As I have often said, *Inyë vestane sanya nótimar vériva* - I have sworn a normal number of oaths. I often meet those who have sworn too few.

My dreams linger upon oaths. Ari, that most ardent adventurer, said the connection in the ceiling of the mage tower felt like a duel. The connection that may be a bridge between worlds. To me, duels feel rather like oaths. I think often, too, of how in elvish, the word for swearing an oath, making a compact, *vesta-*, is the same as for being bound in marriage.[1] Just as other tongues seem to couple "troth" ('oath') and betrothed. This one concept: oath, troth, duel, marriage, binding, perhaps other things more. It is sometimes a fight, but in my dreams and thoughts, it need not be.

I have heard fables, from followers of the pantheon of Valar, of a contest, a duel, over rings, symbol of both marriage and power - ending in death, fire, transformation, salvation. Eucatastrophe, snatched from jaws of defeat. Certainly we here face deaths and fire. We were slain by fire upon the volcano last moon, though the mission succeeded too through unyielding, constantly self-improving persistence.

Maybe we rush to make this worldly something-like-a-duel a fight. I dueled a party member last moon, to good effect, without fighting - no fight was needed, and the result made all known that must be known. (He spoke of ambivalence between saving or killing our king! Openly contemplated, which says much. Knocking himself out upon being dueled shows his lack of commitment - to his own beliefs, or to others. I hope others in this party are more just.)

Many duels, and things like duels, pull together, threads like the bindings of a sword. They may have fights within them, which can at times be won. I see many other things besides: A troth, a binding, an oath, a contract, a marriage, a contest.

I have sworn many oaths. The right number. To King, to country, to our laws, to my fellows in arms, to my people, to my family, to the spirits that sustain. To those around me. Our shared oaths have long sustained my squadmates in battle. My siblings in arms. We fly into the air, we know that one will catch us.

Our king is missing. The quest stands as on the edge of a knife. If we find a way to make this duel not merely be a fight - he may return after all. I dream and wonder often of what else this something-like-a-duel of worlds may be.

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[1] [Out-of-game: I'm being a tiny bit cheeky here, but only a tiny bit. The word for "bond, troth, compact, oath" in quenyan is vérë, and if you conjugate that to a verb, you get "vesta-," which is indeed the word for "to wed" in early quenyan. By the late 1960s, Tolkien started using √BER as the root for marriage verbs rather than √VEŘE, and in neo-quenyan a lot of people have used vesta as "to promise," deriving from vérë. So what Shensi says is true: "vesta-" is used to mean both/all of these things.]