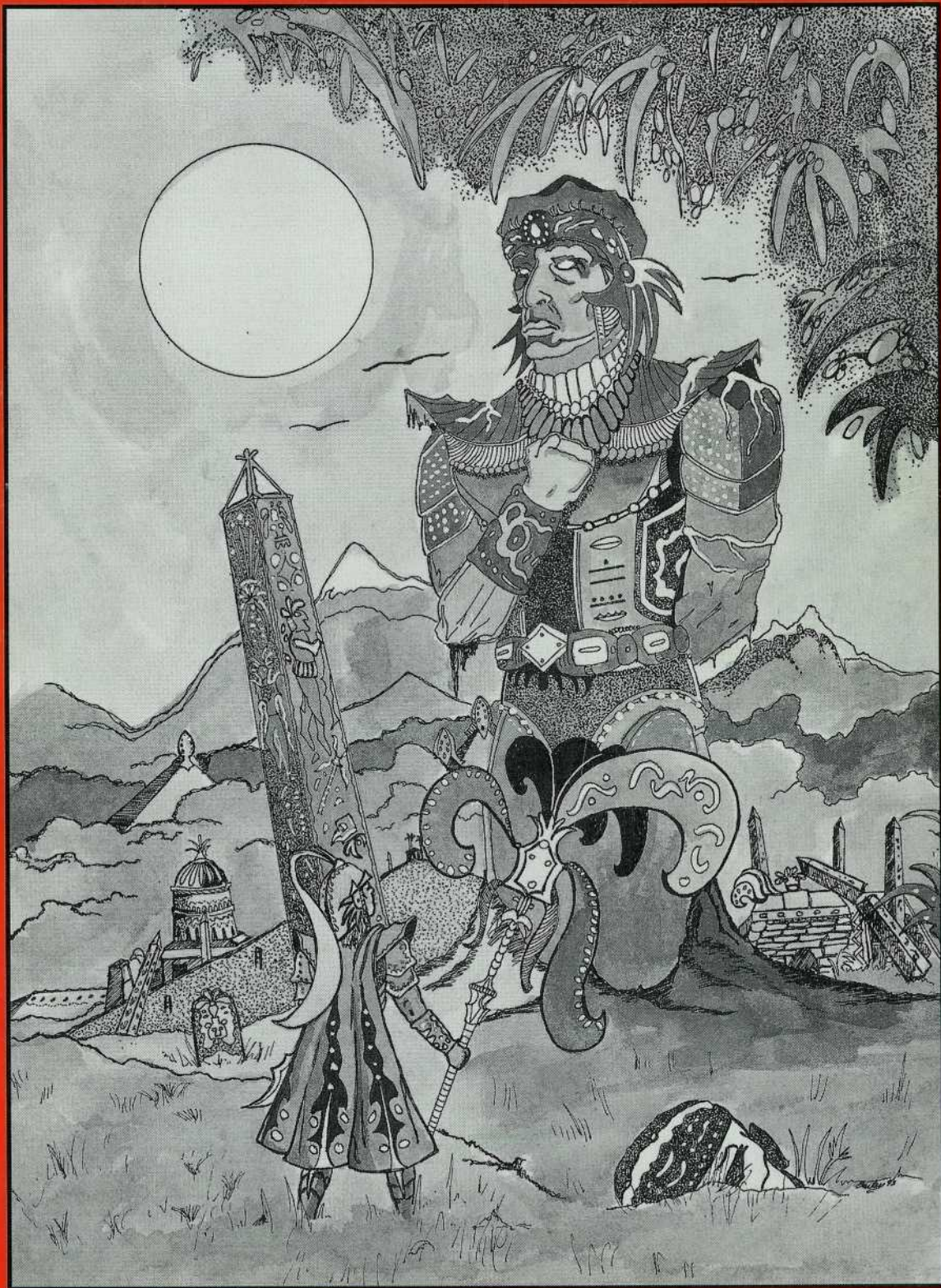


ADVENTURES ON TÉKUMEL

PART TWO/VOLUME TWO: BEYOND THE BORDERS OF TSOLYÁNU

Solitaire Adventures by M.A.R. Barker



Adventures on Tékumel

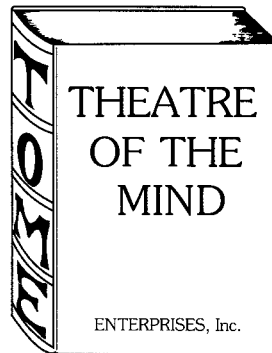
**Part Two, Volume Two:
Beyond the Borders of Tsolyánu**

**Solitaire Adventures for Tékumel
by M.A.R. Barker**

Illustrations by James Bailey and Giovanna Fregni

**With special thanks to:
Bob Alberti, Jr. and Thomas Juntunen**

**Adventures on Tékumel
Part Two, Volume Two
Beyond the Borders of Tsolyánu
A TOME, Inc. Presentation**



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SOLITAIRE ADVENTURES

Part Two is devoted to “solitaire adventures.” It assumes that you have developed a character in Part One, and that this person is now about fifteen years old and ready for the “on-the-job” training young aristocrats (both male and female) receive in Tsolyáni society.

This is Volume Two of Part Two so some characters may be coming here from adventures in Volume One and be more experienced. The adventures start with Sec. 18 and concern broader travelling in and out of Tsolyánu. Sections 10 through 14 are repeated from Part One for your convenience.

10. DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Instruction: Part two of this book is divided into three volumes. In volume 2 you go on adventures D (Livyánu), E (Hunting), F (Caravan) and G (Penóm). In other volumes there are other adventures. Most of these adventures do not overlap or repeat more than the initial combat Sections (Secs. 11, 12, and 13), plus the short Section listing some useful “Eyes” (Sec. 14). Each set of adventures thus stands on its own, with a few exceptions that direct you forward or back to other parts of this work.

You may go on any or all of the adventures in Part Two. You cannot go on the same adventure twice, nor do you need to go on every adventure. You should at least go enough to raise yourself above the level of a novice when you start the rôle-playing game. When you have finished an adventure, you return here to Sec. 10 to go back to school the following year (repeat Sec. 9., ff. in Part One), choose a new adventure, or enter the rôle-playing game.

The adventures are not necessarily sequential: you can select “E,” go forward to “G,” and come back to “D.” There is a logical time-continuity in the case of the “historical” adventures, however. The time frame will be obvious.

Instruction: if you go off on a mission and return home alive (i.e. are not killed, enslaved, or delayed abroad), you still get a HALF year’s worth of skills and hobbies in Sec. 9, ff. in Part One, just as if you had stayed home for six months! Very few journeys last as long as a year, and it is assumed you spend the rest of your time in school, the temple, or the practice-yard.

Instruction: record changes in your personal attributes on your Character Record Sheet. Keep a careful check on the number of years you spend adventuring so that your character enters the rôle-playing game at the proper age. If

you wish, you may space your adventures farther apart in order to develop an older character. By the time you are thirty, however, you should choose a career and settle down. Keep track of your possessions. Money and prices are stated in Tsolyáni Káitars; cf. Sec. 4.3 in Part One. Ranges of amounts instruct you to roll a D10 or D100. For example, 1-100 Káitars = a D100 roll; 100-1,000 Káitars = a D10 roll x 100; 1,000-10,000 Káitars = a D10 roll x 10, etc.

Instruction: whenever you wish to join the rôle-playing game, the gamesmaster will provide a rationale for your character to be in the proper place to join the players’ party.

Your adventure choices for this volume of Part 2 are as follows. Good luck!

1. Go on a sea journey to Livyánu in one of your clan’s commercial ships: start in Sec. D. Does foreign travel make you all starry-eyed? Here’s your chance!
2. Go hunting with your clan-uncle in the Kúrt Hills in central Tsolyánu: start in Sec. E. This promises to be a pleasant outing.
3. Go on a commercial journey with your clan’s trade caravan: start in Sec. F. You need not be a warrior; healers, priests, scribes, etc., are often sent along on such journeys.
4. Travel to Penóm to visit clan-relatives; start in Sec. G. Your clan-elders are thinking of marrying you off to a distant cousin whose nickname is “Old Chlén-breath.” Even Penóm looks better!

11. I DON'T THINK THEY LIKE US!

When you are instructed to fight, you are allowed only ONE D100 ROLL, whether you are alone or whether you are accompanied by comrades or even a whole Legion. This roll is based solely upon your own fighting ability. Combat is thus very different from the rôle-playing game. In this book all weapons, magical devices, and spells are abstracts: they are identical for combat purposes! In the rôle-playing game each has its powers, strengths, and weaknesses. Clever uses of a weapon, spell, or item are thus not possible here but can be done in the rôle-playing game (to the frustration and fury of the gamesmaster!). In every combat you have three choices:

1. Fight physically: use your modified Height-Build-Strength number (Sec. 6.4) plus FIVE POINTS per skill level in the weapon you wish to use: i.e.:

$$\text{H.B.S.} + (\text{Weapon skill level} \times 5) \\ = \text{your combat number}$$

For simplicity's sake, this applies whether you use a hand weapon or a missile weapon. Cross-reference this with your opponent's "type" (identified whenever fights occur in the text of this book) on the combat table below. Now roll D100: if you score lower or equal to the number listed in the table, you win; go to Sec. 12; if you score above the listed number, you lose. Go to Sec. 13.

2. Let your comrades fight for you: if you have no warrior skill, and/or your magic is not powerful enough to help, you may fight physically using only your Height-Build-Strength number, or you can make your one D100 roll based upon the 101-150 column of the table below; this simulates letting your friends fight for you. If you win, you still go to Sec. 12, and if you lose, you go to Sec. 13.
3. Fight magically: find your "sorcerer level" (first through fourth only in this book; cf. Sec. 8.5). Cross-reference this with your opponent's "magical resistance" type number in the lefthand column. You cast your "aggressive" spells at this level. Aggressive spells from Book I include only "Domination," "Soporiferousness," "Terrorisation," and (for animals) "Zoic Domination." If you have a magical weapon (e.g. an "Eye"; cf. Sec. 14), you may use it instead of a spell (you can't do both!) Your opponent's magical resistance number depends upon size and strength, plus any skill levels in sorcerer. In this book, each opponent's "type number" is given in the text. When you have found your level and the opponent's number, roll D100: if you score lower or equal to your opponent's number, you win. Go to Sec. 12. If you score above this number, you lose. Go to Sec. 13.



TABLE 11.1: PHYSICAL COMBAT

ENEMY'S TYPE NUMBER	YOUR H.B.S. + (WEAPON SKILL LEVEL X 5)						
	0-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-300	301-400	401-up
Type 1	40	50	60	70	80	95	99
Type 2	35	45	55	65	75	90	95
Type 3	30	40	50	60	70	85	90
Type 4	25	35	45	55	65	80	85
Type 5	20	30	40	50	60	75	80
Type 6	15	20	25	35	50	65	75
Type 7	10	15	20	30	40	55	65
Type 8	5	10	15	20	30	45	55
Type 9	1	5	10	15	20	35	45
Type 10	You lose!	1	5	10	15	30	35

TABLE 11.2: MAGICAL COMBAT

ENEMY'S TYPE NUMBER AND DESCRIPTION	YOUR SORCERER LEVEL				MAG. WPN.
	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH	
1 Small animal; human of Type 1	65	75	85	95	90
2 Large animal; human of Type 2	50	60	70	80	85
3 Bigger animal; human of Type 3; First Level sorcerer	35	45	60	70	75
4 Very large animal; human of Type 4; Second Level sorcerer	20	35	45	55	65
5 Gigantic animal; monster; human of Type 5*; Third-Fourth Level sorcerer	10	25	35	45	55
6 Big monster; Fifth-Sixth Level sorcerer	5	15	25	35	45
7 Gigantic monster; Seventh- Eighth Level sorcerer	3	15	20	25	35
8 Absolutely world-shaking monster; Ninth-Tenth Level sorcerer	2	10	15	20	25
9 Eleventh-Twelfth Level sorcerer	1	5	10	15	20
10 Thirteenth-Fifteenth Level sorcerer. Pray you never meet one of these, in this book at least. Higher levels exist	You lose!	3	5	10	15

*No human is more powerful than Type 5 unless he/she/they have levels of sorcery.

12. BANG, IT'S DEAD! YOU WIN!

Instruction: when you win a combat, roll a **D10**: 1-9 = you get nothing and are lucky to be alive; 10 = you gain one skill level in the weapon you are using, or one spell if you used sorcery. If you had your friends fight for you (option 2 in Sec. 11), you get no benefits — but at least you're still live!

Instruction: animals and monsters do not carry cash or valuables, but humans often do. If you have defeated

bandits, mutineers, etc., roll **D100**. The score is the number of Káitars you find. Again, if you had your friends fight for you, you get no plunder.

Instruction: return to the adventure Section you came from and continue.

13. BANG, YOU'RE DEAD (YOU HOPE NOT!) YOU LOSE!

Instruction: if you lose a fight, roll a **D10**: 1-3 = you're dead (sorry!); 4-5 = you are seriously wounded; 6-8 = you are lightly wounded; 9-10 = you are miraculously unharmed and return to the adventure.

Instruction: if you are lightly wounded, you lose 1-10 (a **D10** roll) Body Damage Points (Sec. 6.5). You may choose to employ only Body Damage Point totals, or you may roll randomly to see which body part is hit. If this kills you, apologies! A serious wound loses 2-20 (a **D10** roll x 2)

Body Damage Points. You regain these points after you have returned to Tsolyánu: i.e. to Sec. 10. If your Body Damage Points fall below your total in Sec. 6.5, you are dead. If you live, return to the adventure.

Instruction: if you have the skill of "physician," a spell of "healing," or an "Eye of Healing" (Sec. 14), roll a **D10**: 1-6 = your wounds are healed without any loss of points; 7-10 = you do not use your device, spell, etc. in time: go to the preceding paragraph..

14. THE EYES HAVE IT!

During various of the adventures in this book you may find an "Eye." These are devices of the Latter Times, which perform functions similar to magical spells. Eyes were developed later after humankind had become adept in penetrating the "Wall of Reality" and bringing energy over into Tékumel's Plane. An Eye is about the size and shape of a human eye but is made of ancient non-conducting metals, which do not impede spell-casting. An Eye has an aperture in front, and a firing stud on the back. Some also have a little charge-counter beside the firing stud with numerals written in the unreadable languages of the distant past. Later owners

sometimes added translations in Llyáni, Bednálljan, etc. An Eye may contain up to 100 charges, but most have been depleted over the centuries.

Instruction: roll a **D10** to determine which Eye you have found. Then roll **D100** TWICE and subtract the smaller score from the larger score to discover how many charges it has. (Eyes with many charges are rare.) Eyes affect varying numbers of targets: e.g. 1-5 = a **D10** roll ÷ 2. Eyes marked "A" are "aggressive and may be used as weapons. All Eyes and spells allow unwilling targets a "saving throw" in the rôle-playing game; this is assumed in the "magical weapon" column in Sec. 11.

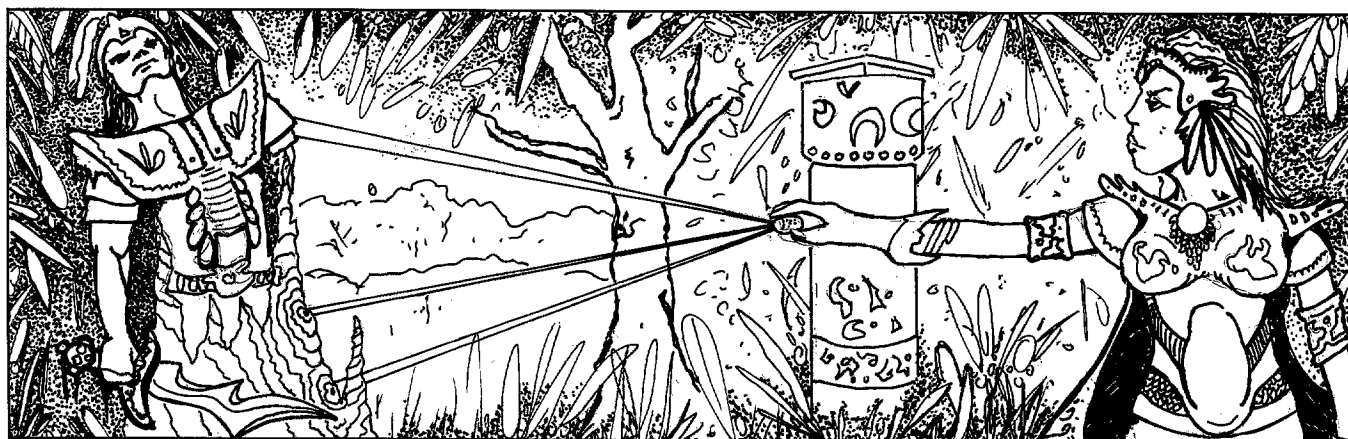
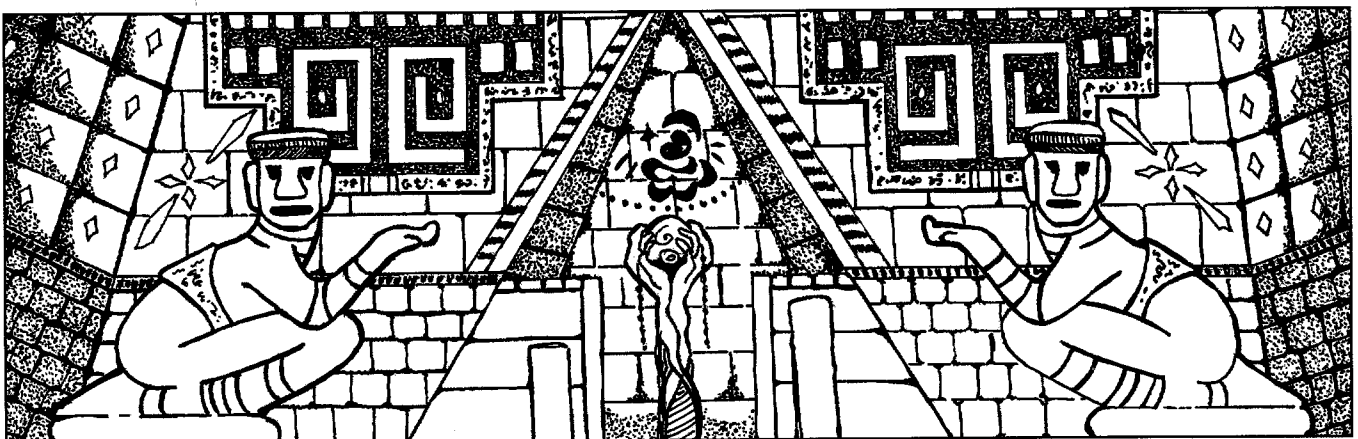


TABLE 14.1: THE "EYES"

NAME OF THE EYE	DESCRIPTION
1 The Excellent Ruby Eye	Puts 1-5 human-size beings slightly out-of-phase with this Plane, causing them to be "frozen" in a faint reddish glow. Victims cannot move, think, or act. They cannot be harmed or touched. Time stops for them until another charge of this same kind of Eye releases them. Range: 50 feet; instantaneous.
2 The Eye of Aerial Excellence	The user and 1-5 comrades may fly up to 300 feet per minute. Lasts 10 minutes. Persons or equivalent weights must be within 5 feet of the user in order to be picked up, and a saving throw is allowed to a target who does not wish to go along on the ride!
3 The Eye of Frigid Breath (A)	Projects a beam of intense cold, which freezes 1-5 targets solid (and dead!). Range: 50 feet. Instantaneous.
4 The Eye of Incomparable Understanding	Translates any spoken human or nonhuman language (but not the languages of the Latter Times, the Great Ancients, nor the secret tongues of the various priesthoods, however) into speech intelligible to the user. It does not act upon written materials. Its effects last 4 minutes and have a range of 20 feet.
5 The Eye of Non-Seeing	Renders the user and 1-5 comrades (within a 5 foot radius) invisible; foes of invisible beings go up two rows in Sec. 11. Lasts 5 minutes.
6 The Ineluctable Eye of Healing	Heals 1-10 lost Damage Points and cures diseases. Range: 5 feet. Instantaneous.
7 The Terrible Eye of Raging Power (A)	Fires a charge of raw electricity that hits 1-5 targets; takes away 3-30 (a D10 x 3) Damage Points! Range: 100 feet, but will rebound upon the user in a smaller space. Instantaneous.
8 The Eye of Hastening Destiny	Causes the user and 1-5 comrades to move at 3 times their normal speed. Comrades must be within a 5 foot radius of the caster. Lasts 2 minutes.
9 The Eye of Allseeing Wonder	Projects a beam which reveals invisible objects or beings, nexus points, and enchanted items. It does not reveal ordinary secret doors. Range: 30 feet. Lasts 1 minute.
10 The Eye of Being an Unimpeachable Shield Against Foes	Provides immunity from hand weapons and physical missiles for the caster and 1-5 comrades within a 5 foot radius. It offers no protection against spells or magical devices. Lasts 5 minutes.



18. LIVYÁNU

D. UP ANCHOUR!

Your fat *Tnék* [a square-rigged sailing ship used to transport cargo] named The Bountiful Hand of Avánthe, sets sail from Jakálla Harbour. You watch the Harbourmaster and his gangs of slaves dredging yellow mud from the shipping lanes, and then Tsolyánu is left behind in a blaze of golden sunset. You travel south to Point Küné, then westward to put in at insect-ridden Penóm, then along the coast to Ngéshtu Head, past several pretty little islands lying off the high bluffs of Pán Cháka, and finally straight across open sea to Point Dásht in Livyánu. There you have an encounter on the high seas!

Instruction: roll a D10 against the following table:

TABLE D.1: TRAVEL TO TSÁMRA

D10	EVENT & INSTRUCTIONS
1-4	You see several Tsolyáni merchant ships escorted by naval vessels. After a safe voyage, you arrive in Tsámra. Go to Sec. D.1
5	Your ship sinks in a storm. Go to Sec. D.2
6	Your ship encounters a <i>Kruá</i> , a platter-shaped sea monster with six spidery legs and two sawtoothed fighting arms. Go to Sec. 11. The <i>Kruá</i> is a Type 5 monster!
7-8	You pick up castaways from a floating spar Go to Sec. D.3
9	You're in trouble: a <i>Hlüss</i> mother-ship has spotted you! The huge, platter-shaped vessel draws in to attack! These scorpion-like nonhumans live on the Island of Hlüssuyal southeast of Point Dásht, and their ferocity is legendary. Go to Sec. 11; the <i>Hlüss</i> are Type 4 monsters; if you win, go to Sec. D.9; if you lose, you become food for the <i>Hlüss</i> young (a horrible fate!)
10	Mutiny! Your captain has been mistreating the sailors, and they've had enough. Go to Sec. 11; the sailors are Type 3 human opponents. If you win, continue to Tsámra (Sec. D.1); if you lose and still live, go to Sec. D.8

D.1. TSÁMRA, GEM OF THE OCEAN

You sail westward into Kápranoi Bay between high, green hills dotted with white marble mansions until at last old Tsámra heaves into view. For the first time you see the monolithic pyramids of the Shadow Gods' temples, each surrounded by windowless, high walls. The palaces of the nobility are something right out of the old tales about the wondrous lost city of

Purdánim: faery towers, domes of translucent glass slabs, enameled tiles, fluted columns, carvings and sculptures and mighty fortified walls! It's too much to see all at once! The youngish clan-brother who is in charge of your cargo sends you ashore to seek the local branch of your clan, and soon you are sipping yellow *Másh*-brandy and getting your land-legs back after weeks at sea. There is much talk of prices, import duties, tolls, and profits; you pick up little of this and go off to sleep. The next day you explore the markets and the shops where finer goods are sold. Tall men in yellows, greens, and purples, wearing crested golden helmets and carrying many-bladed halberds, forbid you to enter certain gates: these are the visible arm of the *Vrú'unek*, the fearsome Livyáni internal security force. You must stay in the Foreigners' Quarter. Bored, you return to your clanhouse.

Instruction: roll a D10 against the following table:

TABLE D.1.1: VISITING TSÁMRA

D10	EVENT & INSTRUCTIONS
1-4	A fascinating visit; after a month in Tsámra, you return home with a profit. You make 100-1,000 <i>Káitars</i> on the voyage. Go to Sec. 10
5-6	If you are a man, you fall in love with a sloe-eyed, tattooed (Sec. D.13) Livyáni maiden; the affair is bittersweet: you can never be together. Sadly you depart for home. If you are a woman, the same except your beloved is a sleek, athletic, tattooed young nobleman from Tsámra. You make 50-500 <i>Káitars</i> — you were too busy with the girl to make money! Go to Sec. 10
7-8	Robbed by footpads! Bah! Lose 10-100 <i>Káitars</i> . Go to Sec. 10
9-10	You lose your way and find yourself in an alleyway that leads deeper and deeper into the old city Go to Sec. D.12. If you return alive, go to Sec. 10

Instruction: you may be asked to return and roll again on the preceding table. You can do this only once. Thereafter, you must go home to Sec. 10. You cannot go on the same adventure more than once; reroll if this happens.

D.2 DOWN, DOWN INTO THE BRINY DEEP!

Your ship founders in one of the terrible storms that harass the coast near Point Dásht. You have barely time to leap overboard before your vessel tilts up and then slides down under the waves.

Instruction: if you have no levels of swimming, you are in trouble! Roll a D10: 1-7 = you drown (alas!); 8-10 = you



manage to hold onto a floating mast. Go to the next paragraph. If you can swim, the D10 scores are: 1-2 = you drown; 3-10 = you survive. Go to the next paragraph.

Instruction: roll a D10: 1-5 = you are rescued by your own sailors in a lifeboat. Give them 500 Káitars as a reward and arrive safely in Tsámra. Go to Sec. D.1; 6-8 = you are rescued by a Mu'ugalavyáni Qél (trireme). Go to Sec. D.5; 9-10 = you are rescued by a Páchi Léi merchant ship (a Tnék). Go to Sec. D.6.

D.3. CASTAWAYS!

Your lookout calls down from the mainmast that he sees people clinging to a floating spar. You demand that they be rescued. Captain Hárchar hiVárshu, a perpetually pessimistic old soul, grumbles but finally agrees.

Instruction: roll a D10 to determine their identity: 1-6 = they are only slaves; your captain declares them worthless and mercifully has them killed; 7-8 = they are merchants: they gratefully reward you with 100-1,000 Káitars; 9-10 = you haul aboard a Mu'ugalavyáni naval officer and his aide (roll a D10: 1-6 = male; 7-10 = female). The officer invites you to visit him in Tsámra, where he is headed to become Chargé-d'Affaires for Mu'ugalavyáni Naval Intelligence. Go to Sec. D.7. If you do not wish to visit the Mu'ugalavyáni, journey on to Tsámra. Go to Sec. D.1.

D.4 MUTINY ON THE BOUNTIFUL

For days you have noticed the sailors' angry looks whenever the captain, old Hárchar hiVárshu of the Blazoned Sail clan, appears. He does not treat them well, even by Tsolyáni standards, and at last they rise in revolt.

Instruction: roll a D10: 1-3 = they lose, bloodily, and you reach Tsámra safely. Go to Sec. D.1; 4-5 = they win and

sell you into slavery in Tsámra. Go to Sec. D.8; 6-8 = their leader, a slick and devious rascal named Matlór, ransoms you back to your clan for 1,000-10,000 Káitars. Go to Sec. D.1; 9-10 = you are held prisoner but are soon rescued by a Tsolyáni warship captained by a straitlaced young officer named Sónkolel hiQolyélmú, who has the mutineers impaled. He takes you on to Tsámra aboard his ship. Go to Sec. D.1.

D.5 RESCUED (?) BY THE RED-HATS!

The red-lacquered trireme stands by as sweating, red-faced sailors haul you aboard. The captain gives his name as Ilumúnish Dilésa (Mu'ugalavyáni men's names end in *-ish* or *-s*, and women's usually end in *-a*. The Red-Hats also do not prefix their lineage names with *hi-*). You are glad to be alive. But then the captain gives orders.

Instruction: roll a D10: 1 = you are taken back to the port of Khéiris and sacrificed to the Lord Jekkúmish, the Aspect of Ever-living Conflagration, in the great temple of Lord Hrhsh (woe!); 2-3 = you are enslaved for two years as a common labourer working on the dikes near Khéiris, but at last you are ransomed by your clan. You owe them 1,000-10,000 Káitars! Go to Sec. 10; 4-5 = you are returned to your homeland at once and no ransom is asked. Go to Sec. 10; 6-8 = you manage to escape overland through the Chákan forests and are taken in by kindly Páchi Léi, who return you to your people. Go to Sec. 10; 9-10 = you are bought by an elderly Mu'ugalavyáni bureaucrat, who hands you over to his young wife as a house-slave. Go to Sec. D.10.

D.6 SAVED BY THE PÁCHI LÉI

The nonhuman Páchi Léi have four short legs, a bulbous body covered with grey-green hide and many protuberances, four slender upper arms, and a

heavy-jawed, toothy, beast-like head. While they are not prepossessing, they are not ill-intentioned. They take you back eastward to the coast of Pán Cháka and thence to their tree-house villages in the depths of the forest. There you see the famed Flame Opals, which are not gems at all but secretions from a type of tree. These are very costly: as much as 600 Káitars per carat in Jakállá!

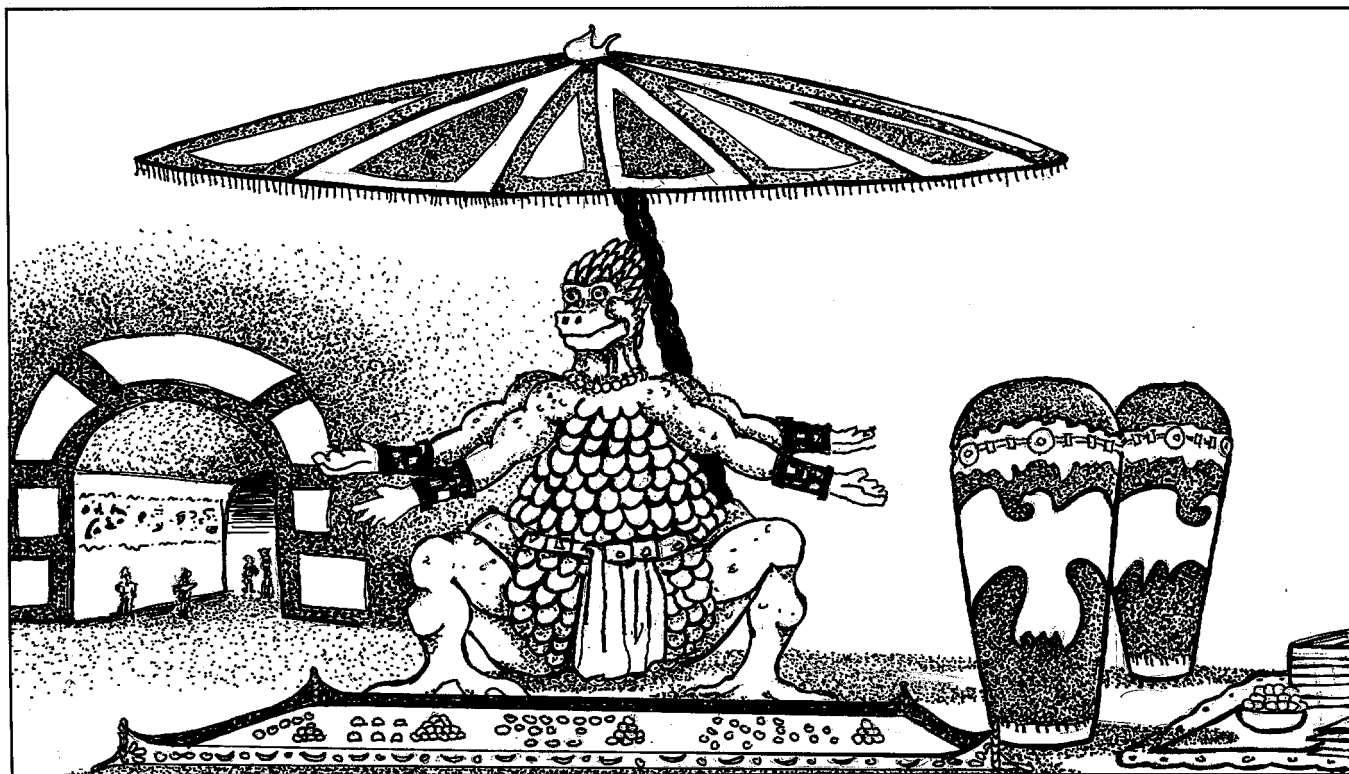
Instruction: roll a D10: 1-5 = your Páchi Léi friends like you but won't give you any Flame Opals. Go to Sec. 10; 6-8 = they give you 1-10 Flame Opals (worth 1,000 Káitars apiece). Go to Sec. 10; 9-10 = they give you 1-10 larger gems worth twice that amount! You may sell these when you get home. Go to Sec. 10.

D.7. DUELLING CHIDÓKS

You visit Lord Jajáish Nettukánu at the Mu'ugalavyáni Legate's compound in Tsámra. He is a big, bluff, pop-eyed man with a slightly unbalanced look about him. You are not eager to come to see him but feel you must pay a courtesy call. After all, you rescued him from the sea. He invites you in, offers you salted and spiced *Hmélu* buttermilk, called *Chumétl*, which nearly all of the Five Empires find refreshing, and a tray of Livyáni delicacies. After awhile his aide enters. You took little notice of this person before on the ship but now realise that he/she is inviting you to continue this party in a more private place. (The sex of the aide does not matter; he, she, or it appears to be stuck on you!)

Lord Jajáish takes umbrage. His reddish features become even redder, and his eyes flash. Before you can leave, he throws his delicate red-glass drinking bowl against the wall and cries that he will not tolerate any "Tsolyáni upstart" stealing his lover from him! There is a brief quarrel, and he challenges you to a duel. If you have any expertise with the long sword, your honour demands that you accept. The aide hurries out and shortly returns with two *Chidók*, the heavy axe-swords favoured in Livyánu. You now realise that you have been set up: this man is an experienced swordsman, and he wants to slay or humiliate a Tsolyáni of high clan for reasons not clear to you.

Instruction: if you have any skill levels in "long sword," you must fight. Go to Sec. 11. Lord Jajáish fights as a Type 4 human. If you win, you do not kill him but may take his nice steel sword (worth 2,000 Káitars) and leave him groaning on the floor. Go to Sec. D.1. If you lose, he smuggles you down to the docks and throws you into the hold of a ship bound for Khéiris. He thinks the Mu'ugalavyáni can gain leverage with your clan by holding you a hostage. Your clan offers to ransom you. Roll a D10: 1-4 = Lord Jajáish accepts the ransom (5,000 Káitars) and frees you in Tsámra. Go to Sec. D.1; 5-8 = you are kidnapped and carried off to Mu'ugalavyá. Go to Sec. D.5; 9-10 = you escape, return to your clanhouse in Tsámra, and have Lord Jajáish arrested by the Vrú'unek. Your relatives want no trouble, what with relations between Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá so badly strained, and they settle for demanding 7,000 Káitars of Shámntla (legally awarded blood-money or damages). Lord



Jajáish haughtily refuses, and your clansmen drop the matter. Later, you see the aide again and chase him/her down an alley, but he/she escapes. Go to Sec. 10.

Instruction: if you have no levels in “long sword,” Lord Jajáish orders you seized, bundled in a carpet, and shipped off to Mu’ugalavyá. It would be ignoble to fight him with magic. Go to Sec. D.5

D.8. A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH

The mutineers hand you over to the slavers in Tsámra. There is no chance to contact your clansmen. At the auction, a bearded, greasy Salarvyáni bids on you, but a stern-faced man in the parti-coloured robes of a priest of one of the Shadow Gods bids higher. His name is Chímudaz Gátha, of the High Singing Bird clan. (Livyáni men’s names end in *-az* or *-z*, and women’s in *-eb* or *-ab*.) He listens politely to your tale of woe, shrugs, and sends you off to quarry stones for the new temple of the God Ru’ungkáno, who is similar to Lord Vimúhla with a little of Lord Ksárul mixed in. The work is terribly hard, and you resolve to escape.

Instruction: roll a D10: 1-4 = you escape and find your way back to your clansmen, who put you on the next ship for Tsolyánu. Go to Sec. 10; 5-7 = you are caught and returned to slavery, where you spend a year at hard labour before you are able to escape. You learn Livyáni well (4 levels) and increase your Height-Build-Strength number by 10%. At last you escape again and make it home. Go to Sec. 10; 8-9 = your owner has you flogged, then sells you to a landowner in far-off Kakársh, where you are forcibly married to a jolly, round-faced girl named Mí’ikeb if you are a man, or to a decent, simple, and honest husband named Múáz if you are a woman. You spend the rest of your life tilling your master’s fields, unable to escape; 10 = Lord Chímudaz coldly orders you sacrificed (sorry!) to dread Ru’ungkáno. You do not want to know the details. (Let us mourn!)

D.9. LET’S LOOT THE HLIÜSS SHIP!

The slanting decks of the huge, hive-ship are awash with greenish Hliüss blood — and a goodly amount of red human blood as well. Your shipmates prowl fearfully from chamber to chamber, wondering at the curving walls and floors, examining artifacts here and there, and making certain that none of the Hliüss still live. These creatures decorate their hard, bluish-green carapaces with patterns of inset gems, and some of your crew are already busy prying these off. You enter a cabin, then go below, using the rough-surfaced ramp that the Hliüss prefer to stairs. Here you find lanterns of bluish glass, weapons and objects strewn about, as well as occasional enemy

corpses. The weapons are pretty, but they do not fit your hand. You may take one as a souvenir. Farther down, you come upon low passageways that twist and curve through the bowels of the vessel. You hear a rustling noise in the dimness: a living Hliüss warrior, jagged sword at the ready, leaps out from a side-corridor. The Hliüss is a type 4 monster. Go to Sec. 11 and fight! If you lose, do not go on to Sec. 13 because you are already dead. If you win, return to this Section and loot the body.

Instruction: roll a D10: 1-8 = you find 1,500 Káitars in gems; 9-10 = you find this amount + one “Eye,” a device of the Great Ancients. Go to Sec. 14 and roll a D10 to find which it is.

Instruction: if you are frightened, you can go back now. You return to your ship and sail on to Tsámra. Go to Sec. D.1. If you want to explore further, go to the next paragraph.

You nervously shovel your loot into your belt-pouch and move on. The great ship is eerie and dark. You plunge forward, torn between fear and a need to see what few humans have ever seen: the deepest recesses of a Hliüss ship. You pass cabin after cabin, corridors that branch and cross and open into other corridors, and odd-shaped rooms filled with enigmatic items. There is too much to see — and more Hliüss vessels will almost certainly be nearby.

At last you enter a vast chamber in what must be the very belly of the ship. Here, bloated and hideous, is the Hliüss-mother, the monstrous creature who spawned the crew you have just slain. She hangs spider-like from in a webby cocoon on the back wall, her eggs scattered untended before her. Farther away, her older offspring, bluish worm-larvae, squirm and writhe amidst a clutter of what look to be wrapped packages. You squint at the latter — and make out a human arm here, a head there! These are previous captives, paralysed and kept here to provide nourishment for the Hliüss-children! Some twitch feebly, and you realise they still live.

The Hliüss-mother appears to be dead. She hangs motionless, but you hear odd plopping sounds from her distended belly — as big as a small house! — and see that new eggs are still being emitted from her birth-channel.

She opens a bulging, filmy eye and looks at you.

You let out an inadvertent gasp and back away. The Hliüss-mother lifts her horny head and clacks her mandibles. Then, horror of horrors, one of the gauze-wrapped captives jerks, quivers, and goes into

convulsions. A human head emerges from the cocoon, blind and coated with sticky, gauzy stuff. It is a man's head, most of the skin gone, the eye-sockets empty and sightless. Words issue from his mouth, although the timbre of his voice is no longer even faintly human. He speaks first in Livyáni, then in Mu'ugalavyáni, and at last in your own Tsolyáni. He says, "You — have — slain my brood, human. You have slain my children. Now you are come to slay me too!"

You gulp, tighten your grip on your weapon, but do not reply. If you found an Eye on the *Hlüss* warrior's body (above), now is the time to see what it does! The *Hlüss*-mother herself is slowly raising a jagged, mottled claw in which she clutches some sort of shiny object.

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight. The *Hlüss*-mother is a Type 6 monster herself, and she is holding a powerful technological weapon: she is thus the equivalent of a Type 8 foe! Shoot your Eye at her if you have one! Otherwise you will end up like the poor wretches on the floor there.

Instruction: if you win, you may take the *Hlüss*-mother's weapon: a purple-hued Ball of Instant Eventuation, stolen long ago from another nonhuman race, the *Mihállí*. The Ball is defective: it emits only a weak beam of energy that fails to fry you. Take it — you can sell it at home for 1,000-10,000 *Káitars* (a D10 roll). Go Sec. D.1.

Instruction: if you lose, roll a D10: 1-4 = you are dead (condolences!); 5-10 = you are wounded: lose a D10 of Body Damage Points. You crawl away to hide among the alien clutter. Your comrades find you there, gibbering and shaking with terror. They take you back to your ship and put you to bed. The next day you discover that your hair has turned permanently prematurely white. Travel on to *Tsámra*. Go to Sec. D.1.

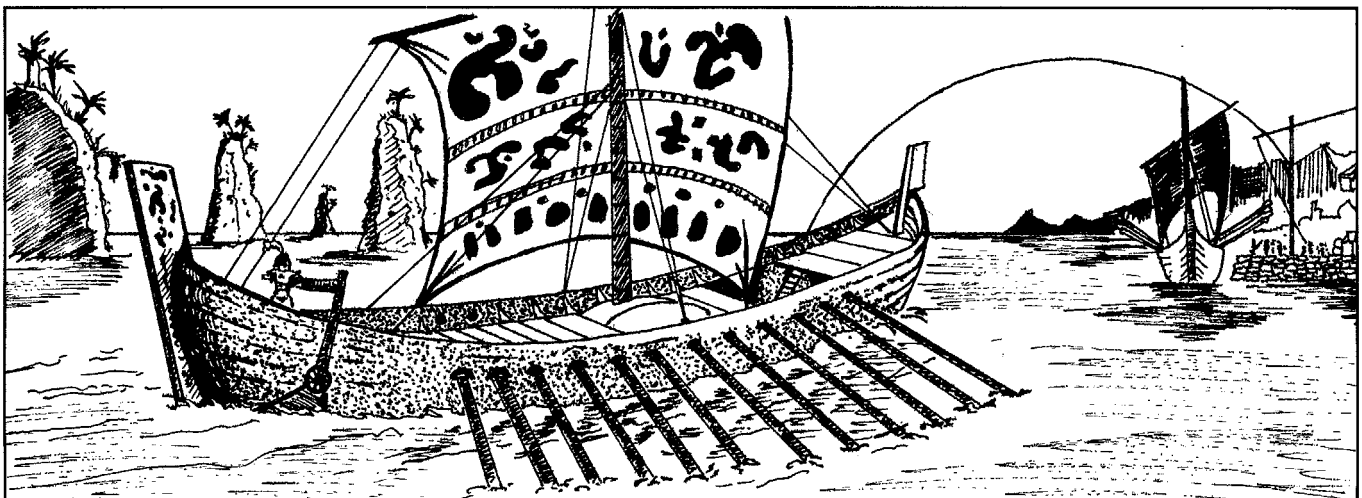
D.10. KHÉIRIS BY THE BAY

Instruction: if you are a man, use this Section. If you are a woman, go to Sec. D.11.

Your new owner, *Tupénish Desátl*, is a fine-featured old man with the pale complexion and silvery white hair of a man of sixty-five; yet his wife cannot be more than twenty: a long-limbed, pretty girl with a look about her that betokens danger. You take heart and furiously begin trying to remember your love-poems. She, on the other hand, only gives you an indolent look then orders two of her stewards to take you to the slave quarters to put a metal collar on you.

"Her name is *Alyána* — *Alyána Desátl*," one of the stewards tells you, "and the last young boy she had brought here spent just one happy night frolicking in her bed. The next morning she had him flayed alive and impaled on a barbed spike in front of the mansion!" The other man adds, "Spoiled, that's her trouble. Her father's a High Preceptor — a *Mre'édish* — in the administration of the Temple of Lord *Hrsh*, and her mother's a sister of Lord *Hurusámish Satléna*, the High General of the Company of the Mourners in Sable, the best Legion *Mu'ugalavyá* has. They're fanatics for Lord *Hrsh*! No, boy, don't play 'beast with two backs' with the young mistress!"

You take their advice. Scrubbing floors in the dining room holds a lot more charm than being flayed, impaled, or whatever other games Lady *Alyána* may want to play. Weeks go by before you manage to smuggle a message out to the *Tsolyáni* Legate by the hand of a sympathetic slave. Within days a delegation appears at Lord *Tupénish*' gates, and the Legate — one of your own distant clan-cousins — offers a large ransom for you. Lord *Tupénish* ponders, then says that he will reply on the morrow.



That night, as you turn a corner in the passage leading from the scullery to the wine-cellar, you find Lady Alyána standing in front of you. You stop. She approaches you and looks into your face. "So our little brown *Küni*-bird is really a proud *Khéshchal*-bird in disguise," she says, with a saucy glint in her eyes. "A Tsolyáni noble boy in our humble scullery!"

"I didn't ask to be here," you say gruffly. "I'd much rather be home in Tsolyánu."

"A boring place. I visited there with my clan-uncle five years ago. He was on a mission to your oh-so-mighty Seal Emperor." We saw nothing but flies, mud, and insolent slaves. One day we shall have to return and teach you true 'noble action!'"

"As your armies tried to do back in 2,020? I don't remember that you won that war!"

"You forget yourself — slave." You find her fingers touching you: here, then there, then in other places. "Tomorrow my husband sells you back to your barbarian kinsmen, but for tonight you are still my property! I can do—"

Instruction: at this point you must make a choice. The smart thing would be to bow low, back away, and toddle off to the slave quarters as fast as your legs will carry you! If you do this, roll a **D10**: 1-5 = Alyána's expression is a mixture of puzzlement and fury, but she lets you go. Go to Sec. 10; 6-7 = she angrily summons her stewards and orders you flogged to death for insulting her. Fortunately her husband sees them dragging you away and intervenes. Next morning he personally sees that you are handed over to your kinsmen. Go to Sec. 10; 8-9 = she imperiously summons you back, orders you into a vacant guest room, and proceeds to teach you things you never learned back home! In the morning she laughs and turns you over to your relatives. Go to Sec. 10; 10 = she snaps her fingers, guards appear, and she watches as they put you messily to death (too bad!). Remember the Tsolyáni adage: "Scorn the Gods before you scorn a woman!"

Instruction: if you take her up on her invitation, roll a **D10**: 1-2 = she sneers, slaps your face, and stalks away; at dawn your people arrive and take you home. Go to Sec. 10; 3-5 = she takes you into her bedroom — Lord Tupénish is away — and puts on a performance that would delight the Goddess Hrihayál Herself! She then tells you that she ordered her stewards to lie to you about what happens to slave lovers, just to see whether you would make a brave pass at her anyway. Time is now too short for such games, she says, and she no longer can deny her passion. In the morning she offers to run away with you to Tsolyánu. You feel you cannot take her with you, and you



kiss and bid one another tearful good-byes. Your kinfolk arrive at dawn, pay the ransom, and take you home. Go to Sec. 10; 6-8 = you are locked in Alyána's embrace when Lord Tupénish enters: he attacks you in a jealous rage. Go to Sec. 11. and fight: he is a Type 2 opponent. If you win, you run away with Alyána to the Tsolyáni Legation and make arrangements to go home at once. You must take her with you or she will be slain by her husband's clansmen; take her home to Mama. Go to Sec. 10. If you lose, Lord Tupénish has you bound, mutilated (bad!), and dumped on the steps of the Tsolyáni Legation in disgrace. You lose a D10 of Body Damage Points and never find out what happened to Alyána. Go to Sec. 10; 9-10 = Alyána bursts into tears and tells you that she has changed her mind and cannot go through with any extra-marital lovemaking! She really cares for Lord Tupénish. Besides, he won't be around too much longer, and his wealth would literally "choke a Hrsh." She sends you back to your quarters to await your relatives. Go to Sec. 10.

Instruction: if you are still alive, you discover that you have learned two skill levels of *Mu'ugalavyáni*. You have also learned some lessons from Lady Alyána. Roll a **D10**: you add 1-10 points to your Charisma score (Sec. 6.8).

D.11. BADLY BEGUN BUT WELL ENDED

At first you fear rape or worse: the fate of a female slave in the Five Empires is often unpleasant. It is soon clear, however, that your new owner, Lord

Tupénish Desátl, is not the sort to mistreat you. He is elderly, stoop-shouldered, and broad-faced, with a shock of shoulder-length white hair, and the delicate look of an artist or musician. You learn that he is some sort of official in the service of Lord Hrsh, the chief deity of Mu'ugalavyá's pantheon. He tells you that you are to be a gift for his wife. You protest that you are a free Aridáni woman of a high Tsolyáni clan, but he only smiles. Relations between your two countries are now so strained that this sort of illegal — and ignoble! — enslavement is winked at.

Khéiris is the chief port city of Mu'ugalavyá. Its grey walls march up the bluffs on the east bank of the Putuhénu River estuary to a ridge topped by pyramids and domes. The quays are busy, crowded with both humans and nonhumans. You see hulking, black, reptilian *Shén*; crested, doughy-white Swamp Folk stumping along on four legs — they are actually excellent sailors and the backbone of Mu'ugalavyá's navy; graceful *Pé Chói* from the Chákan forests, the black chitin of the males and the white of the females gleaming like polished marble in the sun; and a few *Tinalíya*, small creatures with four legs and two arms, looking like toys composed of globes of brownish clay strung together by a child. You even see an *Ahoggyá* or two — rude, smelly monsters! — with four arms, four legs, and eyes on all four sides beneath heavy carapaces.

Lady Alyána Desátl is a surprise: she is at least thirty years younger than her husband. She is slim, angular, and rather melancholy-looking, with a tall forehead, long tresses bound back with a fillet of golden wire, and full, sensuous lips. You decide that your new mistress is too bony for beauty, however: her small breasts and narrow hips would hold little appeal at home! Lady Alyána wears a *Hnelésh*, a poncho-like, shoulder-to-calf tunic of embroidered *Güdrú*-cloth that is left open at both sides and belted at the waist — a costume favoured in western Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá.

You discover that Lady Alyána is very, very lonely. Lord Tupénish is embroiled in politics; he frowns on her taking a slave lover or marrying a second husband (polyandry is sometimes practiced in the Five Empires); and the usual aristocratic pastimes have palled. You offer to teach her your hobby skills, and she responds by teaching you Mu'ugalavyáni and the *Ténturen*, the favoured instrument of the classical epic-singers. This is quite large, with sympathetic strings beneath those that produce the melody, and its sound is dark and moody. It is played by two people: one who fingers the frets and the other who plucks the strings. Lady Alyána also

sings well, and you begin learning the thousands of verses of the modern recension of "The Lament to the Wheel of Black." You and your erstwhile mistress become fast friends.

One night Lady Alyána comes to you with a letter. "I cannot see you suffer, dear one, and I thus took the liberty of writing to your clansmen here in Khéiris. They have replied, offering to ransom you and take you home." She begins to cry. "I have spoken to my husband, and he agrees. I shall hate to lose you, but I know that you want to go home, as I would in your place." She embraces you and turns away. The following morning a delegation of your clansmen, men and women whom you do not know, arrive to take you away. Lady Alyána does not appear.

Instruction: gain two levels of Mu'ugalavyáni and two of the hobby skill of "music and dance" (Sec. 9.3). She also teaches you more about costume and jewellery: gain one level of "fashion and dress" in Sec. 7.4. You have been away for a year. Go to Sec. 10.

D.12. I HATE DARK ALLEYS!

At the end of the alley, there is a stout door. You halt, confused. A slender, foreign-looking man appears at your elbow and gestures you forward. You find yourself in a lamplit cellar fragrant with eddying incense-smoke. All around, you see shadowy groups of people eating together out of brass bowls. Is this the clanhouse of a common food-preparers' clan? After a moment you realise how strange that would be: you are in Livyánu, and as everybody knows, the Livyáni never eat together but always alone by themselves in "privacy booths" of carved wood. Even married couples eat this way. Here, you see people feeding each other — literally putting food into one another's mouths — an act that would send most Livyáni into paroxysms of revulsion! You have stumbled into an illegal joint-eating establishment (an "eat-easy?")! If the secret police, the *Vrú'unek*, discover this place, all of these people will be hung up in bags of *Vraóz*-fibre to die — you included! (*Vraóz*-fibre contracts when exposed to salt, and being tied up in a net-bag and doused with sea water leads to unfortunate consequences.) You also notice people taking pinches of white, blue, and yellow powders from trays passed by small, spidery, brownish creatures with four legs, two upper arms, and great blinking eyes: these are members of a nonhuman race called the *Tinalíya*, who dwell in northern Livyánu. This could become ugly, and it is past time to depart!

As you turn to leave, there is a commotion: two women have begun to fight over a tiny packet of greenish powder. One of the *Tinalíya* scuttles over and begins striking both combatants with a thin cane, gabbling in its alien tongue. A man behind you pushes forward to see better, and you end up in the midst of the altercation.

Instruction: if you are a man, roll a **D10: 1-4** = there isn't much of a problem: you pull the two women apart and then leave as fast as you can. Go to Sec. D.1; **5-7** = you find that the younger woman has been slightly hurt; you gallantly escort her up to her room, where you find a huge gentleman awaiting you with a club: give him all your money (a D100 roll) or fight. Go to Sec. 11; He is a Type 3 opponent. If you win, you gain 1-10 Káitars (roll a D10) and go home. Go to Sec. 10. If you lose, you surrender all your money, weapons, and the belt-pouch in which you carry your most precious possessions; then you are thrown out into the street. You take the next ship home in disgust. Go to Sec. 10; **8-9** = the girl tells you that she is a prostitute, called *Dálayeb* by the *Livyáni*. She has a strange, non-*Livyáni* accent, however, and you learn that she comes from *Tsoléi*, the island archipelago in the far western ocean. Her "home-name" is *Dála* of the Red Moon Beach. She begs you to help her get home — she cannot stand this sordid life and yearns for her blue seas and green islands. She offers you a leathern cup of wine and begins to pull the silver pins out of her hair. Things become friendly. Her sleeping mat looks inviting... You feel a strange lassitude come over you and drift off to sleep. You



wake the next morning, naked, dirty, and without even a copper *Khíya* (the smallest *Livyáni* coin) to your name (lose D100 Káitars) behind a squalid shop in the slums. An officer of the *Vrú'unek* sees you, but instead of arresting you, he takes you back to your clanhouse; your kinsmen give him 50 Káitars, which you must repay. Go to Sec. 10; **10** = a *Tinalíya* enters. Go to Sec. D.13.

Instruction: if you are a woman, roll a **D10: 1-4** = the two combatants turn on you, and you end with a bloody nose and a few minor scratches; a *Tinalíya* proffers you a cup of wine, and one of the diners, a veiled and masked woman who gives her name only as *Sheshna'ób* — which you later learn means "the Hidden One" — guides you home. On the way, you are halted by a squad of city guards; the woman shows them a small glittering object; they bow respectfully; and you reach your clanhouse safely. Go to Sec. D.1, and roll again — but no more dark alleys!; **5-7** = the younger of the two fighters takes you upstairs to her room, ostensibly to clean you up and wash your face. You see that this place is a brothel. The girl offers to do whatever you will pay for, but you are not interested. She tells you that her name is *Dála* of the Red Moon Beach, and that she is a *Tsoléini*. She implores you to help her get home. You hear footsteps, and a huge, bearded man pokes his bald head through the door: he demands money, and you disdainfully offer to buy this poor waif of a girl — he can get better and cheaper ones than this from the butcher-clans! He agrees to sell her for a few coins (give him D100 Káitars), and you take her back to your clanhouse, where you press another 100 Káitars into her hand and set her free. Go to Sec. D.1 and roll again; **8-9** = an ugly monster of a man enters, obviously *Dála's* owner; he smirks, and you go to Sec. D.14; **10** = a *Tinalíya* slips into the room. Go to Sec. D.13.

D.13. OFF TO THE ISLES

The *Tinalíya* scrapes at its hard, horny features with one claw-like hand, then says, "Get your clothes, girl, and get out! I must speak with this foreigner!" *Dála* scrambles to obey, and you are left with the creature. It points at the wine: "Do not drink that. It is drugged to make you easy prey for our gentle *Argonáz*, who relieves *Dála's* less-wary customers of whatever they possess." You rise to leave, but the *Tinalíya* gestures you back. "You are a *Tsolyáni*. Yes? Would you make money? If so, I have a certain — patron — who requires a foreigner to travel out to *Dála's* homeland, the *Tsoléi* Isles, to observe certain — ah — matters and report."

You have heard that the *Livyáni* have recently sent a major expeditionary force out to *Tsoléi*. This makes you cautious: why does this "patron" need a *Tsolyáni*? Why choose a mere stripling like yourself

for the job? Tsoléi is also very far away: a thousand *Tsán* across Livyánu, then nearly another thousand *Tsán* by sea! It could take years!

The little being rubs its hands with a sound like scraping clay pots together. "There is payment — much payment," it says in its precise, prissy, little voice. "And my patron would be grateful. Very grateful." You demur: "Who might your patron be?" "That I must not say, but we speak of one of the highest." You continue to question the creature, and it eventually mutters, "One who may be the Third of Four." You have heard that the Livyáni intelligence service is organised in "cells": the fewer members in your cell, the higher it is. The highest is that which contains Lord Ásqar Gyardánaz, the ruler of this fanatically secretive country. He is said to be the "First of Three." You are dealing with someone VERY exalted.

"It is all right, Ettó," a new voice says in harshly accented Tsolyáni. A lady steps out into the light from behind a curtain. You cannot tell her age, though her voice is not that of a young woman. She is nude except for a cloak draped over one shoulder and a grotesquely carved mask of gilded *Chlén*-hide that conceals her face. Her body is covered with the *Aomúz* tattoos that every Livyáni must have, if he or she is not a lowly slave. You recall that these people identify their sects, clans, and other matters in this odd and highly visible fashion: the more noble, the more tattoos. This lady's tracery of red and black glyphs crawls, slithers, and climbs all over her arms, legs, torso, and elsewhere, like a *Nyüré*-vine in the forest! "Hear me," she says, "I cannot stay long, and if you are to come with me to Tsoléi, we must settle the affair speedily." She gestures to cut off your questions. "In *Tsámra* lips whisper, tongues wag, and even the stones tell tales. We — a certain faction — hear rumblings of an imminent *Mu'ugalavyáni* invasion. We hear sighings that carry threats to our armies in Tsoléi. We hear murmurings of death to our Lord Ásqar and to his branch of the *Chi'úna* lineage of our Clan of the Gilded Wing. Even the birds warble of plots and revolts and impending doom. I have determined to travel to Tsoléi to learn the truth, since all sources say that these events will begin there. There are few I can trust, and our need is great. I shall take Ettó here, and a few guards, and I would also take a foreigner who will be my personal aide. I do not trust any of my own folk — a sad commentary upon us Livyáni. Therefore I seek a non-Livyáni — an innocent-looking foreigner — to accompany me. Will you go?" She waits.

You may not return for years — if you do not perish on the way! Yet there is something appealing about

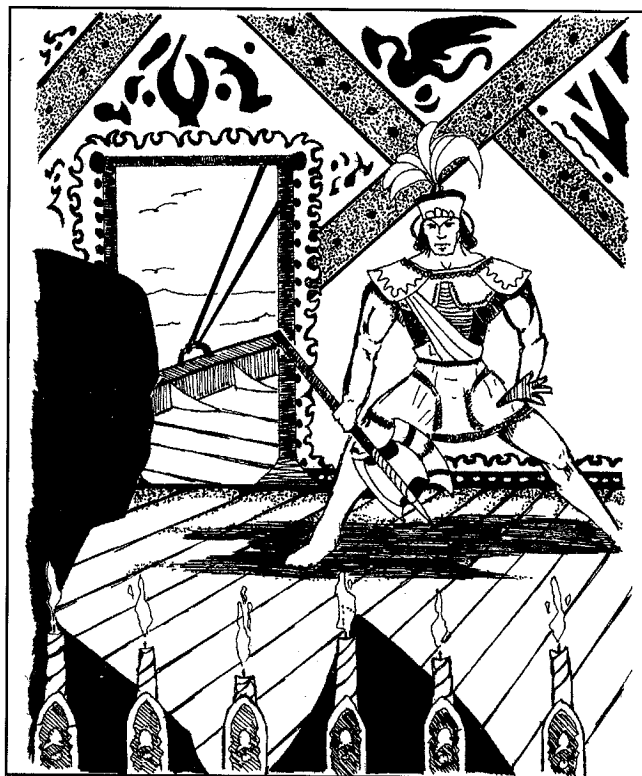
this strange woman. She is an aristocrat, born to the decadent luxury of *Tsámra*, yet she is willing to undertake a journey that would daunt the mythical hero *Hrúgga* himself! You ask for more details, and the *Tinalíya* provides the details of routes and arrangements for the trip. As the lamp gutters down to a spark, you must decide.

Instruction: if you want to accompany this as-yet nameless lady, go to Sec. D.15. If you choose not to make the trip, go to Sec. D.1 and roll again.

D.14. ONE UNPLEASANT TURN DESERVES ANOTHER

You have no choice but to fight. *Argonáz* is much larger than you. You can still beat him with skill, a magical weapon, or a lucky blow. Otherwise you can guess what he'll do to you!

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight. *Argonáz* is a Type 3 foe. Add +5 to your combat number because of the revulsion you feel for your opponent and the fate he has in store for you! If you win, you race down the stairs past other patrons who retreat before you, and thence back to your clanhouse. Go to Sec. D.1 and roll again. If you lose, *Argonáz* seizes you, wraps you in *Dála's* ragged blanket, and carries you off. You struggle to no avail, and soon you are introduced to life as a common prostitute in the lonely city of *Khéng*, far away on the southwestern coast of Livyánu. Roll a D10: 1-6 = after a year, you manage to escape and find your way back to *Tsámra* and a ship for home: you gain two levels of Livyáni.



Go to Sec. 10; 7-10 = you spend five years in Khéng. You become a rich and famous courtesan and eventually hire assassins to kidnap Argonáz and bring him to you for just retribution (which need not be detailed!). You gain all 5 levels of Livyáni, 6 levels of "dagger-knife-fighting" (Sec. 8.6), whether you have other warrior skills or not, 6 of "music and dance," and 3 of "pharmaceuticals and poisons" (Sec. 9.3)! You also receive 5 skill levels to invest as you wish in category 11 in Sec. 9.3. You are now one experienced lady! Go to Sec. 10.

D.15. A LONG WAY FROM HOME

You tell your clansmen where you are going but not with whom. They shake their heads but do not stop you. You make preparations and finally travel off. Weeks later, on a hot, muggy morning, you arrive at the fortress gates that bar the road to the Sealed City of Dláš (which you have NO plans to enter!). The Lady, whose real name you are not told — she calls herself Sheshna'ób ("the Hidden One") — meets you with an entourage of two *Chlén*-carts full of baggage, a *Sikúab* (company) of 25 soldiers, five maid-servants, and little Ettó. The soldiers wear the livery of the High Palace of Lord Ásqar himself, and from their gossip you realise that this woman is his sister. You are about as inconspicuous as a gaudy *Khéshchal*-bird on a white sheet! Travel quickly becomes tiring and hard on the feet. Neither the Lady nor her maids offer much company. It is clear that you are along for "window-dressing": the Lady tells everyone that she is making the trip to deliver you to the Tsołyáni Legate in Tsoley, a personal friend of hers, and she also intends to make a pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Sea-Goddess of Kakársha at Llú'ür in the Tsoley Archipelago, which she has seen in a dream. These

are all "harmless" reasons for making this trip, though they may not fool her enemies.

Instruction: roll D100 for the "do I die on this damned trip?" test: 1-95 = you reach your destination alive and well; 96-98 = you fall ill and lose a year recuperating in Khéng. Go to Sec. D.1; 99-100 = you die and pass on to the Paradises of Teretané (we shall mourn you! Farewell!). You must make this roll again if you are instructed to go back to Tsámra or home to Tsołyánu in the following paragraph.

Instruction: If you reach Tsoley, roll a D10: 1-2 = you watch as the Livyáni sappers go up against the walls of Llú'ür on Llú'úra Isle. Afterward you join in looting the city and gain 5,000-50,000 Káitars (a D10 x 5,000). At last you return home. Go to Sec. 10; 3-4 = you participate in the fighting; gain 1-5 (a D10 ÷ 2) skill levels in one of your "warrior" weapons (Sec. 8.6); also gain 5,000-10,000 Káitars in plunder. Go to Sec. 10; 5-6 = you fall in love with your mysterious patron, who is not bad for an old lady of thirty-two, tattoos or no tattoos; she reciprocates, and when she has learned what she wants to know, she takes you back to Tsámra, where she gives you a great diamond worth 12,000 Káitars. You receive 3 skill levels in the weapon of your choice, plus one "Eye" (Sec. 14: roll randomly for it, then check for the number of charges). Go to Sec. D.1 and roll again — but reroll any more dark alleys!; 7-9 = you are wounded when your patron is attacked by agents of her foes: you lose 1-10 Body Damage Points (unless you have an Eye of Healing) and 1-10 points permanently from your Height-Build-Strength number (Eye or no Eye) the Lady provides you with 10,000 Káitars, however, and safe passage home. Go to Sec. 10; 10 = you are slain by Tsoleyini archers shooting down from the parapets of the citadel at the siege of Ngaró (you will be missed!).



19. HUNTING

E. A-HUNTING WE WILL GO!

It is the month of Langála. The cold season is over, the stately *Gapúl*-trees are budding, the crops are sprouting, and life seems to be returning to the world. You are visiting the town of Haumá, where you have clan-folk. (If you come from Haumá, you are there with your family.) Your clan-uncle, who is a gruff, bristly, outdoorsy man in his fifties, invites you along on a hunting expedition. Even if you have no skill in weapons — or lack interest in hunting entirely — you feel that anything would be preferable to being surrounded by boring relatives for the rest of your visit.

Haumá is a pretty, wooded town: its temples and mansions appear freshly whitewashed and painted, its markets are clean, and its inhabitants are rustic but friendly. Off to the northwest, the thickly-forested Kúrt Hills remind you that not all of Tsolyánu is as tame and orderly. Your clan-elders tell tales of large beasts and strange, bandy-legged inhabitants of the Kúrt Hills, who wear leather jerkins and woven basketry skullcaps. You have seen some of these “Kurtáni” during your visit, and you are frankly curious. They are taciturn, aloof, and obviously disdainful of “city-folk.” People say that the Kurtáni are the best archers in the world, and the Legion of the Clan of the Inverted Hand, the 27th Imperial Light Infantry, produces the best scouts in the Five Empires. A jaunt up into the Kúrt Hills might be interesting.

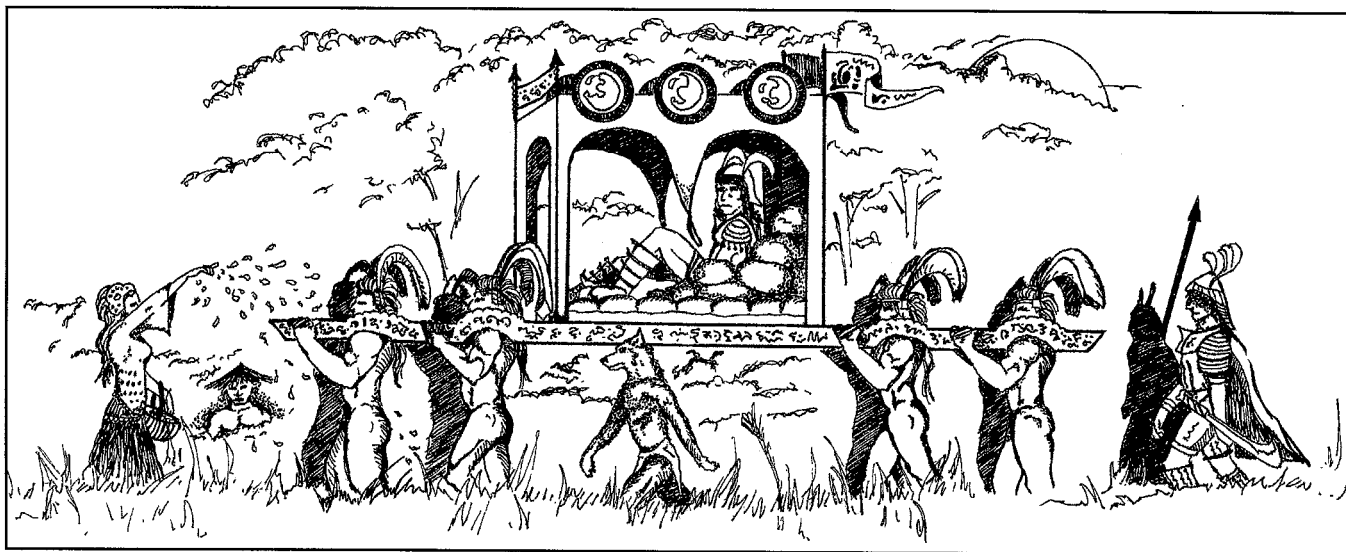
Your clan is well-to-do here in Haumá. On the designated day, your uncle appears with an escort of nearly a hundred stewards, cooks, guides, and

miscellaneous servants. There are people to bathe you, people to dress you, people to make breakfast, people to write and send messages, so that you need not lose touch with the outside world — even people to hold your bow and quiver and show you how to shoot, if you need them! Your uncle has also brought along a gaggle of boon-companions, concubines, musicians, singers, dancers, and acrobats. Muscular fellows wearing black leather kilts jerk at the leashes of huge, yapping dogs, and weapons-masters clamber up into the tarpaulin-covered *Chlén*-carts to inspect sheaves of arrows, bows, strings, and the paraphernalia of the hunt.

Somebody shouts a command; the musicians break into a fanfare of off-key horns and trumpets; the dancing girls shriek and giggle; a score of bearer-slaves lift the palanquin in which you and your uncle (and his current young lady) are riding up onto their shoulders; and you are off.

The first few days pass without incident. The weather is fine; villagers come forth to kneel respectfully by the roadside; your servants prepare meals; others bring fresh meat, fruit, water, and grain — these lands are owned by your clan, and such things are just expected — and at night there is singing, dancing, drinking, and ribaldry under the two moons.

From Haumá, the ascent up into the Kúrt Hills is easy. The forest thickens, the trees are taller, and the undergrowth takes on a dense and tangled look. Your uncle’s hunting lodge stands in the centre of an open meadow. It is walled all around, and two diametrically opposite corners are protected by wooden blockhouses, as though there might be



danger hereabouts. Inside, the facilities are pleasant: a central court with gardens for flowers and vegetables, tended by two old Kurtáni in their basket hats, a one-storey cookhouse and dormitory for the servants, and a squarish, two-storey mansion with all the conveniences for the “high folk.”

You are awakened a *Témmre* before dawn by a great hubbub. Looking out the window, you see a horde of tribal beaters assembling under the stern eye of an overseer, a clump of Kurtáni guides leaning casually on their longbows, servants, dogs, guardsmen, women, and children, all waiting for the hunt to begin. Servants bathe you, feed you, dress you in elegant garments of soft, scarlet-dyed *Vringálu*-hide, and lead you out where your uncle and his comrades await. The beaters trot past, off into the forest, the dogs set up a racket of belling and barking, and the trumpeteers once again provide flourishes and tarantaras. Your bearer-slaves grunt and heave your litter up onto their shoulders and set off after your uncle’s larger palanquin. As you go, you notice what you think are two larger dogs running beside you. They are bipedal, almost human in form, and intelligent enough to communicate verbally in some fashion. These are the first *Rényu* you have seen: creatures bred by the Lords of the Latter Times from canine stock and altered by genetic techniques now lost. They are friendly enough, and you order one of your accompanying servants to find some food for them. This seems to please them.

Your uncle orders a halt. You are shown to a comfortably appointed platform built up in one of the spreading *Gapúl*-trees, the beaters go forward, sounding their drums, rattles, and gongs, and your servants busy themselves preparing lunch behind you. You wait.

Instruction: on the first day you bag 1-5 fat Okhíba: roll a $D10 \div 2$. An Okhíba is a six-legged meat animal. It is a herbivore, harmless, and skittish. Later, a dozen *Nráishu-gazelles* appear. You suspect your uncle has “seeded” the area with these beasts in order to provide his party with sport.

That night your uncle pays the headman of the Kurtáni to provide dancing and folksongs. The party becomes boisterous, and one of your uncle’s friends becomes drunk and pulls a graceful Kurtáni girl down into his lap. At once your uncle rises, goes to the man, and orders him to release her and apologise. The headman watches with slitted eyes, but then gestures for the dancing to begin again. Beside you, one of the strange *Rényu* looks up and speaks in a guttural, grating voice, “Good. Kurtáni kill him otherwise.”

Days pass, each much like the one before, with varying amounts of game and fowl brought back for the sweating cooks to dress and prepare for dinner. Some of your uncle’s friends grow bored and depart, while others arrive, together with their own entourages. None of these people interests you very much, although you do share a hobby with this one or that one, and some guests of the opposite sex are mildly attractive.

One morning, ten days after arriving, you decide to go for a walk in the woods by yourself. As you reach the gate, one of the *Rényu* comes loping up and says, “Not alone. Not forest. I go with you.” You are glad of the beast’s company. You stroll through woods that are silent, dappled with sunlight, and filled with mystery, like one of the green bowers in which Lady Dilinála’s virginal priestesses hold their mysterious rituals.

Instruction: roll a $D10$: 1-2 = a *Zrné* hurtles out of the underbrush. Go to Sec. E.1; 3-4 = a *Sérudla* appears. Go to Sec. E.2; 5-7 = you climb over a gigantic, fallen log and come face to face — or rather face to rear-end — with a *Tsi’íl*. Go to Sec. E.3; 8-9 = you hear a tittering in the bushes, and find yourself surrounded by six *Kurukú*. Go to Sec. E.4; 10 = a huge, man-like creature, a *Dzór*, emerges slowly into the clearing before you. Go to Sec. E.5.

E.1. MAN’S BEST FRIEND

The *Rényu* turns and snarls. You have just time to raise your weapon before a whirlwind of snapping teeth and slashing talons is upon you. It is a *Zrné*, a ferocious carnivore that is little more than a monstrous toothed head on six legs, the back two of which are powerful enough to kick a *Shén* to death! The long, barbed teeth also come out in a victim’s flesh and are poisonous. This specimen is a dirty grey colour and about eight feet long. You go tumbling over and over in the bushes, locked in battle with the creature.

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight! The *Zrné* is a Type 4 opponent. Even if you win, you lose 1-5 (a $D10 \div 2$) of Body Damage Points, unless you are a physician or have either a spell of Healing or an Eye of Healing. You also find your wounds swelling and turning purple: a spell of Alleviation is required! If you do not have this, roll a $D10$: 1-6 = you are dead (O, rue the day!); 7-10 = you survive the toxin. If you lose but do not die, your *Rényu* companion leaps in to aid you. Go to Sec. E.6.

E.2. TALK TO THE ANIMAL!

The *Sérudla* stops, undecided. Your *Rényu* companion growls deep in its throat but does not move either.

For a moment the tableau holds, long enough for you to get a good look at it. This fabled, dragon-like beast stands perhaps 10 feet tall and is nearly 30 feet long, of which a third is spiny tail. It has a fang-jawed, horned head, two small forearms and six powerful legs, a body covered with greenish-grey, iridescent scales, and a row of lighter-hued, horny spines along its backbone and neck. It is watching you with lambent green eyes. What is even more disturbing is the eight-foot long metal sword it holds in one hand. You do recall that one of the smaller nations of the far northwest, Ghatón, has found a way to domesticate *Sérudla* for its army. The secret of taming them is well-guarded, however. Right now you wish you knew it!

You feel your bowels loosening. The *Sérudla* chuckles. In a voice that sounds like somebody rolling a barrel of gravel downhill, it says in good Tsolyáni, “Ngá, tiny one! Would you slay me with your picayune toothpick there? Shall I kneel before you in submission, oh Scourge of All the World?”

What should you say to that? You are stricken dumb. The monster glides forward, pokes its sword into the ground, and looks at you askance. “Come, come! If you would slay me, then let’s get on with it! I cannot waste all day! My mate and five sprats will be coming to look for me, and then you will face a challenge, indeed!”

You have forgotten your *Rényu* friend. It steps in front of you and says, “Leave be, Great One! This human means no harm to us Underpeople but instead gives us food and treats us kindly.” You are astounded at its command of human speech. You have heard vague rumours of the “Underpeople,” a number of semi-intelligent species that have banded together, established communication, and made a pact of mutual peace with one another, but no one knows much about them. Apparently “semi-intelligent” is a serious under-estimate!

“And petted you on the head?” the *Sérudla* snorts. “And scratched you behind your ears? La, how patronising! A paragon of human kindness!”

“It may be so,” the *Rényu* says, “We are who we are. We wish you no ill.”

“Nor can you do me any. Depart!”

Instruction: if you want to fight the *Sérudla*, go to Sec. 11. It is a Type 7 opponent. If you lose, you are dead, mashed into the forest floor like a *Chrí-fly* on a fly-swatter. If you win, you find 1-100 *Káitars*, a golden comb, and, wonder of wonders, an “Eye” (Sec. 14). This Eye is different,

however; some previous owner has inscribed “The Splendid Eye of *Krá the Mighty*” on it, and you recall what one of your teachers said about these: it can push or pull very heavy objects (up to 1,000 pounds) toward or away from the user, and thus can topple stone walls of up to 3 feet in thickness, in a limited area! It can also function as a weapon: it crushes a target, doing 2D10 points of body damage. The drawback is that it has a very short range: only 5 feet. You see a counter on the back (with tiny Tsolyáni numerals incised over earlier, alien ones) and find that the Eye still has 1-10 charges (a D10 roll). Happily, you return to the lodge, and on home. Go to Sec. 10. If you do not want to fight the *Sérudla*, just smile politely and back off. It will let you leave. Go to Sec. 10.

E.3. IS A GOOD STEAK WORTH DYING FOR?

At first you think you are facing a grey-black wall. Then both your eyes and your nose tell you that the wall is alive, smelly, and hopping with tiny vermin! You scramble back up onto the rotten stump just as it lumbers around to face you. It is a *Tsi’íl*, a six-legged herbivore as big as a *Chlén*-cart with the *Chlén* attached! It has a thick, horny carapace, rows of jagged protuberances on its back, and a taller, spiked crest along its spine. Its tail ends in a huge, mace-like ball. It peers at you nearsightedly out of dull, mud-coloured eyes. People hunt the *Tsi’íl* for its meat, and wealthy clans keep “parks” stocked with them in order to have large quantities of cheap meat available for large feasts. It takes ten to fifty warriors to kill one of these behemoths! You also recall that there is a gland up under a *Tsi’íl*’s tail that contains a secretion which repels various deadly sea creatures if poured upon the water. This sells for lots of money, but right now you are hesitant to go and look! The *Tsi’íl* is a Type 7 monster, and nobody in his right mind would take one on alone! You grin weakly and depart. The next day, you go home. Go to Sec. 10.

E.4. PLEASE, NO TITTERING!

All of a sudden, six giggling, little beasts are all over you like *Chrí-flies* on sugar! They are *Kurukú*: a harmless forest omnivore about 3 feet long and 2 feet high. They possess six legs, a prehensile tail, and two small arms in front, as do so many of the animals brought to *Tékumel* ages ago from the *Pé Chói* worlds. *Kurukú* are covered with black or dark brown fur. They also have the silliest expression you have seen since old *Egéth hiNehodlá* died — your teacher in primary school. The *Kurukú* make a high, tittering sound that reminds you of a room full of crazed old ladies. They are both fast and very acquisitive: they steal objects right out of people’s



hands, loot tents and carts, and piddle whenever they cannot find something they want to take!

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight six times! A Kurukú is a Type 1 opponent, but if you lose, it takes something from you: number each possession (e.g. weapon, pouch — not individual contents, please! — belt, shoes (2), tunic, cloak, kilt, hat, quiver, etc.) and roll randomly. You cannot regain lost items. The Kurukú will not harm you, although you are going to smell like a latrine in downtown Jakállá! When you are finished, frustrated, and fuming, you stalk back to the lodge and leave for home the next day. Go to Sec. 10.

E.5. A REAL SIGHT-SAVER

Your *Rényu* companion holds out a paw that is half canine and half human hand. You lower your weapon, and the monstrous creature slowly crosses the clearing. It is twice the height of a man, two-legged, two-armed, and tailless, but there the resemblance stops: the head is anything but human: it is a flattish triangle, with three round eyes above a beak of blackish horn. Its body is covered with short, coarse, dun-hued fur. If it has ears, they are hidden under the thick mane that runs down its back. It also carries a club, and you divine that it has at least enough intelligence to use weapons.

The *Rényu* hisses, “Make no move. It is a *Dzór*, the shyest creature in the forest.”

“One of your ‘Underpeople?’” you inquire with obvious curiosity.

“That matter you must promise to keep secret,” the *Rényu* answers. “Some humans we feel we can trust; others we do not. Some would hunt us down and slay us if they knew we can talk between our species. — Or even if they heard us say more than ‘yes, master’ and ‘no, master.’”

The *Dzór* shambles closer, its mighty club at the ready. It blinks down at you from three, bright blue eyes — like the *Hláka*, the race of flying nonhumans who dwell in the mountains of the far northeast, who also have three blue eyes. Tentatively, you reach for your pouch; it holds a slice of *Hmélu*-cheese. Perhaps this creature will like it. The *Dzór* backs away.

You slowly bring out the cheese, lay it on the ground, and retreat a few paces. The *Dzór* returns, squats down on oddly-jointed haunches, and prods the cheese with one giant forefinger. It picks up the morsel, sniffs, and eats it. Then it fumbles at its waist, and you see that hidden in all the fur it has a crude belt and pouch of woven reeds. It extracts an object, blinks, pushes it toward you, rises, and glides softly back into the forest.

The *Rényu* moves to pick up the item, but you are closer. It is a small cachet, about the size of your thumb, that exudes an odd, spicy odour. Your comrade twitches its long, sharp, dog-like nose. “Fa!” it sneers, “What a stink!”

“What is it?” you ask.

“An amulet, I think: a collection of herbs that will repel certain creatures hateful to the *Dzór*. This one smells like *Tsúral*-buds. They drive off the ‘Eater of Eyes,’ the *Thúnru’u*. The *Dzór* fear them more than any other species — even humankind!”

“We can do without the sarcasm!” you snap back. You have heard of the *Thúnru’u*, monsters who haunt the labyrinthine Underworlds beneath the old cities, where the foolhardy go to seek treasure. You drop the little leathern packet into your pouch and return to the lodge and thence home. Go to Sec. 10.

E.6. FANGS FOR THE MEMORY!

Biting, clawing, and snarling, the *Rényu* disposes of the *Zrné*, then squats down on its haunches to lick its wounds and pant. It does not seem worried about the poison — it is probably immune. You pick yourself up and discover that you have lost nothing more

than portions of a pretty suit of hunting clothes. As far as you can tell, the beast did not actually bite you, and your bruises and scratches are minor.

You suddenly notice that the woods have become very still. The *Rényu* is staring at something behind you. A chill runs down your back, and you turn to see a dozen leather-clad, bearded men standing in a semi-circle at the edge of the glade. They are armed with bows, short swords, axes, and clubs.

“Ohé, Tsolyáni!” calls one of them. He is tall and sinewy-looking, with craggy features and a bent nose beneath bushy brows. “You do us a disservice, slaughtering our beasts!”

“It would have gladly slaughtered me!” From the corner of your eye, you see that the *Rényu* is slowly backing away.

“T’was a fairish fight, Ka’ám!” one of the other Kurtáni says.

“As may be. But the *Zrné* was ours to slay, not this ‘un’s.”

Instruction: do you want to challenge the Kurtáni chieftain? He is a Type 4 opponent. Go to Sec. 11. Or would you rather try gentle reason? Go to Sec. E.7. Or perhaps apologise and plead for greater intercultural understanding? Go to Sec. E.8.

Instruction: if you fight and win, go to Sec E.9. If you lose (but live), go to Sec. E.10.

E.7. MAKE YOUR POINT!

You explain to Ka’ám: (a) the beast attacked you, and not the other way round; (b) you certainly would not have molested it otherwise; (c) you are here for hunting with your uncle, and the *Zrné* was fair game; (d) indeed, these lands — this entire forest — may well belong to your uncle, rather than to Ka’ám and his friends; and (e) you are of high clan and high lineage, and must not be addressed as a common person!

The Kurtáni chieftain ponders, then says, “A rich little crotch-louse, then? Hand over your pouch, your weapons, and whatever else we fancy!” He draws his needle-pointed short sword and waits.

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight; then go to Sec. E.9 or Sec. E.10, as instructed in the last paragraph of Sec. E.6. You may also surrender: The Kurtáni melt back into the forest, and you and the *Rényu* return home, much discomfited. Go to Sec. 10.

E.8. WELL, PARDON ME!

You can see amused contempt in the faces of the Kurtáni as you apologise for killing “their” animal. The one named Ka’ám spits and says, “Let the little bugger go. No sense getting the high folk after us!” Better things to do, eh?” He turns on his heel and slips back into the greenery. His men follow. Dejected, you return to the lodge, the *Rényu* trailing behind. The next morning, you’re off for home. Go to Sec. 10.

E.9. T’WAS BETTER TO HAVE WON...

Ka’ám lies sprawled full length on the forest floor. He sits up, rubbing his pate ruefully. “Cha! What did you hit me with?” His men laugh and move cautiously toward you. It looks like they are going to jump you. Nobody ever accused the Kurtáni of fighting fair!

Instruction: what is your Charisma (Sec. 6.8)? If it is below 50, the Kurtáni swarm over you and beat you unconscious. You cannot win and lose a D10 of Body Damage Points. The *Rényu* carries you back to the lodge, and your uncle sends you home. Go to Sec. 10. If your Charisma is 51-90, Ka’ám stops his followers with a gesture and cries, “The Tsolyáni’s a plucky little Chrí-fly! Let be! Off home with you!” Go to Sec. 10. If your Charisma is 91-100, you’re in a different kind of trouble! If you are a man, go to Sec. E.11. If you are a woman, go to Sec. E.12.

E.10. ...THAN TO HAVE LOST

Ka’ám grins down at you and says, “A quick slash, and you’re done! I’ll not kill you, though — your high folk would turn their beaters and their soldiers upon us, and our villages would go up in smoke like Lord Vimúhla’s Sacred Flame!”

As he speaks, he bends to look at you more closely. “What faith are you, Tsolyáni? Which of the Gods do you hold dear?” You have heard that the Kurtáni are mostly followers of the War-God, Lord Karakán, and his Cohort, Lord Chegárta (Sec. 3). You cannot conceal your faith: like most Tsolyáni, you wear a religious symbol or two around your neck. Ka’ám snatches at this and peers at it.

Instruction: (1) if you are a follower of Lord Karakán or Lord Chegárta, the Kurtáni take you back to their forest village. They provide you with a feast, wine made from a species of berry, a bedmate for the night (not really your type, but, hey — hospitality!), and a guide to take you to the hunting lodge the next day. The *Rényu* accompanies

you. Go to Sec. 10. (2) If you worship any other of the Lords of Stability or their Cohorts, the tribesmen see you back to your uncle safely. Go to Sec. 10. (3) If you are an adherent of Lords Hrú'ü, Ksárul, Vimúhla, or their Cohorts, they also see you to your uncle, though with less friendliness. Go to Sec. 10. (4) A worshipper of Ladies Dlamélish or Hrihayál must spend a night in the village "entertaining" Ka'ám and his people. Add your Intelligence, Comeliness, and Charisma scores (Secs. 6.3, 6.7 and 6.8) together and divide by 3 (i.e. average them). To this number, add +3 for each skill level you have in "priest" (Sec. 8.3) in either of the temples of the Emerald Ladies; add +3 for each level you have of "dancer" or "musician" in Sec. 7.3, or for "music and dance" in Sec. 9.3. Add +4 for every level of the hobby skills in category 11 in Sec. 9.3. If your total is less than 100, you are booted out of the village. Go to Sec. 10. A total of 101-150, your performance is appreciated: you are applauded, and Ka'ám offers you a good dinner. Go to Sec. 10. A total of 151 or over drives the Kurtáni wild; they refuse to let you go home, keep you in the forest for a week, and worship the Emerald Ladies with you, in all sorts of fascinating ways! Here is your chance to practice! You receive 1 level of "music and dance" and 1 level in a hobby skill in Category 11 (your choice!) At last they take you back to the lodge, a tired but happy camper. The Rényu goes along, but it keeps looking at you oddly. It thinks you are weird, even for a human. Go to Sec. 10. (5) If you worship Lord Sárku or his Cohort, Lord Durrítlámish, the Kurtáni attack, and this time they are serious. The people of the Kúrt Hills have always hated the Worm Lord! Go to Sec. 11. and fight. All together, attacking from all sides, Ka'ám and his tribesmen add up to the equivalent of a Type 7 opponent! If you win, you stagger up and lurch to the hunting lodge; the next day, your very worried uncle orders you home. Go to Sec.

10. If you lose, the Kurtáni kill you. The Rényu defends you, but it goes down in a flurry of daggers and clubs. The last thing you see is one of those broadbladed short swords plunging straight at your throat (O, lamentation!).

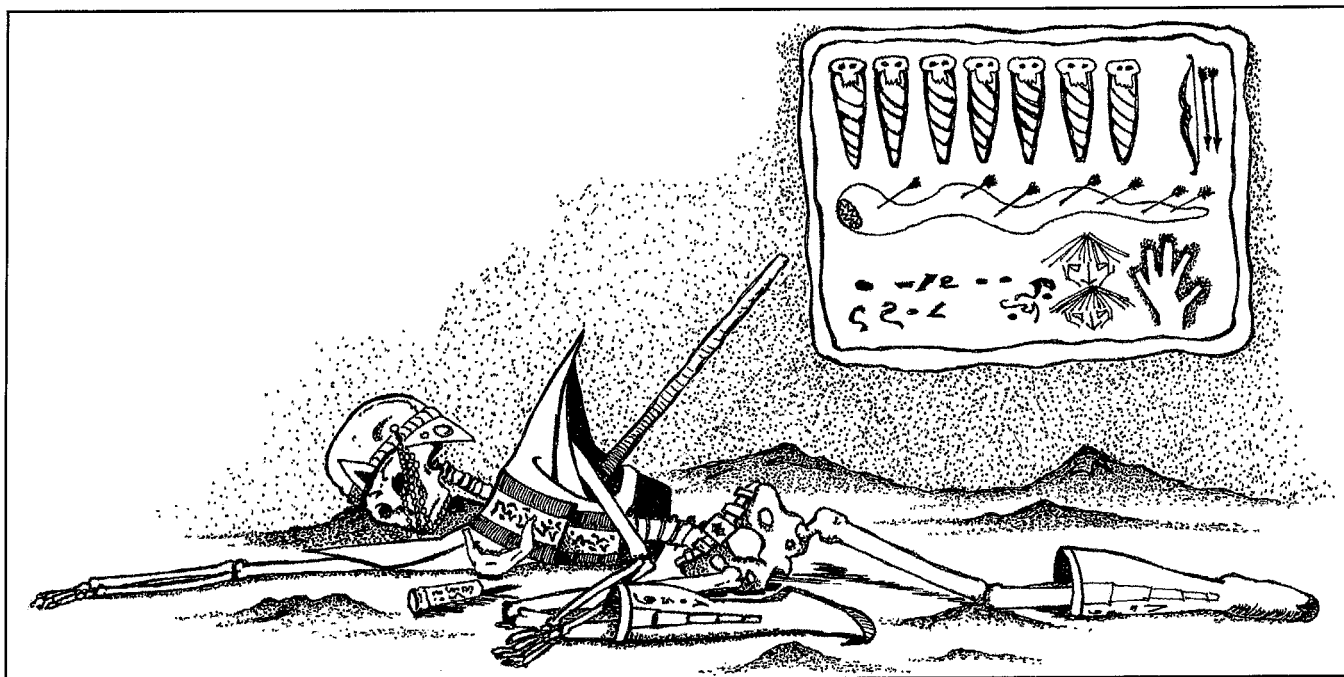
E.11. THE POOL OF REMEMBRANCE

With a Comeliness like this, you should be more careful! If you are a man, use this Section; if you are a woman, employ Sec. E.12.

You receive invitations from all of the Kurtáni ladies in the camp. They are all over you like *Shqá*-beetles on a pile of *Chlén*-droppings. You are petted, fed, pinched, grabbed, and coyly handled as nobody has been handled since the Demon Héssa ... But that's another story. One of Ka'ám's daughters, a short, pretty, moon-faced girl named Ainé, takes your hand and leads you off into the forest. Like many of the Kurtáni women, she does not speak much Tsolyáni, but only a modern dialect of Thu'úsa (Sec. 8.2). You cannot understand her, but you think you know what she wants. You are only partly right. She stops at the edge of a deep pool, dives ten feet or so down into the gloomy water, and calls to you to follow.

Instruction: if you can swim, join her. Go to the next paragraph. If not, wait until she comes out, enjoy a good frolic with her, then return to camp and go home. Go to Sec. 10.

Ainé swims across the pool, laughs, lets you reach her, then plunges away again. This is fun, but the water is cold. You feel her hand upon your arm; she is pointing at a dark cleft under the high, overhanging banks of the pool. The two of you swim



To the High General, the Prince of Chéne Ho, Commander of the Legions of the North, Pontifex of the Faith of the Omniscient Seer, Grey Lord Thúmis, Eternal Fountain of Dignities and Ever-welling Spring of Perfections, the Master of Excellence. Unto the Mighty Lord:

GAYAN MRES Hi SAYAKKU

Greetings and Hail, from the Pen of One Who Should Know Better Than to Write, so many are our foes!

My beloved Lord, I send this missive unto thee in fond hope that it reach thee safely and that the perfume from my breath may still hover about it to caress thy nostrils. I await thy reply.

That the benighted City of Sarkú should fall without my being present to watch! That our soldiers should assault its ebon walls and throw down its battlements without my eyes to see! That the Worm Lord should flee, hissing and mewling, into His caverns while the stones of His temple rain down about His head! I regret that I am not with thee, my beloved Lord! Oh, how I regret it! I yearn for thy face, thy limbs, thy touch. I hold these things dearer to my heart than the life within me, indeed even dearer than the life of that which grows within my womb, that child which is thine — and mine.

My Lord, by this messenger, a trusted man, I send thee a token of my affection. I pray that he pass the perils that the Worm Lord's minions have spread upon the path leading to thee! Here, then, is an Eye, a thing which came lately to my hand, brought by my troops out of one of the Worm Lord's fallen citadels. My savants say that it is an Eye of Bestowing Life, a thing of our Sweet Grey Lord that wafts breath into the cold clay of a dead body and returns it to true mortal existence. Oh, my darling, if ever thou shouldst fall my heart would cease its beating upon that instant! Give this to thy best mage, to some wise officer, or to a squire who is always with thee! Tell him his Empress commands him to watch over thee in event of mishap. Tell him that if he restores thee living to my arms, that he shall have whatever honours my Imperium can convey! Tell him that the Seal Empress of Tsolyanu adores thee, and that is command enough for any man.

With all my love, then, I am thy

Shaira Su
Divine Daughter of Thúmis

into it and enter a shallow cave. She puts a finger to her lips and says, "Holy place. No one come. Man. See." You look where she points and see what appears to be a man asleep at the rear of the cavity. You approach warily and discover a skeleton dressed in rotted, ancient armour. The remains of a bronze javelin-point are still lodged in his ribs. Undaunted — and to show off to Ainé — you poke around under the body with a twig and discover the remains of a leather pouch and a metal cylinder about as big around as a fist and as long as your forearm. It was once embossed with bas-reliefs and symbols, but it is

badly corroded. The end of the tube comes off in your hand, and you realise that this is a message-tube such as Imperial couriers carry. It had once been sealed with lead or wax, but that is gone now. A tightly rolled scroll slips out and falls to the ground. Ainé jumps back, and you are not very steady yourself. Gingerly, you pick it up. It has survived only because, like many important documents, it is incised upon gold foil. Dirt and forest-damp crack and crumble away as you unroll it. Ainé gasps. In archaic Tsolyáni script, you read:

You feel an ancient chill upon your bones, and the passionate spirit of the indomitable Empress Sháira Sú seems to eddy up around you. You know from your history books that Sháira Sú ruled over a thousand years ago, from 945 to 984 A.S. You recall how she strove to establish the power of the Lords of Stability, particularly her own Lord Thúmis, and how she fought to overthrow the forces of Lord Sárku and those of his allies in the other temples of the Dark Trinity. You hazily remember reading about this General, Gayán Mrés hiSayákkú, the hereditary Autocrat of Chéne Hó, and how the Empress sent him and his Legions to pull down the Worm Lord's monstrous temple in the City of Sárku.

You remember that General Gayán died in that siege. Now you know why he died.

The chill that runs down your spine is like nothing you have ever known. The Empress' gift, the Eye of Bestowing Life, never reached Lord Gayán! Lord Sárku's minions found her agent before he could complete his mission. That messenger lies here before you, preserved by the mists and the cold of this strange pool.

But where is the Eye of Bestowing Life? This type of Eye is so rare that only one or two are known to exist! Click the Eye on a dead person, and the powers of the Planes Beyond pour through into a sort of extra-planar "mold" of the target's original body: perfect, without wound or blemish. Then the breath of life surges back, and the dead person lives again! A fantastic treasure! Ainé is forgotten as you begin to claw at the black humus around the body. You find nothing. Nothing. At last, panting, your fingertips raw and bloody, you desist.

Ainé is squatting by the water, watching you. Someone else is watching, too: a tall man on the bank above your head. It is Ka'ám.

"Seek you this, Tsolyáni?" he asks. He holds out a round, blackish object on a thong about his throat.

"The Eye!" you choke, "the Eye of Bestowing Life!"

Ka'ám grins lopsidedly. "Aye," he says. "All used up now. My folk found the Sárku lads after they'd done their deed. We slew the lot of 'em and took the Eye."

"Why didn't you deliver it? Send it on to Lord Gayán?"

"No affair of ours. Empress wasn't even a worshipper of our Lord Karakán!"

"But — but — does the Eye work? Does it still have charges?" Visions of riches dance in your head.

Ka'ám laughs. "Ohé, my dear Grandfather used the last of 'em — him and the other elders of our tribe. When Granddaddy died, he was nigh onto 1,300 years old! Most of his clan-brothers were the same. Oh, they put the Eye to good use, all right!" Ka'ám chortles. "Too bad it was all used up before it got to me! Now I'm fifty and as mortal as you are."

"Oh ... " Suddenly the sunlight doesn't seem as bright, nor the arms of little Ainé quite so alluring.

"You'll be getting back to your folk, then?" Ka'ám asks gently. "You won't — ah — stay and marry Ainé?"

"Um... no. I have to finish my education — things to do — clan responsibilities. You know." Ainé is pretty, but...

"We'll take you back." Ka'ám says something to Ainé in their Thu'úsa dialect. She silently begins to weep. Trembling, she pulls a locket from around her neck and gives it to you. It is a gold coin, with a portrait of the haughty Empress Sháira Sú on one side and the Seal of the Imperium on the other. You ponder how different history would have been if the messenger had succeeded. The next day the Kurtáni return you to your uncle, and you leave for home. Go to Sec. 10.

E.12. BETTER DEAD THAN BRED

Your beauty has attracted more than its share of unwanted attention. You have both a small scalpel-like knife and a tiny vial of poison for emergencies, but you have never been even close to using either.

"A danger, girl, that's what you are!" Ka'ám grumbles. "Well-nigh killed me! Now you'll come home with us."

You struggle, but the Kurtáni prevail. You accompany your captors willy-nilly through the forest and are imprisoned in a semi-underground hut. The lower parts of the walls are of banked earth, the upper sections are of thick logs, and the roof is made of sod, which deadens sound. After a while a vapid-looking, somewhat pretty, adolescent girl comes in with food: meat stew that tastes odd and gamy, coarse *Dná*-grain bread, a porridge of ground-up nuts of some kind, and a handful of raw, green legumes. The girl inspects your aristocratic, Tsolyáni beauty and smiles. She points at herself and says, "Ainé."

You try to talk to her, but she only shakes her head. She speaks a dialect of Thu'úsa, which is still used in these remote regions of the Kúrt Hills. If you have no knowledge of this language, you are helpless. Even if you do, you are still helpless: Ainé can't get you out of here without passing by the guards, and they are unbribable and vigilant. There is a chamberpot in one corner and a sleeping mat on the floor in the other. You're here for the night.

In the morning the heavy door opens, and Ka'am comes in. He has another man with him, a stout, lantern-jawed, beetle-browed individual. Ka'am stares at you.

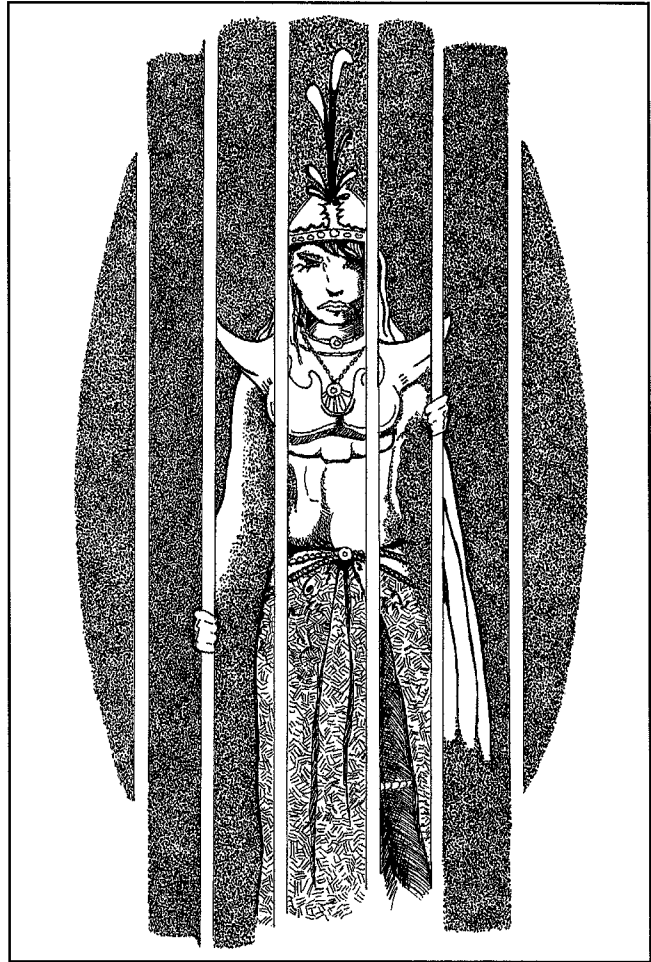
"I said you're a danger," he begins. "Your uncle's already got soldiers and a thousand of his 'tame' tribesmen out hunting for you. I can't let you go, and I can't give you back. I can't keep you here — my men would fight over you as soon as I'm out of sight. — Nor can I kill anything as pretty as you." He runs his hands through his greying, shoulder-length hair. "What am I to do with you?"

"Let me go," you urge him. "I'll never tell." He only gives you a wry grin.

You find out all too soon what he has decided: the second man is a slaver, a Kurtáni by birth, who peddles his unhappy wares up and down the Empire and abroad in Salarvyá and the east. "You won't be ill-treated, girl," says this creature unctuously. "Why, after a time, you'll get used to it. With your beauty, you'll bring a good price from some nobleman. Then it'll be marriage, jewels, clothes, slaves of your own—all you want. You'll thank me!"

You know *Chlén*-dung when you step in it! You've seen slavery — your clan owns many slaves. Only the luckiest of the lucky end as this man tells you. Many more lead lives of poverty, squalor, hunger, and worse. Surreptitiously, you get your fingers on your little scalpel.

Instruction: roll a **D10**: 1-3 = the slaver has seen this happen before: he wrenches your arm back and makes you drop the knife; in a moment you are bound, gagged, and wrapped in a large shawl. Go to Sec. E.13.; 4-5 = you lose the knife but manage to get hold of the poison. Do you really want to die? If so, you drink the stuff, feel agony bursting through your veins, and swirl down into unconsciousness. You are dead (commiserations!); if you decide not to die, go to Sec. E.13; 6-8 = you struggle, bite, claw, shriek, and break free from the two men. You scramble up the sloping entranceway and out into the sunlight, where fifty or sixty men, women, and children are



eating breakfast around an open fire-pit. Ainé stretches out a foot and trips the big slaver behind you, and he tumbles back upon Ka'am. Go to Sec. E.14; 9-10 = you break free and dash through the undergrowth before the tribespeople can react. You finally find your way back to the lodge. Scratched, bleeding, and still trembling, you gasp out your story to your uncle and his cronies. He orders out every clan-guard, soldier, and worker he has, and his friends add their own entourages as well. Soon there are a dozen columns of smoke rising from the jungle as Kurtáni villages go up in flames. There will be an uprising, and Imperial troops will be sent. Many innocent people will die. But this offense against a high clanswoman cannot go unpunished. Go to Sec. 10.

E.13. LIFE IN THE FAR EAST:

You are smuggled out of the Kúrt Hills in a *Chlén*-cart, then to Mrelú, where you are humiliatingly examined and auctioned off to a reptilian *Shén*. This hulking, black, seven-foot monster gives you potions to keep you quiet, hides you in another cart, and travels southeastwards to Usenánu, then by secondary roads (your clan has put out rewards and descriptions all over the Empire by now) to Thráya, then into the

Kerunán Protectorate, across to the last Tsolyáni outpost of Rū, and so to the Salarvyáni city of Koylúga. The *Shén* is now free to sell you openly. He has you well fed, bathed, dressed prettily, made up by his overseer-women, and entered in the next auction.

Instruction: roll a **D10: 1-2** = you are bought by a serious, ugly little sculptor named Jíchka Dzekkága, who wants you as a model. He falls in love with you, and surprisingly, you find yourself caring for him, too. You marry him and bear three children, one of whom dies soon after. The other two, a boy and a girl, are two years apart. You spend five years with Jíchka, and then when he goes on business to the Salarvyáni capital of Tsatsayágga, you take your children and escape. You have learned all 5 levels of Salarvyáni and 3 levels of “sculpture” (Sec. 9.3). You also acquire 5 levels of “infant care” and 3 levels of “home decoration” in Sec. 7.3. Months later, you regret leaving your funny little husband, and at last you write and invite him to join you in Tsolyánu. He does so, and you are now a family again. Go to Sec. 10. **3-5** = you become a lady-in-waiting for Lady Zéshsha Thirreqúmmu, who is of high Koylúgan lineage and also a military general (Sreddéq) of a Legion (“The Nchésh of the Unsheathed Blade”). Her brother, Kurék Tiqónmu Thirreqúmmu, who is also a general of one of Koylúga’s units, takes a fancy to you, buys you from his sister, and makes you his concubine. He lacks appeal: he is sallow-skinned, hairy, and has a beard like a woven rug. He has other, less-endearing traits, as well. After two years as a slave, you catch Lord Kurék drunk one night and persuade him to wager your freedom against a necklace he has just given you. Laughing, he agrees. You win (did you cheat?) and make him sign a document of manumission. The next day, when he is sober, you show him the paper and demand your freedom. He rages and threatens to have you impaled. His sister takes your side, however, and he ruefully gives in. You are free! You learn 2 levels of Salarvyáni and add 1 level each to your skills of “cosmetics and adornment,” “fashion and dress,” and “entertaining.” Go to Sec. 10; **6-7** = you escape and make your way to the Tsolyáni Legate’s house in Koylúga. He agrees to take you back to Tsolyánu with him as a “diplomatic aide,” but he dies on the trip. You find yourself hungry and penniless in the city of Mmilláka, near the Tsolyáni border; there you fall ill, lose most of your beauty (60% of your Comeliness!), and become a seamstress in order to eat. You spend 3 years and learn 4 levels of Salarvyáni and 5 levels of tailoring (Sec. 7.3). Then, almost on a whim, you decide to go home, even though you feel soiled and disgraced by your ordeal. Go to Sec. 10; **8-9** = you are bought, sold, and bought again. After five years of wandering in eastern Tsolyánu and Salarvyá you make your way home. Your family is overjoyed to see you, and they help you recuperate. You have learned 1 level of Salarvyáni and 2 levels of “dagger/knife-fighting,” but nothing more. Go to Sec. 10; **10** = you are bought by the Mad King of Salarvyá,

Griggatsétsa of the Chrugilléshmu family of Tsatsayágga. (Yes, Salarvyáni is a HARD language!) The King is a bona-fide loony: he gives his stable of 5,000 harem girls jewels one day, has them flogged the next, makes them wear garments to match the astrological day-signs the day after, then orders everyone to shave their heads and paint their faces green — etc. The King doesn’t even know you are in his harem, and no one else bothers you. If his clan-cousin, Prince Zhurriúgga, didn’t run things, the country would have long since fallen into anarchy. The Salarvyáni are punctilious royalists, however, and a palace coup could bring more troubles than it would solve. After six months, you get a chance to speak to Prince Zhurriúgga about your plight. He sneers, fingers his curly black beard, and licks his full red lips while he looks you up and down. This does not bode well. Fortunately, the King is nearby and overhears you; he is in a mild mood that day and orders you freed on the spot. He also commands that you be given three large trunks full of elegant clothing (his soiled laundry!), two cases of jewellery worth 15,000 Káitars, a half dozen servants, Prince Zhurriúgga’s left shoe, a Chlén-cart (but no Chlén) and a potted plant. Before he can change his mind, you grab what you can — forget all the stuff he promised; you’d never leave the palace alive — and head for home. Surprisingly, the Salarvyáni do not pursue — they have internal problems — and you reach Tsolyánu safely. You have learned 1 level of Salarvyáni and acquired 5,000 Káitars worth of clothes and gems. You also keep one old woman servant — and the potted plant, which turns out to be a rare species worth 3,000 Káitars to an apothecary. Go to Sec. 10.

E.14. I SHOT AN ARROW IN THE AIR

Both Ka’ám and the slaver are shouting in Thu’úsa. Confused, several young men jump up, nocking arrows on their bows.

Instruction: roll a **D10: 1-4** = the Kurtáni are excellent archers; the first arrow passes right through your heart, and others follow. You are dead before you hit the ground (let us grieve!); **5-8** = you fall, wounded. Ka’ám orders you nursed back to health, but those arrow-scars mar your beauty. The slaver is no longer interested, and at last Ainé helps you escape. Your uncle orders the entire tribe put to the sword, and you are unlucky enough to see both Ainé and Ka’ám dragged to the lodge and cut down by your uncle’s executioners. Go to Sec. 10; **9-10** = arrows whiz past, but you are not hit. Running like the wind, you reach your uncle’s lodge. You know what he will do to the Kurtáni, and even though they treated you badly, you do not want to see them massacred. You tell your uncle that you spent the night in a hole into which you had fallen (partially true!), and a young peasant girl helped you out this morning. Your uncle reluctantly calls off his bully-boys. Go to Sec. 10.

20. CARAVAN!

F. THIS LITTLE TSOLYÁNI WENT TO MARKET

The Tsolyáni Empire measures 1,600 *Tsán* (1,325 miles) west to east from Tumíssa to Fasíltum, and 1,900 *Tsán* (1,573 miles) from Khirgár southeastward to the coast near Jakálla. The basis of the Empire's economy is agriculture, of course. The clans own tracts of land, which they work with the aid of their own members, tenants, hired employees, and slaves. Other, specialised clans produce crafts and commodities. Some clans operate only one type of business, while others maintain several enterprises. Many clans believe that young people should gain experience through work, and even the wealthiest clans often encourage their offspring to learn clan businesses, accompany its caravans on commercial journeys, and oversee its estates. This is the sort of opportunity you need to gain experience!

The Engsvanyáli built a network of thoroughfares called *Sákbe*-roads, which the Tsolyáni still maintain. A *Sákbe*-road has three levels, rather like a three-step many-miles-long staircase. The lowest and broadest tier is for common folk, *Chlén*-carts, and caffles of trotting, basket-laden slaves; the second level is used by higher-clan travellers, better-class merchants, soldiery, and palanquins; and the third and highest level is reserved for Imperial officials, couriers, and the nobility. The highest level always faces the nearest foreign border, since one of the road's purposes is to deter invaders. Every *Tsán* or so there is a guard-tower, crenellated and fitted with gates which block access to the next section of roadway. At intervals, ramps descend to the secondary road system and the villages below, while larger citadels protect the entrances to cities and towns. At each nightly halting-place, food, firewood, entertainment, and other services are available on built-up platforms below the guard towers. The *Sákbe*-roads are patrolled by contingents of road-guards, who are only peripherally part of the Tsolyáni army, and there are always market police, village and town police, and other security forces as well.

When you first travel with a caravan, you become a guard, overseer, and all-purpose "go-fer." The goods it carries belong to your clan, although you may also invest your own private funds in the enterprise, have clan slaves carry your merchandise, and turn a profit, if you're smart and lucky. You need not worry about food and accommodations: everything can be bought along the way, and you will stay at your clan's houses

in other cities. You will have a chance to make contacts, see Tsolyánu, and make a little money.

Instruction: almost all clans engage in commerce. To find out what sort of caravans are going out, roll a D10 twice per game-year. 1-4 = a short journey of 100 *Tsán*, lasting a month, to take grain, fruits, vegetables, meat animals, wood, etc. to a nearby market town; 5-7 = a medium journey of 200-500 *Tsán*, lasting 6 months — you get only half your schooling in Sec. 9. ff. — to deliver grain, craft articles, tools, building stone, minerals, pottery, glassware, wines and liqueurs, skins, parchment, cloth, fibres for weaving, dyes, metal ingots, etc. to a larger town or city; 8-9 = a long journey of 500-1,000 *Tsán* or more lasting a full year — no school at all! — to sell good cloth, preserved food delicacies, costly wines and liqueurs, precious stones, rare dyes and chemicals, perfumes, fancy *Chlén*-hide armour and weapons, leather goods, gold and silver articles, books and manuscripts, fine crockery, exotic woods, birds, pets, and many other things to distant markets; 10 = a very long trip of more than 1,000 *Tsán* — who knows when or if you will return? — to take small quantities of very valuable commodities, such as gems, jewellery, pharmaceuticals, perfumes, spices, art objects, the best cloth, embroidery and brocades, curios, iron and steel weapons and armour — rare! — and the like, to far-off markets, explore, and bring back rarities.

Instruction: a caravan's destination can be treated as abstract, or you can pick a real town on the map. Cargoes, too, can be assumed or selected from the partial lists above.

Instruction: you may go on no more than one commercial trip per year. The exception is a short journey, which you may go on twice, if two are produced by the preceding paragraph. If no caravan goes out that suits you, you must wait until next year.

Instruction: you may not go on any special adventure twice (e.g. a direction that takes you to Sec. F.1, F.2, etc.) Roll the die again.

Instruction: if there is a caravan leaving, and you want to go along, you may add your own funds to those being invested by your clan. You profit if the caravan is successful; you lose if it loses. To find your profit or loss, follow the instructions in the tables below. For example, if you invest 1,000 *Káitars*. and your profit is 25%, you return with $1,000 + 250 = 1,250$ *Káitars*. If you lose 25%, you come back with 750 *Káitars*.

TABLE F.1: SHORT JOURNEYS

D10	EVENT & INSTRUCTION
1-4	A mildly successful trip! Dull, though Profit: 10%. Go to Sec. 10
5-6	The heat nearly killed you, but you bargained well Profit: 15%. Go to Sec. 10
7	It rained all the way, some slaves died, and you caught a cold. Not fun! Loss: 5%. Go to Sec. 10
8	Misery! You were cheated, your goods arrived either broken or spoiled, and you hated every moment of it! Loss: 25%. Go to Sec. 10
9	You found a sucker and made a killing! Profit: 100%! Gain 2 levels of "merchant" in Sec. 7.3. Go to Sec. 10
10	The Market Police arrest you for cheating on weights and measures Loss: 50%; go to jail! Go to Sec. C.1

TABLE F.2: MEDIUM JOURNEYS

D10	EVENT & INSTRUCTION
1-2	You arrive home footsore but happy Profit: 50%. Go to Sec. 10
3-4	Your goods did not appeal to the customers Profit: 10%. Go to Sec. 10
5-6	Nobody's buying! You couldn't give away meat to a starving <i>Qásu</i> -bird! Loss: 75%. You do gain 1 level of "merchant" in Sec. 7.3, though. Go to Sec. 10
7	A dealer offers you an odd statuette Go to Sec. C.2
8	A nice trip! You have a good time and make some money Roll a D10: each digit = 10% profit. Gain 1 level of "merchant" in Sec. 7.3. Go to Sec. 10
9	Bah! You don't even want to talk about it! Roll a D10: each digit = 10% loss. Lose 1 level of "merchant," if you have any. Go to Sec. 10
10	A dog bites you. You cancel the trip and return home to recuperate Neither profit nor loss. Go to Sec. 10

TABLE F.3: LONG JOURNEYS

D10	EVENT & INSTRUCTION
1	Your merchandise sells like purple <i>Qàá</i> -leaves at an <i>Ahoggyá</i> mating dance! Profit: 300% Gain 3 levels of "merchant." Go to Sec. 10
2-4	Home safe with a tidy sum! Profit: 50%. Go to Sec. 10
5-6	Not much of a profit for all the trouble you had with slaves, bribes, and cheating merchants! Profit: 5%. Gain 1 level of "merchant." Go to Sec. 10
7-8	Insects infested your goods, and your <i>Chlén</i> -beast died of overwork. You had a boil on the back of your neck, and you are not happy! Loss: 10% of your investment. Buy a new <i>Chlén</i> for 300-700 <i>Káitars</i> (a D10 roll ÷ 2, with 1 = 300). Go to Sec. 10
9	Bandits steal your goods. No one knows who they are, but that <i>Sákbe</i> -road tower captain looked very suspicious Loss: 100%. Bribes to the Road Police cost another 200 <i>Káitars</i> . Go to Sec. 10
10	You slip and fall off the <i>Sákbe</i> -road parapet Go to Sec. C.3

TABLE F.4: VERY LONG JOURNEYS

D10	EVENT & INSTRUCTION
1	Your journey takes you to Livyánu Go to Sec. 18.
2-3	Rebel Pé Chói attack as you pass through Dó Cháka Go to Sec. C.4
4-6	You return home at last after 3 years in Háida Pakála. You have found a treasure of mother-of-pearl and moonstones Profit: 500%. Gain 2 levels of "merchant," 1 level of "sailor/ship-captain," and 1 of "jeweller-goldsmith." Go to Sec. 10
7-8	You were captured by a <i>Shén</i> warship off Kushí'il Isle in the southwestern ocean Go to Sec. C.5
9	You reach Prajnú in northeastern Yán Kór Go to Sec. C.6
10	Tnalúm in the mountainous eastern state of Kilalámmu offers jewels and rare minerals Go to Sec. C.7

F.1. ALL A MISTAKE!

The market is hot and sticky with humidity. Greenish-blue *Chrí*-flies crawl over the heaps of purple-red *Dlél*, golden *Másh*, and other fruits. The many hues of the *Dmí*-sugar candies are almost lost beneath the swarming insect horde, in spite of the whisks and basketry fans wielded by squads of little boys. Music shrills, hawkers bellow, merchants and customers wrangle, and somewhere in the distance a Legion recruiter's drum beats with endless, tireless, annoying persistence.

Your clan-slaves have just loaded a burlap sack of *Yáfa*-rice onto the pan of your weighing scales when there is a disturbance. Your customer, a rotund, middle-aged man from Úrmish, looks up angrily; he is as hot and uncomfortable as you are. "Now what?" he grumbles.

There is a crash, then the sound of breaking pottery, followed by the sounds of running feet and shouting. A naked slave boy sprints past your stall, stops, and falls on his face before you. You recognise him as one of your own clan-slaves., a sly, dishonest-looking lad named Japékku "Master!" he gasps. "Save me! I didn't steal it! — I was only looking at it!" The noise behind him is louder now.

Your customer covers his nose with the end of his headcloth. "Go away, boy. We are busy!" He looks at you. "Do you accept my offer or not? *Yáfa*-rice is not gold that we should chaffer for it all day in the hot sun!" The slave continues to grovel.

You — or rather your caravan-leader, an experienced clan-cousin named Méletl hiKirisáya — are responsible for this boy, whatever he has done; yet you do not want to lose the rice deal. "Wait!" you

snap at Japékku. "I'm busy. I can't help you now. Go find Evéga!" Evéga hiArdzá is your caravan's accountant and personnel-scribe. Like Méletl, she has the experience to handle this problem.

It is too late to go for anybody. Several merchants, Khirgári by their striped desert cloaks and carefully-trimmed beards, are upon you. Two seize Japékku, and the others begin to belabour him with staffs. You start to intervene, but three or four Market Police wearing leather kilts and gilded *Chlén*-hide skullcaps rush in to sort matters out.

"An amulet!" cries the oldest of the Khirgári. "An amulet of protection blessed by our own mighty Lord Hrü'ü! This slave stole it!" The others jabber agreement.

One of the Market Police, a sturdy, broken-nosed fellow, says, "Take him in, then! We'll dust him off so's he won't get dirty again!"

"Here's the amulet!" another of the Khirgari crows, wrenching the boy's fist open. "Ohé — take him, beat him, impale him! Market theft is an impaling offense!"

"Not if he or his master'll pay *Shámtla* for the item and the trouble caused," a second policeman interjects. The others seem ready to debate the matter all day.

"Here!" you call out. "Here's a *Káitar* for the amulet! Have done!" The thing probably cost no more than five or ten *Hlásh*, but it's hot, and you want to finish up the rice deal before your fat Urmíshi gets away. Japékku deserves punishment, but these policemen would likely maim or kill him with their heavy staves. You have never been one to favour impalement for small offenses. Slaves cost money!

Still arguing, the Khirgári take both your *Káitar* and their amulet and depart. You order Japékku back to your clanhouse to await Méletl or Evéga, and the rice deal is soon done. The Urmíshi summons his own slaves to lift the heavy sack, ostentatiously counts out money into your palm, and departs.

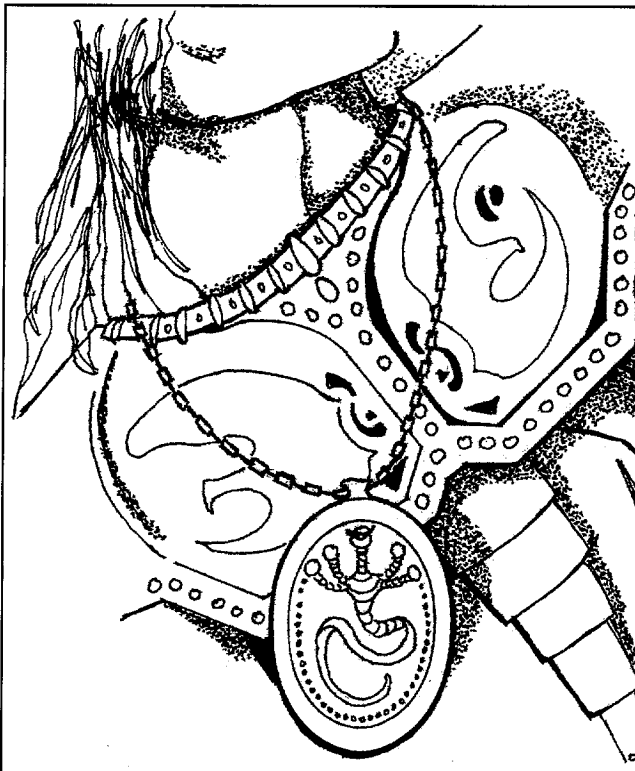
You are about to return to your clanhouse for lunch when you see the Urmíshi merchant returning, accompanied by a squad of Market Police. What now?

"That's him!" your customer squawks. "He must've added a two-*Psé* weight to his side of the scale while I wasn't looking!" (A *Psé* = 1.65 pounds.) "Thus did he make his rice heavier — and made me pay more!"

You protest: "What nonsense! Either this man is lying or else one of my weights was accidentally pushed onto the scales during the scuffle with the slave-boy!"

"Doubtless you arranged that distraction with your slave! You do not fool me! I am Morúdzu hiKhan-úma of the Clan of the Standing Stone, and my experience is weighty indeed!"

"Alas, that your brain has no weight to match! That sack of *Yáfa*-rice cost you only two and a half *Káitars*! I gave one *Káitar* to the Khirgári, thus losing my profit and part of my principal as well!" Your anger makes you forget that it is an offense to insult anyone, even when you are in the right. This man



can now demand *Shámtla*. He can collect, too, if your clan does not intervene.

"To the Palace of the Realm, then!" the police subaltern announces, not unkindly. He takes you by the arm but does not order you bound.

You spend the afternoon in a bare, stone room in the company of two others: a drunken man who is either asleep or dead, and a tired-looking, elderly prostitute, who does not speak to you after you tell her you're not interested in her slatternly charms. In the evening, the police officer and your accuser reappear, followed by Méletl, Evéga, and a florid, elderly person who must be a lawyer.

"Best tell all," Méletl says gently. "Japékku confessed to your deception."

"Under the whip, I suppose!"

"Which you'll soon feel, too!" the Urmíshi snarls. "Admit your crime, and I ask only proper compensation: *Shámtla* of only a thousand *Káitars*—!"

"That you'll never see!" the lawyer explodes. "For a bag of rice? Cha!"

"Hang the wretch up and lay on the whip, then!" the Urmíshi shrugs his meaty shoulders. "We'll find out whether this was pre-arranged. If it was, it's the impalement stake! We need no young criminals in the Empire!"

"There's a matter..." the police officer puts in diffidently. "We're dealing with a high clan here, Sir. Giving somebody of high clan the 'High Ride' won't go unnoticed. There'll be questions —"

For the first time the Urmíshi looks a trifle worried. A bead of sweat crawls out from under his cloth skullcap and wanders down his cheek. "I see. Yes, no need to go so far. Just *Shámtla*, then, I suppose. If he can't pay, there's enslavement — or debtor's prison..."

"Come to think of it, wasn't there a case here just like this one a month or two ago?" The police officer scratches his shaven pate. "Same sort of claim." He peers at the Urmíshi.

Your lawyer says, "Yes. I recall that case, though I wasn't there myself. A boy from Katalál — ordered enslaved, I think. Sneaked a weight into a sack of *Dná*-grain when two slaves started a fight nearby."

"The accuser was from Úrmish!" The police officer purses his lips. "Odd."

"Perhaps we might speak to Japékku again?" Evéga suggests. "He may be confused as to who was with him in this bit of trickery!"

The Urmíshi is perspiring profusely. "A mistake, Sirs. An error. A joke. A bit of fun on my part to test this young sprout of yours here! No harm done. None. Hah! Ho, ho!"

"*Shámtnla*, perhaps?" your lawyer asks silkily. "Impalement — no, maybe not. Enslavement? We could buy him and give him as a gift to the Temple of Lord Chiténg or Lord Vimúhla for sacrifice. He's fat enough to sizzle well."

You leave the Palace of the Realm with Méletl. Behind you, you hear Evéga and your lawyer earnestly discussing *Shámtnla*, plus a nice gift for the police officer. As for Japékku, you decide to sell him off tomorrow at the latest — for just one copper *Qirgál* if that's all anybody will pay! It's too bad you cannot find that wretched boy from Katalál and buy him back his freedom.

Instruction: you lose money because your clan demands that you pay for the bribe to the police officer. He keeps the bag of Yáfa-rice as "evidence" as well. Go to Sec. 10.

F.2. PA'ÍYA

The *Sákbe*-road is hot [almost 105° F] in the midday heat. Travellers have long since stopped being civil to one another, and even the huge, grey-green, six-legged *Chlén*-beasts pulling carts on the first level no longer utter their gurgling, coughing roar. Only a few people are wearing any clothing at all, although the smart ones still keep their travelling boots on to save their feet from the blistering paving stones. Many have draped broad travelling cloaks of thin, black *Giúdrú*-cloth over their heads and shoulders to keep off the sun, and wealthy folk are accompanied by slaves bearing parasols.

Ahead, you see the looming grey stump of a *Sákbe*-road guard tower. There are soldiers on the broad platform beneath its gates. They are attired only in dark blue kilts and sandals. Uniforms are worn only for ceremonials and armour for battle; the heat would kill more troops than the enemy otherwise! Their bearing identifies them at once, however, and as your caravan of carts and slaves approaches, some of them stand up to look.



You and your caravan-mates descend from the second level of the road to the first. There are arrangements to make. Chatsán hiDessúna, your caravan-master, has decided to halt here for the afternoon and march again at night. He is an older man, spare, stern, and grizzled. He is also overly religious, always looking to his amulets and his astrological portents, as superstitious as an old crone.

The platform is occupied by a gaggle of tents and stalls: dealers in firewood and charcoal, provisioners, entertainers, whores, priests and "holy men" offering divine wisdom that always seems to cost money, and peddlars of gewgaws and sundries. The gates to the *Sákbe*-road tower itself are closed: an intelligent captain knows when his men need a siesta.

Left to yourself, you wander over to examine the stalls. Most of the merchandise is trash: glittery costume jewellery suitable for peasant maidens, carved wooden combs, walking staffs, travelling cloaks and badly-made boots, multi-coloured pottery beads, glass mirrors, bolts of cheap fabric, little red birds in cages, salted and dried fish wrapped in blackish oil-paper (ugh!), hot-spiced *Gegrésa* — grilled meat patties — and honey-dripping sweets kept in glass boxes to frustrate the *Chrí*-flies.

You pause at a tent where clay statues and religious icons are sold. The shopkeeper is a member of the *Ninínyal*, the "Pygmy Folk," a race that dwells in the

far northeastern region of Yán Kór. He is bipedal with a vestigial tail, half your height, and covered with grey-black fur. He wears a human-style tunic, a kilt, and even sandals.

The *Ninínyal* opens his long snout to reveal sharp teeth. "Hail, noble Sir," he says in gutturally-accented Tsolyáni. "Buy? Pretty statue? Any god! Any goddess! All Aspects! Lady Dlamélish? Twenty-seventh Act of Lady Hrihayál? Nighted Worm of Lord Sárku? Lady Avánthe as the Mother of Life? Have all. All!"

He's exaggerating, of course. Lady Avánthe alone has 93 Aspects. You say, "I'm not interested." You turn to stroll back. Chatsán will be looking for you.

The little shopkeeper adopts a conspiratorial look. "Old coins, Lord! Old statue! Deep ruin — not far." He gestures nimbly towards the heat-hazed hinterlands.

You know there will be nothing but fakes here. The Pygmy Folk are notorious cheats, as greedy and vicious as a wild *Jakkóhl*. You are bored, however, and Chatsán is nowhere in sight. You grumble, "Might as well look..."

He leads you inside, unrolls a mat for you to sit crosslegged on, proffers a goblet of something sticky, red, and sweet, which you refuse, and brings forth a cloth-wrapped object. This he opens to reveal a statuette of dark, green-mottled, verdigris-encrusted metal, about two *Hói* tall (10 inches). It is a figure of a young woman, standing with her hands clasped demurely at her waist in front of her. The workmanship is quite good, Engsvanyáli perhaps, and it is in good condition, but the style is odd: the pose is peaceful, but the face bears a sensuous, slumberous, taunting expression. There is something salacious about this statuette, even though the girl is depicted as fully clothed, as modest as any virgin priestess of Lady Dilinála.

"Thank you. I am not interested." You get up to go.

"Cheap, Lord! Old! Rare! — Twenty-five *Káitars*!"

"A bad copy. Made yesterday. Not interested!" Unconsciously you imitate the shopkeeper's choppy speech.

"Fifteen *Káitars*! You first customer today. Good luck to sell to first customer! Ten *Káitars*! Children starve, mother weep, make poor Hrágg-Da pauper!" Eight *Káitars*?"

There is something attractive about the little figurine. You bargain for a *Kirén* or two and at last settle on two *Káitars* and six *Hlásh*, but you're still unsure whether you want the thing or not.

Instruction: if you buy the statuette, go to Sec. F.8. If you refuse, go to Sec. F.9.

F.3. THAT HURT!

The mighty *Sákbe*-road is slippery in the rain and darkness. The last guard tower was too crowded to admit you, but the next one may still have room. You hurry on through the torrent, trying to keep an eye on your slaves and *Chlén*-carts on the first level below. As one of the younger clan-members on this trip, you have been given the after-dinner watch, and tonight this has proved anything but pleasant. Your comrades and superiors are bouncing along in their palanquins somewhere behind you on the road, and all you have with you is Sóron hiSa'ásu, the old warrior your family sent along for your protection.

You hear a chanted "háí! háí!" and an aristocrat's palanquin comes splashing toward you from behind. Its bearers are a wet and miserable-looking lot, and its guards are in no mood for pleasantries. One shouts, "Way!" and waves a shadowy halberd at you. He doesn't intend to hit you but just make you move aside.

You are not sure what happens next. You slide on the slippery stones, hit the retaining wall, lose your balance, and tumble. The top of the parapet is at least two feet wide, but by some freak of fate you skitter across it on your stomach and off into the blackness beyond! You fall down onto the first level of the road. The breath whooshes out of you, and pain strikes like a smith's hammer. The gigantic wheels of the *Chlén*-carts rumble along right beside you, and you fear that one may run over you and cut you in half! Being stepped on by a *Chlén* would produce the same result. You try to roll away, moan as your leg becomes a spearpoint of agony, and flop back into a puddle. Unconsciousness swoops down.

You wake, muzzily, to dancing, orange-flaring torches, faces streaming with water, wet-glistening cloaks, and accoutrements and weapons that chink and jangle. Two faces are gazing down at you. You blink, thinking you are seeing double, and the faces sort themselves out into a slender, delicate-looking young man, about 18 years of age, and a thin girl who looks enough like him to be his twin sister.

"Our apologies," the young man says. "My clumsy bearers! I am Tsodlán hiTigál, of the Clan of the

Copper Door, and this is my sister, Résa.” He glances down at your leg. “Ah... my sister is a priestess of our temple of Lord Sárku. She has taken the liberty of casting a spell of healing upon you. Your leg and three ribs were broken, but you are healed now.” You glance over, and the woman smiles prettily. She is tall and very slender, with large, lustrous eyes and a smile like sunrise.

Instruction: if you are a worshipper of Lords Sárku, Hrü’ü, Ksáru, or their Cohorts, this suits you well. If you are a devotee of Lady Dlamélish or her Cohort, you are dubious, but agreeable. Lord Vimúhla’s or Lord Chiténg’s followers may quibble but will still accept the medical ministrations of a priestess of the Worm Lord. Those who love the Lords of Stability will find this a horrifying turn of events, however: for all you know, the fall may have killed you, and this charming lady has turned you into a Jájgi, one of the sentient undead! Choose your reaction: (1) smile sweetly, express gratitude for their help, then quickly depart without showing much friendliness. Go to Sec. F.11; (2) smile just as sweetly and thank them warmly for their aid. Go to Sec. F.12; (3) rudely protest that your own people should have healed you, rise, and limp away. Go to Sec. F.13.

F.4. IT’S ALL IN BLACK AND WHITE

The Protectorates of Dó Cháka and Pán Cháka form the western border of Tsolyánu. Beyond lies the hostile land of Mu’ugalavyá, The nonhuman *Pé Chói* dwell between these two nations. During most of the current century, the Tsolyáni have dominated the region, and many *Pé Chói* have adapted to Tsolyáni culture. A few of the more remote *Pé Chói* settlements maintain a precarious autonomy, however, and give allegiance to neither side. Now, with Emperor Dhich’uné newly on the throne, the political situation is fluid. The Mu’ugalavyáni are trying to assert their hegemony and have sent expeditions as far as Chéne Hó and Páya Gupá in the north. They have also taken Butrús and much of Pán Cháka in the south. The *Pé Chói* do not much like the Mu’ugalavyáni, and many have already declared for Tsolyánu, but the “rebel” *Pé Chói* of the forests have taken this opportunity to throw off the yoke of both human nations.

Your caravan is following the *Sákbe*-road along the Chéne Hó-Tumíssa route. It is almost sunset, and the thickly wooded foothills of the Chákan range are orange-black in the westering light. Without warning, a horde of *Pé Chói* warriors appears before you. They have climbed up the outer wall and now

occupy all three levels between two watch towers, a stretch perhaps two *Tsán* long.

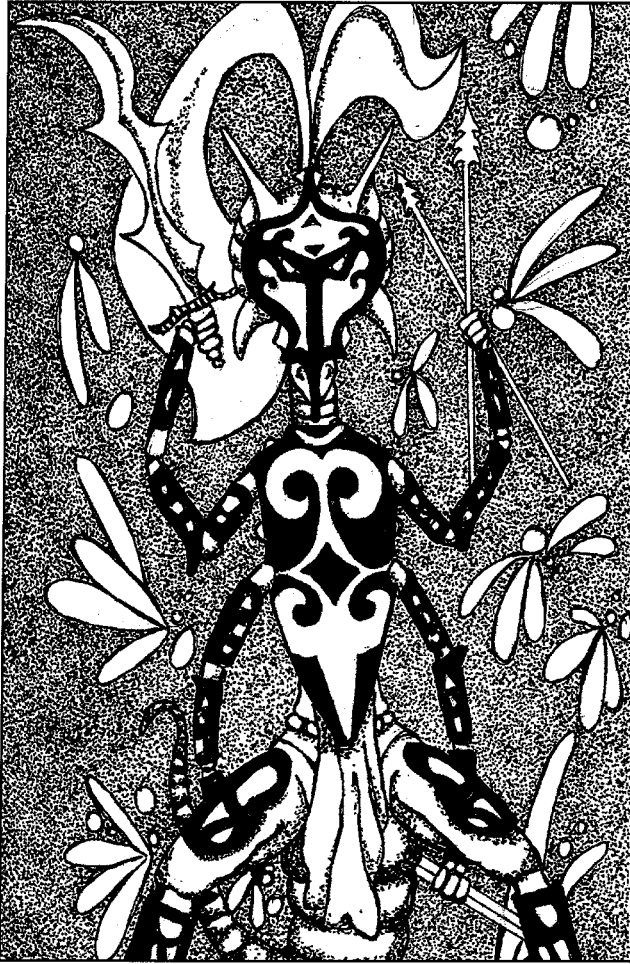
These are mostly male *Pé Chói*. Their gleaming ebon chitin is only dimly visible in the twilight. By contrast, their females’ bone-white integument is almost luminously visible. *Pé Chói* have two powerful rear legs, two pairs of upper hands, a segmented tail, and a long, narrow head. They carry bone-tipped spears and *Chlén*-hide swords, and a few have small bows and shields. They wear neither clothing nor armour, but only leather baldrics.

Your slaves panic, drop their burden-baskets, and begin to leap down from the first level into the underbrush at the base of the road. You hear shouts and realise that the *Pé Chói* are lying in wait down there, too. Your *Chlén*-beasts bawl and shudder as javelins and arrows thud into their armoured hide. One is hit in the eye and rears up like a demon of legend. It hurls itself and its heavily laden cart over the parapet and down into the melee at the foot of the wall. There is pandemonium. Elturé hiFershéna, your caravan-mistress, shouts at you to surrender, but you know that the *Pé Chói* will allow no survivors. You have only your five clan-cousins, ten overseers, and a dozen roustabouts who double as labourers and guards. You also had twenty cart-drivers, *Chlén*-handlers, cooks, and servants, but most of these have already fled.

Instruction: if you fight, go to Sec. F.14. If you surrender, go to Sec. F.15. If you flee, go to Sec. F.16.

F.5. ROW, ROW, ROW THAT BOAT

Kushí’il Isle, off the southeastern coast of Shényu, deserves its reputation as “the basement of the world’s latrine.” Its coasts are low, hot, insect-ridden, and miasmal. Few have ever lived to reach the volcanic cone that rises at the centre of the island. The place is inhabited by the *Shén*, a species of sentient nonhumans similar in many ways to the reptiles of ancient Earth. These creatures are bipedal and stand nearly seven feet tall. In addition to two powerful arms, they have a tail with a sort of mace-like ball at the tip which can be used as a weapon. They have three sexes: males, females, and “egg-fertilisers,” who come along and fertilise the eggs after a male and a female have co-operated in laying them. The *Shén* are excellent fighters, good merchants, skilled sailors, and brave explorers, especially of the hot equatorial regions south of Shényu where few humans ever venture. They tend to be strong, aggressive, crude, and avaricious. These



traits are exactly what humans want in soldiers, and the *Shén* are thus popular as mercenaries.

Your ship founders in a gale off Kushí'il Isle, on its way into Ssorvá in Shényu with a cargo of copper, which the *Shén* prefer over other metals. The seas run high here, and the storm drives all before it. Your comrades lower a dinghy, but it is swamped before they can get it into the water. You help three sailors cut a fallen mast loose from its jumble of rigging. There is just time to push it overside into the raging waves, and then you find the ship's deck tilting under you. "She's going down!" somebody bawls in your ear. Then you are overboard, awash in the thundering, swirling water.

You return to consciousness lying on pitch-fragrant planking in hot, bright sunlight. Next to you is a sailor you recognise from your vessel. His eyes are open, but his skin has the greyish cast of death. You raise your head and see that several more of your shipmates are sprawled nearby, all dead. Farther away, you see black-tarred gunwhales, spars, and rigging, and you realise that you are on board a ship. Two tall, ebon-hued *Shén* are moving among your

companions, stopping here and there to confer in their guttural tongue. You start to get up to go and thank your rescuers. Then you see what they are doing: one points, and the other lifts a saw-bladed cleaver. It goes whunk! and you hear a gargle of satisfaction. Black talons lift a human arm, hold it up where both *Shén* can examine it, and then drop it into a basket. You smell the fragrance of barbecuing meat. It is time to depart.

You try to rise and hurl yourself over into the sea, but you are too weak. One of the *Shén* easily catches you and holds you while his companion binds your wrists. He (you're not sure of the sex) points to the basket of meat, then to you, then shakes his head. You are not destined for the stew-pot. Not yet, anyhow.

They carry you below-decks to a dark cell in the bilges. Here you find more of your comrades alive: two sailors, a girl who had served as assistant to your cook, a clan-cousin (a man you never liked), and two merchants who are passengers.

Your companions untie you, but you cannot escape from the cell, which is pitch-dark and awash with stinking bilge-water. You cannot tell the time. Periodically, the *Shén* throw in strips of roasted meat through a slot in the hatch. These you reject outright. They also toss in round melon-like fruits that have a repulsive flavour and cause stomach cramps and diarrhea: these are *Chr*-melons, a staple of the *Shén* diet.

At last you are hauled out, wet, covered with sores and vermin, and starving. The sunlight hits you like a molten yellow hammer. When your eyes adjust, you see that your vessel is moored beside a long wharf raised on a patchwork of irregular wooden pilings. Beyond rise slovenly buildings of wood, basketry-lattice, and yellow-brown adobe. The place swarms with *Shén*. You see humans, too, but these are mostly naked and shackled. With a sinking feeling, you remember the stories you have heard about Kushí'il Isle. Its slave-pens are infamous.

You are transferred to a holding-pen. Later, you are taken before a *Shén* magistrate who speaks some Livyáni. He says, "No money? No possessions? You owe seven *Ksr*, three *Nssá*, and six *Pésh* to cover the cost of your rescue, your lodging, and your food while you were aboard the *Hrrg-sh-Sá-Tr*." You lack wherewithal to pay your debts. I therefore commit you to slavery."

"Let me contact my clan!" you cry. "They will cover these false debts!"

"False? I fine you two more *Nssá* for insulting *Shén* justice. As for your clan, it has no branch here." The old *Shén* shrugs. "Take the human away."

The following day you and your comrades are sold. One of the sailors is very weak, and the *Shén* buyer licks rows of pointed teeth and feels the man's limbs. The rest are bought by other masters. You watch as the little cook-girl is carried out, kicking and screaming. One of your *Shén* guards, who speaks a few words of *Tsolyáni*, says, "Toy for children.. Last one no good. Break." You shudder.

Your own fate is almost as dismal. You are taken to a great ship, an oared galley called a *Gsá Hr*. You are chained to an oar and set to rowing. You eat and sleep at your rowing bench, and those who fall ill or refuse to work are added to the stew-pot from which you prisoners are fed. After awhile it does not matter any more. Life becomes a dim succession of hard labour, bad food, and discomfort. You envy those who succeed in dying.

Instruction: roll a **D10**: 1-2 = you work at your oar for 23 long years. At last the *Shén* decide you are too feeble to row, and they throw you into the sea. You are rescued by a fisherman and eventually find your way back to *Tsolyánu*, nearly blind, emaciated and white-haired. Your clan does not recognise you but takes you in and gives you a job tending the flower gardens. Only your old dog is still alive and recognises you. (Sound familiar?) You live out the



remainder of your days doddering in the sun. Try another character! 3-5 = one of the *Shén* takes a fancy to you; they are not really such awful creatures, when you get to know them. He buys your freedom, offers you one last *Chrmelon* (which you have now come to like), and takes you to the *Tsolyáni* Legate in the city of *Qeléqmu*. With the Legate's help, you set up a business dealing in cloth and leather goods. (Smuggling *Shén*-hide wallets out of the country is a capital offense!) At last, five years later, you return to *Tsolyánu* with a writ for 15,000 *Káitars*, 3 levels of "merchant," 4 levels of "clothmaker," and 2 levels of "business administrator." Go to Sec. 10; 6-7 = you escape from the vessel while it is in port in *Jakállá*. You inform your clansmen, and several of the younger ones go down to the harbour and set the ship on fire. The *Shén* extinguish the blaze, but the ship is damaged, and they are compelled to put their 250 galley slaves ashore. Your clan then orders the slaves seized as *Shámtdla* for what was done to you.. They are now on *Tsolyáni* soil. You can free the slaves, sell them for 9,000 *Káitars*, or keep them yourself. Go to Sec. 10; 8-9 = you are surprised when a *Shén* military officer descends into your rowing deck and orders you taken out. Standing on the quay is the little cook-girl, now attired in heavy copper jewellery and a velvety black skirt. She runs to you, asks if you are all right, and has you put in a litter and carried to her quarters. She tells you that she was bought to be played with, torn apart, and eaten by her master's rambunctious children, but she offered to cook spicy *Jakállan* food for them, and they found this too tasty to give up. The girl, whose name is *Chísha*, soon became a household favourite and obtained her freedom. If you are a man, *Chísha* wants you to marry her and raise her clan status (she is of the lowly *Wicker Image* clan, but she has a *Comeliness* of 82); if you are a woman, *Chísha* wants you to buy the freedom of her mother and brothers (1,500 *Káitars*) when you get back to *Tsolyánu*. (Go to Sec. 10.) If you don't want to pay her price, you can go row the boat some more — the rest of your life, in fact! 10 = after a few weeks at the oars you die of dysentery (rest in peace!).

F.6. PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN GLASS-CORAL HOUSES...

Merchants are universally respected. As long as you are not caught spying, you may continue to trade and travel in a country at war with your own. There are tensions, of course, and it is not always safe to travel during a conflict, but *Tsolyáni* merchants operated fairly freely in *Yán Kór*, and vice-versa, throughout the recent war. Those clans that have clanhouses in foreign cities still use them in wartime, and only military goods and resources are restricted.

Thus it is that you have jumped at the opportunity to travel to the farthest region of northeastern *Yán Kór*. The journey will take at least two years, but

when you return you will be much in demand as an experienced master-trader. At Prajnú and Ngakü on the shores of Lake Parunál, it is said, humans trade with the aqueous nonhuman species called the *Nyaggá* by means of “silent barter”: each side leaves whatever it wants to trade and somehow indicates what it wishes in return. The other side then leaves the desired items and takes away what it considers fair payment. This in itself is worth seeing.

The trip is longer and more perilous than you had imagined. North, past the frowning escarpments of Avanthár, along the *Sákbe*-road up to the mountain city of Thri’íl, then on through the narrow Pass of Skulls, where Tsolyáni citadels frown down upon the road to the northlands; thence to Sunráya, the fly-blown “capital” of eastern Milumanayá, held now by Tsolyáni troops, and across into the hostile nation of Sa’á Allaqí. The road is now little more than a track; the great thoroughfares built by the Engsvanyáli Priestkings did not reach this far. More marching takes you past the town of Grái, which is no more. It was besieged, looted, and laid waste by the brilliant but fanatic Tsolyáni general Kárin Missúm, whose name translates as “Red Death.” Supplies are hard to find, since much of Sa’á Allaqí’s economy has been depleted by the war. You travel northward on miserable secondary roads to reach the east-west highway between Krú Sékka and Trú, and here you have a confrontation with Sa’á Allaqiyáni troops, who think you ought to contribute to their personal welfare. Your caravan-leader, wise Kúresh hiTlekólmü, has brought extra gems for this purpose, however, and after some threats and chaffering, the Sa’á Allaqiyáni take their leave.

Trú is a small, undistinguished mountain town, where men dig in the stony soil for yellow sulphur, blue-green copper-sulphate, and copper ore. Other gems and minerals are available here, too, but you cannot carry much, and your real goal still lies ahead. You cross the Jánnu Range by a hair-raising pass where you inch along on two-foot-wide mountain trails beside a gorge so deep that all you can see is darkness below. There is no question of *Chlén*-carts here, and even your bearer-slaves find the footing treacherous. Four men slip and fall, their screams trailing away to nothingness in the echoing chasm. At last you descend to the plain beside Lake Parunál and enter the gates of the little fishing town of Káitlan. This is a welcome relief: the squarish, wooden houses, brightly painted and decorated with plumes of scarlet *Dzöntí*-flowers, are peaceful and prosperous. You learn that the road northwestwards to Prajnú is perilous, and it is better to hire a boat and a pilot who knows the *Nyaggá*. Thus you can cross

Dukái Inlet from Prajnú to Ngakü, on across another deep bay to Báni, then still further north to Pechnó in the nation of Chayákkü. From Ngakü, then, you can return by a different route: along a reasonably good road to Greggeésa (skirting the territory of the alien Shunned Ones to the north), thence to Krél (bordering the lands of the Pygmy Folk to the south), over to Khárcha Sárk, south to Tléku Miriyá where the Tsolyáni and the Yán Koryáni fought one of the great sieges of the recent war, and so back to Tsolyánu, a journey worthy of mighty Hrúgga of the Epics himself: the stuff of Heroes!

In Prajnú you find many dealers in the fabled glass-coral of Lake Parunál. This iridescent, crystalline stuff comes from the *Nyaggá* by the “silent barter” method. Once in the hands of human craftsmen, glass-coral is cut and sculpted into many shapes: everything from prisms that reflect rainbows, to miniature sculptures of gods and humans, to tiny vials and goblets for the rarest of rare liqueurs. Prajnú is also the source for *Ondzó*, a kind of silky cloth made of woven grass, from which cloaks and tapestries are made. This is in high demand at home.

What have you brought to trade? Tools of iron and bronze, red glass from Mu’ugalavyá, gems, Flame Opals from Pán Cháka — even a few stone bottles of Tshóridu, the brandies made by secret processes in old Púrdimal. The folk of Prajnú are delighted with your goods, and the *Káitars* come pouring in. Trading is brisk and easy; the Prajnútè, as they call themselves, are indifferent bargainers, and you envision a profit of thousands! You notice a certain secretiveness about Prajnú, and when you take your boat across to Ngakü, the feeling is stronger. The houses have no windows, blind alleys lead nowhere, and high walls conceal all from the onlooker. Unlike Káitlan, you are not invited to meals or festivities, and where the temples are is a mystery. You stay in a sort of city-run hostel for outsiders — other Yán Koryáni included — and twiddle your thumbs when you are not engaged in commerce. The few women you see have a pale, fish-belly appearance, and you wonder if the whispers are true about secret matings between the hideous *Nyaggá* and humankind. Kúresh hiTlekólmü warns the men of your caravan to stay away from the womenfolk. You spend a week in Prajnú, two days in Ngakü, a day in Báni, and even two days in Pechnó, where nobody speaks Tsolyáni and even finding a Yán Koryáni interpreter is hard. All you hear is singsong *Aðmórh*, which people say not even the Gods can learn. Then you are ready to go home. You pack your grass-cloth cloaks and glass-coral sculptures in *Wér*-grass, which is softer than any *Hmélu*-wool, and you and your

comrades leave. None of the Prajnútè even come to say farewell.

Instruction: roll a **D10**: **1** = your caravan is robbed as you travel back through Milumanayá. Go to Sec. 11 and fight. Together, the bandits are a Type 3 opponent. If you win, you catch the robbers and get your goods back; roll again in this paragraph; if you lose, you lose all your investment. Go to Sec. 13, and if you still live, go to Sec. 10; **2-5** = you arrive home after 3 years. You have learned 5 levels of "merchant," 3 of "jeweller-goldsmith," 2 of "desert-survival," 1 of your favourite weapon (Sec. 8.6), and 2 of "mountaineering" in Sec. 7.2. You also receive a profit of 5,000-50,000 Káitars (a D10 x 5,000). Go to Sec. 10. **6-8** = you are kidnapped and held for ransom by Milumanayáni nomads. After 2 years, you escape and make your way home. You gain 4 levels of "desert-survival," 2 of "archery," 4 of "hunting and fishing," 5 of "fisticuffs and brawling," 3 of "dagger/knife-fighting," and all 5 levels of Milumanayáni. You are now "Lawrence of Milumanayá." No money, though. Go to Sec. 10. **9** = you sell your glass-coral for 300% profit on your investment, but you fall sick on the way home and permanently lose 1-10 points from your Height-Build-Strength number (Sec. 6.4). Go to Sec. 10. **10** = you fall into a sand-trap dug by a Mnór, a twenty-legged, insect-like creature that catches its prey this way. Go to Sec. 11 and fight. It is a Type 4 opponent. If you win, you arrive home safely with 1,000-10,000 Káitars profit (a D10 roll), 4 levels of "merchant" and 2 of "jeweller-goldsmith." Mnór also collect glittering objects in their lairs: roll a **D10**: **1-5** = nothing much; **6-8** = a single, rare, Engsvanyáli gold coin (a Suór) worth 1,000 Káitars; **9-10** = an "Eye," roll randomly in Sec. 14, then check for charges. Go to Sec. 10. If you lose against the Mnór, you are history (Oh, bang the drum slowly!).

F.7. SHANGRI-LA!

All of Tsolyánu is a-buzz with tales of strange, magical jewels that are said to come from the remote mining town of Tnalúm, lost amongst the inhospitable peaks of Kilalámmu's Tirúgga Range. Only a few of the greatest caravan-masters of the Empire know how to get to Tnalúm. Your clan is fortunate to have Réshtla hiSrésa, a resident in the far northeast for many years and a friend of the flying nonhuman race called the *Hláka*, who dwell in mountain aeries on the way. He is not keen to guide a party there, however: not only are the mountains dangerous, but there is talk of Salarvyáni raiding parties pushing northwestwards now that Tsolyánu is busy with its own internal affairs. Worse, large numbers of Ssú have been reported in the area. The nonhuman Ssú occupied Tékumel before the coming of humankind, and their hatred is deep and ancient.

Réshtla hiSrésa owes debts to the clan, you hear, and the clan itself needs money for its political activities: provincial governorships, legion generalships, and even posts in the Court of Purple Robes in Avanthár can be had by the highest bidder, now that there is a change of Emperors. The clan offers to cancel Réshtla's debts if he agrees to lead an expedition to Tnalúm — and give the clan whatever profit it makes. Several of your clan's lineages want to be represented; the prestige will be great, and the profits are attractive. Your relatives wangle a place for you in the caravan. This is exciting; you are bored at home, and certain parties are pressing to marry you off to a cousin nicknamed "Old *Chlén*-Breath."

The caravan is large, with many soldiers, *Chlén*-carts, bearer-slaves, servants, and palanquins. More people join as it wends its way through Fasiltum, across the Desert of Eyági, and so to the confluence of the Ranánga River with the tributary that flows out of the eastern mountains from Hekéllu and beyond. You are met by a contingent from the Legion of the Many-Legged Serpent, 20th Imperial Medium Infantry, on its way to reinforce Hekéllu and drive eastward to see what has happened to Sirsúm, the last Tsolyáni outpost, from which nothing has been heard for months. Their officer is General Yamáshsha hiKorokól, who himself comes from the eastern reaches of the Empire. He is a harsh, bitter man who fought under the High General Kéttukal hiMraktiné while the old Emperor was alive.

The first leg of the journey is easy: a long, eastwards tramp on a decaying *Sákbe*-road beside the river folk call "the Stream of Never-Coming-Back." At last you reach Lake Hekéllu beside which sits the city of the same name. You are met by tribesmen wearing calf-length boots, tunics and kilts dyed in patterns of squares and stripes, and crossed baldric-belts, from which hang swords, daggers, axes, and leather pouches. These are the followers of the tribal-religious leader known as "the Young Master"; he is said to be friendly to the Tsolyáni but not to the point of abandoning his autonomy. They watch from the hilltops as you pass, and at night you see bonfires along the peaks and hear the thutter of drums.

Hekéllu is dusty, dirty, and not very prepossessing. It is a copy of finer towns in the Empire, with a central palace-citadel, a small *Hirilákte* arena for gladiatorial sports, the traditional temples of the twenty Gods, and a number of houses belonging to the best-known clans. Lord Denússa hiKutonyál of the White Stone clan is the governor. He is new, having been sent just before the last Seal Emperor's death, and he is eager to make a go of his assignment. He has

repaired the walls, but his aides tell you that they cannot hold against a determined assault. “From whence do you expect such an attack?” Réshltla asks. The Governor’s men gesture around vaguely. “From the Salarvyáni, from the *Ssú*, from the Young Master’s tribesmen, from the *Hláka* down from the sky — from anywhere.”

A few days later, your caravan sets out for Sirsúm. Your soldiers guard the long procession of carts, slaves, merchants, and other travellers who have business in that place. You feel that you are being watched, and you scan each barren bluff and craggy pinnacle anxiously. Your route lies between the steepes of the Chayéngar Range to the north and the windy wasteland of the Chaigári Protectorate to the south. In the blue distance loom the Twin Sisters of legend: the two peaks called *Tláni Hidállu* and *Kákri Midállu*. The *Sákbe*-road, no more than a single level now, takes you along under the frowning scarp of their foothills. One evening you see a line of tall, skeletal, black-wrapped figures leaning on spears, high above you on the crown of one of these buttes. You ask whether those might be *Ssú*, and General Yamáshsha who is nearby answers, “No, those are men. Or at least partly men. They are the *Hóro Kanhái*, a tribe that allows no strangers in its land and speaks to no one.” He shudders and makes a sign of warding used by his temple of Lord Wurú. Réshltla adds that these people are said to be descendants of some ancient Engsvanyáli Legion that lost its way in this desolation, settled down, and perhaps intermarried with earlier inhabitants, not all of whom were human.

You also see occasional *Hláka*. These little flyers dwell in aeries high in the mountains north of your route. They have greyish or brownish fur, leathery wings, three eyes (often a bright blue!) beneath a heavy brow-ridge, comparatively weak arms and legs, and a long tail with a rapier-sharp bony point, which they use as a secondary weapon. *Hláka* are skittish but usually friendly to humankind. These do not approach.

General Yamáshsha sends scouts ahead as you come up to Sirsúm. They return to report that they saw no movement within the walls. He orders a cautious advance, and by evening you stand on the river bank before the *Tí Já* Gate, a squat, squarish building that appears undamaged. Just to the south you can see some sort of pyramidal structure built into the city walls. You see no signs of life.

“Nobody,” one of the General’s scouts calls. You wait while the troops scout and secure the city. Réshltla pulls at his beard impatiently. “This should not be,”



he says worriedly. “When I left here, the Kilalamuyáni had taken control. They had put a tribal chieftain, one Chojjén Jáshkúnai, in charge — but at least there were people!”

A *Heréksa* [a Legion rank equivalent to “lieutenant”] appears. “Bodies, Sir,” he says and points. Your comrades slowly enter the gate, and move through empty streets past the small, plain temples to the first market square. Here you see skeletons, hundreds of them, heaped in a tidy pile before a single wooden pillar. This is covered with rows of impressed dots and circles. Réshltla inspects it, confers with the General, and announces that it is the work of the *Ssú*! Cautiously now, you advance between rows of silent houses, not knowing what lurks within. The Square of Wáris holds no bodies, but there are signs of a battle: broken weapons and bits of armour. Arúo’s Gate, the entrance to the High Citadel, is shut, but General Yamáshsha’s men clamber over the curtain wall to unbar it. The courtyards and palace buildings inside are undamaged but uninhabited. Others of your party return from the once-beautiful Walled Garden of *I’ér Nkáà*, from the eastern Gate of *Chá Vái*, and from the Nighted Gate to the south. Only the squad sent to examine the Old Castle in the far northeastern quadrant of the city finds more bodies: about two hundred that had been horribly mutilated and hung up on stakes like so many *Hmélu*-carcasses. Your party buries them with proper rituals, although no one can be sure

what gods these poor wretches worshipped. Tomorrow General Yamáshsha intends to send a contingent across the river to look at the complex of palaces and town edifices there.

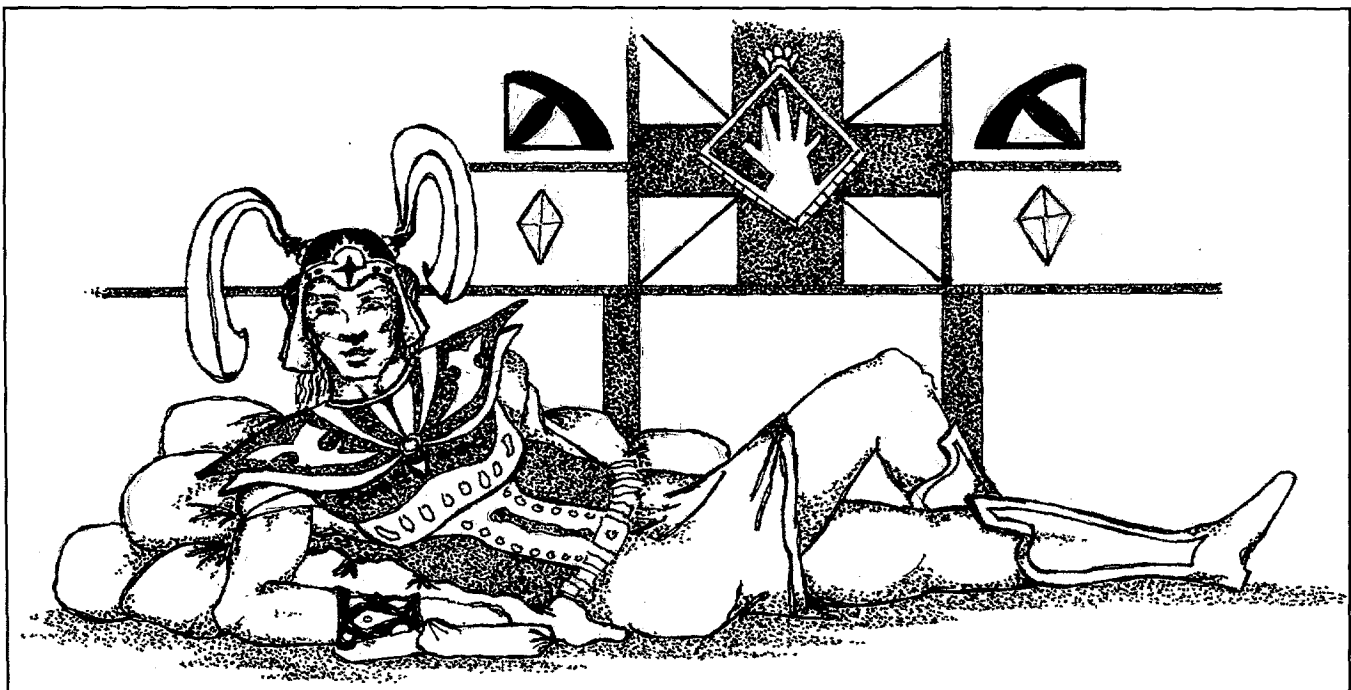
No one sleeps easily. About midnight the sentries raise an outcry, and you rush to the window of your room in the High Citadel to see a line of tiny blue lights dancing across the night-dark slopes beyond the city to the south. "Those are *Ssú*, 'the Foes of Men,'" Réshtla declares. "I actually fought them once. They have four legs and two arms, and their faces are only vaguely human: two bulging eyes, nostril-slits, and a mouth like a vertical oval. Their skin is like rotted corpse-wrappings: it peels away from their limbs like bark from a dead tree, and it stinks of the spice we call *Omógga* [like musty cinnamon]. The homeland of these monsters is called *Ssuyál*, and it lies just a few hundred *Tsán* south of us here. For centuries the *Ssú* have lain quiescent, but now we fear incursions."

During the next three days, you see no more of the *Ssú*, but you do find bits of their cinnamon-smelling skin, like rags of tattered, grey cloth, here and there in the city. You say farewell to General Yamáshsha and his men; he will stay here to occupy the city and arrange for new colonists to be sent to repopulate it — and a permanent force to defend it. You do not envy him his task.

You leave your carts, palanquins, and some slaves in *Sirsúm* and march southeast between peaks that are so high their tops are white with ice, a punishment

from the Goddess Avánthe for invading her realm. You then descend into *Kilalámmu* itself: a pleasant, remote little land, fertile and green in spite of the frigid winds that sweep down from the surrounding heights. It is inhabited by fiercely proud clans under hereditary chiefs called *Dzèù*. You halt at each village and trade your baubles for furs, exotic woods, minerals, perfumed oil pressed from the seeds of the *Haâk*-plant, the harmless and pleasant drug called *Maghz*, a deadly blood-poison made from the root of the *Chrál*-plant, and the bark of the *Ardúro*-tree that one chews as an antidote to certain poisons. You wish you could import wood of the *Nlé*-tree into the Empire; you would make a fortune! It is quite light but does not burn — an excellent material for fences and the roofs of fortresses! Unfortunately, your caravan cannot carry anything so bulky.

Eleven hundred *Tsán*, that is the distance Réshtla reckons west to east across *Kilalámmu*. This trip takes well nigh a year. You cross the *Jánnuka* River at a ford guarded by men in red and white chequered tunics; then you enter a flat plain that is rich with fruits, vegetables, good *Dná*-grain and a dozen other crops. A hundred *Tsán* farther on, *Tnalúm* stands in a bend of the *Mizhátla* River, as pretty a sight as a weary traveller might desire! The city walls are of red brick, decorated with geometric patterns in yellow, white, and black tiles. Inside, the streets are broad, the houses neat and airy, the gardens rich with orange flowers and dark green trees and a thousand strange plants. The roofs are of tan-coloured slate, and there are open courtyards spread with carpets where folk sit to discuss the affairs of the day. The



inhabitants speak one of the myriad mutually-unintelligible dialects of Jannuyáni. This makes communication difficult even for Réshtla. These folk are not tall but are quite handsome, with round or oval faces, hair done in braids or allowed to flow loose, and wiry, muscular bodies. The women wear more concealing clothes than is the custom in the Five Empires. A Tnalúmü girl wears an embroidered bodice, a bright-hued sash, a full, ankle-length skirt of red or black *Firyá*-cloth, and a thin veil that covers the lower half of her face when she goes out of the house. Sexual customs are also stricter than those of Tsolyánu, and Réshtla warns of entanglements that could lead to trouble.

After some days, Réshtla persuades the *Dzèù* of Tnalúm to speak of the jewels you have come to see. These are not “natural” jewels at all but artificial stones made centuries ago by a mysterious race called the *Mihállli*, who are now extinct, he says. The value of each jewel is the “dream” it contains. By rubbing a stone and putting it to your forehead, you “see” strange sights: gigantic metropolises, oval-shaped silver things rising into a jet-black sky, gardens filled with exotic blooms, humans and nonhumans attired in strange costumes — all manner of fantastic things! The dreams give a feeling of pleasure and gentle peace, and they tend to wipe away stress and anxiety. You can see why people want them. They are found, the *Dzèù* says, in the ruins of a lost *Mihállli* city far away in the mountains. He offers to sell a maximum of five stones to each person, but he will not take you to the city. This is not enough to pay for your trip. With difficulty, the *Dzèù* agrees to double his offer. You are cheered when you learn that the *Dzèù* means ten stones for every member of your party, slaves included! His understanding of Tsolyáni social structure is somewhat incomplete! After more haggling, feasting, drinking, hunting, and lazing about, it is time to go home.

Instruction: roll a **D10**: **1** = you reach home safely after four years. You have learned 2 levels of Jannuyáni, 3 of “merchant,” 2 of “mountaineering,” 2 of “jewel-collecting,” and 3 of “nonhuman” expertise in Sec. 9.3. You earn 5,000-50,000 Káitars (a **D10** roll x 5,000). Go to Sec. 10; **2-3** = your caravan is set upon by Ssú, but you escape after a terrible fight. The *Kilalammuyáni* take you in, heal your wounds, and feed you. After five years of wandering, you make it home. You have learned all five levels of Jannuyáni, 4 of “mountaineering,” 2 of “desert survival,” 2 of “swimming,” 5 of “hunting,” 5 of “archery,” and 4 of “botany” in Sec. 9.3. You also master 4 levels of your favourite hand weapon in Sec. 8.6. You gain only 1,000-5,000 Káitars, but you have really lived! Go to Sec. 10; **4-6** = you meet a very angry *Kilalammuyáni*

father, who thinks you’re the one who “did” his daughter! He is a Type 2 opponent. Go to Sec. 11 and fight. If you win, you gain 4,000 Káitars and 2 levels of Jannuyáni. Go to Sec. 10. If you lose, you marry the girl, stay in *Kilálammu* for ten long years, then return home penniless but with 5 levels of Jannuyáni, 5 of “mountaineering,” 3 of “merchant,” and 4 of “cooking” (she couldn’t even boil water without burning it!), and 3 in your favourite weapons skill (Sec. 8.6). Go to Sec. 10; **7-8** = you become lost in one of the “dreams” the jewels give you: you see alien beings that look like tall, bipedal cats, odd buildings, and many other mysterious things. Somehow you know that this dream landscape is called the “Unstraightened City.” The Jannuyáni take care of you, and you dream on for 1-10 years (roll a **D10**). Then one day you recover. You recuperate and decide to go home. You lose 2-20 (2**D10**) points from your Height-Build-Strength number while dreaming, but you gain 4 levels of Jannuyáni, 2 of “mysticism,” 2 of “nonhuman religions,” 2 of “ancient devices,” and 2 levels of ancient *Mihállli* in Sec. 8.2. Go to Sec. 10; **9** = you fall from a narrow mountain path on your way home: you go shrieking down into the abyss to your doom (deepest sympathy). **10** = you may try to find the lost *Mihállli* city, even though your hosts forbid it. If you want to look, roll a **D10**: **1-6** = you do not find it; **7-9** = you do find it and obtain 2-20 (2**D10**) of the jewels, which you may sell for 5,000-50,000 Káitars each: roll a **D10** x 5,000 for each one! You also gain 3 levels of Jannuyáni and 2 of “mountaineering.” Go to Sec. 10; **10** = the *Kilalammuyáni* kill you for violating their secret (enjoy your next incarnation!). If you do not want to explore for the lost city, you learn 2 levels of Jannuyáni, 2 of “merchant,” 1 of your favourite weapon (Sec. 8.6), gain 1,000-5,000 Káitars, and go to Sec. 10.

F.8. IF YOU DID...

Instruction: if you are a man, use this Section. If you are a woman, go to Sec. F.10.

You take the statuette back to your party’s tents, throw the filthy cloth wrapping away, and roll it up in a spare kilt of clean, white cloth, then thrust it into the bottom of your travelling chest. There it stays as you continue your journey. You think it might be a good joke to give it to a cousin who is with you on the trip: Tréshun hiRéshkoru. He is pudgy, blotched with pimples, and as asexual as a clay pot! Oh, yes, he will blush like a village bride, and everyone will laugh! All you need is an opportunity.

Two nights later, as you sit tending the fire beside on another *Sákbe*-road platform, you are approached by one of the prostitutes who frequent these halting places. Normally you would send her packing with a word or two, but this girl is rather appealing: small

but voluptuously curved, with clear golden skin, long-lashed eyes, and a gamin face that is both sensuous and teasing. She wears only a thin skirt, and her breasts are hidden beneath a collar of gilt *Chlén*-hide that sparkles with paste gems. Her eyes are lengthened with black *Tsúnure*-paste; her cheeks are reddened with *Aunú*-pollen, and her shoulders and breasts glitter with sprinklings of *Renudé*-powder. All in all, this girl, little more than a child, wears as much make-up as a bride at her wedding! "No!" you tell her, "Go away!"

"Sweet Lord," she replies, "only seven *Hlásh*!" Her voice has a throaty, purring quality. She poses artfully. "I am called Jiné. I can please you."

"Out! I am high clan, girl. Go and ply your trade with those *Ahoggyá* over there!"

She laughs. "Five *Hlásh*, master! My arts are far too delicate for those stinking monsters! Let me show you..." She moves closer.

She wears some powerful, flowery fragrance. You begin to soften. The journey has been long, and, to be honest, you haven't so much as looked at a woman for months. "Three *Hlásh*," you sigh, and reach for her.

In the morning she is gone, naught but a trace of her perfume left behind to remind you of her. You pack, see to your slaves and cargo, and snap back at Chatsán when he gives you an order. The *Sákbe*-road stretches interminably before you.

A night passes, then another. On the third night, you hear the tinkle of ankle-bells, and suddenly your tent is filled with fragrance again. "Jiné? Is that you? How — ?"

It is she, dressed in a thin sheath of filmy *Thésun*-gauze, her hair done in ringlets around her head. She laughs. "It seems we travel to the same goal, my sweet one! I saw your caravan, and here I am!" She addresses you as *Tsámmeri*, the "'You' of Heart's Desire" that sweethearts employ to one another. This is not proper, but you overlook it.

"I suppose you want your three *Hlásh*?" You call her *Thuntsám*, the "'You' of Pleasurable Delight," with which a gentleman addresses a courtesan or concubine.

She giggles, and her eyes sparkle mischievously. "La! Not so! Now shall I take no less than a full *Káitar*, my mighty one!"

"You think too much of yourself!" you reply sternly. But you know that you'll give her whatever she asks. After all, to a noble person, a *Káitar* is like a single grain of *Dná* to a *Chlén*-beast! Why begrudge this poor waif? She proceeds to prove she is worth every *Qirgál*.

"Stay with me," you whisper at last. "Be my *Kherún*— my concubine. Live with me in my clanhouse, and you shall want for nothing!" Your clansmen will be furious if you take in this lowly road-girl, but at the moment you do not care. You address her as *Tsámmeri*.

She rubs a finger along your jaw and eyes you askance. "I have other patrons, others to please. How think you I came by this *Thésun*-gauze skirt? And these bangles? And this fillet for my hair — its stones are of Mu'ugalavyáni red glass!"

Jealousy thrusts at you unexpectedly, like a dagger. "Cha! I shall buy you better! Bangles of real gold! Armlets of filigree! A fillet with true gems!" How you will pay for this from your clan-allowance you do not stop to consider.

She rolls over on your sleeping mat and pushes back her heavy mane of hair. "Ohé, then begin, my hero! Start with new bangles for this arm, and we shall move onwards to other limbs!" Her tinkling laugh fills the tent, and the evening passes delightfully.

You wake too late to see her go, and the next day's march seems exceptionally tiring. When you halt at last, your feet feel like clay pots filled with earth. You wait anxiously for Jiné to appear, but she does not. When no one is looking, you diffidently approach one of the jewellers' stalls and purchase ten wrist-bangles of massy gold for 15 *Káitars* each. You ask Chatsán to advance you the money, and he does so without question.

The following evening, Jiné is suddenly with you again. She smiles with childish pleasure, accepts the bangles, and lets you have your way. At length she says, "And what of my other arm, oh hero of victories? Does it not look drab and poor beside the one you have now clothed in yellow gold?" She holds up both arms so you can inspect them yourself, and you feel your passion coming back.

"Yes, yes — of course," you mumble. "Tomorrow — next day, when we reach a larger town..." Somehow you cannot resist her!

The next night it is more bangles. Two nights later, it is a fillet encrusted with small garnets (she would have preferred rubies and makes a face). The following

evening she expresses interest in a cap of golden chains, with a sapphire pendant that hangs down upon her forehead. Jiné wants a belt of silver plaques set with small rubies. She yearns for a dress like that she saw a fine lady wearing upon the road yesterday. She needs earrings dripping with sea-pearls. You write out writs upon your personal account, then debits against your share of clan lands, and finally notes upon your family's inheritance itself.

At last your funds are exhausted. What can you tell your relatives? The lands your fathers sweated for all their lives are now mortgaged, and your sisters' dowries are pieces of paper residing in the moneylenders' vaults. When Jiné asks for an emerald ring, you are forced to say no to her.

"La!" she scoffs. "I have other patrons. They will buy it for me!" She starts to get up.

You look miserable, and she softens. "Look you, my heart of love, I cannot go about in rags. If you truly love me, you will find a way to please me! There are those who buy — things — on speculation. They give you money, and you sign a writ to pay them back at a later time. Tomorrow we come to a city big enough to have such people. Will you speak to one of them?"

"Upon what do these — ah — people speculate?"

"Oh, that you will return their loan honestly. That you will give them a gift over and above the principle."

"Interest. Yes, I know. Usury! And what if the customer defaults? What if he has no money to pay?"

She glances at you obliquely. "Hói, why think of that? They might be forgiving. They might bow to your clan's great power. Or..."

"Yes? Or what?"

"They might enslave you to pay your debt. Of course, your clan would quickly buy you back. They would not put up with a highborn member in debtor's prison or in the slave pens!" She smiles. "But why make me speak of ugly things? Buy me my ring, and we shall enjoy the coming of the night as lovers ought." Her caresses are like fire upon your limbs.

You have no opportunity to buy the ring that night, but Jiné grants you her favours anyway. The following morning you wake to find her gone. Worse, your travelling chest is open, and your clothing and goods are spilled out onto the stone floor. You see your white kilt, but the statuette is not there. You

search to no avail. You can hardly believe that Jiné would steal the figurine you bought from that wretched *Ninínyal*. It is worth nothing compared to the wealth you have showered upon her!

Disappointed and angry, you wander the length of the *Sákbe*-road platform. She is nowhere in sight. You feel a rough hand on your arm. It is your caravan-master, Chatsán hiDessúna. "What's the matter?"

"My statue — !" You describe the thing. Then you find yourself talking about Jiné — what she means to you — what she has received from you — all of it.

Chatsán's eyes narrow. "Your statue's gone? A statue of a girl? Demure, like? Yet with a face that tempts and teases? Makes you think of — um — pleasures? An odd, unnatural sort of thing?" He scratches his bald spot. "Hum. Stay here. I return soon."

Within a *Kirén* he comes back with another man, a bent, skinny oldster who wears a tattered yellow robe. Chatsán introduces him reverently: "This is Háku hiChésyel of the Amber Cloak clan, a priest of Lord Belkhánu. We're old friends."

The priest shakes his head. "Chatsán's told me about you, boy. The statue, the mysterious girl, how she wheedles you into giving her so much." He lays a finger alongside his knobby nose and squints. "Have you ever heard of the Demons, boy? The creatures of the Planes Beyond?"

You cannot see what this has to do with anything, and you snap, "Yes, of course."

"There is one, the Demoness Pa'íya, who does precisely what this 'Jiné' does: comes to young men in the guise of a beautiful woman, tempts them, cozens them, sucks away their substance — torments them into crime or slavery or worse! Oh, yes, my temple has documented cases!"

"A Demoness?" you sneer. "Jiné? A — a thief, mayhap — but —"

"The figurine," Chatsán explains patiently. "She is the figurine! You bought her, and now she comes to you! She'll suck out your lifeblood, boy, unless we take steps! That statue is your Jiné! She seeks to ensorcel you!"

These people must be mad! Jiné is a warm, living, delightful girl!

The old priest fairly dances with excitement. “My temple in this town has talented exorcists. I can bring them here. We have to hurry, or you’re a lost soul! Gone forever into the Unending Grey! Worse! Oh, woe!”

Chatsán orders no march that day. Instead, he takes you into town, and you spend hours telling and retelling your story to the priests of Lord Belkhánu, then to the priests of Lord Qón, who wear masks that resemble hideous canine beasts, then for good measure to the clergy of the temple of Lord Thúmis. By nightfall a crowd of several hundred priests, priestesses, local militia, burghers, and citizens has gathered. You are so tired and bewildered that you hardly know where you are. They anoint you, read incantations over you, smear smelly substances on your body in all sorts of unlikely places, dance circles around you, and smoke you like a *Hmélu*-haunch with pungent incense. Then they take you back to the *Sákbe*-road platform and wait.

At first-moonrise, you see Jiné. She seems to materialise on the edge of the platform, and for a moment your hair stands on end. Is she really a Demoness? No, there must be steps there, down to the village roads below. She glides forward, headed toward your tent.

Chatsán’s big, calloused hands thrust you out to meet her. Jiné stops, stiff and alert as a young *Nráishu*-gazelle. “Why — why, my prince of love — what do you — ?”

She gets no further but is engulfed in a horde of shrieking, gabbling priests. Some carry ritual symbols of gold and silver, others bear censers and thuribles, others hold chalk and string with which to draw magical diagrammes, still others carry knives, spears, and staffs. One or two have Eyes clutched in their hands, and in the background you see a forest of waving pitchforks, flails, and shovels. Jiné dodges this way and that, but at last she is taken and held by the beast-masked priests of Lord Qón, who is the particular Foe of Demons.

Someone stuffs her mouth with a cloth dipped in magical water to prevent her from uttering dark spells. Another man, a priest, slashes at her breast with a hooked knife, and she screams. Then others, one by one and then many together, strike at her. She staggers, writhes, and struggles, but to no avail. Chatsán and Háku drag you forward and try to make you bathe in her blood, but you fight them off. You wrench free and kneel beside her.

Jiné is dying. Her features look older, lined, more worldly-wise than you remember. She gazes upon you uncomprehendingly, and her lips open, but death takes her first. She shudders and goes limp. The priests cheer mightily, and the crowd sets up a raucous chanting. Soldiers from the guard tower bring a long, sharpened stake, and soon her battered body is impaled and raised high above the road platform.

“The Demoness is dead! The Demoness is vanquished! We are saved! Humankind triumphs! Pa’íya’s victim goes free!” the priests howl, and you are passed from hand to hand, fondled, kissed, rubbed for good luck, and so befuddled that you swoon.

You wake to find Chatsán beside you. He holds out a mass of jingling golden objects. “Yours, boy. We found her stash of gewgaws down behind the tower. The — um — priests claimed half, and — um — I took out a chain or two for my trouble — but the rest is yours. The Demoness will never bother you more.”

What is there to say? Chatsán declares you lucky that the priests did not confiscate all of your gifts to Jiné as “Demon-possessed.” When you have recovered, you gather up your goods and make ready for the march. As you leave, you avert your eyes from the twisted corpse dangling from its tall stake. Your grief is yours alone.

Later, after you have returned home to your own clanhouse, you chance to pass by your cousin Tréshun’s room. The door is open, and you glance within. There, sitting on a low table, is your statue! He must have been the one who had stolen it! It was never Jiné!

You start off furiously to inform your clan-master: Tréshun will pay for this! Then you pause. What if the statue really is the Demoness Pa’íya? Tréshun richly deserves her! And if not — if poor, greedy little Jiné died for nothing out there on that dusty road — then it is upon Tréshun’s conscience! And those of Chatsán and his superstitious cronies! You shut your eyes and your heart and go on down the corridor.

Instruction: you lose 75% of your personal wealth and 25% of your family wealth for this year (Sec. 4.3). Next time you will know better than to fool with strange statues! Go to Sec. 10.

F.9. OR IF YOU DIDN’T...

Intelligent of you not to buy that statue! You have much the same experiences as in Sec. F.8, (go and read it!) except that no one accuses Jiné of being the

Demoness Pa'íya. She gets you to borrow from the moneylenders, takes all your money, leaves you destitute, and goes off with a fancy dandy from Jakállá named Lord Arái hiSsáivra. You burn with jealousy at being bilked.

Instruction: you have three choices: (1) you may kill the little trollop yourself; (2) you do not kill Jiné, and the moneylenders come to get you; (3) you make a run for it. Go to the following paragraphs.

Choice (1): roll a **D10: 1-5** = you kill her, but you are arrested and compelled to pay 100-500 Káitars (a $D10 \times 100 \div 2$) in Shámtila to Jiné's clan, the Emerald Circlet, which is made up of prostitutes, panderers, and such ilk. Go to Sec. 10; **6-7** = you can't bring yourself to kill her. Go to choice (2), below; **8-9** = Jiné escapes your dagger, but you manage to get 200 Káitars worth of your jewellery back, which still leaves you 6,800 Káitars in debt. Go to choice (2), below; **10** = Jiné lithely turns your knife on you instead: you feel it slide in between your ribs, and that is all. (As the French say, *C'est la vie* — or in Tsolyani, *Másun chranyélikh guál.*)

Choice (2): the moneylenders' clan, the Golden Lintel, wants its money back, please: 7,000 Káitars at 66% compound interest per year. They'll settle for 8,000 Káitars right now, if you have it. If not, roll a **D10: 1-5** = you must fight the "persuader" the moneylenders send; he is a Type 5 opponent. Go to Sec. 11. If you win, you pay them nothing. Go to Sec. 10; if you lose, he breaks your arms and legs, and it costs your clan 10,000 Káitars to have you healed — pay them back, no matter how long it takes! Go to Sec. 10; **6-9** = the moneylenders sell you into slavery. You spend 5 years working in the ruby mines on Tláni Hidállu Peak, where you add 2D10 points to your Height-Build-Strength number (Sec. 6.4), and learn 4 levels of the urban skill of "mining." You are a pauper but still alive! Go to Sec. 10; **10** = Jiné takes pity on you, pays the moneylenders off with your jewellery (and some of her own!), and marries you. Congratulations! She has an Intelligence of 92, a Comeliness of 97, a Charisma of 94, 5 levels of "dagger/knife-fighting," and 7 levels of "prostitute" in Sec. 7.3. Your clan is less than overjoyed and threatens you with expulsion and her with a brief visit from the Black Y Society, the assassins' clan. If you stay and tough it out, you lose status in your clan, face scorn and opprobrium, and get no more clan allowance. Go to Sec. 10. If you take Jiné and run, you live off her earnings for 2 years, learn 3 levels of "fisticuffs and brawling," 2 of "dagger/knife-fighting," 1 of "dagger-throwing," 2 of "pandering," and 2 of "hired bodyguard." You are condemned to death for peddling false "magical statues." You escape, however, and acquire 2 levels of "dish-washing," 2 of "streetcleaning," and 3 of "tomb-robbing" (none of which is on the lists in Sec. 7.3). Your clan

disowns you, and you are no longer allowed in upper-class eateries. Do not go to Sec. 10. You may enter the rôle-playing game as you are, or try another character!

Choice (3): you live in the slums, work at menial jobs, and stay out of sight. Roll a **D10: 1-4** = within a few months your clan forgives you and takes you back. Go to Sec. 10; **5-9** = you learn 5 levels of one of the following crafts (your choice): "glassblower," "tanner," "tailor," "carpenter," or "perfumer." After 5 years, you persuade your family to bring you back. Go to Sec. 10; **10** = you're lucky: you meet a patron who takes you in, gives you money, and helps you. Go to Sec. F.17.

F.10. SO THAT'S WHO IT WAS!

The little statuette is old, perhaps, but you are not very interested. After some desultory dickering, you purchase it for a Káitar and go your way. That night, you notice a pretty, child-like girl dressed in tawdry finery who offers herself to the overseers and clansmen on the Sákbe-road platform. You think, "She looks rather like my statue! I wonder what sort of life the poor creature leads." Then Chatsán comes along with the day's receipts, and you forget about her.

You return from your journey with 500-900 Káitars profit (a $D10 \div 2$, with 1-2 = 500, etc.). One afternoon your clan-cousin Sukúr hiNeshtuél comes by. She is a priestess in Lord Ksáru's temple and is an expert in the Engsvanyáli language. You show her the statuette. She turns it over, scrapes at the flaking verdigris on its base, and shows you a line of graceful Engsvanyáli script. "It says, 'In fond memory of my beloved daughter, Néni, who died of a fall and broke my heart; dated this day of the Priestking Shekkéndu Ssá,...' The rest is lost." Sukúr shakes her head. "It's a memorial figurine, but not a very good one. The sculptor has made the little girl look as seductive as a Jakállan streetwalker instead of saucy and lively, as I'm sure her father intended. It's probably worth five or ten Káitars to an antiquarian." She shrugs, hands it back to you, and turns to other topics. Go to Sec. 10.

F.11. HAVE A GOOD DAY!

Tsodlán stares after you, grimaces, and says to his sister, "These people! No upbringing any more!" You choose to ignore him.

Instruction: you return from your trip. Roll a **D10: 1-2** = 10-100 Káitars loss (roll a $D10 \times 10$); **3-4** = 100-1,000 Káitars loss; **5-6** = no profit or loss: floods washed out most of the markets; **7-8** = 100-1,000 Káitars profit; **9** = 500-1,400 Káitars profit (a $D10$, with 1 = 500, 2 = 600, etc.); **10** = you buy an Eye for 10 Káitars from a roadside

peddlar. To your amazement, it is real and works! Go to Sec. 14 and determine which it is, how many charges it has, etc. All go to Sec. 10.

F.12. A PALANQUIN NAMED DESIRE

Tsodlán graciously offers you a place in the palanquin. Résa smiles at you encouragingly, a servant lowers the rain-curtains, and the bearers splash off at a trot along the *Sákbe*-roadway. The girl lights a tiny lantern, asks your clan and city, and makes small talk.

After a *Tsán* or two you find yourself at ease with these pleasant, urbane people. Résa takes out a pot-bellied *Sra'úr*, and plays. She sings a song or two from the northern mountains and the Kraá Hills. Tsodlán opens a bottle of black Salarvyáni Drónu-wine, so sweet you could drink it for dessert, and the conversation progresses famously.

"You are priests?" you inquire as delicately as you know how. "You, lady, cast a spell, and that is usually the task of priests...?"

"Not I," says she. Résa rarely laughs, but her smile would tame a wild *Zrné*. "I am but a handmaiden to a higher noble lady." She doesn't add any details.

"And I? I own a bit of land hereabouts," Tsodlán waves vaguely in all directions. He peers out into the rainy darkness. "Tell me, how like you our Empire these days?"

This is a dangerous question, even between a mother and the babe in her womb, as the proverb has it. You temporise: "La! The weather could be better!"

Résa smiles. Tsodlán peers into his wine-goblet, then says, "Chances of appointments are good, we hear. Many — ah — older officials have decided to retire, now that we have a new Emperor. Avanthár seeks new people."

You decide to be bold. "Would that I could find such for myself! I am young, perhaps, but I am well educated, willing, and have more than straw betwixt my ears!"

Résa gives you a sidelong glance. "We — my brother and I — may be of help. We shall inquire from friends. Do you seek a soldier's rank, a priestly post, or something other?"

You tell them your qualifications, and Tsodlán nods. "There is a post in the city of Katalál," he says slowly, "although I'm not sure of the details. Someone has left, and now that slot needs filling. I have heard of a post or two in Penóm, too, and mayhap even one in Jakálla for the right young person."

You feel flushed. The thick, black wine makes you both giddy and drowsy. Résa's slim hip jostles yours from one side, and Tsodlán's arm brushes your shoulder from the other. The stuffy darkness of the palanquin, the smell of the smoky lantern oil, the fragrance of Résa's subtle perfume, all set your senses reeling.

Instruction: if you are a man, you may make a mild pass at Résa. If you are a woman, try the same on Tsodlán. (The Tsolyáni have few problems with homosexuality, but both of these people happen to be firmly heterosexual.) If your Comeliness is over 80, and your Charisma is over 75, your interest is returned. If not, then you must hope for better luck some other time. If you fail, or if you're not interested, no harm is done.

The night passes, and the sun pokes up through surly masses of ash-hued clouds on the horizon. Résa yawns. "Soon we return home. Will you come to visit us there? We shall try to find you that post Tsodlán mentioned.... And I would love to see you again as well."

You alight from the palanquin, straighten your stiffening joints, and ask, "Where? I may be travelling again soon. Perhaps —?"

Tsodlán grins. "Why, the City of Sárku, my friend! Come to us! We're easy to find: the Clan of the Copper Door." He waves, Résa smiles, and they depart.

Instruction: if you accept their invitation, go to Sec. F.18. If you decide against it, go to Sec. 10. In either case you make 10-1,000 Káitars profit on the trip (D100 x 10).

F.13. THE SAME TO YOU!

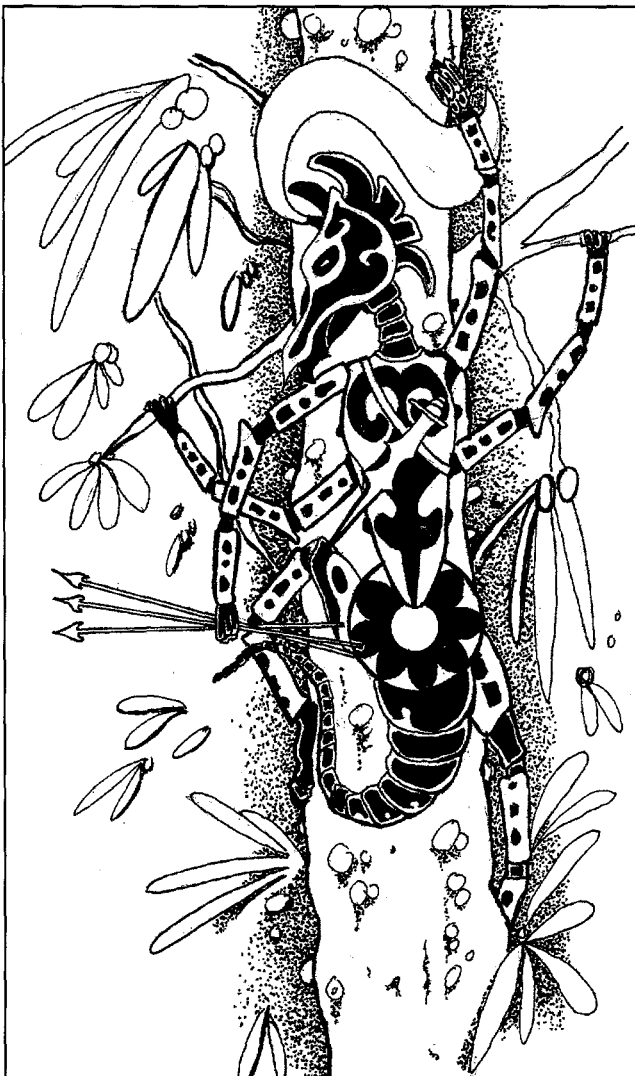
The man, Tsodlán, blinks unbelievably after you. The woman gasps.

"How dare — !" Tsodlán begins, but his sister lays a manicured hand over his arm. "No matter, Brother. Let the clod go. Some are born with no manners; others have to study at it!"

There is no point in starting a fight, not in the middle of the night, in pouring rain, on a *Sákbe*-road, with a gang of hostile guards and litter-bearers glaring at you. You have no witnesses, so you cannot

sue for *Shámtla* for the insult. You stride off with all the dignity you can muster.

Instruction: if your Intelligence (Sec. 6.3) is over 80, you see Résa make a tiny gesture. If it is 80 or below, you don't notice a thing. If you do see it, dodge: roll a D10: if your Dexterity (Sec. 6.2) is 1 through 80, you succeed on a 1-5; if it is 81-90, you make it on a 1-7; if it is 91-100, you escape on a 1-9. If you succeed, just keep walking — she has more sorcery than a Feshénga has legs. If you do not see her cast her spell, or if you fail your Dexterity roll, you feel an odd little biting sensation on your left buttock. You think it's an insect bite and scratch. Next day it is red, and the following day it develops into a tiny, black image of a skull. It doesn't do anything, but you can't get rid of it. How nice that Lord Sárku has marked you "Grade A!" Maybe Lord Gámalu hiBeshyéne, the High Adept of Lord Thúmis in Páya Gupá, knows how to make it go away? In either case, you make 100,-1,000 Káitars on the trip. Go to Sec. 10.



F.14. CUT AND THRUST!

The roadway swiftly becomes a battlefield slippery with blood, and littered with bodies.

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight. Altogether, the Pé Chói are a Type 4 opponent. You and your comrades together are at least in the 151-200 column and may be more if you are a warrior yourself! (Use either the 151-200 column or your own combat number, whichever is greater.) It's too dark, and there are too many Pé Chói to fight them magically. If you win, you gain the admiration of your clansmen, plus 43 Káitars from the Pé Chói bodies. You also gain one level in your favourite weapon (Sec. 8.6), but you lose your investment on the trip. Go to Sec. 10. If you lose, the Pé Chói children carve napkin-holders out of your bones. There is no chance of survival. (Misery!)

F.15. KAMERAD!

You are badly outnumbered. After a brief skirmish, your people drop their weapons, and the Pé Chói close in. They bind you and your comrades and haul you down off the wall and off into the forest.

Instruction: if your Dexterity (Sec. 6.2) is 81 or above, you may try to wriggle free: roll a D10: 1-5 = you free yourself and make your way back to the Sákbe-road, where you inform the tower guards. There is not much they can do, and you are sent home. You lose all your investment on this trip. Go to Sec. 10; 6-7 = you are recaptured. Go to the next paragraph; 8-9 = a great, black Pé Chói looms over you, raises his javelin, then lowers it and hisses, "Go! Away with you! I do not slay helpless ones!" You scramble back to the roadway and make it home — without your goods. Go to Sec. 10; 10 = A pretty, white Pé Chói female stands over you with a jagged sword. "Die, soft-skin!" she screams, as she plunges the point into your breast! (You are now one with the ages.)

Instruction: if you cannot free yourself or if you are recaptured, you are messily sacrificed to the Black Old One, who is theologically the equivalent of all five of your Deities of Change. Not that you care. (Let us pause for a moment of silent prayer!).

F.16. RUN AWAY!

You jump down off the lowest level of the road into a clump of bushes, then run, fall, scabble, stagger, and finally arrive gasping at a farmhouse. There is no light, no dog barking, and no sign of life. You are about to push your way inside when you hear the odd, clicking, crackling speech of the *Pé Chói*. You hurl yourself back into the shadow of a barn wall, and soon you see half a dozen tall, black males and a

white female or two carrying round objects that you queasily suspect are human heads. The *Pé Chói* are well armed, and there's no sense fighting them.

After they have gone, you skirt the house and find a path that leads away from the road, toward the villages of the interior. You struggle along, exhausted, until you see firelight ahead. This is a larger village, with mud walls and even a primitive watch-tower. You see figures up there and call out, "Hó! Help! Let me in!"

A human voice growls back, "Be off! We've no food and no place for strangers!"

There's nothing to do but lurch on into the darkness. At dawn you see another band of *Pé Chói* crossing a little stream ahead of you, and you burrow into a thicket to sleep. Late in the afternoon you are awakened by voices, lots of voices, and the clack and jingle of arms. A company of soldiers is coming up the track toward you.

Gratefully, you emerge from your hiding place. The column stops, and you go forward. An officer holds up his hand, and scouts appear around you.

Instruction: roll a **D10: 1-7** = they are *Tsolyáni*, here to quell the rebellion. They feed you and send you back to the rear, from whence you can go home. You lose your investment, of course. Go to Sec. 10; **8-10** = the soldiers are wearing red-lacquered cook-pot helmets. They are *Mu'ugalavyáni*, sent as a probe to test *Tsolyáni* defences! The men who surround you are grinning, but you do not feel like grinning back. One says, "Oshám khó *Tsolyánesh* mishé." If you speak the language you know what he is saying. Go to the next paragraph.

Instruction: roll a **D10: 1-4** = they interrogate you roughly but let you go. You're no threat to them, after all. Bruised, impoverished, and mad as a wet *Káika*-bird, you make your way home. Go to Sec. 10; **5-8** = the *Mu'ugalavyáni* commander is a gentleman. He orders you to be treated kindly and set free, though with nothing more than your kilt and sandals. Go to Sec. 10; **9-10** = the commander lets his lads have a little sport with you before they kill you. The details are unpleasant. (Better luck next life!)

F.17. IN HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE

If it were not for Lady Ayél hiNétkolun, you might have spent the rest of your life chasing fruit peels in the gutters. She saw you, ordered her litter-bearers to halt, and had you taken back to her mansion. Hungry, dirty, and unkempt as you were, it is not long before her servants have made you presentable

again. You are then led into an elegant room panelled with mosaic scenes from Engsvanyáli mythology. You see a pile of dais-mats, two or three low tables of rare *Nmúr*-wood from the far northeast, a huge bronze candelabra, a writing table and inkstand, and a miscellany of ornate urns, statuary, and bric-a-brac.

The lady awaits you. She has obviously posed this scene for best effect: the light just so over her left shoulder, her features partially in shadow and one long leg thrust out through the slit in the brocaded and begemmed skirt she wears. A silver flower with petals of blue sapphire gleams in her hair, and the collar she is wearing must have cost as much as most folk earn in a lifetime!

She looks at you and knits her dark brows. "I am Ayél hiNétkolun, of the Clan of the Blue Stream."

"Thank you for the food and garments, Lady. But why me? Why pick me from among so many poor and hungry folk?"

She turns her head. The lamplight shows her to be no longer young but still quite lovely. "Perhaps I seek — services."

"Then you must find yourself another! I am no— no—"

"Fear not. I know who you are — and who you once were." She claps her hands, and a chamberlain enters. He is huge, brawny, ugly, and wears a short sword scabbarded at his belt. You begin to worry. There are those whose needs are not satisfied gently.

"I wish to leave," you tell her simply. "Order your monster, there, to stand aside."

She bridles. "What do you take me for? I am no worshipper of the Emerald Ladies! Omdín is here to see that you do not lay hands upon me! I am a priestess of Lady Dilinála, and any man — or woman — who touches me dies! I am sworn to celibacy except for certain — acts — during the Ritual of the Mysteries!"

"All right. I return to my question. Why me?"

"I said I knew of you. I am aware that you have no money, that you live from hand to mouth, working at the most menial of jobs, and more wretched than most slaves. I know that you have been expelled from your clan. Over a woman, was it not?"

It is your turn to stand on your pride. "None of anyone's business!"

“As you wish. But I can help. And you can help me.”

You start to worry again. Her chamberlain, Omdín, stands waiting, arms folded. You do not think the Mysteries of Lady Dilinála include human sacrifice, but you could be wrong. She could also be lying: you see no religious symbols, no house-gods on the table, no amulet at her throat depicting a silver hand on a blue field.

She watches you and laughs. “Don’t look so apprehensive! I eat no meat, not even during our Ceremonies of Welcome to the Returning Year. — Nor would any but a starving *Qásu*-bird fancy a morsel as scrawny as you!” She draws a slow breath. “No, I need you for something quite other.”

“If it is not sexual, then it must be religious, political, or criminal. Or all three?”

“You know of the Princess Arimála Tlakotáni, the Emperor’s half-sister? She worships our Lady Dilinála. She disappeared the night Prince Dhich’uné — ah — assumed — the throne. She was in Avanthár, but now the Emperor’s chamberlains say that she is no longer there, and they know not whither she has gone. She has vanished.”

This is not only worrisome, this is terrifying. Meddling in Imperial politics is the surest way to the impaling stake — or worse! “I have heard rumours, my Lady, but I — “ you stammer. “I have no interest in such matters.”

“We have bribed the Legion of Kétl, the Imperial prison guards, to search the dungeons called the Ultimate Labyrinth deep below Avanthár. We have sought in the Tólek Kána Pits in Béy Sü. We have looked in other prisons as well. We have had our agents seek her everywhere, but she is nowhere, flown away like a magician’s phantasm!”

“I cannot help you,” you tell her with absolute sincerity. Your gutter strikes you as a warm, safe, friendly place at this time.

“I think you can. You see, we — my temple and certain others — have many agents like you. Individually, you are unimportant and helpless. Together, your reports make up a tapestry, and that tapestry becomes a picture.”

“You would hire me only for this? To provide reports? Surely, there are others!”

“There are, and we use them, too. There is no danger. You need not swing into Avanthár on a rope and slay the Worm Lord’s minions singlehandedly! We desire only that you spend time in Béy Sü, make friends, listen, observe, and attend functions. Your — ah — recent experiences may give you entry into circles that are — less than legal — where you can make connections and hear things.” She pauses. “We shall cover your expenses. And if — if — by any chance you do discover the Princess’ whereabouts, the reward will be enough to put you back in your clanhouse — or into any other you name!”

Instruction: you have two choices: (a) you accept Lady Ayél’s offer. Go to Sec. 15 (in volume 1); (b) you refuse. Go to Sec. F.19.

F.18. RHAPSODY IN BROWN

Instruction: if you come from the City of Sárku, or if you worship the Worm Lord or his Cohort, you may go straight in to visit Lord Tsodlán and his sister. Otherwise you must put up with being scrutinised by gate-guards, leered at by ragamuffins, etc.

The City of Sárku lies in the mouth of the narrow pass between the foothills of Thénu Thendráya Peak to the north and the Kraá Hills to the south. Nearly a hundred *Tsán* to the west, the ruins of the High Temple of the Worm Lord stand all alone on a windy peak, girded around with walls and fortifications. The region is otherwise sparsely inhabited, and the villagers are a dour and taciturn lot, with few redeeming graces. The area is actually rich with grain, fruits, black-leaved *Tíu*-trees, and other resources, but to the rest of Tsolyánu, “the chief export of the City of Sárku is tomb-mould.”

The City itself squats upon its mountainside like a brown toad. The outer ward, where the public temples and governmental buildings are located, lies at the bottom of the valley, close to the *Sákbe*-road that runs northeastwards from Tsurú through the mountains to Aukésha. Higher up, amidst jutting promontories of grave-dark basalt, are the mansions of the great clans of the region, and in the northern quadrant on the crest of the slope, behind walls so thick that even Empress Sháira Sú’s sappers could not breach them, looms the Citadel of Tombs, the inmost precincts of the Worm Lord’s sanctuary. According to the Treaty of 975 A.S., no Imperial officer can enter this place unless he or she is a worshipper of Lord Sárku or his Cohort and also has permission from the Masters of the Temple.

The gate-guards wear the brown of the Worm Lord trimmed with the cerulean blue of the Imperium. They peer at your papers as though you come from a foreign land, but at last they motion you and your bearer-slaves inside. [If you do not worship Lord Sárku or Lord Durritlámish, your clanhouse will be here in the outer ward. If you are a follower of these deities, go on up past the second ring of walls, through the Gate of Cries, and ask any of the passersby.] You bathe, change clothes, rest, eat a snack, and ready yourself for the evening. Lord Tsodlán híTigál knows you are coming, and runners with torches and a litter soon arrive to take you to the house of the Clan of the Copper Door.

Your host's clanhouse actually does have a copper door. Three slaves are polishing it as your litter arrives. Inside, a gaunt individual in a brown robe, black skullcap, and slippers escorts you silently into a hall hung with burnished copper shields displaying strange runes; tapestries of umber, deep gold, black and brown; and coppery-red statues of ancient heroes on pedestals of ebon wood. A cavernous fireplace fills one wall of this chamber, and the far end is closed with doors of stained glass that open out onto a pillared verandah.

Lord Tsodlán híTigál rises from a dais appropriate to his clan status. On a higher dais above his head you see the traditional gold and blue symbol of the Seal of the Imperium, but you are disturbed to note that above this stands a tall, black standard with the Five-Headed Worm depicted upon it in copper foil! Emperor Dhich'uné, whose throne-name is "Eternal Splendour," has already begun to enact changes, it seems.

"Hail!" Lord Tsodlán cries. He greets you by touching his right palm to his lips and bowing slightly. You respond in kind, answer his questions about your trip, commerce, the state of the Empire, the Mu'ugalavyáni incursions, and a dozen other topics. You turn to see Résa coming toward you.

She is gorgeous: a black sheath-skirt of *Güdrú*-cloth, a girdle and tabard of ivory-hued plaques decorated with patterns in black enamel, a copper collar set with topazes, heavy earrings and a gem-winking pectoral to match, sandals of gilded *Vringálu*-hide, and cosmetics so artfully applied so that she resembles an Engsvanyáli painting. You stand and marvel. Résa greets you warmly, offers her cheek for you to kiss, and squeezes your arm.

As the setting sun turns the clerestory windows in the western wall to bloody splendour, more people, begin to filter in. Slaves unroll a damask floor-cloth,

set out dishes and utensils upon it, and place steaming serving dishes in the centre. Everyone sits down crosslegged, one of the clan-elders intones, "All hail, the God Emperor!" (somebody else mutters "And yea, the Master of Worms!"), and dinner begins. These folk do not talk much, nor is there the laughter you are used to at home. There is entertainment, however: two flute-girls perform a wistful duet, a poet recites three odes from Yetíl of Gánga's "Second Bouquet," and an epic-singer with a deep baritone voice sings a part of the "Song of the Reaper of Sighs" that you have never heard before. The verses deal with Lord Sárku's glory at the mythological Battle of Dórmóron Plain. Wines, brandies, tiny crystal goblets of *Tsuhóridu*, and other liqueurs are passed around, as are copper trays of "powders" — the harmless social drugs used in the Five Empires. All in all, it is a pleasant evening.

You are thinking of calling for your litter and going home when Tsodlán beckons you aside. "Come," he urges, "We would speak alone." He guides you toward the curving staircase that leads up to the roof garden.

The night is clear, with only a wisp of cloud scudding across the face of the green moon Gayél. You find a mat to sit on, lean back against a soft bolster, and set your drink carefully upon a low table of carved *Séresh*-wood. You wait for him to begin.

"From here," Tsodlán announces, "you can look into the outer court of our Citadel of Tombs. There, do you see that little row of brownish lights between those bastions? Someday I hope to take you into that place." He eyes you obliquely.

You hear soft footsteps, the slither of garments, and the faint jingle of anklets. Résa slides down beside you, her breath fragrant with some sort of minty perfume. "How like you our city?"

These people clearly want something. You answer carefully, sip your drink, and let them make the first move.

It is not long in coming. Tsodlán says, "Ah! I must tell you! I have found you a post, if you want it: an Assistant Scriptorship in the Palace of the Realm in Jakállá! It pays well, and there are plenty of chances for bribes! Promotions are easy, too —"

"—There's that Town Prefecture, too, in the Tsechélnu Flats near Penóm," Résa adds brightly. "That pays even better."

“Near Penóm? The insects are big enough to carry me off unaided!” you exclaim. “Not for me! As for the Jakálla post, well, I would hear more of it.”

You continue to banter as the red moon, Káshi, rises to meet Gayél. The brandy flows ever faster, and you notice that a tray of white and blue powders has miraculously appeared by your side. Résa dips a slim finger into one of these and touches it to your lips. You do not want to become intoxicated and surreptitiously wipe it away.

“Perhaps you would prefer more arduous duties?” Tsodlán inquires smoothly. “A post in Béy Sü or Avanthár? Of course, there are a few religious restrictions — can’t have the wrong person for sensitive work, you know.”

You laugh and pretend to be slightly fuddled. “Do I have to convert?”

Tsodlán grins back. “Ah... no. Just be friendly. In fact, it would be better if you are not a member of Lord Sárku’s faith. The job would take you among all sorts of people.”

“Well...” you temporise.

“You do support the Imperium?” Résa inquires insistently. “You want to help our new Emperor and defeat Tsolyánu’s foes?”

Tsodlán adds: “Your first assignment might be something quite easy: a party in Béy Sü, perhaps, or a visit to Prince Rereshqála’s palace down by Jakálla.” Prince Rereshqála is the previous Emperor’s oldest son; he withdrew from the race for the Petal Throne because of age and what people say is a non-competitive disposition. No one is really sure.

They press you for an immediate reply, but you promise them only an answer in the morning. Résa says she is getting cold and curls up in a shawl beside you. Tsodlán brings out a thick, woolly blanket and sends for a brazier of hot coals — and another bottle of *Tsuhóridu*.

Instruction: if you are a man, you may accept Résa’s obvious invitation. Tsodlán is equally willing to entertain you if you are a woman. Your *Comeliness* and *Charisma* do not matter; this pair will make the sacrifice. The odd thing is that both of these people are so cold-blooded: their flesh just never seems to get warm...

Instruction: if you say yes to this offer, you enter the rôle-playing game as an active agent for Lord Sárku and

Emperor Dhich’uné. You may attend that party in Béy Sü. Go to Sec. 15 (in volume 1), or you may go home to Sec. 10. If you say no, Tsodlán and Résa politely see you back to your clanhouse and say good-bye. Go to Sec. 10.

F.19. COFFIN’ IS BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH!

Lady Ayél smiles, a trifle sadly, and gestures to Omdín. His sword whispers out of its sheath. You were expecting this.

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight. Lady Ayél uses a spell, and Omdín is quite competent with his short sword. Together, they are a Type 6 opponent. If you win, go to Sec. F.20. If you lose, Omdín throws you into a heavy wooden chest and slams down the lid. You are lifted, carried, and at last set down. It is not until you hear the patter of dirt falling on your narrow prison that you realise that you are being buried alive! There is no escape. The air grows foul. You gasp, cough, kick, scream, and claw futilely at the unyielding wood. Then you die. (Earth to earth...)

F.20. TO BÉY SÜ OR NOT TO BÉY SÜ

You have no compunctions about giving the chamberlain, Omdín, the *coup-de-grace*. You did him before he could do you. Lady Ayél is another matter. She lies sprawled beside her writing-stand, either unconscious or dead. You lay two fingers on her throat and feel a pulse still beating there. Should you kill her? Her litter-bearers, gate-guards, and servants will remember your face. In Tsolyánu it is hard to hide when somebody seriously wants you found. The temples know a dozen ways to track a fugitive with magic, and criminals almost always end up on the impaling stake. If you’re going to murder Lady Ayél, you’d better hurry! Someone may come in at any moment.

Instruction: stop wasting time! Either kill her or don’t! It’s past time to take off out of here like the proverbial Küni-bird!

Whatever you decide, you do want to have a quick look around. There is a bag of gold coins on one of the tables, obviously meant for you if you chose to join this little dance. A letter beside it introduces you to some nobleman in Béy Sü, Lady Ayél thought she had you figured, didn’t she?

You paw through the papers on her writing-stand, then make a circuit of the room. Nothing. It is Omdín’s unresisting corpse that gives you a clue: a glittering object on a chain around his neck catches your eye. It is a talisman: a wriggling copper worm set upon a pentagonal plaque of jet-black stone. Lord

Sárku? But didn't the Lady say her household worshipped another deity?

You snatch up a handful of letters from the writing-table again and force yourself to read carefully. The fifth one down begins, "To the most revered Lady Kelétla hiTlélsu, esteemed Priestess of the Aspect of Dread Lord Siyenágga, the Wanderer of Tombs..." It is signed "thy cousin, Churmegásu hiTlélsu, High Ritual Priest of the Worm Lord at Béy Sü."

"Lady Ayél" did not put all her *Dén-den* game pieces on the board! So she was a priestess of one of Lord Sárku's uglier Aspects! But why hire clan-outcasts to spy for her?

It dawns on you. Emperor Dhich'uné and his priests of Sárku have no idea where Princess Arimála has gone! They must use gullible people like you to find out. They want you to believe that you serve Lady Dilinála, one of the Deities of Stability, and seek news of the Princess among the criminal elements. If you do find the Princess' trail, the Emperor's agents will go after her. He will take whatever steps are needed to secure the Petal Throne. Unfortunately, one small step for Emperor Dhich'uné is plenty to squash a nobody like you!

You can still cut this woman's throat. If you do, the servitors of the Worm Lord will follow you all the days of your life. Not many days, at that. You can scamper back to your gutter, or you can attend that soirée in Béy Sü and see what develops. (You must be crazy!)

Instruction: if you decide not to play this perilous game, grab the bag of gold (300 Káitars) and go back to your gutter! Roll a **D10: 1-2** = your clan finally re-admits you, and you return to your former station. Go to Sec. 10. **3-6** = Your clan reluctantly takes you back. You remain a pauper. If you are a man, they offer you a choice of being a door-guard, a night-watchman in a warehouse, an overseer in the tannery, or a Chlén-beast handler in the stables. If you are a woman, you must give up your Aridáni status and become a seamstress, a parasol-carrier for one of the great ladies of the clan, a cat-groomer for an aristocratic family, or marry a fat, middle-aged, and wealthy clan-cousin who is looking for a second wife who will serve his first wife like a slave. Go to Sec. 10; **7-10** = you stay at the lowest level of society, take a mate who earns a living making floral displays for funerals, have three children, become a tomb robber, and are executed at age 42 for digging up corpses to get at the coins placed in their mouths by grieving relatives. (Not a heroic death, but you can try again!)

Instruction: if you want to live dangerously and go to Béy Sü, take the gold, the letter, and head for the door! Go to Sec. 15 (in volume 1). Oh, you'd best scribble a note first to "Lady Ayél" telling her you were not aware of what she really wanted, and you want to join her side after all. Otherwise she'll have you hunted down and chopped finer than Jakállan chutney!



21. PENÓM

G. OH, GIVE ME PENÓM, WHERE THE FESHENGA ROAM... !

If there is any place on Tékumel that the Gods hate, it is the city of Penóm on the southern coast of Tsolyánu. You do not want to go to Penóm; you would gladly sell yourself into slavery (well, perhaps not!) to keep from going there. You have clan-relatives in that city, however, and your family wants you to go and visit. Thus far you have avoided this.

What precipitates your sudden journey is a scheme by your affectionate but devious clan-aunts. They tell you that a certain lovable, clever, wonderful person has evinced a desire to meet you. The object is matrimony!

Through various channels you discover the identity of this perfect mate-to-be. It's time to join the *Ahoggyá* Foreign Legion — if the beasts have one! The individual in question is none other than “Old *Chlén*-breath!” And that's just the nicest of the wretch's nicknames! [If you are a man, “Old *Chlén*-breath” is a female; if you are a woman, the person is a very undesirable male.]

Ah, yes, you tell your clan-relations. It is time to visit Penóm! Why? Business, of course! You hope the monster will not follow you there, and in a month or two you can come sneaking back. You further pray that the Weaver of Skeins will rip this particular fabric from the loom, stomp it to shreds, and throw it into the Abyss Between the Worlds! Let some other poor pawn marry the creature!

On a bright, hot, sunny morning you set out along the mighty *Sákbe*-road. You have thoughtfully informed some of your relatives that you are headed for Khirgár; others believe you are on your way to Thráya. Only a handful of your closest confidants know the truth. They shake their heads, but you insist that nobody will ever look for you in Penóm. Besides, how bad can it really be?

There are really only two ways to reach Penóm: take the *Sákbe*-road south from Úrmish, or go by boat along the coast from Jakálla. There are secondary roads also, including one from Usenánu, but you have heard that the Flats of Tsechélnu are not good for your health. You decide on the scenic route: Úrmish to Penóm, along the Chaigávra River.

Úrmish is a pleasant, prosperous, agricultural city. Like many communities in the centre of the Empire,

it lives for its commerce in *Dná*-grain, *Dlél*-fruit, *Másh*-fruit used to make brandy, *Thésun*-gauze, and a dozen other products. Most of the town lies on the east bank of the Chaigávra River: the markets, the temples, the shops and residential districts, including the “New City,” where the richer clans have built their mansions, and the Governor, Lord Ge'eltigáne *hiBeshmülu*, whiles away his time in the villa called the “Old Tower,” which his father has had splendidly rebuilt. The actual “Governor's Palace,” where the administration of the province is done, is located across the river on the west bank, sandwiched between a noisome district of shops, warehouses, and armouries (the city is famed for its *Chlén*-hide weapons) on the north and the Foreigners' Quarter to the south. All in all, Úrmish is baking hot, crassly commercial, and about as interesting as a stack of bricks, as the natives themselves say.

You can purchase good weapons and armour in Úrmish for about three-quarters of the prices charged in Béy Sü and Jakálla. Other items are also cheaper here than elsewhere, although the merchants can usually spot an outsider from a *Tsán* away! As always, you must bargain hard for what you get — and let the buyer beware!

Every high clan has a clanhouse in Úrmish, so finding accommodation is not a problem. The best hostel for foreigners and those without clanhouses here is the Manor of Chirrukú, which is said to be excellent. The *Hmélu*-stew is renowned, but you have no opportunity to try it.

Your goal lies far to the south, and after a night in Úrmish (and a *Káitar* to the porter of your clanhouse to forget you were ever there), you join a party of merchants travelling on to Penóm.

From the northwest, the *Sákbe*-road enters Úrmish through the Gate of the Green Staff, while that from the northeast comes in through the Gate of the Red Staff. These two massive fortress-gates stand on each side of the river and are connected by the Bridge of the Twelfth Emperor. If you journey to Jakálla, there is another *Sákbe*-road in the southeastern district near the great *Hirilákte* arena that departs through the Gate of Hejjéka II. No one really wants to leave by the Gate of the *Shén* in the Foreigners' Quarter: that is the way to the Tsechélnu Flats and Penóm.

For the first third of your journey your road winds along the bank of the broad, slow-moving river

amongst gardens, fields, and prosperous towns and villages. This is the heart of the Empire, you are told over and over by the complacent folk who dwell here. Grain and produce are cheap, and you rarely have to pass a night on one of the platforms beneath a *Sákbe*-road tower. The villagers invite you in, offer you simple but nourishing fare at no cost, and often send you a bed-mate in the night as well.

When the stone markers tell you that you have covered a little over a hundred *Tsán*, you notice changes in the landscape. Back away from the road you see copses of dark, scraggly trees, stretches of reed-grown marsh, and grassland from which flocks of black birds fly up to squawk and screech at you.

The air becomes increasingly humid, and you become accustomed to being wet through all the time. Water dribbles from you like a leaky sieve. The heat and humidity create a perfect environment for molds and fungi. After throwing away a good pair of boots that have become surprisingly white and furry, and dispensing with a stack of spare kilts that develop pale blue splotches, one of your companions shows you how to wash your things with vinegar and a paste made from the bark of the *Narúr*-tree.

You also see your first "Food of the *Ssú*": ugly, bloated, purple and red bladders and tendrils that the villagers claim is the favourite food of the "Enemies of Humankind." You are warned that these plants are deadly poison to the touch, leaving blisters and raw places as though the skin had been burned off with fire. You see no *Ssú*, fortunately, and none have been reported in this region for hundreds of years; yet a little shudder runs down your spine as you gaze upon the malevolent stuff.

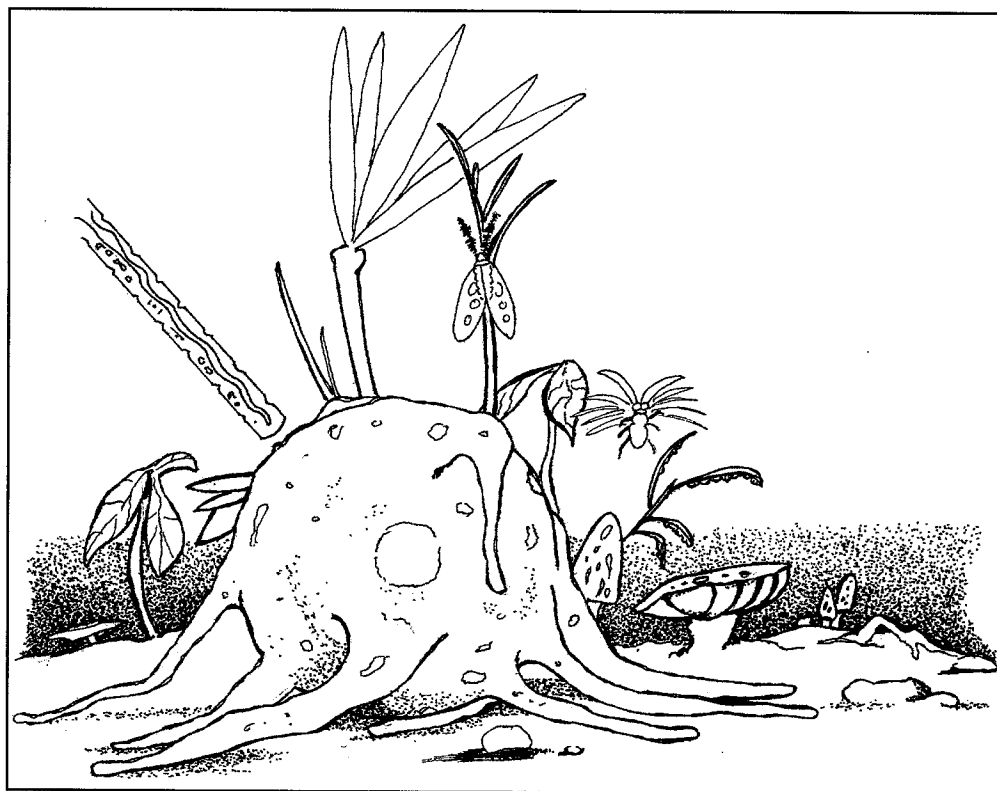
Each day the Flats become more and more swampy, more miasmatic. Great *Horók*-toads croak and splash in the ponds, and grey-black *Qásu*-birds squat upon the skeletal limbs of dead trees. In one village, your hosts also point out a *Pállis* or *Pállis-marásh*, a thing that looks like a huge, dark blue ball the size of your head. It

is covered with ropy, purply-red veins and rather resembles the "Food of the *Ssú*," to which it is related. You wonder why it is special. One of the peasants touches it with a stick, and the thing begins to move — by what means you cannot see — along the ground. "Crawls up to sleepin' folk 'n' squirts poison on 'em," the man tells you. "Then it feeds on what's left." This time your shudder is obvious.

Somewhere close to a hundred *Tsán* farther on the roadway ceases to be built of stone and becomes a timber causeway built up on pilings and gigantic balks of hard, black *Tíu*-wood buried deep in the oozing ground. Each night the insects crowd around your candles, lamps, and fires, and the air stinks with the smell of cremated bugs! Your companions show you how to use tents and netting without setting yourself ablaze.

One evening you are startled by a deep, belling, rumbling roar far off in the bogs. Old Rikám hiGáragu, the caravan-master, sniffs and says, "*Feshénga*. Ever seen one? A lizardy-thing with oily, black hide, and thirty pairs of legs." He spits into the embers of your cooking fire. "This 'un's a big 'un, too. Don't want to cross him!"

By the time you have trudged across nearly a hundred *Tsán* more of rotting, weatherbeaten, grey planking, you rue the day you ever thought of



Penóm as a refuge! “Old *Chlén*-breath” probably has charms you overlooked.

The roadway makes one last turn between a pair of little hills: they must have been the summits of small mountains back in Engsvanyáli times, before the earth shook and dragged mighty Gánga down below the waves.

“There she is!” Rikám sings out, as cheery as a sea-*Akhó* about to devour a shipful of fat and tasty merchants. “Penóm!”

Penóm is built on three low ridges at the southeastern corner of Bamésa Bay, which provides the best harbour along the coast. Indeed, in the distance you can just see the masts of the Flotilla of Hagárr of Paránta at the marine base of Girés farther back in the bay. Closer by, the wharves and warehouses of the shipping clans line the western shore of the harbour. Penóm once had walls, but these defences are now little more than tumbled mounds of green-grown stones. Any threat, you surmise, must come from the sea.

The temples stand high on Metlunél Hill in the centre of the city; the Four Palaces occupy the summit of Kolumkán Ridge in the northwest, and the palace of the Governor covers the steep, craggy peninsula called the Crown of Hrógga in the southern corner. The slopes and hollows between are crammed with residences, commercial buildings, and workshops.

From a distance the place doesn’t look half bad. When you come closer, however, you see that many houses are vacant or collapsed. You pass between walls splotted with green-grey mold, and condensation dribbles down the back of your neck from roofs that lack tiles or thatch. A dozen species of insects buzz around your head, eager to taste your perspiration and sit on your eyelids. What bothers you most, however, is the smell: a mixture of sea-brine, overripe fish, decaying plant life, and something else: an odour like a damp cellar.

You inquire the way to your clan’s residence and find that, in addition to all else, you can hardly understand the local dialect! The citizen you ask replies something like “Oopie stee’ ‘n’ leffona coenah.” [This sounds even funnier in Tsolyáni.] Rikám chortles at your bafflement and translates: “‘Up the street and left on the corner.’ He means turn left at the first corner.”

The clanhouse, when you finally find it, is old, ramshackle, and slowly slumping into ruin. The

paint is peeling, the courtyard is muddy and full of fish-heads, the green-corroded fountain no longer plays, and somebody has abandoned a heap of empty wine-casks in the middle of the little atrium.

Instruction: if you are a man, go to Sec. G.1. If you are a woman, go to Sec. G.2.

G.1. WAITER, THERE’S A SHIVRÁI IN MY SOUP!

In the evening you go to dinner in the clanhouse refectory. A chamberlain seats you on a mat upon a dais of the appropriate height. Servants lay dishes on a floor-cloth before you and your fellow clan-members, but in Penóm the slaves do not put the food on your plate. You are expected to do this yourself — a sure sign of social decadence!

The young man across from you is visibly curious. He is about your age, with a pasty complexion and a bad case of boils or acne or some similar condition you don’t want to know about. He watches for awhile and seems to be getting up courage to talk to you. You guess he is terribly shy.

“What — what brings you here?” he stutters.

You shrug. “Business.”

“Been — been to many cities? Seen mu — much of the Empire?”

You spread your hands expansively. “Oh, a bit here and there. Béy Sü, Tumíssa — Thráya — Thri’íl — “

He eyes you with an expression akin to hunger. “I — I’d like to see those places.”

“Take a trip.”

“Mo — mother — money,” he stammers. You decide that he has more than one problem.

“Perhaps the stranger would prefer to eat by himself.” The new voice is light and feminine. You look over your shoulder to see a child — no, a girl-child — no, a girl who looks like a child — behind you.

“I am Amé,” she says, “Amé hiCháika. This is my brother, Mríddu.” She squats down beside the boy. “Why do you come to Penóm?” She has a broad, low forehead, a triangular face, an up-tilted nose — odd for a Tsolyáni of quality — and a generous mouth. Perhaps she has Vrayáni blood? She inspects you just as candidly.

This Amé is too forward by half. “As I told your brother. Business.”

“Did they warn you about Penóm? The insects, the fungi, the molds, the snakes and lizards and animals? Did they tell you of the belly-cobbles — and many more horrible diseases?” Her words sound serious, but you catch the sardonic flicker in her long, dark eyes.

You give her look for look. “Ohé, and the monstrous sea-beasts that snatch you right off the docks. And the great, flapping bats that seize you while you sleep. And the swamp-toads, and the murderous — “

“They told you true,” Amé says gravely. “You were well warned.”

“Shall — shall we tell him what he’s eating?” the boy, Mríddu, snickers.

You expect a joke. “Worms, I suppose?”

“Not worms,” Amé replies. “*Luó*: squash-beetles. Big, soft, gooey things with legs and feelers. They wiggle. If you cook them in a stew with spices, they’re good over *Yáfa*-rice. That’s what you’re eating right now.”

You want to look down, yet you don’t want to look down. Surely, those lozenge-shaped things in the greenish-yellow stew are some kind of seafood ... !

Instruction: roll a **D10**: **1** = you do not make it to the nearest latrine in time; **2-6** = you do make it — barely; **7-8** = you grimace and pretend you like the awful stuff; **9-10** = you actually do like the stew!

Amé and Mríddu continue to sit with you. A heavy, doughy-looking man with bushy hair and a thick, black beard drifts over and joins you without invitation. He is as pallid as the rest of these people, but his skin has a yellowish cast. He wears a tunic with wrist-length sleeves of opaque purple fabric. This conceals the fact that his arms and torso are as hirsute as any *Ahoggyá*’s. If he took the tunic off, he would still look like he was wearing a black, fur shirt! You guess he is a *Salarvyáni* — or his ancestors were.

Mríddu jerks a thumb at the newcomer. “Here’s Fayés Murúggma. He writes romances.” He grins at you disarmingly. “What’s your name?”

You decide to be friendly and introduce yourself. You’ve never heard of the *Salarvyáni* “author,” but you smile politely.

The man extends a limp, wet hand. “I am a member of your clan from the branch in *Tsatsayágga*, but I’ve lived in *Tsolyánu* a long time,” he says in a passable imitation of a *Jakállan* accent. “Perhaps you have seen my works in the bookshops?”

You have not. Cheap romances, erotic poetry, books of voyages, fictionalised history, all are popular, but you have little interest in them. Even so, if this fellow were well-known, you would have heard of him.

“*Jakállan* cuisine?” Fayés turns to answer something Amé has asked him. “Well, of course. My own preference is for the cooking of *Thráya*, however. Less spicy — don’t have to eat with a bucket of water at your elbow, you know.” He smiles at her in proprietary fashion. Perhaps she has something going with this slug? She looks as though she has better taste.

“*Shivrái!*” Mríddu says suddenly in a low, urgent tone. He is staring at something lying on the dinner-cloth: a thing that resembles a green-brown stick half as long as your forearm.

“Hóil!” Amé’s voice betrays actual fear. She grabs up the lid of the stew-tureen and claps it down over the thing. Furious clacking noises come from underneath the cover. “Call *Téssu!* He’ll know what to do!”

“Can I help?” you ask, not wanting to appear naive. Nobody pays you any attention.

“Let me, Sir!” A rotund, elderly man in a soiled tunic appears. Gingerly, he lifts the lid. A scuttling, writhing, leg-churning thing darts out at him, and he raises the spatula he carries in his other hand and whacks the little monster smartly. “There, now, Lady Amé — no more *Shivrái*,” he announces.

“Thank you, *Téssu*.” She puts out a hand. “Before you — ah — take it away, show it to our new guest, here. He ought to see what a *Shivrái* looks like.”

The thing is an insect: a slender body, long, twig-like legs, and a face not even “Old *Chlén*-breath” could love! “Well, this’s the bitin’ end.” The old man points. “Got a round mouth with chisel-teeth all around. Works ‘em one after t’other in a circle real fast, so’s it looks like a rotary drill-wheel revolvin’. One lands on you, it can drill a hole in your chest quicker’n you can blink.”

Fayés adds, “A big one, now, can put a fist-sized hole through a *Chlén*-hide breastplate. Of course, they’re only found back in the swamps and not in the city.”

Téssu gives the Salarvyáni a disdainful stare. “Don’t have to go so far, Sir! Folk down at t’ Red Sword clanhouse killed a *Shivrái* big as a ten-year-old boy just last month!”

Amé shudders. “How did it get in? You’d better have the slaves check the gauze-screens, Téssu.” She turns to you. “Don’t stand outside near a light after dark. Don’t put your clothes on until you’ve shaken them first. Don’t open a window. Don’t sleep on a mat on the floor, if you’re used to doing that at home. Here we sleep on cots that have legs immersed in pots of poison that kills most of the really ugly crawlers. Téssu will put up your sleeping-net so the flying ones can’t land on you.”

“La! All your ‘don’ts,’ sister dear!” Mríddu chides her. “You’ll frighten our new friend!”

Fayés dabs perspiration from his cheeks with the sleeve of his tunic. “To warn is noble; to allow catastrophe to occur is craven,” he quotes piously from somewhere or other.

“If you’re still hungry,” Amé says, “you’d better order more food.” You look to see small wriggings and eddies of motion beneath the surface of your stew. A tiny head pops out of your rice, then dives back in again.

You have learned one thing about Penóm: your appetite is the least of your worries.

Instruction: go to Sec. G.3.

G.2. THE MARINES HAVE LANDED!

The man on the topmost dais in the refectory is staring at you. You ignore him and go on eating. If he thinks you are just another “good clan-girl” for the bedding, he is very much mistaken. He is handsome, however: tall, muscular, with a squarish chin, intelligent eyes, and a ruddy complexion that shows he is not one of these pasty-faces from Penóm!

A girl and a boy on the dais opposite yours are inspecting you, too. Don’t these people get enough entertainment? You glance around covertly and discover a hulking, bushy-bearded Salarvyáni watching you as well. He looks the hungriest — and the closest to “Old *Chlén*-breath.” You decide that if you must choose a dinner companion, the young girl is your safest choice. You smile at her.

She rises and comes over. “Couldn’t help but notice, Lady,” she says. “We don’t see many outside-folk here.” Her eyes wander over your clothing, your

jewellery, and your coiffure. You wonder if you made the right choice. Her accent is rustic but intelligible. “My name is Amé hiCháika.”

“I’m pleased to make your acquaintance,” you say and introduce yourself. The girl beckons to the boy. He is her brother, and his name is Mríddu. Unfortunately, the Salarvyáni joins you also; these young people seem to know him. Your heart sinks.

An old servant goes hopping down the centre of the hall, whacking with a spatula at something long, skinny, and very fast. “Téssu’s killing a *Shivrái*,” Amé laughs. “Somebody must have left a window open — or torn the netting.”

The Salarvyáni, Fayés Somebody, proceeds to describe the insect population of Penóm with obvious relish. Flying bugs as big as *Küni*-birds, mighty *Epéng* the size of a man’s thigh, creepy-crawlies without number ... ! You decide you do not like either Penóm or this Fayés very much.

You change the subject. “Who’s that tall man on the dais up there?” Just to be devious you add, “I think he’s looking at you, Amé.”

The girl blushes furiously. “He — that’s Lord Sónkolel hiQolyélmu. He’s a guest here, too. He’s from the Legion of Tlanéno the Steersman in Jakállá, sent down to speak to the General of our marines: the Legion of Hagárr of Paránta.”

“He’s a liaison *Molkár*,” Fayés adds with what sounds like a tinge of jealousy.

The officer has seen you looking at him. He smiles encouragingly back, piles his dishes together, wipes his fingers fastidiously on a napkin, and comes to join you. The last thing you wanted was a crowd!

“Ladies, Gentleman,” the officer says. “I am wondering if you would join me for an after-dinner brandy? *Datsú? Másh?*” He turns to the Salarvyáni. “*Drónu?*”

The Salarvyáni’s face is a study in spitefulness before he shifts to a smile. “I never touch the stuff, really. I drink *Ngálu*-wine. The best wine.” You guess that he is pretending to be more Tsolyáni than he really is. Most Salarvyáni love their native *Drónu*.

The brandy-glasses have little gauze covers that you must remove each time you sip. Even so, Mríddu surreptitiously fishes something out of his goblet.

Amé is clearly smitten with the marine officer. “Will you be in Penóm long, *Kási* — ah, *Molkár*?”

Lord Sónkolel ignores her gaffe. “A month or two, then out to sea again.”

“The Red-Hats?” Fayés inquires. “Rumours of fleet movements and raids along the Tsolyáni coast abound.”

The marine shrugs. “They would be fools to attack so far from home and against a fleet as powerful as ours.” He does not elaborate.

You watch as the servant comes dashing back the other way, spatula at the ready. Whatever it was must have eluded him.

The girl, Amé, calls, “Check our guests’ quarters, *Téssu*! No surprises in the night!”

You wonder what she meant.

“My Lady, “ Lord Sónkolel murmurs to you, “would you honour me aboard my vessel tomorrow? I would like you to see that our seacoast is not all insects and swamps. There is much beauty as well.”

From the corner of your eye you see the hurt look on Amé’s face. This man is interesting, but you know many like him at home. Why not do a good turn for the local talent? You smile back and say, “I would be honoured, my Lord. Perhaps Lady Amé and her brother would like to join us?”

He bows to her, but his eyes are on you. “Of course. Delighted.”

Instruction: go to Sec. G.4.

G.3. UNDER SUSPICION!

The days drag by. You spend several hot, sweaty, and dismal afternoons looking at ancient monuments and swatting bugs. You wander around the marketplaces, but aside from fish, pearls, and seashells, there is little of interest. The *Páchi Léi*, the nonhuman race that dwells west of Penóm in the Pán Cháka Protectorate, make elegant sculptures of polished, reddish wood, and their Flame Opals (actually secretions from some tree) are gorgeous — but expensive.

Instruction: you can purchase up to five Flame Opals for 1,000-10,000 Káitars apiece (a D10 roll for each).

In due course you suffer your share of diarrhea: what Amé calls “the Penóm Two-Step.” You develop heat rash, sweat-fungi in very personal places, and a boil where you sit down. For some reason Penóm becomes a challenge which you feel you must defeat in order to keep your honour.

You consider various business prospects, thinking that you might find one that would make some money. Fishing, clam-harvesting, and swamp management hold little appeal, and the local clans have tied up the pearl industry for all time to come. You could try exporting reed baskets and swamp-shoes (large, flat, skate-like footwear the villagers weave from reeds and saplings to use in walking across muddy bogs), but these are hardly lucrative! Shipping, import and export, and the slave trade are either in the hands of other, fiercely competitive clans or are too lowly for one of your status. You wait, lounge, scratch various itches, and read some of Fayés’ torrid romances. Not only is the Salarvyáni a wretched writer, but he’s boring as well!

Amé provides good company, and Mríddu follows you like a *Drí*-ant after a sugar-beetle. You consider bedding the girl, but she is so lively, so elfin, so childish, that you forbear. Unlike many of the tough, self-confident, independent women you know, little Amé has not declared Aridáni status. She is thus legally a ward of her clan and as carefree as her Vrayáni grandparents. She takes you fishing and boating, and you even accompany her on a hunt for swamp-frogs, which the people of Penóm consider a delicacy! You have reservations about eating the ugly beasts, however.

One afternoon a clan-servant comes to inform you that a stranger wants to see you. Have your clan-relatives found you? Has “Old *Chlén*-breath” tracked you down? You throw on a kilt and a pair of sandals and descend to the atrium to see.

The man is slender, middle-aged, gloomy-faced, and has an official look. He bows formally and presents you with a sealed document. Your heart sinks.

It is some sort of summons. The paper is crisp and crackly, the language is “Tsolyáni-bureaucratic,” and the calligraphy clearly says “official scribe.” The document summons you to an audience at the Governor’s palace. You are to go at once.

“Don’t ask me,” the messenger forestalls your question. “I just work there. Please follow me.”



With some trepidation you change into a formal kilt, knee-high buskins of *Vringálu*-hide, a tunic with your clan-symbol blazoned on it, and a light headcloth to protect you from the sun.

The palace is a busy place. The long halls and chambers of the outer ward are crowded with scribes laden with files, delegations of clansmen discussing business in low tones, sea-captains accompanied by slaves bearing manifests, servants, soldiers, officers, chamberlains, stewards, and dozens of people whose business you cannot guess.

Your guide leads you past these, on into a rotunda lit by high clerestory windows, then through echoing marble corridors decorated with bas-reliefs of gods and heroes (somewhat stained by blackish mold), and finally into an open, pillared portico overlooking the blue-grey sea

Seated on a reed mat woven with colourful geometric figures, is none other than Lord Tiktikánu hiSsaronél of the Clan of the Ripened Sheaf, the Governor of Penóm. He is an aristocratic, sophisticated-looking man in his mid-fifties. You recognise him because he attended a feast at your clanhouse only last night (although you were not important enough to be introduced). You have heard somewhere that he worships Lord Qón, but his real passion is watching the *Charáge*-wrestlers.

On the Governor's left, lounging against an untidy heap of brightly embroidered cushions, is his one daughter, Lady Shreku'él hiSsaronél. She is the talk of Penóm for her dalliances with just about everything male. She is said to prefer soldiers — singly, in pairs, or in squads! She is tall and quite beautiful in a high-cheekboned, hawklike way. At the moment she is eyeing you with mild interest.

The third person on the balcony is the Governor's son, Lord Chernáru hiSsaronél, a vapid-looking youth perhaps twenty years of age. He is draped against the sculptured parapet, staring at you with small, mean, close-set eyes and twisting at a lock of greasy-looking hair.

You bow and wait. At last the Governor turns to you and asks, "It is our earnest hope that you enjoy Penóm."

This is very strange. Why has such an august personage summoned you? And why does he care whether you enjoy Penóm? You adopt what you hope is an amicable grin and reply, "Thank you, my Lord. The city is very charming." (Liar!)

The daughter leans forward. "Your work here? Is it about finished?" The Governor shoots her an annoyed glance.

"Done? Um... Hah." What can these people want. "— Ah, yes. It is almost completed."

Lord Chernáru sighs in exasperation. “Do you think he’s just going to tell us? Why don’t you ask him straight out, Father? Bribe him, mind-bar him, or hand him over to the executioners!”

Lady Shreku’él flexes supple fingers. “Let me handle him!” She flashes her brother a look of disgust.

Your affable smile fades away. “My Lords — Lady — I do not understand!”

“Give it up, fellow!” Lord Chernáru snarls. “Your mission!”

“Peace, children!” the Governor chides. “This is not hospitality! Noble Sir, would you take a goblet of chilled wine?”

Chilled wine? How — ? You are amazed to see a serving boy behind you bringing a tray of tall glasses filled with purplish fluid. The glasses are unmistakably frosted, and they tinkle!

The Governor lays a finger alongside his patrician nose. “Not so primitive here as one might think, young man! All the conveniences of home!” He leans forward conspiratorially. “Got a priest of Lord Hrü’ü on the payroll!”

“What does — ? How — ?” You are nonplussed.

“Congelation, noble Sir, the spell of Congelation! A high temple spell belonging to Lord Hrü’ü’s estimable sect! Freezes anything. Might as well use it on water as on Mu’ugalavyáni, eh? Makes for delightful coolth. Got the idea from an estimable

chap I met once: Lord Arumél hiChánkolel. Now I couldn’t do without it.”

Lady Shreku’él stretches and leans back against her cushions. She is nude, except for a twist of bright red *Thésun*-gauze. Nudity is the informal costume of the people of the Five Empires much of the time. The heat makes this mandatory. After all, folk say that all you have to do to fry an egg is give a *Káika*-bird a sunbath! Peasants till the fields as naked as babes, and many city people work, play, shop, and lounge about in the nude, or with little more than a thin scarf to add a dash of colour. You are so used to nudity that anything else seems odd. Still, the Governor’s daughter is undeniably — and startlingly — female.

“In my private chamber,” she purrs, “I have a priestess of the Lady Avánthe. Can you guess what she does for me?”

You lick your lips. The possibilities are numerous.

“Cha! Nothing like that!” The girl’s laughter raises shrill, rippling echoes from the forest of pillars inside the portico. “I have a stable full of priests — and priestesses of the Emerald Ladies for those tasks! No, my little Avánthe lady is skilled in the spell of Climatisation: we shut all the doors, and she uses her spell to create a cool and pleasant climate for those I favour.” She raises an eyebrow.

You decide that enough is too much. “My Lords, Lady, please tell me what you want of me.”

It is the son, Chernáru, who replies: “Do you think we’re all moldy behind the ears, like the folk of this



benighted sewer-city? Come, which faction of the Omnipotent Azure Legion do you serve? Tell us, or by Lord Karakán's sharpest silver scimitar — !"

Lady Shreku'él giggles. "My brother belongs to Lord Karakán's temple because he likes being near sharp things. I am a member of that same faith because I enjoy the brawny arms that wield them!"

"You dissemble well," Lord Tiktikánu interrupts judiciously. "We want no trouble with our glorious new God-Emperor. We have served loyally and long, and we wish no secret prying into our enterprises, our records, our practices, or our relationships. Be at ease, noble Sir; no harm comes to you. All we — my administration and I — want is an understanding." He smiles, showing teeth as sharp and white as any *Zmé's*.

"And," adds Chernáru with ominous charm, "if you are an agent for somebody else — Prince Eselné, Princess Ma'ín Krúthái, Prince Rereshqála — Prince Mirusiya — or anybody else — you can take yourself off home again! We want no part of you."

Instruction: they have the wrong person, of course, but when did that ever stop a mind-bar or a dagger in the night? If you humour them and go on with the charade, go to Sec. G.5. If you tell them who you are and why you're really here, go to Sec. G.6.

G.4. BEACH-BLANKET TSAHLTÉN

The ocean is a bowl of warm, turquoise treacle, the sky a dome of fierce, white light. You laze on the deck of Lord Sónkolel's little pinnace and watch the shores ahead fade from grey-blue to lush green to grey-blue again, as they pass into the distance behind you. Amé is fishing, Mríddu is learning knots from the sailors, and that wretched Salarvyáni, Fayés, is composing odes to your eyes, lips, and other bodily parts! Who invited him along?

"There's the cove!" your host sings out. "Three degrees for'erd of the port beam!" You shade your eyes and see a dark green space between lighter green spaces along the lush, overgrown shoreline. "Take 'er in! Mind that reef off your starboard quarter!" Lord Sónkolel could become tiresome; he loves showing off both his marvellous copper-hued physique and his nautical expertise. Amé shoots him a worshipful glance, but as usual, he is looking at you.

Lord Sónkolel travels in style: the pinnace is about seven man-heights long and has a single mast, a crew of eight armed sailors, a chamberlain, a cook, a wine-steward, two musicians, and four slaves to carry things

and hold parasols — too many for efficiency. It comes smartly about, and in less than a *Kirén* the anchor is down, and everybody is preparing to go ashore.

The beach is white sand, overhung with tall, lacy, *Káuna*-trees. You hear *Khéshchal*-birds shrieking in the forest, back behind the beach, but otherwise the place appears deserted. This land belongs to Lord Sónkolel's commanding officer, and, Amé tells you, the Legion dandies often use it for parties such as this.

You are ferried ashore in the dinghy, followed by boatload after boatload of food-baskets, towels, cushions, umbrellas, cooking equipment, and miscellany. Two pairs of sailors — actually marines from Lord Sónkolel's Legion — scout the area and report no interlopers.

Lunch is served — none of the local cuisine that wriggles, crawls, or tries to fight back! Lord Sónkolel is from Jakálla, and his cook is a true genius. The food is too hot for Mríddu and Amé, but they eat it anyway. Fayés makes a show of needing water to "put out the flames," and you laugh at his discomfiture. So much for his veneer of Jakállan culture!

It is dangerous to sunbathe. Too much exposure can kill, as you well know, and so you swim, staying near the shore where the sea-life is neither large nor hungry, explore the beach, play at *Dén-den*, sleep while the slaves fan you, and chat. Lord Sónkolel starts a game of ball, but Amé proves too agile, and you all fall laughing in a heap to drink cool *Chumétl* and pant. Later, Amé suggests you play tag. This suits Lord Sónkolel, who contrives to tag you in some very unlikely spots. At last you beg off and go to sit under a spreading *Káuna*-tree.

If this were Jakálla, or were you in a better mood, you might consider bedding Lord Sónkolel. You have heard that he has two wives and a brood of children already, but in Tsolyáni society this is no obstacle. You have only recently escaped the clutches of "Old *Chlén*-breath," however, and you are also edgy because of Amé's clear passion for this hulking officer. Better leave well enough alone.

Fayés extracts a sheaf of paper from somewhere and begins to read from his latest novel — aloud. This is more than the human psyche can stand, and you wander down to the water to find Amé morosely skipping pebbles out to sea.

"Étla-crab," she says, a trifle glumly. You look to see that the rock next to you is not a rock at all but a live crustacean. "Not very dangerous. Don't touch him,



though. He's like Lord Sónkolel: he's armoured, he's stiff and proper, and he bites!" You make no comment.

As the tide comes in, the servants begin to prepare dinner. Lord Sónkolel strides down the beach to join you, and the three of you stand gazing out at the two moons rising over the shining silver sea. You feel a strong, masculine arm slide around your waist. You also feel Amé's jealous eyes upon you, and you pull away.

"Dinner!" Mríddu calls, saving you the need to do more. Gratefully, you tramp back up to the fire the servants have lit, to partake of roasted *Hmélu*, fresh loaves of reddish *Dná*-grain bread, *Yáfa*-rice steamed with morsels of crab-meat, and a dozen other savory

dishes. The two musicians play the flute and the *Sra'úr* and warble soulful lovesongs. Fayés first makes a surreptitious play for you, and when you draw away in disgust, he sits down next to Amé. You hear a rustling, then a muffled squeak, and the Salarvyáni rises with a hurt expression on his thick features and stamps off to the other side of the fire. Amé smiles playfully and whispers, "Pushed an *Étla*-crab up under his kilt. Does wonders!"

Fayés takes a blazing ember and trudges off down the beach to build a separate fire where he can nurse his offended dignity. He amuses himself batting live coals out to sea, watching them plummet like tiny red lanterns into the rolling, oily waves.

Lord Sónkolel takes out a bundle of *Tsahlén* sticks and proposes that the rest of you play. You declare that you have brought no money. He indicates your garments and murmurs that it would be "all for fun." You suggest pebbles instead, and he laughs and agrees, not put off in the least.

The larger moon, Gayél, hangs over the jungle like a bloated green lantern, while red Káshi lurks close to the horizon. The music grows more lively. Amé loses her last pebble, and Lord Sónkolel offers to stake her a handful on condition that she dance for the party. You want to warn her but find no opportunity. The girl is old enough to know what she's getting into, after all!

Mríddu says, "Look: fireflies! There, out at sea!" He gets up to point.

The spell is broken. Lord Sónkolel rises and shades his eyes, and you do the same. There are indeed lights out there: dim, reddish glimmerings that hug the water. They look like fire-baskets. A fishing fleet returning, perhaps?

You say as much to Lord Sónkolel, but he is already whirling to snap his fingers at one of his marines. "Get everybody aboard," he says quietly. "Leave the food and gear!"

"What is it?" you ask. "Tell me!"

"Lady, I hope I am wrong. Get to the dinghy. All of you!" He dashes off without another word.

Fayés comes up behind you. "What are they?" you demand of him. "Animals? Monsters?"

He shakes his head. "Lady — Madame — ah, uh — I cannot — "

"Tell me!"

He gulps noisily. "Ah — the Mu'ugalavyáni war-fleet, I surmise." He harrumphs and adds, "Ah — that is the only meaning I can put to our host's untoward reaction..."

"What? Headed where?" Belatedly, you add, "And how do you know?"

"Penóm, Lady. They're on their way to attack Penóm. As for how I know — "

"He knows because he is a Mu'ugalavyáni spy!" Mríddu rises like a ghost between the two of you. "I have overheard him talking to his friends in the marketplace often enough. The language he spoke was not Salarvyáni!"

"Poke-nose boy! Of course it was!"

"Not so! *Misuénlish kho Mu'ugalavyánish mishé?*" He dances out of reach as Fayés lunges at him.

"Somebody comin' in!" one of the marines announces. "Seen our fires, I'd say!"

"I saw this Salarvyáni tossing coals up into the air to signal them!" Mríddu cries. He turns upon Fayés: "Scribbler! Plagiarist! Boring writer!"

"Seize the Salarvyáni!" Lord Sónkolel orders. Fayés squawks and races off down the beach, two marines in hot pursuit.

"Too late to get the pinnace out to sea, Sir!" reports another marine. "Vessel heavin' to in the cove! A Séscha!" You have heard that this type of small, fast galley carries about fifty rowers, fifteen marines, and three officers.

You hear the tick-ticka-tack of the oar-master's muffled drum and shouted commands in the Red-Hats' guttural, clacking tongue. For the first time you begin to realise the enormity of your plight.

"Back!" Sónkolel commands. "Back, into the jungle! You — Arjúá — you know this country, don't you? You can lead us through the swamps and around over Mekkúna Ridge into Penóm by the west gate!" The man salutes and races off to organise the party.

"The Salarvyáni! Two of my men are chasing the bastard! I don't care about him — the Mu'ugalavyáni will probably kill him anyway — but I want Kágesh and Riruné back here!"

Now you learn why there are no villages or houses along this stretch of beach. Directly behind the coast lies a swamp to end all swamps: *Tsán* after *Tsán* of bogs, slimy black water, and quicksand! Lord Sónkolel must be mad to think you can cross this — and in the dark at that!

Instruction: you can fight, but you cannot win against these odds. If you prefer to die a very unpleasant death you can surrender, but one chance is better than none at all, as your sainted Grandmother used to say. You can run along the beach and try to reach a fishing village you saw in the afternoon as your pinnace passed it. If you do this, go to Sec. G. 7. If you decide to follow his suggestion and plunge straight back into the swamp, go to Sec. G.8.

G.5. EASY AIR CONDITIONING

You put on your best conspiratorial frown. "My Lord Governor, you will understand that I am not at liberty to — ah — discuss my objectives in Penóm."

Chernáru breathes, "I thought so!"

"I knew you couldn't be as naive as you look!" Lady Shreku'él observes. "Come, at least tell us which faction you serve!"

"I cannot. There are — reasons."

The Governor gazes at you from under furrowed brows. "Just so we — your people and mine — are not at cross-purposes, eh?"

"We were told of your coming," Lord Chernáru puts in. "We have friends in high places, you know. Still, we weren't informed that it would be — someone like you."

He is not very complimentary. You give him an oblique grin and say, "One of my tasks is to see about certain — irregularities — in the Imperial records. The Emperor would prefer that all of his tax receipts were delivered to Avanthár." You are satisfied to see both Chernáru's and the Governor's faces turn a shade paler.

"Of course," Lord Tiktikánu says soothingly. "Allow me to loan you some of my scribes and secretaries. You have no staff, and they'll make your work so much easier."

Lady Shreku'él runs a hand over her long, golden thigh, brushing aside the last wisp of scarlet drapery that still clings there. "Come — what did you say your name was? — I promised to show you my

apartments. My Avánthe priestess keeps them cool and dry and very comfortable.”

“More chilled wine?” the Governor asks affably.

Instruction: if you go with the Governor’s daughter, go to Sec. G.9. If you refuse — and you know this means trouble — go to Sec. G.10.

G.6. DON’T MAKE AN ASH OF YOURSELF!

“He’s lying!” Chernáru snarls. “Father, we have to —”

You spread your hands. “It’s the truth. I came here to get away from a marriage my clan proposed for me — one I did not want.”

“Kill him!” Chernáru urges hoarsely. “He’s clever — nobody could be as — !” The Governor motions him to silence.

Lady Shreku’él looks up, and you follow the direction of her eyes. There is someone behind you! You turn in time to see a middle-aged man in a purple and mauve robe advancing toward you, hand outstretched.

“I have not previously mentioned another of my employees: my priest of Lord Wurú,” the Governor says. “His specialty is the spell of the Grey Hand.”

Instruction: roll a D10. Add +1 to your score if your Dexterity score (Sec. 6.2) is 76-85; add a +2 if it is 86-95; and add +3 if it is 96-100. If your modified D10 score is 7-10, you avoid his touch. Go to the next paragraph. If you score a 1-6, you dissolve into a pillar of grey ash that slowly crumples and blows away in the breeze. Lady Shreku’él daintily brushes flakes of your remains from her ankle, and says, “It is always best to be decisive, as dear Chernáru says.” She gives her father a dimpled smile and goes inside.

Instruction: if you succeeded in the last paragraph, go to Sec. 11 and fight the Governor’s house-mage. He is a Type 5 opponent. If you win, go to Sec. G.11. If you lose, you are history. (Apologies!)

G.7. A NOVEL WAY OF SAVING FAYES

The sand crunches beneath your feet as you run. You splash through tidal pools, blind to the scuttling and swirling among the wet, slimy rocks. A figure bulks up out of the darkness ahead. You think it is Fayés,

but instead it is one of the two soldiers Lord Sónkolel had sent to find him.

The man stops, sword out. “Hóí? Lady?”

You gasp out your story. “The others are coming!” you tell him. “We must wait here for them.” You are winded, and the sharp stones have cut your feet.

He stands indecisive. “We ought to stay here,” he says dubiously. “Lord Sónkolel would want that. There’s a village this way — some swamp first, though — “

“Where’s Fayés — the Salarvyáni? Did you see him?”

“Aye, Kágesh chased him into the water up ahead. I thought maybe he swam back this way.”

You hear shouts and screaming from behind you. The Mu’ugalavyáni have caught somebody! You decide that staying here is too dangerous. You take the soldier’s arm — this must be the one named Riruné — and splash off together.

The sand gives way to smooth mud, and this to ankle-deep ooze. You try not to think of the things you step on. At least you are past so quickly that they don’t have time to react! The trees here lie close to the water, and Riruné slashes at the clawing branches with his sword.

“There — there’s Kágesh!” he pants.

“No — that’s Fayés.” You clutch the marine’s elbow and pull him to a halt. “What’s he doing?”

The two moons are setting, but there’s light enough to see. The Salarvyáni is standing absolutely still, both arms outstretched. Even from this distance, you can discern the expression of horror on his bearded face.

“What — ?” Riruné begins.

“Look — look — !” As you watch, something glistening rises from the tidal pool in front of Fayés. All you can see is a black maw, claws, and shadowy, waving legs. It is the great-grandmother of all *Étla*-crabs! The beast is as tall as a man!

Fayés shrieks, and there is a flurry of action. Riruné runs forward, sword raised; then he stops. You join him and find that he is staring down at something floating in the tidal pool at his feet. Hundreds of tiny, squirming, wriggling monsters are lashing and tearing at what is left of poor Kágesh!



There is no time to react. Fayés is struggling with the *Étla*. He wrenches free, screaming and bawling like a wounded animal, and wrenches his heavy shoulder-pouch around to thrust it into the monster's clacking mandibles. Something goes crunch! and a shower of white leaves flies up into the air. Fayés has fed the *Étla* the manuscript of his novel! The best use for it, you think!

The creature claws at its face, blinded and infuriated by the fluttering paper. Fayés takes this opportunity to scramble backwards and scramble away, on up the beach.

"Come on, Lady!" Riruné commands roughly. He seems minded to follow Fayés across the broad stretch of swamp that separates your beach from the headland in the distance.

"Why not go back? We can hide in the trees until the Red-Hats depart! They're not going to stay at the cove all night, not if they're moving in to attack Penóm! They won't follow us very far into the swamps either!"

Riruné ponders. "You may be right."

Instruction: if you go back, go to Sec. G.12. If you go on along the shore, go to Sec. G.13.

G.8. THE CHILD MOLESTER

From a distance you hear yelling, then a hoarse scream. The Red-Hats have landed and have caught

some of Lord Sónkolel's crew. You glance back and see that Amé and Mríddu are both with you, as are some of the sailors, the cook, the musicians, and a few of the servants. Lord Sónkolel and his marine are at the head of your column, leading who knows whither into the humid, dripping dark.

Arjúa, the guide, is a native of Penóm. He breaks a branch from a tree and uses it to prod the silent, black waters ahead of the party. Once, something long and sinuous glides away from you. "*Qáqta*," he mutters: "Swamp-snake."

The water is utterly still, the moss-hung trees secretive and dark, the silence eerie. You have the feeling that something — or some things — may be lurking just out of sight, watching you. Lord Sónkolel calls a halt.

You find that your legs are covered with jet-black leeches. Amé comes forward to help pull them off. "Give them time to dig in, and they inject their eggs under your skin," she warns. Soon both of you are aiding the others.

Lord Sónkolel comes to lean against a tree beside you. "I am sorry I got you into this," he tells you. "You could have been home in the clanhouse instead of out here in this awful wilderness."

"Not your fault." You turn him around and yank one of the squishy leeches away from his back. "If we'd stayed in Penóm, the Red-Hats might've

murdered us all in our beds!" Another leech eludes your fingers, and you order him to pull off his boot.

"Penóm is in little danger. We have sentries at Girés, on Palace Point, on Mazgátl Head — all along the coast. By the time the Mu'ugalavyáni arrive, our lads will be formed up and waiting for them!"

"But Fayés — ? If he's a spy, he must have passed on your plans to the Red-Hats."

"He did." Lord Sónkolel leans close, and you are reminded that he is a strong and rather desirable man. "We've been feeding him false information for months. I was sent down here to see to him — and also to investigate 'irregularities' in the Governor's accounts. I already have half a dozen agents quietly going through his files."

You can't resist asking: "Whom do you work for, my Lord?"

His teeth glimmer in the shadows. "The Empire, Lady, the Empire. None of the present candidates. A certain person — one who has no claim to the *Kólumèjalim* at present."

"Prince Rereshqála! That must be who it is!"

Lord Sónkolel only smiles.

"Sir?" One of the marines has come up to you. "Arjúa wants you up ahead."

You find the guide crouching in a thicket of reeds by the banks of a soggy pool. Ahead, on a little hummock in the middle of the water you see a human figure. It looks like a child, wrapped in a blanket or robe of some sort. You are too far away to make out the features, but anybody at all would be a relief out here! He may be what you need to guide you back to Penóm.

"Listen," one of the servants says, "the lad is crying!" You hear a faint whimpering.

"Lost?" you wonder. "Somebody should go to him—"

"Ain't no child, Lady!" Arjúa roughly jerks you back. "That's a *Hlu'ún!*"

"A kind of insect," Amé interjects. "It waits for something to come — either to help the *Hlu'ún* or to eat it — then it unfolds its limbs and pounces! Its body is covered with sticky goo. Just below its head is a long, hollow tube. Once you're enmeshed in its glue, it sticks that into you and sucks you dry!"

"It — it looks like a child — a lost child ..."

"That's one child nobody molests!" answers Arjúa. "Else it molests you!" He chuckles.

"We can get around it that way," another of the marines whispers. Lord Sónkolel points, and the column moves off to the right, away from the monster. You cannot see whether it follows or not.

Instruction: roll a D10: 1-4 = you become lost in the swamp: go to Sec. G.14; 5-6 = your party reaches Penóm, but three members are drowned in the quicksand: roll a D10 three times; a score of "1" on any of these rolls indicates you are one of the casualties! (Death, where is thy sting? Why, in Penóm, of course!). Go to Sec. G.17; 7-10 = all arrive in Penóm safely, though much bitten and bedraggled. Go to Sec. G.17.

G.9. THIS'LL MAKE A REAL MAN OF YOU!

"You like this?" the Governor's daughter murmurs in your ear. She does something. You respond in kind, and for long moments there is silence except for hard breathing. The chamber is stuffy; then a gentle breeze blows up out of nowhere, and it becomes cool and comfortable once more. You have grown used to the Avánthe priestess sitting in one corner, eyes closed, occasionally gesturing and muttering to renew her Climatisation spell.

Lady Shreku'él is certainly skilled — jaded is a better word for it. She knows exactly what to do and when to do it. Frankly, you have never had such a good time. You don't even regret coming to Penóm as long as you can lie on mats and cushions of finest *Güdrü*-cloth in the cool, incense-laden dark with this lovely and passionate — one might even say ferocious — woman. What Shreku'él does not know, she improvises.

At last she rises to kneel beside you. "We will sleep awhile now, Májá," she says to the Avánthe priestess. "Make the room a little warmer, with no breeze — and have the candle burn with a cosy, reddish light." The priestess complies. She mumbles, makes motions in the air, and all is as the girl wishes.

Something is not right. The temple of Lady Avánthe does not "hire out" its priestesses to produce air conditioning and soft lighting any more than the temple of Lord Hrü'ü provides priests to make ice! Shreku'él stretches her long limbs and curls up to sleep. Now she is at her most unguarded. You work

up your courage and casually ask how she manages to acquire such power over these people.

She rolls over and laughs. "Easy, love. Reach me that little gold box from my night table there."

You hand it to her. She opens it, takes out what looks like a tiny twist of paper no larger than a cat's claw, and holds it up. "Ohé, Mája!" she calls softly. "Come here!"

To your surprise, the woman crawls over at once to kneel before her mistress. Shreku'él laughs, low in her throat, and waggles the packet before her. "What would you do for this?"

The woman's thin features contort in apparent pain. "Whatever my Lady commands."

"Here — take my knife! Cut your finger! A good, big slash that will fill my wine-goblet with blood! Then you shall quaff it!"

You put out a hand. "No — ! Leave be!"

"Squeamish? She'll do anything for this!" Lady Shreku'él opens the packet and allows a tiny shower of green dust to sprinkle down over her coverlet. "It's yours, Mája. Lick it up!"

To your horror, the priestess humbly bends and obeys.

Lady Shreku'él offers you a dimpled smile. "Do you know what this is?" She answers her own question: "*Zu'úr*."

"What? But I've heard that *Zu'úr* addicts die within a few months — ?"

"Not this *Zu'úr*! Our — we — have discovered an additive that maintains the pleasure and the addiction, but the taker does not die. Not for a very long time."

On Tékumel, other drugs have long since been purged of their dangerous qualities and made harmless for social use, but *Zu'úr* is different. The only thing that stops an epidemic of *Zu'úr*-addiction is the sure fate of every addict: death within a few months. Shakily you reach for the carafe of wine and pour yourself a small goblet. "I hadn't heard of this in Béy Sü or in Jakállá. Where do you get it?"

She holds out another twist of paper. "Here. Try it! It's not addictive the first time — or the thirtieth time, for some people." She tears the wrapping and

brushes it with her tongue. "Join me in an ecstasy the like of which you have never dreamed, my darling!"

You don't dare try it, but at the same time you don't want to arouse her suspicions. You laugh and say, "La! Who knows where it comes from? This could be the one dose they forgot to cut with the additive!"

She sniffs and begins to tremble. "Take it!" she commands hoarsely. "Take it! The *Hlüss* never forget!"

The priestess, Mája, sends you a stricken look, and you realise you now know too much.

This time Shreku'él is as passionate as a *Zrné* in heat: more than you or a shipload of marines could handle! You pretend, then gamely do your best to cope, then just struggle to keep your limbs intact and stay alive! She finally slumps down, unconscious, on the shredded sleeping mat. You inspect the bruises, teeth-marks, and scratches, wipe away the blood, and stumble toward the door.

"Master?" It is the priestess, Mája. She holds out a ewer of water, a towel and a pot of salve.

"No more!" you pant. "I'm done for the night — nay, for the rest of my life!"

"Lord, let me show you ... " She goes to one of the mosaic-inlaid walls and presses a stone here, a block there. A panel swings open. "This passage leads out to the marketplace. Here's a lamp. Go straight down the stairs and take no turnings." She pauses, then adds, "Leave Penóm, Sir, while you can! The Governor's family and his cronies are all involved in this terrible business. They'll find you otherwise."

"But how is it done? The *Hlüss*? Those monsters do not deal with humans. There can be no trade! We slaughter them, and they us."

"Aye, the *Hlüss*. At night they bring their mighty disc-ships to Black Pearl Cove, down west of the city. The villagers there place materials the *Hlüss* want on the beach, and the monsters reply with *Zu'úr*. The market was suffering because the drug was too deadly. Now — now they've improved it." She spreads her hands helplessly. "Look at me, Sir. Just look at me!"

You hesitate on the threshold of the secret stairway. "Is there anything — anything at all — I can do for you?"

Mája shrugs. "Kill me, Lord. That would be a mercy." You smile sadly; you cannot.

When you reach the marketplace, you find it ablaze with torches. People are running in all directions: old people, women carrying children, armed soldiers, merchants, artisans, labourers, and slaves. To the south a fiery object hisses up into the sky and down again, behind the trees screening the Governor's palace upon its promontory. You hear a distant booming above the sustained roar of the mob.

"What's going on?" You stop a youth by sheer force. "What the hell is going on?"

He gapes at you. "T' Mu'ugalavyáni, Sire! T' Red-Hats! They's attackin' — out in t' harbour! They's about t' land sojers, Sire!" He jerks away and is gone.

Instruction: return to your clanhouse: go to Sec. G.17.

G.10. THE ASSASSIN COMETH

You make excuses, bow many times, and extricate yourself from the palace as soon as you can. Lady Shreku'él's vulpine features are a study in restraint.

You hasten to your clanhouse, throw your clothing into a bag, find Téssu and demand a bearer-slave — it would take too much time to arrange a palanquin— and off you go, headed for Úrmish and "Old Chlén-breath."

You open your door to find a personage who wears a black tunic and a velvet mask standing there. He makes formal obeisance and says, "Sir, I have the honour to be a member of the Association of the Relievers from Life, one of the finest assassin clans in the Empire. You have perpetrated an insult against the person of one Lady Shreku'él hiSsaronél. Our clan has been employed to right this grievous wrong."

"I intended no insult," you reply haughtily, "as the Lady well knows!"

"You imply that she lies? These words are further cause for action!" he cries and draws a slender sword from his waist-clip. You retreat into your chamber. Your own weapon is somewhere near at hand.

"Have at you, Sirrah!" He lunges, parries, and retreats, all in one rather awkward motion.

You toss a blanket at him, snatch up your sword from your luggage, and leap to the attack.

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight. Your foe is a Type 2 opponent. If you win, go to Section G.15. If you lose, you are skewered. (Shuffle gracefully off this mortal coil!)

G.11. LET ME OUT!

You crouch over the body of the fallen house-mage. You are not sure whether he is dead, but at least he is in no condition to try his Grey Hand spell on you.

The Governor, his daughter, and his son all sit as though carved from stone. At last Lord Tiktikánu says mildly, "And what do you propose now?"

"Don't try to stop me! I'm leaving!"

"Leave, then. You have slain one of my valued employees. This will require a payment of *Shámmtla*. Thousands of *Káitars*. We shall be in contact with your clan."

"Do that!" you pant. "You would have had me murdered!"

"Nonsense! All we wanted was to offer our aid while you are in Penóm."

You back away, very slowly. The Governor does not move. When you reach the passage leading to the outer ward, you feel like breaking into a mad dash, but you restrain yourself. Dignity, you tell yourself. Dignity!

You cannot resist looking back as you pass the guards at the outer gate. No one follows. You return to your clanhouse.

Instruction: go to Sec. G.10 and begin in the second paragraph.

G.12. GOD ZO'ÓRA COMES!

You and Riruné retrace your steps along the beach and take cover in a thicket of white-flowering bushes. Aside from an occasional biting insect — wire-worms, mostly — nobody bothers you. The long night passes slowly, but the Red-Hats show no signs of leaving. Their red-painted *Séscha* lies at anchor in the cove, next to Lord Sónkolel's pinnace.

Where is Lord Sónkolel? When you fled up the beach you did not see where he went. It is obvious that he is neither dead nor captured. Amé and Mríddu are also nowhere in sight — for which you are grateful.

The Mu'ugalavyáni make a meal of your picnic provisions. The hampers are soon emptied, the fine wines drunk, and the elegant dishes smashed upon the rocks. What they do to the two poor bearer-slaves they have captured you do not want to think

about. The Red-Hats set up a perimeter, establish sentry-watches, and bed down to sleep. The rest of the fleet is gone on to attack Penóm, but this gang of murderers has apparently been given the duty of staying to guard this cove. You are not sure why. Riruné, too, is puzzled.

About dawn there is a stir in the camp. A patrol returns with three fishermen. They are sorry specimens: bedraggled, bruised, and bound with cords of twisted sea-reed. You are close enough to hear the conversation between them and the Mu'ugalavyáni Captain.

The Red-Hat does not waste words. He points at Lord Sónkolel's pinnace and yells, "Talk! Where is crew of that ship?" His men punctuate his question with kicks and blows.

The Tsolyáni's first reply is inaudible. Then he screams and shouts, "I don't know — I don't know!"

"Other people? You hide other people?" the Captain continues. He looks around. "Last night we see lights burn in next cove. There: toward Penóm city!" He points the direction Fayés went, and from whence you have just returned. "Why that, eh? Why that?"

The man howls again, but you cannot hear what he says. The Captain gestures, and a sword flashes up, then down. He points at a second prisoner. "You! You tell!"

"As Lord Belkhánu loves us, I don't know, Master! I don't know!" The captive begins to blubber.

The Captain snaps his fingers. "Hot cooking oil. Bring. Good to talk." Two troopers attired in red-lacquered armour tramp over to the fire and begin lugging a heavy pot back toward the Captain. One of the junior officers laughs.

A sentry hallooes from down the beach. A new creature appears on the deck of the *Séscha* and hallooes back; a being with whitish rubbery skin, four legs, two upper arms, and a tall crest like a back-curving horn from which a banner-like flap of flexible skin depends. You have heard of the Swamp Folk, the nonhuman race that makes up a good portion of the Mu'ugalavyáni naval personnel.

The newcomer shades its eyes and gazes out to sea. Then it points and gabbles something in Mu'ugalavyáni. The camp erupts into furious activity.

The Tsolyáni fisherman suddenly finds himself released. He dodges a half-hearted sword slash from one of his erstwhile captors, then grabs his remaining comrade and darts back toward the wall of jungle where you and Riruné lie hidden.

As he passes, you hear him yelling at his friend: "It's the God! It's the God! Run for it! Tell the village! Get to safety! God Zo'óra is coming!"

As you watch, a great, domed, bluish-white, skull-like carapace rises out of the waves beyond the harbour entrance. It makes clacking, whistling noises, then stands erect on eight stilted legs, each as thick through as a tree-trunk. The beast must be six or eight man-heights tall! From its underside hangs a twining mass of purple-red tentacles below an open, black maw. It lurches up through the shallows, stops to scuttle the *Séscha* with a well-placed blow, then marches on to put paid to the Mu'ugalavyáni camp, soldiers and all. You see one of the pincer legs bring the Captain up where the tentacles can reach him; then he vanishes into the churning black mouth. Soon there is nothing left on the beach but shreds and ruin.

The thing the fisherfolk name the Zo'óra lingers, seems to admire its work, then turns and strides off, back to the sea.

You and Riruné lie hidden until you are sure all is quiet. Then you emerge and follow the trail left by the Mu'ugalavyáni patrol and the three fishermen. You go no more than fifty paces when Lord Sónkolel and a band of villagers appear from the jungle. Exhausted, you fall into his arms.

At last your party reaches Penóm to find that the attack on the city has been repelled, and the Red-Hats have departed. You return to your clanhouse, not much the worse for wear.

Instruction: go to Sec. G.17.

G.13. EFFACING FAYÉS

Riruné picks his way carefully across the swampy stretch, using his sword to jab at the innocent-looking ground in front of him. You follow in his footsteps. After what seem hours you reach higher ground on the other side. You clamber over the barnacle-crusting boulders of a little promontory and look down into a half-moon cove. The beach here is clean, white sand, the trees are taller and farther back, and the lights of what must be a fishing village

offer a welcome in the distance. You seize Riruné's calloused hand and start to run forward.

The big soldier jerks you back so hard your arm feels as though it is dislocated! "Just a minute, Lady!" he hisses.

You don't understand. He forces you down beside him among the stones of the promontory. Is he going to assault you, now that you are so close to safety? A moment later you berate yourself for harbouring such an unworthy suspicion.

"They've seen us!" he growls in your ear.

"Who?" You see no one. The sand is empty except for driftwood, a few rocks, and heaps of flotsam here and there. The forest behind the beach is a barrier made of black jet.

A shadow drifts out from among the trees: a near-naked man. Another joins him, then another, then several more. You hear stealthy movement behind you, back on the other side of the promontory, from whence you have come.

"Hó! You up there!" a gruff male voice calls. "Come you down!"

"We are of the entourage of Lord Sónkolel hiQolyélmú of the Golden Sunburst clan," Riruné answers back. "He is a close friend of the owner of this land, Lord Hagárr."

There are about thirty in all: grizzled oldsters, tough and muscular-looking fishermen, half a dozen sinewy women, and two or three adolescent boys. One steps forward. "Aye, we be Lord Hagárr's folk. Not that he'd give a copper *Qirgál* if we live or die!"

You don't much like the man's tone. You step forward and state your name, lineage, and clan with all the dignity you can muster for one who is bruised, scratched, near naked, and covered with mud from head to foot. "Help us return to Penóm," you tell them imperiously, "and there'll be rewards for you all."

The village elder eyes Riruné's sword warily. "We'd have joy in that, Lady." He looks down at his bare toes in the sand. "Be just the one problem ... "

"Which is?"

He looks left and right at his followers. "Y'see, Noble Folk, we cannot let you go back. You have seen too much of us. This be Black Pearl Cove."

You feel Riruné tensing beside you. "Why — ? What do you mean? What have we to do with your village?"

A boy glides forward, holding a loop of cord. Two men are moving up from the side, and you hear a clatter in the rocks behind you.

"Good folk! What have we done to you? Have I not said that Lord Sónkolel will reward you handsomely?"

A hawk-beaked crone says, "Add 'em to 't other 'un. Mebbe them give us more."

"We ha'nt got all night!" grumbles another man. He glances nervously back at what you had thought to be a pile of sea-wrack. You now see that it is a stack of wooden crates hidden under a mass of fish-netting.

"Them's there! Them's there!" A boy points excitedly out to sea.

Traitors! These clods are in league with the Mu'ugalavyáni! They're here to help with a landing!

The villagers rush you from all sides.

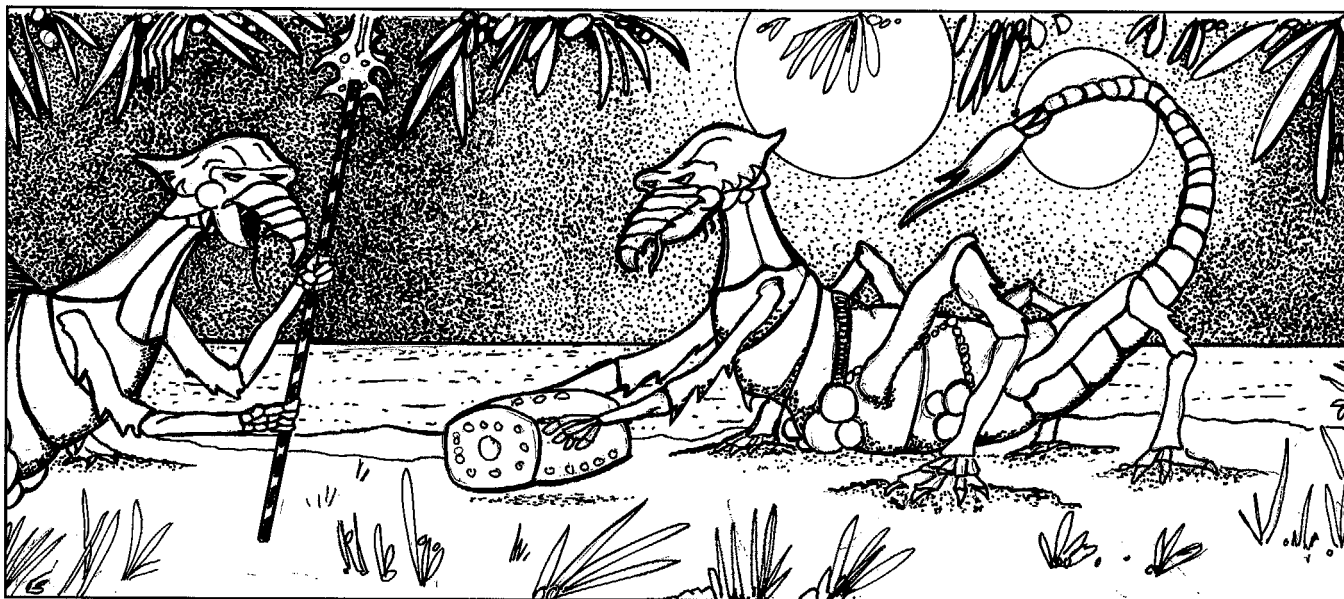
Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight. All together the villagers count as a Type 4 opponent. You can let Riruné fight for you, if you wish: he fights on the "150-200" column of the combat table. He also adds 5 levels of swordsmanship: 5 x 5 = 25. If you win, the villagers scatter and leave you alone. Continue in this Section. If you lose, go to the last paragraph in this Section.

You and Riruné stand victorious together on the beach. The villagers were no match for his military skill, and you helped, too. Aside from the groans of the three fishermen Riruné has wounded, all is silent. You step around a body and go to look at the boxes.

Suddenly Riruné leaps on you from behind and drags you down. "Will you stop doing that!" you protest angrily. "If you must — !"

You mutter questions, and Riruné snaps, "Lady, just shut the hell up! Stuff a dung-ball in it, like a good little *Shqá*-beetle!"

You have never been addressed so rudely. You are about to reply when you feel the hair on the back of your neck prickling. Something is humming — singing? whining? vibrating? — out there in the black waves!



You put your head up to look. Something long, flat, and whitish floats out there, barely a man-height above the water. You cannot tell, but it appears to be at least fifty man-heights in length. There are no sails, no spars, nothing except a kind of rounded, smooth-surfaced central knob or tower.

Something else is moving on the swells also: a small, flat, low craft that glides effortlessly toward your beach.

The crew reminds you of *Étla*-crabs. They seem to have four high-arched legs, two smaller forearms, flattish heads, and up-curving scorpion-like tails. The one in the bow glitters: the entire front of its carapace is covered with a myriad gems set in alien, geometric patterns. The humming rises and falls, grows louder, and takes on a querulous note. Riruné buries his face in the sand and moans, "*Hlüss!*"

The leader comes ashore. He (it?) walks curiously around the bodies of the people you have defeated, and you hear a muffled scream as one of the wounded is put out of his misery. Five other *Hlüss* climb out to load the boxes aboard their small boat. You are surprised to see a limp, bound body being picked up from behind the heap of boxes and loaded onto the dinghy as well. It is Fayés! The Salarvyáni appears unconscious. You look at Riruné, but he only shrugs. Now two of the *Hlüss* are unloading a single, smaller box from their longboat. This they leave in place of the items they have taken.

In less than a *Kirén* the *Hlüss* are gone. Their flattish ship hums and slowly retreats, back out into the Deeps of Chanayága. You check to make sure there is no more danger; then you crawl out to see what the monsters have left behind.

Their chest is curiously shaped, made of some moulded, eggshell-like material, and inset with coloured seashells and a little gem or two. Riruné pries it open with his sword.

It is filled with packets of greenish powder. Everybody in the Five Empires has heard of *Zu'úr*, the deadliest drug known to Tékumel!

"So this — this is where it comes from!" you exclaim in amazement. Each packet must be worth thousands of *Káitars*! You must tell the Omnipotent Azure Legion — the Governor's police — Lord Sónkole! He'll know what to do!

But how are you going to get the chest back to Penóm? It is very heavy, and you certainly cannot depend on the villagers for help!

Instruction: roll a D10. Add 1 to your score if your Strength Bonus (Sec. 6.1 of Part One) is 80-90; add 2 if it is 91-95; and add 3 if it is 96-100. If your modified score is 7 or above, you and Riruné manage to lug the chest back to Penóm and deliver it to the office of the Omnipotent Azure Legion. If you fail this roll, you wrap a few packets of the drug in large leaves and tie them with vines into good-sized bags you can carry. You have to abandon the rest. You reach Penóm safely the next day. Go to Sec. G.17.

If you lose the fight with the villagers of Black Pearl Cove (above), you join Fayés in becoming yummys for the baby *Hlüss* as they hatch. If you are curious about the morbid details, read Sec. D.9. There is no escape. (Grieve!)

G.14. THE BLACK CREATURE FROM THE LAGOON

You wander deeper and deeper into the dripping bogs. *Hú*-bats chitter, tiny tree-lizards dart bright pink tongues, and night-moths flutter about your heads as you squelch through the misty waters. Suddenly an oily, black head appears three feet above you, and you hear a screaming hiss.

Arjúa yells, “*Feshénga! Fesh—*” Then he is silent.

The night erupts into a cacophony of screams, shouts, grunts, and that awful hissing. Lord Sónkolel throws an arm about your waist and drags you down into the murky water. Then he is gone, back to fight the monster.

Instruction: go to Sec. 11 and fight. The *Feshénga* is a Type 6 creature. You can combat it yourself, or let Lord Sónkolel and his party fight for you. He and his marines count as a “201-up” fighter on the table in Sec. 11. If you win, go to the next paragraph. If you lose, you may still survive; see Sec. 13. Otherwise it’s dinnertime for *Feshénga!* (Condolences!) Even if you win, roll a **D10: 1-2** = three of your marines are killed; **3-6** = one marine and two servants are slain; **7-10** = no one is killed or seriously injured, except poor Arjúa, who first encountered the creature. He is slain.

You stagger on through the night. You tire of batting many-legged spidery things away from your face and out of your hair. Lord Sónkolel makes a misstep into a deep hole beneath the water, and long minutes pass before Amé, Mríddu, and the remaining marines manage to find him and pull him out again. (If you have swimming skill, you can help, too.) The dawn finds you lost in the depths of a morass so alien that it seems like another world. Patches of the “Food of the *Ssí*” appear, and you pull back just in time to avoid stumbling into one of them. Flights of brilliant-plumaged *Khéshchal*-birds rise shrieking through the twisted, black trees and off into the invisible sky above.

At dawn you reach something you never thought to see again: a promontory of rock. It rises out of the bogs like the spine of some great leviathan, towering perhaps fifty or sixty man-heights above you. “Up! Up there!” pants Lord Sónkolel. “We’ll rest and get our bearings.” He tries to sound cheerful.

The first part of the climb is easy. Then the rocks become steeper and offer fewer handholds. At last you and Amé are reduced to clutching at the bare rock with fingers and toes, alternately climbing and holding on to each other. One of the musicians lets

out a mournful cry and plummets back down to bounce on the scree below. He slides off into the ebon water and vanishes.

“Here!” Lord Sónkolel reaches down a hand to help Amé up. You follow and note how the girl clings to him. You look behind you and see the expanse of ocean spread out like a grey-blue saucer, all the way to the horizon. Eastward, in the far distance, a smudge of white and a drifting column of smoke announces the presence of Penóm — whatever the Red-Hats have left of it! You are not as optimistic as Lord Sónkolel.

Amé peers down at you from the summit. “Come up!” she cries. “There’s a ruin up here — a tower.” You crawl the last few paces, and find yourself in Lord Sónkolel’s arms. In two minutes you are asleep in the raw, hot sunlight on the stubbly grass.

Instruction: go to Sec. G.16.

G.15. THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE URMISH!

You wipe your sword on your fallen opponent’s cloak, then pull off his mask. As you thought, it is Lord Chernáru hiSsaronél. No assassin could be so clumsy, nor would a professional fight with a sword. Assassins employ trick weapons such as throwing knives, spring-loaded miniature crossbows, garrotes, and other gadgets known to no outsider.

What do you do now? It is probably a capital crime to assault a Governor’s son — at least in Penóm! It is also a capital crime to masquerade as an assassin. This stupid game could cost Chernáru his worthless life; yet you suspect his father can rescue him. Money greases the wheels, but raw power pulls the cart!

One thing is certain: you are not powerful here. It is time to head for home. You finish packing, shout for a servant to bring bearer-slaves, and head for the *Sákbe*-road.

As you leave, the city behind you explodes into chaos. You stop a government scribe, who babbles something about the Red-Hats attacking the city. A woman runs past screaming for her family; children pour out of a temple gateway and race off shrieking; peddlars are pushing their carts as fast as they can, making for home; soldiers tramp by, donning the last pieces of their harness; and ahead you see a mob of citizenry struggling to get up onto the *Sákbe*-road platform. Sweating guards beat them back with staves.

The next hours are a jumble of faces, torches, and staggering, shoving, pushing refugees. The crush is so great that some of the rickety wooden railings break, letting a score of people tumble off into the fetid swamps below. A *Chlén*-beast bawls and charges straight into the crowd, dragging its drivers and a dozen guards with it. You cannot see how many are trampled, but the screaming will stay with you for a long time to come.

At last you emerge from the press and tramp along the torchlit roadway through the remainder of the night. There are still people all around, some faster than you, others who began their flight earlier. You slow down. The *Mu'ugalavyáni* are not insane enough to pursue this mob into the heartland of the Empire! They most probably will set up a beachhead in *Penóm* or else take their loot and slaves aboard their ships and go home.

Just after dawn you halt at a road-tower. There is debris everywhere. People have abandoned bales, boxes, bundles, pouches, and human beings — children, slaves, wives, and even aged parents — all along the road. Without conscious thought, you begin to collect these items and persons and reunite them with their owners. The road-guards assist, and before you know it, you become a sort of lost-and-found department for the folk of *Penóm*. One of the road-guards demands money from a man seeking his wife, and the rest of the garrison soon follows suit. You feel bad about taking money from these helpless souls, but as the morning draws on, your senses become numb, and soon you are accepting the cash the refugees thrust upon you, too. It is not long before you and your erstwhile business partners work out a schedule of prices: so much for a lost trunk of clothing, so much for reuniting a mother with her baby, so much for a cart full of supplies. By noon the next day you fall exhausted into bed in the tower, clutching a satchel stuffed with coins, gems, writs, and jewellery given you freely by grateful people. *Penóm* has finally opened its heart — and its purse — to you.

Instruction: you may refuse to keep the money and donate it to your temple or clan instead. If you do keep it, roll a **D10**: **1** = you are arrested and impaled for illegal profiteering. The Governor's police keep the money; **2-3** = you take in a **D100** × 10 *Káitars*; **4-6** = you earn a **D10** × 1,000 *Káitars*; **7-8** = you collect a **D10** × 1,000 *Káitars*, plus 1-5 (a **D10** ÷ 2) runaway slaves. You can keep them and establish their identities, etc., in Part One, or you can sell them for a **D100** × 10 *Káitars* apiece; **9-10** = you gain a **D100** × 10 *Káitars*, and in addition you acquire an Eye (go to Sec. 14 and determine its details), an amulet that is

supposed to protect you against *Hrá*; and an elaborate machine run by cranks and pulleys employed by the temple of *Lady Hrihayál* for purposes that are not clear. In all cases, you gain 2 skill levels of "Swamp Survival" (cf. Sec. 7.2 in Part One). Go to Sec. 10.

G.16. LIFE IS A BOWL OF CHÉRIS

The stones are old, grass-covered, and worn by the winds of a thousand years. You would recognise the small, delicately-fitted masonry of the *Engsvanyáli*, the cyclopean blocks of the *Bednálljans*, the squat, squarish stones of the Three States of the Triangle, but this is like none of those. These stones are ovoid, almost spherical, held together by a matrix of mortar and smaller round stones. You are puzzled.

Amé calls you toward the tower. She points at a row of dots, circles, and indentations beneath an overhanging lintel. It looks like script.

Instruction: if you have two or more skill levels in the "nonhuman" category of the hobby skills (Sec. 9.3.9 in Part One), roll a **D10**: **1-3** = you haven't a clue; **4-10** = you recognise this as the script of the hated *Ssú*! If you recognise it, you inform *Lord Sónkolel*; if not, you shrug and move on towards the tower.

The tower is a ruin: the bottom floor, with its three-man-height-thick walls and circular central room is intact; the staircase leading up through the thickness of the wall to the second storey is still there; the walls and corbels of the third storey are in place; but there are no floors or roof. An outbuilding behind the tower is a moss-grown ruin. The masonry here is definitely of human manufacture, though you cannot place the period.

"Somebody's been up here recently," *Mríddu* announces. He points to a pile of feces in one corner.

"No surprise," *Lord Sónkolel* mutters. "This is a fine lookout for smugglers! I'll wager there's a path down to the coastal villages somewhere around." He assigns his marines and servants to go look for it, then comes over to you and *Amé*.

"I cannot ask you to go on today," he says. "Your feet are badly cut and blistered!"

You essay a smile. "Aye, and the rest of me is bitten, scratched, poisoned, and covered with rashes and lumps I don't want to think about!" *Amé* reaches over to massage your shoulders. "And were it not for *Amé*, I'd have long since perished from leech-bites!"

The girl takes your cue and says, "Take your armour off, my Lord, and I'll see whether you still entertain unwanted 'guests!'" He lets her have her way, and soon she is massaging his muscled, copper-hued back.

"Sire?" one of the sailors interrupts. "We've found the path. Leads down to Black Pearl Cove — and beyond to the Chigántla Road and straight on to Penóm."

"Nobody's fit to travel tonight. Get us a fire and look for drinkable water. This place was probably built as a watchtower before Gánga sank. There has to be a cistern for rainwater around here someplace."

By the time the sun sets in a blaze of purple and magenta glory, a helmet full of greenish water is bubbling on a fire in the tower's ancient fireplace. Hardtack, bits of dried meat, a piece of moldy cheese, and crusts of bread emerge from various pouches, and an unwary rodent learns too late that these strange bipeds are not as inept as they look. Amé and Míddu add a short, fat-bodied snake, another rodent of a different species, and a giant blue-green beetle to the stew. You think you are going to be ill, but sheer, dogged willpower prevails. You are also ferociously hungry.

As night falls, the wind blows up from the ocean, echoing eerily among the tumbled stones. Gayél rises to shed her gibbous light over the jungle, and Káshi's glaring red eye stares at you balefully from the horizon. Your party crouches near the comforting fire, just as humans huddled in their caves on another planet far away in a distant age, millennia ago.

There are no blankets, no cloaks, and not even many garments. Everybody gathers dry grass for bedding. As night falls, you give a hopeful-looking marine a frosty stare and curl up all alone on your improvised couch. You are gratified to see that Lord Sónkolel has at last seen the light in little Amé's eyes; you can just make out their intertwined bodies in the shadows on the other side of the fire. That could have been me, you think wistfully. Oh well ...

Much later, something awakens you. The fire has died down to ruddy embers, and the sleeping faces of your companions are etched in its orangy red glow. The high walls of the crumbling tower are lost in the tenebrous shadows overhead. What was it?

It comes again: a sort of whistling; a rising, falling, singsong note; a faint shimmering in the air. Fully awake, you sit up against the tower wall. One of the sailors' swords lies near his hand, and you scoop it up. No one else has awakened. The sentry Lord Sónkolel had set must be outside the tower watching

the path. Whatever this is, it is not coming from Black Pearl Cove!

Footsteps. Great, slow, shuffling footsteps.

The hair at the base of your neck prickles. You glance wildly around. A beast? A *Hlüss*?

You realise that the sky is no longer visible above your head. You stare, puzzled. The chamber's high ceiling is intact once more! It is no longer just an open hole! The wavering firelight picks out the outlines of a table piled high with what look like platters. Those were not there before. Worse, you feel something odd about the surface you on which you are lying. It is no longer stone heaped with tufts of dry grass but thick, piled carpet.

All right, you tell yourself grimly: wake up!

The footsteps! You had almost forgotten the footsteps. Now you see their maker: a creature out of nightmare! Entering the room through an outer door that is once more whole and solid is a monster half again as tall as a human being. It is a *Thúnru'u*, if you have heard your legends aright: two huge, platter-shaped eyes, a beak, and rolls of what appear to be oleaginous fat that swing and jiggle from its limbs as it moves. You look to your comrades, but they appear strangely insubstantial, and you know instinctively that you'll get no aid there. All right, this is a dream! You hope...

The horrid thing stumps toward you, then stops, blinks, and raises one thick paw. "You," it growls in a voice so deep it makes your back teeth rattle, "are not here."

"Uh — yes, I am here," you answer. You might as well humour your nightmare.

"Wait," it commands, then turns on huge, doughy, creased-looking feet and tramps up the stairs. You rise, take up a defensive position against the wall, and again try to wake your companions. No response. You feel your limbs, breathe deeply, clutch the sword, and attempt to wake yourself up. To no avail.

Now you hear lighter footsteps on the stair. An elderly man attired in a thick grey robe, belted at the waist, appears. He is balding, bearded, and potbellied, and in his hand he holds a gleaming golden oil-lamp.

"Told you, Master," says the monster's deep voice. It comes down the steps behind him.

“Can’t be helped,” the old man replies. “Shift from the Third Quadrant. Shackle time pillar.” (Or words that sound like that!)

The door bangs open, and a gust of wind and rain booms in to make the fire gutter and smoke. (Rain?) Another oldster stands on the threshold shaking out his thick, black, homespun travelling-cloak. His beard is even longer and more straggly than the first man’s.

“Everybody gone home?” the newcomer asks.

“No. Sarvodáya’s upstairs. Ardzá’s with her, so don’t disturb her unless you want a fireball in the teeth!” The first man rubs his hands and comes to stand beside you at the hearth.

“Who’s this, then?” The second man points a knobbly finger at you.

“Side-Planer. Storm brought her.”

The newcomer squints at you with what seems more than merely paternal interest. “Your name, child? I am Turshánmü, a wizard of power and quality, as Lord Thómar here’ll tell you.”

These two old men do not seem dangerous, and the monster is leaning against the far wall. You introduce yourself. It dawns on you that you’re having a dream about Thómar the Ever-Living, the legendary wizard about whom you’ve heard tales all your life. This can’t be real! You relax a bit.

“She’s cold,” opines Turshánmü, “and next to nekkid like that, it’s no wonder! Hó! *Thúnru’u!* Hot soup! A cup of your good *Chéris* — that’s Lord Thómar’s fine, spiced *Hmélu*-shank soup! He’s always got it ready on cold nights like this.” The monster nods and shuffles away toward a hidden door at the back of the room. In the legends all of the great wizards have familiars. Why not an “Eater of Eyes?”

“Have to get her home again,” your dream-Thómar says. “Otherwise the Planes will be jumbled up all the way out to the Pylons! Nothing worse than snipping off continua that go nowhere.”

The *Thúnru’u* returns with a red clay cup of piping hot, savory broth. It’s so good that you gulp it straight off and ask for more.

“Tell us about your time!” old Turshánmü orders. “We need to fix where and when you’re from.”

You comply. The second cup of broth tastes better than the first, and you look so yearningly at the monster that Thómar commands it to bring the whole kettle of *Chéris*.

“Got her — I think!” Turshánmü cries. “Tsolyáni Empire, in the early part of their twenty-first century. — I — uh — hope.”

Thómar shakes his head so that his beard waggles. “You’re way off. I had better go up-time to the College and get the exact coordinates.”

“Bother! There’s no need! She’s from the reign of Harkúz the Potent! — After the Livyáni reconquered Tsolyánu from the Hokún! I’ll wager my beard on it.”

“La! Prepare to shave, then! That’s a time-line that you can’t even reach from here. Who’s the current Emperor, girl?”

You tell him that and much more. At length, Thómar says, “I have her pinpointed exactly. Are you ready to go back?”

You nod violently. This dream is rather fun, but you feel a need to wake up.

“What, Thómar? A concubine? At your age?” A woman stands upon the stair, gazing down into the room. She wears a long, flame-hued wrap that sparkles and shifts colours as she moves. A bracelet that looks like a live, green snake adorns her left arm, and in a sheath on her right wrist is a dagger with a tiny golden *Zrné*-head for a pommel. Her night-black hair is bound around with a fillet of red-gold and falls loose like ebon wings about her bare shoulders. Her long-lashed eyes are a strange yellow-green in hue. She is lovely, yet there is an air of cold mal-evilence about her.

Turshánmü bows. “Lady Sarvodáya Di’éla.” It is obvious that he covets this woman. — As what male would not?

She gives him a sweet smile. “Such a young girl at your age, Turshánmü? Come, Thómar, can’t you find this gentle old soul a mate? One of your cast-offs, perhaps? I am minded of a certain Queen of the Blue Faience Dynasty of the Engsvanyáli Priestkings!”

“Ah, the one who smelled like the back end of a river-*Ghár* — and whose face so closely resembled that selfsame rear?”

Turshánmü adopts a pitiable expression. “You mock me, friends!”

“What are you about at this hour?” the sorceress asks. “Diddling this poor waif from the Side-Planes?”

Thómar bridles. “Certainly not! She was carried hither by the storm. One of my towers lies unused and ruined at a junction of the force-lines on her Plane. Now we seek to return her home!”

“Leave her to me, and I shall gladly do so. Am I not the most skilled at the art of Plane-Sending in the College?”

“Oh, aye — and the most likely to play a trick or two on the child! I doubt she wants to be dropped back at the Siege of Purdánim — or the reign of Iyérgesh the Slasher of Bellies!” Thómar turns to you. “Face me and be ready.” His fingers weave odd patterns, leaving tiny, half-seen lines of bluish light that form curious glyphs in the air.

There is a sound that is not a sound, a feeling like that of a cork popped out of a bottle, and a smell as of dry, musty leaves. Then you awake, cramped and cold, by the ashes of the fire in the ruined tower.

Lord Sónkolel stands over you. “Come, Lady. T’were time we moved.” He pauses, then asks, “Where did you come by that?”

You look down to see Thómar’s red clay cup still in your hands. A chill as of ancient death runs down your spine.

Before you can reply, Amé comes bustling over, eyes alight with what you easily recognise as love achieved at last. Behind her, Mríddu says, “The sun’s well up, and the sooner home, the sooner fed.” He smirks at his sister. “And the sooner bed — and in your case, Amé, the sooner bred — or wed, as the case may be!”

You refuse to give your bowl to anyone. You carry it all the way down the long slope, through the jungle, and so to Penóm.

At the village behind Black Pearl Cove, Lord Sónkolel learns the sad fate of his marines, Kágesh and Riruné, who have been eaten — the villagers tell you — by sea-monsters. You notice a half-grown girl who wears a purple shirt almost the same colour as that which belonged to Fayés Murúggma. How could that be? If the wretch survived the creatures of the sea, he is probably on board the Mu’ugalavyáni flagship, basking in his masters’ admiration! You wish him

eternal existence in Lord Sárku’s darkest and most dismal hell.

Later, Lord Sónkolel whispers to you that he suspects this village of being the hub of the *Zu’úr* trade, but he requires proof. “We’ve known of this business for a long while” he says, “but the smugglers are in league with somebody high up, and we haven’t been able to spare Imperial agents enough to get to the truth of it.”

“Is Fayés Murúggma involved?” You mention the purple shirt.

“Possibly. I saw the shirt, too. It may be only coincidence — or perhaps the Salarvyáni gave it to the villagers in payment for help in reaching Penóm. If we find him there, he will be impaled as a spy, but I doubt we’ll see him again. In any case, he is unimportant. It’s the *Zu’úr* trade that worries me.”

“I wish you well,” you say. “*Zu’úr* is an awful curse.” Your mind is not on *Zu’úr* at the moment, however; you want a bath, fresh raiment, and time to think upon your curious dream — if it was that. The bowl in your hands is real enough.

Instruction: go to Sec. G.17.

G.17. AMÉ’S IN GIRÉS

When you reach it, you find Penóm a maelstrom of refugees fleeing the city. The harbour is on fire, and blazing ships litter the harbour. Columns of Imperial soldiers from the Legion of the Fishers of Death, marines from the Legion of Hagárr of Paránta, city guards, *Sákbe*-road guards, and even tomb police are streaming in the opposite direction.

The fighting has died down by the time you reach the centre of the city. An old woman tells you that the Red-Hats have retreated to their ships and are leaving. They probably never intended to establish a permanent beachhead but rather planned to raid, destroy shipping, and weaken Tsolyánu’s grip on its southern coast.

Lord Sónkolel does not stop but heads on westward around the bay to Girés, the headquarters of Hagárr’s marines. Amé, Mríddu, and the servants go to your clanhouse to clean up, rest, and eat.

The clanhouse is a mess. The Mu’ugalavyáni never reached it, but frightened clansfolk have abandoned their possessions and fled. Bundles, boxes, articles of clothing, sacks of grain, foodstuffs, all lie scattered

helter-skelter where their owners dropped them. The clanmaster has begun to organise the remaining clansmen, servants, and slaves, fortify the gates, clean the place up, and return things to normal. Exhausted, he listens to your story with half an ear, then sends you on upstairs to your chambers. You half expect to see Fayés there ahead of you, but there is no sign of the Salarvyáni. Amé says she saw him run off down the beach, and he never returned. Good riddance to bad novelists!

You fall onto your sleeping mat and do not wake until the following day. When you get up, a glance from your window tells you that the city is returning to normal. Three giant white moths are sitting on your window-netting, a beetle is patiently boring a hole in your sandal, and a horde of tiny gnats awaits whenever you decide to open your curtains and go down for breakfast. Outside, under a haze of sea-mist and insects, the market is as raucous as usual. A patrol of soldiers goes by in the street below your window, just as a group of mourners comes from the opposite direction carrying a corpse on a bier. There is a brief, sharp altercation as the two parties try to pass one another; then the soldiers push the funeral procession aside and go their way. The only signs of the Red-Hats' raid are columns of smoke near the Governor's palace and out in the harbour where two or three hulks continue to burn.

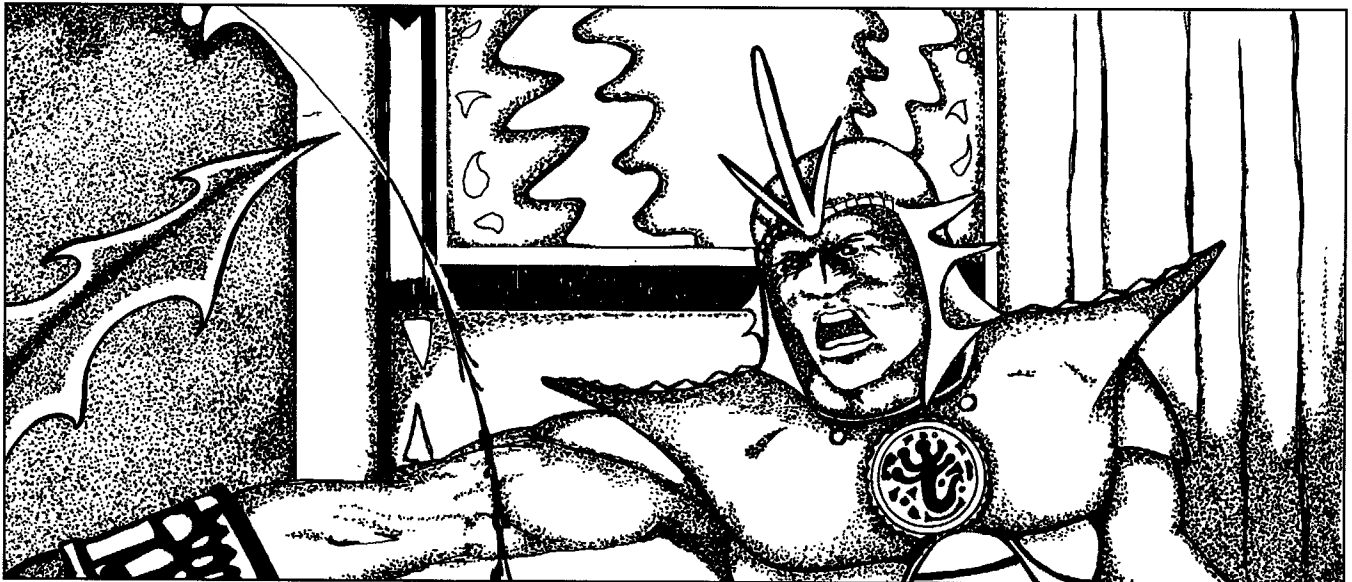
It is time to leave Penóm. You summon a slave and send a message to Amé and Mríddu. He returns to tell you that both have gone to visit Lord Sónkolel hiQolyélmú at the marine base in Girés for an extended period. You sigh. Amé seems to have what she wanted.

It would be nice to say good-bye to everybody, but you have no intention of walking halfway around the harbour to Girés. You pen a farewell note instead and send it by a clan-slave.

Your room looks bare and un-lived in, and you feel a little sad. Then a great, ravenous green thing with innumerable legs bounces off your window-netting like a thrown ball, and you realise how happy you will be never to see this benighted place again!

You are off for home.

Instruction: you gain 3 levels of "Swamp Survival" skills in Sec. 7.2 in Part One. You also gain 2 levels of "Literature" in Sec. 9.3.1 in Part One. This is compensation for having to read Fayés Murúggma's abysmal hack novels. Go to Sec. 10.



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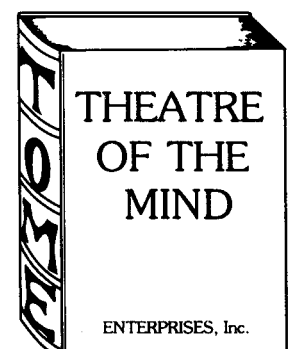
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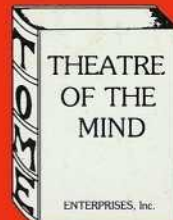
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