

The Scarlet War – the Amber Dragon's story

The Spellpool was our crowning achievement. Arcane magic made material, concentrated spell energy so pure you could run your fingers through it. It was also the most powerful scrying device ever wrought, and by using it our seers could look far into the future... further than anyone ever had, and perhaps, further than was wise.

No one was more adept at scrying than Segilus the Blind, who had put his own eyes out, the better to see. In the year 740, Segilus gathered the Council around the Spellpool, and showed us what he had seen. A war was coming, a war born of fear and jealousy and ambition, and the Lord Marshal Valanthe Amakiir rode at its head.

We saw ourselves, drawing up our strength to meet the onslaught of the Sun, and defeating it. And there was joy at this pronouncement, that we would weather the storm, but one voice cut through the celebration. Segilus, who saw better and further than the rest, said, "Look again!"

And there, with his guidance, we saw further than the rest of us had ever dared look. We saw the true cost of victory – the whole of Crescent laid a blasted ruin. The spell energies pouring forth from the two sides left little of our world unscorched. The Jade Tower stood, alone, presiding over a wasteland.

The council, led by Segilus and Aurora the Insightful, spent many years exploring the multi-threaded future, but the end result was always the same image: The Jade Tower, standing alone amongst the ruins of a world turned against itself. Decades passed, but even with the full might of the Tower feeding his Sight, still Segilus could not see a path through.

Until, that is, he and Aurora explored a thread they had not before seen – a thread that might lead to the salvation of the world. When he reconvened the Council, he made a simple pronouncement of their findings.

The Jade Tower must lose.

He outlined a plan by which the Tower could convince the world, and the Church of ORB in particular, that they had fallen and been vanquished, but yet live. It was a daring plan, relying on deception and misdirection, rather than a direct conflict, and requiring great sacrifice.

In short, his plan was this: The Arcane Masters would seemingly retreat, leaving their enclaves and their towers with only nominal conflict, and fall back to the Jade Tower, where they would put up a last, great fight.

Meanwhile, the Chronomancers – our masters of Time and Space – would weave a great spell to take most of the Masters out of their time, and hide them where no Church member could find them. There they would wait, until the time was ripe, until the world had need of them again and was ready for their presence.

The plan, of course, involved sacrifice for all. Those that went into hiding would lose everything they had ever treasured – family and home and wealth. Those that remained would be martyred to the greater good of our kind.

Segilus described his plan, and all the Council sat, stunned into silence.

All save one, that is. Shinn the Sorcerer rose up, and decried the plan, and swore he would never retreat before the army of ORB. He was a prideful one, Shinn, and in the end it cost him his power and his life and his soul. He left the Tower that day, and not a few of his followers went with him. It was he, and his brethren, I might add, who later rained fire down on the Island of Lost Souls, though we incorporated that act as part of our deception.

This was the year 813, and time was perilously short. Events were in motion already that would lead to the start of war, and we had little time left to lose. So much time – 73 years – had already been lost.

Preparations began immediately on both parts of the plan. Word went out within days to our enclaves and schools, telling those of them able to retreat to the Tower. A call for volunteers to stay and fight and die was sent, and fifty-one of our Master mages stepped forward – myself included.

And the research and creation of one of the most powerful spells ever cast on Crescent began that same night. It was quickly determined that a spell of this magnitude, developed on such short notice, required that it be centralized at one of the ley line nexii.

While it would have been easier to complete the ritual at one of our own sites, misdirection compelled us to center it where it would be interpreted as another strike at the Church – Mt. Daneasus. Segilus knew that the Temple would be empty, as the Lord Marshal would pool his forces and perform the ritual at Luminoux, which was to be his master stroke – the attack that, had we met it directly, was to be the world's ruin.

We were not without allies – some members of the Order of the Fist came over to us, and were instrumental in smuggling mages into the City of Mt. Daneasus in the last days. They were the foundation of the Blood Fists, and have been nominally under my command for centuries, though an element of fanaticism has crept into the group in the last few decades, which will spell the end of my control. It is of no import, though, as they have served their purpose.

We had a small army of soldiers, most with some small mystical talent, at our command, and they fought loyally and hard, serving as the advance guard. We had a legion of apprentices, but to ask our apprentices to die while we hid was shameful, and many of them were sent away, to their homelands. They were stripped of their spellbooks and given instructions to never again use their mystical talent. Most of them were true to their word, and never again cast a single spell, though I believe that their blood ran true, and is related to the current bumper crop of sorcerers.

There is one other group that bears mentioning – the heavenly host of the Archangel Yanseldra. On the last day, as those of us tasked to defend the Tower in our fictitious last stand struggled to give the Chronomancers enough time to complete their spell weaving, she came to us. Appearing in the inner sanctum of the Tower, as though our defenses were no more than tissue to be torn at her whim, she placed herself and her army at our disposal – they would fight in our stead, and hold off the forces of the Lord Marshal as long as they could.

I should add that her appearance and offer were the cause of much consternation. When asked what the meaning of her appearance was, she responded, simply, "ORB is wrath."

So She and her host fought and killed and died for us, and their sacrifice bought us the time we needed. The Chronomancers finished weaving their spell just in time, as the masterstroke of the Lord Marshal tore through our defenses.

I read an account some time ago, where it was claimed that, by calling on ORB's lunar side, the Lord Marshal hid himself from our scrying, and caused us to misfire on the Temple instead of the Island in Luminoux. Nothing, obviously, could be further from the truth. We had known the stroke would come from the Blue City for more than seven decades. The spell was aimed at the Temple in Mt Daneasus for the simple reason that most of our members were hidden away there. All but one of the Chronomancers were there, with only Tollerath in the Jade Tower to act as the conduit between the Spellpool and the Temple. Fifty-one others remained in the Tower, waiting for the inevitable – to sell their lives as dearly as they could, or be stripped of their power and executed.

I myself was given a special task – to survive the fight, and confess to anything and everything the Lord Marshal accused me of, and plead guilty. No man has ever been given more mystical scrutiny than Amakiir, and it had been determined that his pride would not allow him to condemn to death a man who showed true repentance. His inflated ego and belief in his own righteousness would force him to show demency in that instance.

It was a desperate gamble, but my life is proof that it worked. He allowed me to go free, and, not knowing its importance, retain the Pyre of Heroes. The others of the Elemental Conclave escaped in various ways, many to die later at the Sword, but all, apparently, leaving behind their legacy for you to find.

Shinn, of course, sold his life dearly, and the blasted land around his Tower is proof of Segilus' vision – that a direct, all-out conflict between the Church and the Jade Tower would have been disastrous.