

The Well of Shadows

Overview

The Well of Shadows is the new incarnation of Pakanaan's Tower, which once stood in Skarsind. Like the Tower before it, the Well is a chamber in the Night realm and access to it is a powerful boon for any ritualist who wishes to study magic. Following an agreement with Ceslev of the Circle of Zulgan-Tash during the Summer Solstice 379YE, Sadogua has moved the chamber to Miekarova and made it available to those who share his goals.

The real Well is a chamber in the Night Realm, but in the mortal world it appears as a weirwood door built into the side of a low hill. Overgrown with moss, it seems to have been in place for centuries despite having appeared suddenly less than a week after the Solstice.

The door bears no keyhole, and the only sign of its connection to the Tower of Pakanaan is a carved bone doorknocker in the shape of Diras, the Wintermark rune of secrets. If the door is opened, or entry is forced by physical means, then beyond lies nothing but an empty cave, filled with damp stalactites and stalagmites.

The safest way to enter the Well requires magic and the patronage of the eternal Sadogua. If an individual favoured by the Toad King casts operate portal on the door then it opens freely to reveal a winding passage that appears to lead down into the depths of the earth, but actually leads into a chamber in the Night realm.

The passage does not branch, but at regular intervals along its length are doors, archways, or curtained thresholds that lead into the rooms that form the interior of the spiral. The first such chamber is a comfortable living area – always well stocked with food and drink. An open hearth in the centre burns lazily at all times (despite the lack of chimney the room never becomes too smoky), keeping the stone room warm and comfortable, and there is a great bed of furs to ensure a restful night's sleep.

Each other such room is a library of arcane lore. Books fill most of the walls on the upper levels, but the lower down one goes the more scrolls one encounters. After several revolutions of the spiral, the rooms begin to contain paintings, murals, tapestries, tablets and sculptures – it is a little like descending through the history of the study of magic.





Not all the lower chambers contain books. One is built as an enclosed amphitheatre suitable for dramaturgy; another has a gorgeously detailed ceiling depicting the constellations as seen from the hills of Varushka. One opens into a garden of exotic night flowers, full of iridescent butterflies, where the scholar may meditate or study the way life transforms into other life. Another is a dusty tomb, sarcophagi in an unknown style covered in dust and cobwebs. Still another room is an abandoned storeroom inhabited by fist-sized spiders that converse with the scholar in the fussy voices of educated scholars. The further down one goes, the more of these exotic chambers one encounters.

No fire can be kindled in the Well of Shadows, and while the upper levels are lit by lightstones, luminescent crystals, and the occasional exotic fungus, the lower levels are drowned in shadow. The further down one goes, the more a certainty that one should *turn back* grows until eventually even the most single minded visitor will falter, and lose the will to continue.

However, further details of the Well are almost impossible to pin down due to the power of the *thief of memory*, the powerful curse or enchantment that is bound into the very fabric of the Well (see below). Every guest knows that they are not alone in the Well, but cannot quite remember who else inhabits the structure, or the details of any interactions with them.

The Scholar at the Well

The eternal Sadogua owns the Well of Shadows, and ultimately determines who can enter it. As part of the agreement, the Father of Bats allows one Imperial citizen each season to enter the Well and spend time studying there. Regardless of how much time is spent within, no more than three months pass between entering and leaving.

The chosen scholar can make use of the Well, and may use the ritual *Missive for Sadogua* to ask the Eternal to allow someone else to take their place. While anyone could in theory petition Sadogua for entry, he has agreed specifically to honour the requests of the current scholar over those of any interlopers. In theory, Sadogua could remove access to the Well at any time. However, due to his nature and the nature of eternal in general, he is extremely unlikely to do so as long as the mortals of Varushka hold to their end of *the bargain* (see below).

In the end though, this is not an imperial title – control of the Well, and the ability to appoint the scholar, rests with the eternal not any Imperial body. As a result, it is possible for an Imperial citizen to have an Imperial title and still have the title of Scholar at the Well.

Benefits

Arcane Experimentation

The scholar at the Well can weave a single arcane projection each season. This does not require the expenditure of any crystal mana; the power comes from the Well itself. It may detail a magical effect of any realm or magnitude.

Thatumaturgic Mastery

The scholar can research the formula of a new ritual so that it can be mastered. The ritual must already exist in the form of an *arcane projection*, but there is no requirement to select one that the scholar has personally commissioned. The scholar can work on formalising one ritual at a time, and the task may take anywhere from a season to several years depending on the complexity and the resources available (and, indeed, may seem to the scholar themselves to take much longer, or much less time, than passes in the mortal world). The amount of time it takes depends on the magnitude of that ritual.

It requires three months (one season) for every 10 ranks of magnitude the final ritual will have.

If research is not completed, the scholar leaves the notes on their work so far in the Well, and may resume it at a later date from where it was left off.

At the completion, the scholar receives a ritual text suitable for use in mastering the ritual. They may keep the knowledge of the ritual restricted to themselves and their allies, or in theory use a Declaration of Imperial Lore in the Conclave to have that ritual added to the wider body of Imperial Lore, making it available to any ritual magician in the Empire. However, this would contravene the agreement between the Varushkans and Sadogua, with potentially tragic consequences.



Tinctures of the Night

While the Well of Shadows has the facility to allow the scholar to formulate any ritual, its nature makes it much easier to work with the realm of Night. When the scholar works towards a project that is part of the lore of Night, the work proceeds at the rate of 15 ranks of magnitude each season.

Furthermore, when working in the specialty realm, the scholar can increase the rate at which the ritual is researched by expending measures of iridescent gloaming to secure the assistance of Sadogua, his heralds, and the shadowy presences inside the Well.

The first five ranks of additional research in a season cost 18 measures. The next five ranks cost a further 44 measures. The next five ranks cost a further 88 measures, and so on doubling the cost for each additional five ranks of research within the same season.



Limitations

Thief of Memory

The chamber does not allow any memory of the arcane secrets it contains to exist outside its confines. The moment the scholar returns to the mortal world, they forget the details of the books they have read. They may remove *new* arcane information without any problems at all – but they literally cannot remember a single word of the books they have read, the murals they have studied, or the designs they have traced in the lower chambers of the Well. Likewise, they remember nothing about the presences that inhabit the Well beyond that they exist and assist the scholar with their researches.

The scholar can remember mundane details of their time exploring and studying without any problem, and should feel free to weave interesting stories of their experiences inside the Well.

This is not a persistent effect on the scholar – rather it is an effect on the chamber or the Well, or perhaps the regio it is built within. The eternal Sadogua has made it clear that attempts to get round this effect will incur his displeasure.

The Bargain

There are three clauses to the bargain.

Firstly, while the Well requires no upkeep and does not increase the upkeep of any other Imperial College of Magic, Sadogua will only permit access to the Well in return for senate motions. Each summit, a motion must be raised to the Senate that meets the specifications Sadogua communicates to the scholar. The motion does not need to be raised by the Varushkans, and it does not have to be successful, but it must be recognisably the motion Sadogua has defined. If the scholar fails to get the motion raised, they will be barred from the Well in the following season, and may give the eternal grounds to end the agreement. However, due to the nature of the eternal, as long as the motions he demands are raised, he cannot refuse to allow access to the Well to the scholar or their chosen successor.

Secondly, no ritual formulated inside the Well may be placed in Imperial lore. If such a ritual were to enter Imperial lore, Sadogua would most likely remove access to the Well, and would be very likely to exact vengeance on the scholar who allowed this to happen.

Thirdly, it is up to the scholar to select their own successor. As long as the other two clauses are observed, Sadogua will not remove the scholar from their position. Only in the event that the scholar is unable to use the Well or select a successor is the eternal likely to permit someone else to use the Well.

OOC Note

The Dean uses their ability to prepare an arcane projection during Downtime, and selects the arcane projection they wish to formulate, by e-mail to Profound Decisions (empire.rules@profounddecisions.co.uk) prior to the next event. The final magnitude of the ritual text is not guaranteed to be the same as that of the arcane projection.

