



Notes from the Thursday Night Group

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Notes From The Thursday Night Group



Giovanna Fregni 2003

These vignettes are taken from my notes during the regular Thursday Night Games. 2003 was an eventful year with Phil providing us with quantities of detailed source material during the course of the year's games.

When I illustrated the Bestiary over ten years ago, one of the entries that fascinated me was the Nyágga. There was a lot implied in the scant paragraphs in the Bestiary and I came away with a continued curiosity about them. This year we had the opportunity to travel toward Lake Párunal and get a closer look at the hybrid people of the area. Of course not all the questions are answered, but then there will always be more questions...

Later in the year we started a new adventure with new characters, all young, and without much experience or abilities. We took the opportunity to notice the commonplace events around us because it is often too easy to gloss over the details in the course of getting on with an adventure. Everyone has their own vision of what everyday life is like on Téकुमेल, but the game takes on such a greater intensity when day to day life is more closely observed. Of course, transcribing notes from several months of gaming could fill a novel, and so I chose a few vignettes from individual nights to provide source material from an eyewitness point of view, hoping that it would give the reader a greater appreciation of the depth and complexity of the world of Téकुमेल, and also to enhance the experience for gamers who regularly visit the nations of the Five Empires.

I hope you enjoy this small effort and if you have further questions, I can be contacted through the Tekumel Yahoo e-group tekumel@yahoogroups.com.

All the material here has been read and painstakingly corrected by Professor Barker to make sure that everything is as accurate as possible. I'd like to thank him and the rest of the Thursday Night Group for twelve years of gaming and friendship.

Brumázik,
Giovanna Fregni

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Dark Fear Clan Symbol



Notes from Saá Állaqi

(The Káitlani)

The Thursday Night Group had a more 'traditional' mission. The Emperor had been given a jar of what appeared to be candied cherries. They weren't even poisoned. It had been determined that the candies came from somewhere in Saá Állaqi and the party was dispatched to find out who sent the candies and why.

The trip was fairly uneventful (well, as uneventful as a trip through Milumanayá can be) until reaching Saá Állaqi. Here the party learned a fair amount about the mysterious Nyaggá and their human hybrids, the Káitlani.

The narrator is Layéth hiVriddi, who is on her first mission and learning quite a bit about the world.

We left Saá Állaqiyar and headed north toward Trú. It was actually a pleasant trip, quite a contrast from the trek through Mílumanayá. We were considering going back to Avanthár by way of Yán Kór, rather than deal with the desert folk again.

I had the opportunity to see the hybrid people of the Nyaggá. They are very tall, pasty-skinned human-looking beings with large black eyes. They come from the city of Káitlan, just north of Trú. The Káitlani wear robes with high collars and keep their hands concealed within their sleeves. They also wear high boots. No one has ever heard them speak, and we have yet to hear any of them talk, but apparently they can. They just don't talk to humans. However they are not considered hostile or harmful.

We did see some of the Káitlani up close in the local government offices. They have gills on their necks, and sometimes you can see their collars billow slightly as they breathe. Apparently the gill apparatus is not very efficient and it is said that they do not survive underwater very long. One person told us that the Káitlani are bred onshore by the Nyaggá and that there are several 'degrees' of Káitlani. Some are more 'aquatic' than others. They are the servants of the Nyaggá, procuring unprotected female servants and slaves for the Nyaggá along with other items that the Nyaggá might need from land. Rumor has it that the procured slaves are taken into the lake and presumably drown. Others said that they might show up again, slightly altered with gills. Some of the locals made jokes about the Lake Párunal

girls (Hotórgu was out on his first solo trading mission. Everywhere we stopped he asked after any available cute girls).

Apparently Nyaggá do successfully mate with human women, but probably not in the usually accepted fashion.

Later we did see a troop of the more human looking ones who walk with their feet about 6" above the ground. We found out that they have a 'different' way of talking (these facts were gathered from records kept from Metlána hiSunkólum, who had encountered them as far away as Kashkomái, near Sokátis. The 'different' way of talking incorporated a form of telepathic communication). They also use discrete finger and hand signals, similar to the ones used by merchant clans for negotiating. They do trade with humans. They do this in the same way as most non-humans on Tékmel, by laying down objects for trade and then leaving. By leaving various objects and moving them toward the other party, arrangements are made. All of this is done with only one of the parties visible at a time.

While traveling we saw a circle of torches off the side of the road. When we approached we saw two swords lying in the grass. Hotórgu moved one sword to the side and in its place laid a small pile of gemstones. The next morning the gems and the second sword were gone and a few Engsvanyali coins were left beside the remaining sword.

It's most likely a short sword for them, but awkwardly long for a human. It's clear and glassy, like a Hokún sword, but heavily weighted and with a gold hilt. It has an unreadable inscription that looks like glyphs of spider webs. The written language that is used by the Káitlani and others in the region is called Kázhra Vé Ngakóme. The language is ideographic: written symbols with no phonetic associations, so it works with the various human and nonhuman residents of the area. The script is written with symbols strung together with 'diacritical' modifiers hanging down beneath the line of writing.

I managed to trade for some more of the blue gems that are found locally, along with some large garnets and other assorted minerals. Of course if I wanted to see the source, I would have to travel north, closer to the Nyaggá area. The party will have none of it.

Iridescent white opal type stones are also found in fields around the area, and the Káitlani have pearls for trade. It is unknown whether or not they culture them or just harvest them.

Here's some local information on Saá Állaqi:

Food: They eat mostly fish. Not good for a Vriddi such as myself. Most of the other food is derived from the lake. They have crunchy brownish-green ball shaped fruit about 1 - 2 inches in diameter that taste fairly bland. Those are slightly lighter colored inside. If left out of water, they turn completely brown and are thrown away.

There are also grass-like plants that are kept in water. To serve them, they are taken out of the water, sliced and stir-fried. Lake Párunal is freshwater, so everything has a watery, mossy, but not salty flavor. The grassy stuff tasted like, well, watery grass. Not very thrilling.

Undú: Whiskey.

Áhdz: tastes like Cherry brandy cut with kerosene.

Wine is unavailable.

We were able to obtain a 'Tsolyáni-style' meal. It bore little resemblance to what we would normally consider 'our style' of cooking. I doubt that the person preparing it had ever set foot in the empire and had constructed the meal based on the descriptions of other travelers. At least it had meat.

Adventure in Tumíssa

In this shorter adventure we rolled up a set of young and inexperienced characters, essentially kids without a clue. All were members of the Dark Fear Clan (but of different temples). We eventually were sent out to manage a fief at the edge of the Chákas. The game began during the intercalary days and we spent the week hanging out and enjoying the sights of Tumíssa. Abusán (Bob) is an insufferable Dlamélish Priest (really good looks, so-so charisma). Gúnga Díléi is his Shén bodyguard (Joe). Tashán (Victor) is a young Ksáruł priest as is Gayán (Stephen), who is also a promising young lawyer. Omél (Keith) and Kálusü (Gio) are fighters (temple of Hrü'ü for her--not that temple affiliation is as important to her as say, Abusán's is to him and Ksáruł is to Omél).

Impalement

The day started with Abusán being invited to an imperial execution to be held in conjunction with the temple of Dlamélish (the accused was a member of the temple who was caught consorting with the Mu'ugalavyáni).

Abusán was told that the temple needed some more people to round out the 30 needed as witnesses, so he came back to the clanhouse and gathered us up, promising a fabulous buffet afterward. Having nothing better to do, we went along.

Once at the temple of Dlamélish, we were led to a hall where we were lined up with many other people. Most people looked to be average to high clan and we noticed that there were no non-humans among us. From there the group was led to the palace of the priesthoods. While walking I asked one of the others what crime had been committed. The culprit was accused of treason by consorting with the Mu'ugalavyani, but no one seemed to know any details.

The Palace of the priesthoods was filled with people, officers, scribes running with scrolls and soldiers standing around guarding various parts of the building.

We were led up a flight of broad stairs to the second floor and down a hall to a room with a bright blood red symbol above the door. The Vimúhla temple guards that were stationed there moved aside and were replaced by guards from the temples of Dlamélish and Hrü'ü. From there we were directed to a chamber at the end of another hall decorated in green. We were all given places to sit at benches.

After everyone was settled a naked man bound in chains was brought in. He was followed by a man in robes designating him as an imperial judge who declared that the accused would be executed immediately.

We all rose and were led to a side courtyard where a sharpened impaling stake was leaning on a set of crossbucks. Some stakes have a crosspiece to keep the impaled from sliding down. This one was plain.

The man was laid face up on a table and the stake was inserted and pushed up through his internal organs. The stake was then pulled upright and the lower end slid into a hole in the ground prepared for it. The prisoner eventually quit kicking.

Omél fainted dead away during the height of the action, while the rest of us blanched. A woman appeared with a jug of water; her job was to revive witnesses who weren't doing their job of witnessing due to fainting. She tossed a hefty amount of water over Omél to bring him around. After he was revived, Abusán told him that the kicking, screaming and bleeding part was over, whereupon Omél fainted again. This didn't bode well for his career as a warrior. Gúnga carried him to the reception at the temple where a buffet was indeed served and we joked about the hors d'oeuvres on toothpicks. A military contingent came through the reception room, stopping to talk to people and find some recruits who'd like to join the army and march to the Chákas. None of us was interested. We all signed the papers as witnesses and Abusán invited us to join him for further festivities

in the basement of the temple. We all declined and returned to the clanhouse.

The Hirilákte Arena

It was the first of the intercalary days. I decided to go down to the hirilákte arena and see what was happening. Abusán, the young and enthusiastic Dlamélish-worshipper decided to come along. He'd just arrived home from the previous night's rituals and was unable to sleep because of certain inducements.

The area was filled for the holiday, and human and Shén contestants were on the bill. There were 5-7 contests scheduled for the morning bouts with breaks for refreshments, poetry readings and music. The beginning of the program started with hymns to the Emperor and some poetry recitations. The matches began in the late morning with fanfares of trumpets and drums. As the Túnkul gongs around the city struck, the Chárukel (The Master of Ceremonies) came out dressed in an elaborate costume and carrying a tall standard topped with Khéshchal plumes to announce the matches. The first few were amateur matches to clear up personal vendettas between individuals or clans. The first match was to the first blood. A young man addressed the crowd, stating his grievances against his opponent, a member of a neighboring clan. When he was done his opponent came out and countered the challenge. They then began in earnest and fought clumsily. The first man eventually backed down after his sword was knocked from his hand. His suit was lost, but no blood was shed. Naturally the crowd was annoyed.

The second and third matches were much the same, except the third match contestants used maces.

The fourth match was the big one for the morning with professional gladiators. A man from Háida Pakála vs. a Yán Koryáni. At this point the bet-takers began to work the crowd. These are independent men who arrange the taking and paying off of bets made by the audience. They carry a large bowl filled with money and chits. A person places his or her bet by putting a stated amount into the bowl and receiving a stick color-coded for the match and the contestant bet upon. The amount is recorded on the chit and held by the bettor. Abusán was new to this and decided to place a personal bet with me (no chit required, this was just between us) placing five Káitars on the Háida Pakálani.

The gladiators began with staffs and went at it for quite awhile with no decision either way. Eventually the Chárukel came out and rapped on a large stone at the front of the arena with the butt of his standard. This was to announce a half hour intermission. Poor liqueurs but fairly good beer were served along with snack-type foods.

After the break the gladiators returned. The Háida Pakálani immediately fainted with the staff and then whacked the Yán Kóryani in the head with his first blow. The match was over within seconds. Abusán had been confident that his bet would win because he knew that Háida Pakálani always cheat. I'm not sure he cheated, but I paid off the five káitars. It was all in fun anyway.

Since this was scheduled to be the last bout of the morning matches, people left early to go back to their clanhouses for lunch. It's customary to mark your seat, so that you can return there for the afternoon games. It's not a matter of admission price, but more a matter of politeness. People will not take a seat that is already marked for someone else. Abusán and I returned to the clanhouse for lunch and saw Omél and Gayán there. We offered to take them back to the arena, but Omél wasn't into that sort of thing. Blood makes him squeamish (as I said, this doesn't bode well for his career at all).

It was hot at the arena now and time for the main matches. The gladiators were well oiled and looked professional. The first match featured a huge man who was a veteran of several campaigns in the north. After he retired from the military, he made his living as a gladiator and was a local favorite. His opponent was a small, weak looking Lívyáni. Abusán bet that the Lívyáni would not only lose, but would die in the process. This time he placed a five Káitar bet with the men with the bowls.

Meanwhile the gladiator approached the crowd and held out his hands for spectators to touch. He worked the crowd, getting the people in the lower seats pretty excited and offered them more opportunities to touch him (more than just his hands, too) after the match. Abusán wanted seats closer to the front next time.

Sweepers smoothed the sand with rakes while this went on, and then the match began. The gladiators faced each other, saluted, turned to the Imperial Seal, saluted the Seal, turned to each other and then had at it. The first few minutes were spent in fencing and light sparring, taking each other's measure. Then the Tsolyáni moved in and got a cut across the Livyáni's upper arm. The Livyáni pulled back a few paces and then turned his back on the Tsolyáni. As the Tsolyáni gladiator came at him, the Livyáni turned and struck like a serpent. The Tsolyáni managed to veer at the last moment and avoided being stabbed. They exchanged heated insults

until the enraged Tsolyáni lunged at the Livyáni, who skewered him through the chest. The Tsolyáni was badly injured, but not dead. Healers came out, bandaged the Tsolyáni, and the match continued. The contestants bowed to each other, and the Livyáni immediately lunged and cut the Tsolyáni deeply across his midsection. The crowd went wild and people were leaping from their seats. The Livyáni strutted and jeered, taunting the audience. The Tsolyáni was carried to the infirmary.

The next bout was announced, drums beat and nose flutes played. A Shén came out with scales decorated in red, roaring and grunting. Gúnga was with us and understood the Shén's introduction, but was too excited to translate for us. Another Shén came out, decorated in blue. The red one was the odds-on favorite and the blue one was the newcomer. They pulled out huge copper swords, and then the red one quickly dropped his sword and pulled out a multibladed ax. The blue one screamed and a smaller Shén ran out with a similar ax. They squared off and then ran at each other full tilt while throwing the axes at each other in mid stride. The blue Shén's ax was thrown wild, while the red one's weapon hit the other Shén in mid torso. At that point they threw away all their weapons, slammed into each other, screaming while grappling and brawling on the ground. Suddenly the red Shén slumped. The blue one had a long stiletto concealed in his claws. It was ignoble, but not illegal. The Shén were separated and when they returned, the blue one backed off (I think he had one trick, and now he was out of luck). The crowd went wild, screaming and throwing things onto the field. The red Shén followed relentlessly. The blue Shén suddenly broke away and ran off the field.

It was against the rules, all honor and dignity. The Chárukel announced the red Shén the victor, but the red Shén demanded the blood of the blue. Officials tried to reason with the Shén explaining that it is against the law to fight outside the arena and that the other Shén would be dealt with. There continued to be a lot of shouting and posturing and eventually the winning Shén was led away.

The next event featured women warriors. The first contestant was a huge, tough-looking woman who beat her shield and shouted that she'd take on any woman here. Abusán gave me a shove and told me that this was my chance. No way. An ordinary girl came out. She was in her late 20's and obviously not a warrior. The crowd went crazy. Abusán offered to put ten Káitars on the girl, but the bet taker wouldn't accept, explaining that the girl was a suicide case.

It was obvious that the girl did not know how to hold a sword. The woman went to the Chárukel and conferred with him, obviously not wanting to just

dispatch a girl who can't fight. The Chárukel said that it was an official match and there was nothing he could do to cancel it. The woman approached the girl and lifted her sword over her head with both hands. The girl whipped out a dagger in her left hand and struck. The woman, enraged, fainted twice and took the girl's head off with the third blow.

The girl actually wanted to die and made sure that she'd anger the woman enough that she was killed outright and not just injured.

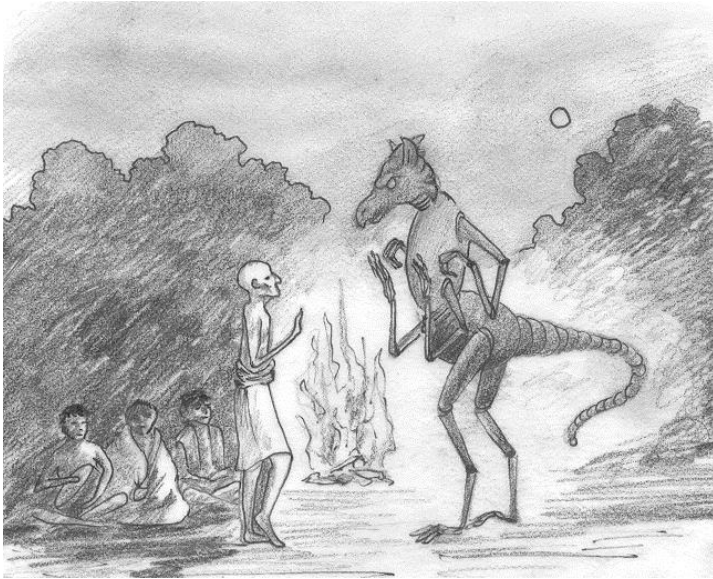
After this bout there was an intermission. Abusán was disappointed that he hadn't gained a coterie yet and wondered what was wrong with this crowd.

There were more matches including another one with the large woman. By the end of the day Abusán had lost about 40 Káitars, but he didn't mind. We were having a pleasant day.

At dusk the Túngul gongs began to ring around the city, starting with the high notes of Hríháyal and Dlamélish and then the fuller notes of Lady Avánthe. Soon the brassier notes of Karakán joined in and then more temples. The crowd dispersed to their clanhouses to get ready for the evening's festivities.

Pé Chói Ritual Night

The clan decided that we needed to do something productive with our lives and decreed that it would be a good idea for us to go keep an eye on the fief of Mokátla, located 2 days walk (with a Chlén cart) outside of town in the Chákan forest. When we arrived we found the manor house in ruins and the population reduced by Mu'ugalavyáni raids. Omél was placed in charge by the clanmaster, and he set about getting things in order. Before this, none of the party had been on anything more rigorous than a picnic (although Dlamélish picnics can be somewhat of a workout...) and were not prepared for the rural life without an array of servants, slaves and amenities. The party settled in, although only a few of the rooms in the manor were repaired enough for residence. The locals accepted us as representatives of the clan, but we were obviously outsiders and most of their loyalties and customs seemed linked to cultures that were far different than those of the young members of the Dark Fear Clan.



That night the headman came and asked if the villagers could perform their ritual in the courtyard as they were accustomed to do. They gathered in the outer courtyard, and we could see Gayél faintly through the tops of the trees. They gathered into a circle, knelt down and began a moaning chant in a language unknown to us. Then the peasants rose and shuffled closer together while continuing the chant. After some time, one held up his hand and said it was done; the ritual was over.

Abusán asked who it was they worshipped and the leader told him it was "The Great Old One". Abusán asked if that wasn't actually a Pé Chóí deity and the villager replied that the Pé Chóí think so, but no one really knows whose god is whose. He then pointed to a group of Pé Chóí sitting under the trees, faintly shining in the greenish moonlight and made some clicking noises.

One Pé Chóí came forward and explained to us that he was Tsolyáni and that this was really their land. There would be no problem as long as the humans did not interfere, they had coexisted with the people here for a long time and didn't expect trouble. Omél talked with them and made an agreement to meet on a regular basis and to check with them before making any changes beyond the borders of the village.

The Pé Chóí then joined the villagers in a ritual dance that lasted most of the night. There was slow drumming, and the Pé Chóí and the villagers

began moving slowly, facing each other, first lifting one foot, stepping, and then slowly raising the other foot. They made gestures with their palms turned outward, facing each other and mirroring each other's movements. Near dawn, the old man clapped his hands and announced that it was done. The Pé Chóí melted away into the forest and the villagers filed out.

The Isles of Teretané

The floors of the manor house were all repaired, and most of the roof had been fixed as well. A functional kitchen had finally been put together. Everyone was looking forward to a comfortable night's sleep. During the night Kálusü awoke to find a large, heavy man on the mat beside her. She immediately jumped up and the man disappeared into thin air. Shaken, she went out to the kitchen to get a light. Her rummaging around awakened Tashán and she told him what happened. They both returned to her room where he performed an elicitation spell on the mat. No luck: he couldn't see a thing. He told her to be careful and not to touch the mat, and he would try the spell again later. She was still disturbed by the event, so he stayed in the room, and they talked late into the night.

They were having a pleasant time, when she turned to see that Tashán had suddenly disappeared and the heavyset man sat in his place. Worse yet, the man had no eyes, just empty sockets, but he still 'looked' straight at her. He smoothly started to rise and Kálusü ran for the door. It was somehow locked. The man came toward her and she grabbed her sword. The thing flopped uselessly. She tried to yell, scream or call out, but she had no voice. If there had been a window in her room there wasn't one now. She waved her sword at him, and his face opened like the doors of a triptych, revealing a blank, glowing sphere inside. She backed away but the creature started to expand, his arms lengthening and reaching in a large arc around her and circling behind her, even though he was still several feet away. The thing made a sort of mewling sound, but Kálusü still couldn't get her voice to work. She pushed at the arms, they were rubbery, cold and soft. She tried to duck under the arms, but couldn't push through. The orb of the face extruded long, tentacle 'eyes' toward her and she tried to turn her sword and ram the pommel into its face. An arm came from behind her back, grabbed the sword and threw it away. No one heard anything.

The next morning seemed normal, except that Gúnga counted heads and realized that Tashán and Kálusü were missing. He became annoyed when people were late for meals and so went to Kálusü's room to find out what

was happening. The door was locked and there was no answer when he knocked.

He beat the door, using his tail and found Kálusü curled up in the corner. He poked her with his claw a couple times. She was alive but not conscious. Gúnga went back to the kitchen and told Omél that Kálusü was there, but not there. He then went to Tashán's room. Tashán was fine and sleeping on his mat. He said he had the weirdest dream and didn't remember returning to his room. Gúnga took him back to Kálusü's room and told her what he had discovered along the way. Meanwhile Abusán tried a healing spell. No luck. He even tried tapping her on the shoulder with the Diadem Dildo of Dlamélish. In spite of it being his most prized and valuable magical possession it had no effect.

Omél decided that the best thing to do would be to load her into a Chlén cart and take her back to Tumíssa. He didn't want to let Tashán go, feeling that he was somehow responsible. Tashán suggested going to the Íto for help, but Omél didn't want to bother them. Gúnga slipped out and went to the edge of the clearing and quietly called the Íto. The Íto arrived, but wouldn't allow the Shén see him. He told Gúnga to clear the courtyard and have Kálusü placed there. The Shén could feel the Íto's presence behind him and didn't dare look back. Two long fingers reached out and touched Kálusü's temples. He said that she'd been taken by the ancient ones. There are beings in the house that were enemies of people from before the times of the Íto. He ordered the Shén to place Kálusü in the sun in the courtyard, saying that they needed to be patient, that she'd recover when the presence departed. Gúnga did this, all the time avoiding looking at the Íto. The Íto also explained that there was more than one of the ancient beings in the house.

Kálusü still didn't recover, and the Íto said that she should be taken back to her temple in Tumíssa, placed on the altar and receive protections from the ancient ones. Gúnga insisted on taking her, but the Íto insisted that she be also accompanied by humans. They got the Chlén cart driver to get things ready and Abusán agreed to go along. He needed to go into town anyway to buy himself a couple pleasure slaves. Tashán also insisted on going. He felt somehow responsible, but also he felt it would be good to keep an eye on Abusán.

Omél heard a voice that told him that he should bury wards in the center of each room. The objects then appeared before him on the floor. He would have to get the workmen back to break up the new concrete floors and seal these in.

Omél conferred with the engineer, Chúrisan. They decided to stay behind and break open the newly cemented floors and install the wards. Dárku, the village headman came by to tell them that the wards would be more effective if blood was mixed into the cement. It had to be human blood, not animal or demon (demon blood?) and only a small quantity was needed. If it colored the cement, it would be too concentrated and might actually attract the demons instead of repelling them. Spitting wine on the floor could help too, but wasn't nearly as effective. Brave Omél volunteered to give the blood, pulled out his sword and slashed his arm apparently forgetting that the sight of the blood would cause him to pass out. He wasn't very handy with a sword either. Chúrisan caught him as he passed out and made sure he didn't bleed to death.

Meanwhile that evening, the rest of the party arrived at the military encampment that was stationed halfway to Tumíssa. The gate was shut and Gayán hailed them. Since he was signed up for service, they would allow him in, but not the others. He tried first to bluff them and then to bribe them. But the gate guard wouldn't budge. Apparently the commanding officer was drunk and no one could give orders to let anyone in. Gúnga wanted to continue on through the night, but the cart driver was afraid of wild feShénga loose in the forest. The party pulled the cart out of bowshot of the gate and camped for the night. No one thought to set watches, so Gúnga stayed up all night.

During the night he saw a large contingent of people moving silently through the woods.

He made no noise and watched. None of them seemed to notice the cart. As the column got farther away, they melted into the mist.

In the morning the Shén noticed blood in the road about 30-40 feet away, where the column disappeared. He kicked everyone out of the cart and explained that he'd been up all night and now wanted to sleep (note: Shén sleep coiled up on their side). By the time the others got out, the blood was gone. Abusán was disappointed that Gúnga would not be making breakfast for all of them.

The sákbe road was in complete disrepair here. The stones were pulled up and piled along the edges, so the road was now only packed dirt. The piled stones do provide a barrier to keep the jungle from encroaching too quickly. The party plodded along.

The party finally reached Tumíssa and headed quickly to the Dark Fear Clanhouse. Abusán was ecstatic and couldn't wait to hit the baths. But first the Shén briefly explained what happened to Kálusü. The clan elder sent out a message and soon there was a priest of Belkhánu ready to take charge.

Abusán was a little surprised and thought that the priest was there to bury Kálusü. He finally understood that the priest was there to restore her chüsetl. Apparently Kálusü had imbibed the essence of a 'dead one'. A ritual would be held at midnight. Of course Abusán asked if refreshments would be served and if entertainment would be provided. Abusán did ask the Shén how he knew so much about the situation, but didn't seem to notice when the Shén replied that "the demon told him". The Shén then asked the majordomo about what would be an appropriate gift to give to an Íto demon. Startled, the majordomo suggested that he go ask at the Íto clanhouse.

The Íto clanhouse was dark, cold and ancient. As Gúnga approached the door an old man sitting on a stool told him to enter and explain the situation to the clanmaster. The Shén was led to a dark, unpleasant smelling room. He explained that he was a servant of the Dark Fear Clan and wanted to give a gift to the Íto demon who lives in the woods because he'd tried to help Kálusü. The clanmaster said that the 'demon' was a servant of the Íto and needed no gift and that it was time for him to return home, anyway. Gúnga tried to insist and explained the situation again. The Íto recognized the demons Gúnga described as being the 'Old ones who were before time' who lived in small, dark homes. The Íto also said that Kálusü should be brought to the Íto clanhouse. Gúnga mentioned that the Temple of Belkhánu might object, since she was already on her way there. The Íto began to get angry and said that Kálusü belonged to them. When they were done, she might be a little grey around the edges, but he insisted that the Shén bring her body back.

Meanwhile Abusán was relaxing in the baths with a couple of pleasure slaves, entertaining them by singing his unique rendition of "Feelings". Gúnga reached the Temple of Belkhánu and was greeted by a priestess in golden yellow robes. The Shén asked for Kálusü hiFerShéna of the Dark Fear Clan and explained the missing soul problem. He was taken to the Chamber of Articulation, where her body would be allowed to deteriorate and eventually follow her soul. On the way they passed long beautifully decorated hallways with dozens of bodies laid out on slabs. This was the embalming chamber. The next room was where special cases were assessed. There they found Kálusü. A priest explained that her soul was removed by a demon and that the soul could possibly be retrieved if someone went after it.

He said that he could possibly send Gúnga after her. The Shén would stand next to her body while priests chanted, burned incense and candles. They hoped that the Shén's soul would be able to follow Kálusü's. It was very unusual for a Shén to do this sort of thing, usually it would be the job of a human. The priest then conferred with a priestess and then led Gúnga down

a hallway filled with golden statues. A man in bright golden robes ushered them into a chamber filled with priests dressed in elaborate veils and headdresses.

A priest turned to Gúnga and asked him how he was related to Kálusü. After conferring, they decided that a Shén would be unable to retrieve a human soul. Gúnga asked if he could take Kálusü's body and then said that he was supposed to take it to the Temple of Sáрку. A cold silence filled the room. One of the priests regained his composure and suggested that the matter be taken up at the Palace of the Priesthoods. He said that the case could be presented in 2-3 days when the planets would be more auspicious. Gúnga asked if waiting that long might be too late. The priests agreed that at the Palace, there would be functionaries, who for the right price, could rearrange the planets and make an earlier date more auspicious, although the process might take a couple days anyway. Gúnga dictated a quick letter to be taken to Abusán at the clanhouse and proceeded to the Palace of the Priesthoods.

At the Palace they were greeted by a man dressed in Belkhánu's colors. He led them through various offices until they arrived at an inner chamber, filled with men in various colored robes (although no brown ones were present). They asked Gúnga to state his case. Gúnga began to tell how Kálusü's soul was taken by a demon, but the priests interrupted. He tried to continue about how she was taken to the Temple of Belkhánu, but again they interrupted because they thought she ought to be dead before going there. They debated about whether her hlákme is there even if the bhákte is missing (i.e. the light is on, but nobody's home).

Eventually they decided that someone must travel to the Isles of Teretané to retrieve her soul. The problem arose in that Shén are not allowed on the human Isles. It would mess up the concessions for all the different species. A young priestess spoke up and said that sending a Shén to the Isles of Teretané would be like making a fish to fly. Gúnga replied that it was not a problem, if you threw the fish hard enough. The Shén was becoming pretty good at getting roomfuls of priests to suddenly shut up and stare at him, but he didn't understand why.

The priests debated and decided that a special dispensation from the gods was needed and that they needed to contact the highest priests to petition the gods. The Shén then explained that he could still go to the Temple of Sáрку, since they offered to help and he could still ask about what would be an appropriate gift to give to a nice Íto demon. Another cold silence.

The priests began to debate again, since the Temple of Sáрку was now involved, the whole situation could be held up for decades.

After awhile a Sáрку priest arrived, saying he was summoned. The priest of Hnálla tried to usher him out, saying that it had been in error. The Hnálla

priest tried to explain the situation, but the Shén noticed he'd left out part, and joined the fray in trying to explain everything. The Sárku priest insisted that Kálusü should have been taken to the Temple of Hrü'ü.

The Belkhánu priest laid prior claims on her body, and louder debate ensued. The Vimúhla priest stormed out saying that they might as well burn the body, it was the only sensible thing to do. Gúnga interrupted and asked why Kálusü couldn't be killed and revived. They all turned and explained that revivification wouldn't work without the soul being present in the body at the time of death. They then turned back and continued the arguments. The one thing agreed on was that a human would have to go to retrieve her soul. Gúnga volunteered to go get someone from the clanhouse, but they didn't trust him to return.

Abusán, finally finished with his bath received the note from Gúnga and felt that the Shén could use some help if he was in the Palace of the Priesthoods. He gathered up Gayán and Tashán.

Once at the Palace, the guards didn't want to let them in, there was too much going on already.

Abusán demanded that his Shén be returned to him and offered a bribe to have the man take a note to the Shén. The guard offered to look into the situation.

The Vimúhla priest returned with priests of Grugánu and Hrü'ü in tow (at this point only Drá was unrepresented). The Hrü'ü and Grugánu priests wanted to explain how traveling to Teretané worked and that it wasn't as bad as everyone made it out to be, but the Belkhánu priest objected to their attitudes. Then they all argued about who was capable of traveling to Teretané, but they all agreed that a Shén could not go.

Gúnga asked if it was a demon who took her soul, then wouldn't it still be with the demon? Maybe she wasn't in Teretané at all and they should go talk to the demon. They argued some more while explaining that one cannot just talk to demons, and that once the soul was separated from the body it wouldn't remain on the demon plane anyway. They debated the fact that anyone who did travel to the Isles would most likely not come back.

The Belkhánu priest still believed the best course would be to just let her die slowly of natural causes. Gúnga became annoyed and asked 'If Kálusü was gone, who would go shopping with him?' The Grugánu priest said that they could send the Shén if the proper price was paid. They then debated the relative worth of Kálusü, since she wasn't rich or very well connected.

The other priests objected to a Shén being sent and said that the gods would be highly insulted and would kill anyone associated with the whole affair, including everyone in the room. The consensus was that Kálusü should be allowed to decay.

The Belkhánu priestess became upset at that and said that at the very least someone ought to go to the Isles and ask if Kálusü wanted to return. Gúnga said that he would go find Abusán; he slipped out during the ongoing debate, and found him, along with Gayán and Tashán faster than he expected since they were cooling their heels in the waiting room. He then hauled the three of them back into the chamber.

Gúnga announced he had three humans to go on the trip and introduced them to the group. The Belkhánu priestess asked them if they were willing to risk their lives. Abusán and his companions were a little surprised by that because Abusán thought that they'd just have a quick ritual at the Temple and then move onto the refreshments afterward. Everything was explained yet again.

Abusán asked if people who go on adventures and return from the Isles of Teretané get written up in epic adventures? Do they at least score better with the ladies? He decided that if he did rescue Kálusü she'd at least be grateful enough to sleep with him... Tashán and Gayán then volunteered to go along too... Sensing an opportunity, Abusán offered to rescue Tashán as well.

The ritual was set for the rising of Gayél in about four hours. Tashán asked if there was some way of locating Kálusü. The Belkhánu priest said that concentrating on her face and calling her name would do. They also explained that there would be a strong feeling of death and despair. The unalterable dead would drift by. The demon wouldn't be there, but he might demand some sort of ransom. They shouldn't be concerned because he'd have no control over anything in the Isles. Tashán said that he needed to prepare for the journey. Abusán agreed and asked for pleasure slaves and liquor to be brought, but first a good meal!

The assembled priests looked at him and he decided it might be better if he returned to his temple for a meal and a romp (a.k.a. purification). They all agreed to meet in three hours and headed to their respective temples.

Tashán went to the Temple of Ksárul and the senior priest asked him if he knew what he was doing. Rumors from the Palace of the Priesthoods had already reached them (well, it is the Temple of Ksárul...). Tashán explained

the entire situation in excruciating detail beginning with when they left Tumíssa for the fief and offered to bring back valuable information from beyond the other side. The priest was unimpressed by that, but was impressed by Tashán's heroism and offered him an amulet. If he should lose his way, or be unable to return, the amulet would guide him to the Isle of the Blue Prince, where he would wait until the next cycle and his eventual reincarnation. The priest made an effort to advise him not to go, saying that most who went to the Isles never returned. Many want to stay with departed relatives and lovers, wandering together and hoping to be reincarnated together. Tashán felt responsible for Kálusü's situation and said he'd go, but agreed to think about what the priest told him.

Gayán, the lawyer, carefully made out his will and then researched the library to see whether visiting the lands of the dead would technically constitute a legal death and release him from any debts or obligations: a sort of disincorporating offshore laundering scheme.

Gúnga headed for the Temple of Dlamélish to retrieve Abusán. The Shén wandered among couches, huge urns of incense and perfumed oils. He finally found Abusán and extracted him from a young woman. "Sorry honey," Abusán said, "I go to rescue someone from the lands beyond death—I go strong and erect like the heroes of old! I will think of you often on my journey... ahh, what was your name?"

They went to the Temple of Belkhánu. The Chamber of Sorceries was elaborately decorated with yellows and golds. The priest asked if they were ready, and Abusán requested that roast Hmá with a touch of hlíng seed be ready for when he returned. They turned him down, and he settled for having a cup of wine available for him when he woke up.

Tashán asked what needed to be done in order to return. All he need do is to call out and ask to return. The only problem was that Kálusü could be manifested in her regular form, as a spirit, a different person, or even something other than human.

Kálusü's body was brought in and laid on the altar. Abusán and the others lay down and got comfortable. There was a smell of powerful drugs in the air, a combination of incense and toxic gas. Their heartbeats slowed and their minds wandered. They had the sensation of moving away and the lights dimming. They heard the faint sound of oars splashing in water. In complete darkness they heard the creaking and splashing of oars rowing slowly, the sound slowly getting louder. Slowly they could see a faint light with no color and could make out vague shapes of people at the oarbanks.

There was the smell of salt on the air and the feeling of being on the open sea. Far away they could sense a pile of lights, a mountain of lights up ahead. The wind rose and the lights fluttered. There was a strange feeling of being disconnected from their bodies and a sensation of trying to shake off their bodies, like wet leaves from one's shoe. They resisted the urge.

The boat slipped into a stone wharf where they were met by cowed figures. It was dark, cold, windy, and unpleasant. The 'people' on the boat rose as one and departed from the ship moving almost in unison. Abusán couldn't see his other companions, but knew that they were there. He could see other spirits. There was no sign of how they died, that was left behind with their physical bodies. These people displayed the images they had of themselves in life, younger and healthier, but with grim, determined faces. Some looked terrified.

There were no nonhumans, no Shén or Pé Chói. They stepped off the boat without any sensation of their feet touching the ground. Abusán tried calling out to Gayán and Tashán, but could hear nothing. Tashán tried to think and concentrate on communicating with Abusán, but without luck. Yet he could sense that both of their companions were nearby.

They moved along the dark wharf. There were blocklike buildings with no doors or windows. The other spirits moved through the buildings turning and going in different directions, but all at the same slow pace. They reached another wharf with dozens of boats and thousands of people.

Abusán called out to Kálusü and felt a faint glimmer ahead. Without communicating directly they tried to find a boat. The darkness deepened and warped sounds echoed. Tashán concentrated on Kálusü. A boat appeared before them and a man with white, ugly features gestured them aboard.

There were people already on the boat, sitting on platforms and daises, peering over the embankment. These were the Excellent Dead.

The water was cold and dark and the boat pulled along the estuary, moving out into a totally black area. They were aware of others around them, but could not see anyone. The boat drifted on forever. There were low lights on pinnacles and huge, ancient stone lantern poles 40-50 feet high. The estuary ended, and the boat slipped out onto open sea and the swell of waves. Everyone on the boat sat still. No one was recognizable, but there was the faint draw of Kálusü ahead. They traveled from one island to another. These were all the same with thousands of slowly moving people, some to remain

on the island, others to continue on. There was no pain, no life, no emotion. The lights had no color. There was no way to understand the passage of time.



Finally they felt the presence of Kálusü nearby. Abusán called out and she faintly felt his presence. She had no feeling of life, everything was peaceful and morbid. Abusán concentrated on the pleasures of life, warm breezes, and excellent food. Kálusü felt that the voices were familiar and moved toward them. She had no sense of personal identity and no means of physical movement, but she approached them. She could sense that the river of life was far away. She vaguely recalled having a body once, but had no present attachment or any emotions. Tashán understood what the Ksárul priests meant, now. Kálusü received a faint inkling of remembering life, warmth and emotions. Abusán continued to concentrate on pleasurable things. Gayán sensed that the task could be accomplished if the group asked in unison to be returned. It was a long, slow process. They tried again and again and began drifting back. There was a light above with a ruddy, pinkish glow.

They finally realized that they were looking at the candlelight in the temple ceiling.

Abusán reached for his promised cup of wine, took a long drink and suddenly spat it out. It was the worst tasting stuff. He'd grabbed a cup of embalming fluid by accident. The priestess saw the group stirring and was happy. Abusán, Tashán and the Shén then all argued about who actually saved Kálusü.

(Note: Victor rightly guessed that the stone lantern poles were a manifestation of the pylons. He does that sort of thing frequently)