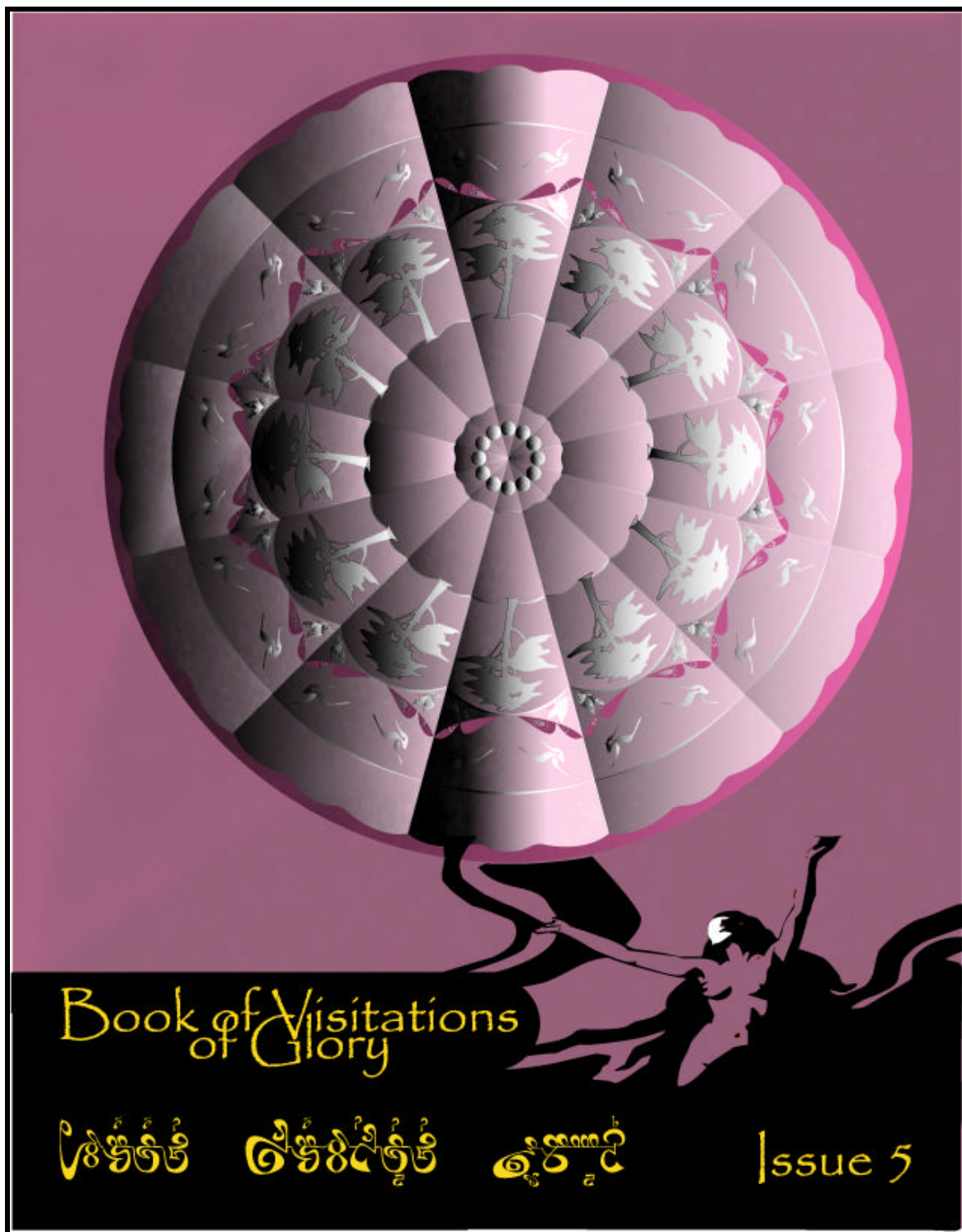




CHAPTER 1

Tekumel for Over the Edge, 2nd Edition Rules

First Draft (June, 2002)

Notice that Over the Edge, 2nd Edition, has a one page rules brief on p. 35.

Author's Notes: Except for magic, OTE works well for Tékumel. After all, combat is pretty basic in most game worlds. Tékumel's magic, however, is specific to its setting, and while it can be modeled to OTE without much trouble, it can be complex for persons not used to both systems. I believe the result is simple, and follows most of the OTE systems: the attacker rolls his characteristic dice, compares the result to the defender's, and the result is multiplied to produce a damage score (or other effect). The seven pages of magic rules are simply details for this basic system. If there are any questions, remember that I'm trying to model the Gardásiyal rules in OTE terms, and this should provide guidance.

In This Chapter

Character creation	4
Combat.....	4
Magic	5

Character creation

Follow the standard OTE rules, with the following notes and changes.

A. Social standing will be average, whatever level the GM has decided for the campaign. Higher social standing should be a trait; lower standing can be a flaw. (Social standing includes both clan and lineage.)

B. Species and nationality is assumed to be the average that the GM has decided for the campaign. Foreigner backgrounds (including nonhumans) must be indicated somehow (trait, descriptor, etc.). Foreigners will know their native language and customs, but may be unaware of Tsolyáni language and customs. Clear this with your GM before play.

C. Magical Ability must be noted as a central or side trait. If chosen as a central trait, one can be a sorcerer, sorcerer-priest, military sorcerer, laypriest, etc. If chosen as a side trait, one is usually more limited: psychic sorcerer (only), ritual sorcerer (only), human "battery," knows one spell, etc.

Central traits for magic implies connections, tutors, access to colleagues, etc. Side traits for magic implies mere magical ability, without other benefits.

D. Note if your character speaks any foreign or scholarly languages. Soldiers, merchants, administrators, or travelers may know foreign languages; sorcerers and scholars are likely to know modern and/or ancient tongues. Clear your choices with the GM before play.

E. Family. Note if your character is married, has children, has close relatives.

F. Hobbies. Your character may have hobbies, and these should be noted in traits or descriptions.

I recommend using standard OTE rules for a character's secret and the most important person in his or her background. Tékelmel has enough conspiratorial elements to make this work.

Combat

Weapons: Most Tékelmel weapons can easily be fitted to OTE: knives, swords, axes, bows, two handed swords, etc. Use the standard damage rules. Steel cutting weapons get a bonus die. Enchanted steel weapons of all kinds get a +1 per enchantment, in addition to the bonus die.

Armor: Can be roughly classified into four types, not counting steel:

- 1** Light (leather) stops 1 point of damage.
- 2** Light chlén hide stops 2 points of damage.
- 3** Medium chlén hide stops 1 die of damage.
- 4** Heavy chlén hide armor stops 2 dice of damage, but with a -1 to all actions due to encumbrance.

Shields: Small shields give +1 to your defense roll; medium shields add a bonus die, large shields add an extra die, plus a penalty die to all non-combat actions when used. Actions in combat requiring agility will receive a penalty die.

Steel armor: Adds a bonus die to the defense, and a penalty die to all non-combat actions. (Combat acrobatics and agility will be hampered by steel armor.) Each level of enchantment adds +1.

Example: Síruchel hiSayunchúna is armed with a steel longsword, and armored with heavy steel armor and a large shield. All of these items are enchanted to +1. He is a 4 die warrior (sign: facial scars; hums martial music.). On the attack, he rolls four dice, plus a bonus die, and adds +1 to the final result. On the defense, he rolls 4 dice for his warrior ability, an extra die for his large shield, with two bonus dice (one for the armor, and one for the shield), with two points added to the final defensive result. Síruchel is going to be very hard to hit! However, he takes two penalty dice to all actions outside of combat so long as he wears the armor, and if he needs to be agile in combat (such as dodging that toppling wall), he'll also take those two penalty dice.

Remember, each combat round is about 3 seconds long.

Magic

Characters are unable to use magic unless an ability to do so is specified. Usually, this is by choosing "sorcerer" as a central trait. (Remember, only those who choose "sorcerer" as a central trait can automatically assume the ability to use both ritual and psychic magic. If a character somehow gains magical ability in play or through experience dice, she should choose either ritual or psychic ability.)

Characters with magical ability must note the following information:

- 1 Level of ability.** This is the number of dice in that skill or ability. (Sometimes referred to as the sorcery characteristic).
- 2 Magical resistance.** Automatically the number of dice in magical ability; beings without magical ability usually have 2 dice of magical resistance.
- 3 Pedhétl.** In OTE terms, this is the number of "shots" the character has.
 - ✍ *Option 1* (Lower power games): Beginning characters, no matter how many dice in their sorcery trait, have 3 shots.
 - ✍ *Option 2* (Higher power games): Beginning characters start with full Pedhétl: for every die of sorcery they have, they get 3 shots.

In either case, a player may choose to roll a die instead of accepting 3 shots, with the result being the number of shots. (Example, Alice has a character with 4 dice in sorcery. She could begin the game with 12 shots [the referee is using the high power Option 2], but chooses to roll one die instead. She rolls a 2, so she now gets 11 shots. Choosing to roll a second die, Alice gets a 5, so she now has a total of 13 shots. Alice decides 13 shots are fine.

- 4 Specific spells known.** During play, players may spend their experience dice to learn additional spells. During character generation, players get fifteen spell learning dice to be used *only* for learning spells (making them 3rd level, in Gardásiyal terms). See the learning spells rules, just below. All of these spell learning dice must be spent during character creation; any left over will be lost. Notice that this does not include the experience die all beginning characters get.

Learning Spells

TOTE treats spells as skills. A sorcerer knows a number of dice in a particular spell, and the more dice the sorcerer has for that spell, the more effects she can do. (Having more dice in a spell is the equivalent of knowing the spell at a higher level in Gardásiyal terms: 1 die in a Universal spell means knowing the equivalent of U1 and U2 levels; 2 dice gives U3 and U4 levels, and so on.)

Limitations on learning or knowing spells

If you have 2 dice in a spell, you can choose to cast it for the 1 die effect or the 2 die effect. Even if cast for the 1 die effect, it is counted as two dice for range, duration, etc.

If there is no effect listed for a spell for a particular number of dice, then there is no effect. For example, the Zoic Domination spell has only two dice listed; while a character may learn it up to five dice, there are no additional effects beyond improving range and duration.

Some spells start with more than one die. (Example: Disenchantment begins at 2 dice.) Sorcerers must spend 2 experience dice to learn this spell at its lowest level. A sorcerer may have one die in Disenchantment, and spend another experience die later to learn it at 2 dice. A sorcerer who knows Disenchantment at 1 die cannot cast it.

Sorcerers may not know a spell with more dice than they have dice in magical ability. (That is, a four die sorcerer cannot learn any spell at five dice, except as noted below.) However, Universals count as one die lower, and Temples count as one die higher: that is, a four die sorcerer can have up to five dice in a Universal spell, but only three dice in a Temple spell.

Spells should not be learned at more than five dice; only the very most senior wizards can do this.

Sorcerers who are only capable of ritual magic cannot learn or use psychic magic and vice versa.

At character creation, sorcerers have 15 dice for learning spells. Each die spent gives one die of a chosen spell. Notice that characters must first learn ten of the eighteen beginner spells before taking any others, and no Generic spells may be learned until twelve Universals are known. (These limits must be adjusted if the character is only capable of learning Ritual or Psychic magic. In this case, the character must learn all of the appropriate beginner spells before advancing to Generics.)

Example: Dhúvash, a sorcerer-priest of the Temple of Ksárul, is a beginning character. He chooses the following spells:

2. Ascertainment	1 die
4. Control of Self	1 die
5. Disenchantment	2 dice
6. Domination	1 die
7. Elicitation	1 die
10. Healing	1 and 2 dice

12. Invisibility 1 die

16. Phantasms 1 die

21. Terrorization 1 die

So far, this counts as ten spells learned. Notice that Disenchantment counts as a single spell, even though it costs 2 dice to learn, and Healing counts as two spells because it was learned for both the 1 die and 2 dice effects. Dhúvash has spent eleven of his fifteen dice. For his remaining four dice, he chooses

15. Perception of the Energies 1 die

24. Warding 2 dice

30. Artfulness 1 die

Dhúvash has spent all fifteen dice on spells. (Any of these dice not spent during character creation would be lost.) He knows one Generic spell, Artfulness.

Experience

Sorcerers may apply experience dice to improving the following abilities:

- 1 Magical ability.** Improving magical ability will improve one's ability to cast and resist spells, and raise the limits on learning spells. A sorcerer must have at least five dice of magical ability before they can try custom modifying spell effects. Boosting magical ability does not increase either number of shots or number of spells known.
- 2 Pedhétl.** Experience dice may be spent to buy an additional die of shots (or 3 shots, without rolling). No sorcerer may have more shots than 6x their number of magical dice. (Example: a five die sorcerer cannot have more than 30 shots.) Exception: some individuals with little or no magical ability may have relatively high Pedhétl; these individuals are treated as "psychic batteries" by senior sorcerers. Such individuals are created by having a trait in "psychic battery." These individuals are not allowed to have more shots than 6x the number of dice they have in "psychic battery." Notice that boosting Pedhétl does not change magical ability or number of spells known.
- 3 Learn more spells.** Each experience die spent on learning a spell gives the character one die in a chosen spell.

Under normal circumstances, a tutor is required to improve these abilities (in addition to the player spending the experience dice). Some exceptional individuals may be able to boost their magical ability or Pedhétl without an instructor, but learning new spells always requires some form of instruction.

Spell Casting

Summary of TOTE magic use

To cast a spell, expend a shot, and roll your sorcery characteristic dice against an opposing roll. Most of the time, the opposing roll will be a secret roll by the GM; for Aimed spells (like Domination), the player will roll directly against her opponent's magical resistance, which for non-sorcerers is usually two dice.

Notice that the determining characteristic of how likely the spell is to succeed is the number of dice in the sorcery characteristic. Having more dice in a spell generally influences the spell's range, duration, and effect, but not the probability of succeeding with casting it.

Spell casting may be opposed or unopposed. Magically semi-barren areas are assumed to raise the cost of the spell, doubling the number of shots needed. Spells can't be cast in barren areas at all, as there's not enough energy. Referees may choose to increase the difficulty as well. Magically fertile areas reduce the cost of spell casting, either to half-shots, or they double the effect.

Opposed spells

A person can tell when he is the target of an aimed spell. He may choose to resist or not. Defenders often don't get a chance to resist areal or radius spells.

Spell resistance is based on one's sorcery dice. The caster rolls her sorcery dice, and the defender rolls his sorcery dice. If the defender's roll equals or exceeds the caster's, the spell doesn't work. If the attacker's roll beats the defender's, then the spell succeeds.

If a defender has no sorcery skill, then he usually gets two dice to resist. Strong will adds +1 to the resistance roll, while a weak will subtracts one from it.

There is a -1 penalty to resist a Generic spell, and a -2 penalty to resist a Temple spell.

Enchanted armor gives a bonus to magical resistance for each plus on the armor, as do enchanted shields. (So an defender wearing +1 steel armor with a +2 shield gets a total of +3 to their magical resistance roll.)

If the defender chooses not to resist (as in a healing spell), then the spell is treated as Unopposed.

Unopposed spells. If there is no defender, or if the defender chooses to not resist the spell, it is unopposed. Under these circumstances, the caster rolls her sorcery dice against the difficulty of the spell or the situation. Typically, this is two dice.

Difficulty is usually related to the situation: the spell caster is running, can't concentrate, is using old ingredients.

Aimed Spells: These spells are targeted on a specific individual, whether the spell has an area effect or not. They are essentially a ranged attack. Unlike regular ranged attacks in OTE, the defense roll is based on the defender's magical resistance, as noted above. (Do include the effects for Generic and Temple spells, and for enchanted steel armor and shields.) Additional factors may add to or subtract from the defense dice; all of these are basic OTE rules, except for the modified distance rules.

- 1** Distance. Spells cast at long range (divide the spell range into thirds; anything in the last third is long range) give the defender an extra die. Spells cast at touch range take away one die from the defender, but this reduction cannot put the defender below his basic magic resistance dice.
- 2** Cover. If the defender is behind cover, he gets 1 die for being at least 50% covered, and 2 dice, if at least 90% covered.
- 3** If the defender is moving fast (running), he gets an additional die.
- 4** If the defender is dodging (using a defensive combat maneuver), he gets bonus dice equal to the number of dice normally rolled for agility.
- 5** Situations where visibility is poor (darkness, fog, etc.) add 1 or 2 dice to the defensive roll.

Misses: Most of the time, when an aimed spell misses, it has no further effect.

Sometimes it's important to know where a missed aimed spell actually lands. The difference between the attacker's roll and the defender's is the number of yards away the spell actually lands. Roll an additional d6 for direction: 1 = far, 2 = far right, 3 = close right, 4 = close, 5 = close left, 6 = far left. (Scatterplot is by sixths, going clockwise, with 1 being opposite the caster.) If there are any targets, friendly or hostile, within the new area of effect, they get to roll their magic resistance against the caster's original roll to see if they were struck, using only magic resistance modifiers (do not count range or visibility: these new targets may dodge, duck behind cover, etc.). The original defender is considered to have already successfully resisted the spell, even if he is still within the new area of effect.

If the scattered spell ends up landing further away from the caster than the maximum allowable range for the spell, it is assumed to have been miscast, and it does not land anywhere.

Because spell effects are usually calculated by the difference between the attacker's roll and the defender's, a miss would usually end up with negative numbers, meaning it would never have an effect. Instead, for the purposes of calculating spell effects of missed spells, assume it succeeded by one point.

Some aimed spells target specific body parts. If so, the body part depends on the degree of success for the spell: Success of 1 - 5 points means a leg or a foot; 6 - 8 points means an arm or hand; 9 - 11 points means the abdomen; 12 - 15 points means the chest; a hit by 15 or more points means the head.

Attackers may aim for a specific body part. This adds points to the defense roll, with any miss meaning the spell missed completely. Aiming at the chest/torso gives the defender +1; aiming at a limb gives the defender a bonus die, and aiming for the head gives two extra dice to the defense. A success means the target body area has been struck; failure means a complete miss.

Example: Alésh, a 4 die sorcerer, casts a 1-die Dessication (G37) on Bálesh, a warrior without magical ability, 25 feet away. Because Alésh has only 1 die in Dessication, the spell's range is 30 feet. Bálesh dodges behind a fallen pillar (about 50% cover). Alésh has 4 dice; she rolls a total of 16. Bálesh has 2 dice of magical resistance (normal), +1 die because he's at long range, +1 die for getting behind cover, +2 bonus dice for dodging with normal agility, for a total of 4 dice + 2 bonus dice. He rolls 5, 2, 1, 1 for his regular dice, and 2, 3 for his bonus dice, for a final roll of 5, 3, 2, 2, or 12 points. Alésh's 16 beats Bálesh's 12 by four points. Dessication needs to know which part of the body was hit: 4 points means a leg or foot. A random roll says it was the right leg; Bálesh's right leg is now withered, numb and useless for $4 \times 3 = 12$ minutes. With each round being 3 seconds long, that's 240 rounds.

Radius spells: Some aimed spells are directed at a target (and may affect multiple targets) while others are directed at the ground, and influence those targets caught within the area of effect. Treat Radius spells as aimed spells, but the attacker targets a place where the spell will land, rather than a living target. Because there is no defender, the "defense dice" are determined by the referee, based on the difficulty of the target, visibility, range, etc. If the spell fails, check for where the spell actually lands, as above. All targets within the area of effect may roll their magical resistance, as for an opposed spell (that is, no dodging, cover, etc.) Unlike aimed spells, if the spell misses, but the target is still within the area of effect, they are still affected.

Example: C hokákh, a 4 die sorcerer, knows the spell "The Web of Kriyag, lover of Spiders" at 3 dice. He casts it at a cowering bunch of four Mu'ugalavyáni hiding behind an overturned rowboat, 30 feet away. It's night. The spell has a range of 30 feet, so this is long range. Chokákh rolls 18. The referee decides the spell is at long range, it's night, and the Red Hat soldiers have 90% cover, giving the situation 5 dice of defense. (1 for long range, 2 for poor visibility, 2 for 90% cover). The referee rolls 5 dice for 21 points. Chokákh misses by $21 - 18 = 3$ yards. A scatter roll of 3 means the spell lands nine feet short and to the right of the Mu'ugalavyáni. The area of effect for the spell is a circle (spell dice) x 3 feet diameter, meaning 9 feet. The Mu'ugalavyáni would just be at the outer edge of this area, but they have good cover, so the referee rules that the spell webs the boat, just missing the Red Hats.

Slow spells: Another special type of spell is the "slow spell", which builds up damage gradually. The caster rolls her casting dice, and the defender rolls his resistance dice as usual. If the spell fails or is resisted, that is the end of the matter. If the spell succeeds, it takes effect one (already rolled) die per round, of the caster's choice. It does not actually take effect until the defender's resistance is overcome, and damage is more gradual as a consequence.

Example: Tlánis, (4 die sorcerer) casts a 2 die Hand of Kra the Mighty against Metláno, a 3 die sorcerer. She rolls 4, 4, 3, 2 = 13 points, and he rolls 2, 4, 4 = 10 points. The spell succeeds. In the first round (the casting round), Tlánis advances one die (a 4). This is less than Metláno's 10 point defense, so the spell does no damage, but Metláno feels a slight tightness around him. On the next round, Tlánis advances a second die (4 again), which is still less than Metláno's defense. On the third round, she advances the third die (3), which gives her a total of 11 points, one more than Metláno's defense. The spell does $1 \times 7 = 7$ points of damage to Metláno from the pressure. On the last round, she advances her last die, which does $2 \times 7 = 14$ additional points of damage. Metláno has taken a total of 21 points of damage from the spell, stretched out over four rounds. Armor will defend, taking away its total damage from the total done. If Metláno were wearing 2 point leather armor, it would subtract 2 points from the first seven administered to him (in the third round), and thereafter be useless for this spell.

Notice that Tlánis does not have to concentrate to maintain a slow spell, although the players have to keep track of the dice! She can continue to cast spells at Metláno while her Hand of Kra squeezes him. If Metláno manages to cast a Disenchantment, dispelling the Hand, he takes only as much damage as the hand has already administered before the Disenchantment removed it.

Maintaining spells

Some spells with durations do not require a sorcerer to concentrate on them; others do. Spells in the list marked with an asterisk (*) require concentration to maintain. If a sorcerer has cast one of these, she can cast additional spells, but if she is maintaining two of these spells, she cannot cast any new spells until at least one of these spells have lapsed. The sorcerer can terminate these spells at any time (and they will automatically terminate if the sorcerer is knocked unconscious, etc.).

Preparing spells

A sorcerer may hold a spell in readiness to cast. Each "prepared" spell counts as a durational spell held by concentration; that is, no more than two. Such spells may be held ready for as many rounds as the sorcerer's magical ability (number of dice) x 4. Such "held" spells will grant the sorcerer a bonus die on their initiative on the round when they choose to cast the spell—provided they announce this intention before the roll.

Extra preparation

A sorcerer may also choose to take extra time to prepare a spell beyond their normal casting time. For each additional round spent preparing, up to two, the sorcerer gains a bonus die on their cast. The caster may not "hold" such a bonus; the spell must be used immediately, or the bonus is lost (and the spell is simply held ready to cast). No other action may be performed for this extra preparation round.

Recovery of Pedhétl

Pedhétl is recovered after rest. After four hours of sleep, or six hours of calm relaxed resting, sorcerers roll their sorcery dice; the result is the number of shots recovered.

Loose Notes About Magic Use

Of course, all Tékumel spell casters are aware of how having metal on their person disrupts spell casting. Any spell-casting attempted while in contact with metal leads to a "short circuit," resulting in damage equal to a roll of the dice for the level of the attempted spell. (A 1-die spell does 1 die of damage to the caster, etc.) Of course, armor does not protect against this damage.

A botched spell cast (all 1s) means the sorcerer has lost all of her shots, and the spell has fizzled. No further magic may be cast in this location for a time--perhaps the Energies from the Planes Beyond have temporarily stopped flowing in this place; perhaps a device of the Ancients is preventing energy from getting through; perhaps there is a large quantity of metal nearby, disrupting the energies. Until this problem is located and fixed, no more spell casting is permitted in the area.

Some rare individuals are psychic dampeners. If a character with this trait stands within ten feet of a spell caster, she simply cannot cast spells. Notice that if the caster is outside of the dampening area, the dampener can still be targeted by a spell.

Note that most spells betray no physical manifestation beyond their effect, although people can tell when a spell has been cast. Sorcerers can usually tell who was doing the casting, and it is possible to detect their magical ability.

Really huge creatures, such as the Akhó, are too large to be affected by most spells. Rather than require multiple castings, TOTE simply grants them large numbers of magical defense dice, making them all but unstoppable by conventional magic.

[Optional: Radius of Protection: A sorcerer may be able to help defend friends. They may be considered to project a radius of power equal in feet to their sorcery trait dice x 3. If an aimed spell lands within their radius of power, they can attract the spell directly to themselves, becoming the target. They may then roll their own magical defense.]

Notes : These are the Universal spells converted from Gardasiyal and Swords and Glory into TOTE. Generally, every for every die the spell is known at (that is, the number of spell learning dice or experience dice applied to learn the spell), two levels are known. More simply, knowing a spell at one die means knowing the equivalent of U1 and U2, and so on. When "dice" are referred to for an effect, this means the number of dice the spell is known at, not the number of dice in the caster's sorcery characteristic. "Success" refers to the amount by which the successful casting roll beat the defense or difficulty. A "skill contest" means the caster and an opponent roll their sorcery characteristic dice or magical resistance dice. Higher roll wins; in a tie, the situation stays as it was before. Notice that magical resistance here is just innate resistance plus will and/or steel armor and shields and enchantments. There is no bonus for cover, dodging, etc.

Italicized spells are beginner spells; * means the spell needs concentration to be maintained, and [] means the spell is my own interpretation.

Universal Spells

1. Alleviation (Ritual)

Type: Range: Touch Area: 1 person Duration: --
Aimed

✍ Preparation time: 1 round

✍ **1 die:** Neutralizes all toxins in the bodies of living beings within 1 meter. It has no effect on alcohol, diseases, or most non-lethal drugs.

2. Ascertainment (Psychic)

Type: Radius **Range:** Caster only **Area:** (success x (dice))
ft radius **Duration:** 1 minute + (x
dice rounds)

✍ Requires concentration to maintain.

✍ Note: Caster rolls against the difficulty of the detection, as judged by the GM.

✍ **1 die:** Read surface thoughts of a co-specific. No probing is possible. Basic hostility or friendliness can be determined. Unwilling targets can defend, in which case they aren't detected.

✍ **2 dice:** Can also read non-intelligent and semi-intelligent animals. Can be used as a detection spell to learn numbers of unseen targets, but not direction or distance. The spell will perceive intelligent beings of other species, but cannot read their thoughts.

✍ **3 dice:** Learn numbers of unseen targets and their distance. Will distinguish species of other intelligent beings, but still cannot read their thoughts. Can simultaneously be used to communicate with willing co-specifics within range. An unwilling target, even if their magical defense fails, can refuse to receive a message, but can still be read.

✍ **4 dice:** Can read the thoughts of friendly intelligent beings of different species. Can communicate with one such being.

✍ ***5 dice:** Psychic trap: Creates a circle (dice) meters in diameter as a psychic trap. Any attempting to probe the circle with a psychic spell or cast a psychic spell within its area must resist or be held motionless until the spell ends (success x 30 minutes.) The circle moves with the caster, who may cast whatever she wishes without setting it off. The trap does not distinguish friends from foes, however. [Roll a sorcery skill contest to see if the trap holds.]

3. Clairaudience/Clairvoyance (Psychic)

Type: Aimed	Range: Touch Area: (success x (dice)) radius circle	Duration: x dice rounds
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- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain.
- ✍ **1 die:** See and hear through obstructions. Metal blocks it. Does not grant the ability to see in the dark.
- ✍ **3 dice:** Projected senses are augmented: can see in the dark, hear very faint sounds.
- ✍ ***4 dice:** Blocks lower levels of this spell; opposing caster assumes they botched the spell. [Roll a skill contest to see if the attacker breaks through this spell.]

4. Control of Self (Psychic)

Type: Range: Caster only Area: Duration: x dice minutes
Aimed

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain.
- ✍ **1 die:** Stop bleeding; cut off sensations of pain. Caster may not engage in melee while maintaining the spell.
- ✍ **2 dice:** Hold breath for duration of spell; have nigh unbreakable grip.
- ✍ **3 dice:** Caster may melee while spell is in effect.

5. Disenchantment (Ritual)

Type: Range: 15 ft Area: Duration: –
Aimed

- ✍ **Preparation time:** 1 round
- ✍ **2 dice:** Affects Universal spells only. Roll a spell contest (roll the number of dice known in Disenchantment against the number of dice in the defending spell, not the caster's magical abilities.). Repeated attempts are possible, but each failed Disenchantment gives a +1 to the defending spell's roll.
- ✍ **3 dice:** Affects Generic and Universal spells.
- ✍ **4 dice:** Affects Temple spells up to 4 dice.
- ✍ **5 dice:** Affects all spells.

6. Domination (Psychic)

Type: Range: (dice) x 30 Area: 1 target Duration: x dice rounds
Aimed ft

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain.
- ✍ **1 die:** If the spell succeeds, the caster has crude control over one intelligent being. Control is limited to frenzy, flight, or immobility.
- ✍ **2 dice:** Control is somewhat better, including simple mechanical tasks (such as opening doors) or providing unwilling guidance.
- ✍ **3 dice:** This version is a Radius type spell, with an area of 10 feet.
- ✍ **4 dice:** Caster may choose more precise control of a single victim: the target may provide information, forget something, etc. An observer needs to make a perception check to detect this control.

7. Elicitation (Psychic)

Type: Range: Touch Area: Duration: x dice rounds
Aimed

Requires concentration to maintain.

- ✍ **1 die:** On an inanimate object, the caster sees a hazy mental picture of the last person to handle the object. (NOTE: Not the scene of the handling; just the person who touched it. It's a magical fingerprint, not a movie.) The object gets a defense: roll against the difficulty of the situation. The caster must be within 10' of the object.
- ✍ ***2 dice:** The caster can sense how powerful an intelligent being is: how many dice they have in spell-casting ability, or how many dice in combat ability.
- ✍ ***3 dice:** The caster can hold a bit of a substance and if there is any more within the area of effect (dice x 4 meters), she is guided to it. (If the caster has mastered this spell at a higher level, they can use this variant by simply concentrating on the substance, without actually having it.) Magical substances roll a skill contest to avoid being detected. The substance must be simple and homogenous. This version lasts (success x 3 rounds)
- ✍ ***4 dice:** The caster can perceive the workings of an object, such as how a lock works or whether a place is trapped. Roll against the complexity of the object to determine if the caster can understand what she sees.
- ✍ ***5 dice:** Two versions:
 - ✍ ***a.** The caster can use this to detect poisons in an object she is looking at. This can be used on substances (such as food) or creatures (such as Hluss.) The spell doesn't identify the toxin, but will specify where the toxin is (such as in the tail-stinger). (No duration: can only be used on a single object.)
 - ✍ ***b.** This version creates a circle of (dice) meters diameter, of (success x 30 minutes) duration around the caster. The caster knows if an object (such as a being, but not a gas) or a psychic spell enters the area of effect. If a being enters the area, the caster learns their dice in magic and combat, the deity they worship, and their general friendliness or hostility. A rough knowledge of distance from the caster is given, but not their direction. The intruder gets a magical resistance roll (or the spell rolls a spell check) to avoid being detected. (Duration: x hours)

8. Execration (Ritual)

Type: Range: Touch Area: Duration: --
Aimed

- ✍ Preparation time: 5 minutes

- ✍ **5 dice:** The caster curses an object. A trigger is named, a being of a general category: "A Pé Chói," "A Change worshipper," "A follower of Dlamélish," and if the trigger person touches the object, even with a tool, the object explodes, doing (roll spell dice) damage to everybody within (dice) x 3 ft. The target gets a magical resistance roll to make the explosion harmless, but if he fails, there is no other defense, although armor and cover will protect. If the object is touched or moved, even by a non-target, the spell is ruined. Writing may be Execrated, in which case it is triggered if it is read. (There is a subtle difference between an Execrated scroll, and a scroll with Execrated writing.)

9. Favouring (Ritual)

Type: Range: Touch Area: Duration: x 10 minutes
Aimed

- ✍ **Preparation time:** 1 minute
- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain
- ✍ **3 dice:** The recipient gains a field of extra planar energy that absorbs physical damage. It has as many hit points as (success). Damage is taken from this pool of points first. When the pool is used up (or when the spell expires), damage is accrued normally. This spell is species-specific, and a target may only receive it once per day.

10. Healing (Ritual)

Type: Range: Touch Area: Duration: --
Aimed

- ✍ **1 die:** Heals wounds. Roll the spell dice; that is how many hit points are recovered. The target may waive magical resistance. If the spell fails, the wound(s) cannot be healed by magic.
- ✍ **2 dice:** As above.
- ✍ **3 dice:** As above.
- ✍ **4 dice:** The spell can also regrow a lost limb or repair serious injuries without scarring: lost eyes, etc. Senses are also restored. Repairs wounds caused by hostile magic, but will not cure genetic deformities, diseases, drugs, starvation.

11. Inscription (Ritual)

Type: Range: Touch Area: Duration: x 10 minutes
Aimed

- ✍ **Preparation time:** 5 minutes

- ✍ **5 dice:** Cast on a book, amulet, etc. Permits the caster to write a Universal spell on an object while the spell lasts. (The writing lasts until used, if it succeeds.) The caster or another (even a non-spell-caster) may read the writing later to cast the spell without paying a shot (and the inscription then fades away). (Psychic Dampeners cannot use the inscribed spell.) The caster may write in any language they know, or even code the spell for a specific reader—the writing is gibberish for anybody else. The writer must choose how many dice the inscribed spell has, and must know the spell at this level already. The reader must roll their sorcery dice against the dice of the inscribed spell; a failure to beat the spell's score means the spell fails. The reader of the failed spell takes damage of $x \frac{1}{2}$ (rounded up), but this is targeted at the reader's head!! (Psychic spells get a +1; it's harder to transcribe them and to read them.) Duration refers to the amount of time the caster has to write the scroll; the spell is permanent until used.

12. Invisibility (Ritual)

Type: Aimed Range: Touch Area: (dice) x 3 ft Duration: x dice x 2 rounds

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain
- ✍ **1 die:** The caster is slightly out of synchronization with this Plane, and becomes invisible in dim light, but not in full daylight. Attackers take three penalty dice to hit an invisible target. Unwilling targets may resist.
- ✍ **2 dice:** The invisibility works even in broad daylight. Two targets may be affected.
- ✍ ***3 dice:** This version doesn't move with the caster, and is used for inanimate objects. This version lasts for x 30 minutes.
- ✍ ***4 dice:** The caster is surrounded by a nimbus of other-planar "light." She can now perceive invisible objects or beings. If they don't want to be perceived, they may roll their sorcery dice against the caster's. Only the caster sees invisible objects; if she describes their location to comrades, they have only one penalty die to hit.

13. Light and Darkness (Ritual)

Type: Radius Range: Caster only Area: (dice) x 10 ft circle Duration: x dice x 30 seconds

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain
- ✍ **1 die:** Creates a ball of dim, whitish light or a ball of blackest darkness on the caster's fingertips. The ball cannot be let go of, or it will disappear. The caster may move.
- ✍ **2 dice:** The ball can be left somewhere for the duration of the spell.
- ✍ **3 dice:** Requires a round of preparation time. Creates a beam of light or darkness that illuminates a 10' circle up to 30 feet away. The beam cannot be put down, but it can be created somewhere out of the caster's hands (and then not moved). Thus, it could be used to illuminate the inside of a chest for a Clairvoyance/Clairaudience spell, or put behind a door into a dark room to blind opponents. (Dazzled or blinded opponents take three penalty dice for one round, then two penalty dice for the next round, then one for the third round.)

14. Nutrification (Ritual)

Type: Range: Touch Area: Duration: --
Aimed

- ✍ Effects: (dice) number of targets
- ✍ **2 dice:** Fills the targets' stomachs with nutriment equivalent to a full meal. Targets may resist, if they choose. This will not sustain life indefinitely: one can live off this food alone for up to 6 days, but one will grow weaker each day, and die on the seventh. One day of real food will erase the problems caused by one day of magical nourishment.
- ✍ **3 dice:** Preparation time: 1 minute. Creates simple, species-specific, visible food for (dice)x2 targets. The food remains visible for 10 minutes or until eaten.

15. Perception of the Energies (Ritual)

Type: Radius Range: Touch Area: (dice) x 5 feet Duration: x dice rounds
circle

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain
- ✍ **1 die:** The caster sees a glittering halo around enchanted objects denoting other-planar power. It doesn't reveal the strength of the power, nor does it work on automatons, undead, etc. The object may roll magical resistance. (Roll sorcery dice against spell dice).
- ✍ **2 dice:** The caster can perceive if the enchantment is hostile or friendly, and whether a spell (whether ritual or psychic) has been cast in the area of effect. The "sorcerous residue" is a faint sparkle in the air, with brightness indicating time since casting, spell phylum, and number of dice. The exact nature of the spell or caster cannot be determined. This spell does not reveal magico-technological devices (e.g. "Eyes"). (Roll sorcery dice against spell dice).

16. Phantasms (Ritual)

Type: Range: (dice) x 5 Area: (dice) x 10 Duration: x dice rounds
Areal ft ft

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain
- ✍ **1 die:** Creates a thin film of ectoplasm in front of the caster, which may used to portray a static, homogeneous, relatively flat surface (wall, curtains, etc.) If touched, the film pops and disappears.
- ✍ ***2 dice:** Creates 1-5 apparitions in front of the caster, of no more than human size. They cannot move outside of the area of effect, and they make no sound. If touched, they vanish. An intelligence check against the spell's roll is needed to see them for what they are.

- ✍ **3 dice:** The apparitions have more solidity, with (spell dice - 1) combat ability. They may attack, with x3 damage if they hit. If they simulate intelligent beings, they can have simple melee weapons (clubs and swords). Their armor cannot be more than medium chlen-hide. They can be ordered to fight, but they must stay within their circle, and cannot distinguish friend from foe, and never check morale. Besides combat, their abilities are very limited.

17. Robustness (Ritual)

Type: Aimed Range: Caster only Area: Duration: x dice x 30 seconds

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain
- ✍ Effect (dice) x 150 kg (350 lbs)
- ✍ **2 dice:** Lightens a burden so the caster can easily carry up to 300 lbs and it only feels like 50. The burden must be a single object, or a collection of objects that can be combined into a single load.
- ✍ **3 dice:** As before, but up to 600 lbs.
- ✍ **4 dice:** Preparation time: 1 round. Up to two individuals may be recipients of this spell. Each can carry up to 600 lbs this way.

18. The Seal Upon the Powers (Ritual)

Type: Radius Range: Caster only Area: (dice) x 5 ft diameter circle Duration: x 30 seconds

- ✍ Requires concentration to maintain
- ✍ **Preparation time:** 1 minute.
- ✍ **5 dice:** The caster is surrounded by a globe of tiny, glowing particles, serving as a barrier to the Planes Beyond. No ritual magic may be cast within the sphere, nor can it cross. Psychic magic and material articles are unaffected. Beings animated by ritual magic are unaffected.

19. Soporiferousness (Ritual)

Type: Radius Range: (dice) x 50 ft Area: (dice) x 3 ft diameter circle Duration: Varies

- ✍ **1 die:** 1 target who fails to resist sleeps for x minutes. Two combat rounds are needed to rouse him to wakefulness. Only living beings can be affected, none larger than a Shén or Black Ssú. The Pygmy Folk and Shunned Ones are immune.
- ✍ **2 dice:** targets sleep for x 10 minutes, and five minutes are needed to shake them awake.
- ✍ **3 dice:** The targets sleep for x hours, and five minutes are needed to wake him. Alternatively, a single large creature (a Sró or Sérudla) can be targeted.

20. The Sphere of Impermeable Quiescence (Psychic)

Type: Radius Range: Caster only Area: (dice) x 5 ft diameter circle Duration: x 30 seconds

✍ Requires concentration to maintain

✍ **Preparation time:** 1 minute.

✍ **5 dice:** The caster is surrounded by a globe of tiny, glowing particles, serving as a barrier to the Planes Beyond. No psychic magic may be cast within the sphere, nor can it cross. Ritual magic and material articles are unaffected. Beings animated by psychic magic are unaffected.

21. Terrorisation (Psychic)

Type: Radius Range: (dice) x 50 ft Area: (dice) x 3 ft circle Duration: x dice rounds

✍ **1 die:** One target flees in utter panic, away from the caster or toward a safe place. The spell travels slowly, however, and the target gets a round (Intelligence or sorcery skill check against 2 dice) to detect it, permitting either a Disenchantment or diving for cover.

✍ **2 dice:** As the 1 die version, but longer ranged and larger area of effect.

✍ **5 dice:** A victim who fails their magical resistance roll by more than six points suffers a heart attack, for 2x damage. If they failed their roll but by six points or less, will be paralysed with fear for a x rounds, after which he flees for x minutes.

22. Translocation (Psychic)

Type: Aimed Range: (dice) x 3 meters Area: Duration: --

✍ **Effects:** (dice) x 5 ounces. Can be moved (dice) x 15 feet.

✍ **1 die:** Lift and slowly move a small object. (Only about 2 ounces; not the 5 the spell would regularly do.) The object typically gets no defense, unless it's restrained. A sorcery check is needed for complex actions, such as turning a key. If the object is thrown and hits (use sorcery dice, but otherwise it's a normal attack), the target takes no damage, but is distracted: a spell is spoiled, two penalty dice are taken in an attack, etc.

✍ **2 dice:** The object can be thrown hard enough to cause damage as though for a thrown rock. A hit that does negligible damage or is blocked by armor will still distract the victim.

✍ **3 dice:** A single object weighing about a pound, or two smaller objects about half a pound each can be lifted and thrown. The larger object does x3 damage if it hits.

✍ **4 dice:** As before, but doing x4 if it hits.

- ✍ **5 dice:** The caster may now pick up a mass of small objects or particles and create a stinging cloud that can be moved out to maximum range, or let stand. The cloud is 10' in diameter, and victims caught within must roll either intelligence, agility, or magical ability (whichever is highest) against the sorcerer's casting dice to avoid being blinded. The difference in scores is how many minutes the victim is blinded by the cloud. If blinded for more than 15 minutes, the victim is permanently blinded, and will require magic to be healed. Such dust storms are sometimes used as smokescreens to permit retreat.

23. Transportation (Ritual)

Type: Radius Range: Caster only Area: 10 ft circle Duration: --

- ✍ **Preparation time:** One round

- ✍ **5 dice:** Transports up to three people back exactly 300 feet to the location previously occupied by the caster. The effect is instantaneous, and the distance is fixed; the spell follows the caster's exact path. Targets must physically touch each other, and their possessions are carried as well. Unwilling targets may resist. Targets who are even partially more than 10' away from the caster will cause the spell to fail (so the spell will fail if the caster attempts to drag back a comrade who is clinging to a large statue). If other beings or large objects already occupy the space the spell is dropping them in, there is a large explosion, doing (spell success) x5 damage. There is no protection from this damage.

24. Warding (Ritual)

Type: Radius Range: Caster only Area: (dice) x 10 ft Duration: x dice rounds

- ✍ Concentration required to maintain

- ✍ **2 dice:** Creates a cylindrical defensive shield. Blows and missiles cannot penetrate, but slow moving objects and gases do. It takes (dice) rounds to penetrate, but once inside, only weapons small enough to fit inside the area may be used. The shield moves with the caster, who may cast spells through it, but may not attack through it nor throw objects through it.

- ✍ **3 dice:** The shield is now big enough to permit the use of long one-handed weapons inside it.

25G. The Web of Kriyag, Lover of Spiders (Ritual)

Type: Radius Range: 30 feet Area: (dice) x 3 ft diameter Duration: x rounds

- ✍ **3 dice:** Hurls a net of tangling webs. Those in the targeted area must dodge against the casting success roll. A failure means being caught. To escape, the victim(s) must roll their trait (dexterity; strength; whatever trait they're using) against the caster's original score. They may roll every other round. The web dissolves x rounds after casting.

25. Zoic Domination (Ritual)

Type: Range: (dice) x 30 Area: Duration: x dice rounds
Aimed ft

✍ **1 die:** One non-intelligent animal can be controlled. It affects sea creatures smaller than "Large" and Underworld beings defined as animals, but not larger animals, undeads, creatures created by sorcery, etc. An animal affected can be made to frenzy, flee, or remain immobile.

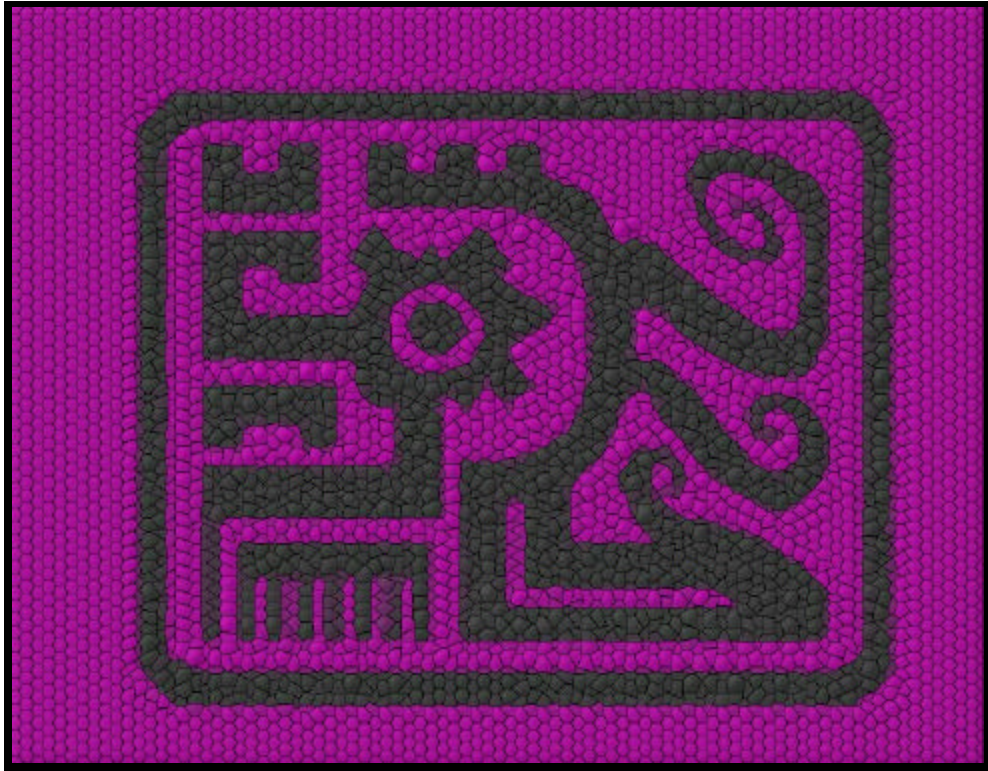
✍ **2 dice:** One very large creature, or semi-intelligent beings can be controlled.

Wurú's Path

Wurú's Path" was an Exquisite Corpse style of writing composed by several authors that took turns with several characters over a period of an adventure. The subject matter was limited to just being Téकुmel in scope, but each writer had great leeway in what was written. There are some deliberately chaotic sequences (this is, after all, about followers of Wurú) and were written from the different perspectives of the characters along a shared timeline. It is dark, disturbing and above all an homage to Professor Barker who inspired us all.

Ground Rules for "The Exquisite Corpse"

1. Tsodlán is from a wealthy high clan from a high lineage.
2. Zágar is from a very low clan of questionable lineage.
3. Both are young, devout male worshippers of Wurú.
4. The venue is modern Tsolyánu after the fall of Emperor Dhich'uné.
5. Temple and clan protocols and motivations were observed as much as possible.
6. Chaos has no true rules; of course this is a rule itself.
7. Once a writer has attributed something to the character the next writer used it in their section or not. We tried to make the story flow smoothly to not contradict the previous entries, unless we found some clever mechanism to explain it.
8. I assigned the episodes based on a rotating schedule. I wrote the introductory passage.
 - a. Ron Heintz wrote the first episode with Tsodlán.
 - b. Malcolm Heath wrote the first episode for Zágar.
 - c. Sean Stidd wrote the next episode for whichever one got back first.
9. We tried to have at most a two-day turnaround. They were supposed to be short, distinct periods of events and actions.
10. We remembered to have fun with the story.



In This Chapter

Introduction.....27

Zágar's Way.....28

Tsodlán's Way.....31

Ghurú's Way.....40

Tsodlán's Way Continues42

The One Other.....45

The Battle46

Wurú's Path - Epilogue49

Introduction

Tsodlán hiBurúsa of the Dark Moon clan and Zágár hiGurúna of the Nighted Tower clan lay sweating in their quarters. Serving as priests at the temple of Wurú in Púrdimal they had just completed their exhausting nightly maze training when they received the summons.

At midnight they dutifully appeared before the portal of the Chamber of Unforeseen Inevitability deep below the great temple. Both of them were clothed in their sect's traditional purple robes, black hoods and timuél dress weapons. Following the silent opening of the great doors they entered and obeised themselves on the cold ink-coloured marble tile. Before falling to the floor Tsodlán saw with great trepidation that the Master of the Chamber tonight was the one called the Elucidator of the Sable Path. His dark assignments were known to be terrifying and often fatal to the recipient.

"You have done well my students." the Master thinly praised, "Tonight you shall prove your devotion to our Lord."

"Choose your fate and begin your journey of serving to prepare this world for the coming Chaos." He pointed to an ancient, heavily carved chest in front of him with an inlay bordered opening on the top.

Tsodlán, being of higher birth, chose first and reached confidently into the shadowy box, grasped a rounded object and pulled it out. He looked down and examined the palm-sized cabochon of amethyst with Wurú's ophidian head carved into the dome and the number seven, representative of Hrü'ü, engraved into the flat back.

Zágár then reached in and pulled out a matching stone made from black jet. His trembling hands were moist with fear.

The Elucidator then silently directed them to steps leading down through a tunnel out of the chamber. After traveling in the dim glow from the walls for what seemed an eternity they spied a torch mounted in the wall separating two passages that led even deeper. One of the entrances was surfaced in purple stone, the other in black. The two priests paused at the juncture, wished the other honor and glory, and descended into their respective destinies.

Zágar's Way

Zágar paused only momentarily to watch Tsodlán step confidently into his side of the maze, if maze indeed this was. "It will be a relief to be alone, without his overwhelming arrogance", thought Zágar as he examined the walls of his corridor. Whenever the two were paired for maze learning, Tsodlán rushed on without taking the time to assess the situation, without a care for the shifting patterns of the maze and test! Tsodlán was wont to question his bravery at times like this, a pattern that Zágar found infuriating.

Zágar knew all things here in the temple were tests, just as each step from his lowly upbringing marked his advancement in the temple. Was he not already a 3rd circle ritual celebrant? One could hardly be thought a coward after the initiation ceremony for that position!

The corridor was unlit, and what little he could see of the walls and floors by the light of the torch beside him seemed smooth and totally without decoration. "Night, cast in stone" though Zágar.

He took a deep breath, used his free hand to hitch up his robes (and surreptitiously dried it on the purple cloth), and moved slowly into the darkness.

Zágar moved slowly into darkness. Tsodlán wouldn't even acknowledge my presence outside the temple, he thought. He is smooth of tongue, highborn, well-connected, handsome. An image of Tsodlán's fine, hawkish face and laughing eyes made Zágar burn with anger at his own great nose and sunken cheeks.

But Zágar was the stronger sorcerer.

He had one other advantage over Tsodlán as well: no high- or low-born Tsolyáni could match the preparation for the mazes Zágar had received as a child of the Nighted Tower. His uncle Nebússa knew the undercities of Púrdimal and its necropolis as a drí-ant knows its hill, and Zágar had learned much under his tutelage.

The jet-black cabochon glittered dark in Zágar's palm as he pressed on, measuring each pace with deliberation. The shifting currents in the air told him that he had come now to an intersection. A soft breeze on his left, open stillness on his right. As he conjured a light he heard Nebússa voice, admonishing him with his child-name: "Watch your left, Tsáhlikh."

Half-whimsically he turned, his eyes adjusting to the werelight, just in time to dodge the blur streaking past him. His ankle turned as he crashed leftward to the wall, and Wurú's talisman danced from his hand, skittering across the floor. The blur, a dismal, unworldly thing vaguely ivory in color, lurched left and right just past Zágar's prone legs. Then it sped off in the direction it had come, into the rightward stillness Zágar had sensed in the dark.

His ankle shot fire up his spine as he stood, but Zágar's only thought was for the cabochon. Ignoring the ramshackle stone path to his right and the narrow, whispering black stair on his left, he hobbled madly ahead. Twenty feet down, his original path came to a dead end. The snake-headed stone lay before him, still glittering, against the abrupt black wall rising at the corridor's end.

"I have you." he thought, clasping the stone in his hand. He then sat down and massaged his ankle for a few seconds. Odd, he was not known for being clumsy. That his ankle should turn, there, and the stone randomly find its way between both of the paths which seemed to lay in wait for him...

His eyes narrowed slightly and then he began to feel the surface of the wall, against which the stone had come to rest.

Yes. Here, and here...

A section of the stone wall slowly fell back, forming a path, upon which he could walk. He started, then, as he saw what lay within.

There was a gap, a chasm that ran some three man-lengths to the other end of this chamber. On the other side there seemed to be some oddments set upon low tables, but he could not see them, because of that which blocked his way, upon the narrow bridge over darkness.

A woman stood before him. She was clothed in thésun-gauze and had unnaturally pale skin. Her hair was full and black and her eyes were a deep brown. Her curves were somewhat more ample than was fashionable and the wrap of her gauzy garments more suited a follower of Dlamélish, accentuating, hiding and promising. Her feet bore no sandals.

"Welcome, Zágáar." Her voice was honeyed and beautiful to hear. It put Zágáar instantly on his guard. "You have done well, listening to the ways of Wurú and discovering this path. There are rewards for you, after a test of your faithfulness and resolve. I am one of your rewards. Come, embrace me."

Zágáar cast an eye dubiously upon the arm's length breadth of the bridge. While playing at the "beast with two backs", with this apparition of beauty, would be agreeable, indeed, the results might give new meaning to the word "having a tumble".

"You of Beauty and Imperceptible Power," he said, smiling and punning a new pronoun, "while I could not have wished for more desirable a prize, do you not think that the far side would be more comfortable?"

"You may not go there, until you have dealt with me."

"Who, then, are you?"

"I am she who has always been here, who will always stand here, unless you move me. I am eternal, unchanging, and I am yours. Come, accept me."

Zágáar moved forward, reaching for the woman. Unchanging? Always here?

His hands caught hold of her delicate shoulders-and she shoved her violently sideways, off the bridge.

A long, fading laugh hung on the air, as she vanished into the black depths.

Zágáar rubbed his hands together. He had touched her for but a second, yet his palms were freezing-cold.

Presuming that he had passed his test of faithfulness to Wurú's path, (of opposition to Stability) for that surely is what "she" had represented, Zágáar cautiously made his way to the end of the chamber, to examine what lay there. As he approached, he could see another two passages, leading off that side.

The alcove before the two passages held a low basalt table. Zágár sat down under the torchlight to examine the items placed on top. The first object was a timuél, the infamous Fang of Chaos. He pulled the blade out of the scabbard and saw the telltale dark stain of venom along its edge. He was now qualified to wear the poisoned wurm instead of the plaything used only for show!

The second item was a jar with a black, slightly liquid material inside. He examined the vessel and read the Engsvanyáli word "skin" on the side. Tentatively he put two fingers into the viscous mixture. Upon touching the thin paste it began to crawl up his hand and then his arm. He thought of screaming, but then quietly accepted his fate as the purplish black covered his entire body. After the transformation he examined his palm. In the darkness he could barely see its outline, the colouring made him almost undetectable.

In a small open box he found a loincloth of a dark ebon weave. He removed his robes and put it on. The camouflage was complete.

The final item was a sealed black glass vial with the words "Devourer of Metal" on an attached bit of paper. He removed the tag, put the vial, timuél and black cabochon into comfortable positions and took the passage to the right for no other reason than it led up.

Naked, with skin made black as the endless void beyond Hrü'ü's planet Zirúna, Zágár padded stealthily along his new path. His senses were alive in the darkness now, every scrap of his legacy from the Nighted Tower reincarnating him as inky silence. He clutched a makeshift satchel in his left hand, cut from his old robes and containing the jar, vial, and timuél, and held the carved jet snakestone in his right.

The corridor he was traveling presently leveled off, and the sigils on the walls told him that this part of the underworld dated from an earlier part of Tsolyánu's first millennium. Strange, tiny crypts and slender corridors slanted off on either side, but he pressed forward. Cool drafts began to come to him, as if he were near the threshold of some broad chasm. Then, unmistakably, he heard voices in the silence, and a purpling of the blackness told him that distant lights were drawing nearer.

With a catlike leap Zágár sprang into one of the crypts at his side. It was a simple indentation in the wall, opening a little in back, where some ancient, forgotten skeleton had rested nigh on two thousand years. Its sleep would of necessity be interrupted now. Zágár pressed his way to the more open space at the rear, feeling mouldering ribs turn to dust under his calves as he squirmed into place. Head between his knees, he watched and waited.

The voices gradually became audible. "Is this not the realm of great and despicable Sárku, and the Black Angel of the Putrescent Hand? What do we here?"

A second voice, full of a grim, calm strength – Zágár could not help but compare it favorably with Tsodlán's cocky self-assurance, though it came from an enemy – answered in reply. "Masters Sárku and Durritlámish have little to do with what transpires here tonight, I pray. Before Tuléng's caress returns to the lands above, a decisive move will have been made in a different struggle, between our ancient lord Qón and the many-legged serpent with whom he has warred since the Time of Darkness and before." Peering through his dim and narrow opening at the approaching illumination, Zágár saw two dog-faced shartoyál of Qón stride into view, maces of more than symbolic potency swinging at their sides. The one in front was tall and powerful, built like a Kuruthuni. It was he who possessed the voice of command; the other, wheedling, continued the conversation from behind.

"Hrúgashkoi Qorúma spoke to you of a vision! `The keys of the ancient gate are found; tonight the serpent brings forth doom...'" They were past Zágár's field of vision now; he thought he heard a quick tsst from the larger one, enjoining his fellow to silence.

Zágár considered. Surely these men had to do with his mission here tonight. To kill one in silence and darkness would be child's play with his poisoned timuél, but with two, and the second so large...

But Zágár trusted the darkness and the glamour on his skin to conceal him in the underworld. Waiting but ten heartbeats, he slid from his hiding-place in the ancient crypt, and followed the receding footsteps of the priests of Qón.

Tsodlán's Way

"So, then," Tsodlán continued, looking at the attentive features of the student-acolytes in the Chamber of Enlightenment, "what, then, is the apparent weakness of our path, as offered so often by debaters who follow the gods of Stability?"

There was a nervous tremor amongst the Kengyél, but Tsodlán smiled at them, thinly.

"Come, now, is our faith not stronger than this? He, that cannot admit of a challenge, finds himself unprepared for it." Chársun, one of the brighter and more courageous acolytes, cleared his throat and ventured, "Ah. That if both we and the followers of Hrü'ü, follow Ultimate Change, then nothing will be accomplished, because our efforts will negate each other?"

Tsodlán indicated mild approbation, to encourage the others to be more forthcoming.

"And therein lies the obvious flaw and weakness of the followers of Stability. They are so incapable of understanding things beyond the wallowing comfort of their own perspective, that they misconstrue the very essence of our nature. And, what is that?

Who can tell me, what is Change?" Nítra responded immediately. Tsodlán smiled, as he thought of this one. Clever, ambitious and good-looking. She would be taken on by one of the senior priests before long. More was the pity; he might find being the patron of such a one very rewarding, if her remarks last evening had been any indication. There was the problem of her lineage line, however, though her Clan was quite acceptable.

"Change is life. It is the process of moving from one step to the next."

"A good beginning. Let us take it further, however. Was does the word 'stable' mean? Unchanging, lasting, inert. We expect 'stable' things to remain the same, to be predictable. Many would also say that stability implies trustworthiness, conservatism, adherence to form and order and precedence. Now, these last few things are the pillars of our Tsolyáni society. They cannot be criticized, can they?"

He was warming to his discourse, and the students seemed intent, wondering how daring he might become. For all he knew, one of these "acolytes" could actually be in the employ of a senior, checking on orthodoxy. The black robes of Ksárul were not the only ones that practiced such deceptions. He built this tiny side-thought into his lecture, seamlessly. "Whereas our hallmark is unpredictability. To that some would add a number of unsavoury descriptions. But those are born out of fear and ignorance." He paused, for dramatic effect. "We are the hope of the Empire, and of the Tsolyáni people. There is a difference between change and randomness. There is a difference between change and simple, pure and primordial chaos. Change includes the ability to adapt, to grow, to conquer. Look to the minions of Drá the Uncaring, for the ultimate expression of Stability!" There were appreciative chuckles from the students. Tsodlán noted the length of the incense stick, which had been lit at the beginning of his talk, and brought this exposition to a summation. "Stability may also be equated with stagnation. It is the force, the fire of Change, that allows us to draw upon the wisdom of antiquity and of the Ancients and express them in new, ever-changing ways, to the glory of our gods and the Petal Throne. As Nitra so eloquently put it--" The glitter in the young woman's eyes told him that that foray would bear fruit-- "-- change is the process. Without process, there is nothing. Our drive, our ability to succeed, to create; all these are the products of Change. It falls to we who follow Wurú, to be the foremost soldiers in the war against the morass of Stability, to be the most forceful advocates of holy and lán change." He allowed the murmurs and snaps of appreciation for a moment, then continued, to some barely-stifle groans, "I have a list of readings for you, from the Kusijáktosa..." It was later, the evening, and Tsodlán marched confidently into the testing-maze. He chided himself for once more taking pleasure in Zágár's disapproving gaze, as that one deliberated his method and path. What point in overplanning? Tsodlán was confident that his knowledge and intuition would see him through, as it had before. He did not despise Zágár, as the other seemed to think. He just felt that overlong deliberation was not appropriate to a follower of Wurú. Moreover, he had a rather special intuition about this particular 'test'. He was of an appropriate status and rank for contact, by some of the societies that operated within the Temple, and he had noted certain subtle signs that made him think that there might just be some occupants awaiting him-- or them?-- in the Maze. If so, there would be an offer, perhaps a test. And, if things went well, he might just allow himself the amusement and excitement of further discourse of change with Kengyél Nitra, later in the night...

After choosing his stone Tsodlán strode down the passageway with confidence. Remembrance of the many traps that he had encountered in previous excursions kept his guard up. This time, the usual twists and turns did not occur. This concerned him more than anything else. Could this simplicity be a trap in itself?

The floor was the only thing that changed. From polished tile, to rough hewn blocks and finally to an ancient tile mosaic before a bronze door. The mosaic depicted an ancient temple rivalry. Across half of outside edge of the circle was the Many-Legged Serpent of Doom, opposite to that was the Stylized Mace of Qón. What was most interesting was the strange figure and unknown symbols that was centered between the two of them. Who could they be fighting over? Tsodlán noted the symbols for future research.

He checked the door thoroughly and satisfied that no traps were set, he pulled on the great handle. With a deep creaking of the hinges the door opened. The bright light from the torches temporarily blinded him. The dark figures standing before him let him get his bearings in the new room.

"Welcome young priest." the one closest to him said in a deeply accented voice. "Please follow us to the feast."

As the group proceeded downward Tsodlán began to observe his fellow travelers. Their skin was grayish and their facial features under their hoods appeared to be not quite human. He suspected them to be Hehegánu. The temple dealt with these underpeople on certain occasions, but he had never seen one, let alone been invited to eat with them.

During the darkest part of the journey they would surround him and keep him from walking into unseen objects. The passage eventually widened and emptied out into a large domed room filled with these beings. He was accompanied to a seat at one of the tables and with no ceremony the eating began. He was served a meal of items that he could not identify. Their textures and tastes at time revolted him and at other times were quite pleasing. It was best to not be concerned about the origin of these delicacies.

The feasting ended with a large empty ceremonial cup presented to him. He was invited to join a particular group in an adjacent room. The headman had taken his place on a dais and was being fed cut pieces of a putrescent black melon. The others in the room began to chant in an unintelligible language. The eater appeared to go into a trance and swayed to the music that came from behind some screens. The chanting became more rhythmic and suddenly the leader stood and began to walk around. He was grabbed by several of the attendants and held still while he relieved himself. His urine was collected into a ewer and after he was finished, he was released to continue his walking.

His attendants began to pour out fractions from the ewer to the rest of the participants who quickly drank their share. Tsodlán now realized the purpose of his empty cup. He graciously received his portion and looked down into the disturbingly dark liquid. As he quaffed the unpleasant drink his senses intensified. He could see new colors and shapes in the dark spaces beyond the fires around him. He stood up and walked through the camp looking at the grey creatures and their surroundings.

Tsodlán wandered out into the main hall. The large group that they had left behind crowded towards him and followed Tsodlán's chaotic path around the village extending small wooden bowls. When Tsodlán would stop and urinate, the stream was caught in the containers and then ingested by the lucky participant who then joined in the revelation.

The visions of a shadowy voyage began. He learned of small dark secrets, of paths through the underworld, of unseen deaths.

He awoke in a featureless cylindrical room. His newfound senses noticed a door in the ceiling and another one in the smooth wall. His journey continued.

Tsodlán's eyes blinked open into endless gray. Supine he lay on the thrumming floor, staring upward, watching the edges of the world grow quite arbitrary. The cylindrical room he dreamed in was featureless and without exit in four directions, but there were others. Shadowy ethereal beings like bumbling Aqpú fluttered beyond its walls, showing him the way to its gates. A door here, one there; the one meant for him was in the ceiling.

With less effort than it had ever taken him, Tsodlán levitated his body, still lying flat, towards the circular portal. Aeriality was no longer an effort; a smile played across his lips. He motioned with his hand as to a slave, and the round gate in the ceiling drew aside. He continued to rise, through the circular door and out of the cylinder, into a vast cavern of chalky desolation,

Languorously he settled to his feet to take in his new surroundings. The ceiling was high, fifty or more dháiba above his head. Spires of a whitish mineral, some neat and carved, others jagged like stalagmites, stretched up from the ground and down from the ceiling, in a few cases covering the entire distance in between. An eerie silence dwelt over the catacomb of spires. Neither sight nor sound came to him; aside from the pillars of chalk only a timid zephyr, with a scent vaguely reminiscent of the flesh-devouring Shédra, told him that anything other than endless intermittent white yet dwelt in the underworld.

He felt a twisting in his palm, and he looked down to see the amethyst cabochon grow brilliant with indigo light. Dazzling it played across the columns of white about him, transforming the aspect of this new world he had entered. Wurú's purple would now show him what truly was; the chalky spires took on the aspect of pale forgotten shadows, lying at a great distance from the place Tsodlán now stood.

The six tiny eyes of his talisman turned infinitesimally in his hand, and Tsodlán followed the path marked out by their gaze. Cautiously he moved forward among the spires, seeking out the ancient mystery behind the quarrel between Qón and his master, Wurú, who appears where evil dwells.

Tsodlán slowly maneuvered between the spires until he came upon a richly carved column that reached from the floor of the cavern to the ceiling. He went to the base and proceeded upward. The carvings told a story in images of the ancient struggle between Wurú and Qón. The attacks of the forces of Change against the bastions of Stability and the eternal back and forth victories of both sides were spiral cut around the cylinder. At the cap the carving was incomplete as a story awaiting an ending.

Using his newfound sight he could see an underwriting beneath the carvings. This was where the true information was hidden from the ungifted viewer. He received knowledge of hidden passages beneath the city of Thráya from which a sliver of chaos could launch a terrible blow onto the mother temple of Qón. He realized that this acquired lore was very dangerous to him, for something learned cannot be unlearned.

As Tsodlán continued his quest for the enlightenment of instability (and, so it occurred to him, the instability of enlightenment), a shadow detached itself from the dark, corridor wall and, unbeknownst to him, moved with great silence towards his back.

As it came within arm's length, he turned and his eyes narrowed. He allowed the energies, which had been building within him, to subside.

"I am impressed," commented Zágár, quietly. "I had thought that this skin made me well-nigh invisible."

"It did," murmured Tsodlán. "However, despite the visions, powers and knowledge with which I have been favoured, I am not so stupid as to wander these underworlds, without occasionally preparing spells of alarm and protection. I find that my reservoirs do not drain very quickly, this night. You have been busy."

Zágár nodded, held up two fingers for silence and led Tsodlán to the niche that he had been occupying for some minutes.

"Ahead of us," he whispered, "are two minions of Qón. They seem to have some mission; moreover I overheard them say that some time of import was at hand, something concerning our Lord of Purple Mysteries. They rest for a few moments, up ahead, in the next chamber-- or they look for something. I had thought to kill them, waylay them."

Tsodlán looked at Zágár. "It would seem that our Lord, our Temple, your choices, or all three, have chosen a very active service for you. My own maze-travels have led me to secret knowledge, regarding a blow that might be made against the forces of Stability-- and especially those of Qón. I do not doubt but that what you overheard and what I learned, are intertwined. But simple slaughter may not be the best course. Let us determine what they are about. It may be that we will be led to our own goal by them, or better fitted to seek it out, in any event, once we have observed."

"Do not imply me a fool. I was already acting as the shadow within their shadows. Their lives would not have ended, before I knew what they were doing. How came you here? I saw a momentary deepening of the darkness, against that wall. A secret door?"

"Not precisely. When I was done with the cavern of secrets, I was able to make use of a portal that-- ssst!"

The warning had been unnecessary. Zágár, too, had heard the signs of renewed movement. A scraping and a rustling sound issued from the next room. Zágár indicated by signs that he would scout ahead. Tsodlán nodded, in acknowledgement. It would seem that their roles had been defined by their testing, tonight.

Zágár moved onward ahead of Tsodlán. Rounding the corner, he felt a long, dusty corridor yawning ahead of him, growing ever more ancient with rot and crumbling stone along its downward slope. As he tried to take its measure in the long dark, a light flickered at the far end. There the priests of Qón were revealed before a strange gateway.

The portal appeared to have been carved from some ancient and desiccated substance the pale yellow color of ancient bone. Fumbling with an ancient ring of keys, the smaller priest's hands shook as the larger man looked back the way they had come. Zágár sprang back; Tsodlán, who had just arrived at the corner, halted in his path. A long silence ensued. Neither Zágár nor Tsodlán moved, not even their brows. Zágár's hand flickered; was it time to release his poisoned stiletto from its imprisonment? Not a sound came to answer his question.

Finally a scratching susurration, echoing eerily in the dark like the muted vomiting of some forgotten abomination of stone, issued forth from the key's turning. A fetid chill engulfed Tsodlán and Zágár almost immediately, even at their great distance from the portal. Inching forward, both of the dark serpent's minions peered around the corner.

Zágar observed the tall priest thrust his glowing mace-head forward into some unimaginably ancient complex, its walls a chalky black the color of mildewed ebony. He felt his dark cabochon grow cold as ice in his left hand, and he shivered with anticipation, his body grown electric in Wurú's service.

Tsodlán saw all this as well, and heard more. Though the priests spoke in the most skilled of whispers, he their words floated effortlessly up to his own ears. It was the smaller one talking now. "If Wurú's priests did not come this way, as the elder priest suspected they would, it must be one of the other two entries."

"Who knows how many entries there truly are, Zelésh? If there are three, why not one other? There is no escaping it; if we do not find them here at the perimeter, we must proceed inward, all the way to the Caged Purple." This last clause was delivered with a tincture of jocular sadism, and it had its effect: the smaller priest shivered in his bones. The big man continued: "You secure us within this entrance; I will walk the path and examine the others..."

Tsodlán started out of his reverie at a rap to his knuckles. The corridor was full around him with light of lambent amethyst, radiated from his own ophidiancarving. Zágar, rendered a pair of shadows in the sudden light, pointed insistently at Tsodlán's talisman. Tsodlán tucked it within his shirt to smother it and cleared his throat, pointing down the corridor at the small priest trying to close the gate from within.

"Go, Zágar! Now we have come to the next leg of tonight's path! The timuél is for yon Zelésh, to end his life in the service of the Ancient One of Pleasures. It is yours for the taking. Do your murder for the glory of Lord Wurú!"

Zelésh made a basic mistake. It would be his last. As the small priest had been securing the door, he paused when he heard the light, quick footfalls in the corridor. He looked out and the last vision he saw was the disembodied white of Zágar's eyes and the teeth of a broad smile as a blade bit into his neck. The poison immediately constricted his windpipe and the follower of Qón died a quiet, sad death.

Zágar reached down next to the body and took hold of the brightly glowing mace and cast it away. The nearness of it allowed his darkened form to be seen as the two magics battled each other for dominance. He then took station just outside of the threshold and waited.

Tsodlán moved down the path after the glow dimmed inside of the doorway. He had enjoyed seeing the look of on the victim's face as it changed from curiosity to great fear when chaos came upon him. The job was cleanly done. He only regretted that he was not the one who delivered the deathblow. He nodded appreciatively to Zágar as he reached the entrance. He sensed no presence coming from the path taken by the tall priest. He motioned for them to move inside and they completed closing the portal.

The two priests of Wurú moved quietly down the corridor, Zágar leading. The unfortunate and recently departed Zelésh's companion was further within, apparently checking on the security of other entrances to these chambers. It seemed that they were part of a place of significance to the followers of Qón, surely that which Tsodlán's spires and Zágar's eavesdropping had intimated. Ironically, in trying to secure them, they had given entrance to their adversaries.

Tsodlán was cautious in his optimism. The other Qónite was seemingly the stronger; also, he knew that there were followers of Wurú about. Finally, he was on his own territory.

If it came to a conflict-- and that seemed likely-- Tsodlán hoped to have Zágar launch himself at the other, while Tsodlán protected him with his magics. Heretofore, the lower-status priest had exhibited signs of strength, in certain forms of magic, but Tsodlán was now confident that he would prove the superior sorcerer. Zágar's path seemed to lie with the Indigo Givers of Surcease.

The two neared an intersection. The inky assassin froze for a moment, in the lead, and then slid back to Tsodlán.

"He comes back from another entrance," Zágar murmured.

"Be ready to kill, if need be," came the whispered reply. "I will essay a deception. It would be better if he led us further in, lest we must brave all the defenses ourselves." Tsodlán reached into the Planes Beyond and gathered energies in through the Skin Between.

As the older priest of Qón approached the intersection, it seemed to him that he had seen his partner Zelésh come to it, make a sign of approbation, and continue further down the inward-pointing corridor. Curious, he turned right at the intersection and continued inward himself.

The priests of Wurú followed. Zágar relied upon his Shadow Skin and skills; Tsodlán had wrapped himself in a spell that rendered him invisible in anything short of direct sunlight. Thus, each hidden in his own way, followed the Qón priest deeper into the structure. The Qón priest was happily guiding them through the maze! What an ironic turn, thought Tsodlán, the priests of the God of Mazes being led by their enemy!

Far from simply leading them inside, the priest of Qón was apparently performing some sort of ritual action as well. Periodically, he would stop, touch a stone, say a prayer, move a concealed level, and move on. There were many doors, some of which he opened, some he closed and bolted. The priest of Wurú grew confused, and began to lose track of the turnings and openings.

Tsodlán, with his heightened magical senses, began to grow impatient, but didn't sense the correct action to take. His shadowy companion, however, seemed as patient as a Zrné, stalking prey. His concentration was so intense that despite the concealment Zágar operated under, Tsodlán could sense him as clearly as if he were in a well lit room.

Finally, Tsodlán could not resist whispering to Zágar, and the priest of Qón once again stopped and manipulated a door (this time a small one, set at about head level). "Oh silent one, what actions does this priest perform?" he hissed at where he sensed Zágar was standing.

"He is opening the ways, to let the light in, I think. It is what keeps the Purple One trapped here." came the whispered reply. "Now be quiet. I must keep track of the openings."

In the blink of an eye, the big priest of Qón disappeared. Zágáar whistled low and both men began preparing spells, but neither the dogface nor any other entity emerged upon which to vent their crackling energy. With a start Zágáar realized that the enchanted steel of his poisoned timuél would have shorted his own conjuring in any case. Cursing inwardly, he turned and noted Tsodlán's far-seeing, placid concentration. Scant hours ago this one's focus was as nothing next to his own; yet now he saw clearly that the many planes would reveal their secrets to Tsodlán's penetrating gaze as the tetél-blossoms opened their petals in springtime. Contemplating his own inky blackness and lethal sting, bile rose in Zágáar's throat. Is this how it was ever to be? The nobleman as the perceptive leader, his worthless self a mere cat's-paw? In Wurú's name alone was Zágáar able to stifle a sudden, brutal urge to cut Tsodlán's neck ear to ear, savoring the black congelation of his blood by the blade's dread venom. His face turned down in dark and angry humiliation. Tsodlán, emerged from his reverie, clapped Zágáar's shoulder and motioned to the strange closed portal.

Cautiously the pair stepped forward to examine the small, head-level doorway, which had shut behind the priest as quickly as it had opened, if indeed it had ever opened at all. Four concentric circles were carved into its square face. The outer one consisted of highly stylized, posturing serpents, some with many legs, all with their faces pointed poisonously inward. They were searching for some way past a second circle of vigilant, six-legged hounds, stoutly facing left and right, legs locked together to prevent their enemies' passage. The third was a simple line, as was the fourth; the stone within the third circle was bare, but the innermost had been deftly crosshatched in a sinister pattern of inhuman geometry, and seemed almost to scintillate in the darkness.

Tsodlán saw that this last was the key, and began meditating on the proper rite of passage. The inner circle's cryptic topology seemed to beckon into heretofore unknown dimensions, and his hlákme and pedhétl wandered more and more deeply within, losing themselves in its twisting intricacy. So intent upon the pattern was he that he did not hear Zágáar whirl to face their adversary, re-emerged from some unknown place and time; nor did he note the darker scratching against his balétl of an ancient serpentine force locked underneath the world, longing for its freedom.

A canine mask glowered in malevolent amusement at frozen Tsodlán and crouching Zágáar from under its white-gold cowl. Even as Zágáar's eyes probed for a leap that would take him past the priest's huge mace, Qón's servant reached out to depress a hidden stud on the far side of the passage. A wrenching noise of metal on metal made the whole corridor shudder, as some ancient mechanism ground into action. The floor under the Wurú's priests yawned open. "Huróth take you!" cried the priest. The Servants of Gloom fell free, bodies bouncing from one hard, stony ledge to another, down into a distant darkness.

As the timuél flew from his hand, Zágáar immediately regretted its loss. He did not see it strike the target as he tumbled into the void. He rolled several times until he hit hard on a flat surface. Looking around he saw nothing in the pitch black.

A clanking noise caused him to look up. A brilliant radiance was coming down towards him quickly and erratically. Could this be the Guardian's servant coming to finish what his priest began? He put his hands up in a protective mode and waited for his end. The glowing mace came smashing into his forearms with great force. After picking himself up once more Zágar stood and rubbed his arms and stared at the weapon. A smile slowly spread across his face. He knew that the follower of Qón would never have dropped this unless the thrown dagger had hit him. Wurú's tooth had found its mark and the dark Lord had blessed him with a replacement in the form of this profane weapon.

Reaching down and picking up the lighted bludgeon he could now see that he was at the edge of an overhang. Turning to the cliff face behind him he could see a small tunnel at his feet. He always hated such crawls. He called out to his fellow Traveler of the Path and heard a reply from farther below.

Tsodlán nursed the sharp pain in his left hand. He suspected that it was broken, or at least badly sprained. Spell gesturing would be dangerous until it healed. His head was also hurting and he assumed that it was blood flowing down his brow. With his new senses he could see that they had fallen into what looked like a natural near vertical shaft that traveled deep into the earth. He shuddered to think what denizens existed below.

The noise above attracted his attention. As he looked up and across the channel he saw Zágar being hit, and then recover from the blow. Afterward they discussed their situation and agreed that they must go their separate ways since there was no means for them join up. Perhaps, this was part of their testing by the Great Lord. Zágar was to face his fear of small, enclosed spaces and he was to face the dangers below. As Tsodlán reached for footholds on the downward facing slope he hoped his injuries would not slow him from his next encounter with the worshippers of the dog faced god.

Ghurú's Way

Ghurú hiKemuel rested his head against the crumbling brick wall of the Outer Catacomb of the Imprisoned One of Púrdimal. A stream of profane and sibilant curses emanated quietly from his lips. Listening to the blasphemies pour forth from his own mouth in a state of detachment, his mind ranged back his days as Kási in the Legion of Defense against Evil, where such oaths were more common than among his new brethren in Qón's temple. He ran his hand abstractly across his smoothly healed chest, which had been laid open by a poisoned timuél only moments before. To cast the spells of Alleviation and Healing he had had to drop his mace, freeing up both hands for the work. Now the blessed and potent weapon was down in the pit with his enemies.

Ghurú took stock. Zelésh was surely dead. He himself was alone and unarmed in a dangerous catacomb older than Éngsvan hlá Gánga. Further, he had depleted himself substantially of magical energy unlocking the outer wardings of the place, and now with the spells of healing his pedhétl was still more sorely exercised. In this state it was expected that he should foil two mad and dangerous young priests of Wurú, keep the Imprisoned One behind his gates, reseal the wards, and be back above ground before Tuléng rose. Far below, at the root of Púrdimal's Tsuru'úm, the Mouth of the World sighed.

Qón's priest gave a grunt and let the powerful muscles of his upper thighs carry him to his feet. There was work to be done. He glanced at the open pit, but that way was too dangerous; instead his fingers searched out another hidden slide in the wall, and a portal opened upon an old bronze ladder, mounted to stones that were older still.

As he climbed downward, he sang a quiet atonal hymn to the Ancient One of Pleasures, gleaned from a Salarvyáni redaction of the Bednálljan which itself claimed to derive from a manuscript of the Three States of the Triangle, and so on, back into the ancient trembling eternity in which even the skeins of deities ebb and flow. His Lord was a survivor. Let the priests of Hnálla and Vimúhla prate as they liked; not all of Pavár's pantheon first appeared to the Dragon Warriors.

With casual grace, Ghurú sprang from the ladder into a corridor of bone-white cobbles lit eerily by a pinkish phosphorescent fungus. Nearly as tall as a few N'lüss and more muscular than many, Qón's devoted servant made the tricky leap look simple indeed. Now he would proceed methodically downward, checking the egresses from the ancient pit one after another, until both of Chaos' servants were eliminated. The Caretaker of the Gates of Hell would not be thwarted tonight.

At the second observation platform he heard the black-skinned priest who threw the timuél, tapping cautiously against the wall of the corridor below with Ghurú's mace. The passage below was a dead end, but the servant of Chaos had correctly deduced that a secret exit must be concealed somewhere behind the masonry. Ghurú watched him with a twinge of sadness; but there was no help for the matter. He called out in the quietest and most mystical voice he could manage. "Across the corridor and to your left." The priest's black head snapped back towards him, but Ghurú had already moved back to the wall, resting his hand against yet another of the countless hidden studs built into the walls to protect against intruders. Then he waited. The blackskin looked left and right, tapped elsewhere, sat on his haunches and made a light to visually investigate the ground Ghurú had pointed out to him. Ghurú waited patiently; by providing no more stimuli he could ensure that the priest would eventually move to the indicated wall. Finally, after ten minutes or more spent exhausting every other possibility, Wurú's minion again glanced over his shoulder, and then moved across the corridor and to his left.

Ghurú pressed the stud.

Zágar's death was abrupt and exceedingly painful. Ancient bronze spears, soaked with verdigris, lacerated his body from both walls and the floor. The ancient green metal pierced and ripped his skin everywhere, running him through in a dozen or more places. From the magic-blackened body red blood foamed forth, corrupted by the decaying bronze. Zágar twitched; he shook himself on the spears with a titanic effort of will; his eyes rolled upward; his last breath emptied ragged from his lungs. Then a vomit of blood and bile poured from his mouth, and he sagged manikin-like onto the shafts of the spears.

As he felt his life's blood leave his quivering body, Zágar fervently prayed to his Master for the honor to continue on with his duties. As his chusétl began to extinguish it was abruptly projected into a shadowy place where it resumed its slumber, thus paving the way for the Spirit Soul to follow. As his balétl began to shed its identity and travel to the Ultimate Dark of Hrü'ü, it turned and followed the Shadow Self into the black carved receptacle now being held in his palm.

Zágar's senses had changed. His previous physical form no longer limited him. He was aware of his surroundings even as the follower of Qón approached his now lifeless body. He realized that he had been given one last opportunity to strike at his foes before he journeyed beyond this existence.

Ghurú climbed down five dháiba from the observation platform and conjured a werelight. Zágar's eyes stared vacantly into his. The priest of Qón reclaimed his mace from the ground; then he noticed something else – something black near the corpse. His hand closed around it. An ophidian cabochon of jet, with six carven eyes, seemed to watch him from his palm.

As he gazed at it wonderingly, his mind came loose from his body again, and he felt the entire catacomb quake slightly from below. He quickly placed his trophy into a pocket. He felt a searing grey-white energy, capable of bleaching Téकुmel's very bones, aimed at the very heart of the complex. A new force sought the Imprisoned One's release; and suddenly the matter of the remaining servitor of Wurú seemed of trifling consequence indeed.

The priests of the One Other were here.

Tsodlán's Way Continues

Tsodlán felt the rumbling as he reached the bottom of the shaft. He quickly entered the passageway to the left to avoid any falling rock. His heightened senses allowed him to pass freely through this black gloom. The glowing fungus that was prevalent in most of the earlier tunnels was disturbingly missing from this area.

He came to the end and faced a wall containing a large incised circle with a dot centered in it. He could perceive a hidden layer, but it would not come into focus. He turned suddenly as he felt a slight movement in the air. Standing in front of him was a small lizard-like creature with a spiny back and many eyes. It combed its black fur and grinned (?) at him with its long, toothy mouth.

"You have done well, young priest." It intoned and reached forward and through the shirt to touch Tsodlán on the breast. Pain shot through his body as a shadow grew from the point of the creature's claw and covered Tsodlán's torso. In his mind he heard, "Know my name of Usunggáhla! Khomóyi is demanded with this gift of Avoidance." And then it was gone.

Tsodlán's mind was racing. The demon's glyph appeared to his eyes as a dark glow of ever-changing patterns across his chest. He stood up and faced the carved wall. He reached forward, touched the centered dot and witnessed the sculpted section retract into the stone revealing the next step along his path to glory.

Nursing his injured hand, Tsodlán stepped forward through the open portal. Ebon glinting coruscated across his chest as Usunggáhla's blessing settled into his skin. As Tsolyáni went, Tsodlán had ever been an egoist, going so far in his private moments as to doubt whether a person's five selves were really not one in the last analysis. But now that he had received Lord Wurú's first initiation into eldritch mystery, he saw that this vain doctrine of his pampered youth was foolishness. As his eyes watched pieces of reality fall away into the corners, and he felt his chusétl dance in and out of his chest, he knew that whatever his balétl indeed was, it was no more than another fragment of an endlessly changing and in finitely variable whole. For the sorcerer, who plays dice with his shifting selves, the pedhétl was the aspect which held it all together; but Tsodlán began to suspect now that even this burning fire of personal force was but an abstraction, a pastiche of darker, more elemental aspects within.

Somewhere in all this metaphysical speculation it came to him that, wherever he was, Zágar was no longer connected to his body.

The maze in which Tsodlán now wandered was drawn in chalky lines on an ancient gray floor. The cavern was everywhere open to the old sight of his eyes, but in the new dimensions he could now see a more intricate catacomb could hardly be imagined. A dark, antlered head with a Ssú's peeling flesh regarded him from two different directions, each well to the left of up. Westward physically, but on an entirely different path in the true maze, a group of eleven somber priests in heavy robes marked by the circled dot made their way across the enigmatic plain as well. Tsodlán smiled at them, unafraid. Each could see the other, but the straight line between them in the three visible dimensions was a road of a thousand suicides. Each would have to make their own way across to the Tomb of the Chained One, with such senses and powers as they could apply to the task.

Just then Tsodlán caught his first glimpse of his goal: far in the distance, the cavern was spiked through with a towering metal cylinder, an artifact of the ancients. The cylinder was suspended across a deep and conical chasm, a tributary tunnel of wind producing a haunting bass whisper from the breezes of the Mouth of the World. Only hours ago a younger Tsodlán would have felt the need to rush, to arrive at the cylinder before the plodding priests of the One Other. But stepping casually around a four-eyed insectal face peering at him from just to the right of below, hardly working to elude the snap of its jelly-dripping mandibles, he knew that there was no need. The confrontation would be joined, and the One in Chains would be chained no longer; Qón would be thwarted, and the servants of the One Other would find that in this skein they could not control the ancient and unknowable entity. Thus would chaos explode below Púrdimal, and thus would Master Wurú's cosmic shrieking, his laughter of joy in the service of the Outer Dark, be heard across the underworlds.

The chalk outlines were sometimes difficult to follow. Still, considering the untold years that had passed since they were first laid down they were in good shape. When the lines crossed and several choices were presented, a deeper understanding of the mysteries was required. A small glyph here, a sound there, even smells were clues. Fortunately his gifted sight allowed him to avoid the traps that would destroy those blinded by impatience.

At one of these points he stopped and saw that both directions led to the horned creature that he had seen at the beginning. He took the path to the left and walked up to the parchment fleshed being and stood before it just out of claws reach. He noticed that the being had similar markings on its torso as those given to him by the demon. The creature obviously noticed the same markings. Both appeared to be calculating whether this meant that the gifts would cancel each other out, or possibly negate each other's existence. Tsodlán sat down and motioned for the creature to do the same. Its eyes warily surveyed the human and decided that parlay was an acceptable action.

After several frustrating attempts at language it became obvious that oral communication was not feasible. Tsodlán slowly took out the cabochon from his pocket and showed it. The creature slowly reached back with its double-jointed limbs into a sack on top of its thorax and took out a similarly coloured stone in the shape of an insect's head with six eyes. Perhaps they were on the same mission from similar Masters. Tsodlán decided that a quick decision was necessary to beat the One Other's priests to the goal. He motioned to himself and then to the creature and then down the path that he wanted to go.

The creature looked down the path and put back his stone. He slowly got up, looking at Tsodlán and stepped back so that they both had room to travel side by side. Together they started down this new path as potential allies, although neither let the other behind them.

Tsodlán and the antlered demon trod their path side by side, cautiously making their way towards a square alabastrine tower rising from the chalky plain before them. Columns of yellow gold and pure white marble were set along the three upper floors of each of its smooth, ancient sides. At the tower's base were four portals of clear crystal, set into giant, graven canine mouths whose teeth rose in a terrifying arc around the dully-glittering doorways.

Looking back, the pair saw the chanting procession of the One Other, singing their dissonant and atonal hymns, still behind them, walking somberly with their strange lanterns held aloft towards the mouth to the left of their own. If the two groups met at all, they would meet within. Then the flickering impingements of a thousand adjacent dimensions vanished from the eyes of Tsodlán and his ssú-like companion, and they stood before the mouth of Qón, seeking what lay beyond.

Tsodlán stepped forward, but his companion raised an arm like dripping necrotic parchment to hold him back. Reaching into a pouch hanging at his side, he pulled forth a handful of steel shavings and cast them into the portal's haze.

The effect was explosive. The steel ignited the shimmering spells of warding, and the presence of metal created a feedback that blinded Tsodlán and the demon with its intensity. The brilliant discharge flashed across the plain, and did not go unnoticed by the servants of the pariah gods. Yet the portal and spells alike held, so old and potent were the enchantments that the ancient priests of Qón had laid upon them.

Now it was the demon's turn to hesitate, and Tsodlán's to find a solution. He knew no spell that could open such a portal, and his new sight saw no path around it; but those who had sent him on this mission were wise. He had taken but one gift from the temple above, and so it must be the key. Confidently, he produced the amethyst talisman of Wurú from his belt, and by motions enjoined his companion to do the same.

A creaking, musty sound, the whispering of some desolate tomb, filled the air, and Tsodlán started. But it came from his new companion: the demon was singing. The words were beyond Tsodlán's comprehension; and yet somehow it stirred in his soul the chord of one of his master's most ancient songs of praise. With difficulty at first, Tsodlán recalled the phrases of the Engsvanyáli recension of the "Ode to the Violet Mandibles of Darkness," and joyously joined his fellow missionary in proclaiming the truth of their faith before the stolid, square tower of Belkhánu's mastiff.

The two cabochons glittered darkly, and the hazy golden light within the canine mouths tinted amethyst. The crystal door within itself gradually caught the color, and soon all within the great dog's mouth around the portal was overcome with a deep purple hue. The gloomy light of chaos staked out a path into the tower. The many-legged serpent of gloom had showed them a way into the heart of Qón's realm, where they would let the One in Chains loose upon Púrdimal, gloriously enacting one humble portion of the world's eternal rupture and rebirth in Master Hrú'ü's endless cataclysm.

Crawling around in the mazes under the city did not prepare him for walking across this endless plain. He was also not supplied for such a long journey. It seemed that days had passed. His companion seemed amenable to stopping and resting at regular intervals, but Tsodlán thought that it could probably travel faster without him. Since he had no provisions the creature had offered some food to him, but the smell indicated that it was not healthy for humans to consume.

Water was another problem. The creature did not use any. Perhaps the noisome food provided all of the moisture it needed. He took a chance at drinking from one of the nearby streams. He didn't have much of a choice. If it was his fate to die in this lonely place, then so be it. The stream not only held potable water, it seemed to heal his wounded arm. Unfortunately he had no container to take some of this liquid with him. He judged the distance to the far off tower to maybe another half-day's walk. He should be able to make it after a good sleep.

His dreams came quickly. The knowledge that he gained from the column and the senses that he had been granted began to guide him to new possibilities. He awoke suddenly with an epiphany. Quickly he took out the purple stone that the Master had given him at the beginning of this mission. He gazed deeply into the carved senary of ophidian eyes and gained the knowledge of casting Amphoria. He continued to gaze deeper and learned the secret of The Grey Hand. Both of these spells required the use of this magical bauble and then only once for each spell. Even then it would drain him of all of his power. He must choose the timing of their employment carefully.

Fully rested they continued down the path towards the edifice. He saw a large human sitting front of the gates. Could this be his opponent priest from the underground?

Across the expanding glyph he saw a party begin to step into this final battlefield and begin to prepare themselves. His companion became very agitated at the sight of these individuals. As soon as it and Tsodlán crossed the symbol's boundaries the creature began to run in great bounding leaps towards them. The fight was on.

The One Other

...away along the tree of time from hlikku bey su serving an other one one other lord of secret places greatest sober slinking trickster imprisoned ksarul mighty ksarul might have saved them sleeping stupid under blue glass since dormoron plain now just a race reallocate into nullity dissipation the end foolish plane incidental cut off she has eaten but she will not eat the other one's nullity the mad one the one of fears serve another underbelly master of negation without whom with whom not i was there hirkane one piece ours every emperor even trakonel burning cur simulacrum of hlakme chusetl swimming gallery of shadows far endlessly far beneath old metropolis bey su hlikku sweating gyrating squat aborigines hum atona l panegyrics mad one nmedz one other erasing priests speak not tongue spears of bone ancient secrets one in chains ours limping servitor other one rattling ancient cage key is mine weapon from hlikku pit smoky cauldron of ruin ancient glimmering metal stea ms icy spirits of nullity end the end foolish wuru serpent's ends not served in collaboration arrogance serves another one in chains strides the earth again dissipation gas cauldron melts mind mad one free blinding stability prankish change tekumel tilts towards concluding days downward path realm of ancient grey plain not yet eaten dog god old tower keeps one in chains in chains purple amphoria wuru eating up endless grey abysmal floor birds one other he serves they serve even qon's stupid priest serves one other purpose release destructuration of plain plane return of tekumel to nullity not stomach of pale bone the other end spears pointed primal madness cauldron smoking a few old rituals suffice one in chains chained no more...

The Battle

Tsodlán and his new companion made their way carefully towards the tower, cabochons glittering darkly against the endless grey of their surroundings. Undulating ovoids of fluorescent purple rose from the rolling seas of mist about them, falling into uncertain trains on their side. Tsodlán felt the bubbles as personifications of his god, as the dimmest, distant reaches of semi-sentience in the incomprehensibly transfinite consciousness of Lord Wurú. Or perhaps it was Master Hrü'ü's being itself he sensed in them, and the role of his lord was merely to gather it forth for application...

The pair stepped onto the plain at the same moment as the servitors of the One Other. Tsodlán knew not what his strange, parchment-skinned companion heard in the nauseating ululations of their music, but much of his own considerable willpower was spent in shutting out the suppurating atonality of their chant. One of their party was a Tsolyáni, with the hawkish facial structure of the nobler families of Béy Sü; the rest were squat and horrid, like the indigenes of Yán Kór, but with a vastly disturbing angularity in their gait, a pronounced and unsettling slouch in their posture, and a sickly cast to their skin. One of these embraced a great urn manufactured of some strange ceramic, obviously ancient but apparently impervious to the ravages of time. A roiling whitish mist seemed to crawl in places over this vessel's lip, pseudopods of smog tasting at the uncertain ether of the lonely plane.

Looking ahead, Tsodlán adjudged his opponent, the tautly muscled priest of Qón posed in the protective center of a Glyph of Present Defense – and how was it that a minor sorcerer such as he had gained not only the perception but also the lore of his master's masters? Could the urine-drinking rites of the Hehe gánu alone possibly produce such an effect? Noting the incandescent yellow-white blaze of the dog-face's mace, Tsodlán held up a hand to his antlered demon-compatriot and called out to the Tsolyáni priest of the One Other.

"Ohé! Our parties have common cause for now. Let us adjoin our forces to overcome this wretched servant of the Tlomitlányal, and release the One in Chains from his overlong slumber. Then we can wrangle among ourselves over the spoils, if need be."

The priest from Béy Sü folded his hands across the dotted circle upon his robe in the manner of a corpse, and something sparkling in his eyes suggested that the nod he gave implied agreement. But the half-dozen Hlíkkuyani warriors accompanying him, apparently heedless of their colloquy, demurred. Their chanting cracked to an insane pitch, and their bone-tipped shortspears flew into their hands, glittering like stars in an empty void as they drew power from the strange land about them. Tsodlán saw the first priest give what looked like a faint shrug and turn away from them all, concentrating instead on the urn carried by the eighth member of their procession, a servitor of that Mad One who is worshipped in the forbidden city of Yán Kór. Its vapors boiled over the edge of the pot and churned, languidly in aspect but not in pace, over the naked plain of rock below the tower towards Ghurú.

Their otherworldly hymns replaced by screams of battle-lust, the cachinnating spearmen of Hlíkku raced towards Tsodlán and the demon, faceless plaques swinging from their necks before them by leathern thongs. Wurú's servants raised their cabochons, marshalling the plasms of violet amorphia that had joined them from the seas of this grey world, in preparation for the first clash of this battle.

From within his protective emblem, Ghurú waited, mouthing prayers soundlessly as he studied the battle unfolding before him. What protective spells he knew had been cast; together with the unknown defensive enchantments of the glyph they would have to suffice. He clutched the great mace of his god and awaited the column of pustulant smoke rapidly engaging his position.

The smoke twisted itself into a great trunk, sprouting tentacles that began to blindly search around for a target. It seemed that the summoned fiend could not fully form in this plane, but it still posed a great risk. Ghurú aimed his dímlalukh at its center and pressed the stud. The blazing white light leapt from the end and bored into the target. The resulting explosion as the gaseous creature ignited would have done the Vimúhla fire performers in the market proud. As the pressure wave washed over the arena Ghurú was almost knocked out of his protective symbols. He stood back up and observed the resulting scene.

Tsodlán had ordered the small bits of floating chaos towards the onrushing hoard. As the amphoria hit the first assailant he could see light through its body as the conjured void consumed the fleshy tissue and bone as it passed through the upper body. Its spear clattered to the ground as it realized that it was no longer completely whole. The flesh of Wurú was to take another two of the onrushing worshippers of the Mad One before they engaged his towering companion.

The antlered compatriot confronted the three remaining attackers with its bare appendages. The first foe was stripped of its spear and was lifted high into the air and impaled onto the weapon of the following onrusher. The second attacker, now weaponless, lunged at its opponent. This action distracted its target long enough so that the third of its party was able to plunge its bone barb deep into the thorax. The protective markings on the body of the ally of Wurú could not deflect both attacks. In its death throes the horned one snapped the neck of the one it was grappling with and then plunged its claw into the chest of the third antagonist. Together they fell to the ground staring at each other defiantly.

The hawk-faced priest of The One Other picked himself up after the explosion and ordered the cauldron-bearer to send out another of the denizens. Perhaps this one would be able to continue the fight. As the stunted servant began the summoning a stray piece of amphoria found the vessel and punctured through its walls releasing the foul liquid onto the soil. The followers of the One looked on impotently as the priest of Qón let loose with a second discharge of energy. The blast ignited the fluid sending flying fragments of the cauldron to shred their bodies as they prayed for intervention that would never come.

Tsodlán was thrown back off of his feet. As he recovered he could feel the blood pouring from his nose and ears from the overpressure of the second detonation. He grasped the cabochon of his god and focused his mind on casting the Gray Hand as he struggled to walk toward his lone remaining opponent with his arm outstretched.

Ghurú shifted forward in time as soon as he fired his weapon. The shockwave had passed when he returned to the present. The staggering priest of the Serpent of Doom was heading toward him. Ghurú raised his mace and fired. The beam hit the cleric full in the chest and began to merge with the demon-gifted tattoos. The markings began to fade as Ghurú fire thrice more on the advancing figure. Finally there were no more defensive emblems as he prepared to fire for the last time.

Zágar had observed the events unfold around him from deep inside of his hiding place within the amethyst stone foolishly carried by the priest of stability. As the disciple of Qón was about to deliver the final strike Zágar struck out in his shadow form and enveloped the glowing mace. His dark nature nullified the great power within the bludgeon. He reveled in the look of confusion the wielder's face.

Tsodlán reached out and touched the devotee of Qón as he felt his skull crush under the blow from the enemy's dímlalukh. In his last seconds of life he felt his selves separate and begin the transformation into the cabochon that he held. Zágar retreated back into his stone as he sensed the death of his brother in chaos. They remained there, hibernating, until they were again called into the glorious service of their dark master.

Ghurú had swung his now inert weapon with as much force as he had remaining. The popping sound that the dark priest's head made as it cracked open was satisfying. Even as he felt his body turn into irretrievable ash from the Gray Hand he knew that had successfully defended the tower from these unworthy looters. He understood that another would take his duties in this existence and that he would now take his place in the paradise of Teretáne. On his final journey he was honored by being personally guided by the Aspect Malán. They had an enjoyable discussion along the way.

The battlefield returned to its original size as the leather wings of the scavengers beat into position for their next meal. A low howl could be heard coming from the tower, as The One in Chains was frustrated once again. With great fury he consumed the spirits of the followers of the Mad One as they tried to take flight from the barren plane. Their nourishment made him stronger. He only had to wait for more to come to this place before he could make his escape and take his revenge.

Wurú's Path - Epilogue

Káshi yet hung in Tékel's sky as Tuléng crossed the horizon, flaming dimly over old Púrdimal. Deep underground, the savants of the Hehegánu slumbered in uncertain delight. Kengyé Nitra slept in an alcove not far from the Chamber of Unforeseen Inevitability, for the time blissfully ignorant that her anticipated liaison with Shártokoi Tsodlán would never take place. Walking past in the company of a balding servant of Hrü'ü, the Elucidator of the Sable Path smiled behind his mask at her pouting lips and wine-dark hair. He would inquire into her records tomorrow; if they showed promise, he suspected that she would make a fitting protégé indeed.

"I fail to understand," Drónu hiKángolel was saying, "how this underground carnage, this spectacular waste of lives without apparent consequence, has served our purpose in any way. The One in Chains is still entombed - perhaps a good thing, since the Pandects of Apodeictic Calamity are quite unclear on whether that great demon serves Wurú or the One Other! - Two of your most talented young priests are dead, and the gift of the Hehegánu is effectively lost to us as well. Many goings-on, but what beneficial change has accrued to us?"

The Elucidator remained silent for a moment as he weighed a response to Otlúkoi Drónu's question. Better not to confirm that the One in Chains served the One Other. Wurú's priests sometimes disagreed with those of their master over the appropriateness of marshalling the pariah gods in the service of Change. But he owed him an accounting, for the draught of enchanted urine gifted to Tsodlán by the underpeople had been a favor owed to Master Hrü'ü.

Finally he spoke. "First, the One in Chains has been strengthened by this, and we have shown the priesthood of Qón that we are capable of penetrating their defenses."

Drónu's fat features contracted around his skull. "What use is this? They will merely redouble their protections. Better to strike all at once with success!"

The Elucidator shrugged his ambivalence between these interpretations. "Second, we have seen - our travelers between the worlds have seen - different possible futures. Many of them involved the warrior-priest Ghurú working great deeds for Qón and Belkhánu, and the rest of their flaccid, static cohorts among the Tlomitlányal. By securing his elimination, we ensure that those timelines are not the ones which matter to us."

The Otlúkoi of Hrü'ü nodded more thoughtfully at this. "Interesting. So we sacrifice two whites for a token we think likely to become a green."

"Perhaps even a black, if the Purple Crawlers of the Infinite Tree perceive truly. And we strengthen our hidden ally in anticipation of his release. And, of course, we have learned a great deal concerning Púrdimal's Tsuru'úm, much of which was unknown to us previously." The Elucidator produced a stretched parchment embossed with richly parti-coloured ink diagrams. "This is a copy of our new map, including the hidden places of the Temple of Qón."

Drónu chortled. "I trust you haven't held the locations of too many secret alcoves back for your own private use? Good." He examined the parchment approvingly. "This is something indeed. I suppose the rest can be given a proper accounting. After all, there are others in our temples besides Tsodlán to whom the Perceptions of the Planes have been granted; and as you say, the pair of young priests, for all their budding talent, were just whites on the verge of becoming blues. It would seem then that we could consider this matter at an end."

Across the city, watching the rays of the rising sun play off the stately, chalky yellow columns and ancient tessellated floor of her bedroom, Njáshterakoi Lelái saluted Tuléng and the departed balétl of Ghurú with a bottle of másh. Her disciple had done his duty well.

Stroking the hair of a fetching young female acolyte lying sated across her sleeping-mat, she contemplated the next move in the game.

The Court of the Purple Robes

A four to six player game
Concept and Programming by *David Dickie* (see
"http://www.dickieville.net/~ddickie/
-
<http://www.dickieville.net/~ddickie/>")
EPT background and images by Brad Johnson

The Court of the Purple Robe is a web based multiplayer game that simulates the machinations behind the Court of the Purple Robe, taken from The Court of the Purple Robes from the Imperial courtiers at the Citadel of Avanthár, out of Professor Barker's .

In the game, players compete to be the power behind the throne, influencing decisions by the Emperor through the various Palaces of Téकुmel and through the heads of the major Clans.

Turns are fast, typically under two minutes. Negotiations between players... sometimes less so.



In This Chapter

Introduction.....	52
Installation.....	53
Joining a game	53
Starting the game	53
The Main Display.....	54
Decisions, Clans, Advisors, and Cronies	55
Notes on entering orders with the Main Display	61
Notes on technical implementation.....	62

Introduction

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Turns are fast, typically under two minutes. Negotiations between players... sometimes less so.

The Court of the Purple Robes - Dave

The Emperor:



Decisions:

Financial 3/3/1/5

Religious 3/1/5/3

Financial 3/3/1/5

The Clans



Golden Bough [1]

Rick [1]

Cloak of Azure Gems [1]

Kotaru [1]

Sea Blue [1]

Alex [1]

Jade Diadem [1]

Rick [1]

Golden Sunburst [1]

Dave [1]

Blade Raised High [1]

Paul [1]

Palace of the Realm [V]



Imperial Party [2]

Alex [6]

Provost, High Chancery [3]

Alex [11]

Royalist Party [1]

Alex [7]

Palace of Everglorious War [V]



High Command of Avanthar [1]

Paul [5]

Military Party [3]

Dave [6]

Kerdudali [2]

Dave [10]

Palace of the Priesthoods [V]



Priestly Party [3]

Kotaru [7]

The Cusp of Night Society [2]

Kotaru [5]

Companionship of Scintillation [2]

Kotaru [3]

Palace of Foreign Lands [V]



Chancellor of Foreign Trade [3]

Paul [12]

Chancellor of Ext. Relations [3]

Paul [13]

Version 1.8

You have already submitted orders

Game Turn and Phase

Turn:4 Casting Votes

Who's influencing decision:

Golden Sunburst

Decision to influence:

☒ Financial 3/3/1/5 1 Raise Taxes
 ☐ Religious 3/1/5/3 1 Burn at stake
 ☐ Financial 3/3/1/5 1 Raise Taxes

Cast Vote

Have not submitted:

Messages

RELOAD

Current Scores

41 Paul

28 Dave

25 Alex

12 Kotaru

26 Rick

Installation

Court of the Purple Robes runs as a Java 2 executable. To run it, you must be able to run Java 1.3.1 or higher from a command prompt. The easiest way to do this is to download the Java Runtime Environment (JRE) from Sun.

✍ **Download JRE 1.3.1** (see "<http://java.sun.com/j2se/1.3/jre> - <http://java.sun.com/j2se/1.3/jre>")

✍ **Download JRE 1.4** <http://java.sun.com/j2se/1.4/download.html>

Follow the installation instructions. If you are running on a Linux or Solaris platform, you can download the PurpleRobes.jar file. For Windows 95 or higher, download the self extracting ZIP file PurpleRobes.exe.

✍ Download PurpleRobes.jar

✍ Download PurpleRobes.exe

Extract the files into a directory (the self extracting zip file will automatically insert the files into c:\purple).

Joining a game

Because this is a multiplayer game, there is a game server to which you must be added. As a result, to join a game, you have to contact me at ddickie@ucopian.com.

Starting the game

Open a command prompt (usually under the windows "Start" "Programs" "Accessories" menu) or a terminal window in Unix. Change to the directory in which you installed the program (for instance, "cd c:\purple").

Type "java UI.MainDisplay GAMENAME PLAYERNAME" (where GAMENAME is the name of the game, PLAYERNAME is your player name, both previously set up with me). The game communicates with game server via standard HTTP (World Wide Web) protocols, and if you have Web connectivity, the application should start without problems. If it doesn't, try typing "ping ". If the ping fails, you don't have connectivity to my web server; check your general ability to connect to the internet, and if that works, wait a while (either my server is down or there is a internet problem... either should be fixed within a day). If you have connectivity, copy the text in the command window into an Email and send it to me at ddickie@ucopian.com.

The Main Display

Once the application has started, the Main Display will open. If there are unread game messages or player messages, the Message Display will open as well (see "Messages"). The Main Display is where you enter your orders for the game. See the following chapters for the different game sequences and what orders may be submitted in each.

Nomenclature

Court Member – Any individual on the Main Display that can be influenced (has a grey box under their name).

Influence – The ability to in some way attempt to move a Court Member or the Emperor to act in a specific way. The attempt may fail, however, due to other, greater influence being applied in some other direction. Note that there are many levels of influence; items influence Court Members, Clans influence Cronies, Cronies influence Advisors, and Advisors and Clans influence the Emperor.

Influence Point – the smallest quantity of influence that can be used. In situations where different influences are used to achieve different outcomes, the outcome with the most influence points will win. Note that influence points used to control a Court Member is not the same as the influence they exert; for instance, someone may control the High Commander of Avanthár with 10 influence points, but the High Commander will still only exert 1 influence on the Palace of Everglorious War.

Player influence – influence by players, applied by using items or by using influence from controlled Court Members.

Court Member Influence – influence by Court Members, which may be used as Player Influence if the Court Member is controlled by a player.

Control box – the text box under the Court Member that indicates which player current controls that court member and the amount of influence they are keeping control with.

Control – The ability to make a court member exert court member influence in the manner desired by the person with Control, won through applying the most player influence on that court member.

Control Influence – the amount of influence by which a player has established control of a Court Member.

Advisor – one of four individuals that represent the major palaces of the realm, that is, the Palace of the Realm, the Palace of Everglorious War, the Palace of the Priesthoods, and the Palace of Foreign Affairs.

Clans – one of six individuals that represent the great Clans of the Realm, that is, the Golden Bough Clan, the Cloak of Azure Gems Clan, the Blade Raised High Clan, the Blue Sea Clan, the Golden Sun Clan, and the Jade Diadem Clan.

Cronies – One of eleven individuals that have special relationships with an Advisor, listed under the associated Advisor. Cronies belong to a Clan, as indicated by the color around the control box.

Player – The people playing the game, representing the hidden powers behind the throne.

Bid Marker – A numerical value that allows bidding on items, with the highest bid marker always winning. The bid markers are in a linear sequence from 1 to 20.

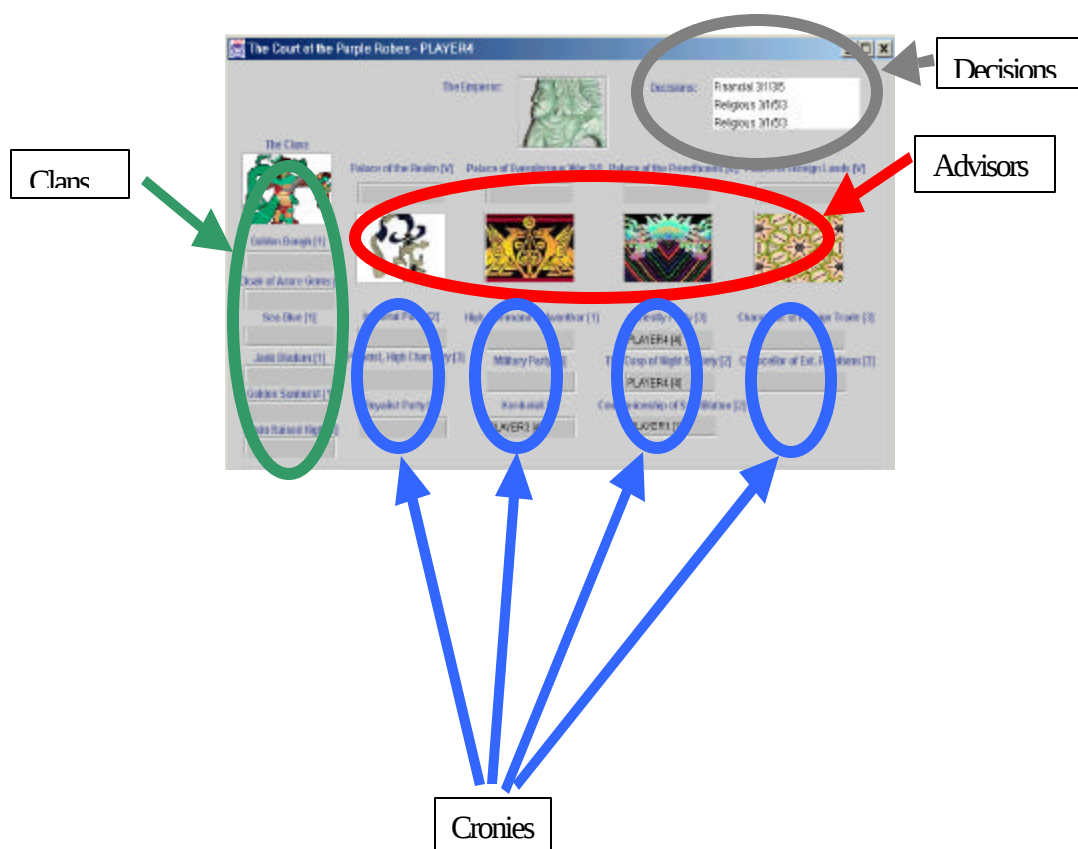
Item – An object that allows a player to influence a Court Member.

Queue – A group of items on which a player may bid using a Bid Marker.

Decision – An agenda item for which the Emperor must make a decision. Decisions come in different flavors, and depending on the type of decision, the amount of influence exerted by any particular palace will be different.

Casting – the tallying of influence on the Emperor to determine what option he will vote for a decision.

Decisions, Clans, Advisors, and Cronies



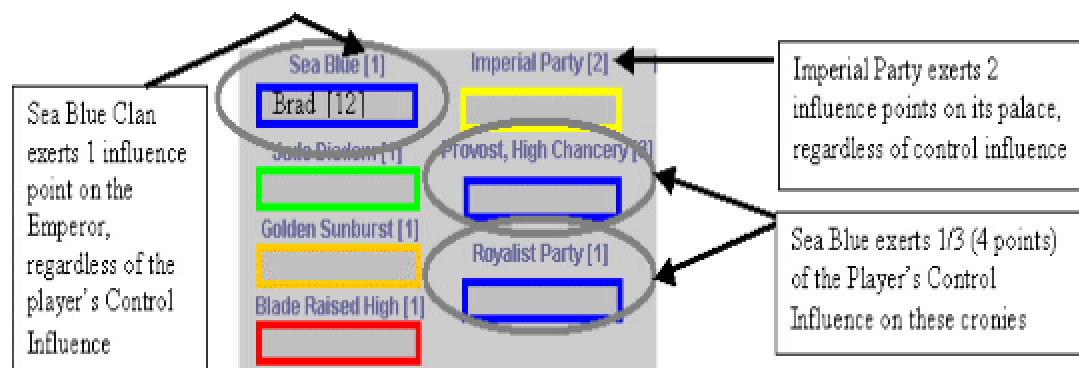
The Court of the Purple Robes Court Display

The Emperor's decisions are what drive the empire. The goal of the game, and how players generally get victory points (see "Scoring") is to influence the way a decision is voted (yes or no). To be the "power behind the throne," this influence must be indirect, through those the Emperor trusts.

Clans and Advisors influence the Emperor. The clans each exert one influence point on any particular decision. The Advisors (Palaces responsible for different aspects of the Empire's functions) exert different amounts of influence based on the type of decision being made; the numbers to the right of the decision type are the amount of influence exerted in the same order as the Advisors appear on the Game Board.

Clans also influence Cronies, who typically come from a clan. The relationship between a Clan and a Crony is indicated by the color of the border around the Court Member's Control Box. A Clan will exert one third of the current Control Influence on cronies from that Clan. For instance, if a player has 9 control influence on the Clan of the Jade Diadem, he will have 3 additional influence for any attempt to control the Priestly Party.

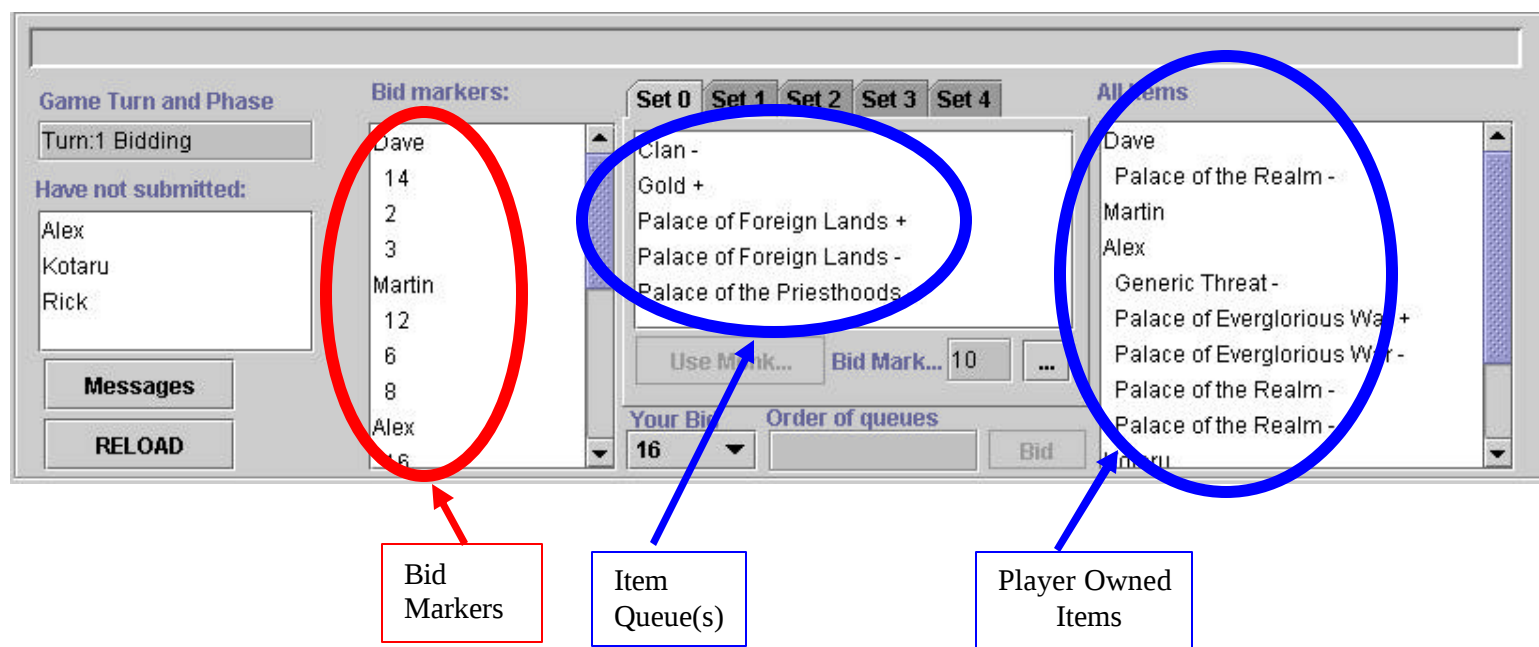
Cronies do not influence the Emperor. They influence the Advisor responsible for a particular palace and make it easier to keep that Advisor / Palace under your control (see "Controlling Court Members"). Cronies only influence the Advisor for the Palace in which they serve. They are listed under this Advisor. The amount of influence by which a player controls a Crony does not affect the amount of influence the Crony exerts on the Palace. This amount is indicated in brackets after the Cronies name. For instance, the High Commander exerts a "1" influence on the Palace of Everglorious War, regardless of how much influence a player controls the Crony by.



You use items (see "Items") to influence any member of the court, be they advisor, crony, or clan.

You use bid markers (see "Bid Markers") to get items by bidding on Queues, groups of items.

The player order portion of the display



Items

Items are how you win control of a member of the court. Some items are owned by players (indicated in the "all items" list), while others are unowned. Unowned items are in a queue, where they can be bid on as a group.

Items are either bribes (indicated with a "+") or threats (indicated with a "-"). Some items exert more influence points than others, indicated with a number such as "+2" or "-3." Otherwise the items provide one influence point over the court members they affect. In combination, however, a single point bribe and a threat count double, using the old "carrot and stick" routine. Thus a Clan bribe (Clan +) and Clan threat (Clan -) used together count as 4 influence points instead of two; two of each count as 8 influence points, etc. Higher value bribes and threats cannot be used in combination, so for instance a Clan +2 and a Clan - would be worth 3 points.

Items fall in three categories, general items, specific items, and monkeys. General items (Gold and Generic Threats) may only be used on cronies and clans. Specific items are used on the type of court member indicated. If the specific item is for an Advisor, it also works on that Advisor's cronies. Monkeys can be used as a bribe on anyone (*everyone* loves monkeys). Monkeys can also be used to steal items from the biddable item queue (see "Queuing Round"). Distribution of items is random.

Bid Markers

Bid markers allow you to get items. Bid markers are sequential, starting at 1 and ending at 5 times the number of players. Thus, at the beginning of any bidding sequence, each player will have three bid markers. Initial distribution is slightly random but is intended to keep players reasonably close to balanced. When bidding starts on the biddable item queue, everyone is allowed to bid. The highest bid marker wins. The winning bid goes into the biddable item queue; the winner of the next bid gets that bid marker, but it is not usable until after the next influencing and casting round. As a result, bid marker distribution is more random as the game goes on.

Game sequence

The game sequence consists of three phases, bidding, influencing, and casting. There can be many bidding rounds before an influencing round. There may be many influencing rounds before a casting round. A casting round always follows the last influencing round. There are as many casting rounds as there are players, then the game ends and the high score wins.

Bidding round

Each bidding phase starts with X queues, where X is the number of players. Each queue will have a random number (1-8) of random items. During the bidding phase, you pick your bid marker and the order in which you want to bid on the queues. Once everyone has put in orders, the bids are evaluated as follows. Each "first choice" bid is evaluated. If you are the highest bidder for your first choice queue, you win the queue and you're done. Then second choice is evaluated, and so on and so forth. So, if we have queues 1-5, with 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 gold respectively, and players 1 - 5 with bid markers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively, bidding might go as follows:

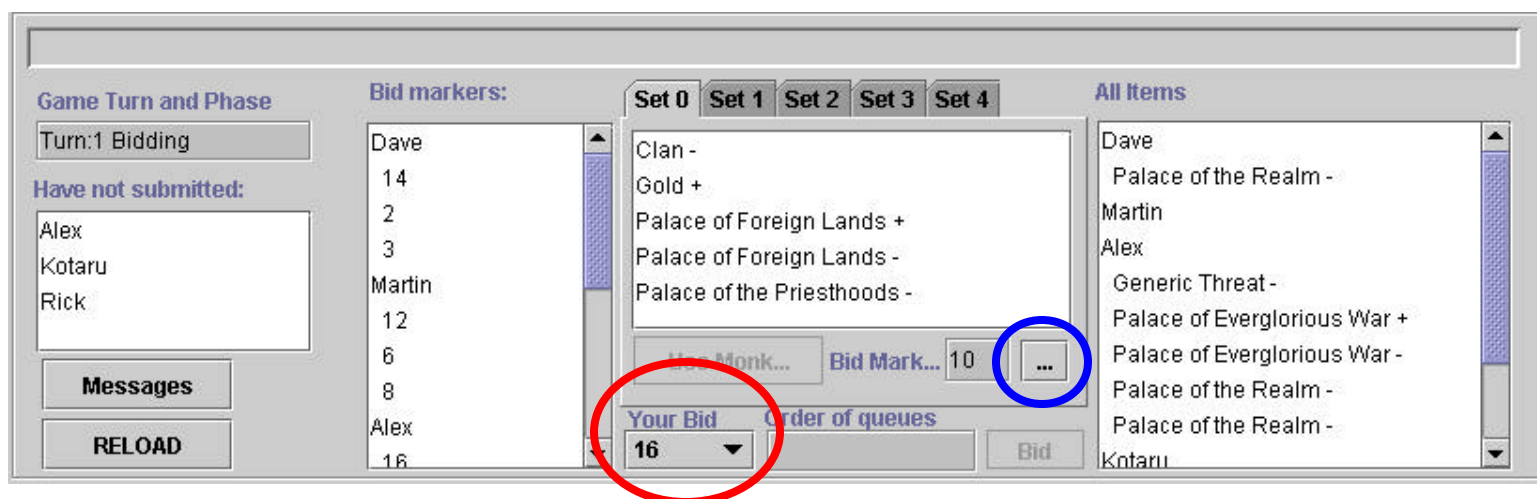
- ✍ Player 1 [Bid Marker 1] - Bids on 3, 2, 1, 4, 5 (because it is unlikely they can win 4 or 5)
- ✍ Player 2 [Bid Marker 2] - Bids on 3, 2, 1, 4, 5
- ✍ Player 3 [Bid Marker 3] - Bids on 4, 3, 2, 1, 5
- ✍ Player 4 [Bid Marker 4] - Bids on 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- ✍ Player 5 [Bid Marker 5] - Bids on 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

Then, evaluating first choices, Player 5 gets queue 5, Player 3 gets queue 4, Player 2 gets queue 3. Evaluating second choices, player 1 gets queue 2 (player 4 picked 4 but it's already taken) and, eventually, player 4 gets queue 1 (since they are the only player left and queue 1 is the only queue left).

To set your bid, select your bid marker, then select the item queues in the order you want to try to get them in by pushing the "... " button.

Influencing round

During the influence round, players use items to gain control of a court member. The amount of influence they exert depends on the number and mix of items used (see "Items"), and additional influence from other members of the court you already control. For Advisors, this is any of the Advisor's Cronies **currently** controlled by the player. For Cronies, it is a related Clan **currently** controlled by the player. Players may take control of a court member away from another player by exceeding the current amount of influence a player has by two.



Players may also increase influence on a court they already control. In this case, the amount of influence exerted is the maximum of the new bid, or the old bid + the new bid divided by two. For instance, if a player controls the Sea Blue Clan with 4 influence, and adds 2 more, the final influence is $4 + 2/2 = 5$. If they have 4 influence and add 10, they end up with $4 + 10/2 = 9$ (which is less than 10) = 10. The new amount of influence is considered new for this turn.

If several players bid for the same court member on the same round, the highest bid wins. If there are ties for highest bid, a randomly selected player wins. Influencing rounds continue until all players pass. Failed influence attempts still use up items. When all players pass, the game proceeds to the Casting round.

Players may also trade items during the influencing round. Only one trade is allowed for a player in a turn. A trade attempt must be done before an influence attempt. Unless both players trade the exact same items, or if the player doesn't have the item traded, the trade will not succeed. The actual trade completes after any influence attempts.

Remember the following about influencing:

- ✍ The goal is to influence the Emperor; and only clans and advisors (Palaces) influence the emperor. Cronies can help you gain control of an Advisor, but they do not directly influence the Emperor.
- ✍ You can, however, get points, and sometimes many, for controlling groups of cronies or a large number of the clans. See "Scoring."

- ✍ For a crony to help you, you have to control them prior to your attempt to take control of the crony's boss, so bid for cronies before bidding on their advisor.
- ✍ You can use multiple items at once to gain control of someone. If you use a "+" and "-" item at the same time, they count as 4 instead of 2 (and 2 of each will be 8 etc. etc).
- ✍ You want as much influence (control) over people as possible to keep others from grabbing them away from you.
- ✍ You can up your influence amount on someone, but you only get half the new amount, unless that would be less than the new amount.
- ✍ Influence degrades after the influence round, but it doesn't disappear in all cases. Advisor influence goes away, Clans are reduced by 66%, so a "3" control would be reduced to a "1." Cronies are reduced by 33%, so a "3" control would be reduced to a "2."

Casting round

During the casting round, players use the court members under their control to influence the Emperor to vote a particular way on a decision. There is only one round. Players may vote all court members they control the same way, or they may vote different ways for different members or groups of members. At the end of the casting round, victory points are awarded (see "Scoring"). After the casting round, control on court members changes as follows. All existing influence on advisors is removed (they have short memories). **Clans are reduced by 66%, so a "3" control would be reduced to a "1." Cronies are reduced by 33%, so a "3" control would be reduced to a "2."**

It is important to work with other players during the casting round. For instance, on a Financial Decision, the player who controls the Palace of Foreign Affairs will have 5 influence points on the vote. Suppose they select "Raise Taxes." If one player with the Palace of the Realm (with 3 influence points) and two other players with three clans between them vote for "Lower Spending," the first player will get nothing, while the player with the Palace of the Realm will get 6 points, and the players with the clans will get 1 point apiece.

Scoring

Players score after the casting round as follows:

- ✍ Most influence for winning a vote (no tie): 4 + the number of other players that voted the same way.
- ✍ Most influence for winning a vote (one or more players tied): 2 + number of other players that voted the same way (of which there will always be at least one).
- ✍ Voted the same way as the winning vote: 1
- ✍ Control all advisors: 12
- ✍ Control all cronies of one advisor: 3
- ✍ Control all clans: 8
- ✍ Control 3-5 clans: 3

Messages

Game messages and player messages are displayed in the Message Window. The message window will be displayed automatically when you start the game if there are waiting messages. It can be redisplayed at any time with the "Messages" button on the main display. You may clear messages with the "clear" button. You may add player messages with the "Post" or "Post Anonymous" button after entering some text in the new message text area.

Notes on entering orders with the Main Display

The main display consists of two pieces, the Court Display and the Player Order Display. The Court Display shows the court members, and any current control of those members. The amount of influence the court member is controlled by is indicated as well. The Player Order Display shows the current status of the item queues, player owned items, current scores, and other things needed to make decisions for a particular game phase. The Player Order Display changes based on what phase the game is in.

On the Player Order Display, options that are not available are typically disabled.

When you have entered an order that completes your turn, a message is displayed, "you have already entered orders." Until all other players have submitted orders and that particular round, this message will continue to be displayed. While in this state, the only action a player may take is to send messages using the Message Display.

In some cases, orders can be automatically generated for you (if you have no items in the Influence phase or no advisors / clans under your control in the Casting phase).

In cases where you may enter multiple items (using multiple items to influence one person, having several controlled court members vote a single way), use a left mouse click to select one item, shift-click to select a range of items, and control-click to select a set of items.

If you want to refresh data after submitting orders, or to see any other actions that have occurred since you started COPR, use the "reload" button on the main display.

Notes on technical implementation

In order to provide as simple and universal a communications method as possible, standard web protocols (HTTP and CGI-BIN) have been used for the game's communications layer. This results in delays of up to a minute in processing orders. After submitting orders, wait a minute before using the "reload" button.

