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A Dish Best Savoured Cold

The indigenous races of Tékumel have good reason to hate mankind—even though mankind doesn’t know it!

Many thousands of years ago, when Tékumel was still located in this universe, spacefarers from Earth and elsewhere subjected it to terraforming with a view to colonization. How many species became extinct then, or were forced to traumatic adaptation simply to survive? The Hlüss and the Ssú were forced back into small enclaves, tolerated as amusing animals by the invaders.

Then disaster struck. For reasons still not known, the Tékumel system was sucked out of the cosmos at large. Along with her sun, two moons and sister planets, Tékumel was stranded in a starless mini-universe where new laws of nature applied. Civilization collapsed, and slowly the old life forms began to regain lost ground.

These write-ups present the Ssú and Hlüss for use in a *RuneQuest*-derived campaign. With minor adaptation they could be made to fit a *Stormbringer* game. (And since Elric and his cronies are indeed wont to hurtle like pinballs through the multiverse, why should they not end up on Tékumel?)

These creatures, like many life forms native to Tékumel, appear to have evolved from a six-legged ancestor. The upright stance has been achieved by changes in the back structure which ‘folded’ the forequarters up by almost ninety degrees. This is more fully advanced in the Ssú, which have four almost equidistantly spaced legs, whereas the Hlüss are far more obviously close to their forerunners’ six-legged stance. Other questions—whether these creatures are warm- or cold-blooded, whether they possess an internal skeletal structure, the nature of their nervous system, etc—remain to be asked, much less answered.

Hlüss: the Spawn of the Old Ones

Characteristics Average
STR 3D6 10–11
CON 4D6 14
SIZ 2D6+8 15
INT 2D6+6 13 Move 3
POW 3D6+2 12–13 Hit Points 15
DEX 3D6+1 11–12 Fatigue 25

This species inhabited Tékumel before the coming of man and other interstellar races. They hate mankind and most other intelligent nonhumans, but are friendly to their cousins the Ssú. Their segmented bodies are armoured with a chitinous exoskeleton that ranges from green-blue to black. They have three limpid black eyes set above a proboscis that conceals a row of razor-sharp mandibles. They walk on four legs, and have two arms and a long scorpion-like tail. The tail ends in a sting, injecting a venom of POT 12 which causes paralysis if it overcomes the victim’s CON. Popular belief has it that paralysed captives are carried off back to the Isle of the Hlüss, there to serve as food for the great Hlüss Mother and her young. The island is the main centre of Hlüss habitation, but others live on hive-like ships made from a stony bodily secretion. They are greedy for ancient technological devices and magic weaponry, and any party encountered will include at least one Hlüss Lord armed with "Eyes", etc, and having 91% skill or better in its preferred weapon (usually a sword shaped like a lightning bolt). The bodily secretion mentioned above is also used to cement gems onto the exoskeleton, making a Hlüss champion a glittering and magnificent sight.

Ssú: the Enemies of Man

Characteristics Average
STR 3D6+1 11–12
CON 4D6 14
SIZ 2D6+6 13
INT 2D6+6 13 Move 4
POW 4D6 14 Hit Points 14
DEX 3D6+1 11–12 Fatigue 26

This ancient race has been forced back into a small area to the east of Tsolyánu, but they yearn to retake the ancient stronghold of Ssúganar, in modern Pechano. The Ssú are mankind’s deadliest foes, still filled with bitter hatred because humans destroyed the original form of their planet. They are slender six limbed beings wrapped in what looks like grey web (actually a loose integument which is shed continually). The eyes are large and milky-white with no pupils, and the mouth is a stark black vertical slit; there are no other facial features. The usual stance for a Ssú is to stand upon its four rear limbs and hold weapons, etc, in its triple-digit hands. In this way it can stalk quietly or scuttle quickly in any direction. When fighting, however, Ssú sometimes rear up onto their back legs and use the middle pair of limbs to wield a shield or additional weapon. This allows the creature two blows (or parries) a round, though the second blow is made with reduced effectiveness. For battle they wear a simple harness of leather studded with metal plaques and bear black wood shields with raised copper bosses. Ssú smell like musty cinnamon and speak in a high chiming like the sound of bells. They are friendly to the Hlüss and may be neutral to Shunned Ones or Hlaáka.

Ssú parties range through the human nations seeking magical weaponry, passing unnoticed by border patrols. It is said that they may have access to some tunnel transportation system now lost to mankind.

Ssú are fearsome magic-users and every group met outside Ssú territory will include at least one with 75% or more in sorcery skills. Each Ssú also has the power to hypnotise 1-3 people, who must be within 10 metres and looking in the Ssú’s direction. This counts as its action for the round, and requires the Ssú to make a Hypnotist skill check. (Assume any Ssú met in human territory will be at 50%-plus in this special skill.) Victims are then hypnotised if the Ssú overcomes their POW, and will fight as the Ssú directs, being freed by the death of the Ssú who hypnotised them. Fortunately the neuter worker-fighters who make up the bulk of Ssú society do not possess this hypnotic ability.