

We continue to explore Orin Rakatha anew. Our principal objectives were to seek a solution to the Ison problem and to attend the coronation of the new Kalid King as emissaries of the Mystics. The Ti'an had moved Ison out of our nation to a place nearby The Neck waystation where the risk to our people would be reduced while he continued to seek a way to help the boy.

The group consisted of Baku, Ceth, Driedyn, Drokal, Kurt, Kyle, Lyra, Tornado, Verrick and myself.

Over the course of the mission, we encountered numerous groups along the way. The following are some general observations:

Hordelings

Nothing unusual or noteworthy about these. They continue to exhibit distinct personalities.

Court of a Thousand Swords

Continuing hostility from the CoaTS renders any and all attempts at diplomacy impractical. All Valley groups should expect immediate and unprovoked attacks if you meet with this Nation-in-waiting. All members carry an embodied Greater Spirit which can be controlled/dismissed once the "host" has been slain.

Elementals

No groups of mixed elementals seem to be roaming the lands to the north of our own. Green elementals are still problematic. Their Elemental Prince feels that we have betrayed some agreement with him. Those who were present explained that there was some misunderstanding which has been relayed to the Prince. All Green Elementals are likely to be hostile.

Fortress of Pentar

We are formally at war with this Nation. Expect immediate hostility from a people almost as diverse as we are. Vampires appear to form a core part of the senior levels of this Nation, possibly at the highest levels.

They appear to be formed of 5 separate factions and there may be an additional ruling faction. If such a ruling body exists, it is most likely made up of Vampires.

Faction: Drow formerly of House Tilduring.

Contribution: Labyrinthe of Xenos technology and Psionics.

Faction: Yakuza from Sokoku Island, Shao Lun.

Contribution: Binding Tattoos, Oni expertise, blood magic and muscle.

Faction: Melnibonean Hepathologists from Vanishing Tower.

Contribution: Hepathology and planar expertise.

Faction: Sorcerors from Wizards Concilium.

Contribution: Teaching scrolls and magical expertise.

Faction: Unknown - Possibly Vampires. Possibly Kalid.

Halls of Sutekh

Home to the Knights of Our Dark Lady. An uneasy neutrality at present pending a visit to the Temple. Their Tower is located far to the southeast of our own, beyond the Ikarthian Triangle. They revere the Black Pharaoh and refer to him as His Dark Majesty.

Halmadon's Heights

Cordial and rational discussion is possible even when their mission goals are at odds with our own. Conflict may be avoidable in most circumstances.

Kalid

Attempting to present an overtly friendly stance, the Kalid are once again working against the

Valley Nation. At this time, they are primarily encouraging and arming our enemies including the Fortress of Pentar.

Bane: All entering Kalid Lands uninvited are subject to the effects of a Curse and a Blight. After a several hours, the Curse increases in magnitude. It is not known if this continues to grow in effect.

Boon: Unknown.

Labyrinth of Xenos

Well disposed to any course of action which work against the interests of the Fortress of Pentar.

Reader

Reader groups are becoming progressively less cordial as their demands for rulings of law become more insistent. No attempt to trade has been made by any Reader we encountered over the last few moons.

Saldorians

Persisting in their attempts to "enlighten" any non-humans they encounter.

Shadowfall

No roaming groups of displaced Shadowfall were encountered. In this area at least, we met only those in the employ of the Reader.

Wizards Concilium

Friendly relations continue and they are willing to cooperate on many matters.

Earth Day

We arrived at The Neck waystation and were briefed by Arknor Kagari N'Ri Suth Eymeric, assistant to the Ti'an. The child Ison had been determined to be too great a risk to our people and had been removed from the Valley by the Ti'an and a number of his retinue to a place where they would continue to work on the problematic appearance of hepaths. It had been ascertained that the tattoos covering the boy were binding "extreme energies" within him and that we had no understanding of how to remove them or to dissipate the energies they held.

Arknor tasked us (on behalf of the Ti'an) with finding a solution the challenges that Ison presented. Our first avenue of investigation was to seek further knowledge of the tattoos which seemed to be of a style common on Shao Lun. At this point, Tornado was able to provide us with some information obtained by Lord Middleton of Aether Town which shed further light on the origin of the tattoos.

Kasai Sensei was known to be an expert of some repute on these matters but had recently departed from our Nation to seek a place with the Celestial Bureaucracy. Travelling with his

former bakemono Steelwind allies (Hordelings), they had not yet travelled far and we were able to find their camp after brushing aside some Hordelings and Spiders.

After we had proved our worthiness in a series of duels, Kunai shared his knowledge with us. The tattoos are used by a group from Sokoku Island which lies north of Akari Island and are the trademark of the Yakuza. They are inscribed with blood and used to bind the power of an Oni. Oni, it appears are creatures sharing many of the traits of both Hepaths and the Undead. "Stronger" blood would permit the binding of a greater Oni and that which we described on Ison was surely capable of containing the very strongest of Oni within him. Additionally, a person in possession of the blood used in the tattoo, would be able to compel the tattooed person to act as they wished.

Kunai gave us a scroll detailing a ritual by which we could summon forth the bound Oni from the tattoos although it would require the use of the same blood used in the binding.

Fire Day

We went to witness the Coronation of the new Kalid king. We were officially welcomed into their lands and, as a result, did not suffer any adverse effects from their Bane. As we travelled through the Kalid lands we were grudgingly allowed to pass by the Kalid. We were assailed by a group of beasts that we suspect were deliberately herded into our path and by a group from the Fortress of Pentar who were also guests in the Kalid lands. The beasts were unremarkable save for a troll/drow hybrid. The Pentar group, however, was heavily equipped with Labyrinth of Xenos (LoX) technology including Drones, Steel Elementals and War Elementals.

We also met some Yakuza claiming to represent "one who would become their leader" who offered to assist us if we chose to move against Azumi Sensei on their behalf.

At the Coronation site, which was opulently decorated, we were greeted by one Gabrielle Chide (pronounced Gabreel Cheed) whom we immediately divined to be the Kalid Spymaster. The coronation was a thankfully brief affair involving the murder of the old king and the eating of his still beating heart by Striking Condor of the Stone Panthers. The new king declared that "The time of the Truebloods is over" and also that "The past between the Kalid and Valley Nations should be forgotten." It was interesting to note how quickly this mighty king rushed to do the bidding of Chide.

Returning to The Neck, we took refreshments and were soon interrupted by a group of squires from Halmadons Heights. Initially, they demanded that we hand Ison and his family members over to the care of the Knights of Chastity but it quickly became clear that they were interested in Ison alone. Rhianna and Lyonnaise, Ison's mother and grandfather respectively, were not truly their concern. We told them we would make our decision by midnight that night and they left.

Representatives of the Reader, once again accompanied by Shadowsfall mercenaries, came to make demands of us regarding the status of the Gest as a currency and for assistance with their debt defaulters. Their representative was a Mr. Vetallis who was somewhat intractable. We agreed to ensure that a meeting would be organised with the Reader in our nation within a moon to inform them of our decision. This despite the Reader having failed to organise the meeting they had promised in their own lands but weeks before.

We were then assailed by a strong Pentar group who briefly demanded we "Hand over the Child" before attacking. After the fight, we discovered that one of the humans amongst them, probably of Sukoku origin, was controlling their drones by means of a psionically active mask. We were unable to recover this device due to the damaging effect it had on those that touched it.

A Pordaradrim arrived to tell us that the Shadowsfall had not been pleased by the planting of Death mushrooms along their borders, a task he claimed to have undertaken on our instructions. After some consideration, we suggested that he consult with the Thissessin to see if they would welcome the mushrooms either as additional security around their spawning pools or perhaps to isolate them on an unused island.

Two Wizards Concilium sorcerors also came by and agreed that they would ask among their own people and the LoX about ways to control or diminish the power of a hepath. A representative of the Kalid also came by and offered to take the boy Ison off our hands if we were finding it difficult to deal with him. The child would be "contained" and used for research.

A group of Drones came by to clear the way for the arrival of High Enchanter Leshanka who offered to construct a containment trap by the Ikarthian Triangle to keep the child from harming others. The High Enchanter then departed.

After much discussion of our options, we decided to accept the LoX offer as being the least likely to harm Ison and effectively buy us the time to learn how to help him properly. Thus resolved, we sent messages to the Ti'an, the LoX and the Halmadonian squires.

The Ti'an arrived accompanied only by the child. The rest of his group had been killed or incapacitated by hepaths. The boy seemed pleasant enough but somewhat simple. His maturity was astonishing for one not yet a full year old. He spent much time speaking to Alekzander. This disembodied voice had been dismissed as an imaginary friend by the child's mother but we were able to hear its voice even if the words it spoke were not clear to us.

As the evening went on we were assaulted by the Halmadonian squires, Pentar forces and hepaths that seemed to pour forth from Ison. Sometimes by more than one group at a time.

Eventually, Azumi Sensei himself led a Pentar group against us. We killed his followers but he took control of Ison, calling him Alekzander, and the child slew the Ti'an. We were unable to affect Azumi and unwilling to attack the boy. Azumi was able to take Ison from us and we were left to lick our wounds and consider our options.

Steel Day

After plenty of discussion, we decided that our best course would be to try to strike a blow against the Pentar following their actions the previous day. Reasoning that we could draw forth the Oni from within the tattoos of Azumi Sensei in the same fashion as those of Ison, we would attempt to obtain the blood that Azumi had used as ink.

We invaded the Kalid lands, meeting significant and increasing resistance to our incursion. We also saw several groups of Truebloods attempting to flee other Kalid groups. Seeing our enemy warring upon themselves was most satisfying. Eventually, we recovered what we sought from an Alchemists lab deep in Kalid territory guarded by both Kalid legionaries and Hepaths.

We retreated back to the waystation despite being constantly harried by the Hunt. Shortly afterwards, we were visited by Sir Giles Lavive de la Castille Noir. A representative of the Knights of Our Dark Lady, he demanded that His Dark Majesty (Dreadlord Araikas) should be immediately relocated to either the Halls of Sutekh or to the Central Isle. We explained that

Araikas chose to reside in the Temple of the Four Winds and Sir Giles resolved to visit the Temple. He would then camp outside our lands and await our decision on moving Araikas as per their demands. We agreed to arrange a meeting for him with our people once their visit to the Temple was concluded.

At this point, we performed the ritual to summon forth the Oni. This creature was formidable and, had we not been prepared, the situation could have been dire.

As darkness fell, we received news from the Yakuza pretender of the location of Azumi Sensei. We fought through a large encampment of guards and were assailed by some kind of spiritual assassins which were most annoying.

Finally, we assaulted Azumi Sensei with his cadre. Azumi was unable to call upon the Oni which had so ably defended him the previous night. He was assisted by a Major Vampire which was ably dismissed by Kurt. These two setbacks provided us with the opportunity to kill his guards and to slay Azumi.

We found neither evidence of the location of Ison nor the blood used to control him. We did, however, strike down one of the leaders of the Fortress of Pentar. Having achieved as much as we could, we returned to the Valley.