

Issue Five | Summer 1995

Another Charge from Incomparable Understanding

Continuing Mark Wigoder-Daniel's interview for The Eye with Professor Barker.

The Eye: *Tell me some more about the recently revealed Princes and Princesses. Where do they come from and what are their affiliations?*

MARB: Ma'ala (who took the royal name of Arimela) was brought up in Avanthar and publicly declared in 2364. An accomplished sculptress, she worships Dilinala. Taksuru is a Ksarul-worshipping prince brought up by the Viridame lineage.

The Eye: *Can one can get Imperial citizenship without being a member of a clan?*

MARB: You can, but it is hard to do. It means you're not harassed by the authorities for residence permits, etc., when crossing borders.

The Eye: *What is the countryside like alongside the sakbé roads?*

MARB: Farmlands tend to be rice fields with raised borders on which chlen-carts can carry the produce. There are occasional copses of trees, etc. The area around Jakálla is a maze of small garden farms and plots. The produce is trucked into Jakálla for sale.

The Eye: *What is so special about the 'Jade Arch'?*

MARB: The people who pass through 'believe' they are loyal, so they must obey any order bearing the Imperial Seal—though in some cases it doesn't take. Many complex rituals are involved, tied in with astrological timings and so on. Passing through the Arch is a great honour.

The Eye: *Can you tell me more about the bureaucracy at Avanthar?*

MARB: There are several versions of the Chancery at Avanthar. The first deals with the public business of the Imperium. (This was the branch run by Lord Chaimira hiSsanmiren.) A massive collation of reports, edicts and letters goes in and out each day.

The second branch is the Court of Purple Robes, situated off the great Throne Room with speaking tubes connecting it with the Golden Tower. This branch advises the Emperor on matters of high policy—politics, foreign relations, etc. There are special links with some of the higher echelons of the Omnipotent Azure Legion. (The exact number of members of the Court of Purple Robes is unknown, but estimated at over thirty.)

The Omnipotent Azure Legion's intelligence-gathering arm is similarly confused. Those under Lord Chaimira form a massive network of spies. Those linked to the Court of Purple Robes counter real threats to Imperial security.

The Eye: *What are the principal virtues admired by the Tsolyáni?*

MARB: Noble action dictates you should behave as you say you will behave. Be honest and straightforward. Laziness and venality are disapproved of. Gamblers who venerate Niyunen, the Giver of Unexpected Wealth (ne of the aspects of Hrihayal—Ed.) should spend their money, not hoard it up. Treachery is really bad—nobody regards it as noble. (Worshippers of Ksarul who dissemble are only honourable if their lies are for the purpose of Ksarul's eventual release from the Blue Room.) Slavers and moneylenders are looked down on by everyone.

The Eye: *What sort of clothing do the upper classes wear? Is there an equivalent of a "black tie" dinner?*

MARB: The First to Fifth Forms are informal, like "lounge suits". A low clan might occasionally throw parties requiring up to the Seventh Form, a medium clan up to Fifteenth Form. The Tenth to Fourteenth Forms are usual for high clans in a large metropolis. Sixteenth through Eighteenth Form is usual for the parties of an Imperial Governor or Prince.

By the Twenty-Second Form you have garb that includes tall plumes and heavy brocade capes. This would be for a very formal reception. Priests enter in order of temple bearing sacred icons and sigils, ascend a stairway to the right of the Imperial insignia and then descend a ramp on the other side. The doors of the chamber will be closed, opening when dinner is over for people to visit the side entertainments.

The Twenty-Fourth Form is used only for a personal presentation to the Emperor or at a coronation. These costumes weigh 100 lbs and must be supported by guy ropes held by page boys.

The Eye: *How would a Livyáni be regarded by the Tsolyáni?*

MARB: A Livyáni gentleman would be very condescending towards the Tsolyáni. The Livyáni never discuss their religion with anyone. They are overly elegant, overly mannered and silently contemptuous of almost everything outside of their secretive, xenophobic society. Far from 'rough-hewn', a Livyáni would be rather like a French courtier faced with the barbarisms of the English court in the late Middle Ages. The Tsolyáni consider the Livyáni to be too delicate, too devious, and generally snobbish.

The Eye: *Who are the companions of the Livyáni wizard Eyloa (...from the Professor's own campaign) ?*

MARB: Eyloa's group comprises Arumel hiChankolel (son of the wizard Hagarr), Harkuz (a Livyáni wizard skilled in making curious devices—his weather machine flooded the Tlashtë Heights!) and a bodyguard-type called Achan. Their base is Eyloa's magical house in the Tlashtë Heights which opens onto other dimensions including the Unending Grey.

The Eye: *What are the distinguishing features of the people of the Chakas?*

MARB: Slightly slanted eyes, sometimes grey, are features of the Chakas. One of our characters, the Aridani wife of a player character, is from the Chakas. She has one brown and one green eye, which she more or less keeps hidden by veils in order not to give offence.

The Eye: *Do ordinary people make use of Tsolyáni words as personal names?*

MARB: A short powerful character might have the nickname Anvil. The Tsolyáni word for Anvil is Hetlekh. The kh is the ignoble suffix, so the name would be pronounced just Hetle.

The Eye: *Do any of the nonhuman races have their own ethical attitudes?*

MARB: The Ahoggyá's ideas on right and wrong are as clear as swamp mud to humans. The Tinaliya are righteous little prudes, loyal to the social goals of the Lords of Stability."

The Eye: *Who created automata such as the ru'un? Were they effective as bodyguards when faced with the weapons of the Ancients?*

MARB: The ru'un were created by societies after the Time of Darkness. (The word ru'un is a High Star Empire derivative from Old Arabic ra'a, meaning "to see".) Technology remained high for a long time after, and there are still pockets of secret high technology—though much mixed now with religion. The use of killer androids as assassins and bodyguards was common only in the Age of the Magicians.

The Eye: *How do the Tsolyáni know which dais to sit on at parties?*

MARB: Tsolyáni parties are distinguished by a series of daises which are assigned to various social levels. An empty seat and Imperial Seal are always at the top, princes and princesses just below this, and so on down to the lowest levels of the outer garden, where the common folk are served chunks of roast meat from spits.

The Eye: *Will a female Tsolyáni character run into problems when travelling through Ghaton?*

MARB: In Ghaton women have no rights whatsoever and are always kept in the great wooden clanhouses from birth to death. A woman who goes about in the marketplace will be stoned. Since none of the southern peoples have sexual hang-ups, this means that a woman going to Ghaton is taking her life in her hands, although the Ghatoni won't mind if she remains hidden in camp and doesn't behave like an Aridani.

The Eye: *How many priests of Sáрку choose to or are able to become undead?*

MARB: Priests of Sáрку occasionally do retain control of their bodies after death, but this requires a high-level mage and some sacrifice of one's good looks. It is rare to find a priest powerful enough to do this and still keep all of his faculties and abilities.

The Eye: *What caused The Time of Darkness? Was it a natural event?*

MARB: Tékumel's departure into its own pocket dimension was not due to a natural catastrophe but to deliberate tampering on the part of certain interplanar beings who still operate on Tékumel. There was no warning. By the time ships were sent out from other planets there was nothing there but empty space. Humans and other species in the rest of the galaxy made concerted efforts to find out what had happened, but the enemy struck again and again, and further planets were dropped into space-time cul-de sacs. Not all of these were as pleasant as Tékumel's empty dimension. There are thus several cases like that of Tékumel, and I could provide data for half a dozen further encapsulated worlds.

The Eye: *Why don't the Livyáni worship the Pantheon of Pavar?*

MARB: The Livyáni hold that the division of the gods into twenty beings with neatly arranged attributes is a Tsolyáni simplification of their true nature.

The Eye: *How fair is the Tsolyáni legal process?*

MARB: It is fine for a large and powerful clan to use its influence to affect a court case. There is no hypocrisy about "true justice". The Tsolyáni reason that neither people nor the gods are truly "just", so why bother with such concepts?

The Eye: *Who is or was Kokun?*

MARB: Kokun was a Karakan-worshipping general in the days of Engsvan hlaGanga: He was betrayed by a comrade who used Kokun's lover to get at him. Kokun was summoned into the forest near his estates on Ganga. He walked along a path until he saw his lover lying on the ground. In running to help her he was beset by forest demons. This story is known to every peasant, and has been told and retold by poets such as Yetil.

The Eye: *How is Livyánu dealing with the war in Tsolyánu?*

MARB: In 2366 a plague was visited on the Tsolei archipelago to scare off the Livyáni. It killed virtually all their forces there and even spread to the mainland, where many perished. The Mu'ugalavyáni took the opportunity to invade, but the Livyáni brought the plague under control and are now beating them back.

Vra is in turmoil, having received no goods from Livyánu (because of the plague) and very little from Tsolyánu (because of the war). There is a growing movement towards autonomy.

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