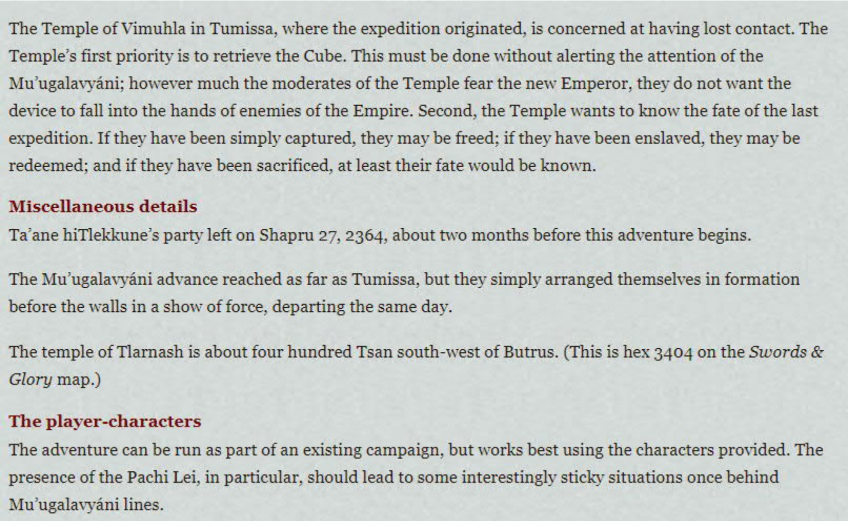


The Temple of Vimuhla in Tumissa, where the expedition originated, is concerned at having lost contact. The Temple's first priority is to retrieve the Cube. This must be done without alerting the attention of the Mu'ugalavyáni; however much the moderates of the Temple fear the new Emperor, they do not want the device to fall into the hands of enemies of the Empire. Second, the Temple wants to know the fate of the last expedition. If they have been simply captured, they may be freed; if they have been enslaved, they may be redeemed; and if they have been sacrificed, at least their fate would be known.

Miscellaneous details

Ta'ane hiTlekkune's party left on Shapru 27, 2364, about two months before this adventure begins.

The Mu'ugalavyáni advance reached as far as Tumissa, but they simply arranged themselves in formation before the walls in a show of force, departing the same day.

The temple of Tlarnash is about four hundred Tsan south-west of Butrus. (This is hex 3404 on the *Swords & Glory* map.)

The player-characters

The adventure can be run as part of an existing campaign, but works best using the characters provided. The presence of the Pachi Lei, in particular, should lead to some interestingly sticky situations once behind Mu'ugalavyáni lines.

All the characters are worshippers of Vimuhla or Chiteng who have links with the Temple in Tumissa and are Assumed to have given useful service in the past. If there is time, it may be useful to play through a little of the characters' day-to-day life in Tumissa to give the players some idea of their **Strength**s, weaknesses, relationships and rivalries.

Dresu hiTankolel of the Sword of Fire Clan

Xth Circle Ritual Priest of Vimuhla

Strength 9
Stamina 7
Dexterity 8
Cleverness 18
Reasoning 16
Psy Ab 15
Psy Res 11
Comeliness 16
Size 9
Base Melee 11
Base Missile 5
Evade 4
Magic Resistance 16
Hit Points 9 [2/4/5]
Damage Bonus 0
Age 53
Social Status 12

Melee Value: Longsword 19, other weapons 15

Skills: Artist (painting) 6, Astrologer 8, Calligraphy 10, City Lore (Tumissa) 1, Classical Mu'ugalavyáni 10, Connoisseur (painting) 8, Dancer 6, Divination 3, Etiquette 12, Gaming (Denden) 10, Gaming (Tsahlten) 8, High Society 13, Historian 10, Hunting 7, Intrigue 12, Literacy 10, Longsword 4, Magical Lore 6, Mathematician 10, Musician 6, Mu'ugalavyáni 10, Philosopher 10, Poet 7, Theologian 15, Tsolyáni 12, Warrior 4

Description: Holds the title "Senior Ritual Priest" but no real executive authority. Old and tired. Friendly to the Mu'ugalavyáni as fellow Flame-worshippers. Now conflicted because of the war.

Omel hiTlakan of the Red Stone Clan

VIIth Circle Warrior Priest of Vimuhla

Strength 12
Stamina 11
Dexterity 13
Cleverness 17
Reasoning 16
Psy Ab 6
Psy Res 14
Comeliness 11
Size 13
Base Melee 13
Base Missile 7
Evade 6
Magic Resistance 15
Hit Points 14 [3/5/8]
Damage Bonus 0
Age 43
Social Status 12

Melee Value: Longsword 34, Shortsword 34, Poleaxe 32, other weapons 20

Missile Value: Crossbow 17

Skills: Armourer 7, Calligraphy 12, City Lore (Tumissa) 4, Crossbow 10, Etiquette 12, Gaming (Denden) 12, Gaming (Kevuk) 10, Gaming (Tsahlten) 10, High Society 9, Historian 7, Hunting 3, Intrigue 12, Literacy 12, Longsword 14, Mathematician 8, Musician 4, Mu'ugalavyáni 5, Physician 7, Poet 4, Polearm 12, Shortsword 14, Soldier 11, Strategist 10, Theologian 5, Tsolyáni 12, Warrior 7

Description: Captain in the Temple Guard. Wise and canny. A politician.

Possessions: steel sword; steel breastplate

Balash hiChankolu of the Red Sword Clan

Vth Circle Warrior Priest of Vimuhla

Strength 15
Stamina 14
Dexterity 15
Cleverness 14
Reasoning 13
Psy Ab 3
Psy Res 7
Comeliness 14
Size 14
Base Melee 13
Base Missile 7
Evade 8
Magic Resistance 4
Hit Points **14** [3/5/8]
Damage Bonus +1
Age 27
Social Status 11

Melee Value: Longsword 25, Shortsword 25, Poleaxe 22, Dagger 21, other weapons 16

Missile Value: Bow 11, Crossbow 10

Skills: Administrator 4, Bow 4, Calligraphy 12, City Lore (Tumissa) 5, Crossbow 3, Dagger 5, Etiquette 14, High Society 12, Historian 6, Hunting 4, Intrigue 6, Literacy 12, Longsword 9, Musician (tenturen) 5, Mu'ugalavyáni 8, Polearm 6, Shortsword 9, Soldier 8, Strategist 5, Swimming 6, Theologian 11, Tsolyáni 12, Warrior 3

Description: Fanatic. Aspires to join the Legion of Red Devastation

Pi'ur hiSayuncha of the Red Stone Clan

Vth Circle Warrior Priest of Vimuhla

Strength 9
Stamina 13
Dexterity 17
Cleverness 13
Reasoning 10
Psy Ab 10
Psy Res 11
Comeliness 15
Size 14
Base Melee 13
Base Missile 8
Evade 6
Magic Resistance 16
Hit Points **12** [3/5/7]
Damage Bonus 0
Age 26
Social Status 9

Melee Value: Spear 26, Longsword 21, Poleaxe 21, Dagger 20, other weapons 16

Missile Value: Bow 23

Skills: Armourer 3, Bow 15, Calligraphy 4, City Lore (Tumissa) 1, Connoisseur (brandy) 6, Dagger 4, Etiquette 11, Gaming (Kevuk) 6, High Society 10, Historian 3, Hunting 12, Intrigue 3, Literacy 4, Longsword 5, Marotlan 10, Mathematician 4, Mu'ugalavyáni 3, Paramour 5, Physician 4, Polearm 5, Soldier 5, Spear 10, Theologian 3, Tsolyáni 11, Warrior 3

Description: Loves to hunt. Takes pride in his skill. A show off.

Possessions: A customized bow that gives him +1 on Missile Value

Sanjesh hiMriyen of the Great Stone Clan

Lay Priest of Vimuhla

Strength 8
Stamina 15

Melee Value: Longsword 16, other weapons 13

Spellpoints: 310

Skills: Calligraphy 11, City Lore (Tumissa) 1, Etiquette 11, High Society 5, Historian 6, Intrigue 4, Literacy 11,

Dexterity 14
Cleverness 13
Reasoning 17
Psy Ab 15
Psy Res 16
Comeliness 16
Size 9
Base Melee 10
Base Missile 7
Evade 7
Magic Resistance 14
Hit Points 9 [2/4/5]
Damage Bonus 0
Age 23
Social Status 9

Longsword 3, Mathematician 5, Mu'ugalavyáni 6, Physician 3, Ritual Sorcerer 6, Swimming 5, Theologian 6, Tsolyáni 11, Warrior 3

Description: Ranked as a Rusala, or "Seer". Could have achieved more, but for a lazy streak.

Ruqu hiKutonyal of the Red Sword Clan

IIIrd Circle Ritual Priest of Vimuhla

Strength 11
Stamina 12
Dexterity 12
Cleverness 15
Reasoning 16
Psy Ab 18
Psy Res 2
Comeliness 8
Size 13
Base Melee 12
Base Missile 6
Evade 5
Magic Resistance 13
Hit Points 12 [3/5/7]
Damage Bonus 0
Age 24
Social Status 7

Melee Value: Longsword 20, other weapons 16

Spellpoints: 200

Skills: Artist (sculpture) 3, Bednalljan 5, Calligraphy 10, City Lore (Tumissa) 5, Classical Mu'ugalavyáni 5, Dancer 7, Etiquette 8, Gaming (Denden) 3, High Society 3, Historian 8, Intrigue 6, Literacy 10, Longsword 4, Mathematician 6, Musician 3, Mu'ugalavyáni 8, Poet 3, Psychic Sorcerer 2, Swimming 6, Theologian 8, Tsolyáni 10, Warrior 4

Description: Holds the title "Chanter of Praise". Did his labour of reverence for IIIrd Circle on the subject of Tlarnash. A bit of a brown-noser.

Feshran hiTakolen of the Scarlet Sail Clan

Merchant adventurer

Strength 13
Stamina 20
Dexterity 14
Cleverness 16
Reasoning 16
Psy Ab 6
Psy Res 14
Comeliness 14
Size 11

Melee Value: Longsword 30, Halberd 27, Dagger 30, other weapons 18

Missile Value: Crossbow 21

Skills: Armourer 6, Calligraphy 10, City Lore (Penom) 10, Connoisseur (food & wine) 7, Crossbow 12, Dagger 12, Etiquette 10, Gaming (Denden) 7, Gaming (Kevuk) 9, Gaming (Tsahlten) 7, Halberd 9, Historian 7, Intrigue 8, Literacy 10, Longsword 12, Mathematician 10, Merchant 12, Mu'ugalavyáni 12, Paramour 9, Physician 8, Sailor 12, Salarvyani 12, Soldier 7, Strategist 2, Survival 8, Theologian 7, Tsolyáni 12, Warrior 5

Base Melee 13
Base Missile 9
Evade 8
Magic Resistance 16
Hit Points 12 [3/5/7]
Damage Bonus 0
Age 40
Social Status 6

Sescription: Worldly and experienced. Once served in the Flotilla of Hagarr of Paranta. Joined this expedition on the urging of his devout spouse.

Possessions: steel longsword

Horu hiSerekel of the Clan of the Sweet Singers of Nakome

Former legionary; worshipper of Chiteng

Strength 20
Stamina 20
Dexterity 14
Cleverness 9
Reasoning 6
Psy Ab 9
Psy Res 7
Comeliness 18
Size 17
Base Melee 14
Base Missile 6
Evade 8
Magic Resistance 9
Hit Points 18 [4/7/10]
Damage Bonus +3
Age 28
Social Status 6

Melee Value: Shortsword 31, Spear 31, Longsword 29, other weapons 21

Missile Value: Bow 13

Skills: Armourer 2, Bow 7, City Lore (Fasiltum) 5, Etiquette 6, Gaming (Denden) 3, Gaming (Kevuk) 3, High Society 5, Historian 1, Hunting 4, Intrigue 2, Longsword 8, Paramour 2, Physician 1, Shortsword 10, Soldier 9, Spear 10, Strategist 2, Theologian 1, Tsolyáni 8, Warrior 7

Description: Served in the Legion of the Givers of Sorrow. Has inflated sense of self-worth, especially with the ladies. A bully. (NB illiterate and cannot speak Mu'ugalavyáni.)

"Friend of the Flame" (a Pachi Lei)

Lay Priest of Vimuhla

Strength 15
Stamina 16
Dexterity 16
Cleverness 15
Reasoning 18
Psy Ab 18
Psy Res 18

Melee Value: Longsword 18, other weapons 16

Spellpoints: 360

Skills: Astrologer 6, Basket Weaver 8, Botanist 8, Calligraphy 12, City Lore (Tumissa) 1, Classical Mu'ugalavyáni 8, Etiquette 12, Forest Survival 8, High Society 4, Historian 4, Intrigue 5, Literacy 12, Longsword 2, Mu'ugalavyáni 10, Psychic Sorcerer 10, Ritual Sorcerer 10, Theologian 8, Tracking 8, Tsolyáni 12, Warrior 2, Zoology 8

Comeliness ?
Size 13
Base Melee 14
Base Missile 8
Evade 9
Magic Resistance 12
Hit Points 14 [3/5/8]
Damage Bonus +1
Age 19

Description: Ranked as a Chagun, or "Commander of Energies and Powers". Delights in destroying things. Particularly fond of Doomkill. Deceptively polite and soft-spoken. Sees well in darkness and can usually sense an ambush, hidden panel, etc, within 3 metres. Real name is something like Mtelghf Blfhom; humans prefer to use his nickname.

The adventure begins

It is 3 Fesru 2364 AS. Temple Patriarch Feresthi hiBurukai summons the characters to his office. The Meshqu next to his door is green with red stripes running from upper left to lower right: "the Badge of Solemn Contemplation".

Feresthi loses no time on pleasantries: "As you know, the Mu'ugalavyáni have invaded Pan Chaka. Shortly before the invasion, we had dispatched an archaeological expedition to the ruined temple of Tlarnash in the Pan Chaka forest. Tlarnash was an Aspect of Lord Vimuhla from the time of the Dragon Warriors. We have heard no word of the expedition; they may have fled, been captured, or sacrificed.

"This expedition was looking for articles of more than mere scholarly interest. We had found references that mention an item of value said to be secreted in a strongroom beneath the temple. The temple wishes to possess this article once again.

"I have prepared papers that will let you cross Mu'ugalavyáni lines as pilgrims seeking to do rituals at the shrine of Tlarnash. While you are at the shrine, you are to seek out the temple strongroom and recover the Cube of Immediate Immolation. It is a cube of reddish glass, about five inches on a side. No better description is available. The sorcerer-priest Ta'ane hiTlekkune knew more of the device, but he was lost with the rest of the expedition. Ta'ane believed the entrance to the strongroom was under the altar itself, but he had no more information than this when he departed for the ruin.

"If you have the opportunity, you should learn the fate of the missing expedition. Your first duty, however, is to bring home the Cube of Immediate Immolation. If you cannot recover it yourself, hide it so that the Mu'ugalavyáni cannot find it. We need it here; if they obtain it, it will be sent to Ssa'atis where we will never get it again!"

Besides their travelling papers, the characters are provided with bearer slaves, two sacrificial slaves, letters of credit, and whatever equipment they may need, including weapons and armor.

The road to Butrus

The Sakbe road to Butrus is busier than usual, with refugees stumping up to Tumissa. The Sakbe guards at every tower are nervously alert. For the five days of the journey, the characters see many more Pachi Lei than would normally be encountered outside the forests. These nonhumans are historically the enemies of the Mu'ugalavyáni and can expect persecution if not outright massacre.

Some refugees stare dully, others raise their hands for a priestly blessing, and a few call for the the Flame to fall upon the invading Mu'ugalavyáni. If the party stops to speak with any refugees, the predominant feeling is of anger at the loss of Butrus. The refugees look forward to the day when Prince Eselne or the Emperor recaptures the city.

Butrus itself looks no different from usual when they first glimpse it in the distance, but the damage becomes more apparent as they approach the city. The red-laquered armour of Mu'ugalavaya is everywhere. Many of the citizens have fled for Tumissa, Urmish, or wherever their legs can carry them. There is garbage all over because the sweeper clans are disorganzied, and flies are everywhere. The white buildings are stained with smoke, and the air smells of smoke and carrion and refuse.

The guards at the gate are heavy infantrymen of Legion I of the Second Palace: "Destroy in Glory". They fail to treat the party with proper respect. They chaffer them over their writ and open every sack, looking for the gods know what. They stare at the characters' Pachi Lei colleague and are distinctly unfriendly to him. The officer in charge is a Balketl—the equivalent of the Tsolyáni Tirrikamu rank, a subaltern commanding a platoon of twenty men. Eventually he relents and allows the characters to seek refuge at their temple.

The Temple in Butrus

Things are better at the Temple of Vimuhla, which was spared from looting by the Mu'ugalavyáni, but the food is definitely of poorer quality than usual. Nearly everybody here is nervous. The Temple Commandant is keen to question the characters about their mission to the ruins of Tlarnash, but falls silent if reminded that the orders came from Patriarch Feresthi.

It is possible to trade rumours with some of the other priests: Prince Eselne intends to march for Bey Su, Prince Eselne has been assassinated, Prince Mirusiya has died in Yan Kor, Prince Mirusiya returns to Fasiltum in triumph, Princess Arimela is gaining support, Princess Arimela will renounce the gold, Princess Ma'in has agreed to marry Prince Eselne, Princess Ma'in has fled the city... No-one knows which are true and which are simply stories. That night, sleep does not come easily.

Red tape

When it comes to obtaining travel permits, the characters have to apply to the administrative staff of Field Marshal Chelmu'utlish, the senior general commanding the district. His staff are in the former Palace of the Realm. There are far too few scribes and clerks for the work, and the characters are obliged wait among the gabbling complaining horde of supplicants.

After four days of this, they are finally seen by a clerk, who quizzes them desultorily. Sample responses are included in italics:

"What is your purpose for entering the Pan Chaka District of the 2nd Palace of Mu'ugalavyá?"
"We are pilgrims, seeking to perform a ritual at the Temple of Tlarnash."

"Why must this ritual be performed now? This is a poor time to be a pilgrim."
"The time is astrologically auspicious. It would be ignoble to skip the rite because of the present difficulties."

"Why should we believe this? What proof is there to be shown?"
"You have our papers. What more proof is required?"

"How can it be demonstrated that you are not spies?"

"What proof would you accept? We are priests of Vimuhla, we have the correct papers, and we place ourselves at your mercy."

"Your papers are a request to enter occupied territory, not a recovered district. How do you explain this discrepancy?"
"Our superiors must not have had time to obtain the proper papers. With such recent changes, it is hard to know exactly what papers we need. Please Issue us the correct ones, as we must not miss the rite."

"You also lack the papers to travel with a restricted species. There are too many Leaf-Eaters in Pan Chaka already. It should be left here."
"He is our colleague and his participation is necessary for the rite."

"Hmph. We will have correct papers for you in two days."

Two days later, after waiting for nearly three hours, they receive a scroll-case from the clerk containing their papers. He charges 50 Qura per form (two per person, making 30 Hlash apiece). There is also a list of regulations. Among other details, it is illegal to insult officers of the Mu'ugalavyáni empire, to light campfires bigger than half a man-height wide (with an exception made for ritual bonfires in approved locations), or to cut down trees for any purpose other than firewood. They are advised to proceed directly to their destination and back again. Pachi Lei are a restricted species. They are forbidden to congregate in groups of more than three, may not travel more than one Shan (a Tsolyáni Tsan, nearly 1500 yards) without papers or accompanying humans, and are forbidden to eat, drink, or sleep in the same room as humans.

Winding mossy ways

The next day the characters take the road into Pan Chaka. Black smoke from burning villages lines the horizon. Occasional refugees emerge from the forest, usually carrying their possessions on their backs, but a lucky few still have Chlen carts. These souls are more dejected than the refugees seen previously on the Sakbe. They know the Red Hats will be in Pan Chaka for some time, and they will have nothing left to return to. Their delay in leaving may have cost them exit fees and the loss of loved ones as well.

The first patrol

Two days out from Butrus, the characters run into their first Mu'ugalavyáni picket. Roll a dice. On a 1 or 2, the party is surprised by the soldiers emerging suddenly from the forest. On a roll of 3-6, they spot the patrol as it spots them.

"Halt! Make no sudden moves! Keep your hands where they can be seen!"

Three men approach casually, spears at the ready, shortswords at their belts. They belong to Legion VI of the 2nd Palace, "Exalted Flame". Their corporal emerges from a stand of brush on the other side of the road and asks the characters for their papers. He cursorily scans them (he may not be able to read!) and asks the characters what purpose they have in travelling to the Pan Chaka District of the Second Palace of the Empire of Mu'ugalavyá. He will escort them to his lieutenant's command post, where their papers may be more carefully checked.

The lieutenant's tent sits in a small clearing surrounded by the five tents of his platoon. There is a campfire burning in a carefully tended fire pit. The soldiers not on duty are polishing their equipment and otherwise tending to affairs.

Lieutenant Amush Tekhu'um keeps the characters waiting nearly half an hour, finally strolling out and giving them a long hard look. "This is a poor time to be a pilgrim. And why do you travel with a Leaf-Eater? Surely it cannot be a pilgrim as well? What about those slaves and bundles? Are none of those for trade?" He calls over five soldiers, who search every parcel with typical Mu'ugalavyáni thoroughness.

At last the lieutenant relents and allows the party to go on their way. "You passage is granted. Please note the new regulations concerning travel in Pan Chaka. We are the masters now, and things are not so lax as they were before."

First blood!

They have to travel for another twenty days to reach the temple of Tlarnash. Each day there is 1 chance in 6 of running into a patrol of Mu'ugalavyáni soldiers, who will insist on examining their papers, eventually allowing them to pass with only minor harassment. The Pachi Lei is eyed with suspicion bordering on overt hostility.

On the third day, the characters encounter a Dlakolel. It attacks immediately, having been earlier disturbed by the soldiers in the forest.

Other encounters

After the fight with the Dlakolel, there is 1 chance in 6 of an encounter each day. (Consult the Forest Encounter Table.) So as not to waste too much time, these should be limited to just a couple of encounters before reaching the ruined temple. They can be combined—eg, in a village they might find a patrol or a band of Chnelh.

Forest Encounters

1–3 A Mu'ugalavyáni patrol of five men (65%) or twenty men (35%).

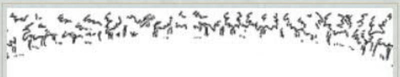
4–5 An occupied village with 3–30 adult inhabitants. Most villages here are neutral to the conflict between Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá, but one in three might favour one side or the other. The headman will offer food and shelter if needed, but the general mood is sullen and suspicious. However, as priests the party will be treated with appropriate deference. There is a 75% chance that Ta'ane's expedition passed through, with a 50% chance the villagers will volunteer this information without asking for any reward.

6–7 An abandoned village. The first they come to has a woman and her infant dwelling in the burnt-out buildings. She's the last survivor of a looting spree, half mad with fear. If not approached carefully, she will flee into the forest. If treated kindly she might follow at a safe distance, snatching scraps of food, and eventually gain enough confidence to travel with the group.

8 A pack of 2–12 Zrne, which launch an attack by leaping out of the undergrowth on all sides.

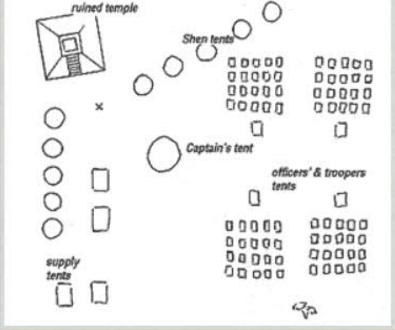
9 A band of 5–50 Chnelh armed with clubs, who may attack but are just as likely to retreat shyly into the depths of the forest.

10 A Mu'ugalavyáni column one hundred strong advancing towards the front.



The ruined temple

One morning, after almost a month in the jungle, the party are stopped by a five-man patrol who



insist on escorting them to their base camp.

This is a major encampment set in a clearing formed by hacking away the trees. The tents of Mu'ugalavyáni soldiers are all around, and there is also a smattering of hulking Shén, whose black scales gleam in the sunlight. Dominating the area is a ruined pyramid overgrown with vines: the temple of Tlarnash.

There are about five hundred troopers here, drawn from several units: Destroy in Glory (1st Heavy Infantry), Exalted Flame (6th Medium Infantry) and Pride of Xax (11th Mercenaries). It is part rest camp, part field hospital, part training area for reserves.

The captain's tent is nearly three man-heights high and twice that in diameter. It is set in the centre of the camp, with the subalterns' tents around it and the troopers' tents surrounding those. The ruined pyramid provides a secure rear and is also in use as an observation post, though the Ebzal trees block any observation of the forest floor beyond a quarter Tsan or so.

In the captain's tent

The Pachi Lei is marched off at once as not fit for human company. "We will put it in the animal pen," decides the lieutenant in charge. The rest of the party are told to wait. They might want to try protesting about the Pach Lei's treatment. They could remind the troops that Pachi Lei are forbidden to travel without humans and therefore they must associate with him by law, and furthermore that he is a respected colleague. The former argument will carry more weight than the latter.

The characters are left to cool their heels under the watchful eyes of two burly legionaries of Destroy in Glory in full kit. After an hour, as they begin to doze in the midday heat, their is a sharp command and the legionaries admit them to the tent. (If they managed to convince the lieutenant to let the Pachi Lei stay with them, he must wait outside.)

Birelish Gusatl of the Clan of the Three Stones did not achieve the rank of captain by being stupid. He wonders why Tsolyáni priests should suddenly wish to worship at an old shrine that never attracted much attention before—particularly since that shrine happens to be the site of a reserve encampment. He suspects many things, but the thing he suspects most of all is that this is a scouting expedition for a surprise attack of some kind. Noble action precludes him from simply imprisoning the party on suspicion of spying. He prefers to meet them in a battle of wits.

Captain Birelish sits cross-legged on a raised plinth at the rear of the tent. Before him lies a huge pile of documents. Two junior officers sit below with other papers, and there are several scribes working quietly to one side.

The captain languidly waves his hand. The junior officers leave.

"So. Guests from our neighbour to the east?"

"No, commander," answers one of the legionaries. "These are travellers from Tumissa, and they say they have rituals to perform."

"Rituals?" Birelish smiles dubiously. "What rituals need to be performed in this ruin?"

The leader of the party should take his cue.

Captain Birelish is clever and quick, and very little gets past him unnoticed. A cultured man, he avoids undue haste in this conversation. His movements are more reminiscent of a musician than a warrior, although his lithe energy warns that he might be a dangerous opponent in a duel. His goals are three-fold. He wants to gather information on the political situation in Tsolyánu, especially with regard to Prince Eselne. He wants to trip the characters up and get them to reveal their true purpose in coming here. And he wants to get their measure so he can post appropriate people to watch them.

If the characters please him, he will invite those of higher status to join him and his lieutenants for dinner that evening. This applies to those of social level 9 or more. Others may dine separately with junior subalterns. The Pachi Lei will of course not be invited, since sharing meals with such a creature is against Mu'ugalavyáni law. If the characters object rudely to being split up, or otherwise behave in an objectionable manner, he will have them dine with the ordinary troopers—shame to the Tsolyáni leaders!

At dinner

Dinner is an urbane affair that the captain will pitch mid-way between a social occasion and a game of Denden. His clan-cousin Zh'kh'üsh Mi'iguz, a sorcerer who has been sent back wounded from the front, is present to guard against spells. He also has a priest of Vimuhla on hand to watch for any slip-ups the Tsolyáni might make over dogma, though he thinks this unlikely because the Omnipotent Azure Legion would presumably have the sense to employ genuine priests of Vimuhla for such a mission.

The dinner is remarkably formal for a meal in the middle of the jungle. Captain BIrelish sits on the next-to-top step of a four-step dais, the top step being occupied by two large bronze plaques bearing the symbols of Hrsh and Vimuhla. There are four levels of rugs on the floor for the Tsolyáni guests to array themselves on. Dresu and Omel are invited up to the captain's dais, Balash to the step just below. Also on that level are Zhükhüsh Mi'iguz, Lieutenant Zune'esh Tle'eqtol of the Crimson River Clan, and Hü'üsh Malashab of the Vermillion Axe Clan, a priest of Vimuhla.

First the slaves bring cups of Chumetl, a bit bland to Tsolyáni taste because of the lack of hot spices. There are pottery bowls of grassy soup with thin strips of Dlush (like zucchini) and tiny flecks of Kaika meat in it. After the soup comes a steaming bowl of stew, mostly Hma meat with some chunks of Kao-squash. Another dish comprises various barbequed game birds with little glazed bowls containing different sauces. There are baskets containing tortillas of reddish Dna-bread for scooping up the sauces, and other baskets of fruit—mostly Pu'om (like apples) and Mash. There are small savoury cakes with minced Hma meat and tubers in the middle, sweetly spiced. There is a bowl of crispy fried Itlu'ush beetle grubs and small dumplings stuffed with Hmelu. Bowls of pickles accompany many of the dishes.

After the meal, fingerbowls and a mouth-rinse bowl are passed around. Slaves bring platters with Pu'om and

Dzimush (melons), and glass ewers of Ngalu wine.

Birelish tries careful probing to see if he can catch the Tsolyáni out. Here are some possible gambits:

"How do you like the new Emperor? Eternal Splendour is his throne-name, I believe."

"I am no authority on the customs of other lands, but I have heard that the Kolumejalim was a trifle, shall we say, hastily conducted on this occasion. Was this because of the war with Yan Kor? What happened to the other candidates?"

"Tell me about Tlarnash. He was considered an aspect of Vimuhla in ancient times, wasn't he?"

Should Birelish be asked about the politics of Mu'ugalavyá, he says that the Second Palace has gained much prestige with the recovery of Pan Chaka. Prince M'ülga'ash of the Second Palace has the reputation of being a canny administrator, and all is smooth at present. Birelish did not participate in the invasion himself as he was involved in training fresh cohorts. However, he claims he was with the advance and that the peasants of the forest greeted his soldiers with garlands and gifts of food. "The only enmity," he maintains, "was from a few bandits and rebels."

After dinner, Birelish offers a game of Denden. This is a board game for four to six players, the Tékumelani equivalent of chess in that it represents military units abstractly by counters. There is the opportunity for gambling too in the form of Kevuk (a dice game) and Tsahlten, a game of Mu'ugalavyáni origin where players must make patterns by tossing down sticks. A man's measure can be gauged by the way he wins and loses money: the Tsolyáni ideal is daring but not stupid, generous but not ostentatious, not taking the game too seriously. The Mu'ugalavyáni, on the other hand, gamble with a fierce and icy concentration and take it very seriously indeed. The party would impress their hosts more by following the Mu'ugalavyáni custom than by sticking to their own ideal, which to Mu'ugalavyáni eyes would seem incomprehensibly frivolous.

If the Tsolyáni pull off a successful evening, they will be given a degree of freedom to roam around the camp, provided they don't go poking around inside officers' tents or otherwise being nosy. Captain Birelish will be sure to get them to invite H'üsh'üsh in the forthcoming ritual, so that he can report back.

The run of the camp?

The characters are given space to pitch their tents near those of the Shén, at the point marked with an X on the map. Captain Birelish will give orders for two men to patrol the vicinity of the Tsolyáni tents. The more the Tsolyáni pleased him at dinner, the less conspicuous these men will be. They keep watch in three-hour shifts.

In addition, Birelish assigns a hidden watcher: Lieutenant Vuimulsh Gayashu of the Four Coins Clan, an expert in stealth, tracking and jungle warfare. Along with two similarly-trained troopers, Vuimulsh keeps an eye on the Tsolyáni at all times. He also makes sure to attend their ritual so as to judge for himself what their real purposes might be.

Hiatus

There is a day or two before the planets are properly aspected for the ritual. The characters are free to wander about as long as they don't obviously start snooping. They are not at liberty to leave the encampment without an escort, however.

During this time, they are bound to notice a peasant who comes to sell goods to the soldiers: fruit, Jakkohl meat, Hnequ weed... whatever he can get. His name is Achan. The soldiers tolerate him while making him the butt of their jokes. It might occur to the characters that Achan represents a good way to get the Cube out of the camp once they've got it. His goods are given only a cursory inspection as he comes and goes.

The characters will have to leave the camp to cut down an Ebzal tree for the ritual. They must do this themselves, not simply buy firewood from the Mu'ugalavyáni. Two troopers will come along to keep an eye on them, but these men are of course ignorant of ceremonial matters and can be fooled into thinking that the search for a suitable tree is a lengthy business. If they get bored enough, they are likely to snatch forty winks in the shade—possibly giving the characters a chance to speak to Achan without being overheard.

The ritual

At the proper time, with the sun at its zenith, the party ascend the pyramid steps. They are accompanied by the priest Hü'üsh, Vuimulsh, and a few other particularly devout officers.

The shrine at the top is partially ruined but still accessible. First the altar must be ritually scrubbed clean, then the firepit filled with the Ebzal wood they collected the day before. The Pachi Lei ignites the fire using a spell, and as it burns the priests chant incantations.

When the fire is burning fiercely, the two slaves are sacrificed, the chant climaxing with their screams. There is a final hymn of farewell to Tlarnash and the flames are allowed to die down, while all stand in silence and experience the Presence of Blazing Purity.

Underneath the altar is a secret chamber. It is opened by pressing on a stone in the wall behind the altar to unlock one of the flagstones so it can be lifted up. The Pachi Lei is almost certain to notice the flagstone itself. Dresu and Ruqu, standing closest to the altar, will spot the stone that releases it if they succeed in a -5 Cleverness/Psychic Ability check. (It is revealed as a momentary glint of firelight on the rear wall.)

If the characters have any sense, they'll keep quiet about what they've noticed and come back later on to investigate. If they reveal the secret door to the Mu'ugalavyáni then they will of course have blown the whole mission!

The best time to sneak back to the shrine is after dark. The characters will still have to shake off their guards somehow. Options include killing them (quickly and quietly!), coshing them, controlling them with Domination, offering them spiked drinks, and bribery. The last course is tricky to handle—the guards won't accept a bribe if they think something really important might be at stake. An appropriate bribe under the circumstances might be anything up to 200 Kaitars each.

In any event, the party's main problem is not the guards but Lieutenant Vuimulsh. Unless they're very observant, they should not be aware that he is watching them. Vuimulsh will not follow them into the shrine at once, but will conceal himself nearby and wait for them to return. If they haven't reappeared after an hour or so, he'll go in himself.

To enter the area below the shrine, it is necessary to press a stone in the wall. This causes one of the flagstones of the floor to lift up slightly. When this is removed, a shaft is revealed with stone rungs carved roughly into one side. This descends to a chamber in the interior of the pyramid. The floor slopes gently down towards the far wall, where there are three archways. Reading from right to left, these bear inscriptions across the lintel in Ancient N'lüssa: "Mighty Destruction", "All-Consuming Ruin", and "Glorious Conflagration". (These are the three mythological Tongues of the Flame.)

Mighty Destruction

The passage on the right leads to a short corridor, which ends at the top of a flight of steps. The steps are steep and the way narrow. After descending for some distance, they reach another short corridor opening into a tall chamber. On the far side is a verdigris-coloured bronze door with a similarly green crank in the wall next to it.

The crank is the only means of opening the door. It takes some effort to turn, clattering as it does. A ratchet prevents it from being turned in the other direction. As the crank turns, the door slides up very slowly, rising perhaps an inch with every three rotations of the crank

Beyond the door is a passage three metres wide that continues for about twelve metres. It ends abruptly at the brink of a pit that stretches the full width of the passage. The pit is also three metres across, making it square in cross-section. There are stone rungs carved into the side of the pit. At the bottom, on the far side as the characters look down, is a bronze door.

This is not what it seems. If somebody descends into the pit and tries to open the door, a bronze grille falls across the top, trapping them in the pit. At the same time, the door the characters entered by slides inexorably back into place. The grille can be raised by turning the crank outside that opens the door. (So, opening that door also resets the trap.)

By walking across the top of the grille it is possible to reach the apparent dead end of the passage, which is in fact a secret door. This opens into a small chamber hacked out of the living rock. Runes of the Dragon Kings proclaim the power and glory of Tlarnash the Lord of Flame. There is a mouldered heap of what might once have been wood. Buried in this is a tarnished metal rod about six centimetres long. The rod tapers, one end being flattened. Careful inspection and some cleaning will reveal that the rod bears inscriptions in Classical Mu'ugalavyáni describing it as a key for "the sacred embers". There is also a curse against thieves.

All-Consuming Ruin

The central passage twists and turns, then leads steeply downward to a small flat arch. Beyond the arch is a narrow tunnel where they must advance in single file. After a single zig-zag, the tunnel widens to permit two abreast. Here the walls are covered with small blobs of rock. A close inspection shows that these blobs are randomly scattered and lie on top of inscriptions, partially obscuring them.

Human bones litter the floor of the tunnel just ahead. There are two reasonably intact skeletons and a heap of Hma bones. An observant character may notice small holes bored into some of the bones. The blobs of rock on the walls are most closely grouped near to the bones, growing sparse before and after.

The blobs are not in fact rock, but eggs of the Blood-digger insect. These can detect the presence of living creatures, hatching out to swarm all over them. Armour gives scant protection. The insects are easy to kill, but there are too many to deal with physically. Once they have found a gap in a person's armour, they burrow into his flesh and lay their eggs. The adults then die. The eggs remain in the host's body for several days until they hatch. The new adults feed on the host body, seek out other adults and mate. Subsequently they emerge to form chrysalides on durable surfaces such as walls. The chrysalides can remain dormant for centuries.

If the party go blundering forward towards the bones, they will be engulfed in a swarm of Blood-diggers before they know it. Each character is attacked by 2-20 of the flying rust-coloured insects. Each insect does 1 point of damage per round, burrowing under the flesh after two rounds. They can still be dug out for a further two rounds, at the cost of 1-4 extra points of damage. They then tunnel around for another 2-12 rounds before they settle to egg-laying. The eggs hatch after three days—by which time the host body should be getting nicely game for the young mandibles to chew.

The solution is to send ahead a scapegoat—either a Hma (perhaps taken from the animal pen in the camp) or a hapless slave. The Blood-diggers will obliterate this while the party hold back at a safe distance, and once all the insects have tunnelled into the body they can proceed.

Once past the Blood-diggers, the tunnel ends in a simple chamber. A heap of rotted wood has collapsed on the floor. Lying in a corner as if tossed there long ago is an open box carved from red jasper. The box has a clasp with a hole of the right size for the key found in Mighty Destruction. However, the lock is so badly corroded as to be useless.

The box is lined with lead. On the outside there is a line of prayers to Tlarnash written in Classical Muâugalavyani. The interior of the lid bears an inscription which says that the guardian of the treasure must be appeased with one of the sacred embers to permit passage. Presumably this box once contained the 'sacred embers'. There are none left in it now.

Glorious Conflagration

The left-hand passage leads to a large chamber with a stone sarcophagus against the far wall. When anyone touches this, the guardian manifests itself...

A black thorny branch appears, wreathed in smokeless fire but not being consumed. Then another, and another. The heat is intense, driving the party back. The branches seem to grow out of the floor, wall or even empty air.

The branches are in fact the limbs of a demonic creature called Burning Spikes, which exists on another plane but can extrude itself into Tékumel's dimension through innate nexus points. Burning Spikes cannot travel around on Tékumel's plane except by extending its limbs. This process resembles very rapid growth of about a metre a second. It can move greater distances by withdrawing a limb back to its own plane and extruding it elsewhere. Thus it can appear at non-contiguous points (up to five at once) and swiftly surround foes.

Burning Spikes attacks by enclosing a victim and striking with its limbs. Each limb has an Attack of 10 and inflicts 1d6 damage. Any character within one metre of a limb takes 1 point of burn damage (per limb) each round, armour giving no protection.

The limbs can be chopped through. It takes 10 points of damage to do this. Edged weapons are needed, and Chlenhide weapons do only half damage. If a limb is severed it starts to burn away to ash, lashing out blindly as it dies. It continues to attack random targets for two rounds, now doing 1 d6+1 in its frenzy. The increased heat means that the victim and adjacent characters now take 2 points of burn damage also. After two rounds, the severed limb disintegrates into ashes.

Burning Spikes is charged with guarding the Cube of Immediate Immolation. Lacking the 'sacred embers' required to appease it, the characters can only hope to drive it away. To do so they must destroy all five limbs. This forces Burning Spikes to retreat to its own dimension for one week.

Burning Spikes need not appear straight away. It is cunning and might track the characters so as to attack them when they are least prepared. Depending on the whim of the referee it could end up burning down the Mu'ugalavyáni camp, scaring away enemies (and friends!) on the way back to Tumissa, or cause the unexpected demise of senior members of the temple of Vimuhla.

Should the referee prefer a more cut-&-dried solution, a single sacred ember can remain in the box. It is a large flake of black metal, heavier than gold, etched with unreadable glyphs. It has monetary value only to a collector of curios, and probably not much at that. The ember is weakly radioactive; holding it close to one's body for more than a month or so (such as in a pouch) will lead to ugly bruising and loss of hair at that spot. After another month there will be skin lesions and the person will be weak and nauseous. Cancer is now probable, and unless this can be surgically removed (a -15 Physician check) death will result within five years.

Presenting an ember to Burning Spikes causes it to pause. The characters must put the ember on the floor and step back. Burning Spikes will sweep over it and then retreat to its own plane, taking the ember with it.

A crystal cube

The sarcophagus can be opened with a combined **Strength** of 40. There is room for up to three people to try at once. It is filled with some kind of rotted fibrous material. There are a few gems, worth about 2000 Kaitars in all, and a reddish wooden box. (Yes, wooden, and yet it has not decayed!)

The box is about eighteen centimetres on a side and is carved with incantations and prayers that are not really comprehensible, though their purport is clear, along with more imprecations against the pernicious undead and their black-robed masters. There is a small brass clasp, easily opened. The box is lined with red silky Güdru cloth and contains a ruby cube some thirteen centimetres on each side. Within the cube, a smoke seems to swirl. There is also a silver rod thirteen centimetres long nestled in the silk.

The Cube of Immediate Immolation is a device for detecting and destroying the undead. When undead beings are within one Tsan (1.33 kilometres), gold spots appear inside the cube, their position corresponding to the location of the undead. The rod can be used to indicate specific targets, and the Cube can then be used to immolate those selected undead. The Jajgi, or intelligent undead, get a Magic Resistance roll (against an attack of +10) but take 1-8 damage even if they succeed. Shedra and Mrur are destroyed automatically. In destructive mode the Cube can be used six times a day, but its detection ability functions constantly.

Or then again...

Alternatively, for a more challenging adventure, have the party arrive to find the shrine already looted by the previous expedition before the Mu'ugalavyáni arrived. They must then try to find the earlier expedition's trail. Clever clues: a recent ink-bottle on the open sarcophagus lid (Trelnib the scribe was ever forgetful), a Tsolyáni body by the Blood-diggers, a cracked shield, a relatively fresh discarded torch, etc.

The long walk home

The party has a problem. Now they've got the Cube, they have to return home through hostile territory. Hopefully they have realized by now that Captain Birelish is likely to have them searched before letting them go. If he finds the Cube it will mean the sacrificial altar for them.

There are several possible solutions. They can bury the Cube and come back for it later. They can distract the soldiers searching them and slip it to someone who's already been searched. They can bribe a Red Hat to carry it for them and hand it back once they've left the camp. They can try to conceal it (though it's difficult with something that big). Possibly the best plan would just be to decamp at night and slip off into the woods.

If they escape the camp they'll still have to deal with patrols encountered on the way back to Tumissa. There are two alternative routes: the way they came, or via the swamps surrounding Penom.

The way back via Butrus uses the same encounter tables as on the way out—unless the party slipped away without saying goodbye, in which case there's a 65% chance they'll encounter a patrol sent out in pursuit.

Travelling via the swamps takes ten days per hundred Tsan in dense jungle, for a total of twenty to forty days depending on how direct a route they take, followed by some five hundred Tsan in swampland, taking a further forty days. This route would really test the party's survival skills. If they take the swamps there should be at least two really nasty encounters such as a Hlu'un or a shoal of Kayi. (See *The Tékumel Bestiary.)*

Oh, not now!

At the fringes of the forest the party runs into a group of bandits. This is the climactic encounter and it can be no-holds-barred. There are fifteen humans and a Shén: mercenaries who were in the pay of the Mu'ugalavyáni but who deserted out of boredom and the hope of richer pickings. They are ignoble and untrustworthy, and the humans are all scared of Hrgz Ggrgz the Shén, who commands them.

The party are liable to be looking out for pursuers, not ambushes, so the first they will know of the bandits is when they're hit by four crossbows (including Hrgz Ggrgz's pistol-bow). The bandits have the sense to concentrate on anyone who looks like an obvious sorcerer, so the ritual priests will be targeted too.

Depending on the results of the first volley or two, the bandits will either call for the party's surrender, charge in for the kill, or run away. They don't want to risk themselves unnecessarily in a fight—their only interest is the party's valuables—but they are ruthless enough to kill anybody who resists. The bandits' morale is brittle, and they will flee if more than five of them are injured without any appreciable wounds to the player-characters. If the Shén is downed they'll almost certainly run off, since it is only he who keeps them whipped into shape. They are also liable to panic if any flashy sorcery is used.

If the party succeeds in routing the bandits they might be able to find their camp on an unmodified Tracking roll.

There is loot comprising 250 Kaitars worth of jewellery and another 100 Kaitars in loose coins. There are also belongings from the previous expedition—a customized sword, an inscribed pencase, an identifiable signet ring. The remains of the other expedition are buried in a shallow grave nearby. They ran into the bandits towards the end of Langala and most perished on the spot, though one or two escaped into the swamps and met a more lingering end.

Way down south

Assuming the party take the route through the swamps and survive, they will eventually arrive at Penom. It is an unpleasant and impoverished town, very evocatively described in *Adventures on Tékumel 11/2*. Not a place to visit if you suffer from blennophobia.

The party will wish to clean up at the local temple of Vimuhla, which is far from impressive, and leave for Tumissa as soon as possible. They will be interrogated first of all by Dremel hiSukosh of the Domed Tomb Clan, an official recently appointed to Penom. He is obnoxious in the extreme, and demands to know why the party returned from Pan Chaka by way of Penom. If they are stupid enough to tell him the whole story then he will confiscate the Cube 'for the glory of the Emperor' and (since such a find might well represent his meal ticket out of here) he'll require a very handsome bribe to give it back.

All's well

The party returns home on the Sakbe causeway. The journey to Urmish, on to Katalal, and thence to Tumissa will take about forty days.

On arriving home they are given a quiet welcome by Fereshthi hiBurukhoi, who chides them for taking so long. He makes it clear the Cube is to remain a secret. There is of course no monetary reward but, in the temple's Inner Circle, they have all gained great prestige.

	Melee value	Damage	Hit Points	Armour	Stamina
Mu'ugalavyáni					
Hvy Infantryman	18 (2h axe) two cohorts have bows: Missile 13	+1	13 [3/5/7]	5*	13
Mdm Infantry	18 (shortsword)		12 [3/5/7]	4*	12
Shén mercenary	23 (halberd) four cohorts have pistol-bows: Missile 13	+3	19 [4/7/10]	5	12
Bandits					
Hrgz Ggrgz	25 (lh axe)and 13 with pistol-bow	+3	19 [4/7/10]		11
average bandit	15 (sword) three men have crossbows: Missile 9		12 [3/5/7]		12

[Return to Top]