

Well it was 6 moons later and time to go and see exactly what Gaia had meant by “Harvesting the Cyst” a job given to us “growths” cos we were unfettered by the rules that stopped anyone from the Plane of Unshed Tears from doin’ it.

Me thanks to Bloodbark, Spark, Nathan, Wolf, Kevy, Lan, Balthy and Puke for comin’ along. And me brother Caedere of course. Don’t reckon I’ve bin with a bunch o’ people who did stuff so well without really knowin each other for a long time.

So trusting that the “ways would be opened” we walked back to where we were lookin’ for the rangers last time, up on the south edge of the Greenheart. Sure enough we popped across to the Plane of Unshed Tears.

All the time we were there, up until we had released the cyst, it seems we couldn’t die properly. Everyone got back up mostly fine, and without losing any spirit strength. However we didn’t trust it so we did our damndest not to get chopped.

We travelled in, looking for the building we were stayin’ in last time, but it weren’t anywhere around. But we did find an open barn with some tarps to shelter under. That evening we were attacked by Hierophant Sunset, as we were a bunch of “oathbreakers”. Cos we had to talk about the “hidden” group of Silvani who were working together (Nar and Sol) the Blood Oath we made was broken. So they decided to kill us. Anyway we sorted it out and apologised an’ he let us off, or we’d have had to kill ‘im instead.

He had to really cos he’d been given orders in a big Hierophant Moot to give us our task on behalf of Gaia, the Very Bones of the Earth. Basically we had to travel to the Tombs of the Dead, collect four essences and then do a ritual at the right time and in the right place to create the Construct, whatever that was. Then it would grab the Cyst into itself and allow us to Harvest it. He said a guide would come the next day to take us where we needed to go and tell us what to do. He told us it had been hard for him to get a decent stock of undead recently and didn’t know why. Then he hopped off sharpish as we were attacked by some undead.

Now this lot happened to be Rolu’s, who once we’d all recognised each other, released their spirits and said hello. Like always he was a bit “you should know that already” and stuff which I have always found really unhelpful of him, but it was nice ta see him and its just his way. Really all he told us was that he didn’t know about any of this Gaia and Cyst

stuff cos he's bin getting the Mor-Silvani off plane. He was definite that he was goin' to actually take his place with the Kalid, and was comin' to Orin Rakatha the next day, cos his task was done. He asked us to join him with the Kalid, and I asked him to come back to the Valley, but we both said no. He did nothin' to put my worries that what we were doin' for Gaia was goin' ta help Kerney Oakrot though. He was like us really sus of the whole thing, but then he weren't actually from there either. Also he told us that the Nar and Sol Silvani were goin' around killin' all the undead.

Next day New-Shmu appeared, a construct of Gaia's to take us where we needed ta go. But before we could leave the Duke from last time turned up and decided ta give us a kickin' for being on the Hierophant's side. His scout had overheard me and Spark and Nathan chattin' about stuff, so there was no persuading him ta lay off. So we chopped him and his cronies, with a bit of encouragement from Nathan. Actually they weren't as tough as we had thought, or maybe its us that have got better? That also let us settle a bit of business that I will let others talk about if they want to. We gathered from their rants that the Hierophants had been missin' for 6 months and everything was falling apart and they thought they had been betrayed, so were doin' in anyone that had anything to do with them. Like us.

So off we trooped to the Tombs of the Dead. We travelled a bit then crossed a bridge guarded by a couple of statues that were unkillable. You just had to get past them. Anyone who tried to cross the stream without usin' the bridge ended up somewhere else, so we all had ta use the bridge. On the other side we did some castin', but got attacked by some dead and undead. We got a bit mullered due ta some confusion and some bad thinkin', but won through.

One of the dead that we met didn't fight us, but turned out ta be a dead Hierophant. He 'ad been there dead for "too long" and knew something was wrong! He wanted to leave and said he would help us if we helped him. We told him why we were there and said we thought it would help him if we were able to do it, that we thought it might reverse what was wrong. So he made us look like the dead with Masks of Death, cos the dead there were under a compulsion to seek out and destroy any living thing. Now they'd think we were dead too. He said he'd meet us later when we finished. He also put me mind at rest about being on Kerny Oakrot's side. I realised I had to concentrate on what Gaia wanted! Kerny was just another person, whereas Gaia was the Forest and the Bones of the Earth.

We moved on and met some people who were doin' shocks through their weapons. We had a real organised, almost civil, fight with them. Turns out that they were the first set of

Guards for the First Essence, that of the Heart, which started callin' to me from a huge tree nearby. Unfortunately some tougher things, one of which could make you bleed copiously from every pore and stop your heart too, guarded it. Ouch.

Anyway we got the essence and moved on, guided by New-Shmu. We met a dead'un, one of the Dukes men we killed earlier that day, who, cos he thought we were dead now, was quite pleasant and wished us well.

The next Essence was the Mind one. This had the outer guards too, followed by the big nasty with the Essence. Lots of brain hurting here – they would just look at you with their big eyes and your head blew up. Particularly the big Ram-headed one. That one could teleport or something too, just appearing out of nowhere. Lan found the Essence before the fight was over and ran away. But the thing just went after him and he couldn't get away. Lan got chopped into little pieces. But we defeated them and got the essence. Lan got up right as rain a few minutes later, nothin' to do with us, with only a minor wound or two to show for his beating. Very odd.

By this time we were quite well slapped around and needed a rest (we had some little fights along the way with undead and stuff). New-Shmu took us somewhere safe and we had a bit of nosh and a rest.

The next Essence was the Soul. Now this was quite funny lookin' back, but at the time was really not good. We got through a first guard, and then Kevy had these bad cramps and pain from where the Soul Spider had stuck its mandibles into her 6 moons ago. So Nathan had a look and declared that there was no possibility that anything was going to burst out of Kevralyn's stomach any time soon and we relaxed a bit. However pretty much no sooner than he had said this, a Soul Spider and clutch of Monstrous Spiders burst out of Kevralyn's stomach. Bathy met Susan three times, with a harm in there too, Bloodbark met Tod, the rest of us had a smattering of Harms, Diseases, Causes, Paralysis and all. Very painful. But we won through again and got the Essence.

Kevy was in bits, barely alive, but we made her better. She was kind of in two minds about the spiders, cos she worships the Spider Queen and was kind of their mum, but on the other hand... well you see my point. Spark had it down though – he stopped us all getting webbed by casting loads of shields of air. But it had taken pretty much everything we had.

Horray. Except that our Masks of Death had run out and a we got jumped by some undead and stuff. A few minutes later we were all lying in a pile of blinded, paralysed, diseased, nearly dead people, except for Lan who had made it away, but had dropped two of the Essences while running. We all lay still and thought dead thoughts and the dead things wandered off. We patched ourselves up as best we could and ran for it. We came back and found the Essences later.

There was no way we were goin' ta be able to get the last Essence so we hid in a shack we found. The dead Hierophant visited again and apologised about his masks. He thought that they would last longer, but he had said that he didn't really understand how long they would last cos we were outsiders. Anyway he redid a more permanent version, but one that would cost us power that we wouldn't be able to get back. Nathan put up a ward so he could force things out of it when he wanted and we slept a cold night under the stars.

Now all this time we had been harried by the Snake-heads, the Yuanti, who always seemed to have some Elemental things with them and could make your brain hurt too. They didn't want us to do what we were there to do, Harvest the Cyst, and were trying everything to stop us. Each time we chopped them up though, and each time they sent more. That morning we faced some more of these and Nathan's ward did a great job!

Chatted a bit with some more dead and got ready for the next two essences. Found out that the Nar and Sol were now working together, even though they still didn't really like each other. Caedere arrived to, lead into the Tombs by New-Shmu.

Then off we went to get the last Essence, the one of the Body. It took a while and we did quite a lot of OFAT, and it was guarded a bit more than the others, but we won through and gathered the last one, and went back to the shack for some nosh before doing the big ritual at sunset.

Time to leave for the ritual site came and off we went. Only to be confronted with the leader of the Yuanti and a Medusa and a bunch of her men and some elementals. Well we won, but not before she had shown us that she could teleport around like a mad thing too! Luckily one time she popped the medusa over behind the party, but then left it there. That was nice for us! It meant Lan could really chop into it one on one, until he got turned to

stone. Wolf did to and someone else, but Puke dispelled one and the others wore off eventually. Anyway we dealt with them and moved on to the place where the ritual was to be done.

We found what looked to be halfway between a ruined castle and a cave in a cliff face. New-Shmu said that it was to be done here and the Essences were opened in the right order to do the ritual. Upon which a load of people appeared behind us, and a voice came from inside, challenging us. It was a Green Knight, and I told it what we were there for. It accepted our terms and came out fighting!

We did for it and its men, but this was just the time for the Cyst to spill its contents out into the body of the Knight, and it became a horrible twisted thing of Corruption. We all fell to a Fatal Disease, except Balthy who shouted "for the King" and remained standing and Nathan who had of course nipped off to Meditate during the fight. But there weren't enough power or time to cure everyone. So we pretty much lay there dying.

Then Gaia appeared from the Forest and told us we had started something that would quickly kill the forest were the task not completed, for the corruption had left the Tombs of the Dead. It said we must hunt the corruption down during daylight, when it was weakest, and that should this be done the forest would be saved. You have to remember that the forest was dying anyway, just slower. Gaia's presence revived us, but we were left with the disease infecting the forest.

So, broken and sore, we were lead out of the Tombs back to the barn where we had stayed before entering, and slept the night. That morning we were once again visited by the Hierophant, but of course now he had escaped the Tombs. He released the Masks of Death and told us that only very rarely had he ever met people who would help others without asking for any return. We had told him before that had no Hierophant, no one to guide us. Out of the blue he offered to come to our world and aid us, should we wish it, in the same spirit. Nathan, as a High Priest in the Valley alliance, invited him to come and speak with Raucus, and I seconded it as the highest ranked Druid there, though obviously I cannot officially speak for our sect. Cheers Nathan for doing that.

Then we went to hunt the Corruption.

Well we found it. Along with a bunch of its corrupt cronies. It was a Knight of Disease, and started with greeting us with an Unholy Word, Contagiatus or something. All the Good people fell over and the rest of us thought: "bugger" as we ran to stand over them. However their charge only reached us after they started to stand up again, as Balthy had strode forward to meet the Knight.

So we fought it, and its mates including the unranked Spirit of Disease which was doing a really nasty disease to anyone who hit it, and a fatal one to anyone who did anything really threatening, like a Cure Major Disease invocation, of which we needed 6 to kill it.

Eventually we were left with the Knight alone, and it was raging, doing massive amounts of damage, disease and who knows what else with its unfeasibly large sword. At one point we thought we had it dead, but then it went all berserk and carried on choppin'.

Well eventually we took it down, and it formed a big pile of pus, which all was repelled away from the chain mail hauberk it was wearing. Turns out that the act o'killin it made its armour, and the person who wears it, immune to disease.

An' so we returned and re-traced the path back to where we came onto the Plane. The Hierophant, who never told us his name, cos he used to be a Dead-un, and the Dead should never reveal their names to the living, joined us and has come back to the Groves with me and Caedere and Bloodbark. Interesting chap, an' I think he is someone that may give us the focus we 'ave been lacking since Hunter was done for, or maybe even since the Valley Druid, now Rolu, disappeared.

And I didn't mention that now the corruption is purged, the Necromantic Sphere no longer eclipses the Nature Sphere there. It was right what we thought, that since the Eclipsing the Nature Sphere with the Necro one, and then the collaring of all the Mor-Silvani meaning there was little or no use of the Evil Sphere, the imbalance grew and grew, with all the corruption and nastiness just piling up until it threw the Natural process of life and death all out of wack and threatened to bring it all down. Gaia had it all stuck into a Cyst to keep it contained, but I guess you can only do that for a while, and eventually it needed lancing before it burst all on its own.

But who was the red elf we met last time that no one from the plane could see?

And what will the Hierophants do now that the Nature Sphere has changed again?

And who is goin' to take on all that evil sphere stuff, cos there ain't no Mor-Silvani there now at all? They are all here.

And what are they going to do about the Shadow Lords, who used to be their bosses back before this all started?

Lots o' questions still.

Anyway, welcome to, hopefully, our new Hierophant.

Bella Rossi
Druid