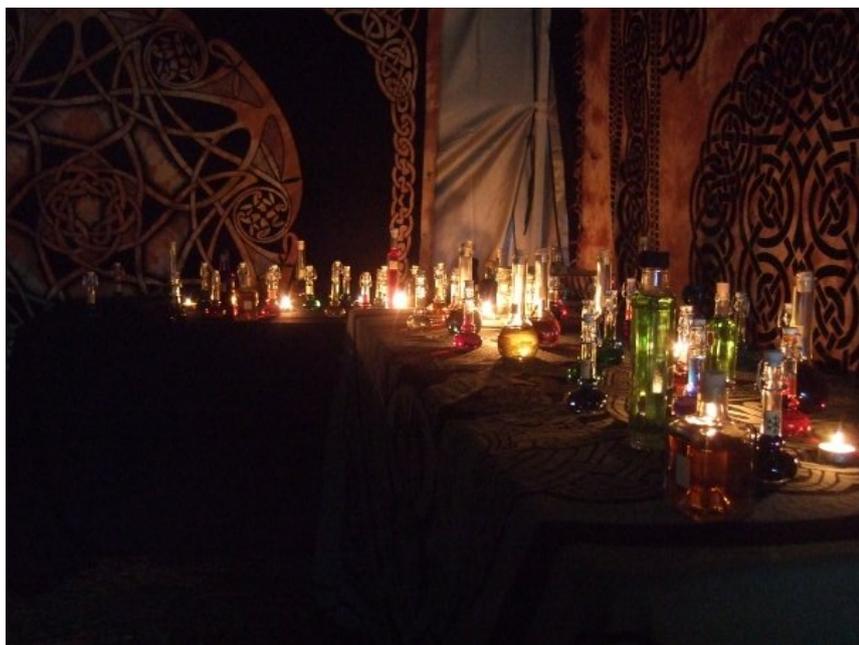


Moon Day – The Void

Within the Void, Khortaz, Teppic and myself could feel ourselves been drawn in a particular direction, that of Otion Wraithchild's Soul Garden. Without a firm location in mind, it is possible to wander within the Void for as long as you live, never finding anywhere.

We initially met some blank-faced creatures who presented little challenge, and the tugging drew us to the boundaries of what appeared to be a very overgrown garden, with one warrior standing guard. Due to the narrow path, we pushed him back with spiritual blows from Khortaz and Sir Kal, until he eventually fell and reformed at the entrance to the Soul Garden, where two other guardians stood to defend. As they could fight unceasingly, most of the group battled these creatures while a few people slipped past into the heart of the Soul Garden itself.



We were presented with the sight of, perhaps, one hundred many-hued bottles, glowing with the spiritual essences contained inside them. We needed to release every single essence to sever Otion Wraithchild's connection to his Agothian power. Opening one or two bottles at a time, we worked our way through them, sometimes releasing a creature (including a minotaur, mindflayer, Kalid scout, Halmadonian, abyssal creature and some others we could not even identify) but in the main unleashing a large number of spiritual invocations with occasional unfortunate effects.

We also found a large blue crystalline stone that, from knowledge gained within the library, we sought and the spiritual essence of a Vere (a large bleeding heart) that we would need to access the Agothian Experiment. As usual, Randolphin took care of these. We called upon our Spheres once more and focused on returning to the Hall of Heroes using the chant that allowed us to first traverse there.

Moon Day – Hall of Heroes

We returned safely to Lord Cardinaris's Lodge, where we found Sorceress Myrtle of the Temple of Earth. She had been banished to this realm by Wraithchild in the same way Cirith and Tancred had earlier. After dinner, we returned her back to Orin Rakatha.

We caused the Lodge's servant constructs some concern by setting up a ward around Lord Cardinaris's throne using Soul Candles that Lancorin had obtained from the library. We had knowledge of a ritual that would bind one particular named individual and prevent them from leaving the warded area. Thus, we keyed the ward to Lord Cardinaris.

We were alerted to the arrival of Duke Jurgen Zarn with a powerful Saldorean retinue nearby at a ruined castle nearby. For those who did not know him, Zarn was a red and green sorcerer, highly proficient with his sword and in the use of magics. When we fought him here, he cast unlimited vanishes on people, shields and so forth. It turned out that potent magical blades wounded him, and so Tersius and I eventually finished him off. We resurrected our fallen after this fight in the way required by the place we were in: by remembering out loud this person, their deeds, their bravery.

Back in the Lodge, we awaited the arrival of Lord Cardinaris. However, our presence here had finally been detected by the Agothians and the entrance to our building was ringed with our enemies who with one voice sounded our least-favourite chant: "We declare ourselves the Hollowed of Agoth!" To compound the situation, they were accompanied by a psionic Vere who was powered by three Soul Gardens (all intact): possibly the most powerful Vere of them all. There was a way to potentially entrap this creature, but it involved ushering her into a small trap close to the library using the Soul Candles we had bound in the ward against Cardinaris.

So began our hardest battle, with the Hollow Ones unleashing numerous evil invocations through their weapons and the Vere causing mayhem by possessing party member after party member, in addition to her other psionic powers. With resources running low, we picked off the Hollowed until there were but two guardians of the Vere who she animated by her psionic strength alone – these guardians were long since dead. Ezekial bravely stepped forward to take on the Vere himself, but her guardians proved too much for him and he fell in need of tending.

Eventually the Vere thanked us for the entertainment and departed, much amused.

The Lodge was a quiet place after that testing battle, and it was to a hushed building that Lord Cardinaris appeared, seated in his throne, hand upon the Staff of Doom. The conversation was initially genial and he seemed pleased at our continued progress against Agoth. Matters changed, however, when he rose and started forward to collect the Book of the Dead. With much anticipation, we watched him as he was repelled by the ward: the Soul Candles had bound him successfully.

Lord Cardinaris called upon me as an Ambassador to act in accord with the alliance between Wolfhold and the Dymwan, and thus to break this ward to grant him passage. I refused, and he dissolved this alliance, although he agreed to honour the pre-existing agreements made concerning Agoth, whom he wished destroyed.

The Dymwan Head then disappeared, this time taking with him the Staff of Doom, and the constructs within the Hut seemed to take on personalities, complaining about the duties they had been tasked with – rebelling as it were. We persuaded them to activate the wards on the building, and retired for the night.

Air Day – Hall of Heroes

The next morning, the Hut was barely recognisable – the constructs were dismantling it and it almost seemed to be 'breaking down' in front of our eyes, the altar gone and the decorations/dead bodies stripped from the main room. One suspicion is that this building was linked to the Staff of Doom, which one of the constructs had earlier said should always be present – we believe Lord Cardinaris had recalled the building, which was a change of plans, as a few days earlier he had requested I would return the summoning components to him.

The blue crystalline stone that we had claimed from the Soul Garden had the power to 'pool' spirit strength. Of our number, Ezekial was unable to be resurrected should he fall once more, and some others were in danger of coming close to their final deaths. Thus, we performed a ritual that was required to be in spell-distance of the library, reading the power words from the Book of Keys in a particular order. Barring Sulisong and Puke, each person present bound themselves in the ritual to preserve the lives of our fellows: the Spheres themselves would decide who would lose strength in their place.

We then performed the ritual that would take us to the Void, this time focusing on reaching the heart of the Agothian Experiment.

Air Day – The Void

Approaching the Experiment, we fought a few Agothian Soul Harvesters – tentacled-faced beasts that caused much trouble by possessing members of the party. Outside the Experiment building was more of the same, and some other Agothian followers whom we dispatched.

Opening the door to the Experiment let loose a thick white cloud of smoke: inside the building it was almost impossible to see the powerful white creatures that lurked inside. Far more disturbing was the barely-clothed form of Gil, the necromancer behind all these troubles – blood flowing through a tube that connected an enormous bulging brain with his head, a maniacal look in his eyes. After a period of fighting his guardians, Sir Kal struck him, and we were all plunged into Darkness.

Scattered into the Void, blind in the darkness, we could occasionally hear the shouts of other party members but we were never able to walk towards them. Multiple voices and unusual noises sounded within our heads. First we heard the voice of Agoth telling us that we had failed and that we were “nothing”. This was revealed as an immediate fallacy as if we did not exist, why would he be talking to us? Then, voices of a more personal nature resounded through our heads, expressing disappointment in our “failure”. Yet these were also revealed as a lie, as I could still call upon my Sphere. Focusing on the location of the Agothian Experiment was the only way we could avoid wandering in the Void forever, but this proved unsuccessful until the voices of The Chorien and Anubis echoed through all our minds. They told us that Agoth had been destroyed, and we urgently needed to return to the Experiment and reassemble the key to prevent us from being consumed by the Darkness. Making the diamond gesture they suggested, we were finally guided back to the place of the Experiment where, still blind, Quicksilver and others of spatial intelligence spent time piecing together the key. Everybody else remained close to each other to prevent the Darkness from claiming any of our number, as it tried to do.

The key was reassembled and we re-appeared back in the room of the Experiment, where there was more fighting. Once this was dealt with, Randolphin claimed another Agothian ritual component, and we were assured that Agoth truly had been dismantled. We returned hurriedly to the Hall of Heroes, unsure how long we had before Otion Wraithchild would perform the Ritual of Sundering: as already mentioned, travel to and from the Void could potentially take upto three days.

Air Day – Hall of Heroes

Making one last break for recovery and preparation, we then said goodbye to Puke and

Sulisong. Puke would return to the Realm of Battle, where he was Realm Lord. And Sulisong would stay in the Hall of Heroes forever, sealing it so that the dead memories could not return, and that the living could not enter. Three High Priests ten beseeched our Spheres to leave the Hall of Heroes; from the Realm of Battle, Aruna called forth the Chorien and we travelled rapidly to Orin Rakatha via the Plane of the Sleepless Dead.

Air Day – Orin Rakatha

We were greeted back on Orin Rakatha close to the Aldonar Tombs by an old acquaintance, Sarathan of the Dark Path. We headed towards the ritual site, coming across two groups of Agothians. Many took great satisfaction in that their calls upon Agoth were not answered, and they were butchered in short order.

Pausing only for an invoke, we felt waves of darkness start to roll towards us and knew we had little time before Otion Wraithchild would complete his Ritual of Sundering, that would open a connection to the Void and strip all life from the area around our Towers.

Our front line pushed back the Agothian defence which allowed me to dispel their Soul Restorer (that could 'resurrect' the fallen undead). With everyone engaged in the combat in some way, I found Otion Wraithchild casting beside some sort of gateway. After a quick check that he was not warded, I broke him out of his casting and a couple of other people joined me in pounding him with numerous spiritual blows, the healers being quick to step in behind us. After a long fight, he eventually crumpled and his body faded into nothing, leaving only his garb and adornments behind. The Ritual of Sundering had been prevented, Wraithchild was no more.

Some members of Wolfhold met us and informed us that a group of Dymwan were heading our way. I informed them that the alliance was now ended, and the Dymwan were turned away without reaching our abode. We were advised to await the Dreadlord's pleasure within the nearby Aldonar waystation.

One task remained uncompleted: Tiresias, the last person with the knowledge on how to recreate the Agothian experiment. We received word that he was shifting towards us in an unpredictable manner, but ultimately heading towards Wraithchild's ritual site. We went forward to meet him, preparing for battle.

And initially, battle it was: Tiresias turned out to be an Enchanter (formerly of the Labyrinth of Xenos I believe) specialising in Yellow Magic and he had with him a large group of 'followers' to whom he referred as "Lords of Elements": they were striking us with magical blows with battle magic dispels attached, but were affected in kind.

Tiresias tried to persuade us that he had no further interest in the Agoth Experiment by offering us the final key that could be used to create it. When pushed on giving his word that he would never create it in future, he declined, saying that he was a Sorcerer, not a Priest to give his word. However Sir Kal decided that rather than fight Tiresias and potentially risk losing all the keys, he would take the one offered and gain control of all of three. Midway through the discussions, Tiresias mysteriously informed us that "I have activated my staff" - when we looked it was indeed glowing, but the significance of this was unknown. It also appears he has yet to decide upon the new name of the Tower. Things were concluded with no further combat, and we returned to the waystation.

The Chorien and Anubis met us later in the darkness, confirming our success in destroying Agoth, after which they departed to carve out a place for themselves once more on the Plane of the Sleepless Dead.

As a chill drew into the night air, Dreadlord Araikas, Sir Clavados and Arbor (Alpha Hierophant of the Druid Sect, representing the Valley Alliance Tower) arrived at the waystation. Accompanying them was Puke, whom Dreadlord Araikas declared Acting Head of the Necromancers' Sect: it turns out that Lady Mortifera was lost.

Sir Kal gave a brief summary of the activities we had undertaken over the previous few days, and offered the Stewards the ritual components for the Agothian Experiment. Dreadlord Araikas handed these over to the White Retreat, where they should be beyond temptation. Sir Kal promised to uphold his oath and return the Necronomicon to Dreadlord Araikas. The Wolfhold Steward asked me to visit the Catacombs' Tower in an ambassadorial capacity.

Sir Clavados and Dreadlord Araikas jointly declared that we would be called "the last Heroes of the Kern Valley Alliance": no more will this title be awarded to members of our Towers.

Sir Clavados elevated Aruna to the rank of Sorcerer within the Red School of Magic, and – having had a conversation with his Sect Head – Jack declared himself a Hierophant. Sir Clavados departed, and we began to celebrate our success but politics never rests: for example, Arbor was most interested to know who we personally would consider a suitable leader for the Valley Alliance Tower now that Raucus has departed. Lord Mian later joined us for dinner.

I wish to acknowledge the efforts of all present on this mission; it would be wrong to single out individuals, all were competent, everyone contributed, all were resolute.

This quest perhaps underlines everything that makes our Alliance successful -

***Strength through diversity,
Strength in unity.***

