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A fanzine of M.A.R. Barker's World of Tékumel

INTRODUCTION

Time flies!

It's been a year since I last wrote a new introduction to an issue of *The Excellent Travelling Volume*. There are several reasons for that, starting with the fact that putting together one of these issues takes a surprising amount of time and effort. Though I have a great deal of material from my ongoing House of Worms *Empire of the Petal Throne* campaign (which celebrated its 5-year anniversary at the beginning of March), turning it into something usable by others isn't always as straightforward as I would like. I continue to struggle with figuring out a more efficient way to do this so that I can release issues more often.

A more significant cause of the delay is that I was struck by a car while crossing the street near my home. While I was able to walk away from the accident under my own steam, I suffered a non-displaced fracture of my left fibular neck. I was in a fair amount of pain for several weeks and spent two months limping. This occurred the day before my 50th birthday and two days before I was scheduled to fly to Madison, Wisconsin to attend Gamehole Con. I had to cancel my trip, since my doctor was concerned I could have suffered a concussion (I hadn't, fortunately). I had not expected how much my injury would affect me psychologically. I became very wary of crossing the street and even of being around cars. More worryingly, I lost a lot of enthusiasm for things I'd previously enjoyed, including writing – which meant that work on this issue ceased for many more months.

I am doing much better now but, as everyone reading this knows well, the world is in the grips of a pandemic the likes of which we have not seen in many generations. It's a time of anxiety and uncertainty and part of me felt that trying to complete new issue in the midst of it was a misuse of time. On further reflection, though, it's clear that we could all probably use some distraction during this time of isolation and social distancing. It's my hope that issue #11 will provide readers with a chance to leave the cares of the real world behind, if only for a little while.

The contents of this issue are, I think, a good mix of expansions on existing material and original content, most of which comes from my own campaign. In addition, I'm very happy to present the first part of a piece of original Tékumel fiction by David Lemire. Fiction was, in fact, my first real introduction to Tékumel. I read Professor Barker's *The Man of Gold* sometime in the mid to late 1980s and found it very compelling. It would still be several more years before I picked up a Tékumel RPG book, but it was *The Man of Gold* that first fired my imagination and ultimately led to my exploring the setting in greater detail. I hope you will enjoy Mr Lemire's submission, whose second part will appear in issue #12 (which I hope won't take another year to appear!).

Which reminds me: submissions to *The Excellent Travelling Volume* are always welcome. Indeed, they are something I very much want to see, since having pieces by other authors will lessen some of my burden in producing sufficient content for each new issue. If you have anything you'd be interested in submitting, please drop me a note at jdmaliszewski@gmail.com. I am open to almost any sort of Tékumel-related content, though the primary focus of the 'zine remains role-playing in Professor Barker's world and priority will be given to such material.

— James Maliszewski
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The EXcellent Travelling Volume



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Ahoggyá & Shén Characters

(Additions and Changes)

In my current *Empire of the Petal Throne* campaigns, intelligent nonhumans other than the Inimical Races have generally played very small roles to date. A prominent exception to this have been the Shén, who maintain a colony (Shuggár) on the eastern coast of the Achgé Peninsula of the Southern Continent (see issue #8 of *The Excellent Travelling Volume* for more details). Due to their relative proximity to the Tsolyáni colony in the same region, several players have created Shén characters who have played memorable rôles in that campaign. What follows are rules modifications to *Empire of the Petal Throne* to enable the playing of Shén characters, as well as similar modifications for the playing of Ahoggyá who have, to date, appeared only briefly in my campaigns.

The information in this article depends heavily on *Swords & Glory, Volume 1: Tékumel Sourcebook* and other writings by Professor Barker, but some of it is my own invention and should not be considered an “official” addition or expansion of the Tékumel setting. It is nevertheless hoped that it will not only prove useful to *EPT* players and referees with an interest in generating Ahoggyá and Shén characters, but also as a reminder that creating new material for one’s personal Tékumel is not “wrong,” but, rather, to be encouraged.

310. ALIGNMENT

Change and Stability seemingly mean little to the Ahoggyá, who do not make use of these concepts either in their own regions or when living among humans. This is typical of the Ahoggyá, who rarely adapt themselves to the worldviews of other species, instead clinging stubbornly to their own inscrutable ways. Shén, on the other hand, understand Change and Stability, since these ideas comport the nature of their religion (see Sec. 2100 below).

320. CHOICE OF SEX

Ahoggyá are reputed to have eight sexes, none of which are readily distinguishable from one another by non-Ahoggyá. Their complex mating and reproductive habits are therefore a mystery—and source of humour—to humans and other races. As such, there is no need to choose a sex for an Ahoggyá character, as it is unlikely to have any effect on play. Conversely, the Shén have three sexes: males, who are gleaming black in colour (40% of their population); females, who are smaller and tinged with grey (35%);



and “egg-fertilisers,” who are also small and grey and whose task it is to fertilise the eggs produced by the males and females (25%).

330. PROFESSION

Ahoggyá most commonly take up the profession of warrior, both because of their natural temperaments but also because one out of every four members of this species is anti-psychic (see next issue for more information). Nevertheless, Ahoggyá magic-users do exist, though they are unusual. There are, however, no priests among the Ahoggyá. The Shén likewise favour the profession of warrior. As a rule, they disdain sorcery and are, at best, indifferent priests. Nevertheless, both magic-users and priests can be found among them, though neither profession is highly regarded in their home regions.

710. HIT DICE

Section 710 of the *Empire of the Petal Throne* rulebook notes that both Ahoggyá and Shén are larger and tougher creatures than humans and, as such, provides different hit dice tables. Thus, a Level I Ahoggyá or Shén warrior has 3 Hit Dice rather than 1+1, as humans do.

900. STARTING THE GAME

Despite not being human, Ahoggyá and Shén generally do not start the game any differently than human characters.

1127. DESCRIPTIONS OF NONHUMAN RACES ENCOUNTERED

Ahoggyá have eyes on each of the four sides of their barrel-like bodies and, therefore, cannot be flanked or taken by surprise from the rear. In addition, they may strike two blows per round against an opponent on any one side. If surrounded, they may attack opponents on all sides, which is to say, four blows per combat round. Ahoggyá are generally fearless, receiving a +4 bonus to saving throws against fear effects.

The Shén tail ends in a mace-like, horny, elongated ball. The tail is hard and, if swung with great force, deals one four-sided die of damage. The Shén tend to lash their tails in battle-rage and cannot thus consciously coordinate both the tail and their other weapons in a fight. In such situations, the player of a Shén character should roll percentile dice, and if the score is less than his character's Dexterity score, there is no problem. If it exceeds the Dexterity score, then he has accidentally struck a companion.

2100. THE GODS, COHORTS, AND DIVINE INTERVENTION

As far as is known, the Ahoggyá have no religion whatsoever. The Tsolyáni emperor Dúrumu “the Copper Blade of Sárku” (1747-1809 A.S.) once sent a delegation of scholar priests to ascertain the deities the Ahoggyá worshipped. These priests concluded that the Ahoggyá had no gods at all, which led Dúrumu to declare them animals for citizenship and census purposes (as, in his mind, only animals acknowledged no gods or higher powers). Unsurprisingly, in human lands, Ahoggyá will not take up the veneration of any divinities even for purely pragmatic reasons, as some nonhumans (such as the Tinalíya; see issue #10 of *The Excellent Travelling Volume*) do.

Meanwhile, the Shén possess a dualist religion, with one god, “the One of Eggs,” encompassing all the gods of Stability and another, “the One Who Rends,” encompassing all the gods of Change. While living among humans, Shén often adopt the worship of an appropriate Change or Stability deity, but this is far from universal.

Ahoggyá and Shén Names

The Ahoggyá language is both incomprehensible to and unspeakable by humans. The same is thus true of what they call themselves, leading hu-





mans to identify them with colourful nicknames intended to distinguish them from their fellows. Examples of such nicknames include: Barrel of Swords, Big Bag, Black-Spotted One, Dirty One, Gnarled One, Loudest Belly, Red-Eye, Scar-Gut, and Yellow Splotched One. Meanwhile, Shén names, while difficult for humans to pronounce, are not completely beyond their capacity. A few examples of Shén names are: A-Shg-Ssá, Chrâ-Ssé-Kk, Etk-ti-Tsú, Fr-Ssâ-Chì, Gr-Gá, Grg-Ssá, Hss-nn-Khú, Hsú-Ssí, Hú-Shà-Gsh, Mrgág, Nkék, Shékw, Shrá-Kék, and Ss-Qâ-Hs.

Ahoggyá and Shén Clans

From what has been observed, the Ahoggyá do not seem to possess anything comparable to the Engsvanyáli-descended clan system of the Five Empires – though it is difficult to say this with any certainty. In any event, when dwelling among humans, the Ahoggyá generally show no interest in joining a clan. This is just as well, as any human clan asked to accept one as a member would probably take it as a grave insult.

The Shén do not have clans as such, but instead divide themselves into “egg-groups,” which are lineages of genetically related Shén. Some of these egg-groups are implacably hostile to one another and cooperation between them is nigh impossible. Outside their own lands, Shén are very rarely accepted into a human clan.

Homelands

The Ahoggyá inhabit the Sharúna Lowlands in Salarvyá and the Flats of Gyógma in Háida Pakála. However, the state of Ónmu Tlé Hléktis to the southeast of the Five Empires comes close to being a true homeland of the race. Fortunately for humans, it is sufficiently remote from the Five Empires that it has little influence outside its immediate area.

The largest Shén enclave is the state humans call Shényu, located on the tip of the continent between the Deeps of Chanayága and the Gulf of Teriyál. Between Shényu and Livyánu to the north, there are several smaller Shén nations: Gái, Gopúri, Khákh, Mmátugual, Ngúa, Qónu, Rá, and Shrúke'él. Other Shén enclaves exist, such as the colony of Shuggár on the coast of the Achgé Peninsula noted above. There is also an island in the southern ocean inhabited by Shén who have never seen a human being.

Ahoggyá and Shén Legions

Humans believe that there is great hostility between the Shén and the Ahoggyá, supposedly because the Ahoggyá ate Shén captives during the invasion of Salarvyá by the Tsolyáni emperor Hejjéka II “the Heretic” (1325–1340 A.S.). Whether true or not, human generals never put a unit of Shén next a unit of Ahoggyá on the battlefield, lest violence erupt between the two. This hostility is somewhat overstated, but it is nevertheless true that these two aggressive, often violent species do not always work well with one another.

Ahoggyá and Shén are renowned for their martial prowess and, as such, can be found serving in the legions of many states, including those of the Five Empires. Among the more notable ones are the Legion of the Splendour of Shényu (Tsolyáni 4th Auxiliary Shén Heavy Infantry), the Legion of the Dancer Without Eyes (Tsolyáni 2nd Auxiliary Ahoggyá Heavy Infantry), the Pride of Khákh (Mu'ugalavyáni Shén Legion XI), Sword in Hand (Mu'ugalavyáni Ahoggyá Legion XIII), the Nchesh of the Four-Limbed One (Salarvyáni Ahoggyá), and the Nchesh of the Claws of Shényu (Salarvyáni Shén). Likewise, Ahoggyá and Shén units can be found within human-dominated legions in many states across Téकुमел.



The Hokún

The Glass Monsters

The Hokún (called Sáàkhü in the languages of the Naqsái – see issue #8 of *The Excellent Travelling Volume*) resemble eight-foot-tall sculptures of cloudy green-grey glass. They have six limbs, the rear pair of which are very long and powerful, while the front pair is small and used to manipulate tools, hold weapons, and other fine tasks. The middle pair of limbs can be employed for heavy work, firm grasping, and balance, though, like the rear pair, it is most generally used for locomotion.

THE HOKÚN

Number Appearing:
10–120

Hit Dice: 1+3

Armour Class: 3

Treasure: A: 40

Movement: 12"

Lair: 70: 100–600 (near own territory)

Treasure in Lair: H: 50

A Hokún's head is a long, vertical ovoid, with a faceted eye set on either side of a central ridge. A set of powerful mandibles occupies a recess at the base of the throat. These beings possess a hard exoskeleton, which is comparable to Chlén-hide plate armour in the protection it affords. Thinner portions of the exoskeleton are transparent, allowing internal organs and musculature to be seen; even thicker portions (e.g. the torso and skull) are somewhat translucent.

The Hokún dwell primarily on the hemisphere of Téकुmel opposite that occupied by the Five Empires. Their single largest enclave is a large island (or small continent) known as Benré Sà, located in the southern ocean of this hemisphere. The Hokún also claim numerous other islands and island chains throughout all latitudes. The Naqsái peoples of the Achgé Peninsula report the existence of a large Hokún settlement in the far south, beyond the Land of the Crystalline Hmá. They further claim that, in ages past, these "glass demons" slaughtered the inhabitants of Srún, leaving it the barren waste it is today. Regardless of the truth of such claims, there can be little doubt that the Hokún are widespread, perhaps the only species other than humanity to be found in so many places across the planet.

The Hokún have two sexes: males (65% of the population) and egg-laying females (35%). In most Hokún settlements, selective breeding is practised, with the goal of "improving" the species in various ways. One example of this can be found in the riding animals some Hokún employ (see p. 10), which are in fact a selectively bred mutation of the baseline Hokún. Travelers to other lands where the Hokún are encountered have reported seeing other such sub-species.

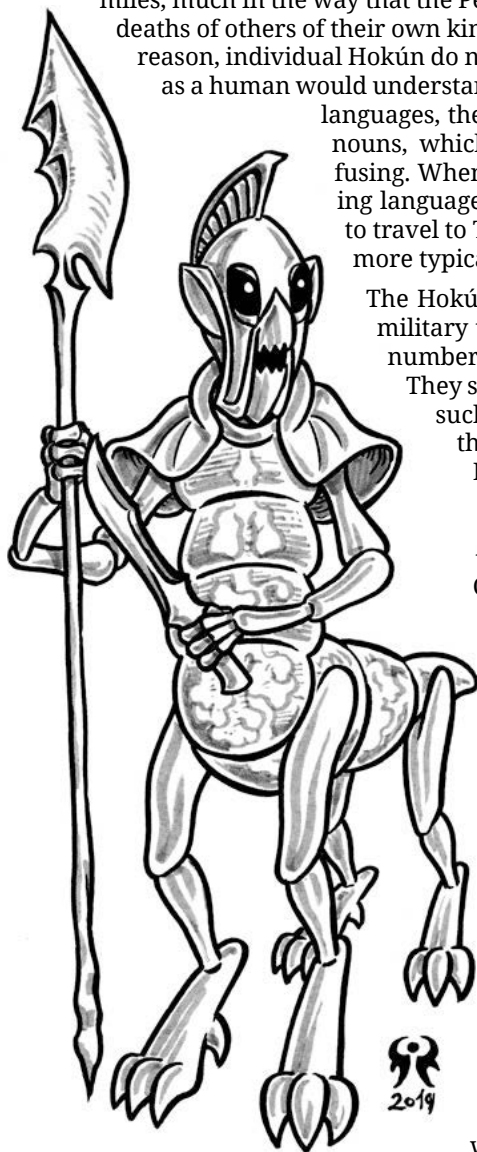
Compared to most intelligent species, Hokún seemingly possess little individuality. They act and even think as a group, as they all participate in some sort of Gestalt or group-mind with any of their kind who are physically close to them. In this case, “close” seems to mean up to several miles, much in the way that the Pé Chói possess the ability to sense the deaths of others of their own kind but much more powerful. For that reason, individual Hokún do not have personal names or identities as a human would understand such things. When speaking other

languages, they have difficulty with personal pronouns, which they consider unnecessarily confusing. When pressed, a Hokún employs distancing language, such as “It is the desire of this one to travel to Tsolyánu” rather than conforming to more typical grammatical constructions.

The Hokún are decent warriors, though their military tactics by and large depend on large numbers to overwhelm their opponents.

They show little concern about casualties if such losses will enable them to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the Hokún are quite talented sorcerers, possessing strong psychic abilities on par with—or even surpassing—those of human beings or the Pé Chói. They are also said to possess unique spells, though there is limited evidence to support this assertion.

As far as is known, the Hokún have no religion and worship no deities. Instead, they possess a complex system of prohibitions and commands that stem from “the World-Mind,” as they put it. The few human scholars who have attempted to delve into the matter, such as Kanésh hi-Tanjár (a priest of Thúmis from Jakálla) and Míshuaz Itáya (a Livyáni scholar of Tsámra), surmise that the World-Mind is the collective memories of the Hokún across the millennia, to which each of them has access, perhaps by psychic means. The World-Mind



is therefore not so much a separate being or entity as another facet of the Gestalt that seems fundamental to their manner of viewing the world. In any case, the existence of the World-Mind, whatever its ultimate nature, does not ensure that all Hokún think in exactly the same way or prevent disagreements—even violent ones—from arising among them.

A good example of the degree to which Hokún societies may disagree with one another can be seen in their attitudes toward human beings. On the island of Benré Sà, for example, the Hokún hunt humans (who are considered little more than naked animals) and utilise their flesh as food. In other regions, the Hokún have merely enslaved humanity and rule them as masters. In a few locales (such as the lands of the northern seas), they live as equals with humankind, while on one island humans rule the Hokún and use their riding beasts themselves!

Disagreements between Hokún societies sometimes result in warfare between them, much as humans and other species war with their own kind. These disagreements occur for many of the same reasons—territory and resources—though it appears that another major factor is their attitudes toward other species. Not all Hokún are implacably hostile to humanity or believe that the World-Mind is impelling them to conquer the whole of Tékumel. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the Hokún are perhaps the greatest challenger to mankind’s dominance over Tékumel.

THE HOKÚN AND THE PÉ CHÓI

The broad physical similarities between the Hokún and the Pé Chói have led some humans to speculate that there is a “familial” relationship between the two species. This theory is especially popular among scholars of the Tsolyáni colony of Linyaró in the Achgé Peninsula (see issue #8 of *The Excellent Travelling Volume*), such as Arsuél hiTikóshu and Ekúna hiNézar (both of the Temple of Thúmis). The wider acceptance of this theory has run afoul of several difficulties, most notably the lack of regular contact with the Hokún (or Sââkhü, as they are known locally). Equally vexing is the fact that Pé Chói rarely come to Linyaró and the few who have come have shown decidedly little interest in exploring the topic during their stay. Despite this, Arsuél and Ekúna remain convinced and are attempting to rally other scholars to their cause. They have even petitioned the governor of the colony to mount an expedition to the inhospitable lands to the far south of the Achgé Peninsula in order to observe the Hokún better. The matter is currently under advisement. Even if the expedition should be launched, the question is likely impossible to answer, given the antiquity of Tékumel.

Bestiary (Addition)

Empire of the Petal Throne includes descriptions of a wide variety of the alien planet's animal and plant life, as well as its intelligent non-human species. Nevertheless, Tékumel is home to many more creatures than those included in the rulebook. What follows are details of four such creatures, all of which can be found in remote locales far from the continent of the Five Empires. Like everything in *The Excellent Travelling Volume*, these new creatures are intended to serve as examples of how to expand upon and add to the material presented elsewhere to make Tékumel your own.

LÉKSA “THE GLASS BEAST”

Number Appearing: 1–20

Hit Dice: 3

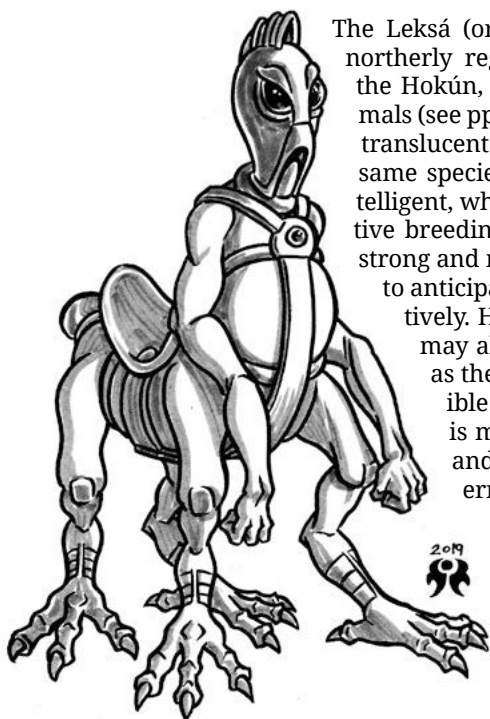
Armour Class: 2

Treasure: nil

Movement: 15”

Lair: 20: 6–36

Treasure in Lair: C: 15



The Leksá (or Chíkum, as they are called in more northerly regions) is a specially-bred mutation of the Hokún, which the latter employ as riding animals (see pp. 7–9). The beast is short, squat, and less translucent than the Hokún, but it is essentially the same species as its rider, albeit seemingly less intelligent, which is no doubt on account of the selective breeding process that created it. The Leksá is strong and moves quickly, in addition to being able to anticipate its rider's commands almost instinctively. Human scholars theorise that the Leksá may also participate in the same group-mind as the Hokún, but there is little incontrovertible evidence of this. In any event, the Leksá is most common on the island of Benré Sà and other Hokún settlements of the southern ocean. There are also reports of these creatures in the southernmost regions of the Achgé Peninsula (see *The Excellent Travelling Volume* issue #8).

NGÉKKA “THE GRACEFUL RUNNER”

Number Appearing: 1–12

Hit Dice: 2+1

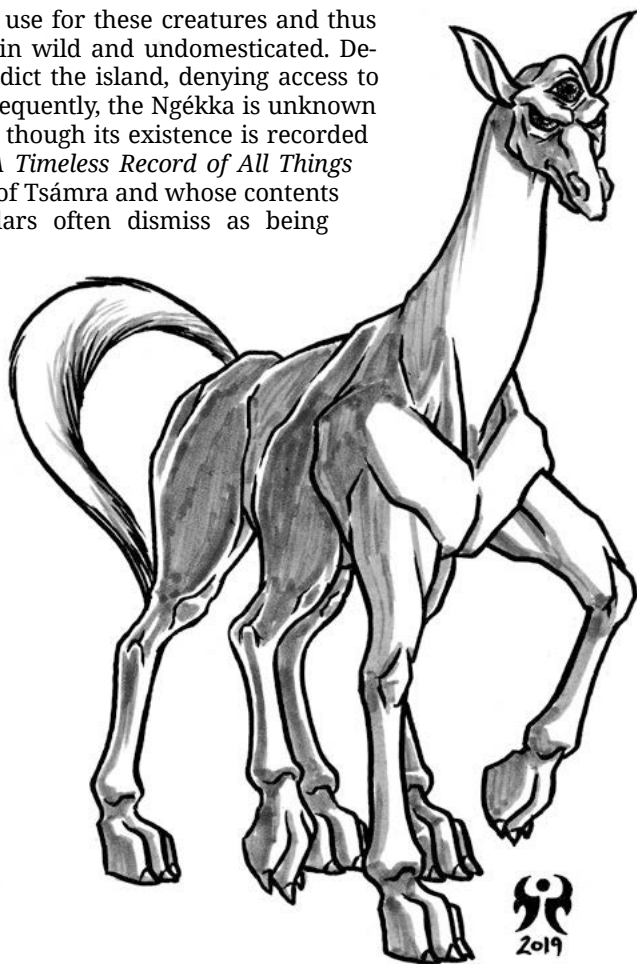
Armour Class: 7

Treasure: nil

Movement: 12”

Lair: 40: 2–24

The Ngékka is a delicate, graceful, six-legged beast that looks like a mammal but in fact lays leathery eggs from which its young hatch. The creature stands about six feet tall at the shoulder. It has along neck and a slender, sharp-eared, three-eyed skull. Its fur is soft and velvety and is yellow-white or pure white in colour. The Ngékka also possesses three-toed feet and a long, plume-like tail. The island on which the Ngékka lives is near Benré Sà, which is part of the domain of the Hokún. The Hokún have no use for these creatures and thus allow them to remain wild and undomesticated. Despite this, they interdict the island, denying access to all non-Hokún. Consequently, the Ngékka is unknown in the Five Empires, though its existence is recorded in a tome entitled *A Timeless Record of All Things* (attributed to Llyán of Tsámra and whose contents contemporary scholars often dismiss as being mythological).



QU'ÚNI “THE CRUSTACEAN”

Number Appearing: 50–100

Hit Dice: 2

Armour Class: 3

Treasure: nil

Movement: 10”

Lair: 60: 100–600 (near own territory)

Treasure in Lair: C: 30

Qu'úni are pallid, shrimp-like creatures with pale green, translucent shells. They are roughly human-sized and have six slender legs, the front pair of which end in three-fingered hands. They are hostile to interlopers and generally attack other creatures that come too near to their lairs. Most such lairs are located in remote coastal locations across Tékumel, such as the City of Red-Tiled Roofs and the Achgé Peninsula of the Southern Continent. If provoked, Qu'úni attack in hordes of hundreds of individuals. Otherwise, this species serves mostly as food for the Vriyágga (see p. 13) and other similarly large predators. The Qu'úni are at least semi-intelligent, showing the capacity to use crude tools and weapons, but little else is known about them and their social organisation (if any). Naqsái sailors consider them dangerous pests and try to steer clear of waters they are known to inhabit.



VRIYÁGGA “THE WHEELED HORROR”

Number Appearing: 1–10

Hit Dice: 10/15/25

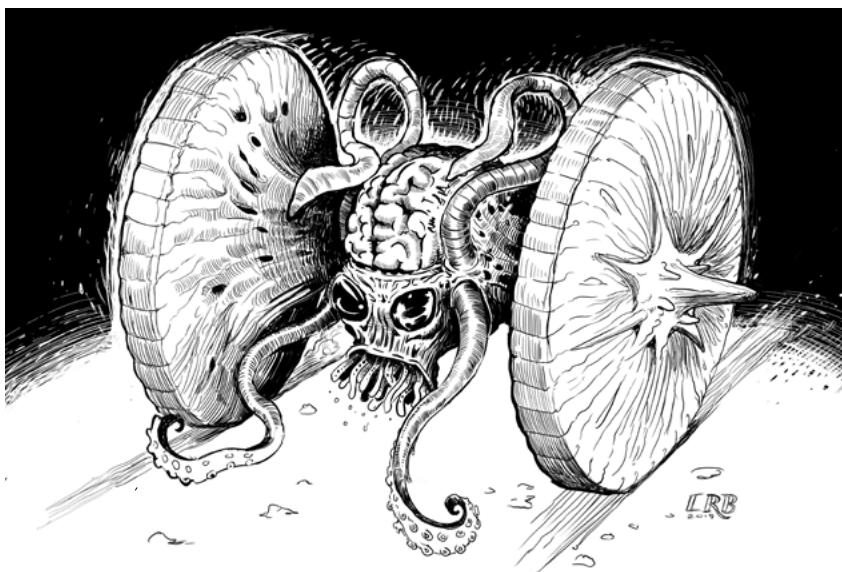
Armour Class: 1

Treasure: nil

Movement: 12”/10”/8”

Lair: 40: 20–200 (City of Red-Tiled Roofs)

Treasure in Lair: nil



A Vriyágga is a creature to strike terror into the most heroic breast: a huge pair of wheel-like appendages revolve around central axes like the treads of a tank, powered by gnarled and knotted cores of muscle-fibre. A great central braincase hangs between these along with the parody of a face. From this dangle four – or more, in larger specimens – great tentacles covered with powerful suckers. A Vriyágga’s mouth is lined with venom-dripping purple feelers, which are used to kill and ingest the monster’s victims. Touching the venom demands an immediate saving throw against poison or death results in two rounds. The spell *neutralise poison* or an *eye of healing* applied during this period is sufficient to overcome its effects.

A Vriyágga’s ebon eyes are like great black opals, allowing it to see in the dark at a range of 15”. This terrible creature has considerable intelligence and can think, organise, call up its fellows, and lay ambushes, although it seemingly cannot speak. It is limited, of course, in that it can only enter areas where its great treaded wheels will carry it. Thus, it cannot climb stairs or do more than reach with its tentacles into areas smaller than itself.

A Vriyágga can sense heat and gropes about until it catches prey. Its tentacles are very tough and deal two six-sided dice of damage to a victim caught in their coils. The largest specimens (10% chance) have “wheels” that are 15–20 feet high and a tentacle reach of perhaps 30 feet. These behemoths move slower than others of their kind, but are much more intelligent and cunning – true terrors! The smallest examples (60% chance) range up to five feet in height, with a tentacle-reach of no more than 10 feet. Medium-size Vriyágga (30% chance) are ten feet in height, with tentacles 20 feet long. Regardless of their size, all Vriyágga are relentless predators that flee only in the face of overwhelming danger to themselves.

The Vriyágga are rare on Téकुmel. Their only known habitat is a ruin known simply as “the City of the Red-Tiled Roofs.” To date, the only established means of reaching the City – whose precise whereabouts on Téकुmel are unclear – is by tubeway car. Initial reports suggest that it is located upon an island. The ruined city is filled with great, empty buildings, vast halls, and intricate architecture, entirely devoid of life and lacking in any sign of the reasons for its desertion long ago. Ewers and utensils still sit on crumbled tables, furniture long rotted away to dust still lines the hallways, chests of incomprehensible objects are still stored in its storehouses. Based on the reports of the few Tsolyáni who have visited the City of Red-Tiled Roofs, the Vriyágga are its only inhabitants.

The primary food source of the Vriyágga are the Qu’úni (see p. 12), which can be found in great numbers along the coast near the City of Red-Tiles Roofs. Nevertheless, the Vriyágga seem to relish other fare, such as visitors to their home! Survivors of encounters with these creatures describe the fervour with which they pursued them, even to the point of fighting amongst themselves for the “right” to kill the new prey. For that reason, would-be explorers are cautioned against attempting to find, let alone step foot inside, the City of Red-Tiled Roofs. Not even the normally inquisitive Temples of Ksáruł or Thúmis have seen fit to launch expeditions to this deadly region.

THE ORIGINS OF THE VRIYÁGGA

The peculiarity of the Vriyágga’s appearance has left many wondering about its origins over the millennia. Unfortunately, no scholar possesses sufficient information to do more than offer wild theories. In this respect, it is little different than many creatures on Téकुmel, almost all of which were first brought to the planet from other worlds during the days of humanity’s starfaring past.

Demons of Sárku & Durritlámish (Addition)

In common speech on Tékumel, the word “demon” can refer to any monstrous creature or mysterious phenomenon. Scholars, however, use it to refer to beings usually (but not always) native to the extra-dimensional realms known as “the Planes Beyond.” Demons (or Sharétkoi in Tsolyáni) are thus entities of power, who draw some form of sustenance or energy from the beings or planes of their patrons gods.

Demons native to a plane controlled by a particular god may be said to be of that god’s “substance,” while those whose goals and behaviours indicate an alliance with a given deity are said to be of that god’s “essence.” Since the goals, alliances, and planes of the gods and demons are not truly within the grasp of mortal understanding, scholars warn that these terms are, at best, gross approximations of reality. What is known is that certain demons seem to ally themselves with or do the bidding of various gods and that these demons will usually respond more favourably to requests made by mortal worshippers of their patron deity.

Lord Sárku rules over a plane known as the Wastelands of the Dead, which is home to his many demonic minions, as well as those who served him in life. It is a place of continual ghastly joy, like the grimacing of a skull, and of endless consciousness in death. Within the Wastelands can be found the River of Death, at whose head is the Fount of Evidlu, which plays a role in many myths and legends, such as the tale of the sorcerer Isínju and his war against the City of Nine Walls. Lord Sárku also rules over a hell to which recants are condemned. This nameless plane is one of terror and pain, where worms gnaw upon the flesh, limbs wither and crumble, and being buried alive for all eternity are but a few of the exquisite tortures to be visited upon the unfaithful.

In this issue, two demon lords and a demon race associated with Sárku and his cohort Durritlámish are described, along with game statistics for their use in Empire of the Petal Throne adventures. Their potency varies and, as such, they are not all suitable opponents for low or even mid-level characters. However, they all provide referees examples of what beings of the Planes Beyond might be like in order to aid him in creating his own. Future issues of *The Excellent Travelling Volume* will include additional examples of demons.

THE BLIND ONES OF HRESHKAGGÉTL

Number Appearing: 3–18

Hit Dice: 5

Armour Class: 3

Treasure: nil

Movement: 6"

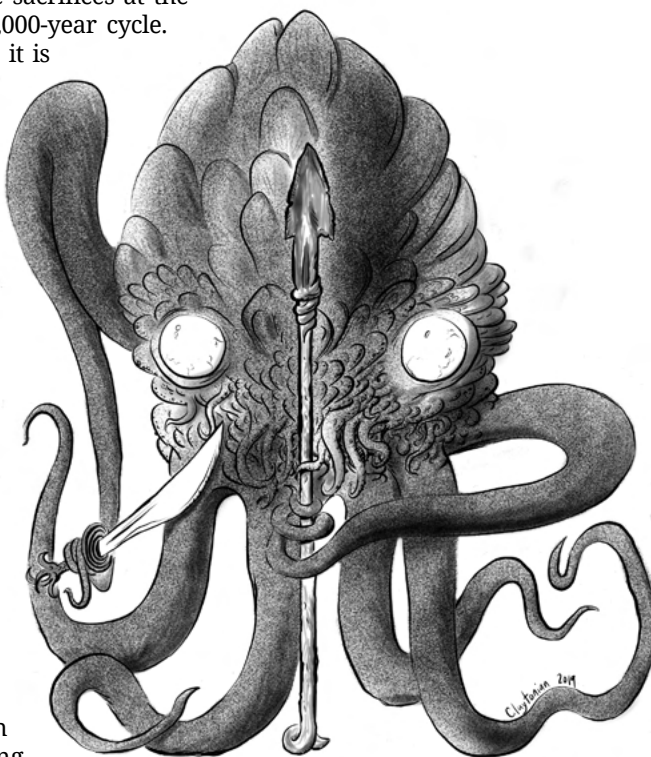
Lair: G: 50

The Blind Ones of Hreshkaggétl are rusty-brown demons are tall (over 7 feet) squid-like beings, with six writhing limbs. They also possess large, white saucer-like eyes with which they can see, leading to much debate among sorcerers as to the nature of the blindness alluded to in their common name. They reek of rotting flesh, requiring most creatures within a 3" radius of them to make a saving throw versus poison or become nauseated (–2 to hit) for 1–6 rounds. In combat, they make use of scimitars and spears, often employing two or three of these weapons at a time, with no penalty to their attack rolls. They are poor sorcerers; it is a rare example of the kind who can cast any spells and those that do are usually restricted to Group I bonus spells at most.

The Blind Ones revere the mighty Durritlámish-aligned demon lord Kurritlakál the Eater of Skins, whose image they often bear before them in battle and to whom they make sacrifices at the conclusion of every 350,000-year cycle.

Like many demon races, it is possible to bargain with the Blind Ones, exacting services from them in exchange for gems, gold, and copper weapons and armour. They can also be enticed by the brains of the recently deceased, which they have been observed to consume on the battlefield.

Though minor demons, the Blind Ones of Hreshkaggétl are nevertheless reputed to know the secret names of Kurritlakál. Sorcerers wishing to command the mighty Prince of the Tenth Circle therefore treat with them in hopes of learning these mysteries.



SRÜKÁRUM

Number Appearing: 1

Hit Dice: 20 (120 hit points)

Armour Class: 1

Treasure: E:80

Movement: 12"

Lair: nil

Known as the Lord of the Legions of the Despairing Dead, the Castellan of the Citadel of Sighs, and the Warder of the Gates of Skulls, among many other sobriquets, dread Srükárum is one of the mightiest demons to serve Sáрку. He appears as a skull-faced warrior in copper and gold armour, bearing a two-handed axe +4, which he can use twice per round and whose every hit

drains one experience level from its target. Residents of Jakálla claim this great demon in fact resides beneath that city, on a lonely island in the midst of the subterranean River of Death, but that is of course only a local legend.

Being of the substance of Sáрку and the essence of Durritlámish, Srükárum serves both deities with fervour. He relishes combat of all sorts, particularly against the forces of Stability. Anyone attempting to summon him for any other purpose will suffer his wrath. In addition to being a mighty combatant in his own right, Srükárum can summon a small portion of the Despairing Dead to Téकुmel. These frightful undead have armour class 2 and 3+1 Hit Dice each, moving at a speed of 9". Generally, Srükárum summons 10-100 of the Despairing Dead, the number varying based on the purpose for which he was invoked.



SSÜSSÜ

Number Appearing: 1

Hit Dice: 12 (72 hit points)

Armour Class: 2

Treasure: F:70

Movement: 18"

Lair: nil

Known as the Eater of the Dead and the Lord of the Twenty-Ninth Circle (according to the schema of *The Book of Ebon Bindings*), Ssüssü is a demon of the substance of Durritlámish and the essence of Sárku. He appears as a huge snake-like beast, with an elongated jaw filled with rows of teeth like chips of rock. Overseer of Lord Sárku's hells, Ssüssü always acts in the interests of his master and can never be swayed to behave in any other way. Further, this demon lord is known to be very difficult to control once summoned, which is why only the most puissant — or foolhardy — sorcerers dare to invoke him.

Ssüssü possesses many talents, the first of which is the ability to fly (like the Group III spell), which he can grant to others. The demon lord can also cast *paralysis* and *withering* (both Group II spells) at will. He can also instill courage in others, making them immune to fear and doubling their hit points for one day. Finally, Ssüssü can create a permanent state of antipathy between any two individuals. This state prevents their ever working together amicably and indeed instills violence in the targets should they ever be forced to do so. Such antipathy cannot be revoked by any known means; only Ssüssü can end it.



GROUP III BONUS SPELL: THE DEMON

The Blind Ones of Hreshkaggétl are a good example of an appropriately powerful demonic race that can be summoned through the use of this spell by priests and magic-users devoted to Lord Sárku or his cohort, Durritlámish. Worshipers of other gods and cohorts may summon other demon types (e.g. the Aerial Ones of Tu'unékélmú for Dlamélísh or the Entities of Light for Hnálla). Future issues of *The Excellent Travelling Volume* will describe more demon races for use with this bonus spell, in addition to others to be used opponents, antagonists, and possibly even allies of the player characters in their adventures).

Amulets (Addition)

Section 1400 of *Empire of the Petal Throne* details twelve magical amulets for inclusion in treasure troves. In my opinion, that is far too few. What follows are fourteen more, some drawn from other Tékumel writings and others wholly original to this issue, with the intention of broadening the types of amulets available to Tekumeláni adventurers. Future issues of *The Excellent Travelling Volume* will no doubt provide yet more examples of this type of enchanted treasure.

AMULET OF UTMOST ALARM

This amulet, shaped like a tiny hand of greenish metal, gives its wearer a sharp electrical jolt when it is brought within 30 feet of a temple, demon, high priest, or artifact of one of the Pariah Deities. What other information the amulet provides under such circumstances is determined by a percentile roll: 01-10 = the amulet reveals the exact nature of the target (location, level, etc.); 11-60 = the amulet operates normally; 61-80 = the amulet works but gives such a jolt that the wearer is knocked unconscious for 1–6 turns; 81-100 = the amulet does not work, unbeknownst to the wearer.



AMULET OF PEACEFUL EXISTENCE AMONGST THE POWERS

This amulet is a greyish-silver disc about the size of a coin or a thumbnail. The wearer is protected against hostile spells, eyes, and other damage-dealing magical effects as though he were a Level XI magic-user. Thus, his saving throws are those of that class and level rather than his own (see Sec. 2000 of the *EPT* rulebook). However, should the wearer ever fail a saving throw while wearing it, the amulet vanishes in a puff of dust and reddish flame, dealing him 1–6 points of damage.

AMULET OF THE DENIAL OF DOMINATION

This amulet is an irregular white stone with arcane glyphs carved on it. The wearer saves against mind-controlling spells such as *calm*, *control person*, *fear*, *madness*, *mind-bar*, *sleep*, and the like as if he were a Level XI magic-user.



AMULET OF AERIAL INVISIBILITY

This amulet is composed of two 3-inch long metal Vringálu wings; the presence of this metal prevents a magic-user or priest from wearing it while casting spells. While worn, the amulet confers invisibility to creatures flying more than 10 feet above the ground. This protection only applies to one who is moving at a slow speed or standing still. If the wearer attempts to attack a flying creature, the amulet's protection is negated.

AMULET OF IMPERVIOUS DWELLING AMONG INSECTS

The wearer of this green cylinder is ignored by all biting, stinging insects found on Tékmel's northern hemisphere. Some insects on the southern continent (see issue #8 of *The Excellent Travelling Volume* for information on one of its regions) are rumoured to be attracted to rather than repelled by this amulet. Activating it requires reading aloud an inscription in Bednallján Salarvyáni.

AMULET OF THE BLESSING OF THE EMERALD LADY

This amulet is an emerald heart on a delicate necklace of malachite beads. The wearer always looks and feels 10 years younger than his present age so long as he wears it. Should the amulet be worn for more than 10 months (in total), the wearer will look and feel 10 years older than his present age if he ever removes or loses it.

AMULET OF REPELLING INCLEMENCIES

This amulet is shaped like a raindrop made of a clear, transparent stone that bears an inscription in Llyáni, which must be spoken to activate it. The amulet disperses a storm within 1 mile of the wearer for 4–8 hours, after which time the storm returns unless the local weather has changed. This amulet can only be used once every 24 hours. In magic poor areas (e.g. the Tsoléi Isles), the amulet can only be used once per week.

AMULET OF JOYFUL ADVENT INTO PARADISE

This amulet is a bright yellow diamond dedicated to Lord Belkhánu. Therefore, only worshippers of the gods of Stability can make use of it; followers of Change gain no benefit from it. When slain, the wearer's spirit-soul goes directly to Belkhánu's Paradise and cannot be turned into an undead creature. No paralysing or decaying spells of Lords Sáрку or Durritlámish affect him, but, should he die, he is harder to revive since his spirit-soul will not wish to leave Paradise. Should the wearer be slain while wearing this amulet, a roll of 01–50 on percentile dice is necessary when any form of revivification is attempted. Failure on this roll indicates that he can never be restored to life by any means.

AMULET OF VOYAGING BEYOND THE WORLDS

This rare amulet is a diamond-shaped crystal of obsidian. If squeezed by the wearer, it transports him and 2–12 other beings within a 10-foot circle to an uninhabited world covered with tall, green grass, trees, harmless herbivores, and gentle breezes. The travellers can rest here peacefully until the wearer squeezes the amulet again. The party is then transported to another Plane, as determined by a percentile dice roll: 01–20 = they return to the same place whence they departed but one hour later; 21–40 = they travel to another location in the present Five Empires, as decided by the referee; 41–70 = they travel to a region covered with wet, lush jungle and filled with ferocious beasts and deadly serpents; 71–90 = they are marooned on a cold and windy island in the southern ocean near the land of the nonhuman Urúnén (see issue #10 of *The Excellent Travelling Volume*); 91–100 = they travel to a ruined city occupied by parties of murderous Hokún (see pp. 7–10). All of these are places on contemporary Tékumel and the party must contrive to get back to their homes as best they can. After one use (i.e. a journey and a return trip), the amulet disappears in a puff of purplish smoke.



AMULET OF DEVOTION OF BEASTS

This is a spiral-shaped carving of polished black wood. It causes one Zrné (see Sec. 1128 of the *EPT* rulebook) to become a loyal follower of the wearer, attacking his foes, guiding him to water, etc. The Zrné will never leave the forest, however, and if the wearer departs, the great creature dies, disconsolate and lonely. If the wearer attempts to dominate a second Zrné, there is only a 60% chance it will succeed. A third (and last) attempt has only a 40% chance of success. If a second or third attempt fails, the amulet crumbles to powder. Since this amulet is made of wood, it is susceptible to fire, worms, water-logging, etc. If the amulet is lost or destroyed, any Zrné controlled by the wearer then attacks him.



AMULET OF TURNING AWAY THE DEADLY BONE-TIPPED SPEAR

This amulet is an arrowhead made of some white bone-like substance. While worn, it protects its wearer from any sharp blade made from bone, flint, stone, glass, or wood, including swords, daggers, spears, and missiles. It has no effect upon clubs, maces, or thrown stones, nor is it useful against Chlén-hide, copper, bronze, iron, steel, or other metals. It can only be destroyed by a direct blow from a mace or other blunt weapon.

AMULET OF THE LUMINANCE OF THE SCARLET MASTER

This amulet is a tiny vial of glass that appears to be filled with bright red flame. If displayed, it lights up an area 5 feet in diameter around the wearer, who can light it or put it out with a thought. This dim light is sufficient to see one's way, read an inscription, etc. However, it is not hot and can be hidden by a hand or a garment. There is a 30% chance of extinguishing it permanently if a *light* spell or similar magical effect is cast upon the wearer. The amulet is otherwise unbreakable.

AMULET OF SORCEROUS SUPREMACY

This uncommon amulet looks like an irregularly shaped stone of translucent grey. If worn by a magic-user or priest (or adventurer or shaman, if those optional classes are used – see *The Excellent Travelling Volume*, issues 1 and 2 respectively), there is a chance of immediately regenerating any spells he casts. The base chance is 20% for any spells derived from specific professional skills (e.g. *cure light wounds* or *telepathy* for a priest or *illusion* or *telekinesis* for a magic user), 15% for Group I bonus spells, 10% for Group II bonus spells, and 5% for Group III bonus spells. This base chance can be increased by the bonus to the chance of spells working specified in Sec. 414 of the *Empire of the Petal Throne* rulebook. Thus, a character with a Psychic Ability score of 65 has a 25% of immediately regenerating a spell from his specific professional skills, 20% chance of doing so for Group I spells, and so on, while one with a Psychic Ability score of 92 has a 30% chance of immediately regenerating a spell from his specific professional skills, etc.

Unlike most other amulets, the *amulet of sorcerous supremacy* is powered much like an eye. The number of charges is determined by percentile dice. When a spell is regenerated, one or more charges is expended: one charge for a specific professional skill, two charges for a Group I spell, three charges for a Group II spell, and four charges for a Group III spell. Like an eye, this amulet can be recharged by means of a *thoroughly useful eye*.

AMULET OF IMMEDIATE INVIGORATION

This amulet appears to be a tiny crystalline flask or container, inside of which can be seen a quantity of blue liquid. Upon taking damage from any source, the wearer is instantly healed for 1–6 points of damage. This effect cannot be limited or controlled, except by removal of the amulet. The amulet can only heal a total of 100 points of damage to any wearer before it crumbles to dust. The referee should roll percentile dice to determine how many points remain to the amulet's healing.

The Tower of Jayúritlal

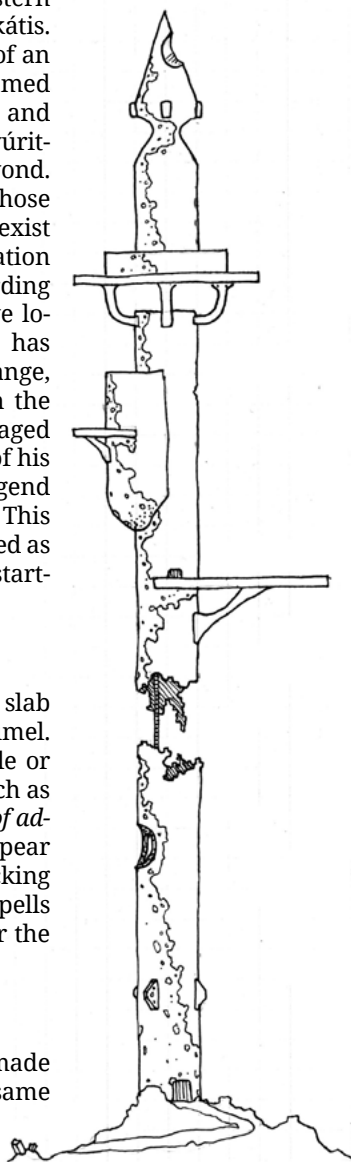
The Tower of Jayúritlal is legendary in the eastern provinces of Tsolyánu, from Fasiltúm down to Sokátis. Tales claim that the structure was once the abode of an Engsvanyáli (or perhaps Bednálljan) sorcerer named Jayúritlal, who also figures in the stories of Qiyór and Wába. Like those more well-known wizards, Jayúritlal was renowned as a traveller of the Planes Beyond. Thanks to the magic Jayúritlal acquired on one of those planes, the tower that bears his name is said to exist only partially on Téकुmel, which is why its location varies: the tower moves from place to place according to the unpredictable connection between its native locale and Téकुmel. Over the centuries, the tower has appeared in the Desert of Eyági, the Chayéngar Range, on the Hundránu Rise, and, most recently, within the Forest of Gilrayá. The referee is, therefore, encouraged to place it wherever it is most useful to the events of his own campaign. The specific details of Jayúritlal's legend can likewise be tailored to suit the referee's needs. This locale is offered with the expectation that it be altered as required, with the details that follow being but a starting point rather than the final word.

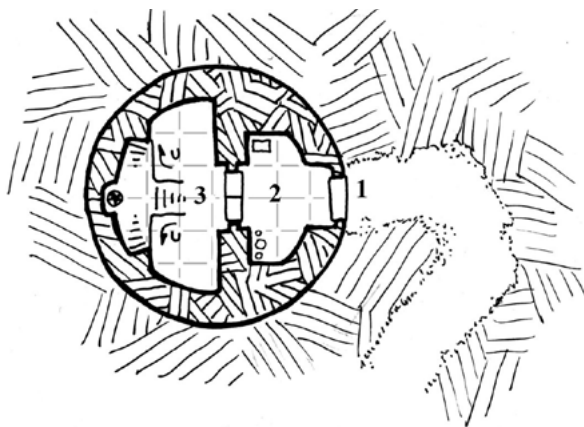
1. ENTRANCE

The entrance to the tower is blocked by a large slab made from an orange-red stone not native to Téकुmel. The slab is not a door per se, as there is no handle or obvious means to slide it away. The use of spells such as door control or dispel magic or devices like an *eye of advancing through portals* will cause the slab to disappear for 1–4 rounds, after which it reappears, again blocking the way into the tower. Additional applications of spells or devices will cause it to disappear once more, for the aforementioned duration.

2. VESTIBULE

This open area contains three empty containers made of a hard, reddish wood and a cabinet made of the same





material. The cabinet contains two finely made cloaks of *Gúdrú*-cloth. Embroidered on the inside of each cloak is an incantation in Llyáni that, if spoken by the wearer, enables him to cast the Group III spell *change self*. The spell effect lasts only as long as the wearer wishes and the cloak is worn. If the cloak is removed before the wearer ends the effect, he must make a successful saving throw versus spells or remain stuck in his changed form (only the priest skill *remove curse* can undo this).

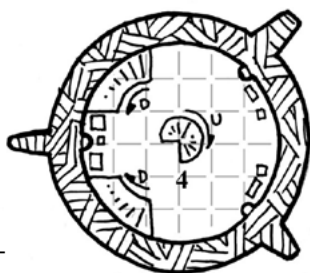
Two large double doors of the same hard, reddish wood as the room's furnishings bar the way to the next room. Like the stone slab in area 1, they are magically barred and any spells or devices used to unlock them work for only 1–4 rounds.

3. STAIRWAY

Resting upon a raised area is a stone statue of a cross-legged man, peering up through a sextant. Characters with the Scholar original skill or worshippers of Belkhánu may recognise him as an aspect of that deity known as Mrisó, “the Knower of the Planes.” On opposite sides of the statue are two sets of stairs, leading upwards.

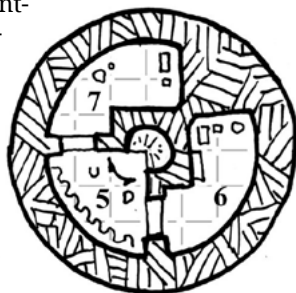
4. WORK AREA

Within this open chamber are a half-dozen tables of varying sizes, all made from the reddish wood found in the rooms below. Several sport colourful stains of unknown origin. In the centre of the room is spiral staircase made of a bluish metallic substance that is pleasantly warm to the touch. A frightful howling can be heard from above (see area 6).



5. RED ROOM

The walls, floor, and ceiling of this chamber are painted red. Its outermost wall is covered by a yellow curtain fashioned of something akin to *Firyá*-silk but clearly much more resilient, as it resists cutting by non-enchanted blades and retards non-magical fire. The curtain obscures an unsettling mosaic depicting several dozen glaring eyes and a gaping maw. The mosaic functions as the Group I spell, *madness* against anyone viewing it. The howling heard in area 4 is even louder in this chamber; it clearly emanates from area 6.



6. HOWLER LAIR

Three Hurú'u occupy this chamber. They attack the first being to enter the room.

Hurú'u (3) (AC 7 MV 9" HD 2+3 HP 12 (×2), 11

The creatures guard a small hoard of treasure, consisting of 5321 Rachár (Bednálljan silver coins worth approximately 2128 Tsolyáni Káitars for their metal alone, possibly much more to collectors and antiquarians), 21 Suór (Engsvanyáli gold coins worth approximately 3150 Káitars), and two gems (worth 100 and 500 Káitars), all held in a wooden chest.

7. EMPTY ROOM

Aside from some wooden debris, this chamber is devoid of contents.

8. SKELETAL REMAINS

Lying on the floor are the skeletons of three small winged beings, possibly Hláka. Judging from the state of the bones, it is unlikely that they died longer than a few years ago. Each of the skeletons has a leather harness with small pockets containing coloured stones and pieces of glass but nothing else of obvious value.

9. DAMAGED CHAMBER

This room no longer has a door and its contents, whatever they once were, have been reduced to detritus.

10. SHATTERED ROOM

A large hole in this room's outer wall gapes open, exposing it to the elements. Alert characters will notice strange spoor in the chamber, along with more Hláka bones.



11. NEST

A small number of Gerednyá have established a nest in this room and will attack to defend it.

Gerednyá (6) (AC 4 MV 3/18" HD 3 HP 14, 13, 10 (×2), 7(×2))

12. RUINED LEVEL

This entire section of the tower has been thoroughly ruined. The spiral staircase is broken and does not continue upwards. All the individual chambers have suffered severe weathering. A rope ladder extending into the upper reaches of the tower ends here. Climbing it takes one into area 14.



13. SHRINE

In addition to a set of stairs leading upwards, this room contains three plinths on which rest wooden statues of the following: a gout of flame; a tall, cloaked figure with a cylindrical, horned helmet; and a beautiful winged maiden. Characters with the Scholar original skill or who are worshippers of Qón will know that they represents three different aspects of the god, namely Qazór “He Who Flies Beyond the Pylons,” Huróth “the Watcher at the Gate,” and Nekkudláké “the One Who Sees the Paths” respectively.

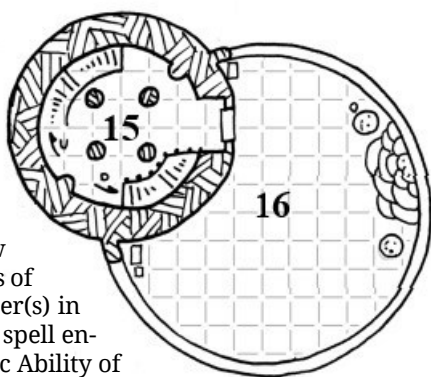
14. DAMAGED SHRINE

Like area 13, this was once a shrine, complete with two plinths on which rested two statues. They have long since disappeared, perhaps due to the damage to the floor of the room. The top of the rope ladder from area 12 is here.



15. CHAMBER OF THE PILLARS

Four stone pillars dominate this room. The pillars are made from a black stone. The pillars periodically crackle with red electricity. Anyone who touches a pillar takes 1–6 points of damage (no saving throw). Anyone stands in the centre of the four pillars must make a saving throw versus spells: failure indicates 3–18 points of damage, while success grants the character(s) in the centre the ability to cast the Group III spell energy bolt once per day so long as a Psychic Ability of 41 or more is possessed.



16. LEDGE

This large, open area is accessible only by means of a magically barred door in area 15. Like all the other doors in the tower, its enchantment can be defeated by the appropriate spells or devices for 1–4 rounds before locking again. The ledge itself is now home to colony of Gerednyá (a few of which can be found in area 11 below).

Gerednyá (11) (AC 4 MV 3/18" HD 3 HP 17, 14 (×3), 13 (×2), 12, 9 (×2), 8, 6)

17. SACKED LIBRARY

In addition to four ornamental pillars of the same stone as in area 15 below (though non-magical), this room contains a number of wooden bookshelves whose contents were long ago stolen. Hidden behind a false panel of one of the bookshelves is a copy of Púrohlan Znamrîshsha Kagékte, "The Book of the Unnamed God." Along one wall there is a secret door allowing access from area 18.

18. STAIRWAY

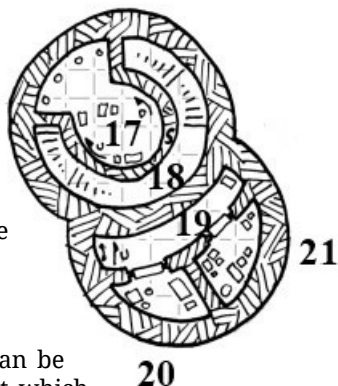
Two sets of stairs occupy this area.

19. CORRIDOR

This area is accessible only by means of a ladder in area 22 above. There is a wooden storage box at one end of the area containing a dozen empty bone scroll tubes.

20. STORAGE AREA

Five wooden boxes and chests of varying sizes can be found here. All but the largest are empty. The largest, which



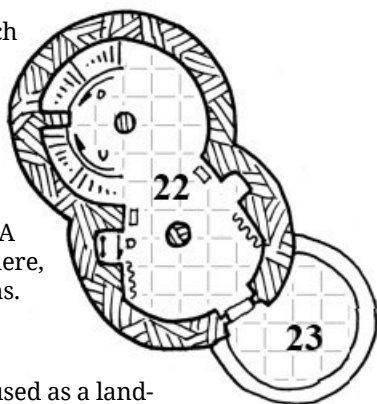
is reinforced with metal, holds the mummified corpse of what seems to be a Qól, but is in fact an inhabitant of one of the Demon Planes associated with Lord Ksárul.

21. STORAGE AREA

The door to this chamber is magically barred, like others in this tower. There are ten wooden containers here, all of which contain carefully preserved and flora and fauna from locations across Tékmel, including some very far removed from the Five Empires. The containers also contain ledgers, written in Engsvanyáli, which identify the remains in extreme detail.

22. NEXUS OBSERVATORY

Two pillars of black stone stand here. Each crackles with bluish electricity. Touching either one grants knowledge of nearby nexus points that lead to other planes beyond Tékmel. The locations of these nexus points are always places the person touching the pillar recognises. Knowledge of where the nexus points lead is not granted, however. A ladder leading down to area 19 is located here, as are two threadbare blue *Firyá*-silk curtains.

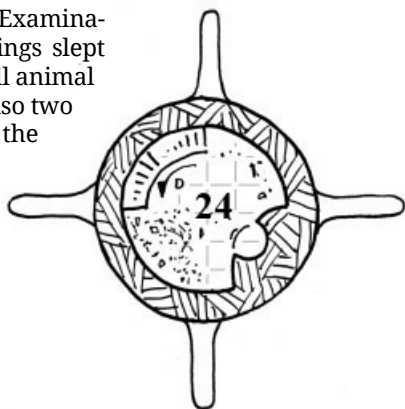


23. AIR CAR LANDING AREA

Though it is now empty, this area was once used as a landing pad for a Chariot of the Gods owned by Jayúritlal.

24. DESPOILED CHAMBER

This room is filled with refuse and debris. Examination of it shows signs that one or more beings slept and ate here (e.g. a tattered blanket and small animal bones) in the not-so-distant past. There are also two Tsolyáni Hlásh coins laying in a corner of the room. In another section is a vertical tube (without a ladder or other obvious means of ascent) leading up to area 25.



25. CHOKE POINT

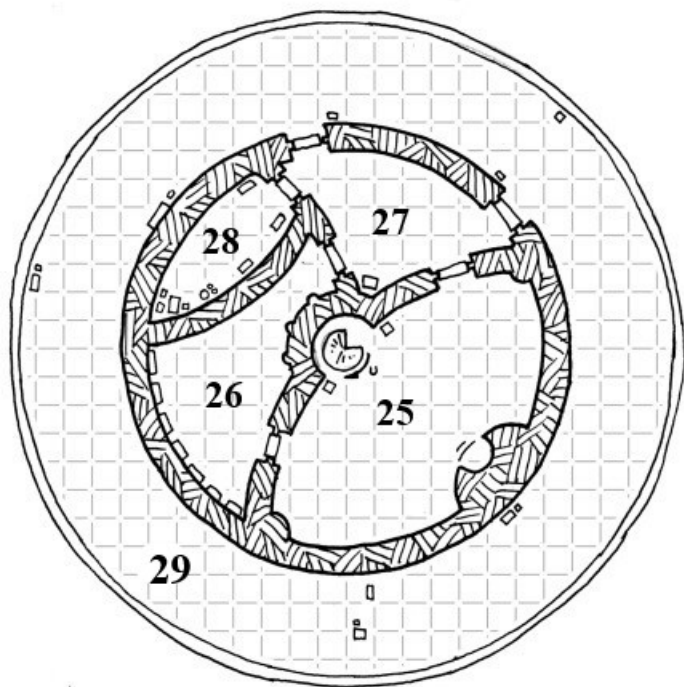
A pair of Ru'ún guard this area, attacking anyone who ascends from below. Ru'ún (2) (AC 2 MV 15" HD 11 HP 47, 32)

26. GALLERY

Seven gold reliefs decorate the far way of this room. Each relief depicts strange alien beings (many of them non-humanoid) engaged in various activities, such as warfare, exploration, magical endeavours, etc. The reliefs are not magical but are extremely valuable, being worth in excess of 10,000 Káitars each for their materials alone.

27. SPEAKER ROOM

This large chamber is empty, except for a small golden image of an animal headed being resting atop of a wooden stand. The image is a version of the Speaker to Heaven, enabling its user to gain +5 percent to the chances of Divine Intervention. The device has 27 charges and an indicator in Bednálljan Salarvyáni.



28. HOARD

The door to this chamber is magically locked, like the others elsewhere in the tower. However, unlike the others, if anyone touches this door before first dispelling its lock, he will suffer 2–12 points of shock damage (save against spells for half). There are five metal and ceramic containers within, whose contents are as follows: an *abominable eye of detestation* (40 charges, indicator in Engsvanyáli); an *amulet of utmost alarm*; a *wondrous enhancer of jewels*; a scroll of *remove curse* and *cure serious wounds*; a *warhammer* +2/+1; and Bednálljan and Engsvanyáli coins totalling 9000 Káitars.

The chamber is guarded by an Nshé that only attacks if an unauthorised person removes any of the aforementioned from its container.

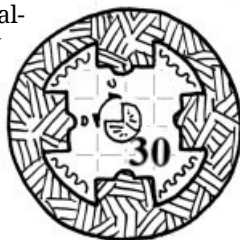
Nshé (AC 2 MV 15" HD 10 HP 35)

29. UPPER RING

The upper ring of the tower is protected from the elements by means of a magical shield that still functions. The shield also prevents anyone from falling from the ring.

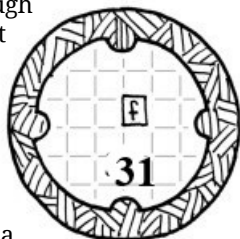
30. MEDITATION CHAMBER

There are four – the sacred number of Lord Belkhánu – alcoves in this room, each hidden behind a golden yellow curtain of heavy cloth. Behind each curtain is a highly polished mirror. If all four curtains are drawn back and a light brought into this chamber, a priest of Belkhánu or Qón may then meditate here, gaining access to the magic-user professional skill medium as described in Sec. 433 of the *Empire of the Petal Throne* rulebook.



31. SECRET CHAMBER

The topmost chamber of the tower is accessible only through a hidden door in the ceiling of area 30. The door is not locked as such but is difficult to open due to the fact that a mummified body wearing brocaded ritual vestments rests upon it. The body is that of a priest of Belkhánu who, while his shadow-self was exploring the Planes Beyond, became lost and his physical body died due to lack of nourishment. The body has a scroll of *seeing other planes*, *extra-vision*, and *fly* (written in Engsvanyáli) and a *dagger* +2.



The Roads of Avanthár (Part 1)

by David A. Lemire

Deep within the Shrine of the Heart of Hrógga, a group of ritualists gathered around a delicately inlaid, flat-topped, wooden chest. It had not been found there, but rather brought to the important locale. The Heart of Hrógga was an architectural wonder of immense limestone slabs (a Dzór's height, each one) originally erected under Tuléng, but now buried deep by the custom of Dítlána. Military men conducted their initiations and promotion ceremonies there, whatever the discomfort (or even danger). And so, the group had come there with its trophy.

The tíu-wood of the chest, around which all gathered, shone dry and stone-like, its lid displaying a red-brown hieroglyph in ancient Bednálljan. Young captain Héttukeng hiChaishyáni squinted through the disgusting murk, aiming to set his will, in ceremonial union with his comrades, against that of the evil glyph – an elaborate “Y” in the ancient script of legendary Queen Nayári's court.

Héttukeng's supposed superior in the chamber had explained something about the rune, but soldiers didn't listen to scholars. It was beneath the dignity of one who lived by the sword to credit such – and an Aridáni on top of it all.

The lector-priestess, Nrinéla híJarásh (of a clan too formidable to counter), was twice Héttukeng's age. She wore ritual vestments of heavy *gydru*. Their deep scarlet colour looked grey in the torchlight and smoke. The impatient Kási attempted once more to focus his concentration. His black eyes bore down into the hieroglyph, inked in *hurumón* and human blood he'd been told, but the image, resembling a leftward gaping jaw or claw, seemed to squirm, seemed to snap.

Héttukeng would have liked to smash the thing open and be done, but the sorceress had warned all that the container was protected by a charm woven long ages ago by minions, at the height of their power, of the despised Tlokiriqáluyal.

Her incantations having reached a crescendo and then having portentously ceased, Nrinéla híJarásh gestured to Héttukeng and his fellow captains.

“Take care,” hissed the lector-priestess.

Héttukeng and his three rival Kási took up steel bars and, working in the gloom, pried the glyph-haunted lid loose from its basing. Nríga híKétkolel, a clan-cousin of Nrinéla's and Kási of the Third Cohort, slipped his hand under the lid's edge, but Héttukeng did the unexpected, using his steel bar's

ingenious crook to snatch Nríga's prize from his grip and flipping it into his own.

Héttukeng gave a short laugh, "*Kýni-kh babáil másun, tlasézhme!*"

Héttukeng's competitor for promotion to Drítlan flared, his nostrils wide, his eyes in darkness aglow at the 'hawks tossing snakes' reference.

"Hsst!" interrupted Nrinéla. She then gingerly peeled aside the Vringá-lu-membrane that protected the rectangular object beneath. Reading the book's title, in a script no right-minded man would stoop to learn, the weird lector-priestess gazed up. No smile spread across her face; rather, an enigmatic look, one that serially took in each of the captains around her – Kási of the Fourth Cohort, Kshétra hiKharsámra; Kási of the Fifth Cohort, Váressu hiTánkolel; Nríga; and, lastly, Héttukeng himself.

To Héttukeng, the woman's eyes seemed to say to all, "goodbye".

Superstitious as are all soldiers, Héttukeng jerked, banging the cursed-by-sigil wooden lid against the stone altar beneath the crate. This caused Nrinéla's large eyes to swiftly sharpen.

"Break that", she ordered, "break that at once, and thoroughly too."

"No," answered Héttukeng, who then marvelled at his own audacity, at how the word seemed to spring forth, unbidden.

Strange Nrinéla saw it all.

"The Vurír will gobble you", she slowly replied.

"Until then, I claim it as my own," returned Héttukeng.

A silence followed.

Unequal to the tension, there in the dark and damp of the *tsuru'úm* beneath Báy Sý, one of Héttukeng's brothers-in-arms coughed.

"What of the book?" the brother asked.

Without taking her eyes from those of the impetuous Héttukeng, the eerie, psychical Nrinéla responded.

"It is", said she, "the *Púrohlan Znamrîshsha Kagékte*, a gift for our beloved emperor the equal of which our enemies can never marshal!"

"If", intoned Héttukeng, "we can get it to Avanthár.

A week later, beneath the blare and heat of Tuléng, the five former ritualists carried their trophy aboard an old and neglected-looking river galley. The square-prowed and three storied ship, with masts amidships and stern, rocked unsteadily in Pà-Setlkolúm Harbour. Similar galleys north at Asométl Port and south at the Port of Swords boarded identical groups. All would depart Báy Sý at midday: one to sail south, one east, and the one with Héttukeng to sail north toward Avanthár.

Having swapped ritual vestments for disguises, Héttukeng and his comrades lugged heavy bales of trade fabrics aboard the blunt rivercraft and quickly ducked through an open double-door facing the bow.

Once below-decks, Héttukeng set down his stacked bolts of heavily brocade-d *fírya*-cloth and, with a single hand, directed Nríga's attention to a mid-sized object wrapped about by, and thus hidden within, one of his lengths of rich material. Nríga's stomach lurched and he jerked the object further free. A new exquisitely-crafted oval shield hove into view.

The freshly re-lacquered Bednálljan Vurír stared redly forth from the shield's central boss.

Nrinéla, sensing something amiss, leaned in. She stared incredulously at the magic symbol for many, many heartbeats.

"You've been to Hláru's", Nríga rasped.

"And did he ever charge me to get it done on time!", Héttukeng affirmed.

After the two captains traded these words, Nrinéla whipped the brocade back over the blood-red maw.

"It sees us", she warned. "Are you two so very ardent for death that you alert our enemies to our presence here?"

"It's dead. Or what was all the mummery about last month? The preparation. Mental exercises. Dragging that altar stone below ground. Incantations, incantations, and more incantations. We drained its essence", demanded Héttukeng.

Nrinéla clucked, "So you *do* listen."

"Nothing escapes him, cousin; it's not a good thing," offered Nríga.

Nrinéla surveyed Héttukeng's smile.

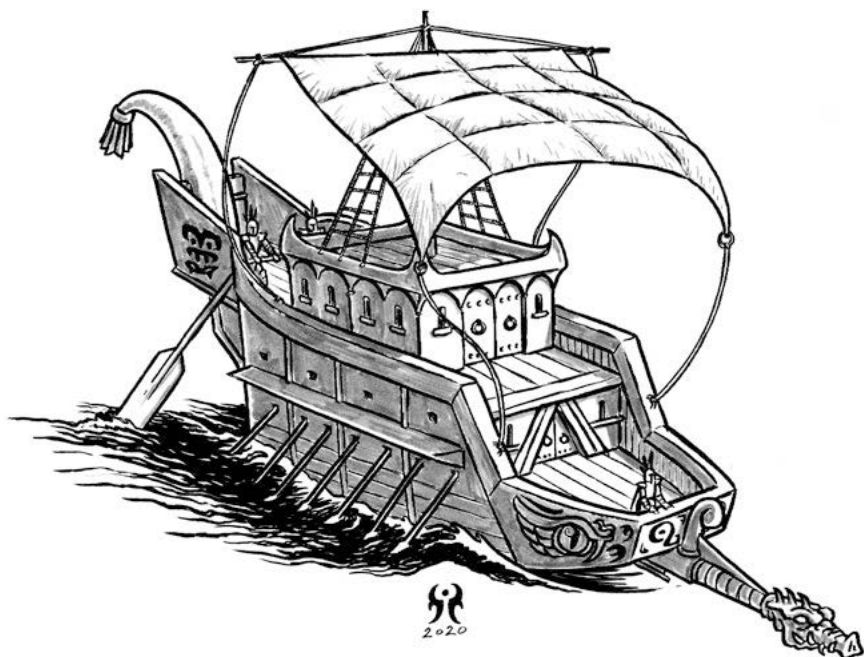
"Stop. You're pleased with yourself, but you only 'half-listen.' We drained its essence, but, when I ordered you to pay off its substance, you balked," Nrinéla declared, flush with righteous certainty.

Héttukeng riled, "I balked at nothing."

Billows of dust swept passed as Kshétra and Váressu threw down their burdens. They sensed the electric air and paused, smiling at the prospect of their companion giving the bookworm another upbraiding.

Outnumbered by four block-headed soldiers, Nrinéla shoved the fabric bale concealing the *Book of the Unnamed God* underneath Héttukeng's newly re-fashioned shield. She then straightened.

"Indeed, at 'no-thing'," the lector-priestess harped, after which she exited to further the imposture of their being mere textile merchants. Her clan-cousin followed instantly after.



Héttukeng, Kshétrá and Váressu grinned at each other and considered the treasure at their feet.

“Who believes that spies will judge us merchants?” asked Kshétrá.

“I have steel,” admitted Váressu.

“So too have I, and shield,” finished Héttukeng.

The three captains of the First Legion of Ever-Present Glory adopted the carriage and posture of civilians as eight galley slaves, naked except for a breechclout, entered and passed meekly overhead, taking their oarsmen’s stations.

Behind them, but careful of his dignity, there came Nríga. He stood there in the hatch, appraising his fellow officers for a heartbeat. The costume of each included a pleated knee-length skirt, sleeveless vest, belt and tabard.

The sun-darkened and hard-muscled men beneath the almost too ordinary costumes, however, could never be mistaken for anyone other than highly trained soldiers. Even his own keen awareness of the galley slaves told all with eyes to see that they four were no peddlers of upholstery. Seeing the futility of disguise, Nríga straightened his shoulders and gave Héttukeng a slap on the back.

“Forget her,” he chuckled, “It’s not as if our enemies need your plunder there to signal them we’re First Legion and on errand to the Emperor.”

Váressu straightened too.

“Three days to Avanthár,” he speculated.

“Close to the mountain, we’re safe,” added Kshétra, craning around to look out of the middle deck doorway northward.

Héttukeng voiced everyone’s thought: “Which means that tomorrow night, Kéttukal’s foes make their move.”

From that moment to the nightfall of the day all agreed the assault would arrive, the four young captains had toiled. After nearly a month of horrid who-knows-what under odd Nrinéla’s direction, and then a further week of remaining out-of-sight while First Legion Command arranged decoy galleys and escorts, Héttukeng, Nríga, Kshétra and Váressu strove to return their muscles to proper tone. They commandeered the after deck for this enterprise, and had gone so far as to bind all their bolts of rich brocade to the rear mast for a training pell. This padded dummy they attacked with the flats of their steel swords, attempting to outdo one another in the number of strikes they could deliver in a brief interval of time. Héttukeng, as usual, had been first to shed his shopkeeper’s vest. Now his chest and limbs shone with perspiration, even though the sun had begun its descent behind the Berenánga Plateau to the west.

The youth gazed toward the northeast, where the knees and feet of Bý Trántis Peak clawed toward the Mssúma River. In that direction wound two ancient riverbeds and the Right Bank Canal of (fabled Bednálljan emperor) Ssirandár III. Héttukeng felt displeased remembering this, for from that direction also approached their Ssirandár-descended Royalist Party enemies.

Driving his breath out of his mouth, and then very slowly inhaling through his nose, Héttukeng tried to enjoy how the horizontal rays of Tuléng cast the ridges and valleys of Bý Trántis in rich amber and bronzed black. He recalled that it had been he who had scored the highest number of strikes against the pell.

Although he could not see her, Héttukeng could sense the *hlákme*-dominated Nrinéla behind him, under cover of the midships canopy. Without deigning to turn, he offered a challenge in return for her silent spite.

“Tuléng wanes; you won’t boil away, so come out and join us, Lecturer,” he advised, and then winked at his comrades.

Nrinéla laughed, “You think I avoid sun?”

“We’ve listened to your lectures,” continued Héttukeng, “Come out here and learn the secret of steel.”

Kshétra and Váressu joined in: “Make sacred the workspace!”, Kshétra in-

toned, aping the priestess' manner of speech.

"A matter of reaching through!", added Váressu.

Even Nrinéla's clan-cousin could not resist inserting himself into the conversation, laughing "All permanent spells require..."

Nríga tried to remember, but then looked to Héttukeng.

"Negating conditions' – Gods!", the prospective Drítlan bit out, in disgust at his rival's failure. Héttukeng then leaned, cruelly smiling, against the galley's rear gunwale and seized the priestess' eyes with his own.

Nrinéla's own eyes searched her clan-cousin's face as she emerged into the orange honey light of approaching sunset. She did not alter to meet Héttukeng's gaze until at his feet, or virtually...

"You said something about secrets", the priestess coldly observed.

Héttukeng addressed her relative, "Nríga hiKétkolel, of the Golden Sunburst Clan, hand that priceless blade of yours to your cousin."

Nríga paused a moment, then offered the pommel of his short-sword to Nrinéla, except she did the unexpected, breaking the cord of the kýni's-head amulet around her neck with a single savage rake of her left hand. Into her right, she accepted the heirloom sword. Then upon the rear gunwale, almost grazing Héttukeng, the Golden Sunburst Aridáni hammered her beautiful amulet – thump! crump! thump! – into an unrecognizable mass of sun-hued precious metal.

Héttukeng watched, interested.

Nrinéla whipped the cratered disk of gold into the Mssúma's mineral rich waters; then, flipping her cousin's weapon into reverse-grip with the unconsciousness of a duelling master, she whispered the ancient ritualized affirmation, "Otuléngba."

The ensuing lesson was over within a few minutes. Seized by a lightness of limb that she had only experienced while learning the sleight of Higher Mastery, Nrinéla drove Héttukeng where she would around the after deck and finally brought the handsome but arrogant swordsman to bay. Having avenged her clan's pride, she again allowed to his feet her foe.

For one instant, Héttukeng appeared as though he might whip his own dearly purchased steel short-sword into the river after Nrinéla's smashed amulet. But then, shame-faced, he stormed away forward, toward the lower deck hold.

"Enjoy the sunset, gentlemen," advised the lector-priestess.

"For it will likely be our last," concluded Nríga.

(to be concluded next issue)

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