing a sniper.”

“Yeah, maybe. Let’s see what I can get out of her.”

I had my clone positioned a good ten feet from the Mist agent in front; the amulet held lazily in my hand. The silver-haired woman stepped forward again. Of the seven, only two were real – the silver-haired woman and the broad-shouldered man at the back of the group. The rest were projected might, while the illusions of Simon and Nina were just projected bait.

“I don’t suppose you’re going to tell me what this thing really is?” I asked, nodding toward the amulet.

Vivian repeated the silver-haired woman’s response as fast as she could “How about first you tell me what you were doing snooping around our warehouse. That’s quite a stab in the dark, even for a man of your particular abilities.”

I smirked. “You mean the warehouse? Ha, all I was doing was investigating a bank robbery. I had no idea you guys were involved in it. Might have left the whole thing alone if I hadn’t stumbled across several items that didn’t come from any bank.”

I waved the amulet lazily in her direction. “Very curious looking things. This one in particular caught my eye.”

She gave a short laugh, dry and sharp. “So, you’re just a curious little thief, aren’t you?”

“Curious, yes. Thief? Well.... No more than you guys.”

I continued “But like I said, this didn’t come from any bank. Based on the inscriptions etched into this thing, it looks Nether-crafted. But how’s that possible? Care to enlighten me?”

Her smile didn’t reach her eyes. “You ask too many questions.”

“Hey, I’m just trying to figure out what’s really going on here.” I shot back.

“I didn’t come here to chat?” She barked. “You hand over the amulet; and get your friends back. That’s the only thing that’s really going on here.”

Vivian was doing a good job of trying to mimic the woman’s tone of voice. It was helpful.

“Look, you can’t blame me for wanting to know what kind of game you guys are up to. Don’t want to get blindsided by whatever you guys are cooking up.”

“Sorry, this isn’t a game. And even if it were... you’re not invited to play. Your only option is hand it over, take your friends and feel lucky that we’re even allowing that.”

“Ah, but I like games though,” I responded in jest. “And like any good game, you wanna make sure your opponent doesn’t get the upper hand on you.”

Vivian snorted through the link. “She’s not impressed.”

“I didn’t come here to discuss what you do or don’t like,” the woman said coldly. “I came here to retrieve something that doesn’t belong to you. You’re just delaying the inevitable but you’re wasting your time.”

Meanwhile, the real me had already teleported and was crouched behind the Mist’s van, low between shadow and steel. My heart was pounding like a war drum, but I had to maintain my concentration, or I’d lose my connection with the clone. I stared at the side panel.

I couldn’t just open the door. There was a guard inside. Furthermore, just teleporting in blindly would be suicide – I had no idea where I’d land. I could phase into a chair or even the guard himself. I had to think of something fast.

Then I saw it: the cracked-open driver’s window, left ajar by the smoking agent. A sliver of shadow leaked through it.

Perfect.

I slipped into my shadow form and quickly snaked through the opening like black silk. Inside, it was cramped and smelled like smoke and leather.

And the guard was standing right there.

I surged forward and reached out of the shadows and cracked him across the base of his neck with my nightstick. Not too hard. I didn’t want to kill him. The enchantment did its work though – he dropped like a marionette with its strings cut. I instinctively grabbed him by the collar to avoid having him make a large crashing sound in the van.

Simon and Nina were slumped over against the back seats, heads still bagged, limbs slack.

I knelt and tugged off their black hoods.

Both blinked slowly. Vacant. Their eyes tracked movement, but they weren't registering anything.

"Vivian," I whispered through the link, "I've got them, but they're not responding. Like they're... hypnotized. Tranced."

"Shit! Really?" she said, tension rising.

I didn't wait. I grabbed Simon first and shadow warped back through the crack in the window. From outside, I was able to instantly teleport us over to the catwalk. We materializing directly beside Vivian. She stepped back instinctively, but I quickly reminded her to maintain eye contact on the Mist. I held Simon under my arms and lowered him gently, leaning him against the wall Vivian was perched behind.

I quickly returned for Nina.

Second jump. Same landing.

Both of them sat slumped against the railing. Alive. Breathing. But vacant.

"Vivian," I said, placing a hand on Nina's shoulder. "They're definitely trapped in some sort of magical mental bind. Let me try something."

Back at the drop point, I had the clone call out.

“Simon? You alright, buddy?”

The illusory Simon didn't move. Didn't flinch.

The silver-haired woman gave a sly smile.

“They can hear you,” she said. “But they won't respond. Just a little mind binding spell.

Makes them easier to manage. Don't worry – it's not permanent. They'll come around.”

I had my clone tilt it's head.

“Forgive me if I'm not big on blind trust.”

“You'll have to be,” she said. “Because you're out of time.”

She was right. Time was up. I had already done what I came to do. The clone was still showing the amulet – and it was still holding her attention.

But now, we had to prepare for the real trick: We had already managed to vanish Simon and Nina from under their noses. Now all we had to do was clean up.

Vivian moved to Simon and Nina, checking pulses, brushing hair back from their faces. I leaned beside her, breath steadying, calculating our next move.

The Mist thought they were in control. They thought they had the upper hand.

They knew very well of my shadow magic capabilities; and had come prepared. However, they didn't take into consideration that they were dealing with someone who was also a master illusionist of a different kind – and one with a few new tricks up his sleeve...

Chapter 6 – The Vanishing Act



I had already teleported back to the van, waiting in preparation what was coming next. “Man, they really want this amulet,” I said through the mental link, “They’re in for a huge disappointment. I almost feel sorry for them.”

Vivian was still crouched on the catwalk behind a rusted metal beam, adjusting the WhisperScope. *“Their illusions are still in place,”* she said, *“nothing’s changed, but you’ve got their full attention. Time to wrap this thing up.”*

Through the shadow clone, I nodded at the silver-haired agent and spoke through the clone. “Look, it’s clear you’re not going to tell me what the significance of this thing really is.

It's a shame, but if it's that important, I'm probably better off not knowing. So, fine. You can have your little trinket back. Just bring my friends forward. I'll bring the amulet forward.

We can exchange at the same time."

The woman narrowed her eyes, then let out a quick laugh. "Ha, you want theater? Fine." She snapped her fingers at the broad-shouldered agent, who stepped forward, guiding the illusions of Simon and Nina toward us.

Vivian's voice echoed softly in my mind. *"They're not real – obviously – but she's playing along. I say it's time."*

"Agreed," I replied silently.

Hiding behind the rear tire of the van, my hand was already moving down to the side of my boot, drawing out the short, stiletto knife I had tucked away.

I had to keep my movements with the clone down to a minimum, in order to avoid the possibility of making an odd move that might hint at the deception.

Vivian informed me when the illusions of Simon and Nina were lined up next to the silver-haired woman agent.

"Alright. Now just have your guy take a few steps back and you can have your thing back," I said, having my clone wave the amulet loosely in its hand.

The silver-haired agent hesitated, then nodded once. The illusions of Simon and Nina were pushed a couple steps closer, and the broad-shouldered man took a few steps back.

Now it was just the clone and the silver-haired agent, standing face to face.

I had the clone hold out the amulet, letting it swing slightly between its fingers. It flickered in the moonlight as it spun from its chain.

“Just take it,” I said through the clone.

Her eyes gleamed. She stepped forward, slowly and deliberately, and reached out for the amulet.

Her hand passed clean through it.

She blinked and then violently shook her head. I didn’t let the illusion break – not yet.

“*Now*,” Vivian yelled out through the link.

The clone instantly dissolved into shadow, dispersing like ash in the wind.

And then I struck.

I jammed my blade hard into the back tire of the van, puncturing it in one swift jab. There was a loud explosive sound from the pressure which startled me, but I continued to move quickly to the next tire – *stab*. The air burst out and the van wheel limped down to the pavement.

Shouts rang out. The Mist agents were scrambling, confused.

“The hell—?!”

“Where are they?!”

“Get back to the van—NOW!”

By the time the first one slid the van door open, they were greeted with nothing but an unconscious teammate and empty seats.

I was already gone.

Teleport – snap – back to the catwalk. In matter of seconds, I had teleported Vivian, Simon and Nina, back to the car where Garrick was waiting. I had to drape Simon over Garrick’s shoulders like a ragdoll. Strong as Garrick was, he effortlessly tossed Simon into the back of the hatchback while Vivian and I struggled to manage loading Nina into the car together.

“Move, go go go!” I barked.

We all scrambled into the car and the engine roared to life.

We peeled out from behind the shipping containers, headlights blinding as they cut across the marina. The Mist agents turned at once – eyes wide as our car sped into view.

Garrick revved the engine hard. Tires spun churning the gravel.

I rolled down the window, locking eyes with the silver-haired agent.

She stood frozen, hair whipping in the wind, face painting with several coats of fury.

I gave her a wink and a slow, exaggerated wave.

Then we were gone – vanishing into the dark as the marina shrank behind us.

And for the first time in days, the odds felt like they had tilted back in our favor.

Chapter 7 – The Realm Rift



The interior of the car was silent except for the low hum of the engine and the occasional crackle from the walkie talkie Garrick hadn't turned off yet.

Simon and Nina sat slumped against each other in the back seat, still locked in that eerie, unblinking trance. Their breathing was steady. Their bodies unharmed. But their eyes... vacant. As if they were present only in body.

Vivian twisted in her seat to look at them again. "We can't just take them home like this," she said. "What would we even tell them when they wake up? Assuming they do wake up."

"They will," Garrick said firmly from the driver's seat. "The trance will break in time. The Mist are precise with this kind of thing. It's not meant to kill – just twist their senses enough to keep them out of reality."

Vivian turned back around, arms crossed. "Still. How do we explain what happened? 'Hey, sorry you were kidnapped and mentally hijacked by a group of illusion-wielding warlocks, but we brought you to a magical junk shop to sleep it off?'"

"Hey, I've got some real quality items in my shop," Garrick barked back.

"She has a point," I said. "Anything we tell them is going to raise more questions than it answers."

Silence followed.

It was Garrick who finally broke it. "Then maybe we don't tell them anything."

I turned to look at him. "What do you mean?"

"Let's just drop em off at the ER. Let the doctors check them out and keep them under observation until they come to. No need for suspicious cover stories. Just two confused

patients with memory gaps and no injuries. When they come to, they'll be safe. And far away from whatever comes next."

Vivian sighed. "It's a good call. It's just..." she looked back again. "They were used like pawns tonight. And when they wake up, what then? The Mist are furious right now. Who knows how they're going to respond? There's no way I'd call Simon and Nina safe.... much less the three of us for that matter."

"Yeah," I said quietly. "When the Mist want something, they'll go to extreme lengths to get it."

Vivian leaned her head against the window, voice low. "Declan... they're going to retaliate for sure. But it'll be worse next time. Much worse. What are we going to do?"

I stared ahead, jaw tight.

"I gotta take this to my father," I said finally. "If anyone can negotiate a truce or any measurable line of sanity with the Mist, it's him."

Garrick nodded. "He's the only one they'd even consider having a civilized parlay with."

Vivian exhaled. "Let's hope he's in the mood for diplomacy."

We pulled up to the emergency entrance of the downtown hospital. There were still a few hours before sunrise. The lot was quiet, just a few ambulances and a tired crew of night-shift nurses I could see moving back and forth behind the sliding glass entrance doors.

Garrick helped me guide Simon and Nina out of the car, each of them still dazed but mobile enough to walk with support.

We propped them up gently on the bench just inside the ER entrance.

“I left a note in Simon’s coat pocket,” Vivian said, brushing Nina’s hair back one last time. “It says they were found wandering near the waterfront – confused but unharmed. No ID, no explanation.”

“They’ll run the usual tests,” Garrick added. “Scan for substances, maybe run a psych eval when they wake up. But nothing will come up.”

I nodded. “Which is good. Because this isn’t something you can treat with pills and therapy.”

We watched from the car until a nurse came outside, spotted them, and rushed back in to alert the front desk.

Then we left.

By the time we got back to Garrick’s shop, the first fingers of daylight were curling over the skyline. He unlocked the back entrance with a grunt and led us inside. The scent of iron, dust, and spell-laced oil clung to the air like an old coat.

None of us said much as we shed our jackets and made our way to the back room. I was exhausted, but my mind was wired, restless. We’d somehow managed to deceive the Mist –

masters of deception in their own right. We rescued Simona and Nina while not being forced to give up the amulet. It felt like a major win, but we hadn't won. We'd only delayed whatever was coming next.

"I'm going to start digging again," Garrick said, moving toward his book collection. "That amulet still has more secrets to give, and I don't like walking blind."

Garrick returned holding a heavy, dust-caked grimoire. He dropped it on the table with a solid thump. "This," he said, brushing off the cover, "is where I saw that glyph before."

He flipped through the pages, stopping at a full-color illustration of a similar violet gemstone encased in amber. The same shape as the amulet in my coat pocket.

I pulled the amulet free and laid it beside the illustration. Identical.

"There's a passage," he said, tapping the right-hand page. "Written in Fae. Pretty old dialect, but I think it says..."

He squinted, then carefully sounded it out. "Satia mirian thu'riel."

"What does it mean?" I asked.

He glanced up. "Roughly? 'From this world to the next. Across the veil between realms.'"

My breath caught. "So, it really is a realm-walker amulet. Not just teleportation across space, but... through dimensions."

“Seems so,” Garrick said. “But activating a realm-jump spell is not like a point-to-point teleport. You’ve got some pretty incredible natural ability, I’ll grant you that. But realm walking is going to require some serious intent. An intense focus on not only where you’re going but where you’re coming from. You could wind up conjuring a portal to a dimension without time for all we know – and be stuck there for all eternity.”

I studied the book again. An illustration on the next page showed what seemed to be some sort of sacred site, surrounded by jagged stones formed in a circle. It looked like a rendition of the popular Celtic ritual site Stonehenge – well, Stonehenge as you might imagine it would have looked perfectly constructed and covered in Fae inscriptions.

The image somehow sparked an immediate connection in my mind. It was far from a precise connection though. It was like opening a file folder with 1,000 picture files inside. You’ve seen the picture before, and you’re sure you’re in the right spot but clueless as to which file contains the image you’re looking for.

“I think I’ve seen this before.” I said shockingly. “Or something like it at least. In a dream. Maybe. Or... maybe not a dream... I don’t know. But this is eerily familiar to me.”

Vivian leaned in. “Are you saying you’ve been there before?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “But I definitely feel some sort of connection to this place.”

I stood and took the amulet in hand again. The violet gem pulsed, almost in sync with my heartbeat.

“I want to give it a try.”

Garrick raised an eyebrow. “Hold on there buddy. I don’t know if that’s a good idea.”

“Yeah. I know it’s dangerous, but I can’t explain it. It’s like it’s calling to me or something.”

Vivian interjected. Her voice tinged with both fatigue and concern. “Declan... How about we just take a rest and rethink this whole thing in the morning with a fresh head. We’ve had enough excitement for one night, don’t you think?”

Her sense of reason was not lost on me, but I couldn’t explain to either of them what I was feeling. It was as if the image in the book were begging me to come and find it. But not as if for the first time. More like as if to reunite with an old friend. I picked up the book holding it open at the page with the portal glyph and the picture of the sacred site. I stared at the sketch, letting my mind get lost in the image – as if I were really there walking amongst the monstrous stone pillars.

Then I focused.

“Satia mirian thu'riel.” I whispered.

The air in the center of the room shimmered.

Then, with a soft crack, it tore.

A glowing rift opened before me, spiraling outward, shimmering like a black whirlpool of water stretched over light. I stepped back, the amulet almost burning with warmth in my palm.

Vivian stood slowly. “Holy Shit! Is that a...?”

“It’s Waypoint,” I said, barely able to hear my own voice over the thrum in my chest.

“Conjured out of thin air.”

The rift pulsed. Silent. Waiting. Calling even.

This wasn’t just an open door to another world – it felt like an open invitation.

To where, I had no idea. Yet it felt so familiar to me.

I knew the risks, but for some reason I couldn’t explain, it didn’t feel like a risk at all.

I was about to find out.

Countdown

This is a stunning transposition effect of mine that has been a long-standing example of the power of simplification for me. When I was a young burgeoning magician, I had developed an effect that made use of several gimmicks – a trim card, a duplicate and double-sided sticky tape. This was a lot to have set up for one simple transposition effect. Stunning as the effect was, it was still an overcomplicated, impractical method for accomplishing the feat. *Countdown* showcases my final evolution of this original effect. It accomplishes the same result as my original handling while only requiring a tip over change and a simple overhand shuffle control. It exemplifies the simplification of my thought process over time regarding my methodology for card trick construction.

Start by having the deck thoroughly shuffled by your participant. Take the deck back *face down* in your left hand and bring your right hand over for an overhand grip. Perform a pinky pull down of the bottom card with your left pinky and then transfer it to a thumb-break with your right thumb. See Figure 1.

Fig 1.



Begin riffling down the top left corner of the deck with your left thumb, inviting your participant to call stop whenever they would like. When they say stop, separate the top portion from the bottom portion by lifting the top portion up with your right index finger and swinging it over to the

left. Grasp this top portion of cards in the crotch of your left hand as seen in Figure 2 and then bring this portion now to bottom, leaving it hovering just below and a little to the left of the right-hand packet.

Fig 2.



Now ask your participant to call out any random number between 1 and 10. Let's say they call out the number 4. With the left thumb, peel off cards from the right-hand packet to the left-hand packet equal to the number they call out. In this case, peel off 4 cards as seen in Figure 3.

Fig 3.



Fig 4.



When you finish counting, you are going to expose the top card of the left-hand packet to your participant. With the right fingers over top, jog the top card of the left-hand packet forward as seen in Figure 4.

You are now going to turn your wrist clockwise to show the out-jogged card to your participant so that they can secretly view the selection. In the process of turning your hand over, the right hand secretly deposits the bottom card at the thumb-break on top of the left-hand packet. See Figure 5.

Fig 5.



You want the identity of the card to remain a secret to you, so turn your head away as you show the out-jogged card to your participant. Have them commit the card they see too memory. When this is done, your left wrist is going to turn back counterclockwise to its

original position. As this happens, the left index finger pushes the out-jogged card in flush with the packet.

This will leave the card originally held by your thumb-break on top – but your participant will believe it to be the card they just saw. **Note:** *This move is essentially a tip over change without the tip over part.* Immediately push over the top card of the left-hand packet with your left thumb and insert it into the middle of the right-hand packet. Now offer the right-hand packet to your participant to hold on to. As it stands now, the card your participant secretly selected and viewed is on top of your packet, but your participant believes it to be in the middle of the packet that they are holding.

Now you are going to suggest an exercise in imagination which you say will help your participant to locate their own card – as if by magic. Ask your participant to think of a new number between 1 and 10 and call it out. Let's say they say the number 7. Tell them to think of their card and imagine that the number 7 is slowly circling around it.

Also explain that they are to shuffle the cards as they are imagining this. You will demonstrate a casual overhand shuffle to show the participant how to shuffle the cards, though it really matters not how they prefer to shuffle their cards. What matters is that you perform a controlled jog-shuffle of the top card of your packet to the 7th position when you shuffle your cards.

To do this, simply perform an overhand shuffle running the first 7 cards one at a time into the left hand. When you reach the 8th card, you will in-jog it slightly and then shuffle off the rest at random on top – as seen in Figure 6.

Fig 6.



Now, with your right thumb and fingers, simply grab the 7 cards beneath the in-jogged card and throw them on top of the packet. Your participant's card is now at the 7th position of your packet. This should be done quickly and then set your cards *face down* on the table off

to the side. You want to keep the attention on your participant as they shuffle. Tell your

participant to just focus on the number 7 circling around their card as they shuffle and to stop whenever they feel good about the shuffle.

When they have finished, recap that they imagined circling the number 7 around their card (a card only they know the identity of) as they shuffled their packet. Ask if your participant would find it amazing if they now found their card to be at the 7th position of their packet. Would they believe it to be just a coincidence? Have them deal cards *face up* on to the table one at a time counting to the 7th card. Have them deal in an overlapping row so that each card can be seen laid out on the table. When they reach the 7th card, it will not be their card – obviously.

None of the cards seen will be their card. Feign mild disappointment but then follow that up with an attitude of optimism stating that maybe their card has fallen at an *interval* of 7. Have your participant deal 7 more cards *face up* on the table. Again, the 7th card will not be their card, and none of the other cards shown will be their card either. Continue in this manner until your participant runs out of cards. This will be a moment to act as surprised as your participant should be. Not only did their card not show up at any of the 7th position, it isn't among any of the cards in your participant's packet.

Act confused as you say “you mean your card isn't any of these cards? But you shuffled your card into your packet, right?” They will agree. Raise your eyebrows and act as though an impossible thought has just come to your head. Ask your participant to name what their card was. Let's say it was the 8 of Hearts. Your packet should still be *face down* off to the side. Do not touch it. Present to your participant the impossible circumstance of their 8 of Hearts having somehow made its way to the 7th position of the wrong packet of cards. Have

your participant count down to the 7th position of your packet. They will be amazed to discover their card. Say “Wow, you did it after all. We just need to work a little bit on your aim.”

Treducio

This effect is one that I created shortly after discovering the delights of the automatic placement principle, a card concept you should be familiar with. I call it Treducio because my effect makes use of a 3 and a 2. This effect is best suited for 2 participants. Also, for this particular handling of the automatic placement principle, you will require both Jokers to be present in the deck. You will need all 52 cards plus the two jokers. I recommend starting with your two Jokers in a positioned towards the very bottom of the deck. This will eliminate the possibility of them being accidentally selected during the selection process. Finally, you will need to have any 3-spot on top of the deck followed by any 2-spot. The entire deck is *face down*. You are ready to begin.

Have your 2 participants seated, one to your left and one to your right. State that you are going to try a little experiment to test and see if your 2 participants are in tune with one another. You start by having participant A select a card using a *cut deeper force*. Have participant A cut off a small packet of cards from the deck and turn them over *face up* putting them back on top of the deck. Now, have your participant cut a little bit deeper and flip those cards *face up* and place them back on top of the deck. Spread through the cards. There will be a run of all *face up* cards that will eventually end at the first *face down* card.

Tell your participant that they cut freely, but all these *face up* cards are not what we're looking for. You want them to take the first *face down* card. Slide this card *face down* in front of them. Have them slide it to the side allowing it to remain a mystery until later. It will be the 3-spot card you placed on top of the deck to begin the trick, but they will have no idea what it is.

Turn the *face up* cards *face down* and cut them to the middle of the deck. Now perform the same cut deeper procedure again but with participant B. This will leave participant B with the 2-spot that was at the second position at the start of the trick. It will also remain a secret staying *face down* near participant B until later. Turn the *face up* cards *face down* and cut them to the middle of the deck as well. At this point, you can shuffle the cards casually – making sure you leave the Jokers near the bottom of the deck. Invite participant A to secretly cut off a small packet of cards (specify less than 20) from the top of the deck and hide them in her lap under the table. You will not watch. Ask her to secretly count how many cards she cut off and remember that number. You will again not watch and do not want to know what this number is.

Have participant A secretly whisper this number to participant B. State that this is so that they can both try to attune with one another and be able to follow along with the following procedure together. Once this is done, deal the top 20 cards of the deck *face up* in an overlapping row on the table for all to see. State that both participants are thinking of a number, and that they are about to associate that number with one of these *face up* cards. You have laid out 20 cards because your participant should not have cut off more than 20 cards from the deck. Tell them that they are now to remember what card falls at the

position equal to the secret number they are both thinking of. *I.E. If they are thinking of the number 8 – they will take note and remember the card that is at the 8th position.*

You will count the *face up* cards one at a time so that your participants can follow. If you dealt overlapping cards from left to right, you will count from left to right as well. If you dealt right to left, you will need to count right to left. Say that you will count out loud all the cards one at a time in order. When you reach the position equal to the number they are secretly thinking of – they are to remember that card. State that you do not want to see any visual cues from your participants, so you will be looking down and counting the entire time. Your participants are not to make any noises or indications when you count to their card. They are to simply allow you to count all the cards, giving no indication as to which one their card is.

You will now slowly count each card in the row; touching each one as you go. When you are finished, ask if they now know the card that falls at the position of their secret number.

Confirm that they are both thinking of the same card now by having them whisper it secretly to each other. When this is confirmed, collect all the *face up* cards (without changing the order) and place them *face down* at the bottom of the rest of the deck still in your left hand. This part is important. The dealt cards must go to the bottom of the deck. At this point, I like to recap what has happened by bringing attention to the fact that both participants have together come up with a secret number and have used that number to arrive at a secret card selection that they both know the identity of.

When they confirm, you will have both participants take part in cutting the deck. You will be using a Jay Ose false cut with both of your participants to do this. This is because as the

deck stands now, it is already in perfect condition for the automatic placement procedure. Holding the deck *face down*, have participant A cut off about a third of the deck and place it down on the table. Then have participant B cut off about half of the remaining cards in your hand and place them *face down* on the table to the right of the first packet.

Place the rest of the cards in your hand down to the right side of these. Pause for a moment as if to inspect the accuracy of the cuts, then stack the far-left packet on top of the packet to the right. Then stack that packet on top of the packet to the right of that. This is a completely false cut, but it looks completely fair. The cards are still in the same order, but both of your participants will feel as if they have taken part in a fair cutting procedure.

Now, the deck is set, but you need to first bring attention back to the two *face down* cards that were selected at the very start of the routing. Have participant A flip over and reveal her card. It will be the 3-spot card. Call out that it is a 3. Make no mention of its suit. Next, have participant B reveal their face down card. It will be the 2-spot. Call out that it is a 2 also making no mention of the suit. Now recap that they both had free selection of these cards at the beginning of the effect. No one could have known what they would be. Say that “we have a 3 and a 2. Together that makes 32.”

Now, recap that this whole ordeal has been an exercise in seeing if the two of your participants are in tune with one another. They have both taken part in the selection of a card and have cut it to a random position in the deck. We now are presented with a random number 32. Count down slowly and fairly to the 32nd card. Ask your participants to call out what their secret card was and ask if it would be amazing if the 32nd card were their card. It will be. That’s the automatic placement principle for you.

Automatic placement breakdown – If you follow the above procedure exactly, your participants card will always arrive at the 32nd position. There are a few conditions that must be met though.

1. At the beginning, when asked to secretly cut off a small packet of cards – it must be less than 20 cards.
2. When dealing the cards overlapping and *face up* on the table – you must deal exactly 20 cards.
3. After the selection process, these 20 cards must be placed (face down, in order) at the bottom of the deck.
4. There must be exactly 52 cards used for the effect.

Important Note: In this application of the automatic placement principle, a 3-spot and a 2-spot are removed from the deck at the beginning. This brings the total number of cards left over to 50. To correct this, I added the two Jokers – bringing the count back to 52.

Furthermore, you are free to play with the numbers to create your own effects using this principle. It all depends on how many cards are in your hand and how many cards you deal out. For example: Let's say you just did away with the whole 2 and 3-spot selection at the beginning of the trick. Instead, you just had your participant cut off a small packet of cards, remember the number of cards they cut, then remember the card that falls at the position of that number. If you are using a deck with 52 cards, their card will always arrive at position 32. If you added the 2 Jokers to the mix, their card would arrive at the 34th

position. Take one Joker away – 33rd position and so on. The automatic placement principle offers a lot of room for creativity.

Duo Detective

This is essentially a sandwich effect that uses two Jokers. The Jokers are presented as two magical detectives, who set out to solve a case. You will need your two Jokers placed *face down* on the table off to the side before beginning the effect. Have your participant shuffle the deck and return it to you but do not call attention to the 2 Jokers just yet.

To start, you are going to offer your participant to secretly select a card. You will do this by preparing for a tip over change (the same change detailed above for the *Countdown* effect.). Perform a pinky pulldown of the bottom card with the left pinky finger and transfer it to a thumb-break with the right thumb in an overhand grip. Riffle down the top left corner of the deck inviting your participant to call stop whenever they would like. When they do, separate the top portion from the bottom portion by lifting the top portion up with your right index finger and swinging it over to the left. Grasp this top portion of cards in the crotch of your left hand bringing it to the bottom, leaving it hovering just below and a little to the left.

Now ask your participant to call out any random number between 1 and 10. Let's say they call out the number 5. With the left thumb, peel off cards from the right-hand packet to the left-hand packet equal to the number they call out. In this case, thumb off 5 cards. Now use

the right fingers from over the top to slide the top card of bottom portion packet forward about halfway.

Drop the bottom card held by your thumb-break on top of the bottom portion as you simultaneously turn the left wrist clockwise to expose the protruding card to your participant to secretly observe and remember. When they do, turn your left hand back counterclockwise while pushing in the protruding card with your left index finger as you do so. The left thumb then immediately pushes over the top card to the right and then inserts it into the middle of the packet held in the right hand. The right-hand packet is then handed to your participant to hold on to.

Your participant should feel as though they have randomly selected a card, secretly viewed it and are now holding on to it within the packet in their hands. You will present this situation as if they have just witnessed a crime and therefore know the identity of the perpetrator (represented by the card they secretly saw). Not only that, but they know what neighborhood the perpetrator lives in. The neighborhood will be represented by the packet of cards they are holding. Say that the police are now on the case. And like any good case, you need a couple of good detectives. Reach over and pick up the two Jokers holding them *face down* as one in your right fingers. As you do this, in your left hand, slightly push over the top card to the right with your left thumb and then immediately pull it back inserting your pinky finger underneath the top card, holding a pinky break beneath it.

Flip the first Joker over *face up* and place it on top of the left-hand packet, aligning it with the top card held by the pinky break. Flip the second Joker *face up* and add it to the top as well. State that these two detectives are the best in the business and they always work

together. As you say this, begin to lift the 3-card packet as one with the right hand in an overhand grip. As you lift away the packet, the left thumb will drag the top Joker off to the left, letting it slide down onto the left-hand packet slightly protruding to the right. See Figure 7.

Fig 7.



The right hand then grips the bottom Joker between the thumb and middle finger, holding both from over the top as seen in Figure 8.

Fig 8.



Your participant's secretly viewed card is being secretly held underneath the top Joker. You are now going to place the 2 Jokers on the table. The following manner is the easiest way to do this without having the cards separate exposing the *face down* card already between them. Hover the cards about a half

inch above the table and let the middle finger drop the top edge of the cards down onto table. On the back end, the cards will be held in place by the thumb at the rear and the index finger applying slight downward directional force from the top. See Figure 9.

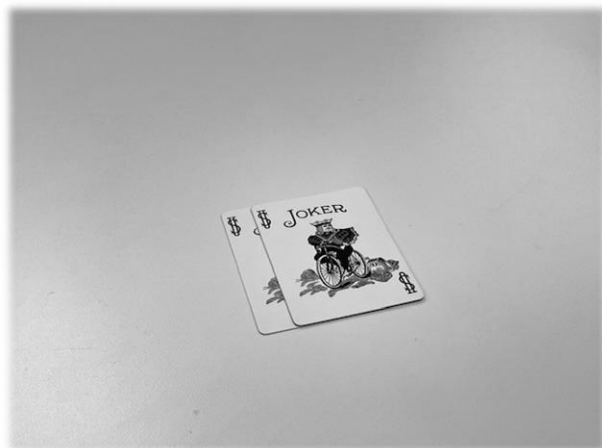
Fig 9.



Now release the pressure with your index finger as you simultaneously push the cards forward with the right thumb. This may take a little practice for you to develop a level of fluidity in the procedure but doing it this way will help keep your cards aligned. The tabled

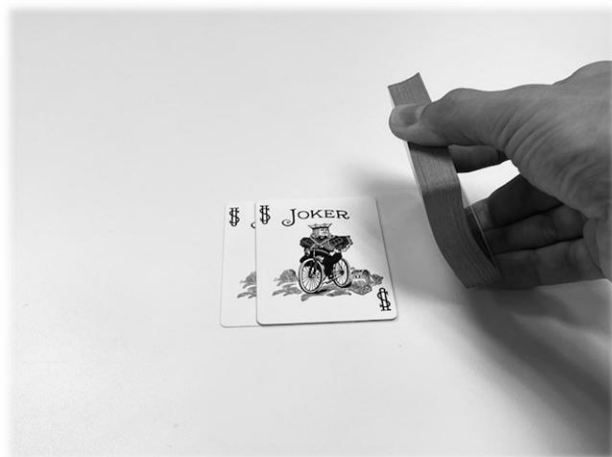
Jokers should now look as they do in fig 10.

Fig 10.



When you place the Jokers down, state that “no one knows how they do it. They just go out, work their magic, and always seem to catch the bad guy.” Bring the leftover cards in your hand over to your right hand in a lateral overhand grip and hold them over the Jokers as seen in Figure 1.

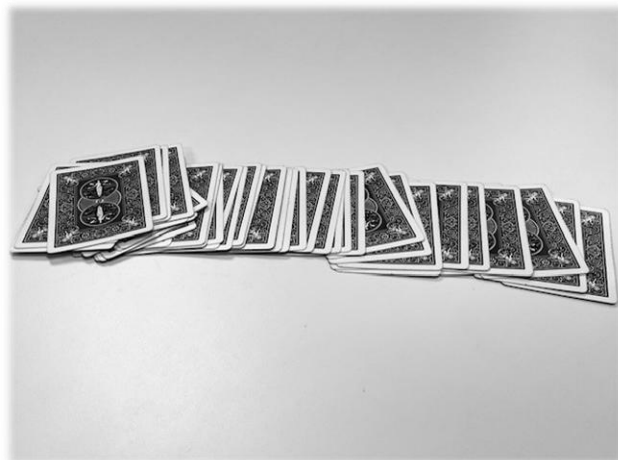
Fig 11.



State that “that’s just it though. They use magic.” You are now going to let the cards spring to the left and over the top of the Jokers by releasing pressure from your right-thumb. You don’t want to hold the right-hand packet too far to the right of the Jokers so as to allow for the possibility of

one of the cards to accidentally shoot in-between the Jokers. You want to spring them out over the top of the Jokers as seen in Figure 12.

Fig 12.



You already have a *face down* card secretly hidden between the 2 Jokers. When you remove the mess of cards on top, you can now show that one card has magically been caught between the Jokers. Gather the remaining cards and move them to the side. Leave the 2 Jokers *face up* on the table

showing the *face down* card between them. State that “it doesn’t take them long and they’re back at the station with their guy.”

Before revealing the *face down* card, tell your participant that “they have already come to the station and have given the police a description of the perpetrator and his whereabouts.” Have your participant shuffle the cards in their hands and then spread them. Now reach in and remove 4 cards at random, presenting them as the usual suspects already apprehended by the police.

Continue by saying that “the police have brought them to the station where you are to point out the perpetrator from a line up.” Flip over the 4 cards placing them *face up* in a line on the table. Ask your participant if any of the cards in the line are the perpetrator they saw (the card they secretly viewed at the beginning). They will say no. Ask your participant to finally reveal what the name of the card was. When they do, you can slowly flip over the *face down* card between the 2 Jokers in dramatic fashion showing how the magic detectives always find their man.

Shadowcast

Shadowcast is an interesting transposition effect that makes use of a secret subtraction sleight I created. I have never seen this method before in any literature that I've ever read, but then again, the amount of magic literature out there borders on astronomical. I'd be far from the only magician who's stumbled across a new method on their own only to discover later that someone else stumbled across the same method 100 years ago. Within the context of this trick, I call it the *Shadow Subtraction*, since the move happens under the shadow up the cards on top.

The effect starts with any 4 of a kind *face down* on top of the deck. For this example, let's go with the 4 kings. Tell your participant that you are going to have them select 4 random cards and then narrow that selection down to just 1 card. Slowly spread the cards *face down* and invite your participant to *touch* any card as you spread from your left hand to your right hand. You will want to do a block push over of the top 4 cards to avoid having your participant accidentally select one of the top 4 kings.

When your participant touches a card, out-jog that card forward and then continue slowly spreading, allowing your participant to touch another card. When they do, out-jog this card to the front as well and continue spreading. Do the same when the third card is touched. When the fourth card is touched, you will out-jog it as you did the other three cards, but you will not out-jog it nearly as far. You will now quickly close the spread, leaving the out-jogged cards exposed from the pack.

From underneath, Figure 13 shows an exposed view of how the bottom out-jogged card is only out-jogged far enough for you to reach the end of it with your left index finger.

Fig 13.



This all happens beneath the cover of the top out-jogged cards.

Your right hand is now going to come over to the left-side in overhand style and strip the out-jogged cards out towards the right in an arcing motion. As this happens, the left index finger is going to secretly push the bottom card back into the deck. This all happens in one motion. See Figure 14.

Fig 14.



Your participant will believe you have stripped out all 4 cards but really there are only 3. The cards you strip out are then immediately thrown *face down* on top of the deck. You will now spread over the top 4 cards and toss them *face down* to your participant to observe. The bottom card

will be one of the kings. To your participant, it will appear as if the king is only one of the 4 randomly selected cards. As your participant looks at the cards, grab a pinky break with your left pinky finger beneath the top 3 cards of the deck (the 3 kings).

Take the 4 cards back from your participant *face up* in a casual manner for you to look over. As you look over the cards, remark that they seem to be a pretty random selection of cards. As you say this, you need to casually shuffle or sift through these 4 cards in a way that brings the king to the bottom of the *face up* group of 4 cards.

Once this is done, place them on top of the deck aligning them squarely to your pinky-break of the top 3 cards. You are now going to identify each of the 4 *face up* cards using a secret addition method.

With the right hand in overhand grip, pick up all the cards at the break. Call out the identity of the card. Then with your left thumb, strip off the top card to the left while using the right-hand packet to flip it over *face down* onto the left-hand packet. You will do the same

thing for the next card. Call out the identity of the card, strip it off, flip it over *face down* onto the left-hand packet. When you get to the third card, you will call out its identity, but when you flip it over *face down* with the right-hand packet, you will immediately drop all the cards left in your right hand on top of the left-hand packet. Immediately, you will then push over the top *face up* card with your left thumb calling out its identity and then flip it *face down* on top of everything. The 4 random cards have now been secretly switched for the 4 kings which are now on top of the deck.

Deal these 4 cards into a pile onto the table. If you have followed along correctly, the bottom card should be the king that your participant has already seen. This is the card you are now going to force him to select using the *Countaround Force* detailed in volume 1. State that, as you said before, you are now going to have your participant randomly select only 1 card of the 4. State that you have devised one of the most random ways possible to do this.

Pick the cards up and openly give them a quick mix. What you are really doing is mixing the cards in a way that moves the bottom card to the second from bottom position. This should be easy to track given that you are only mixing 4 cards. Now state that you are going to count backwards from ten and that your participant can call stop whenever they would like. Draw the top card off the packet and move it to the bottom, calling out the number 10 as you do so. Next, draw the new top card off and move it to the bottom, calling out the number 9 as you do so. Continue in this way counting backwards from 10 moving each card to the bottom as you count until your participant calls stop. Let's say they stop at the number 6.

Say “Great, since you stopped at the number 6. I will give you the 6th card.” Now you will count to the 6th card, moving the top card to the bottom one at a time as you count – this time from 1 to 6. You will place the 6th card *face up* on the table for all to see. It will be the king that they have already seen before. Let’s say it is a King of Hearts. Say “You have arrived at the King of Hearts. You can’t get much more random than that.” Place the 3 left over cards *face down* on the table near you as one and pick up the *face up* King of Hearts.

Recap that all the selections were made randomly by your participant. No one could have known the 4 cards he would have selected, and no one could have known which one he would have selected from the 4. You have ultimately arrived at the King of Hearts. Say this as you display it openly *face up*, hovering over the left-over *face down* packet of 3 cards. If you have any decent light source above you, the King of Hearts should at least cast a faint shadow onto the table. The shadow will be darker the closer you bring the card to the table. Hover the card over the tabled packet calling attention to the shadow being cast. Align the shadow directly over the tabled packet leaving it there for a few seconds and then snap your fingers. You can now turn over the other 3 cards showing that they have now magically transformed into the other 3 kings.