

Mission Briefing

We wish it to be known that the trial of the individual formerly holding the rank of Master Seer Number Ten will be held during the first week of Wind Moon. He stands charged with various offences against our peoples including the release of the entity known as the Manitou.

Due to the seriousness of these crimes and the damage done to other Towers as a result, this trial will be held in public with a triumvirate of judges to be drawn from representatives of any Towers that choose to accept the invitation to attend.

The Reader have agreed to host the proceedings. A mission will be dispatched to ensure the smooth running of the Trial. Any interested should raise the issue with the appropriate Guild Masters.

*On behalf of the King,
With the support of the Steward of Wolfhold and Rednow Futz*

The release of the North Wind upon Orin Rakatha has caused significant problems for those travelling in the North of Orin Rakatha: this in turn has disrupted trade in that area. I am told that the Shadowsfall had informed other Towers that the Kern Valley Alliance was responsible for the release of the North Wind. Thus, a number of Towers had applied pressure to the trading Towers to withhold trade from the Kern Valley Alliance. We are not entirely self-sufficient, for example the Labyrinth of Xenos supply us with base material for items. The Dai-fah-Dyne were intending to terminate trade altogether with us leaving only one supplier, the Reader, who could therefore price their goods as they liked: clearly not in Valley interests.

A diplomatic meeting was thus arranged and invitations put out to other Towers for an open trial held for the individual accused of unleashing the North Wind (Simian, ex-Master Seer).

Earth Day

A small retinue consisting of myself (Kevralyn Soulfire), Shard Farsight - High Priest of the Grey Wardens, Maggot - High Priest of the Dark Brethren, Jon Barleycorn - Priest of the Druids, and Tarquin - Acolyte of the Grey Gauntlets, made our way North guided by Marten to the Open Gauntlet waystation, my orders being to ensure the smooth running of the trial of former Master Seer Number Ten, otherwise known as Simian.

As we started to approach the area, Jon and Tarquin started to fall asleep which later we would realise heralded the arrival of the so-called "spirits of cold and evil". For reference, these generally appeared as a mixed group of white and black forms, the former casting much white battle magic and striking with magical blows, the latter dealing out lay evil invocations and assailing us with blows of a spiritual nature.

Dealing with these, and an inconsequential group of undead, we arrived at the Open Gauntlet

waystation, a building that was once formerly by the Reader, and built on the foundations of the former Hold of the Azad-An (actually built on part of the Tower), formerly a tower of mercenaries, whose colours were red and green, that fell due to status irregularities at Eostarre almost exactly seven years earlier.

At the waystation was a Seeker known as Caradac who later joined with our group for the duration of the mission. Shortly after our arrival, a Dymwan Priestess visited us with an entourage of undead, including a large one that shrieked with rage, that she repeatedly had to order under control. After informing us that she was intending to attend the trial of Simian as the Dymwan representative, she lost her tenuous control of the creature, which swiftly slew her and turned its attentions to our group, draining us of our blood. Maggot and myself eventually destroyed the creature with touch evil invocations; Shard had discerned that the creature's body held an embodied vampiric essence. A more enlightening note was found upon the body of the Dymwan Priestess. Rather than an elaborate attempt to discredit Alliance trial proceedings, it transpired that the Dymwan Priestess simply did not have the ability to control the undead creature, which also contained the Herald of the Blood Wind:

Priest Tobias

As you will no doubt now be aware we succeeded in retrieving the blood wind herald from the shrine within the Aldonar Tombs, our distraction although not as successful as we would have liked proves sufficient. The herald is strongwilled and prone to fits of rage.

The embodiments allows for some measure of control. It is best to pander to its whiles where possible carrot and stick. The herald should lead you to the shrine of the blood oracle. We continue to locate the others and will meet you if we are able.

The past is ours

Chief Archaeologist Tomas

The Blood Wind was one of the Four Winds originally free upon Orin Rakatha, that had long disappeared. An Alliance group had, a few moons earlier, discovered that the Blood Oracle could be summoned by a token offering of blood at its shrine - something that the Dymwan appeared to be seeking to do. Recovering the Blood Oracle could well lead to the return of the Blood Wind, which - unopposed (its opposing Wind, the Darkwind, having been consigned to the Void merely over a decade ago) - could lead to great troubles upon Orin Rakatha.

We were visited by some representatives of Dreadlord Araikas, who had been arranging the safe escort of Simian for trial. They informed us that other Tower representatives were due the next evening (Fire Day), and that the trial would take place on the eve of Steel Day. Simian would be delivered to us earlier, for questioning.

After they had left we discussed the forthcoming trial and what charges would be levied against Simian; it seems that the exact nature of these charges were for us to decide. We would also have to - from within our group - provide both the "prosecution" and "defence". My instructions

were that we should thoroughly investigate the case against Simian including the possibility that he was not the true "culprit", as he claimed.

Fire Day

We were greeted in the morning by a Reader named Velmir Hollyhock, who seemed to be one of the main Reader figures present around the waystation during our time there.

The North Wind maintained its icy clench upon the land and air the next morning, with many people clustering around a rather ineffectual stove for minimal warmth, the embers of any fires the previous night having died long before. I have never felt such unseasonably cold weather before - not in the deepest heart of Winter - and would prefer not to experience it again, it was most unpleasant. To compound this chill, more spirits of cold and evil assailed us; this time causing everyone to fall asleep (although those who had adventured most seemed best able to withstand its effects) before they attacked our sleeping forms.

Randolphin, Sorcerer of the Yellow Guild, teleported into our midst - a welcome addition with his extensive magical capabilities.

Sloe, a Journeyman Pathfinder, advised us that there were two unauthorised groups in the area. We were expecting some representatives from other Towers, however these groups did not match the descriptions of those permitted to attend the trial. To ensure that they would not pose a subsequent threat to proceedings, we left to investigate one of these.

The Garamite Group

Not far from the building we encountered a group of rough-looking men, each with a diamond mark upon their face; with these were some toadstools: slow-moving slightly-sentient plants with a white trunk and poisonous red & white spotted cap through which they emit their spores. This group had little to say, and did not pose much resistance as we removed them from our path. The men were part of a racial group known as "garamites", they tend to talk in nasal voices and have little of value to say. We dispatched some more as we continued - with them were creatures with some skill in brown magic, including one that required being soundly beaten with weapons empowered by the grace of the Spheres, although I cannot recall its appearance now.

Caradac reported he had met a scout from the Kalid, a Stone Panther who had named himself as being from the Lodge of the Eating Wind (a variant on Hungry Wind). We did not see any further Kalid along this patrol, but came across a much larger garamite group who were clearly expecting to meet with someone. One of the garamites requested that we grovel before their Duke. Talks were therefore short, although the following fight was somewhat protracted. The Duke seemed to have some skill in the Evil Sphere, causing a number of us to become overly suspicious of other members of our group, without his needing to sit down and cast. He also had an unusual white creature (possibly wearing armour?) - not an elemental, but it was able to reflect some of the damage or spells cast at it.

Finally, Caradac slit the Duke's throat - although as he did so, the Duke appeared to call upon some powers of earth and escape, sinking rapidly and then disappearing into the ground before our very eyes. We found some letters amongst the group addressed to a Duke Draha (see Recovered Material in the Archives), one from a Palu, Guardian of the Crystal Groves, which seemed to suggest that a branch of the garamites sought to claim a Tower using the help of the wendigos' allies. The other was signed by Tal U, "Dragon Shaman and Hierarch of the Boreas".

While returning to the Open Gauntlet, we were assailed by two unusual beasts of great physical strength, purple in appearance with great fangs and a mass of hair. Although they were capable of knocking us down to the floor many times, we overcame them and arrived safely at the building.

During our lunch, a man in the colours of the Knights of Our Dark Lady approached and said that the Knight Philip de Beaugarde would be attending the trial on behalf of their Tower. However, no such representative ever arrived.

The Dymwan Group

We set off to investigate the other unauthorised group in the area, which were reportedly Dymwan. We were resolved to attack them in a way that did not draw blood in case they had indeed located the shrine of the Blood Oracle. Summoning this powerful entity 'by accident' would be more than careless.

Upon our approach we were greeted by more spirits of cold and evil, and others that drained blood or caused weakness to those they struck. The more powerful ones were able to draw blood from a distance, as the Herald of the Blood Wind had done the night before.

We then found a large group of Dymwan who were acting suspiciously. We set about attacking them: they were mainly human but they had a creature with them that was capable of innately dishing out much white magic and evil power at a whim. We dispatched their forces and then approached a small hut inside which this creature and a bound Dymwan man were residing. The ward around the hut was surprisingly ineffectual and I was able to pass through and destroy the creature with a torrent of magic. I turned to speak with the man, who was kneeling on the floor, but he claimed it was a little late for negotiations before quickly dying in front of my eyes and giving his blood to the ground, which caused the dead Dymwan to rise up as undead creatures and assail us once more. They were slow and easy to deal with. Inside the hut was a box and some sort of ritual, however the power appeared to be dissipating quickly and we recovered it to examine later. The Dymwan also possessed another letter:

Priest Geraud,

We have used the cantos to compel the herald. This has allowed us to locate the shrine. It is in ruins but stands still atop a nearby wooded hill. Our investigations suggest that it is also possibly one of the points.

The herald has played his part and may yet prove useful later, but we can proceed regardless. We have prepared a rite to awaken the blood oracle from his slumber and ensure he succumbs to the condition that our past endeavours have inflicted upon the other Hierarchs we have awakened.

The rite must be performed at the shrine in the hour before midnight. We will secure the area once the dark of the night is fully upon us.

You will remain at our camp with a token force to ensure we have somewhere to rest once we are done. Do not fail us.

Archaeologist Durwent

from which we it was rather obvious that the Dymwan were seeking to awaken the Oracle later that evening. Naturally we resolved to halt their endeavours. Marten pointed out that the site of a shrine would look considerably more impressive than the encampment we had just visited, and hence would be located elsewhere.

Unfortunately, during our fight with the Dymwan, a mysterious malevolent force overcame Randolphin who had collapsed to the ground in much pain. We were unable to assist him and thus dispatched him to the Hospital with great haste.

Simian's Arrival

We returned to the Open Gauntlet, where we awaited the arrival of Simian, who was duly delivered by Thoran, Adjutant of the Fell Knights of Ushaz. Also accompanying this group was Gutrot, Champion of the Iron Guard, who stayed with our group thereafter so that we now had one true warrior. Simian was unwilling to speak openly to anybody except his "defence counsel". As no-one else was prepared to defend Simian, I was obliged to take this role to ensure that the trial was properly conducted. He then "explained" his actions/line of defence privately to me, and also indicated that he had evidence via a "memory box" that proved another individual was to blame, and that this evidence was currently in transit to our location.

While Simian was with us, we were suddenly attacked by a group of extremely well-prepared human assassins, who would go off to cast and then return with a high-level black wizardry spell. They were human in appearance. They had quite an array of offence at their disposal, including some paralysing venoms, and they made a concerted effort to get to Simian. This was prevented, and then they fled into the night (some alive). Upon one dead body was a note:

This note allows the bearer to withdraw the sum of 2 Gold Crowns from the company funds.

Captain Decimus, Crimson Hawks, SulanThoe

The nature of this note caused us to speculate that they were Empire mercenaries. After this assault, members of the Wolfhold retinue returned and took Simian again into their custody.

Pre-Trial Arrangements

We were then visited by a number of Towered representatives who had come to find out more about the open Trial that the Alliance were holding (hosted courtesy of the Reader); a number of these were angry about the release of the North Wind, for various reasons. The delegates were: Rufus Ash, Red Sorcerer of the Wizards Concillium; High Priest Vendar of Halmadons Heights; Win Tsu, Ministry of the Heavens, Celestial Bureaucracy; Velmir Hollyhock, of the Reader; Geomancer Septimus, Labyrinth of Xenos; Ullab Achim Lecham, Lord of the Swords, Dai-fah-Dyne. (Names recorded by Maggot). Members of our group then spoke with each of the delegates to find out about their concerns and also to help us determine how they would approach the trial: we were to select a tribunal from these representatives. I was interested in selecting those who were most likely to give a fair, unbiased and just verdict at the trial. Based on our conversations, I chose the Celestial Bureaucracy, Halmadons Heights (adjudged by Caradac to be primarily concerned with Law as opposed to Good) and Labyrinth of Xenos Towers as those who would form the tribunal at the trial. The Reader had already declined to participate in this regard, as they were hosting the trial. All other delegates were welcome to attend the trial, as the Alliance were holding it in public.

It should be noted that the Wizards Concillium and Dai-fah-Dyne were particularly hostile and angry with the Alliance about the effect of the Winds. In contrast, the Halmadonian stated that his people were not greatly affected by the North Wind as they do not leave their Tower all that often.

Disrupting the Dymwan Ritual

With the tribunal selected, the delegates departed and we set off to find the Blood Oracle's Shrine, at which the Dymwan would be conducting a ritual to unbind the Oracle that evening. The shrine was not all that far away, as it turns out, and we found a large Dymwan group assembled and casting some sort of ritual in the corner of the field. The Dymwan leader (Archaeologist Durwent) came over to ask us crossly what we were doing there, helpfully stepping in range of my invocation which severely limited her capacity to fight. The Dymwan undead were reasonably powerful, the most problematic being a ghast. After Maggot and I had finished stealing all the Archaeologist's power, she rose again as some sort of undead creature, which we also dispatched.

We headed towards the shrine, a once-impressive ruined building atop a hill, which was guarded by many strange creatures, the like of which I have not seen before. I was not present for most of this fight, so I could not describe them, but Caradac reported that some struck with poisonous blows and had amongst them what he thought were snake-creatures.

Beyond this was another guard, some sort of crystalline automaton, that was capable of reflecting spells and invocations and only seemed to be affected by immense physical blows,

while itself doling these out rather capably. It was well-dispatched by Shard and Gutrot in a united effort. Passing up the darkened, narrow stone stairway we came across a shrunken body clothed in a strange tabard (black, outlined with yellow). It was reminiscent of the Knights of our Dark Lady colours, although it did not have their heraldic symbol emblazoned across the front. There was a couple of scrolls here too:

Moonday

Have arrived at the shrine and secured it without attracting attention from the inhabitants of the nearby way station. So far so good and all is quiet.

Earthday

The guards fought off a small force of undead last night. We suspect they were a scouting force. It seems our information was correct and the Dymwan intend to make a move on the shrine. We must not let this happen.

Fireday

Another attack last night, this one with a little more force. We held easily enough. They seem unable to cope with the Men-Hadim. We should be able to hold them until we are done.

We are undone. A mighty attack has scattered the Men-Hadim and our final defenses are under assault. It is not the Dymwan! Even if we hold now we will not hold another night...

and the other:

Supplicant

Travel to the ruined shrine that lies close to the Open Gauntlet waystation. We have word that some who dwell within the Dymwan intend to awake that which rests there. Moreover they intend to do so in a manner not in keeping with scripture. It is of the utmost importance that they fail.

If all else is lost then it would be better that he be awakened early rather than fall under their sway. Take such forces as you need to complete the task.

Kamenyati the Undying

The state of the body initially gave me cause to suspect it had been dead for a while, but upon reflection it is possible that its blood or life substance had in some way been drained, and that the letter had been penned not long before our arrival; the "Men-Hadim" referring to the mysterious creatures that seemed to be guarding the building. It also suggests that this force were not some original force long-set to guard the shrine, as the first entry indicates that they had secured the area only days before.

Shard communed with the tabard to see if we could identify the Tower in question, but reported that this Tower's identity was in some way obscured or occluded.

Steel Day

Upon this morning, the freezing guests of the waystation took refuge in the small patch of sunlight - and therefore only source of warmth - in the area, but the icy grip of the North Wind was no less biting than before. A number of waves of spirits of cold and evil flung themselves upon us, although all were dispatched.

Labyrinth of Xenos - Defective Geomancer

We were approached by an "ambassadorial and facilitation unit" from the Labyrinth of Xenos, which Maggot has recorded as being High Enchanter Geomidas (or on behalf of). It transpired that the Geomancer Septimus is "defective" and needs to be returned to the care of Labyrinth of Xenos. The LoX regarded this as a source of embarrassment, and so we agreed to retrieve him on their behalf - not wanting a rogue unit to falsely represent the Tower at the trial amongst other things. The LoX ambassador warned us that the Geomancer was "with ordnance", which seems to be LoX-speak for "is accompanied by a number of powerful drone units".

We duly waded our way through minatours and various sets of drones, some of which were unleashing ritual/mass ritual neutral invocations from a vast distance, and came across the Geomancer. Unsurprisingly, there was a lot of brown magic flying around and the protections from earthquake I cast on everybody proved most useful. Fighting in amongst a small and prickly thicket, many of our (much smaller) group were felled one by one, Jon Barleycorn having a limb almost severed at one point. However, the Geomancer proved susceptible to the ritual powers of the Evil Sphere and the rest of his retinue were easily slain thereafter. We recovered his component parts for the Labyrinth, and a further letter on one of the people accompanying him:

Klavido

You are to meet with this Geomancer on my behalf. Our allies have arranged this meeting but I fear they may betray us. See if this one they have sent us too can be trusted. If you find it so you know what we are willing to offer him. I trust you will do well.

Duke Draha

My recollections are now vague, but I think this letter was found on a garamite with the geomancer.

LoX Information on the Four Winds

The LoX ambassadorial unit met us later at the Open Gauntlet, and furnished us with some information about the nature of the Four Winds in return for the body of Septimus. Questioning the Unit proved intriguing as it would answer each question both directly and literally. Maggot has recorded some of the pertinent points in his reports. To summarise:

Once, four winds blew upon Orin Rakatha as natural forces: the North Wind (Boreas), that of ice & cold, opposed by the South Wind (Sirocco), the Fire Wind. From the West came the Dark Wind (Coromell) in opposition to the East Wind, the Blood Wind (Levanter). Each wind is associated with a season upon Orin Rakatha: the North Wind the winter, the Fire Wind the summer, the Blood Wind the spring and the Dark Wind the autumn. Without an opposing Wind, the seasons become out of balance, as has been evident this year where the Winter has been lasting much longer than is usual.

Each Wind can be controlled by a number of points of power, and each has a 'master' point of power, which is not upon Orin Rakatha. The Labyrinth of Xenos were not aware of where any of the master points were.

The "Arc of Fire" was an artefact crafted by the Labyrinth of Xenos, into which the Fire Wind was bound and taken by the followers of the Sirocco into/through the Void (there is a Void at the centre of the Ikarthian Triangle, which the LoX use for travel). The LoX did not know what had happened to the followers of the Sirocco, nor where they had ended up.

The Blood Wind had been bound into their Hierarchs (their peoples of equivalent standing to our Council of Lords).

The Dark Wind was the same Dark Wind that had been consigned to the Void during the Dymwan Wars, and whose master point of power had once lain on a shadow demi-plane and had been destroyed by an Alliance group over a decade ago.

The North Wind had been bound into the earth by the Stone Panthers, in doing so, they lost so much status that eventually they lost their Tower and their peoples subsumed into the Kalid. There was some confusion as to how the North Wind related to the manitou, I don't believe we got to the bottom of this during our questioning. However, the North Wind had undergone some change during the Day of the Black Sands.

The LoX did not seem to properly understand the concept of time, so were unable to answer our questions about "when" the First of the Towers of the Four Wind had lived upon Orin Rakatha.

The LoX seemed prepared to work with the Kern Valley Alliance in terms of dealing with the current problems caused by the North Wind.

Simian's Memory Box

Later, while we were dining, the Dreadlord's representatives brought Simian into our safekeeping once more. He spoke again of the box that contained his evidence, expressing his concern that it had not arrived - as it should have done - this morning, and that he had 'lost contact' with the person bringing it.

Later, when he had gone, an injured Reaper burst into the waystation stating that a Wolfhold group were nearby and had been attacked by hostile forces. We hurried to the location he cited, fighting two groups of Kalid Stone Panthers (that included a number of barbarians). The latter had with them both the dead body of a Wolfhold Seer, and a box. We resurrected the Seer, Ludwig von Heisenberg, who confirmed that their group had been assaulted by a number of Stone Panther groups, who seemed to have gone out of their way to do so. Heisenberg also stiffly asked me to inform Simian that the former considered his 'debt' to the latter to have been repaid, and would no longer assist him. It transpired that Heisenberg was also one of the Seer Priests who had been poisoned (with a sleeping venom) by Simian last year, when Simian had performed the rituals to harness the power of the manitou. Heisenberg could only speculate why this was, but his line of reasoning was different to the one offered later by Simian. Passing the box into our care, he said that we would need Simian to be present to "activate" it.

With the box recovered, we started organising for the trial, Gutrot organising the layout of the room to something befitting a tribunal. Two figures in red and green appeared, and started playing a game of chess: these are a regular phenomenon at the Open Gauntlet, and rarely interact with anybody (although a Thissessin Seer once did). Various people started arriving, including a couple of the invited Towers, and two members of the Shadowsfall - Jerric and Ursus - who had previously met an Alliance group led by Lord Giles in the Tower of the 4 Winds. The Shadowsfall politely enquired why they had (apparently) not been invited to the trial, and whether the Kern Valley Alliance now considered themselves the law-makers upon Orin Rakatha, or words to that effect. I defused the situation with one of the Shadowsfall agreeing to preside as judge for the trial (although to be clear, he himself was not a Shadowsfall Judge). This benefited the Alliance, as I would say it brought more credence to proceedings and the outcome of the trial in the eyes of other Towers.

Simian was also delivered to us once more, and he relayed that to unlock the evidence in the 'memory box', it required merely a high-level commune. Although this was obviously suspicious, I weighed up the risks and requested Shard to commune with the box which he duly did. It transpired to be an elaborate attempt for Simian to escape, because the box unleashed a wave of fear and paranoia amongst many of those assembled. This caused some momentary inconvenience but I easily retrieved Simian along with a helpful member of Wolfhold who had recently arrived. The Shadowsfall and I then incapacitated and restrained Simian more forcefully before dinner was served. Simian protested at that point that he had tried to escape as the trial was a "set up", apparently unaware of the irony that by repeatedly lying about evidence to the very person defending him that he had heavily discredited himself.

Pre-Trial Discussions

Prior to dinner, the Shadowfall were curious to know why a Reader enforcer (distinguishable by his garb) had arrived. It appears he was tracking a Reader merchant known as Alessandro who is wanted for questioning over an alleged incident on Murandir.

During dinner, I conversed more with the Shadowfall, who expressed some concern that the 'identity' of the Kern Valley Alliance was changing (due to the restructuring ongoing with the King). Before, we used to be seen as an alliance 'in balance'. The movement of White Retreat members to Murandir could potentially change this identity. They warned that this could potentially have devastating consequences, as the mystics might not judge us worthy of towers in future (although it can take some time to come to that decision) and there are times when simply having sufficient status is not enough to warrant a Tower.

The Time of Reckoning did not used to take place on an annual basis, nor was it originally designed to necessarily do so, however that is how it has been interpreted in more recent times. The powers behind the mystics act in their own time, hence it may take time for the will of the mystics to be enacted.

They confirmed that the Four Winds were tools of the mystics, that can be used by any "at their own risk" until they are required by the mystics, and that doing so does not break nor violate any Laws of Orin Rakatha. The Dark Wind could be returned to Orin Rakatha. In terms of dealing with the current situation, their Tower had no official preference as to what steps the Alliance took. Neither did they consider the Dymwan to be doing any wrong, by corrupting the Blood Wind Hierarchs and seeking to potentially unleash the Blood Wind upon Orin Rakatha.

In terms of timescales, I seem to recall they stated that the Tower of the Four Winds was founded after the Second Cataclysm.

Prior to the trial, one of the Shadowfall departed and the other asked for him to try repeating the ritual but with the Collegium Magicum this time as opposed to the Collegium Elementa; it sounded as if the first attempt had not been entirely successful.

The Trial

Two charges were brought against Simian: deliberately unleashing the North Wind upon Orin Rakatha, and breaking Valley Law. Thus it was appropriate for a trial to be held publicly, as opposed to the usual internal routine where Valley Law is concerned.

While under questioning from "the prosecution", Jon Barleycorn (who did an excellent job), Simian freely admitted he had administered some sleeping draughts to his fellow Seers so that they would not impede his activities (in performing the Ritual of Breaking upon the Rod of Yugantir).

As defence, I called Shard Farsight as a witness, who confirmed that he had seen the Rod of Yugantir appear to spiritually influence people when it was held by his group, causing them to act in ways that they would not normally do so.

I then questioned Simian, who confirmed that he had performed a Ritual of Breaking, but claimed that his motives were essentially benevolent: he could sense that the bonds on the manitou were becoming weaker (partly due to activities by the Kalid Earthwarp), and that the manitou was now on the verge of becoming free, but nobody would listen to his qualms. Eventually, he took matters into his own hands, and intended to perform his own ritual to restrain the creature, admitting that he was aware that by binding it to himself he would enhance his 'powers' but that not being his primary motivation. In my closing speech to the tribunal, I pointed out that unleashing the North Wind was not against the Laws of Orin Rakatha (which they could confirm with the Shadowsfall if they so wished).

The tribunal and Shadowsfall left the trial for a short while to discuss proceedings, before returning to deliver their verdicts, which were as follows:

- Deliberately unleashing the North Wind upon Orin Rakatha: Not Guilty
- Breaking Kern Valley Alliance Law: Guilty

The Shadowsfall declared that the sentence should be delivered from the Valley Alliance Tower and appointed High Priest Shard Farsight to declare what this should be. Shard declared that Simian be held in Sector 7 until he could become a useful member of Kern Valley Alliance society once more.

The Shadowsfall left proceedings stating that they were "satisfied". Rufus Ash of the Wizards Concillium departed, also pleased (and interested to hear of the Kalid Earthwarp involvement) indicating that their Tower (or components thereof) would be prepared to work with the Alliance to sort out the problems with the North Wind.

Simian's Disappearance

Before Simian could be taken away to be detained in Sector 7, a gush of freezing wind rushed through the waystation and we all found ourselves encased in ice and unable to move. A voice behind me (which transpired to be an ancient wendigo - a powerful undead) announced that "the North Wind claims its own", and I am told that Simian vanished into thin air. The wendigo stayed around for a little bit longer (I seem to recall it unleashing some evil power), before it, too, left.

The evening was darkening rapidly and it was perhaps an hour before midnight, when the Dymwan would seek to perform their ritual to unleash the Blood Oracle once more.

One of the Priests in Thoran's group offered us the chance to track Simian over the next couple of hours, but as Simian was moving rapidly in a direction opposite from where the Dymwan were likely to assault the Blood Wind shrine, we were obliged to choose between retrieving him, and stopping the Dymwan's activities. A number of the group were keen to go after the Seer,

however I decided that - in the bigger scheme of things - preventing the Dymwan from potentially unleashing and gaining control of the Blood Wind on Orin Rakatha was more important.

Many Alliance members will remember the prolonged Dymwan Wars and the effort put into removing the Darkwind from their control.

Disrupting the Dymwan Ritual

We journeyed swiftly to the shrine, the hour of midnight approaching fast. Already, a Dymwan had ascended to the top room of the shrine, and was unleashing large amounts of black wizardry out of its window at a great range without much effort. There were a large guard, including undead and two human Dymwan warriors obstructing the passageway, whom I eventually weakened to the floor.

The narrow staircase up to the top of the shrine proved inconvenient, as it meant that we were obliged to face the Dymwan Priest/Sorcerer one by one, and he was able to weaken a person simply by striking them with his sword. It is worth noting that the amount of black magic he was doling out was far superior to any shade I have seen, more along the levels of a much greater elemental such as a shade prince. Fortunately, he was also affected by black magic and I weakened him to the floor too (careful to avoid the spillage of blood in the area, which could potentially awaken the Herald of the Blood Wind).

We removed him from the site, however our attempts to steal his power were relatively unsuccessful, as he appeared to have a great amount wrapped up - potentially in some ritual elsewhere. Maggot cast a disease upon the Dymwan to prevent the latter from escaping.

We took him back to the Open Gauntlet, and although traditional Wolfhold questioning methods did not yield much information, Shard was able to call upon the Spheres to confirm that this was Chief Archaeologist Tomas (as referred to in previous letters we had intercepted). I gather that the ritual that the Archeaologist had been performing had failed that evening.

Matters took an unexpected turn when Caradac - without forewarning - decided to put the Dymwan out of his misery by slitting his throat, catching the rest of us somewhat unawares. The Dymwan bled out and suddenly leapt to his feet (despite being cocooned in a reasonably thick web that normally would have provided a significant amount of restraint), effortlessly unleashed yet more black wizardry, and ran out of the building at a great speed. A couple of those unimpeded by the magic gave chase, but to no avail.

Sun Day

As was becoming a routine, everyone crowded into the small patch of sunlight in a bid to reduce

the impact of the bone-freezing cold, with marginal success.

We were alerted that Simian - rather than fleeing from us, as he had before - was now coming directly for our camp.

While waiting, we were assaulted by some members of the Kalid Stone Panthers, barbarians once more, one of whom had some reasonable skill with the Evil Sphere.

We headed to the Open Gauntlet's nearby fighting palisade as a better ground to meet Simian. He had transformed into the Oracle of the North Wind, having now a frozen pallor, and was accompanied by a large retinue that included members of the Kalid Stone Panthers, and other creatures. As they were an evil-aligned group, Evil power was also highly effective against them.

Simian was striking out with powerful blows of a spiritual nature, and seemingly able to cast ritual evil (Seer) invocations at will. He was affected by my magical sword and I disarmed him for good measure. As he realised that the fight had turned and I was about to destroy the form he inhabited, he launched into a dramatic proclamation that he would return mid-Summer to unleash the havoc of the North Wind upon us. After a prolonged magical assault, Simian/the Oracle disappeared.

Outcome

It was later confirmed that the Alliance's diplomatic overtures had been successful and that due to the "good will" of the Kern Valley Alliance and our stated intent to take action to curtail the problems caused by the release of the North Wind, trade embargos have currently been lifted until the end of the year.