

5The following is our plan of engagement for what we hope will be the final, decisive battle to secure these lands against our enemies. I will keep this as brief as possible in the interest of operational security as well as expediency of disseminating information. For those who wish it, some relevant background and historical information is included as an appendix.

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Plan of Engagement

Note to travelers: We have intelligence that our enemy is patrolling the mists to prevent us from bringing in reinforcements. Those traveling from other shards should be prepared for a fight when passing through the mists.

Floating Objective: We have at least one objective that may need to be added to our agenda. It is currently not known if this is mission critical. Since its status is unknown I will include details as an appendix. See Appendix IV: The Shadows of Garrenshaw.

Friday evening has three objectives. The timing is uncertain but it would be wise to prepare as though they are to be prosecuted simultaneously. Please consider in which of these tasks you feel you would be most useful, and prepare accordingly. Certain individuals are required specifically for each task, and should know who they are.

- **Awaken the Great Guardian**

This ancient creature slumbers beneath a land far to the East. If we can awaken it with stories and songs, we can gain a powerful ally for our cause. We need people who are adept with words, who have tales to share of hope, of the great deeds we have done thus far, and of why this land and its inhabitants are worth fighting for. Martial prowess is not required directly for the task, but we may encounter enemy resistance..

- **Empower our forces through Hope**

Squire Shin, The Empress, Sir Tolgar and perhaps a few others will be casting a ritual to harness the Hope of Fortannis, in order to empower our forces, particularly those who have traveled from other shards to join our cause. This may attract enemy attention, so we will need people to stand watch and defend the casters if need be.

- **Recover Artifacts from the Plane of Mind**

Our final act in this war, fate willing, will be to perform a ritual to close the holes that the Outsiders have created between Maelstrom and the Void. Several items necessary for this ritual will need to be retrieved from the Plane of Mind. This plane is highly dangerous and will require a strike force that is both quick and powerful. Details as to the nature of the items will be provided to the relevant team when the time comes. This likely to be a get in, hit hard, get out scenario. If there is a protracted engagement something has gone wrong. This will require timing with other allied forces, details to come.

The following day, we should prepare for a long and difficult series of battles. Once we begin, we will not stop until we, or more preferably, our enemies, are dead. Bring everything you expect you might need, and then some, as we will not be returning to our encampment. Our rough agenda is as follows:

- **End the Curse of the Eternal Sun**

A group will need to travel to the place of origin of the Empire, where four casters will perform a ritual designed to end the curse. Our current designated casters are Lady Vellis, Baroness Ashlyn, Gregory, and Plue. We will at minimum need to cast a Resonance and retrieve one additional ritual ingredient, and expect resistance from the land's inherent Necromantic effects, the automata that protect the capitol, and likely the Dread Pride of Life and its associated elementals. Martial support will be required. Those making this journey will require protections against the Chaos aura that blankets the continent. See Preparations below for details on this protection. See Appendix III: Notable Enemies for information on the Dread Pride, and Appendix II for relevant background information on the Curse.

- **Retrieve the final component for the Void-Sealing ritual**

Details will be forthcoming – Paladin Orem is the lead on this objective. We will assault a location to be specified and retrieve an item needed for the final ritual. Resistance will be very heavy – a powerful and entrenched Outsider is believed to be on the field. While we cannot be sure of which Outsider, intelligence suggests the Diplomat. Please see Appendix III: Notable Enemies for details if you expect to engage with the Diplomat directly.

- **Perform the Void-Sealing Ritual**

Details of the ritual and its casting are omitted for operational security. When the ritual is cast, we expect the Outsiders and their allies to come at us in force. Prepare for Outsiders, Fifth Column forces, and anything and everything else they can bring to bear. See details on known Outsiders and Fifth Column forces below.

Expected Enemies

- **Outsiders**

Powerful creatures from the Void beyond Fortannis. Outsiders are foreign, powerful, and should not be underestimated. If you wish to understand them more fully, please speak to any of the Lantern Bearers. Regrettably I have not had time to commit a more thorough study to writing.

- Known abilities and tactics
 - Physical, mental, and societal corruption -- see note below for more details.
 - Powerful magical and martial abilities, including Dragon Magic
 - Powerful Outsiders exponentially increase in strength when being mobbed by a large number of adventurers.
 - The most powerful among them can only be killed under specific circumstances
 - Many Outsiders are immune to command, binding and healed by prison.
 - Some outsiders have reverse thresholds
 - Many of them will attempt to consume the fallen
 - Some Outsiders may attempt to apply marks to those they have taken. We believe these marks are a means of tracking and control.
- Precautions
 - Do not touch them or their leavings (IE remains, equipment, etc.). Do not read or examine them or anything associated with them if it becomes painful or feels wrong.
 - People should be checked for corruption after contact. Purify works for early stages. More significant corruption requires other means of intervention. Sgt. Liren also has a means of removing Outsider corruption.
 - People should also be checked for marks if they have been taken or in extended contact. Liren will have several Mark/Unmark scrolls in case of this eventuality. Marks should be removed as soon as possible.
 - Be aware of sharp jumps in strength. Be prepared to rapidly cycle out with your comrades so people stay armored and healed, but only four or five individuals are fighting an Outsider at one time.
 - Consumed allies can be recovered by killing the foe and cutting the victim out. The victim will need a life spell after this, and will almost certainly be corrupted.
 - Our leaders, as well as people with strong metaphysical connections, are likely to be considered high value targets and are at greater risk of capture (though everyone on the field is a target for capture to some extent). People should watch each other's backs; a battle buddy system is highly recommended. Skirmishers should be prepared to disrupt rifting Outsiders to prevent them from taking prisoners.
- Known weaknesses
 - Weapons of jade, orichalcum, obsidian, and aeog
 - Banish spells
 - Warding sigils and Proscribe magic can keep them away
- On the Corrupting Power of the Outsiders

Outsiders are known to attack our sense of morals and camaraderie. They will attempt to drive wedges between us with illusions, mental compulsions and other forms of

insidious influence. They will trap us in moral quandaries in order to force us to either burn time, or damage our sense of trust in one another. The way to combat this tactic is threefold.

- First, keep an eye on those closest to you for strange or compulsive behavior.
- Second, remain calm and have faith at the comrades at your side. Do not allow the sense of paranoia the Outsiders will attempt to seed in us to overtake your better judgment. They think of our bonds to one another as a weakness, prove that they are our greatest strength.
- Third, remain focused on our objective. The Outsiders will attempt to distract, distress or tempt people with any and all things imaginable. The return of a departed loved one, fulfilling a lifelong goal, the power to rain destruction upon your enemies. The power they offer is very real, but the price is complete subversion of your will and very essence.
- For information on specific known Outsiders, see Appendix III: Notable Enemies

- **Fifth Column forces**

An Outsider controlled mortal military force. Extremely efficient and skilled combatants.

- Known abilities and tactics
 - Ambush and siege tactics
 - Disabling alchemy
 - Traps have not been in evidence but would not be out of character
 - Highly disciplined
 - At least one Shadow Mage has been seen among their numbers, using battle cast Destroy Magic
 - Isolation and divide and conquer tactics
 - Fear tactics
 - Smoking out/destroying provisions
- Precautions
 - Prepare to deal with large amounts of alchemy. Poison shields as well as Purifies, Awakens and Cleanses will be in high demand. We primarily encountered the use of Sleep, Berserk and Paralysis poisons but it would be wise to prepare for others.
 - As difficult as it is, stay together and do all you can to keep a level head.
 - Do not chase them off into the dark.
- Known weaknesses
 - They are normal, untainted mortals as far as we are aware.
- For information on specific known Fifth Column forces, see Appendix III: Notable Enemies

- **Dread Pride**

The Dread Pride are a group of extremely powerful gryphons which have been made undead, elementally tainted, and brought under Outsider influence.

- DO NOT ENGAGE THE DREAD PRIDE OF DEATH. Death has indicated that it will deal with this gryphon personally. We are not to interfere.
- Known abilities and tactics

- Extreme combat intelligence
- Physical might and stamina
- Summon or spawn multiple intelligent elementals.
- Spikes in strength when mobbed
- Some form of elemental attunement/Vulnerability. The life Dread Pride is most likely to be able to strike straight past armor and other physical defenses.
- Either outright immunity or the ability to rip free from all binding.
- Possible immunity to prison.
- Possible immunity to command.
- The ability to command undead by voice.
- At least one was able to take flight at high speed in the middle of battle.
- Precautions
 - Engage in small, cycling teams.
 - Isolate the gryphon from its elemental minions.
 - Do not let it camp the dead, the Dread Pride have been known to rift dead bodies away from the field and likely to other planes.
- Known weaknesses
 - The Gryphon blade is a short sword which imparts unmitigatable damage (Vengeance) to the Dread Pride. The blade must be attuned to to be wielded. The blade must be handed off from fighter to fighter over the course of the battle. If the gryphon is able to identify who wields the blade it will sack that person, take the blade and rift it away to another location. To attune to the blade speak to Sir Kjeld.
 - Doom may have an alternate effect on the Life Gryphon. It may also be highly resistant.
- **Elementals**

While we have significantly decreased the elemental presence in Maelstrom, they may still be present, especially those from planes we have not yet sealed away (Life and Death), and Flame (see Appendix III: Notable Enemies for information on Angana, Icon of Flame). Standard strategies for elemental combat are effective, namely, be prepared for elemental damage, and to inflict damage via opposing elements.
- **Outsider tainted mortals**

The Outsiders have spread their corruption to mortals of this land, and use them as combat troops. Largely their abilities are those of normal mortals, though entities that are particularly corrupted may be capable of wielding powers of the Outsiders. As difficult as it is, at this point the corrupted are beyond our help, and the kindest thing we can do for them is to end their suffering.
- **Undead**

While we do expect resistance of a necromantic variety on the Old Continent where we will pursue breaking the Curse of the Eternal Sun, it is important to know that we have a non-aggression treaty with the Eternal Sun itself. Any Undead entity that identifies itself as a member of the Empire of the Eternal Sun and does not attack, is not to be harmed.

Recommended Preparations

- Protectives. Spell shields will be especially needed as Dragon Magic and radius effects may likely be present. Poison Shields, Cleanses, Awakens and Purifies will also be in high demand.
- Enslavement Antidotes.
- Planar asylum against Void (and for those who will be making the journey to the curse-breaking objective, Chaos). This will be provided by our allies. Spellcrafts are available for those who cannot tolerate this magic for a long period of time – be prepared to supply components. Alternate means of protection may also be sought if needed.
- Mental blocks. Their effectiveness may be of limited use against our foes but it cannot hurt. Plue and Petronia are willing to provide them for any who wish.
- Outsider killing weapons. Jade, orichalcum, obsidian, and aeog. These will certainly be targeted and so should be strengthened if possible.
- Means to protect spirits against death. Casualty estimates are high for this encounter. If you have the means to protect yourself from death, by regeneration, rebirth, or protective reflex, or rituals designed to strengthen the spirit against weakening in death, now is the time to deploy those measures.
- Spellcrafting can be provided by Sir Tolgar. Please be mindful of his resources and do not use this frivolously. He also requests ropes for circles of power be brought.
- Supplies for an extended engagement. Potions, battle magic scrolls and alchemy will all be useful. Remember, we will not have an opportunity to return for a resupply.

Who to speak to for more information

- Battle plans or other military matters: General Duke Sir Marcus, Dame Marisa, Sir Kjeld, or Sir Tolgar
- Need equipment, or equipment to offer: Plue or Squire Pfeil
- Healers, please speak to Petronia, who will be heading up our triage unit
- For spellcrafting or other ritual needs, please speak to Sir Tolgar
- Information on Outsiders or other foes, combat focused: Sir Kjeld, Dame Marisa, or Sgt. Liren
- Additional information on any topic, or unsure who to speak to: Plue, Lady Vellis, or Squire Pfeil

Appendix I: A Brief History of the Maelstrom

Much of the history of this land is hazy, but the broad strokes of what we have reconstructed are this. There was a time when the Empire of the Iron Hand exercised a harsh rule over much of this land. A nation headed by biata, they enforced their superiority by propaganda and mind control.

At some point, they became engaged in a protracted war with the Undead. Many were lost in this war, and of course the lost simply joined the enemy forces. The cause began to look hopeless. Rather than allow themselves to be defeated, the Iron Hand opened gates into the Elemental planes, hoping to use the Elementals as forces in their fight against their necromantic enemy. It is unclear what precisely happened after this point, but it is easy enough to extrapolate the likely outcome, given the state of utter destruction the Maelstrom was in when we found it.

It is unknown precisely at what point the Outsiders insinuated themselves into this land, but their subt and terrible influence can be seen throughout its history. It is certain that they drew out the war against the undead, and that it was in part their vile powers that allowed the Iron Hand to crush their various enemies so thoroughly. The true extent of their influence may never be known.

In any case, the world was, for all intents and purposes, lost completely. Seven years ago, the first Lantern Bearers came into this world across the mists, finding nothing but destruction. They reestablished the first Earth Circles, and the people who had given their lives in the war began to resurrect. Together, they began the slow and difficult process of reclaiming this land.

Over these past years, we have won many victories. We have grown from a small band of refugees and mistwalkers living in borrowed Vaeltarri caves, into a unified force of over two thousand spirits, not to mention the other factions that have begun their own resurgence. We have resealed six of the eight elemental gates, and established multiple permanent settlements on the surface. We have defeated the last of the Iron Hand, and are building in their place the beginnings of a new, better society. We have mounted two expeditions into the void itself, reclaimed a stronghold that the Outsiders had corrupted and freed millions of spirits from their foul prison. These victories have cost us greatly. But we finally have a chance, here and now, to finish the fight once and for all.

Appendix II: The Dread Pride and the Empire of the Eternal Sun

During the reign of the Empire of the Iron Hand, there was a blight on the land of the southern continent which grew stronger as it fed on the magics used on it. The Empire attempted to crack down on it by pretending it didn't exist and slaughtering villages and researchers to hide its existence. The gryphons of the Empire, the Pride, came to the Imperial council to offer help and were slaughtered and left to rot.

The Empire fled to the continent we now occupy with the people they deemed important enough to save. The Pride, and the rest of the population, were left behind. The slaughtered gryphons rose as the Dread Pride -- cursed to Undeath, and ultimately tainted elementally and by Outsiders. They build what is now called the Empire of the Eternal Sun from the former Iron Hand subjects who had been left to die.

The Undeath that affects the Empire of the Eternal Sun is not the ordinary kind. They are under the effects of a curse, and cannot be restored with a Gift of Life. Additionally, those under the effects of the curse cannot remember it or speak freely of it.

A team consisting primarily of Lady Vellis, Baroness Ashlyn, Gregory, and Plue is working to break this curse.

Appendix III: Notable Enemies

Outsiders

- **The Hammer**

The closest thing we've observed to the Outsiders having a leader.

- Known abilities and tactics
 - Heinously physically powerful and durable.
 - Strikes with unavoidable might.
 - He is a consumer, he will eat immobilized or fallen people.
 - Mental manipulation
 - Natural capability to use Enslavement, including through his weapon.
 - Likely to have massive jumps in strength when mobbed
- Precautions
 - NEVER engage without backup.
 - Be prepared to cycle in small units.
 - Do not let him camp dead bodies. Use endows to grab your friends and run.
- Known Weaknesses
 - Jade, aeog, obsidian etc.
 - A penchant for monologuing

- **The Diplomat**

Curious, insidious and manipulative by nature, The Diplomat isn't as physically imposing as the Hammer but his tactics and manipulations are just as lethal.

- Known abilities and tactics
 - Spikes in strength when mobbed.
 - Naturally strikes with Arcane Doom.
 - Strikes with unavoidable might.
 - Can use by voice effects.
 - Rarely fully manifests. What is engaged in the field is actually a projection or "lure" which leads back to the whole being.
 - Places "listeners" on people he comes into contact with. These are incredibly difficult to detect. Exercise caution if you come into physical contact with the Diplomat and he survives.
- Precautions
 - Cycle in small units.
 - Cloak Curse or Dodge.
 - The Diplomat has a large physical range, but is relatively slow. Stay agile and mobile.
- Known Weaknesses
 - Jade, aeog, etc.

- **The Executioner**

- Known abilities and tactics
 - Wields a giant two handed axe
- Precautions
 - Has not been often encountered, be prepared for anything.

- Weaknesses
 - Presumably Jade, aeog, obsidian etc.
- **The Jester**
 - Known abilities and tactics
 - Distraction. Likes to claim he is “nonviolent” or wants to talk.
 - Will chuck a cartload of prisons when engaged directly.
 - Precautions
 - The element of surprise, or backup to deal with an excess of Prisons.
 - He has, however, only been engaged once and that was before the magic changed. He may have also changed.
 - Weaknesses
 - Jade, aeog, obsidian, etc.
 - Seemed to not be physically potent, but this may have been a front.
- **Unnamed Outsider**
 - Known abilities and tactics
 - Consumer, will eat the immobilized and the fallen.
 - Immeasurable physical power.
 - Spent a great deal of time in the plane of death
 - Precautions
 - At the time we fled it instead of fighting. We were weaker then, we may have closed the gap since. It may still be too powerful for mortals to combat.
 - Do not allow him to close in on dead bodies.
 - Weaknesses
 - Theoretically jade, aeog, obsidian, etc.

Fifth Column Agents

- **Esses the Mad aka Swordfish**
 - Known Tactics
 - Incredibly potent physical fighter with a penchant for one on one duels.
 - Will shun by voice similarly to a Pantharghast (Shun all non-oathsworn, Selunari etc.)
 - Wields an Aeog Greatsword.
 - Precautions
 - Disarms seem to stick
 - DO NOT PICK UP OR TOUCH THE GREATSWORD
 - Use of strong martial skills will draw his attention. He will prosecute an opponent until they are dispatched.
 - Weaknesses
 - To be permanently killed he must be called out and challenged by an Oathsworn and defeated in single combat. If the duel is interfered with he will not die at the end of it, even if he is defeated.

- **The Fifth Column Admiral**

- Known Tactics
 - Has yet to personally take the field.
 - Genius warmaster and tactician.
 - Will sacrifice their men in feints or bait and switches.
 - Will attack “soft targets” IE civilians, children, food stores etc.
- Precautions
 - They are incredibly patient, ruthless and use fear and deprivation to their advantage. Remain level headed.
- Known Weaknesses
 - Allegedly mortal, but likely empowered.
 - May have to be killed in a specific way.

Other Enemies

- **Queen Angana**

The Elemental Icon of Flame and a subordinate of the Outsiders. She is as cruel as she is arrogant, and seeks to burn all of Fortannis one shard at a time. We do not have specific intelligence that she will be present, but given her past antagonism towards us it would be wise to be prepared.

- Known Tactics
 - Angana is a sadist who will act not only to win but to demoralize and maim her enemies.
 - She is an incredibly competent fighter. She tends to shape her natural aura of flames into a shield and claw-like blade.
 - She is an adept battle commander.
 - She will call flame elementals to her side at will.
- Precautions
 - Isolate her from her minions
 - Be careful of traps she may have laid in the field. She has a fondness for popping in and out of a circle of power.
 - Anything which can heighten your resistance to Flame will be a boon.
- Known Weaknesses
 - Angana has a natural resistance to Ice. But once this is punched through she is as vulnerable as any Flame Elemental
 - Her temper can be used against her.

Appendix IV: The Shadows of Garrenshaw

There is far too much history to divulge here at once. Suffice to say that a body of Outsiders known as "The Shadows" once laid siege to the lands of Garrenshaw. Garrenshaw fell but we have been given the chance to banish the shadows once and for all. This will entail the recovery of a highly tainted artifact and the use of that artifact to seal a gate. We may have to travel to Garrenshaw itself, where we can expect Outsiders, corrupted shadows and undead. We do not know when this will need to happen, intelligence on this objective is still actively coming in. Contacts for this objective are Captain Liren Silverrose and Duke Marcus.