

The Temple of Sárku

by M.A.R. Barker

The Judeo-Christian tradition has come to equate death and dead things with horror. The flesh is supposed to be transitory, decay is unclean, the poor mortal shells abandoned by those who have passed on are ugly and frightening, and the thought of the spirits who have not quite departed - ghosts - has frightened humankind and stimulated religion, art, and literature down through the ages.

Yet societies have existed in which death was less feared. The ancient Egyptians spent their lives - and much of their economic wealth - preparing for the Hereafter. Gods of the dead, skull-racks, human sacrifice, and the wearing of the skins of flayed victims were all part of accepted religious practice in Aztec Mexico. Even today, some Mexican communities celebrate "The Day of the Dead," visiting tombs of the ancestors, cleaning and honoring the corpses, and making candles, cakes, and sweetmeats in the form of skeletons. On the island of Madagascar, it is reported that during certain festivals one takes the bones of one's ancestors home, holds feasts in their honour, and even takes the remains of particularly beloved relatives for a drive around the island to see what has transpired since they left this life! The American tradition of Halloween bears some similarity to such commemorations, although the religious basis for it is different.

The world of Tékumel is so far removed from Terra that many of the latter's fundamental religious and ethical concepts no longer apply. Ideas, like monuments and mighty empires, fade and are replaced. The polytheistic folk of the Five Empires now speak of "noble" versus "ignoble", rather than "good" versus "evil"; there are subtle differences. The horror of dead things and the grave is largely gone, too, although these facets are still considered ugly and smelly! An Aztec, an ancient Egyptian, or certain sects of Hindus would find similarities between his/her culture and those of Tékumel, while a Christian, Jew, or Muslim might be puzzled, amazed, and repelled. A Buddhist or a member of one of those philosophical sects of Hinduism, Christianity, or other faiths that emphasize Mysticism, the illusory nature of reality, and the unimportance of the material world would be thoroughly confused. No Tsolyáni philosopher would argue for one God, for example; proof of "many Gods" is all too apparent, even though these beings are perhaps not "gods" in the same theological sense in which the Christian understands them. A Tsolyáni, too, would say that death and the grave are as much a part of the cycle of reality as Lady Avánthe's rain, crops, and greenery.

It is in this context that Lord Sárku, the Five-Headed Lord of Worms, Master of the Undead, Guide into darkness, and Demon-Lord of Decay must be seen. To the Tsolyáni, Lord Sárku is a necessary facet of the cycle of life and death. As Lady Avánthe rules the

round of fertility, growth, and living things, so does Lord Sárku take charge of the mortal remains of those who have passed on. Lord Sárku does not deal with the souls - Spirit-Souls, life forces, or whatever one chooses to call them - of the deceased; those belong to Lord Belkhánu and His Cohort, Lord Qón, who see to the continuing pilgrimage of each Spirit-Soul through the Planes of the Afterlife. The domain of the Worm Lord is that of corpses, the grave, the process of decay, the eventual Change of all things into putrefaction and dust, ready for the Weaver of Skeins to take them up again and weave more of the Fabric of Time.

In Pavár's cosmology, Lord Sárku has little to do with the causes of death. He is not a warrior like Lord Karakán, whose violence is meant for the stabilization and structuring of the world, nor is He an insensate destroyer like Lord Vimúhla, whose Flame is intended to burn, ravage, and effect Change in its most drastic form. Indeed, had it not been for one persuasive element of His doctrine, Lord Sárku might have remained a minor, unpleasant, busy, little deity, concerned with corpses, funerals, embalming, and the tomb. Yet early in the Age of the First Imperium, and certainly by the dynasties of the Kings of the Mask of Night and the Omniarch of Urúkkha. Lord Sárku's teachings had started to include a promise that has tantalized humankind ever since the race began. This is the promise of real, physical immortality.

The immortality that Lord Sárku offers is not that of the Spirit-Soul, not some pleasant - but unprovable - paradise in the Afterworld. The Spirit-Soul may continue its journey through the Planes of the Afterlife, but the self (the consciousness of identity, memory, and rational thought, that which the Tsolyáni named the Hlákme) remains behind. Lord Sárku's gift combines the Hlákme and the Bákte, the physical body, and allows both to live on, aware and active, for centuries, perhaps millennia. The body does suffer some decay, but its muscles are powered by energy from one of the Worm Lord's Planes. It is thus serviceable, but not very pretty.

Immortality is one of the most tempting of all humankind's legendary goals. To live on, to possess an eternal body, a mind with which to perceive, and a will! It is this that attracts so many to Lord Sárku's otherwise rather mournful faith.

Immortality is not achieved without sacrifice, however. The master must be served, both during life and thereafter, and the Undead must obey in every word and deed. Moreover, there is no guarantee that even assiduous devotions will result in an eternity of unimpaired existence; most of the Undead retain only portions of the abilities they had in life. The causes are not known - or are not revealed by the Worm Lord's scholars - but most of the Undead are little more than walking shells, the zombie-like Mrúr. At a higher level are the Shédra, who possess some willpower and intelligence, while a select few become Jájgi. These last are Lord Sárku's elite. They possess all of their faculties and their bodies are not usually physically decayed, although they may have a puffy, pallid look. Some exude a faint stench of the grave, but others are said to be as presentable as they were in life.

The details of these matters are kept secret. For example, no one knows how long the Undead "live". Some claim to have encountered Mrúr and Shédra attired in Engsvanyáli armour and cerements, while a few unattested reports describe still older specimens garbed in tattered raiment reminiscent of the First Imperium. No accounts from still earlier periods have been proved.

In reality, the transformation of a corpse into one of the Undead is more difficult than it is in either "Empire of the Petal Throne" or "Swords and Glory." Game mechanics require a bending or telescoping of events. Every worshipper of the Worm Lord cannot be chosen, moreover, nor is every cadaver serviceable. A day or two is needed to produce a Mrúr; three or four days are necessary for a Shédra; and an involved series of rituals and ceremonies lasting a month or more are required for a Jájgi.

Beyond the Jájgi there are said to be still higher levels. The Llyani myths speak of the Hotékpu, the Undead aides of the Worm Lord at the Battle of Dórmoron Plain. These may only be legend, but the inner shrines of the City of Sárku remain sealed to all outsiders, and who knows what lies within? Sorcerers whisper also of some form of direct identification with the Worm Lord, claiming that this is what has occurred with Prince Dhích'une, the Emperor's youngest son. History records still greater horrors during the reigns of the Emperors Hehejállu "the Dark Moon" (709- 801 A.S.) and Dúrumu "the Copper Blade of Sárku" (1.747-1,809 A.S.). The deeds of these two rulers are subject of a lengthy cycle of folk epics dealing with events of unparalleled vileness and abomination. The truth of these apocryphal tales cannot be ascertained.

Lord Sárku's Temple is fortunate in having an entire Tsolyáni city as its headquarters; the City of Sárku in the rugged Kráa hills in northwestern Tsolyánu. Within its sere-brown walls, only those clans, traders, and even Imperial Legions are permitted who are approved by the Grand Adept of the sect. This accords with the treaty made in 975 A.S. between the priesthood of Lord Sárku and the Empress Shaíra Sú, "the Divine Daughter of Thúmis" (945-984 A.S.). In 973 A.S., her troops besieged the city, later reaching the inner enceinte of walls that surround the Five Hills upon which the Temple of the Worm squats. After two years or siege, the city still held out, aided by hordes of Undead minions and creatures from the depths of the labyrinths below the Temple. Further fighting would obviously weaken the Empire and leave it prey to external foes - or even tear it in half, as Lord Sárku's allies and enemies among the other sects prepared to either help or hinder - and the Empress thus agreed to a treaty that limited the power of the Temple, forbade the use of the Undead soldiers anywhere except as sanctuary guardians within the City of Sárku itself, and blocked the expansion of the sect for half a millennium thereafter. Later, Emperor Dúrumu attempted to remove some of these strictures, but in this he was thwarted by the Temples of Stability, who grew strong during the latter years of his reign.

The iconography of the Temple of Sárku is, like all of the deities of Pavár's pantheon, complex. The First Greater Aspect of the Worm is, of course, a monstrous vermiform creature with five questing heads. He has 107 further Greater Aspects, each with a name, form, symbols, and all the trappings of myth and religion. Given the unappealing nature

of Sárku's Godhead, his priests seem to have made a virtue out of ugliness: the 108 Greater Aspects are hideous in the extreme! Worms, demons, monsters, supernatural horrors out of the race-memories of ancient Terra, the ghastlier forms of decay - all are depicted in the shrines, the murals, the copper-inked manuscripts, and, on a more humble level, in the wax tapers, the candles of Dmí-sugar, the gold and copper ornaments worn by the clans, and the earthen icons sown by farmers in their fields to cause the decay of stubble and fertilizer, ready for Lady Avánthe's green rebirth in the spring.

Each of the Worm Lord's 108 Greater Aspects is charged with some specific ritual and mythological function. For instance, Ku'ún the Corpse-Lord represents the deceased in the Judgement Hall of the Worm, wherein the deeds of the newly-dead are weighed by Dijátl the Copper-Clawed. Lord Sárku himself then metes out the Pleasures and Punishments of the Sepulchre.

Another Greater Aspect, Chmúr of the Hands of Grey, protects graves and catacombs, while Siyenágga the Wanderer of Tombs pursues those who have violated the Worm Lord's sanctuaries to wreak horrid vengeance. Ákhmer the Visage in the Mist haunts lonely places and whispers to those contemplating suicide; Naupál of the Blackened Lips governs certain rotting diseases and stinking tumours; Zaídza the Princess of the Liquescent mould carries away little children who have died in their sleep; Áweth the Paladin of Skulls is the form the Worm Lord used to hoodwink the hero Hrúgga - etc. Each of these Greater Aspects must have a shrine within any major temple of Lord Sárku.

The Master of Worms is also allied with - governs? - many of the Sharétlya'l, the Demon Lords of the Many Planes. Lord Srúkarum, Lord Geréshma'a, and a dozen others are discussed in such abominable treatises as "The Book of Ebon Bindings." These Demon Lords do not seem to be Aspects of Lord Sárku's Godhead, but rather separate entities: servants, rulers of other planes, and the like.

The rituals of the Worm Lord are celebrated mostly at night, usually in the underground shrines below the upper temple, and often in secret. Worshipers are divided into classes: the low laity, who are not taken below ground; the high laity, who are escorted into the dimly lit subterranean shrines for grand occasions; the elite, who are classified in groups according to their preferences and needs, and who are permitted to witness some of the more clandestine ceremonies; and the inner circle, which consists of those non-priests permitted to partake of the Worm Lord's special sacraments. The priesthood is similarly divided into many Circles, functions, and levels. Its organization closely resembles those of the other sects in the Five Empires, and need not be described again here (cf. vol. I of "Swords and Glory" and previous Tékel Journal articles on the Temples of Vimúhla, Ksáru, Thúmis, and Karakán).

Temples of Lord Sárku are physically similar to other Tsolyáni shrines, but there are differences. There are no external courtyards or outbuildings - all is included within the central edifice itself. The temple rises as a single trapezoidal monolith of stone, usually brown in hue, topped by jagged towers and swooping eaves arranged without apparent

symmetry or plan. This is said to be deliberate. The high outer walls are covered with panels of murals or bas-reliefs depicting processions of rulers, nobles, soldiers, and ordinary folk, all approaching Lord Sárku's sanctuary; "Each returns unto Him in the end, and this is the True Beginning," as it says in the Prologue to "The Book of Rust Brown Glimmerings."

Inside the massive copper-bound gates, an antechamber opens into a columned hall, filled with clouds of yellow-brown incense smoke, grotesque idols of the Worm, and banners of amber and ochre hung from the ceiling far above. Worshippers drift to and fro like wan ghosts among the earthen-robed clergy. Officials, their faces and hands daubed with bone-white, chant litanies before each shrine to one of the Greater Aspects, and the whole room takes on a hazy, coiling nightmarish appearance that defies description.

In the center of the hall stands a dais upon which a huge copper horn, two man-lengths or more, is blown by a leather-lunged servitor. This is the Nórnekoi hiChrányel, "the one Who is Mournful of Life." Its anguished, sobbing notes stress the futility of ephemeral existence, the end of all things mortal, and the return unto the Tomb. From time to time, the great Túnkel gong of the temple thunders and shudders overhead. Here and there, grieving mourners squat beside the ochre-wrapped corpse of some relative. The dead are often brought thus, in hopes of Lord Sárku's favour and their eventual resurrection as Undead with eternal "life" to come. It is believed that most such cadavers are used as food, however, for the monstrous creatures who guard the labyrinths below the temple.

From the upper hall, galleries lead off toward the rear of the building, where the dormitories, kitchens, robing chambers, storehouses, schools, libraries, and other mundane functions are located. There are usually two or three floors of such service areas, constructed in a three-sided square around the main nave.

At the far end of the great hall, staircases lead up to a mezzanine: a pillared gallery that runs all along the back of the chamber. Along its length are shrines to the more important Greater Aspects, more candelabra of massy copper, urns of fuming incense, priests in elaborate vestments, and thronging worshippers. A doorway leads back from the center-rear of this balcony into a narrow inner shrine, where the First Aspect of the Worm Lord coils in all His repulsive splendour. This chamber is as far into the temple as most laity ever reach. Here are celebrated the public rituals, e.g. "The touching of the Worm of Copper." on the 19th of the month of Didóm.

Copper-sheathed gates open out of the shrine chamber into staircases and passages leading down into the real temple below; the catacombs, the labyrinths, the ancient shrines buried far beneath the modern streets, the innermost sepulchers of the dead (and the Undead), the fanes where Demon Lords of the Planes Beyond may be summoned, the silent tombs of the pontiffs of the Worm who have passed away before, and eventually to the Holy of Holies, that Place Wherein the Worm Comes Forth. Only the priests of the highest Circles may venture there.

The rituals of the Worm Lord are varied. Some involve only incense, litany, and ritual gesture, while others demand dead flesh, tithes of gold and gems, and other, less savoury, ceremonial substances and implements. Like certain others of the Lords of Change, great Sárku accepts living sacrifices. This is not frequent, as it is in the temples of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg, nor is it even as regular as in the shrines of Lady Hríhayal, who delights in pain. The Worm Lord's rituals are performed according to fixed sequences and cycles, and those attending include not only the living and the Undead, but also creatures of the Underworlds: the huge and terrible Hrá, the flying Voródlá, who are modified Undead, and a dozen other types of beings. Various of mighty Sárku's Demon Lords require sustenance, too, and sacrifices are thus fairly common, though not a daily occurrence. Most victims are slaves or war-captives, although the Worm Lord's clergy have sometimes been accused of kidnapping foes. What occurs above ground is governed by the Concordat between the temples, but events in the subterranean depths go unhampered by laws.

Lord Sárku's worshippers are drawn from many areas. The City of Sárku and the Kráa Hills are His, as are the remoter regions of Dó Cháka, once ruled by the Sárku-worshipping Íto clan. Sokátis and Jaíkalor have major Sárku temples in the eastern Empire, while Úrmish in the west contains a very old and powerful sanctuary, a monastery of scholar-priests, and a library that dates back to the Engsvanyáli age. Other monasteries are located in the ruined city of Hmúkuyal, Púrdimal, and near Thri'íl and the Pass of Skulls in the northeast.

A few persons, motivated by temperament or other considerations, convert to the Worm Lord's faith each year, but the majority of His flock comes from old clans traditionally devoted to Him. Such are the Íto in the Chákas, the Domed Tomb (who rule the City of Sárku), and many of the "dark" and "black" clans (e.g. Dark Fear, Black Hood). As with most human organizations, these folk range from "worshippers-in-name-only" to "fanatics." The average is probably no more or less devout than any other religious congregation anywhere.

Within the priesthood of the Worm Lord, one finds the usual mix of factions and societies. The Copper Tomb Society, which presently dominates the Temple's politics, urges cooperation with other "activist" groups such as the Ndálu Clan of the Temple of Ksárul. These press for involvement in the political process, attempts to obtain important posts, the acquisition of more power, lands, and perquisites for the sect, and the support of whatever Imperial heir displays favour to the cause.

At present, the Brotherhood of the Victory of the Worm is the only other major faction within the Temple. This group is uninterested in the "living" world, emphasizing instead, the life in the tomb, the rituals of the catacombs, collaboration with the dwellers of the Demon Planes, and necromancy and sorcery in their service of the Worm Lord. members eschew wealth and power, retain no personal possessions, wear the brown robe and skull-white face paint of the initiate priest constantly (even while asleep, it is said), and marry

only mates who are as dedicated as themselves. This sub-sect is considered harmless by the political masters of the Five Empires.

A third, minor, party within the Temple is that of the Brethren of the Amber Coiling. This faction follows the Worm Lord's rituals, taboos, and tenants to the letter, believing that thereby they will be chosen for eternal life, not as Mrúr, Shédra, or even Jájgi, but as some still higher and even more perfect form of the Undead, which they term "the Glorified Immortals." The Brethren operate one of the more remote monasteries in the mountains northeast of Thri'íl. They are distinguished by copper-sheathed demon-masks and headdresses, constantly-worn copper sacrificial knives (the Ku'núr), and by an over-eagerness to sacrifice unwary visitors to the Worm Lord. Their remoteness from the populous areas of the Empire is perhaps all that preserves them from Imperial retribution.

Lord Sárku is also worshipped outside of Tsolyanu. In Yán Kór, He is called Shrággu, who is otherwise fairly similar to the Tsolyáni Deity described above. The same is true in Mu'ugalavyá, although the Red Hats do not much favour any others but the Flame Lord Vimúhla, and their own uniquely Mu'ugalavyáni Deity, Lord Hrsh. The rest of Pavár's Engsvanyáli pantheon is now largely limited to the Foreigner's Quarters of the larger Mu'ugalavyáni cities.

In Salarvyá, Black Qárqa, the cult-God of the Lords of the city of Tsa'avtúlgu, is particularly repugnant. He - It? - is said to favour cannibalism, necrophilia, and other practices too unsettling to describe. In Livyánu, the Worm Lord occurs in feminine form as the Goddess Qúyo, the Walker of the Demon Planes and the Mistress of the Grave. Her main sanctuary is at Hemétku, and her role includes funerals, which in Tsolyánu fall within the province of Lord Belkhánu. The reasons for this are unknown. It is rumored that Mother Qúyo accepts occasional foreigners into her clergy, a feature quite unusual in xenophobic Livyánu.

Lord Sárku's sect is rich in symbolism. The Worm Himself has five heads, and thus the "pattern number" for Sárku is five. in Tsolyánu, it is the custom for quintuplets to be handed over to the priesthood of Sárku to be raised as His, whatever their original parents' faith. Copper is similarly Lord Sárku's metal. He abhors iron and steel, but He does accept gold and silver - somewhat grudgingly, albeit. his gems are yellow and brown - topaz, amber, and the like. His colours are brown and bone-white, making it easy to distinguish His clergy and pious members of His clans from the rest of the colourful members of the Five Empires. His worm-insignia appears on temples, houses, fabrics, and pottery, and His ritual gestures are seen in every street and marketplace in Tsolyánu.

Like each of the Deities in Pavár's pantheon, Lord Sárku is served by a "Cohort", a sort of demigod who extends and elaborates certain aspects of His or Her Deity's doctrines. This Cohort is Lord Durritlámish, the Black Angel of the Putrescent Hand, He of the Rotted Face, and Opener of Catacombs. His doctrines stress the Worm Lord's hegemony over the catacombs and the creatures who stand sentinel there. He is master of the Undead, the Marshall of the Worm Lord's legions, and Himself, the seniormost guardian of all that

pertains to the Worm Lord and the Tomb. His priesthood is often charged with the protection of the necropolises, and the Tomb Police are often worshippers of Lord Durrítlámish. His 16 Greater Aspects are particularly repulsive, and His ceremonies are not for the fainthearted.

Both the Temples of Sárke and Durrítlámish are obsessed with secrecy. It is thus difficult to assess their philosophical and theological premises. All important texts are written in the Tongue of the Lord of Worms, an arcane language, perhaps once spoken by some lost civilization in the Chákas. The Tongue is now vocalized only for high rituals and for occasional secret communications. It is Common, however, in manuscripts, being written in vertical columns in copper ink upon black-dyes paper, with ochre, white, gold, and deep scarlet illuminations. The script consists of 2,120 individual glyphs, all incomprehensible to the outsider. None but the Inner Circles of the Worm Lord's (and Lord Durrítlámish's) clergy are even allowed to learn anything of the Tongue, and newcomers are carefully - and sorcerously - screened before being accepted for tuition. The grisly fate of one pretender who managed to acquire a smattering is still celebrated in the Jakállan ballad, "The Five Suppers of Ra'inátle hiTékkol." There is, however, no need to go into further loathsome detail here.

Secrecy also makes it hard to know who is in actual command of each temple - and of the sect as a whole. A few of the more prominent personalities are listed here:

1. Lord Vorússa hiTúkkolen: Grand Adept of the Temple of Sárku, in the City of Sárku; perhaps 22nd priestly Circle; Domed Tomb Clan; 42 years old; three wives and five (?) children. Lord Vorússa is afflicted with a blotched, yellowish skin, that "gives him the pleasing aspect of a desiccated mummy", as one of his own colleagues puts it. A leader of the Copper Tomb Society, he is extremely active in temple administration and Imperial politics. He shows little aptitude for ritual or sorcery, his main forte being public relations. He thus spends as much time in Avanthár as he does in his own city. In demeanor, he is dry, polite, ironic, and prone to little pleasantries - small gifts, compliments, and jests - that make him acceptable at court. His hobbies, likes, and dislikes, etc., are otherwise unknown.

2. Vársu hi Chéttukeng: High Ritual Priest of Sárku, in the City of Sárku; 21st priestly Circle; Black Water clan; 61 years old; two wives (deceased) and four grown male children. He is short, rotund, bald, and of a reddish complexion. As he jokingly says of himself, "The more fat, the more food for the Worm Lord when I leave this life." He is deeply involved with the ritual aspects of the temple, and is noted as a great scholar of ancient religious practices, archaeology, history, and languages. Lord Vársu possesses few social graces, but his learning makes him desirable in any company of scholars. It is said that he collects coins and gems.

3. Vridékka hiTlélsu: Tselinál (Great Wizard") of the Temple, permanently assigned as liaison officer to Prince Dhích'une, who himself is a Lord Adept of the Temple; 20th priestly Circle; Black Stone clan, from Tumíssa; 71 (?) years old; presently unmarried.

His stooped, fragile-looking and disheveled appearance causes others to underestimate him; he is neither senile or a fool. He disappeared for about six months a year or so ago, and has only recently reappeared at his master's side. Like the Prince, Lord Vridékka is a fanatic member of the Copper Tomb Society. His magical powers are famous, although of late he seems to be somewhat chastened. A scholar of artifacts and demonology, Lord Vridékka is rumored to have connections with some of the uglier denizens of the Planes Beyond. His interests also include epic poetry, history, and folklore.

4. Churmegásu hiTlélsu: High Ritual Priest of Sárku at Béy Sü; 22nd priestly Circle; Black Stone clan, from Béy Sü; 72 years old; one wife, four concubines, and three daughters all married to officers in the army). A distant clan-cousin of Lord Vridékka, this man is a moderate, a member of no known secret faction, and a pleasant, urbane, cultured person, who frequently hosts the grand feasts that are the hallmark of the elite of the capitol. He governs the necropolis on the east bank of the Missúma River, but his political position is hard to determine. He is tall and slender, with skin as smooth as old ivory, a fine head of silvery white hair, the hooked nose of the Tsolyáni aristocrat, and a mien that commands attention in any gathering. He is skilled in many arts and fields of learning, and can discourse knowledgeably upon almost any topic. The Temple considers him and his family a great social asset.

5. Mirusháste hiTlélsu: High Ritual Priest of Sárku at Khirgár; 18th priestly Circle; Domed Tomb clan, from the City of Sárku; 63 years old; marital status unknown. This man is the Temple's "swift adjudicator" - its "hatchetman" - who is charged with various secret missions, political "neutralizations", and the like. Lord Mirusháste is a lineage-cousin of the foregoing two persons, but belongs to a different clan. He is still young-looking, vulpine, cruel of expression, with a habit of displaying his curved, yellow teeth in what he may hope is a polite smile. He is probably a member of the Copper Tomb Society. His knowledge of the rituals is said to be mediocre, and it is rumored that he would not hold his present high position were it not for certain more clandestine talents useful to Prince Dhích'une and the Temple. Nothing is known of his personal hobbies, although marketplace rumor has it that he is the cause of the disappearance of many young slaves, both male and female.

6. Ugétme hiDautlésa: Grand High Priest of Sárku at Béy Sü; 19th priestly Circle; from the small Glory of the Worm clan, of the City of Sárku; 64 years old; has one wife, two children and several grandchildren. Serving directly under Lord Churngásu, this man is a powerful speaker, a propagandist, and a charismatic missionary. He is very tall, bald, with heavy eyebrows and a great beak of a nose - a commanding presence. He is said to be corrupt and not above accepting a bit of "encouragement", but all of his actions are eventually directed towards the advancement of his faith.

7. Háraku huTurushán: Temple Commandant of Tsúru; 11th priestly Circle; Domed Tomb Clan; 29 years old; marital status unknown. This man typifies the younger clergy of the Worm Lord's Temple. A practiced sorcerer, he is passionately devoted to the Worm Lord's cause. His interests include history and languages, and he is said to be skilled in

medicine as well. The Temple assigned "younger lights" like Lord Háraku to junior posts, then promotes them if they perform well.

8. Kégo Íto: Current heir to the Íto clan in Dó Cháka; 38 years old; many wives, concubines, and children. This man lives quietly in Páya Gupá, a semi-prisoner of the Tsolyáni Imperium. His ancestors once ruled the Chákas, and the Íto clan is renowned for its devotion to Lords Sárku, Durrítlámish, its clandestine rituals, and its clannish isolation. Kégo is considered a "good Íto" by the Imperium, but his elder brother Mrído Íto, who should now be about 40-42 years old, fled rather than exist under polite house arrest. Mrído is reported to be in Pelesár, in Milumanayá, aiding the Mu'ulgalvyáni rebel general Mi'itlénish. Other reports place Mrído in Livyánu. A few unattested sources have also questioned whether Mrído is still alive - not that he is dead and buried, but that he may now be one of the Jájgi, or even some higher form of Undead. It is said to be difficult to tell Kégo and Mrído apart. Both are stocky, powerful, and handsome, with the reddish complexion of the Chákas. Both are also excellent swordsmen, and their ancient clan storehouses have provided them with a plethora of magical weapons and devices.

9. Tonku'él hiSharvóya: Grand Adept of the Temple of Durrítlámish; 22nd priestly Circle; Dark Fear Clan, from Pénom; 49 years old; two wives, one concubine, four children. This man carries the grimmer aspects of his faith into his home life. It is said that the embalmed corpses of his parents, a brother, two children, several slaves, and three family pets adorn his sitting room, and that he frequently descends into the labyrinth beneath Pénom to discourse with his grandfather, who is one of the leading Undead residents. Lord Tonku'él is small, balding, with a receding chin and protuberant eyes. He is a fanatic member of the Copper Tomb Society, and a supporter of Prince Dhích'une - whom he considers a moderate!

10. Haikón hiVoródu: General of the Legion of the Peaks of Kráa, 12th Imperial Archers; Domed Tomb clan, from the City of Sárku; 34 years old; two wives, one child. A fierce, clever officer, Lord Haikón is famed for his knowledge gourmet foods, fine wines, and Epicurean living. He is devoted to his Legion and to the Temple - he used to be a Temple Guard commander before being taken over into the regular Tsolyáni army.

11. Illelmúna hiSharvóya: General of the Legion of the Fishers of Death, 21st Imperial Heavy Infantry; Dark Fear clan, from Penóm; 43 years old; one current wife, two concubines, many slave mistresses, four legal children. The clan-brother of Lord Tonku'él (cf. above), this man is another scion of the ancient Sharvóya lineage of Southern Tsolyánu. He is physically huge, very strong, and inexperienced but enthusiastic soldier, and a devout follower of Durrítlámish. He does not share the necromantic interests of his clan-brother, however, preferring women and feasting to the things of the tomb. He and Lord Tonku'él thus disagree, and there was something of a family squabble on the occasion of the Emperor's birthday in Avanthár last year.

12. Kakagánu hiBeshúdla: General of the Legion of the Slayers of Cities, 5th Imperial Sappers; Black Stone clan, from Katalál; 50 years old; two wives, three children, three

grandchildren. Short, squat, and ugly, this man is a friend of General Vrishtára (below), a good engineer and sapper, but only raised to command. It is said that he always carries the mummified hand of his clan-ancestor, the famous Jirókku hiBeshúdla, with him, using it as a sorcerous instrument to make decisions for him and to point the way. Lord Kakagánu is harsh with his troops, cruel and blustery.

13. Qútmu hiTsizéna: new General of the Battalions of the Seal of the Worm, 9th Imperial Medium Infantry; Domed Tomb clan, from the City of Sáрку; 37 years old; several wives and many children. Lord Qútmu has recently been appointed General upon the retirement of Qúrrumu hiKhanúma, who felt himself too old for field command. The Legion has now been sent off to the northeastern front in Milumanayá, to besiege the town of Pu'ér. Lord Qútmu is ambitious, an officer promoted up from the ranks, callous, somewhat cruel, and with little kindness in him. He is devoted to certain of the more gruesome Aspects of the Worm Lord.

14. Vrishtára hiAuvésu: General of the Battalions of Vrishtára the Mole, 2nd Imperial Sappers; Dark Water clan, from Ru; 53 years old; one wife, five children, one grandchild. Lord Vrishtára is dark and saturnine, taciturn, and so parsimonious of speech that his soldiers joke that he rarely utters more than one word at a time, even in his prayers. He is an excellent, trained sapper and soldier, and has devoted his life to his Legion.

15. Sikún hiKhanúma: General of the Legion of the Scale of Brown, 9th Imperial Heavy Infantry; Domed Tomb clan, from Khirgár; 47 years old; unmarried. This officer served as a Mriyán (roughly equivalent to "Bishop") of the Temple of Khirgár and Méku, until the recent reactivation of the Legion due to the efforts of Prince Dhích'une. It is rumored that the Prince has entrusted a number of Undead warriors to Lord Síkun to be used on the northeastern front, in violation of the treaty signed between Temple and the Imperium in 975 A.S. Such Undead will probably go unnoticed amidst the bureaucratic confusion of the war, unless one of Prince Dhích'une's co-heirs were to discover sure proof of them. Lord Sikún is a sycophant of the Prince, and a fanatic. He is clever enough to realize that the use of the Undead in open battle would gain him a swift trip to the impaling stake, however, and it is likely that he will pass the Undead soldiers on to General Qútmu or someone else.

16. Jnaíka hiTurushán: High Ritual Priestess of the Temple of Sáрку in Jakálla; 16th priestly Circle; Dark Moon clan, from Púrdimal; 27 years old; unmarried. This woman belongs to a wealthy branch of the Ancient Turushán lineage. She is petite, beautiful, and somewhat enigmatic. Rumor has it that she is herself one of the Undead, while others claim that she is enamoured of one of the Worm Lord's Jájgi, and disports herself with him and other repulsive companions in the catacombs beyond Jakálla's walls. She uses her money to the Temple's advantage, however, and few of her clergy seem to question her recreations. Lady Jnaíka is also famed for her erudition, her sorcery, and her exploration of the Demon Planes.