

Melkeron called together a number of people, a rather random assortment of people from the three alliance towers. Present, in no particular order were the following people: Melkeron, Erf, Gravesong, Woolf, Balthazar, Kal, Kortaz, Suliman, Althea, Itam, Puke, Renown, Thorn, Teppic, Gilreyhen and Piskie.

I'm sure that Melkeron's invite to me was delayed in the inter alliance post due to the inclement weather conditions at this time of year. Being the kind and forgiving sort that I am renowned for being I decided not to take offence, but to come along anyway and offer what help I could.

We were to rendezvous near to Cerements Embrace, a way station owned by the Dymwan, and operated on their behalf by the Dai-Fah-Dyne. The groups from the three towers united in that area and after spending a little time skirmishing with the infinite amounts of undead wandering around the area we moved to the vicinity of the way station.

As this was not an official alliance mission, we had not been booked into the way station, the Dymwan and Dai-Fah-Dyne were unwilling to permit us entry at such short notice. This was not just a matter of money, they wished to be assured that we were who we claimed to be. Several people were challenged to prove their identities by naming the head (or assistant head) of their guild or sect. After several extremely humorous minutes in which many people displayed their ignorance of such basic details some were found who knew these details, myself amongst them. The ranking members of the White Retreat agreed that their tower would cover the necessary fee for use of the way station.

The names of the ignorant are available for a small fee, or can be concealed for a similar fee, first come first served.

There were three matters of interest about the way station that I will draw to the attention of the interested reader.

First the way station had a warded vault with "No Entry" on the door. This was obviously an area that at some time we were going to do our best to get inside, when there were no witnesses about. Which leads me onto the next matter....

There was also a Shadowsfall "watcher" here ostensibly to make sure that the normal functions of the way station were not disturbed (i.e. making sure that no Kern Valley Alliance group murders everyone present and takes everything of value before framing a third party). I was shocked at how many people were happy to answer his questions as to what we were doing and why we were here. What the hell is the matter with the adventurers these days? It's none of the Shadowsfall business what we are doing, where we are going and why we are doing it. I had to speak quite firmly and directly to several people about this matter. The Shadowsfall aren't our friends, and they don't need to know anything about us.

The final matter of interest was an offer by the Dai-Fah-Dyne, concerning casting. For a reasonable fee (5 guest) they would setup an area that could enhance casting speed dramatically, but only for non-harmful spells and invocations, this area would last for about a dozen hours I believe. This area acted to put one in element as well as speeding the casting, thus cosmic and arcane could all be enacted here. This was an offer that we accepted instantly. I am not sure if this is a property of the area the way station is in, or something that the Dai-Fah-Dyne have recently successfully researched (or revealed). Very useful indeed, a secret we could well do with knowing.

After a little while there the people who had asked Melkeron to come and meet them arrived, these were an order of monks, who introduced themselves as the Guards of the Oracle to be. Before we could go any further we were required to prove ourselves as worthy by defeating these monks. They gave us as long as we wanted to prepare, we said 5 minutes, and agreed to meet them in front of the way station. We were ready in five minutes, but as the monks were outside in the cold took a few extra minutes preparing ourselves, so that the cold would slow the reactions of the monks. Never turn away an edge in combat I say. We didn't really need it though, as our warrior line supported by the priests and wizards, made short work of these monks cutting them down where they stood. They had some sort of Feign Death ability and seemed as if dead when they fell, but rose up a minute or two later as declared non-combatants.

After this combat we were declared the victors by the monks leader and were deemed as worthy to continue in the quest to discover the Oracle. We went back inside to discuss this quest some more. It transpired that we had been chosen to discover this year's Oracle, and our defeat of the Oracles guardians was proof of our worthiness to undertake the task. The task was simple, upon the morrow we must meet and deal with eight encounters before dust and acquire from each a scroll, upon the scrolls would be runes, putting those runes together would give us the name of the Oracle. Simple enough indeed. 8 letters, the answer was fairly obvious, I am pleased to record that my first guess was indeed the correct one. However I will leave you

wondering what that is in order to heighten the sense of suspense and interest and also to maintain the order and consistency of this report.

A little while later, while most people were beginning to drift off to sleep we had a rather important visitor arrive. The head of the Dymwan tower and his close entourage. This person appeared slightly different to those who saw him, being, Lord Cardonaris, Kelnoz Hatchnett, or Cranium DoomWraith. The body seemed to be a blending of all three, and I believe more than that. He was concerned that we were here in his way station and wanted confirmation that we were not interfering with him or his tower. Such confirmation came quickly given by many there. He seemed reassured by this, and moved about his business, requiring us to remain in the side rooms whilst he deposited several items within the warded vault. Being concerned at this appearance of many in one, I took the opportunity to "bump" into him "accidentally" to verify that he was a solid presence. He was, although I received a very cold stare for doing so. Drow are so graceful that I think he saw through my simple deception, which was all I could come up with at such short notice.

Amongst the entourage (of large and gnarly undead) were two beings of interest, one was a hag or which or some sort, clearly mad. The other was Lady Kevralyn Soulfire - very unusual I thought, especially as she made no attempt to speak with me and even avoided eye contact. She's a Drow, I'm a Drow. When Drow meet, there is always a battle or a politicking going on between them, sometimes even both. Something was wrong here. I know she was acting as an ambassador to Lord Cardonaris, but even so something wasn't right. Still Lord Cardonaris was clearly prepared for action and we weren't. It was best to leave the situation as it was and sort it out later. Lady Kevralyn seemed to be in no immediate danger. After completing his business he retired in the private quarters of the Dymwan amongst dire threats should his rest be disturbed. After his broad hints about us being quiet we ourselves also retired for the night.

Come the morning, one of the Monks came to guide us to the area of the testing. Passing through the cordon of limitless undead around the waystation we walked the mile or so to the place of testing.

There we met our first challenge. The group of the monks, this time their full number was arrayed against us. They presented as little threat to us this time as they had done before. Soon the ground was littered with Monkish bodies, all clearly Feigning Death. Their leader agreed that we had passed this challenge and gave us the scroll. He also informed us that they would meet us at the end of the day to see if we were proved as worthy champions.

Next were a group of off world peasants, who we gave some little healing and food and drink to, they were pathetically grateful and gave us the scroll. Quite frankly a waste of resources, we should have taken the scroll from their corpses.

After that were some Shadowsfall. It is clear that we were supposed to persuade them that we were good Orin Rakathan's through our knowledge and they would have handed over the scroll. The only problem with this was Renown's strong feelings of hatred as regarding Shadowsfall. He snuck around the side and opened up the fighting whilst we were still answering questions. That ended the verbal question and answer session, replacing it with a sword and spell session. One where our skills were amply demonstrated, although chasing down the runner, who had the scroll proved interesting.

Then we met some Dymwan. We negotiated with them and due to the alliance that Wolfhold have with them I was able to persuade them to hand over the scroll. We took the liberty of directing them towards the freshly felled bodies of the Shadowsfall as they were looking for some more. A few "summon undead" invocations on those corpses should help to hide the murder of Shadowsfall. It's always best not to leave any evidence behind if you can.

Our scouts then bumped into some Kalid true blood. This was altogether more satisfying, they had no interest in negotiations, they wanted the ground to run red with our blood. Strangely enough a somewhat similar sentiment as regarding the Kalid's blood ran through the heads of most of us. The combat was joined, I could see that the Kalid had many scrolls and potions, and wisely volunteered to guard our hospitaler, Suliman whilst he was casting. Sadly by the time I reached the fight most of those powerful effects had already been unleashed on others and I was unable to receive my fair share. Still, there was plenty of battle left in the Kalid by the time myself and Suliman arrived. In the end we triumphed and it was their fallen forms that littered the ground.

Moving on further we encountered a small group of Halmadonians. We unleashed our White Retreat members upon them. The Halmadonians were helpless before the barrage of questions and chumminess that oozed out of the White Retreat members, like pus from a tainted wound. We discovered that the Dymwan had slaughtered a group of Halmadonian guards at one of their vaults and had plundered it. The vault supposedly contained a hag like creature that none could slay. This group were out and about seeking to take revenge, and re-imprison the creature. The white retreat members spilled all the knowledge we had about lord Cardonaris' possession of such a creature. I could see the dismay on the faces of the Halmadonians leader, they knew they had no chance, without a Grand Knight amongst them for such to oppose a Tower Leader of the stature of Lord Cardonaris was tantamount to a death sentence. I presume

their vows bound them to pursue this course. How wonderful After taking the scroll from them we left the soon to be undead behind us as we moved on.

Next up was a group of Elementals, I think there may have been one of each colour. One of them had the scroll. Straight up fight against such creatures, no need for negotiations. Blades and skins all around, bolts a plenty. We looted the scroll and moved on.

Near to our original position we discovered a bunch of undead. And guess what, they too had a scroll. A jolly fight against them was undertaken. The only matter of interest I report from this was that a ghoul did manage to sneak up on the three casting priests and their guard, paralysing three out of the four. Khortaz was totally ignored by the ghoul, even those he was there casting with the others. Perhaps there is something to this Humacti's protection after all?

That gave us the eight letters. We put them together and the name was obvious. The Monks approached us and asked us if we had succeeded and asked us to explain the nature of the challenges. I'll leave that explanation to the imagination of the reader. Then they asked Melkeron if he knew the name, which he confirmed that he did. They asked him to say it. High Priest Melkeron then spoke the name of this years Oracle. "Melkeron" he said. At that moment he was teleported into the midst of the monks and stood there wrapped in the robes and the power of the Oracle.

The Oracle informed us that it would be keeping the body of Melkeron for a year and that it would be returned unharmed after the passage of a year. The monks were clearly ready to fight should we seek to assail the Oracle to recover Melkeron. The Oracle informed us that due to the shifting of the spheres that during the next year it would only be answering Yes/No questions and that such answers would be forthcoming immediately, although the passage of challenges and the offering of gifts was still expected. Those of us who had assisted in discovering the Oracle's host this year we were offered a boon, an extra question each. I am willing to ask this question on behalf of another, for suitable recompense obviously.

The Oracle and guards departed. Having succeeded in this minor quest, having misplaced one of our member for a year, and seeing as night was drawing in we made our way back to the way station intending to take our rest there that night before making our way back to the towers. It was only a mile away, a short walk. Arriving there, it was of course, as ever surrounded by hordes of undead, limitless numbers really. The Humacti's played for a while with these until we all grew bored and as a group moved into the way station.

Once we were there after again negotiating with the Dai-Fah-Dyne for a nights rest, we were met by Gilreyhen, a Sorcerer from the White Retreat. He had been sent from the Humacti's with a message that we should investigate what the Dymwan were doing. The Humacti's had become aware of an unusual gathering of undead on the Plane of the Sleepless dead. Gilreyhen also informed us that several people from the towers would be coming to contact us, discussing matters of import and we were to make our selves available, but they were still several hours away. We soon noticed that there were in fact no Dymwan present (at their own way station no less). Quite surprising. Questioning the Dai-Fah-Dyne merchant he told us that they had all left just before dusk and were taking part in some ritual or other, a short distance away. Intriguing.

Still, that meant that there was no remaining impediment to our seeking to open the sealed and warded vault. Nothing. Except Puke and myself. Who vainly attempted to defend the vault of our Dymwan hosts (Wolfhold allies) in accordance with our given word. I note once more that the "good" and "neutral" people seem all too willing to break their given word when afforded the slightest excuse if such word is given to "evil" folk. Too they seem only too willing to undermine the alliances Wolfhold has, whilst expecting us to support their alliances. Hypocrites.

After being overwhelmed by the united might of the rest of our group, the valiant and yet ultimately futile defence of the vault by myself and Puke was ended. This was soon followed by the extensive plundering of the contents of the vault. The contents of the vault were of course trapped, and whilst the vault door was open undead guardians previously inanimate within the way station assailed us many times.

We recovered a number of items, potions and scrolls, but more importantly two books. One of those was known to me, the book of prophecies written by the Chapel of the Watch of the Church of All Time (a religious order on Dagroban). The other was a more interesting tome, the Necronomicon.

Inside the Necronomicon was the writings of Lord Cardonaris, however the book was of course trapped. After several were activated the group assigned it to Puke to read (over my objections I would like to point out - you don't let Humacti and Necromancers play with necromantic things alone, it always ends badly). Some while later after he had finished reading it the books were then returned to the vault by Puke (once more, my vociferous objections were ignored and overridden), Puke informing us that it was interesting and did not contain anything of use or relevance to us right now. In fact Puke had in fact been secretly possessed by the book, and

when he was inside the vault alone and unwatched he concealed the Necronomicon about his person.

Other avenues being exhausted we decided that the group should investigate the nearby ritual site, where the Tower leader and many other Dymwan had been performing a powerful ritual that the Humactis were worried about. . Clearly this was going to lead to some serious confrontation. Along the way we were assailed by several groups of powerful undead, guards who's purpose was to ensure the ritual was not disturbed. These were destroyed, though the combats against them were quite difficult. Hardly surprising, considering they they were clearly set there at the provenance of Lord Cardonaris. We pressed on to investigated the ritual site. Whatever had happened had been completed, but the ritual was still setup. It was an active portal to the Plane of the Sleepless Dead. Puke was the only one who could enter through this portal, and pass through he did, returning a few minutes later, reporting that there was nothing of interest on the far side. In reality, Puke, still under the influence of the Necronomicon delivered that book to Dymwan waiting on the other side, and then promptly forgot about doing so.

Having now run out of things to investigate, or otherwise disturb we then made our way back to the way station, to rest in the warmth, eat a hearty meal and await the messengers from the Towers. A little while later these folk arrived.

I myself was informed that Lady Kevralyn SoulFire was in fact accompanying Lord Cardonaris under a degree of some distress and that we were required to retrieve her, ideally alive. A number of other matters of business were undertaken or concluded however I do not feel it necessary to make the details public at this time, as they are not relevant to this report. Naturally I enlisted the support of the rest of the group in seeking to accomplish this matter over the next few hours.

Some time afterwards as people were considering retiring for the night an ancient crone and her bodyguards approached the way station of a matter of great import concerning us and our quest. They had some knowledge (from what source we did not know at the time) of our quest and other matters relating to it. The crones words were mysterious and full of power, it was clear from the deference paid to her by her entourage that she was a person of significance.

She told us that without her aid, we were doomed to failure and she asked if we were of the stuff of heroes, if we were willing to walk the path of heroes. Had we the knowledge contained

within the pages of the Necronomicon the import of her actions and questions would have been realised. As it was we continued onwards making guesses as to what was going on and as to why. She began a ritual - the casting of the bones and the choosing of the heroes, calling each of us forth one at a time, naming us by our deeds and type and actions. Clearly great power at work in this ritual, for she spoke of many things about people that were not generally known, she herself did not know who was called, but she knew of the attributes of that person.

At the end of this ritual we had all been chosen by one means or another, cheered on each of us by our companions. Save one. I will not forget the mockery directed at me, when all others were cheered. I will long remember that you all mocked me, that you could not find it in your hearts to cheer me on. So many of you who call yourselves "Good" seem only too eager to mock, castigate and belittle those who are different. Look inside yourselves I say and see what darkness lies in there nestled in your hearts and souls, festering away.

The Crone's hints told us that we needed the Necronomicon, and so we sought to retrieve it from the vault. It was from this that we discovered what had happened to Puke, and what had happened to the Necronomicon. There was an aura of despondency about the group that we had lost such a critical piece of information. Without it's knowledge it looked as though we would have little or no chance of success in our mission.

Come the next morning, we arose to discover that the Necronomicon had been recovered by the Crone and furnished to us. This time, as a group we read it's contents, we now understood what was happening and what our place and actions should be. The book contains a great deal of information that (while fascinating) is not relevant to this mission report, in the interests of brevity such information is omitted.

Lord Cardonaris intended to travel to a place called the Hall of Heroes where the memories of the permanently dead lingered on. He intended to recover those memories and subsequently embody those memories into specifically prepared hosts. Lord Cardonaris believed that he would be able to repeat this process each and every time that the new hosts of the memories was slain, and thereby ensure immortality. The list of names he intended to call back represented a who's who of the Kern Valley Alliance enemies. Assys Sorbonne, Malvinous, Grey, Sandaster, Judge Helm Brighthand, Guy de Valour, Prince Sardonyx, Stealth Nighthawk, Cardinal Lungash, Path, Eyes of Stars, Dymtharis, Marlonette, Duke Jurgen Zarn, Erelan Black and N'rahn the Decayer.

To explain in a little more detail. The mind (or memory) of a person is not the same as the soul. From the writings in the book, which were a summary of years of investigations by Lord Cardonaris all souls are called to the Life Sphere. Some souls are called quicker than others, but the siren call of the Life Sphere will ultimately call all souls to it in the end. Due to this irresistible call there can be no true immortality of the soul. Lord Cardonaris' investigations had shown him that in their final journey to rejoin with the Life Sphere all souls must pass through a place called the Hall of Heroes. It is in that place there that the memory (or mind) of the person is separated from their soul that the "cleansed" soul may join the Life Sphere. His researches had shown him that powerful "memories" often remain behind, sometimes for a great deal of time. It was due to the recent joining of Lord Cardonaris with Kelnoz Hatchnett and his assumption of the power of the Soul Shriever that he had finally gained the power and knowledge to enact this plan.

The Necronomicon contained the complete details of the ritual that was necessary to accomplish this act. For reasons of security I think it best if these details are closely held for now. The ritual had to be accomplished on the Plane of the Sleepless Dead, in an area known as the Realm of Battle. Strangely enough the still open nearby gate to the Plane of the Sleepless Dead, lead out into that selfsame Realm.

Having been prepared by the Crone's ritual the night before we were now in some way a part of Lord Cardonaris' ritual and as such we were able to use the portal to the Plane of the Sleepless Dead. In we went. Oh a pesky druid by the name of pisky joined us, the Crone had sent her to us believing that we would find her aid invaluable.

We spent a long time wandering around this plane, seeing to find our way to the Lord of the Realm. We fought some undead, after that we fought some more undead, and just for a change we then fought some more undead. Amongst the undead we fought were some of interest, I will detail those. First was an encounter with one of the Halmadonians we had met yesterday. His quest to lay to rest this hag had failed. he had been raised by Lord Cardonaris and set as a guard on the path to prevent others from following. We left his unmoving corpse behind us.

We had several encounters with undead from Woolf's clan the McBeasts. These were trapped there, serving the Lord of Battle. We took the opportunity to butcher his close friends and family in their undead state. Woolf had some sort of barbarian ritual of proving himself as he took on his father in a one on one duel, which Woolf won. The prize for winning was that he had to wear the stupid crown of the McBeasts (I believe the prize for coming second was that you had to wear two of these crowns). Perhaps this conferred some sort of lordship or mastery to him, it seemed to be significant to him, but then petty tribal matters like this are often seen as being of

great import to such folk.

Our final fight before confronting the Realm Lord was to face three knight, three of our warriors took up this challenge, and from each duel we were successful. The Knights gifted us their sashes as tokens of our victory.

We met the Lord of Battle. However before we could negotiate with him we have to prove ourselves as worthy once more, by meeting him and his entourage in battle I though we had just done that with his outer guards? Oh well, I guess he likes to fight. He is called the Lord of Battle after all. We fought for a while, some five to ten minutes, and then the Lord of Battle called truce. We had demonstrated our worth to his satisfaction.

In the process of the negotiations for his aid, some people had personal business to transact with him, or in some cases had such business thrust upon them.

Woolf sought the freedom of his clan, and offered to duel the Lord of Battle one on one - if he won they were to go free, if he lost, Woolf was to serve. The combat was joined. Woolf proved unequal to the task - he was unable to harm with Lord of Battle with his weapons, and was slain, having his head severed from his shoulders. The Lord of Battle was pleased with Woolf actions, and put the spirit of Woolf's father, Odin, into Woolf body as he resurrected it in some form, and agreed to let the rest go free. Odin was to accompany us for the rest of this mission in Woolf place.

Puke was next for the Lord of Battle. The Realm Lord was annoyed by the two spirits in Pukes body, a body should contain only one spirit. He wanted this matter resolved, so he and split them asunder. One was Puke, the other a Dymwan Necromancer. The Lord ordered the two to fight to determine which one would truly own the body, and he decreed that this was to be a single combat. After receiving a damn good beating the Dymwan fled down the hill and off into the trees, Puke followed. Sometime later Puke returned, victor of this contest. The Lord of Battle was glad this was resolved. It appears that sometime last year Puke ate a Dymwan necromancer (in some form) and has been possessed by that necromancer since. The necromancer has been providing information to the Dymwan ever since.

Finally with these personal matters out of the way, we were able to negotiate with the Realm

Lord concerning the portal to the Hall of Heroes. He told us of some disturbance in his realm, and that should we deal with that we would have his guidance to the portal. Further discussion revealed that the disturbance concerned elementals, specifically shades. The magical resources of the Lord of Battle were negligible, fortunately we were well equipped with magics and able to deal with such creatures. We agreed to his bargain and went to the area where this disturbance was. As we were now acting to further his aims the Lord of Battle placed us under his personal protection, and the "normal" undead of his realm no longer troubled us.

Shades. Often associated with Drow. Lady Kevralyn SoulFire accompanying Lord Cardonaris. The link was obvious to us. We butchered our way through several groups of the Shades that were such a problem to the Lord of Battle to discover Lady Kevralyn holed up in a cave with several other Drow. She had been abandoned here by Lord Cardonaris. Discarded after she had served his purposes, still better discarded than murdered. Lady Kevralyn wished nothing other than to leave the Plane of the Sleepless Dead. As the place was now clear we summoned the Lord of Battle as agreed and he for his part banished Lady Kevralyn and the Drow from his realm, back to Orin Rakatha. He then told us of the ritual site and provided us with some intelligence concerning the goings on there.

Now knowing where we were going we moved towards the site with all haste. On the way to the site we encountered the Crone once more, exactly as she had predicted in our last meeting. She called us to halt and wished to discuss with us what we intended to do and what we understood of the ritual. With her knowledge and insight into these events our task became clearer.

She told us that the ritual had already begun with Lord Cardonaris as the prime mover. Simply interrupting it would not be enough, for now that Lord Cardonaris had the knowledge he would be able to restart it at a later time. Too he would probably slaughter us as he was highly prepared. The only way to prevent Lord Cardonaris' plan was to close the path from the other side. That meant we had to be there, ahead of him. We had to become a part of the ritual ourselves, murdering and replacing the other participants of the ritual, then joining in to ensure it's success, but ensuring that we passed through first so that we would be on the other side ahead of Lord Cardonaris. Because Lord Cardonaris was the prime mover of the ritual he would be unaware of events not connected with the ritual. Should we join in at the appropriate moments performing the necessary and prescribed actions and chants he would remain unaware that the current participants of the ritual were not his intended participants.

There was some great concern that we would not be able to return from the Hall of Heroes. Erf at this point volunteered to become an anchor, bound to this place, so that his life force would

provide a path back for us. The Crone agreed to this, and with another ritual bound Erf's soul to a tree permanently. The consequence of the ritual were far reaching for Erf. No longer would he be able to walk amongst us freely, he would be bound to his daggers and bound here. We would be able to summon him once a year only from now on. I am always grateful when others agree to have themselves willingly sacrificed. It saves all the usual screaming and tussling, which can be such a hassle.

Having prepared our return path (thanks Erf) we pressed ahead to the ritual site. There we found Lord Cardonaris engaged in the ritual, surrounded and supported by a great number of Mor Silvani, and some number of undead. Fired up, and sensing that there was little time we pressed the attack against the Mor Silvani hard, slaying them. We assumed their places in the ritual and we worked for it's success. A key part of this ritual was the slaying of a sacrifice - the sacrifice was none other than then Hag we had seen accompanying Lord Cardonaris previously night. The ritual was a success and the path to the Hall of Heroes opened before us.

Now our mettle was tested. With the ritual completed Lord Cardonaris was now aware of us and knew that we had interfered with his ritual. Summoning Undead and Mor Silvani he set upon us with their assistance. The path to the Hall of Heroes is not for cowards, but for those of courage and perseverance. All stood there fighting off the endless hordes. Standing one with another shoulder-to-shoulder, unflinching in the face of our death and destruction. All stood there fighting, chanting the words of power that the Crone had taught us.

Lo there do I see my father.

Lo there do I see my mother,

my sisters and my brothers.

Lo there do I see the line of my people, back to the beginning.

They do call to me, they bid me take my place amongst them

in the halls of the beyond

where the brave may live forever.

One by one we slain. Overwhelmed by this unending assault on the Plane of the Sleepless Dead. We fell into death and darkness, but not to our ending...

In another place we awoke. Alive once more. Whole and hale and healthy as if recently raised from the dead. The crone came to us once more, but here in this place she was changed, she stood revealed for the higher being she was. "Come quickly" she called to us, "your enemy is coming soon. You must be upon the path and you must stop him. He must not pass you by no matter what." She guided us across the empty open fields to a path, a path lined with fire and there we made preparations for our stand.

After only a few minutes Lord Cardonaris along with a horde of undead and Mor Silvani approached. There was no discussion; he launched an attack upon us. The attack was fierce and drove us back a few paces. Lord Cardonaris released dozens of ritual invocations upon us, and though our determination to stand was strong he forced us back. It was there that Suliman made his final stand. Determined to ensure the victory of life he spent himself and became one with this way. His sacrifice was rewarded and his power grew apace as he transcended mortal limits. The power of Unlife embodied in Lord Cardonaris duelled the power of Life embodied in Suliman. In that time and place Life triumphed, Suliman triumphed. The path was closed and barred against Lord Cardonaris, now and forever. It is of such sacrifices and actions that the world turns.

As the way closed we were drawn away, drawn to a building. There we were met by the Crone in her ascended state. She told us to take our rest, to eat and drink and enjoy the warmth, that after we were restored that she would come and speak with us. Gratefully after many hours out in the cold we accepted this offer. Food, drink and warmth soon restored our spirits.

When she rejoined us she told us of this place. Most of what she said confirmed the speculations written by Lord Cardonaris in the Necronomicon. He had come frighteningly close

to success. The sacrifice by Suliman at the path had ensured that he would never be able to attempt this again, and that he was now barred from this place forever. She warned us about memories, and our speaking with and to the memories, how that would strengthen them. Having read the list of enemies compiled by Lord Cardonaris I found I could not stop thinking about Erelan Black. She warned us that our life forces would draw things to us, things that hoped to use the strength of our life threads to find a way back to Orin Rakatha. Further discussion with her revealed that it was possible for us to travel back. However in order to do so we would need three High Priests acting in unison, one from each of the Good, Neutral and Evil Spheres. That each of us must invoke our spheres and implore them to return us. Without such a united supplication it would be impossible for us to return.

While we were there many people were visited by shades from their past, old friends who had stayed to wish them goodbye. Sadly, my thoughts were too strong, Erelan Black came to visit. Still bitter after all these years. Still twisted with hatred at how he had been used. The last scion of a broken house, of a failed people. A man used by all and then discarded when no longer needed.

I remembered the two times I had met him before in perfect clarity. The first time being when on all-hallows-eve he dropped Gurthang with but a word. Gurthang fell upon me trapping me beneath his ungainly, ill-formed body. I remembered how Erelan Black had slaughtered Gurthang whilst the half-orc lay on top of me. The second time being on a great quest in the Dymwan War. Erelan Black stood suddenly revealed as the man behind the Fleshweavers and the tainting of the mists of Orin Rakatha. There it was we destroyed his corporeal form and banished him. I remember his last words. Pitiful and weak they were, swearing that he would return one day. We stood around his fallen form, looting the corpse, taking trophies with which to celebrate of our victory. The sun rising, the last remnants of his spirit being shredded and torn apart in the light of the dawn.

Now, years later, I meet Erelan Black again. The desire to return strong within him. My determination was that he should not do so.

One other person of interest there was in this building, a caretaker of sorts, a Shadowsfall. He knew much about this place and organised much. I remember him clearly saying that his replacement was being prepared - the name of his replacement being Marloon Pozner. Further discussions with this Shadowsfall brought more information to light, some of which concerned the creatures of this place, creatures that had been imprisoned here ages ago, creatures called the Wendel. These creatures had been a scourge upon Orin Rakatha until they were trapped here. They had recently become roused, by the death of their mother. Their mother was none

other than the Hag, slain as part of Lord Cardonaris' ritual that brought us here. He told us that he feared one or more of these creatures would seek to travel back to Orin Rakatha with us, and that it was imperative that we prevented such a thing.

He offered us a chance to test ourselves against the Wendel in a courtyard, several people took up this challenge, mostly our warriors, I placed myself amongst the challengers. Single combat took place between the challengers and the Wendel, in each cast it triumphed over us. It was a powerful creature, and struck physical blows more powerful than any I have been hit by before. My investigations indicated that it was immune to both power and magic, and that only physical blows affected, it.

Come the next day we determined with the aid of the Crone where the place was that the return ritual must be performed and we travelled there. Along the way we met and defeated several groups of Memories led by Wendel. Any group less powerful than us would have been overwhelmed by the forces assembled, but we ourselves coped admirably, having been forged into a supremely skilled fighting unit over the past few days.

We finally arrived at the place to perform our ritual, and there we began the necessary actions. Whilst three High Priests (myself amongst them) performed the rituals necessary for our escape, the rest of the group came under a sustained savage attack by the most powerful of memories seeking escape.

Perhaps as many as twenty had been assembled, led by Erelan Black, Duke Jurgen Zarn and N'hrain the Decayer. After the conclusion of the invocation, the three High Priests raised our voices in supplication, calling, calling for the way to be opened, to less us pass home to Orin Rakatha. Again and again we called, louder and louder we raised our voices that they might be heard across the planes. Our comrades surrounded us on all sides taking spells, invocations and weapon blows upon themselves defending us, knowing that they must protect us so that all could return. After a time that seemed like many minutes, but was probably just a few moments the Spheres answered our call and one by one we were plucked from the Hall of Heroes. Naturally, Lollth reached out and gathered me up first, caring for her most loyal High Priest, Draal LollthSpawn.

But not all of us. Some choose to stay behind, to bar the way to the Memories. To deny them any escape. Itam, Puke and Thorn remained behind, battling the Memories to the end. Staying until after the way was shut that none should pass. Their sacrifice is noted, and praised.

A few moments later, those of us who returned found ourselves back on Orin Rakatha, a few miles away from where we had left. Taking stock of the situation we returned to the Kern Valley Towers, fewer in number and somewhat sadder of heart.

Many will look back upon this and see the loss of Heroes and count this as a black day that so many are lost and gone. This is not so. Those who say such are wrong, by their words they would belittle the sacrifices of those who are now gone.

It is said that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. I tell you now that we stand tall indeed. For we stand upon the shoulders of mighty Heroes.

Erf. Itam. Puke. Suliman. Thorne.

Heroes all.