

# Mitlányal

*(The Gods)*

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by Bob Alberti and M. A. R. Barker

edited by Joe Saul

Being a Compendium of the Theologies, Deities, Rites and Rituals of the Empire of the Petal Throne

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**Authors' Note** 1 Paradán 2369 A.S.

This work was written during the civil war of 2364-2367 A.S. As such, it contains many references to The Usurper as "Emperor Dhich'uné." It is hoped that the reader will understand that circumstances demanded this language, and that no endorsement of the Usurper, or disloyalty to the Great and Glorious Emperor, may He Rule Forever in Majesty from the Golden Tower, is intended by the authors.

## **Ripper's Notes.**

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# An Introduction to Tékumel

The culture of the nation of Tsolyánu resonates with the depth of its detail, like a great temple-bell calling out across an ancient city. Such a gong, echoing off the sides of buildings, and splashing down stone causeways, would hint at the complexity of the city around it without illuminating its beauty or revealing its secrets.

Those who have visited Tsolyánu have heard the echo of the *Tunkúl-gongs*; in rulebooks and novels they have sensed the lingering echo. These works have hinted at the underlying mystery and enchantment of the world of Tékumel, which spring from its complexity.

Much of Tékumel's culture revolves around its complex pantheon of religious faith. Few other role-playing systems so pointedly stress the role of religion in the worldview of the populace, despite the fact that religion has been an important part of every human culture.

The Tsolyáni know their Gods exist, through manifestations and by responses to prayers. This direct experience of the Gods deeply affects the culture and worldview of the people of Tékumel.

Magic exists as well: both the technological magic of "sufficiently advanced science" as well as honest-to-goodness magic. Through magic, an individual can violate the Laws of Physics by force of will alone. Science is rendered impossible, for the scientist's mind can change the outcome of an experiment: on Tékumel, a watched pot might truly fail to boil!

Additionally, humans are not alone on Tékumel. In every temple and marketplace non-human intelligent creatures rub "elbows" with their human neighbors. The reptilian Shén, the chitinous Pé Chói, the Swamp Folk, the Páchi Léi and the irritatingly literal Tinalíya all share the stage of sentience with humanity. And the dread Ssú and Hlüss, the indigenous sophonts of Tékumel, bear an undying grudge against the invaders who took over their planet thousands of years ago. Among these creatures and countless others, humanity is just a breed of soft-skinned hairless monkey with a penchant for unchecked reproduction.

Role-players ask "what would it be like?" To fight a monster, to cast a spell, to come face-to-face with a god. Whether through Tékumel or any of a score of other game systems, the role-player seeks to experience unknown, alien environments. Sometimes players are just out for fun, and sometimes they seek to learn something about themselves through their own responses to these novel situations.

Whether for introspection or entertainment, the more detailed the game setting, the more rewarding the result. In an early form of role-playing (referred to as "dungeon diving") mighty heroes defeated the dragon in its lair and returned home with the dragon's hoard of gold. Inevitably, questions arose: where does the hero keep this treasure? Is he or she spending it, and on what?

Soon the "dungeons" grew into "campaigns" as the game-master added taverns, marketplaces, castles, and cathedrals to the environment surrounding the original dungeon. A more complex environment led to a more rewarding, entertaining game.

But behind it all were the lingering questions. "Why is my character here? Who lives in the castle? Who is worshipped in the cathedral?" Behind each question lies another, until one reaches the essential "Where did this all come from?" Taken to its logical extension, this is a religious question, and one that applies to reality as much as any fantasy game.

The richness of Tékumel arises from the sense that these questions have answers. The effect is subtle, but profound. On Tékumel the Emperor rules from the fortress of Avanthár, and the Temples exist in each city, because they are part of an interdependent web of deities, humans, and aliens sharing tens of thousands of years of history, and a complex theology. And the underlying questions, the religious beliefs of the citizens of Tékumel, are addressed in this book.

By understanding the religions of Tékumel, players and game-masters alike can come to know an entirely alien people who just happen to be human. The mystery and enchantment of Tékumel spring from its complexity, the fact that by fully exploring what it would mean to live with such commonplace fantasy elements as immanent gods, "real" magic, and actual monsters, one necessarily learns that the result is alien to our experience.

The values expressed by the inhabitants of Tékumel are very different from those of modern-day Western society on Earth. Nudity is more acceptable, for instance, due in part to the much hotter climate of Tékumel. Other differences in values and morals, from human sacrifice to the polyamorous clanhouses, may surprise or even shock the unprepared. Yet these cultural differences, the products of a totally foreign environment, are not without precedent in our own short history.

For the player, this book offers important background for the creation and development of characters, ranging from insights into the choices each individual must make, to the expectations placed upon them by their religion and family. For the game-master, this book presents a wealth of background on the doctrines of the Twenty Gods of Tsolyánu, as well as insights into the interconnections between the religious hierarchies and the government of the Empire.

The mystery and enchantment of Tékumel arise from the complex and beautiful environment that offers one of the richest role-playing settings of any game ever developed. Hopefully this book will provide a means for more people to explore the Empire of the Petal Throne, and in so doing to explore something of themselves.

# A Brief History of Tékumel

## Origins

A stellar system alone in the darkness. Five planets, a few moons, sundry asteroids and abandoned space installations orbiting an ordinary G-class star — enveloped in the darkness of an isolated universe. No other stars shine: the glimmering lights of the planets and moons move through uninterrupted velvet blackness.

On Tékumel, the third planet of five orbiting the sun Tuléng, several races of intelligent life coexist in an arid, alien environment. Their forgotten ancestors came to this planet a hundred thousand years ago, before the great cataclysm. Though this star system was once part of a larger universe, visited by humans and aliens who traversed a mighty interstellar empire, few of their legends recall the sparkling lights that used to attend the motions of the orbiting planets and moons.

## The Time of Darkness

Tremendous tectonic and cultural upheavals followed the unexplained plunge of the star Sinistra Nu Ophiuchi and its solar system into this isolated "pocket" universe. The mighty space-faring peoples trapped on Tékumel were hurled into the legendary chaos known as the Time of Darkness.

## The Latter Times

During the subsequent millennia empires rose and fell, at times nearly achieving the great heights of their interstellar ancestors. These mighty civilizations of the Latter Times regained much of their still-remembered ancestors' technology and power, and created new devices of their own. Humanity and its nonhuman neighbors quickly learned that this pocket universe followed a different set of physical laws. The "fabric of reality" was thinner, more easily penetrated to reach other "Planes" of Reality.

Motivated perhaps by a desire to return to their universe of origin, the Lords of the Latter Times became skilled at penetrating the veils separating one universe from another. They built subtle and crafty devices to assist them in their endeavors, and a few even learned to dispense with technology, parting the veils between the Planes with the power of their own minds. The discovery of the vastness of infinite possibility somewhat compensated for the loss of the infinite reaches of Space.

But despite their mighty abilities, none of the Lords of the Latter Times managed to return to their original universe... or, if they did, they neglected to return and fetch everyone else! Eventually Time had its way with even these puissant Lords, and darkness ushered in another forgotten era. The mighty Lords left behind caches of powerful and incomprehensible devices as testimony to their lost majesty — but perhaps the greatest

legacy left by the Lords of the Latter Times was Tékumel's first contact with the Gods.

## The Gods

These mighty interdimensional beings demanded worship and sacrifice: transgressions were punished and obedience was rewarded. But it was soon discovered that rivalries and enmities existed between the Gods, disputes about which Humanity could only be dimly aware, conflicts involving whole Planes of Reality. Humanity's poor comprehension of these great entities is illustrated by the variation in beliefs held by different cultures: two separate deities in one land are combined in another; one deity can be worshipped in vastly different ways in different parts of one nation, etc. The evolutions of these faiths, from god to god, in various places and in various times, are mixed with the mythos, culture and worldviews of the various inhabitants of Tékumel.

## The Llyáni Empire

The first empire to emerge from the darkness following the Latter Times was that of Llyán of Tsámra. Occupying the lands of modern-day Livyánu, the Llyáni Empire was long-lived and prosperous. Many contemporary Livyáni claim lineage extending all the way back to the Llyáni Empire. Whether their pedigrees are authentic may be debatable, but the fact that the claim can be made at all testifies to the age and endurance of the Livyáni culture across the eons.

The eldest gods of mankind are the "Shadow Gods," who preceded the Empire of Llyán of Tsámra, and are worshipped by Llyán's descendants in Livyánu.

## Vimúhla

It was during the latter days of the Llyáni Empire that an unknown scholar made contact with one of the mightiest beings of the Planes Beyond, known today as Lord Vimúhla, the God of Red Ruin.

## The Dragon Warriors

Upon Lord Vimúhla's worship was founded the legendary Empire of the Dragon Warriors of N'lüss, the barbarian warriors of the wild lands to the north of Llyán's Empire. At the height of their power a thousand captives a day were sacrificed to their god in the "Cupped Hands of Flame" atop their pyramid-temples.

## The Fisherman Kings

The N'lüss eventually gave way to the Empire of Gámalu, the so-called Fisherman Kings. During the reign of the 22nd king of Gámalu's dynasty, some forgotten sorcerer contacted another of the Gods, Lord Ksáru, Ancient One of Secrets.

### Sárku, Hrü'ü and Dlamélish

Lord Sárku's undead worship began next, in the Kraá Hills, during the centuries of the Fishermen Kings, followed by the emergence of the worshippers of the God of Change, Lord Hrü'ü, in Hmakuyál and Ngála. Hedonistic Lady Dlamélish rose to become the favorite deity of the lords of sybaritic Jakálla.

### The Bednálljan Empire

A cunning and seductive worshipper of Chótl, the Burning Light (thought to be an ancient amalgam of the Gods Hnálla and Dlamélish,) the Empress Nayári of the Silken Thighs employed her talents in the palaces of Purdánim and Jakálla to found the Bednálljan Empire. Many clans and certain elements of modern Tsolyáni custom and tradition date back to this "First Empire," as it is called.

### Pavár

A priest there was, of low station within the hierarchy of the Bednálljan Empire, by the name of Pavár. A worshipper of Enomé, an old variant of Lord Ksáru, Pavár contacted, or was contacted by, wise Thúmis, Lord of Knowledge. With the aid of Thúmis, Pavár contacted the other Gods of Stability or *Tlomítlányal*. Lords Vimúhla, Ksáru and the others were recognized as the *Tlokíriqaluyal*, the Gods of Change. Pavár set forth the roles and the relationships that each of these deities dictates for his or her devotees on the many Planes: how each god must be served and how life is to be lived.

### The Scrolls of Pavár

According to the Impeccable Scrolls of Pavár, the *Tlomítlányal* support Stability, the status quo, a tranquil and peaceful progression of time and space towards a final amalgamation into a perfect and eternal "Light of Being." Lord Hnálla is their leader, the Lord of the Eternal Light. The *Tlokíriqaluyal* urge Change: continual and endless ephemerality, with all Planes perpetually undergoing violent upheavals, birth, death, and renewal. Lord Hrü'ü, the Lord of Incessant Chaos leads them. Pavár also described other gods who stand outside of these two parties, the dread Pariah Deities whose goal is neither Stability or Change, but the Nullity and nonbeing of all things, even the gods.

These doctrines were set down in the Scrolls of Pavár, and serve as the theological basis for the modern nation of Tsolyánu.

### The Engsvanyáli Empire

The Bednálljan Empire held sway for several millennia, but the years of its hegemony were tumultuous. Worship of Pavár's Pantheon steadily replaced or displaced old, traditional religions. In some cases the old faith was "clarified" into the worship of the "true" God — the prior deity having been, so it was said, "an Aspect of the God, but not the God Himself." More obstreperous gods were

simply eliminated — their worshippers persecuted and their temples razed to make way for the new order.

Eventually the Bednálljan aristocracy gave way to the theocracy of the Priest-kings of Pavár's Pantheon, located on the island of Gánga. Éngsvan hlá Gánga, the Engsvanyáli Empire, endured for an incredible length of time. Its society ruled for over twenty thousand years, spanning the central and southern portions of the continent that covers half of the northern hemisphere of Tékumel.

Its end was abrupt. Vast seismic convulsions gripped the planet. In the tumult, the western end of the island of Gánga tilted up, and its eastern end sank beneath the waves, carrying the city of the Priest-kings with it. The shallow inland sea of Yán Kór rose up, spilling its waters north to drown the coastal islands and south to smash against the mountains. Around what is now the desert of Milumanayá are the ruins of ancient cities whose names include "*tléku*," the Engsvanyáli word for "port." Some legends blame the dread Pariah Deities, whose names themselves are too terrible to utter.

### The Time of No Kings

For several millennia following the collapse of Éngsvan hlá Gánga, human civilization lay in ruins. Historical records from this period are fragmentary, but no one empire left its mark. Much of the cultural mythos of Tsolyánu refers to legendary events from this time. Mighty and near-immortal sages walked the land; cities vanished and reappeared; ships moved without oars or sails. The necromancer Nyélmú was condemned by the Gods for his arrogance and imprisoned in the Garden of Weeping Snows beneath Jakálla. And Súbadim the Sorcerer was led by his insatiable curiosity to seek the Egg of the World upon the dizzying crags of Thénu Thendráya Peak. Only these and other equally colorful myths survive this Time of No Kings.

### The Second Empire

The very name of the first Emperor of the Second Imperium did not survive the darkness. Known only as "the Tlakotáni," his accomplishments, antecedents, and achievements remain unrecorded. Somehow, this anonymous warlord united the city-states of central Tsolyánu into the cornerstone of the present nation.

Despite his unbecoming anonymity, this Emperor's endeavor survived and thrived. Over two thousand years later Tsolyánu is one of the mighty Five Empires that rule the lands formerly held by Éngsvan hlá Gánga. The Gods of Stability and the Gods of Change stand as the twin pillars of the religious beliefs of the Empire of the Petal Throne. Their rivalries are held in check by the Concordat, a treaty of nonviolent conduct stringently enforced by the Imperial Troops of the Omnipotent Azure Legion.



# Who are the Tsolyáni?

## Ancient History

Long ago humankind invented nuclear energy, and with it, nuclear weaponry. The survivors of the subsequent nuclear holocaust resided in Southern Asia and Central America. Hence the humans who reached the stars some fifty or sixty centuries later were uniformly black-haired, olive-skinned, and small-statured.

In time humanity joined with alien races, such as the insectoid Pé Chói, the reptilian Shén, and several others, to form a great interstellar empire. The planet Tékumel, orbiting near Sinistra Nu Ophiuchi, was conveniently located along the interstellar trade routes. Tens of thousands years ago this solar system fell (or was pushed?) into a "pocket dimension." Called *Tuléng* by the residents of the nation of Tsolyánu, their sun is the only star in the sky.

## The Modern Era

The oldest Tsolyáni clans trace their lineage back to the legendary "First Empire." The Bednálljan Empire founded by Queen Nayári endured for between one and three thousand years and occupied much of modern Tsolyánu and Salarvyá. The Tsolyáni proudly refer to their nation as the "Second Empire."

All but the oldest clans and customs date back to the incredibly long reign of the Priest-Kings of the island of Gánga. Engsvan hlá Gánga, the Engsvanyáli empire, endured for between ten and twenty-thousand years, and encompassed most of what are now the Five Empires of Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Yán Kór, Salarvyá and Livyánu. Of the Five, only Livyánu predated Gánga, and remained an independent nation at the peak of Gánga's might.

Millennia after the sinking of Gánga, the first emperor of Tsolyánu emerged. Known only as "the Tlakotáni," this warlord united the city-states of the central portions of the present Empire, including regions around Béy Sü, Usenánu and Jakálla. The Tlakotáni brought three important symbols to his new empire.

The first was the Seal of the Imperium. Believed to be a device of the Great Ancients, the Seal's whorls and impressions lead off in unlikely directions and are impossible to counterfeit.

The second was the Petal Throne itself, imported from distant Malcháiran and erected in the Great Hall in Avanthár, the "seat" of the Empire. The Throne is carved to resemble twining vines and flowers, intricate and beautiful in design. It faces a great screen fitted into the wall, carved into a pattern of blossoms and leaves. Both parts are formed of a translucent pale-green jade.

Petitioners see only the Screen of the Petal Throne, and throw themselves face-down in supplication. A small oil lamp behind the translucent screen indicates when the Emperor is present. The throne dates from before the

Time of Darkness, and is said to possess magical properties Tsolyánu is often referred to as the Empire of the Petal Throne in honor of this powerful device.

The third tool with which the Tlakotáni built his empire was the Jade Arch. Pale green and slightly pointed, the Arch appears to be a constructed object but has an unusual flowing, dripping appearance.

The Arch has powers that render anyone passing through it intensely loyal to the occupant of the Petal Throne. It does not alter the inclinations of its subjects — one who severely disliked the Emperor would still do so, for instance — but would unwaveringly obey and protect the Emperor nonetheless.

An ancient and powerful device, the Emperor commands the Jade Arch used only when absolutely necessary.

## Society

The three legs that support the Empire are the Imperium, the Temples, and the Clans. The Imperium is the bureaucracy of the Empire itself, and all property in Tsolyánu is "owned" by the Emperor through the Imperium; the Temples are great theocratic institutions that control much of the land and agriculture, and see to the education of the people; and the Clans provide the trade, commerce, labor, and craftsmanship of the Empire.

The Military maintains order and protects the Empire under the control of the Imperium, but it is sponsored largely by the Temples (and a few of the most wealthy Clans). The power of the Military is carefully balanced between the Imperium and the Temples. While the Military Party has a significant voice in Imperial affairs, the Military itself cannot easily be used by the Imperium against the Temples, or vice-versa.

The Imperium does have a force to act on its behalf, a quasi-military secret police called the Omnipotent Azure Legion. The Temples, in turn, each have contingents of temple guards, with the War-Temples of Lords Karakán, Vimúhla and Their Cohorts controlling significant portions of the Military. The Clans usually do not have any formal guard or police units of their own, although clan-members may be employed as private guards. Neither clan-guards nor the informal rural "militias" (by which townspeople attend to day-to-day security of their villages) have any real authority in the presence of Imperial troops.

## The Clans

The basic unit of Tsolyáni life is the clan-family. Most Tsolyáni live with other adults and children of their clan in a common dwelling or clanhouse. A small clanhouse might have only a few generations of a single family, while the burgeoning clanhouses of the great metropolises of Béy Sü and Jakálla can house over a thousand clanmembers, servants and slaves.

Tsolyáni children usually know who their mothers are, but only casually track paternity. Often a child has a good idea which of the "clan-fathers" is their biological father, but this is not usually considered terribly important. For a child, all adult males are "clan-fathers" or "clan-uncles," and all adult females are "clan-mothers" or "clan-aunts."

The lives of Tsolyáni children are merry, tempered with a strict but loving discipline. A Tsolyáni proverb declares that "the happiest clanhouse laughs with the voices of children." Adults and older children all share the responsibilities of keeping track of the littlest ones.

The Tsolyáni practice a fully polyamorous lifestyle, meaning that any adult is free to have as many spouses, of either gender, as they can manage. The most common kinds of relationships are heterosexual pairs and triads or homosexual pairs, due simply to the increasingly tangled logistics inherent in more complicated constructions. However, no stigma is attached to other arrangements, and the upper classes often have large and complicated clan-families.

Women in Tsolyánu have the choice upon reaching adulthood (around 13 or 14 years of age) of declaring themselves *Aridáni*, making them the full social and legal equals of males. They are then able to conduct business and sign contracts with full legal rights, and are additionally able to take on husbands or wives should they desire to do so. Women who do not choose to declare themselves *Aridáni* remain "clan-women," subject to the desires of their husbands and fathers, but not onerously so. For many women in Tsolyánu, declaring *Aridáni* status is merely a legal formality necessary to conducting business, but not greatly affecting their social status or relationships.

The clanhouses in which the Tsolyáni live come in a variety of forms, from simple rural dwellings of thatch or sod, to walled estates, or multistoried urban complexes. Middle-class clanhouses usually include a walled front courtyard where business transactions and deliveries take place; an entrance hall, possibly with sitting-rooms off to the side; a refectory which can double as a celebration hall in smaller clanhouses; slaves' quarters and animal pens around the rear; warehouses on the premises for mercantile clans; sundry kitchens, restrooms, closets, etc. Private family apartments are the norm among the higher clans, with those of a higher family lineage within a clan having preference. Separate dormitories are common for children, young men, and young women (although fraternization is not frowned upon). Some clans also have large baths tended by specially-trained slaves, massage rooms, workshops (for the crafting clans), or other facilities as appropriate.

### Clan Business

Most clans have traditional occupations, so that in addition to being bustling centers of family life, clanhouses are also where much of the trade and commerce of Tsolyánu take place. If you are born into a mat-weaving clan or a vintners' clan or a leatherworking clan, then the clanhouse will be where you are trained

into your trade as you grow. If the clan-occupation is not to your liking you will be free to engage in a number of other occupations including the military, the priesthood, or administrative functions within the Imperium. It would be difficult, however, to take up a different trade under the control of a different clan.

### Clan Faith

Religion intertwines with clan just as it permeates all other areas of Tsolyáni life. Many clans have embraced the worship of either Change or Stability Gods, and some have even gone so far as to worship only one God exclusively. The haughty Vrídidi, for instance, worship only their Fiery Lord Vimúhla or His Cohort, Chíténg, while Standing Pinnacle reserve their devotions for Lovely Avánthe and Her Cohort. Other clans, such as Sea Blue, hold to no traditional faith and include members of all Temples.

### Religious Conversion

On an individual level, however, one retains the right to worship whichever of the Twenty Gods one desires. Even among the Vrídidi, or within Lord Sárku's Glory of the Worm clan, one can choose to worship another deity. The penalties for these rare breaches of tradition are strictly familial: the umbrage of parents, and the disapproval of peers. While such has always been the lot of converts, there are no legal or ecclesiastical sanctions for conversion. Indeed, the Concordat strictly defends the right of the individual to worship any of Pavár's Twenty Deities.

The reaction of one's clan to conversion varies in a predictable fashion. Conversion within an ecumenical clan is less scandalous than within a more sectarian clan. Conversion between Stability and Change will usually raise eyebrows, but conversion between the faiths of Lords Vimúhla and Karakán by a member of one of the "Red" clans, for example, is hardly notable.

When, as is frequently the case, conversion accompanies a marriage (when a husband converts to his new wife's faith, for example) the higher clans will usually pay the Temple to hold a small "observance of welcome." This may be conducted by an appropriate Ritual priest who happens to be a member of the clan, and held either in a smaller sanctuary within the Temple, or within a hall in the clanhouse itself. There are no doctrinal Temple observances of conversion events, nor must a worshipper ritually "take leave" of their former faith. Theological indoctrination is required of new laity. These simple classes last a few months and offer instruction in the basic catechisms of the Temple.

Hnálla    Belkhánu    Karakán    Vimúhla    Ksáruł  
 Avánthe    Thúmis    Hrü'ü    Sárku    Dlamélish

Tlakotáni	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Very High</b>										
Sea Blue	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Golden Sunburst	•				•					
Vriddi							•			
Might of Gánga	•	•	•	•						
Íto								•		
Golden Bough	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sword of Fire							•			
Cloak of Azure Gems						•			•	
Jade Diadem										•
Blade Raised High					•					
<b>High</b>										
White Stone		•								•
White Crystal	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Red Sword, Sun, Mountain, Stone					•		•			
Purple Gem	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
High Pinnacle	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Emerald Girdle	•	•		•						
Great Stone						•			•	
Domed Tomb								•		
Dark Fear, Water, Moon, Flame						•		•	•	
Amber Cloak			•	•						
Sweet Singers of Nakomé							•			
Standing Stone	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Rising Sun	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Joyous of Vrá	•	•	•	•						
Iron Helm						•			•	
Staff of Beneficence				•						
Grey Cloak, Wand				•						
<b>Medium</b>										
Green Bough	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Blue Kirtle		•								
Black Stone						•	•	•	•	•
Green Malachite	•	•	•	•	•					



Black Stone Tomb								•		
Black Hand						•		•	•	
Woven Whip	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Round Rock	•									
<b>Very Low</b>										
Woven Mat	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Red Moon							•			
Scarlet Mantle					•					
Arch of Heaven	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Nighted Tower						•		•	•	•
Bright Sword	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Green Pyramid										•
Flat Rock	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Scarlet Planet of Knives					•					
Granite Lintel	•	•		•						
Black Earth						•				
Glass Spear	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sinking Land			•							
Artificers of Iron					•		•			
Turning Wheel	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Standing Reed							•		•	
Collar of Bronze	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Hand of Compassion			•							
Wicker Image			•							
Emerald Circlet										•
Polished Stone		•								

**The Average Tsolyáni on the Street**

When dealing with the Tsolyáni, it is all-too-easy to allow fear and prejudice to color one's perspective. Some believe the Tsolyáni to be cowed by the Temples and the Omnipotent Azure Legion, others fear that the Tsolyáni are temperamental and humorless, and still others believe them bloodthirsty and cruel. The truth is much less dramatic: most people in most places are, in a word, ordinary. So too among the Tsolyáni. The "average Tsolyáni" is as peaceable and kindly as you or I. They are perfectly happy to fulfill their role in the clan or temple, to seek acceptable measures of gain and advancement that bring respect and reward, to marry the girls- or boys-next-door, and to stay out of trouble.

From the point-of-view of the "average Tsolyáni" life is about doing your job, pleasing your friends, family and

bosses, looking forward to the spring celebrations and the autumn harvests, and trying to enjoy your brief stay upon the Plane.

**Place**

An important element of Tsolyáni life is the concept of "place," closely linked to the ethics of noble and ignoble (*lán* and *bússan*) action. Just as the same action can be noble for one person, and ignoble for another, so there are acceptable roles that each person can occupy. A person born into the Black Mat clan, for example, is noble when he or she participates in the clan business of weaving sleeping-mats. This person may also nobly seek to enter one of the military legions as a soldier, or to become a low-ranking member of a temple. These are all part of the role of a member of that clan in society.

Acts of presumption, in contrast, are ignoble. Should such a person join a temple and ambitiously begin to scheme to become the High Administrative Priest, they would be looked upon as behaving in an unseemly and ignoble fashion.

Similarly, should a member of the venerable Cloak of Azure Gems clan take up mat weaving or a latrine digging, all of society would gasp in astonishment at such ignoble behavior. If he or she joined a temple and performed in a slipshod and corrupt manner, again, this would be viewed as ignoble. It is the role of such high persons to uphold the honor of their clans and to behave in a dignified manner. Such high folk are best suited to the governance of properties, temple administration, or the overseeing of clan businesses for the benefit of all. Failure to behave nobly reflects badly upon the clan as well as upon the individual, and clanmembers will be quick to react to such behavior.

Each person has a role and is expected to fulfill it. In return, society recognizes the noble behavior of such individuals. As a common Tsolyáni idiom puts it, "there is honor in weaving mats, if the mats are well-woven." Where would the administrator of the temple lie at night but upon the cold stone floor without a properly woven mat? Likewise, who would see to the availability of textiles for the weaving of mats if not for the administrator, who guides the temple in the collection and sale of raw materials?

In the spectrum of Tsolyáni experience, "place" is an important concept. Striving to achieve unseemly heights, when taken to its logical conclusion, becomes the blasphemous attempt of humanity to ape the Gods. Likewise, failing to maintain one's place threatens all of Society, just as a loose brick can bring down a whole wall. Therefore, each Tsolyáni of good character seeks as best they can to behave in a noble and dignified manner, as defined by their position within society.

The rewards of noble behavior are considerable. The clan is more than a family- or business-entity: it is also the primary means of support for its members. Should a clanmember need lodging in a foreign city, he or she need only rum to the local clanhouse. If a business-venture were to go awry, the clan would help its member pay his or her debts. Should a clanmember fall ill or be injured, the clan will pay for the best healers it can afford.

Should a person behave ignobly, however, the clan will seek to correct this behavior, at first with advice, and eventually with sanctions. Minor eccentricities will be tolerated, but a persistently ignoble member will eventually be asked to leave. One of the worst fates that can befall a Tsolyáni citizen is to be kicked out of their clan! Such persons will find themselves without lodging, without employment, dependent upon handouts and unprotected from disaster. Only the most ignoble and reprehensible behavior will render one *nakomé*, or clanless. Conversely, only acts of incredible nobility and character would convince a clan to make a member of a *nakomé* individual. Such is the importance of place and clan in Tsolyánu.

# The Nation of Tsolyánu

The Empire of the Petal Throne encompasses twenty Temples, dozens of major cities, and several discrete cultural regions. There are many elements of Tsolyáni culture that, despite its size and diversity, apply throughout the Empire, and even across the other four of the Five Empires — Livyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá and Yán Kór.

It is difficult to distinguish between religious and secular events, since religious tradition is so closely bound to daily events in Tsolyánu. Almost any custom eventually takes on religious attributes. Births, deaths, and the celebration of a successful harvest are all examples of commonplace life-events that are adorned with religious significance.

## Theology

### The Gods

What is a god? What are those qualities and attributes that are sufficient to the definition? If an entity transcends our perceptible reality and wields vast and subtle powers no being in our experience possesses, and if this being is so far beyond us in substance and nature that all of our imaginings fall short of conceiving its purposes, then is not this being, for all practical purposes, a god?

The Impeccable Scrolls of the Priest Pavár set forth the ineffable beings of the Gods, and indicate the paths which obedience to the Gods dictate.

*"What matters it to the Drí whether he is stepped upon by a man or by a dog?" [Scroll XLII, Stanza 12]*

When it comes to the Gods, they are so much more puissant than we that they fulfill all of the conditions of any definition of a god that we may rationally postulate.

The Gods are active upon Tékumel. They have repeatedly been perceived, and those vouchsafed the Divine Encounter will attest that Their existence is no vision, no drugged dream. They are active in all affairs. The man who claims to be an atheist or an agnostic upon Tékumel is either blind or a fool. What does it profit to debate whether these beings are truly "gods" or "beings of god-like power?" In the end, it is the same; all the rest is word-mongering.

The Gods are active in everyday life and, if propitiated in ways pleasing to Them, may grant boons and aid purposes. The savants insist that the erection of temples and the giving of sacrifices and rituals of adoration are desired by the Gods. But do They in turn need Their worshippers? None can say, for Their natures are beyond the ken of limited mortal intellects. Lord Ksárul did appear to "need" human aid at the battle of Dórmoron Plain: when He called forth His minions from the many Planes of Reality, His human followers were amongst them, and were rewarded for their allegiance.

The records of the sages suggest that the Gods are not omnipotent. They may indeed "need" their worshippers, somehow drawing sustenance from sacrifices, and inhaling the prayers of myriad worshippers as a man inhales sweet incense, taking some unimaginable pleasure from the performance of rituals.

### Cohorts

One Cohort serves each God. These are no mere minions, not demons or demi-gods, but are individuals of only slightly less potency than the Gods Themselves. These Cohorts are separate personae; also, not simply facets of the natures of the Lords They serve. The relationship between the Gods and the Cohorts is a mystery that the theologians have thus far been unable to encompass.

Each Cohort partakes of the nature of His or Her patron God. One may say that a Cohort focuses upon one area of the sphere of interest of a God. Thus, while Lady Avánthe is "Woman" in her role of lover, mother, wife, clanswoman, and upholder of the social order, Her Cohort, Lady Dilinála is "Woman as Woman Alone:" woman without the polarity of female versus male.

### Aspects

Each of the Gods and Cohorts is multi-faceted. Every temple has shrines devoted to the Aspects of its God. Aspects are unlike the Cohorts, for They are not separate beings and have no identities of their own. An "Aspect" is no more than one "focus" of a God or Cohort. Just as a man behaves differently when with his family, his superiors, his sweetheart, his comrades, or his foes, so does each Aspect represent the persona of a God or Cohort in different spheres of His or Her activity. Some are frequently worshipped, such as Tahelé, the Maid of Beauty, who is that Aspect of Lady Avánthe which makes young girls pretty and is said to attract others to them. Shrines of other Aspects are bare and dusty. Indeed, some Aspects are found only in the epics; for example, Lord Thúmis takes the form of a bejeweled, two-legged serpent when He fights against the Demon Qu'ú; and He becomes one of many limbs and faces when He shields Hrugga against the Dark Ones on Dórudai Fields.

Each Aspect has a name, rituals, shrines, a contingent of clergy, iconography and mythology.

On the average, the Gods display more Aspects than do the Cohorts. In addition, certain Aspects are worshipped in other lands, some are enshrined only in one city or in one temple, and there are some that have fallen into disuse and no longer are worshipped at all. Over time, the relationships between Greater and Lesser Aspects (those Aspects worshipped only in a single city or a small region) will change. Some of the Greater Aspects fall into disuse, for whatever reasons, and Lesser Aspects take their places. This process is slow and complex,

entangled with politics, the clans, and other elements in the theocratic hierarchy.

A devotee may thus proceed directly to the central shrine of a temple and worship the Deity as a single unified being, or he or she may stop outside at one or more of the smaller shrines of those Aspects relevant to the purpose of the visit — or both.

### Localities of Worship

Within the Empire of Tsolyánu there are centers and strongholds of each deity: the Imperium is not homogenous. The farther west one goes the more one finds the worship of Lord Vimúhla predominating — so much so that the nation of Mu'ugalavyá, on Tsolyánu's western border, may be said to be Lord Vimúhla's territory in spite of the influence of the Mu'ugalavyáni's ancient cult-god, Hrsh. Lord Vimúhla is also strong in desert-locked Fasíltum in the eastern half of Tsolyánu. Lord Sárku is very strong in the north, particularly around the City of Sárku. Lords Hnálla and Karakán hold sway in Béy Sü and Avanthár. Lord Thúmis predominates in Dó Cháka, has a large following in Béy

Sü, and is also worshipped in Sokátis. Lord Ksáru is in the ascendancy in Mrelú and to some extent in Púrdimal. And Lady Dlamélish has held sway over the south, especially near Jakálla, since the First Empire was founded.

It is rare that a particular God holds exclusive power in an area. While Lord Sárku is, for all practical purposes, the only Deity in the City of Sárku, and while Lord Vimúhla is the dominant Deity of the city of Fasíltum, still even in these places the other Gods are represented, and Their worship is entirely legal.

In most places the "dominance," or popularity, of a particular God is not a hindrance to worship of the other Gods, and the Temples of other Deities are of a dignified size. The "dominant" God in these areas may have large representations in the important businesses and clans, but are not organized so as to shut out worshippers of other Gods (beyond the nepotism endemic to any bureaucracy). Such behavior would be directly contrary to the ancient Concordat of the Temples.

### Other Religions and Pantheons

A question frequently asked is whether or not one might find temples of Pavár's pantheon in other lands. Can one travel to the city of Ssa'átis in Mu'ugalavyá and be assured of finding a temple of Lord Thúmis?

In Mu'ugalavyá one finds temples to the local equivalents of all the Tsolyáni Gods, plus their own deity, Hrsh. In Yán Kór, similarly, one will encounter Pavár's Deities under new guises, although there are several smaller sects and local cults. The little nation of Pijéna worships their strange "She Who Is Not Seen." By her interests in fertility and the seas she is similar to Ladies Avánthe or Dlamélish, but as strangers are not allowed to view her rituals no more is known. In the nations of Ghatón, Milumanayá, and Sa'á Allaqí are modifications of the Tsolyáni religious system descended from their history as

states of the lost empire of Éngsvan hlá Gánga. The Salarvyáni hold their melded form of Ladies Avánthe and Dlamélish, Shiringgáyi, in special reverence, although small temples to other deities also exist there. Scholars of the Five Empires theorize that the powerful animal spirits of Rannálu and the Lorún tribes of Yán Kór are really only Aspects of Engsvanyáli deities simplified to appeal to these tribal cultures. The sometimes-astonishing effects that their shamans can achieve are believed to be due to the unrecognized use of other-planar power.

In the far-off nation of ancient Livyánu, the overlordship belongs to Qame'él, Lord of Shadows, and the other gods of that priest-ridden land are equally mysterious and secretive. Whether these deities are really the same interdimensional beings as the Gods of the Tsolyáni, or whether they are simply creations of their human worshippers, or whether they are interdimensional beings different from the familiar Twenty of the Imperium — these are questions whose answers are known only to the Gods Themselves. It is clear that the Livyáni are mighty sorcerers and are indeed in contact with some interdimensional force, but whether Qame'él or the Homed One of Secrets of the city of Laigás are the "same" as the Gods of Tsolyánu is as yet unresolved by scholars and theologians.

### Diplomacy

The Temples of the Empire are always seeking to increase their influence in foreign nations through diplomatic relations. The Concordat, the agreement that ensures the peaceful coexistence of the many faiths of the Five Empires, prohibits religious proselytization and other aggressive attempts to convert the worshippers of other Temples to one's own. However, there are no prohibitions against political and secular efforts to increase Temple influence. For example, every Temple seeks to have its own clergy assigned as Imperial ambassadors to other nations.

Such international ambassadors appointed by the Emperor first serve the Emperor, and then their Temple. It is understood that when the ambassadors have fulfilled their Imperial roles, they are free to pursue the interests of their Temples or clans.

For an example, one need only look to the mercantile negotiations conducted a few years ago by Lord Mítulan híVéssuma, worshipper of the God Karakán and High Legate of the Seal Emperor of the Tsolyáni Imperium, a member of the Clan of the Blade Raised High. Through intense bargaining, he worked up a million-*Káitar* contract between the nations of Mu'ugalavyá and Tsolyánu. That an additional two hundred thousand *Káitars* worth of trade was to flow through the holdings of the Temple of Karakán was not considered unusual. That fifty-thousand more in specific trade items (mostly Dó Chákan Fire Opals and red Mu'ugalavyáni glassware) were to be transferred through Lord Mítulan's personal clanhouse drew no notice at all. And that twentyfive-thousand additional *Káitars* in gems and *objets d'art* were directed to Lord Mítulan's own possession was completely normal. Such perquisites are not considered



corruption, and in fact are held in high regard. Having been dispatched by the Empire to negotiate a one-million-*Káitar* contract, Lord Mítulan returned with over twenty-five percent more trade than originally anticipated. As a result, he was promoted and assigned to critical negotiations as Plenipotentiary *pro tempore* to the Ecclesiarchs of the Temple of the Dual Gods of the Two Moons of Hólis Isle. These sensitive negotiations, if successfully completed, could help stem a war between the Livyáni and the Tsoléini Isles, and would bring great respect to Lord Mítulan.

So ambassadorial posts are extremely important in terms of both foreign and domestic power. Lord Hrü'ü's Temple, for example, would not wish to find a worshipper of Lord Thúmis on the throne in Mu'ugalavyá, so an ambassador faithful to Lord Hrü'ü would work to be sure that as far as Temple influence went, a potential Mu'ugalavyáni ruler would be someone more to their liking.

### The Palaces

The bureaucracy of the Empire of Tsolyánu is divided into four branches: the Palace of the Priesthoods of the Gods, the Palace of the Realm, the Palace of Foreign Lands, and the Palace of Ever-Glorious War. In most cities of any size, these will be represented by four structures arranged about a central square.

The Palace of the Priesthoods of the Gods oversees relations between the Temples and their interactions with Imperial and local government, collects taxes from temple lands, organizes public ceremonies, and sees to religious issues affecting the State. The Palace of the Realm oversees Imperial bureaucracy, including laws, shipping, and taxes. The Palace of Foreign Lands handles matters outside the Empire, including imports and exports and the diplomatic and foreign-intelligence services. And the Palace of Ever-Glorious war is the military branch of the Empire;

All large cities have these Four Palaces, while smaller cities will have one building with individual areas for each Palace.

### Administration

The public locale for the administration of bureaucratic concerns within each temple is its Hall of Enactments. This is a bustling space, crowded with scribes and bureaucrats as well as merchants and members of the public. Here taxes are levied and paid, disputes and concerns weighed and resolved or passed on to higher authorities, and records regarding land, crops, births and deaths tallied in scrolls and ledgers.

When a city is large enough for a Palace of the Realm, much of the Imperial bureaucracy takes place in that structure's Hall of Enactments. In remote or rural areas, however, the local temple serves both Temple and Imperial concerns.

### Education

Almost all formal learning is in the hands of the priesthoods. Clans do hold informal classes (taught by one or another more learned elders), but the children are given only a little reading and writing and some arithmetic before they go off to become apprentices in their clan's profession. Indeed, most peasants and lower-class townspeople are denied even this rudimentary education. Estimates of literacy range from 10-15 percent for Livyánu, 10-12 percent for Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá, 9-10 percent for Pijéna, Pecháno and Yán Kór, 5-8 percent for Salarvyá, and less than one percent for the more remote states.

Followers of Stability may send their children either to a school run by the priesthoods of Lords Thúmis or Keténgku, or, if they wish, directly to a more doctrinaire seminary operated by their own sects in which their specific tenets will be stressed. Advocates of Change have a similar choice between schools staffed by priests of Lords Ksáru or Grugánu or an institution provided by their own denominations.

Those who wish to learn the profession or skill of their clan do not attend a Temple school but rather a specialized clan school; these teach the fundamentals of reading and simple mathematics and then go directly to impart their clan occupation to the apprentice. When a particularly bright student is found, the clan may provide the support to send the student to one of the Temple schools.

Temple schools offer courses in the basics of literacy and mathematics, plus theology, calligraphy, the recitation of epics, music, divine ritual, languages, history, poetry and versification. Further training is then provided for those who would remain in the priesthood, while less priestly-inclined students return to their clans, apply for posts within the Imperial bureaucracy, etc. Peasants and common townspeople, of course, are largely illiterate and enjoy none of these benefits. Most military units recruit directly from the peasantry and also from the townspeople. More literate and intelligent youths are then trained by the Legion for officership, while the remainder serve out a contracted term as simple soldiery.

Education is thus the prerogative of those who can find support, either from their clan or from the personal fortunes of their parents and families. Slaves are not normally educated, although the great households maintain training for slave clerks, scribes, and such specialized skills as singing, dancing, poetry, art, etc. The scions of the great nobility are often educated partially by these slave tutors and partially at one of the more prestigious temple schools. Any free citizen of Tsolyánu may seek membership as a priest or priestess of a Temple while undertaking whatever education and training he or she can afford. Once accepted into the hierarchy as a priest or priestess, the young student need no longer be supported by a clan, parent or other patron but rather receives support from the temple.

## Foreign enrollment

The children of foreigners in Tsolyánu are usually allowed to enter the priestly Temple schools, where they must support themselves until they are approved as first-circle priests or priestesses. The cost to their clan is usually ten to twenty percent higher than that charged native Tsolyáni. They are then given the usual training and allowed to serve as their interests and skills permit.

It is true that the Deities of Tsolyánu have their counterparts in some of the other empires — Mu'ugalavyá, Yán Kór, and to some extent Salarvyá, with Livyánu's Shadow Gods being an entirely different matter. Attributes and forms may differ considerably. A young Salarvyáni follower of Shiringgáyi, their principal Goddess, might choose to follow Lady Avánthe, her nearest Tsolyáni counterpart, but this is not absolutely necessary. One might perceive closer affinities with one of the Gods Hnálla, Thúmis, or Karakán, one of the Cohorts, or even with one of the Deities of Change, since Shiringgáyi embodies several of those attributes as well.

Castaways from the great southern continent across the Deeps of Chanayága are very rare. Their religious predilections usually seem to fit in with one or another of the Tsolyáni Deities, however, and several such foreigners are now recognized priests, scholars, etc. within the Tsolyáni hierarchies. Again, this seems guided by their personal conscience and desire. For the most part, foreign persons entering Tsolyánu choose to enter the military as mercenaries or soldiers, thus they are often found in the temples of the War Gods, Karakán, Vimúhla and their Cohorts.

Nonhumans are another problem. The Ahoggyá, Hláka, Pygmy Folk and Tinalíya do not, by nature, ever give true allegiance to one of the human Gods; their own deities are quite different and almost unintelligible to humankind. The Páchi Léi, Pé Chói, and Swamp Folk on the other hand tend to imitate their human neighbors and accept human Deities as their own while they are in the lands of humans. They claim that these same Deities are manifested to them in much the same way as they appear to humans; the names and attributes are different, of course. The Shén accept human Deities indifferently while journeying in human territories, but they always revert to the worship of their own two gods when they return home. One of these, the One of Eggs, is apparently roughly equivalent to human "Stability" Gods, while the One Who Rends is apparently closer to Change.

The inimical races — Hlutrgú, Hlüss, Shunned Ones, and the Ssú — stand completely outside the human system. There is no question of Stability or Change with them. Their gods, whatever they may be, are totally opposed to the whole human pantheon.

## Temple Curricula

The first year curricula begin with reading, writing, and arithmetic, followed by religious dogma, history, and a modern language. This instruction lasts some 8-10 years, after which most pupils return to their clans and professions.

Most of those who remain to acquire further learning intend to become priests, although a few scions of nobility, children of officials and wealthy clanspeople continue as well. The second stage lasts another 3-5 years and subjects include theology, philosophy, calligraphy, art, music, the recitation of epics, divine ritual, etiquette, versification, mathematics, classical languages, astrology and astronomy, law, geography, further history, medicine, alchemy, etc. The basics of magic and other-planar power are taught, but actual spells and methods are not. Most students begin to specialize during the latter years of this phase, and soon become accomplished amateurs.

Physical education, games, athletics, and combat techniques are not part of most Temples' curricula. The War-Temples do inculcate military discipline, swordsmanship, tactics, and archery, but those who wish to become really proficient must attend a dueling master's academy in the marketplace, join a military legion, or, if they are wealthy, hire an instructor to come to their clanhouses.

Martial arts are available within the Temples of Vimúhla, Thúmis, and Hrsh in Mu'ugalavyá, by most of the priesthoods of Saá Allaqí and Pecháno, by the Shén, and in Livyánu by the Temples of Guodái, Kirrineb, Ru'ungkáno, Kikumársha, and Qame'él.

More esoteric disciplines are imparted only to those who are favored by their Temple. No purpose is served by teaching students who are not going to benefit the hierarchy. Outsiders, dilettantes, and those of dubious loyalties are thus discouraged. The third phase of an education in the Five Empires takes place within the temple and is rarely open to outsiders. Advanced classes continue in the subjects previously described, as well as engineering and architecture, navigation, the composition of odes in praise of the Emperor and the Gods, high cartography (which has nothing to do with the making of paper maps), the casting of horoscopes and the taking of omens, further rituals and ceremonies, scribal and administrative procedures, and spells and practical applications of the sorcerer.

During this period, which may last anywhere from 4 or 5 years to the rest of one's life, students attend classes taught by the more learned preceptors of the temple. Small groups sit here and there upon mats beneath the pillared colonnades. The teachers lecture, and their pupils memorize every word. Questions and discussion are not considered good form, and rote learning and obedience are rewarded. There are no examinations: a student who is not progressing will be bluntly told to weave his or her Skein of Destiny elsewhere. Although their hierarchies pay advanced teachers, it is also customary to provide one's instructor with gifts, the amount of which varies with the student's ability to pay. Most pupils at this stage are already junior priests.

There is considerable mixing of boy and girl students at the temple schools, and fraternization is not frowned upon unless it interferes with the student's educational development. The only Deity who does not favor co-education is Lady Dilinála, the Cohort of Avánthe, Who

accepts only females as priestesses in Her sect (although Her worshippers are of course of all genders). Both males and females may serve in the hierarchies of other Temples and may marry. Such marriages usually occur within one's clan, but it is not unusual for colleagues in the priesthood to marry across clan lines. Depending upon their parents' desires the children of such unions can be made members of the parents' clan to learn a skill or profession, or they may be brought quite young to the temple school and educated for the priesthood.

### Advanced Education

Every Temple has its Inner Doctrines, its anagogical enigmas, its recondite lore of demonology, and its compendia of secret spells and knowledge. These things are revealed only to those who have proved their fidelity to the Temple and who have attained a high rank in its hierarchy. These advanced classes are open only to initiates, and outsiders caught there may be slain or condemned to a living death by an ecclesiastical court. In the Temples of Ksáru and Grugánu there are Inner Doctrines within Inner Doctrines; the process of learning never ends, and only the High Adepts at the summit of the pyramid are aware of all the ramifications. In these two Temples — and in all of the priesthoods of the Livyáni Shadow Gods — Circle memberships are often concealed, and even principles and theology may be misrepresented to those lower down in the hierarchy.

## The Priesthood

### Circles

The priesthood is divided into Circles, ascending from lowly acolytes and servitors to beginners of the First Circle, to the active priests and priestesses of the intermediate Circles, all the way up to the Adepts of the 30th Circle, who form the religious and political elite of the sect. This ancient Engsvanyáli classification of ecclesiastical ranks in terms of "Circles" (Tsolyáni: *Kartu'ún*) still persists throughout the Five Empires, their client states, and Mihállu, and it will be recognized in other lands as well. Knowledge of a cleric's Circle membership immediately reveals their position vis-a-vis their own hierarchy and clarifies their status in the social order.

### Acolytes

Recruits join a temple as Acolytes during the second phase of their education or, in some cases, at the end of the first phase. Most sects waive the fees of their brighter Acolytes, and it is not uncommon for a temple to pay the living expenses of very gifted pupils and even offer compensation to their clans in return for their services. Recruits for a temple guard corps are usually given Acolyte training and status, and a few sects (e.g. those of Lords Vimúhla, Karakán, and their Cohorts) require that every soldier in their legions belong to the First Circle at least. Those planning to go into the military arm of their sect are thus quickly segregated from the rest, and they then progress along the lines given for the military.

### First Circle

After six months to a year of study, Acolytes are either initiated into the First Circle or told to return home. It is at this point that each recruit must consider which branch of Temple service to enter: the Ritual priesthood, the Administrative division, or the Scholarly contingent. A final decision must be made within a year or so of achieving the First Circle, and thereafter it is very difficult to obtain permission to change. All further training progresses rigidly within one of these three divisions, and no one may pursue two at once.

First Circle membership lasts for perhaps a year to three years. Slow, uncooperative, or dubiously eccentric candidates can still be weeded out during this period. Young Ritual priests and priestesses learn their practical duties, the incantations and sacraments, the Temple's theology and dogma, and assist their seniors in the performance of the rituals. Those in the Administrative branch are taught the details of record-keeping, tithing, the supervision of Temple lands and property, the procurement of vestments and ceremonial accouterments, the organization of the kitchens and refectories, and the thousand and one bureaucratic particulars of the vast networks of the hierarchy. Scholarly priests continue their studies, specialize in one (or at most two) fields under the tutelage of a master, and learn the fundamentals of research.

### Higher Circles

Satisfactory progress results in promotion. A candidate whose work is not acceptable may be sent off to serve as the curate of a village shrine, or may simply be shunted aside into a minor post within an urban temple.

From the Second through the Sixth Circles each of the three branches has a multitude of petty functions and titles, and a list of these in one's dossier provides the temple authorities with an idea of one's abilities and experience. For example, Ritual priests of the Second through Sixth Circle may be assigned functions in specific ceremonials: e.g. "Holder of the Emerald Censer" (Temple of Dlamélísh), "Opener of the Way of Bones" (Temple of Sárku), "Bearer of the Raiment of the Blue Room" (Temple of Ksáru), "Opener of the Eye of Dawn" (Temple of Thúmis), "Flame-keeper" (Temple of Vimúhla), "Guide of Those Who Are Sent to the God" (Temple of Chiténg), "Standard-bearer of the Golden Legions" (Temples of Karakán and Chegárra), "Singer of Purity" (Temples of Avánthe and Dilinála), "Illuminator of the Face of Light" (Temple of Hnálla), "Utterer of the Litanies of the Isles" (Temple of Belkhánu), "Attendant in Purple" (Temple of Hríüi), etc., etc. As always, these titles and the roles they represent vary by temple, so that the "Flamekeeper" in one temple may or may not be the same role as the title of the same name in the temple of another city. Similar, though less ornately titled, posts are found in the Administrative and Scholarly branches as well.

It takes at least a year to ascend from the Second to Sixth Circle, and usually more. Thereafter, most higher posts relate more and more to temple governance and the

supervision of one's juniors. Clerics of the most exalted echelons, whatever their branch, tend to become little more than bureaucrats with duties revolving around attendance at administrative functions, temple conferences and ceremonials, service on the ecclesiastical judiciary, and representing the sect to governmental or other external bodies.

High Ritual priesthood does not necessarily mean high sorcerous circle. Usually only about two or three High Ritual priests out of ten might have significant magical skill. The position of High Ritual Priest indicates a life spent within the Temple hierarchy structure, studying the practices and devotions to the God, playing at politics with colleagues, but not necessarily studying magic.

### Priestly Duties

A priest or priestess graduating from the First Circle, or arriving via reassignment to a new temple, is quickly assigned regular tasks within the hierarchy and is expected to serve there until given an assignment elsewhere. Free choice does not much enter into the question. If a member of the priesthood is assigned to a post, he or she is expected to go there and perform accordingly. Upon this performance (and the natural considerations of power and politics) he or she will receive further promotions — or demotions.

There are of course several circumstances that allow an individual more freedom of choice and movement than are described above. Those who seek to travel may become couriers between the temple branches of different cities, liaisons to other Temples or to the Palace of the Realm, or undertake temporary assignments involving travel (such as artists assigned to an archaeological dig to sketch the findings and their locations.) Additionally, the Golden Rule — those with the gold make the rules — certainly applies in Tsolyánu. Persons with sufficient resources can persuade the duty priest to report on brief "assignments" which do not really exist. This allows for short "vacations" over and above those normally granted for serious personal matters or as performance-based rewards. When handled discreetly, such "vacations" might or might not be winked at by the temple, depending on the attitudes of one's superiors and the amounts of one's inducements. For longer absences one should see about arranging a formal leave of absence.

### The Branches of the Priesthood

The responsibilities of the three branches of the Priesthood rarely overlap. Once a priest has begun to advance along one branch, it is usually impossible to switch to another branch without returning to acolyte status (something rarely ever done). All three of these groups are technically "priests;" they are housed, fed, and clothed in the temple, and have regular temple duties.

#### *Ritual Priests*

The Ritual priests are concerned with Temple observances, performing the ceremonies, and serving in the temple. After passing beyond the stage of acolyte and First Circle priest a Ritual priest is assigned to a temple where he or she learns the basic observances, studies the

books of sacraments and ceremonies, and progresses on through many, many intermediate levels of the hierarchy as high as a temple's Chief Ritual Priest. Beyond this stage the levels are largely symbolic and partially connected with internal temple administration; one can progress to the levels of High Priest, Grand High Priest, and finally Temple Preceptor. The Temple Preceptor is a member of the High Council.

#### *Administrative Priests*

Administrative priests govern the Temple lands and businesses, see to provisioning and staffing, and deal with the Imperium and other outside agencies. Administrative priests are graduated from the First Circle into the tasks of the recording of tithes, the keeping of records, maintenance of vital statistics for the residents of the area, collecting and accounting of land taxes, produce, donations, and many other such clerical tasks. Most temples administer large tracts of land, worked by peasants, tenant farmers, renters, etc., and all of these things must be kept in order. Temple buildings, payments to craftspeople for decorations, repairs, new accouterments, robes and symbols, etc., are also recorded, and the network of priestly administration has to be maintained and overseen out into the smallest villages.

Promising Administrative priests can be promoted to head of a local temple bureau, then to temple administrative commandant, then to commandant of a smaller city temple complex, then to a larger city or fief, then to overlordship of a district, then to the governance of a major city and its suburbs, then to regional or provincial commandant, and finally to High Preceptor, and membership in the High Council of the Temple.

#### *Scholar Priests*

Scholar priests teach in the temple schools, study, and perform research. Having passed through their acolyteship and been assigned to a temple, they continue their studies in the temple school. Successful scholar priests go on to higher study in a major city, where they are promoted to the rank of scholar, then to senior scholar, and then to ranking scholar, licentiate and proctor. Proctors and Great Proctors are members of the High Council.

#### *Other Priests*

##### *Military Priests*

Temples that have military units within their hierarchies (as opposed to the patronage or financial support of a non-temple Imperial Legion) hire low-level soldiers directly from their adherents among the peasantry and urban residents. These recruits are quickly separated into fighters and field officers, versus those who will go on into military administration. The latter progress much as regular Imperial soldiery: through a sort of basic training in officership, to captain, major, colonel, force commander, general and high general (the terms are all rough equivalents of the corresponding Tsolyáni terminology). High generals are members of the High Council of the Temple.

*Lay Priests*

Quite apart from the Priests of the Hierarchy, however, are the "Lay priests" of the Temple: persons with priestly training who have opted to remain out of the hierarchy and devote their lives to study, practical work, or other pursuits. Lay priests are educated in the schools and participants in its overall perspectives, but they receive no salary from the temple and are expected to fend for themselves and find their own living. They do not live within the temple precincts (although they may stay in a temple dormitory for a week or two while visiting another city). They are not bound by Temple regimens and responsibilities, nor are they usually involved in Temple (and inter-Temple) politics. A Lay priest or priestess may use Temple facilities (e.g. the libraries) and call upon the Temple for help or advice, but this is expected to be less frequent and less demanding than the assistance vouchsafed to regular members of the hierarchy. They frequently cooperate with their colleagues in the formal hierarchy.

Lay priests usually have occupations other than those of regular priests: scholars, physicians, architects, engineers, and practitioners of sorcery and other arts. They perform their skills for pay in the marketplace, hire out as apprentices to more senior Lay priests, or serve as "house priests" or "magical bodyguards" in the entourages of the noble families and high clans. Lay priests also function as bureaucrats in the governments, soldiers, advisors to the clans or as specialists whose skills are needed by society and who thus remain independent and charge for their work.

Their main connection with their Temple is simply one of religious membership. Such Lay priests are often itinerant physicians, makers of spells and potions for the poor, or scribes and teachers with a bent towards religious study who are unwilling to undergo the rigors of Temple hierarchy membership. Some of these Lay priests go on to become great scholars in their own right, and if they are then recognized by their Temple they may be included, if they wish, in the High Council of the Temple.

The institution of Lay priest provides greater interaction between the Temples and other sectors of society. A Lay priest is independent of the strictures and "ivory tower" quality inherent in Temple life, and he or she can carry the Temple's influence into parts of the culture where the busy clergy cannot reach.

There are no "guilds" in the Five Empires, nor are there specific "astronomers' clans," "historians' clans," or other academic organizations (although there are indeed "vintners' clans" and other familial clans based on crafts or labor). The priests of the Scholarly branches of the Temples plus their assorted groups of Lay priests take the place of such institutions. There is frequently collaboration or cooperation between the scholars of one Temple with those of "friendly" Temples, but between "neutral" or "hostile" sects one encounters secrecy, rivalry, and sometimes-actual enmity. Every Temple, moreover, has its Inner Doctrines and arcana which it reveals to no other.

Lay priests may be adjudged by their Temples to be of any Circle from Second through the Thirtieth, based on their scholarship, skills, and reputation. Those of the highest Circles may join the High Council, if they wish, but they are rarely elected as Patriarchs, Lord Adepts, or Grand Adepts — after all, it is the Lay priest's unwillingness to join in the tasks of Temple governance which makes them opt for their role in the first place!

Although Lay priests progress upward in Circle membership, there are no official titles for most of them. They are known, rather, by their disciplines: e.g. "Historian," "Astronomer," or "Physician."

*High Council*

The three-part temple hierarchy is unified under a High Council consisting of the Ritual and Administrative Preceptors, the High Proctors of the Scholarly branch, and such senior Lay priests as are invited to join it. These elect an Inner Synod, consisting of 10-50 members. A few Temples have an intermediate level between their Inner Synod and the Grand Adept, who represents the Temple as a whole and reports directly to the Petal Throne in Avanthár. This intermediate group is comprised of three to five Lord Adepts who act as the advisors to the Grand Adept. The Temple of Vimúhla, for example, currently has an Inner Synod of 32 members, of whom four are Lord Adepts, and one is Grand Adept. These exalted persons are usually old, of noble clan, and of considerable political importance within the Empire.

*Staff*

A large urban sanctuary may be staffed by hundreds of priests, priestesses, guards, servants, artisans, and slaves.

A village chapel (consisting of little more than a single room with a stone altar and a crude clay image or two) must have its curate. The hierarchies of the Temples are thus as complicated as the bureaucracies of the Empire.

The higher one progresses, the less direct correlation there is between Circles and specific Temple posts. Any number of clergy may belong to a given Circle, but the number of official positions available within each regional temple is limited. Rivalry can be fierce between ambitious candidates, and experience, ability, and seniority are frequently subordinated to "influence" and blatant "inducements." There may be only one or two vacancies open for a pool of over a hundred likely applicants, and an individual's progress upward through the ranks may come to a dead end at any point along the way, even though they may continue to be initiated into ever higher Circles.

Real talent, wisdom, and proficiency are thus more clearly indicated by membership in a high Circle than they are by incumbency in a temple post. A respected scholar, for example, may belong to the Eighteenth or Twentieth Circle but hold no office in the hierarchy at all. Circle membership does depend to some degree upon influence and inducements, of course, but the competition is less fierce than that for temple posts.

Circle	Ritual	Administrative	Scholarly
1	Priest	Priest	Priest
2	Junior Priest	Junior Priest	Scholar
5	Senior Priest	Senior Priest	Senior Scholar
7			Ranking Scholar
8	Chief Ritual Priest	Temple Commandant	
9			Licentiate
10	High Priest	District Commandant	
11			Proctor
12	Grand High Priest	Senior Commandant	
15	Ritual Preceptor	Admin. Preceptor	
16		Patriarch	Great Proctor
17		Patriarch	
19		Lord Adept	
20		Lord Adept	
>20		Grand Adept	

Titles of Posts of the Three Branches of the Priestly Hierarchies.

Each Temple is governed by a High Council (Tsolyáni: *Hesnuchéldalikoi*), composed of its Ritual and Administrative Preceptors, the Great Proctors, High Generals and those senior Lay Priests who wish to join it. This body then elects an Inner Synod (Tsolyáni: *Qotlashánkoi*) consisting of 10 to 50 Patriarchs. These in turn choose 3-5 of their number to act as an Advisory Curia (Tsolyáni: *Vurtléshkoi*), plus a Grand Adept for the entire sect. In most Temples these posts are held for life, although the Temples of Sárku and Durritlámish elect their Patriarchs and Lord Adepts for five-year terms and their Grand Adepts for ten. Occasionally a sect may have more than one Grand Adept (perhaps for internal political reasons), but there are no recorded instances of more than three of these functionaries at one time.

#### The Concordat

The Concordat is probably the single most important unifying element of the Five Empires. Out of mutual self-interest, the sects of even the most distant lands agreed to a great Concordat of Temples tens of thousands of years ago when Pavár's pantheon was newly perceived. The Concordat prohibits any overt religious hostility: there is to be no fighting, no unfriendly use of "magic," no proselytizing. It was not adopted overnight, but over the course of hundreds and even thousands of years of blood and ruin. The Concordat cannot prevent covert bigotry and violence, and what takes place in the sanctuaries, catacombs, and remote wildernesses is known only to those present — and perhaps to the ever-watching Gods. Heresy and heterodoxy are not culpable

offenses under the laws of any of the Five Empires except Livyánu, and an apostate or a heretic will not be tried but will be expelled from his orders. Only if a defrocked priest later reveals Temple secrets to outsiders will he be hauled before an ecclesiastical tribunal.

#### Conversion

While conversion is legal and is protected by the Concordat, there are no law or rituals for priests who convert. Each Temple is quite protective of its Inner Teachings, so priestly conversion becomes more difficult the higher the priestly circle. Additionally, a priest who would convert must begin with the First Circle in their new Temple, and few are willing to take this step. This holds true even for priests who would convert between the faiths of a God and His or Her Cohort, with the exception of those Priestesses who would leave Lady Dilinála's priesthood for that of Lady Avánthe. This is discussed further in Lady Dilinála's chapter.

#### Ecclesiastical Courts

Ecclesiastical courts exist only to try cases involving the clergy. A priest who steals from their temple's coffers, a hierophant that disobeys a superior's commands, these might be tried in an ecclesiastical court, as well as issues involving inter-temple disputes (breaches of the Concordat, etc.).

The punishments imposed by these courts are as harsh (or harsher) as those prescribed by the Imperial courts. *Shámtila*, payment of money as penalty, is not accepted.

A person condemned by the ecclesiastical court will be confined in the gloomy dungeons below their temple.

### Corrupt Sorcerers

Clergy with sorcerous training are a special case for Imperial or Ecclesiastical punishment. A trained sorcerer is dangerous and such an individual must have committed a very serious offense indeed to cause the Temple to refuse to redeem them. While the punishment for many imperial crimes is enslavement, slaves with training in sorcery are among the most dangerous. Many priesthoods prefer to sacrifice corrupt priests or ne'er-do-well students who have fallen into debt or crime, rather than face the disgrace and danger of seeing the convicts sold publicly.

### Imperial heirs

Tlakotáni tradition holds that the children of the Emperor should be handed off to important clans and Temples. Since a male Emperor may have as many wives and concubines as He wishes, it would be possible for Him to have many offspring born at the same time to different mothers. This would be quite complicated and politically messy, so the Emperor is traditionally careful to space His offspring apart by at least a year or so.

Newborn heirs are distributed to important groups in society. The Emperor Himself, along with His counselors, decides whether a child should be brought up within the palace as an heir from birth. Due to political considerations, children may be delivered to certain clans around the Empire to be raised by that clan. Chamberlains within the Golden Tower hand over the infant to the Omnipotent Azure Legion, who see to the absolutely secret delivery of the child to the clan. The child is then raised as a member of the clan until adulthood, with a clan-name and no hint of his or her background revealed.

Upon reaching adulthood, the child is usually "Given the Gold" and notified of his or her Imperial status. The circumstances of this revelation vary greatly according to the character of the individual: a particularly gifted individual may be revealed early in life, a particularly inept person might never be revealed at all.

All must take place in deadly secret, but raising such a child is a mark of favor and prestige for these groups. The transfer takes place within the inner sanctums of Avanthár, assisted by the Servitors of Silence and the Emperor.

The lives of Emperors are lengthy due both to the healthy environment of the Golden Tower (where it is hard to die of anything but old age) and magic. Spells are often employed to reinvigorate or heal an ill Emperor, and although the Emperor is never supposed to be Undead, nor are they supposed to be revived, still, who is there to tell? Not the Servitors of Silence.

Historically, some Emperors have had to request that They not be healed magically or revived in order that they be allowed to die and go to Their rest.

### The Marékh

These guardians are assigned by the Inner Councils of the Temples to persons considered to be particularly important to the fate and skeins of the world. *Marékh* need not by necessity have magical ability, but usually do. They protect people and beings who are likely to become "decisive nodes" in the Universe. The Temples of Thúmis, Belkhánu, and Ksárul employ the *Marékh* frequently, as these Temples share an interest in the courses of the Many Planes.

*Marékh* are usually nondescript people with no visible importance or role, sigil or uniform: their duties are carried out with absolute discretion. They are usually careful to avoid notice and notoriety. They are rarely the best scholars, sorcerers or warriors in their fields. Yet their respective Temples train them in a number of unique styles of physical and magical combat.

### Knowledge and Science

The Temples are repositories of considerable knowledge. They are jealous of their power and prerogatives, however, and rarely share their information — not only across the line between Change and Stability, but even between the priesthoods of a God and Cohort! Certain of the clergy of Lord Thúmis (the most "open" of all deities) once wished to compile an encyclopedia of all knowledge; yet they soon found that none of the other Temples would cooperate — or provided only incomplete or deliberately misleading data. This was true even of the priests of Lord Thúmis' Cohort Keténgku!

### Astrology

The Tsolyáni recognize twelve astrological houses, such as the Self, the External World, the Lover, the Sign of Death, the Sign of Action and Life, the Enemy, and several others. The presences of the planets, moons, or the sun in a person's horoscope are examined and their inter-relationships are studied. Transits of the celestial bodies over important positions in one's natal chart are utilized to foretell daily events and influences. As there are no stars in the Tékumel's sky, the concept of a zodiac is meaningless.

### Astronomy

An orrery is a model of the cosmos, and there exist several on Tékumel in monasteries of learning. These models have at their centers Tuléng, the sun; Ülétl, a small yellow-brown world is nearest Tuléng; then scarlet Ríruchel; then green Tékumel with its moons beside it, orange Káshi and jade-green Gayél; then blue Shichél; and finally purple Zirúna, 'the Vigilant Eye of Lord Hrü'ü.'; next to Zirúna should be moons, too, but no scholar of Tékumel has ever seen them, nor are they mentioned in any book.

In addition to contemporary clockwork orreries, legend describes the High Orreries of the Great Ancients, built before the Time of Darkness. The planets of a High Orrery move along on hidden tracks in the floor. When touched, voices and pictures unroll in the mind; words in strange languages fill the ears.

Each sphere of a High Orrery possesses its own internal power: force drawn directly, so say the Tsolyáni, from the Being of its God, according to the immutable laws of astrology. Scarlet Ríruchel is filled with the warlike essence of Lord Karakán. Blue Shichél shines with the peaceful joy of Lady Avánthe, and the others are powered similarly. Thus, High Orreries can operate even in magically barren areas.

### Cosmology

With the exception of the Temple of Vimúhla — which holds that Reality is a leaf spiraling down into His flame — most of the thinkers in Tsolyánu subscribe to the theories of Dádrinan of Khéiris. His theory holds that Tékumel is a flat island floating inside a black sphere — an attempt by Lord Hrü'ü to contain and stifle the glorious light of Lord Hnálla. This island is longer from north to south than from east to west, leaving room on the latter two sides for the rising and setting of the celestial bodies, which spend the night or day, respectively, "enjoying the favors of their patron Gods in the paradises beyond Teretané."

The orreries of the Temples do not greatly influence the Tsolyáni cosmological view. Comparatively few people ever see an orrery, and the system they represent is truly understood by only a handful of Scholar priests of the various Temples. Most of these, in turn, view orreries as clever devices for predicting the passages of the lights in the sky, and not as scale-models based upon some greater physical reality.

### Demonology

The study of demonology is hazardous, and thus restricted to the most skilled — and most foolhardy — of every Temple. Across the millennia these researchers have discovered that every demon has two important characteristics labeled Substance and Essence. Substance is the demon's innate structure, while Essence is an additional element of being which occurs over time, an "inclination" which a Demon develops. So a creature whose Substance is of Lord Hrü'ü is a being of one of His Planes or His construction, but if it is of the Essence of Lord Ksáru, then this being is sympathetic to the goals of Lord Ksáru, and has an affinity for His desires.

All of the Gods have associated demons that are of their Substance, their Essence, or both. Priests and followers of other Gods can call up demons, but there is no way to state definitively who may attempt to summon a given demon. Knowledge of the rituals and the innermost words and summonings is certainly necessary, but the element of affinity cannot be denied. To summon a demon that does not have an affinity for you and your beliefs is a recipe for disaster. Still, the ego, self-possession, and raw power of the summoners have sometimes been effective in containing very hostile demons.

Usually, however, a priestess of Lady Avánthe would not call upon the same demons as a priestess of Lord Hrü'ü, but she might call upon the demons who serve Lord Thúmis. Lord Hrü'ü's priestess might call upon some of the horrid creatures of other Gods, such as Lady

Dlamélish's demon Rrü'ülánesh, but clergy of Lord Sárku might refrain from calling upon some of Lord Hrü'ü's demons if they were not deemed compatible. The matter of compatibility encompasses the will of those Gods with whom a demon is associated, and the minds of the individuals involved in the summoning. This is in part why any demonic summoning is terribly dangerous, for who can be said to know their own mind?

### Ethics

#### *Khomóyi, Lán and Bússan*

While there are many Tsolyáni terms for things which are "good" ("elegant," "useful," "tasty") or "bad" ("ugly," "wasted," "futile,") the more general expressions of *lán* and *bússan* shape the ethical views of the Tsolyáni. *Lán* encompasses the concepts of "good," "noble" and "dignified," but cannot be precisely defined as any one of these. Similarly *bússan* includes "bad," "undignified," and "rude" within its definition, but is not any one of these. Their meanings must be derived from the concepts they embrace, and additionally must include the Tsolyáni worldview in which one's position in the social hierarchy and perceived duties and obligations are set forth.

All citizens of the Five Empires agree upon one great ethical principle since the days of the Engsvanyáli Priest-kings — the concept of *Khomóyi*, "Noble Action." People may follow any moral code, any religious belief, any political or social doctrine, as long as it has the sanction of their faith and tradition. They are "noble" who obey their teachings openly and proudly; those who are lazy, hypocritical, weak, or unwilling to act are "ignoble" and beneath contempt.

One might incorrectly state that a person always engages in *khomóyi* when they perform deeds of charity and kindness. Yet charitable acts constitute *khomóyi* only when an observer approves of the recipient: to aid and comfort an enemy is rarely *khomóyi*, although the charitable action is the same. Likewise, actions are *bússan* only when contrary to the viewer's wishes. When a priest of Lord Vimúhla consigns the shrieking victim to the sacrificial flames, he is *lán* to his colleagues, to his Temple, to his clan and to the Imperium. He is *bússan* to the victim's family and supporters... in most cases. However, if the victim is a noble warrior, he and his clan will understand that sacrifice following capture in war is *lán*. His own *khomóyi* is to participate in his sacrifice, singing his death-song. Thus the terms *khomóyi*, *lán* and *bússan* cannot imply a universal "good" or "evil," for upon what shall we base our standard?

There is no "absolute moral good" or "absolute moral evil" in Tsolyáni experience, who believe that only one's responses to one's environment, upbringing and principles can be seen in this world. To give is not necessarily "good," nor is to take necessarily "evil." To love is intrinsically no better than to slay. All depends on the individual instance. If to slay is "evil," then what of the "good" being who must kill animals and plants (and these have as much life and being as does he) in order to live? What of the noble warrior of Lord Karakán who slays a soldier hostile to the state? His act is irrevocable,



yet history demonstrates the ephemeral nature of states and empires.

One may thus ask, if indeed there are no objectively demonstrable universals in human affairs, then are there no strictures laid upon all by the commandments of the Gods? Their perceptions are far vaster than those of humanity, so should not humanity gain guidance from Them as to how to live?

The response is that each Deity does indeed counsel certain principles and actions. Yet these are often at variance. Lord Thúmis recommends that knowledge be made available to all of humankind; Lord Ksárul orders knowledge kept within the Circles of His priesthood and used only for His ends. Each Lord of Stability in some fashion commends the achievement of a state of stasis; each Lord of Change insists upon the existence of constant alternations.

### *Heresy*

With so many religions, sects, Gods and philosophies, the idea that a particular concept is somehow "heretical" is difficult to arrive at. The Pariah Deities, with their shared desire to consume the Many Planes, all that ever was, is, or ever could be, are one of the few areas of heresy that the Tsolyáni readily agree upon.

Possibly one who claimed the Pavár texts were interpreted incorrectly might be considered a heretic, but such a particularly scholarly heresy would not attract much attention. One of Lord Vimúhla's worshippers who rescued a sacrifice for personal reasons might be judged a heretic who stole the God's goods. A priest of Lord Thúmis who hoarded a private cache of books and items of the Latter Times could likewise be labeled a heretic for violating his Temple's doctrine.

### *Absolution*

The Temples sanction fasting and other forms of spiritual absolution as a means of cleansing oneself of the effects of *bússan* deeds. Without a hard-and-fast concept of inherent wrong, acts are viewed within the context of the role each person plays in society, and judged as being either worthy or unworthy of that role.

It is often the personal integrity and dignity of the individual that calls for them to fast or otherwise act to absolve themselves of ignoble "stains upon their skeins." Certainly were a priest of Lord Thúmis to hoard knowledge, or consort with Demons of Lord Sárku; his need for absolution might be so great as to call for extreme societal intervention to cleanse his skein of stains. For the most part, however, Tsolyáni society is not concerned with what others might perceive as "iniquity." Instead, the Tsolyáni are concerned with the fulfillment of one's societal role. If the priest of Lord Thúmis serves his post of High Scholarly Priest with alacrity and dignity, then there is little real concern for his private foibles. Should he act ignobly in a public manner, then society and his Temple would call for public acts of contrition in the interest of maintaining the social order.

### *Stability and Change*

Neither Stability nor Change are *lán* or *bússan* in any universal sense. Those who seek Stability yearn for a status quo, an unchanging and unruffled flow of being. Those who support Change desire a universe that alters and varies, a place ever in the throes of mutable creation and annihilation.

Even the ultimate ends of the universe as promised by the Gods are neither *lán* nor *bússan* in and of themselves. Lord Hnálla strives to attain the final stasis of all-pervading Light; Lord Hrü'ü desires the chaos of the Dark, a constant wild and random change. There is nothing *lán* and *bússan* inherent in either of these states. Any value judgment lies in the wills of these two Gods.

### *The Temples*

Each Temple preaches its own doctrines and attracts followers according to their preferences. The resulting contrasts are striking. Lord Vimúhla, the Master of Flame, commands the sacrifice of slaves, felons, and foes upon His flame-altars. He does not preach the preservation of society, but the joys of burning, destruction, and violence. What is *lán* for Lord Vimúhla can be *bússan* for Lord Karakán and other deities. Great Sárku's adepts are "noble" when they reanimate the dead and hold grisly congress in the necropolis. Life after death is central to the Worm Lord's tenets, while others find corpses and lich-fires disgusting.

Lady Avánthe is the Patroness of fertility and the cycles of nature; Her rites are joyously sexual. Yet Lady Avánthe's own Cohort, Lady Dilinála, accepts no males into her clergy. She speaks of "woman for woman's sake alone." She thus allows female-female sex but not male-female unions.

Meanwhile, from Lord Karakán's view of *Khomóyi*, children are future soldiers. The warriors of Lord Karakán tolerate Lady Dilinála's virgins, the priestesses tolerate the warriors, and both tolerate Lady Dlamélish's hedonists, who consider sensuous delights to be the pinnacle of *Khomóyi*. The Emerald Goddess holds that existence is short and life is transitory. In Her view, one's duty is to experience the highest peaks and lowest depths of bodily pleasure!

It is not given to everyone to act with "nobility." This is too much to expect, for most men and women must live out average lives, obey the Gods when they can, and pay more attention to their stomachs and their matings than to high principles and philosophy. Nevertheless, most do make some attempt to live up to this instinct, within their limitations. It is the task of the priesthoods to exhort humanity to turn to the Gods and to live according to Their guidance. Nobility is the most satisfactory behavior, personally, intellectually, and emotionally, individually and societally. The virtue of humanity is thus to obey the Gods and to be ruled by this and other instincts. No more can be asked.

### *Genesis theories*

Like all else on Tékumel, there are many different beliefs about the source of the world and its creatures. Among

the cities and Temples of Tsolyánu there are rough areas of commonly held belief, shaped and tempered to each particular Tsolyáni subculture. The following descriptions are, therefore, of the most general type: the specifics for any given case are bound to be much more complex and shrouded in creed and dogma.

Many scholars deny any interest in the question at all: things, they say, have always been as they are now. This conclusion is hard to refute in light of the unchanging nature of history on Tékumel, the lack of fossils with which to establish a ladder of evolutionary development, and the fact that the ancients are all dead and dust in spite of their technology and glory.

Speculation is hampered and almost precluded by the immanence and reality of the Gods. Their looming presence leads to a cultural inferiority complex. As put forth by Pavár,

*"it is not for humanity to know the answers, and it is futile to do anything but obey the Gods,"*

The role of humanity is to act "nobly," and follow one's Skein of Destiny as best one can.

By and large, the Tsolyáni believe that the Deities brought all living things from the Planes Beyond (a theory more correct than its proponents might realize).

Lord Hnálla, others say, created the Egg of the World, and when the other Gods saw this They quarreled over its perfection and caused Him to drop it, whereupon some of its fragments were transformed into humans, others became the Shén, the Pé Chói, etc. Subsequently, the Gods made these creatures sapient that they might serve in the unending battle between Stability and Change.

According to the tenets of the priesthood of Lord Ksárul, humanity was called forth as one among many minions in the struggle against the rest of the Gods. For their part in this conflict, humankind was granted the Power of Enchantments.

#### Language

Salarvyáni Bednálljan is the accepted language of scholarship, literature and diplomacy within the Temples of Tsolyánu, and across national borders. The language of Thu'úsa serves a similar role between the Temples of Stability.

#### Legends

The line between religion and mythology is wide and gray, and contains many shades therein. While the legends of Tékumel are not in and of themselves statements of religious dogma, they are bound up inextricably with the tenets and beliefs of the culture in which religion plays a major role. Rather than laying forth the tenets of doctrine, legends serve to illustrate instances of doctrine in practice. For instance, while no Tsolyáni would claim to worship the Hero Hrúgga, still all would state that he exemplifies the epitome of "noble action" central to the Tsolyáni ethos, and his exploits demonstrate the relationships between the Gods and humanity. If a man is faithful and acts nobly the Gods

will reward him, and implicitly, if he does not, he will be duly punished.

Therefore it is well that a compendium of theological doctrines includes also some mention of the central legends of the Five Empires.

#### *The Battle of Dórmoron Plain*

The legend of the Battle of Dórmoron plain is set forth in several epic poems, including "The Lament to the Wheel of Black," and "The Song of the Reaper of Sighs." These describe the basic theology and ethos of Tsolyáni culture in a storytelling fashion, and proceed roughly as follows:

In the "Time of the Gods," before Tékumel was yet created, Lord Ksárul was the youngest of the Gods, a brilliant and ambitious deity of great cunning and power. Through His arrogance and impatience, He came to strive for mastery against His Fellows, particularly the Lords of Stability. His allies included the Demons of the Dark, the Dwellers in Shadow, the Spirits of the mythical aerial realm of Tu'unkélmú, and later, after Tékumel's creation, even certain humans and nonhumans (e.g. the Mihállí).

At first Lord Ksárul's foes were only the Lords of Stability, the Gods Hnálla, Avánthe, Thúmis, Karakán, and Belkhánu, together with Their Cohorts. As the struggle drew on from age to age and dimension to dimension, the other Lords of Change (the Gods Hrü'ü, Vimúhla, Sárku, and Dlamélish, plus Their Cohorts) perceived that Lord Ksárul's ultimate objective was His own personal mastery over all of the continua. Lord Vimúhla and Lady Dlamélish became neutral, while Lords Hrü'ü and Sárku continued to support Lord Ksárul. In the end, however, They also saw that Lord Ksárul's victory meant Their extinction or expulsion from the Many Planes.

A compact was then made with the Lords of Stability, but it was agreed only that Lord Ksárul would be contained and weakened, not destroyed. The legends speak of the Armageddon of the Gods, the great Battle of Dórmoron Plain (not the present Dórmoron Plain in Mu'ugalavyá, no matter what local folk say). Lord Ksárul's minions were defeated at this battle and were driven forth from this universe, while the Doomed Prince Himself was brought low and captured, imprisoned in the Blue Room.

The Nine Gods then erected walls around the Blue Room to prevent Lord Ksárul from escaping or His followers from rescuing Him. It is said that there are ten such walls, but the builder of the tenth is never named and is referred to only as "the One Other." In order, from innermost to outermost, the Gods Hnálla, Hrü'ü, Karakán, Vimúhla, Thúmis, Sárku, Avánthe, Dlamélish, Belkhánu, and also "the One Other" erected these walls. The Cohorts of the Gods are named only as "assisting" Their masters in the forming of these walls.

From entertainer to entertainer, clan to clan, and Temple to Temple, the recounting of this legend shifts to favor the sentiments of the teller and the audience. A worshipper of Lord Karakán might exclaim on a thing's antiquity by saying "This has existed since Lord Karakán won the victory at the Battle of Dórmoron Plain!" This

in turn might prompt a Ksáruł worshipper to object that "My Lord Ksáruł was defeated by treachery: the other Gods betrayed the Prince and imprisoned Him in the Blue Room!" Such disagreements are unavoidable and are allowed under the Concordat, as long as they do not degenerate into violent altercation.

#### *Hrúgga, Hero of the Age*

The eternal hero and mythological protagonist, Hrúgga is the epitome of the Tsolyáni: courageous, noble, proud, and capable. His exploits include the legendary battle with the Demon Qu'ú upon Dórmoron Plain; scaling the insurmountable slopes of Thénu Thendráya peak; and gambling with the Lady Avánthe until he won "all the world, and half as much again, after which he demonstrated his nobility and sense of place by deliberately losing it all back to Her. Hrúgga's legend is ancient, found in engravings from the Bednálljan Era and before.

#### *Súbadim the Sorcerer*

The legendary Undying Wizard who sought the broken shards of the Egg of the World upon the magical slopes of Thénu Thendráya Peak. With the exception of Hrúgga, most figures and tales of Tsolyáni legend have their source in the Time of No Kings, the dark millennia following the fall of Éngsvan hlá Gánga.

#### *Metállja the Wizard*

Ruler of the Unstraightened City, and of his followers, the Blasphemous Accelerators of the legendary city of Onchósh Chíran.

#### *Girigámish*

Legendary priest of Lord Ksáruł whose "Visitations of Girigámish" speak of the cosmic landmarks: the Nine Pylons of the Barrier Gods, the Gate of Iron Fangs, and the River which Flows into Eternity.

#### *Pendárte of Khéiris*

Said to have entered the southwest quadrant of the Demon Planes, there to confront the inconceivable Rū'ütlánesh himself and win back the abducted Princess Ssáneleth of the city of Purdánim.

### Magic

Although most Temple academies teach Other-Planar "sorcery," not every student has the talent to master it. One needs more than just willpower or "psychic ability." Meditation without guidance is as useless as a cart without a driver. The beginner must study magical theory and develop those mind-sets that draw power from the Space Between. Students say that the sensation is like raising one's head and staring into the darkness of an attic: one sees unexpected shapes and shadows. These shapes must be "grouped," "connected," and "bridged," and the resulting constructs "energized" by spell gestalts that one learns by rote. Without these "circuit-boards," Other-Planar power would be more uncontrolled and undisciplined than a bolt of lightning.

Some spells are purely "psychic:" mind-sets that are memorized, practiced, and reproduced as swiftly as thought itself. Other spells are "ritual," requiring incantations, diagrams, gestures, chalk, precious stones and metals, paper, inks, wax, and a veritable "wizard's bag" full of odd substances. Also needed are a sure hand, a good memory, skill in mime and gesture, and a modicum of musical talent (in order to modulate the voice precisely for incantations).

In theory, both types of magic are straightforward. In practice, they are complicated by Other-Planar factors that often cannot be put into human words. For example, it is very difficult to open a Nexus Point into a nearby Plane: one cannot easily travel from a Plane where one has just wiggled a big toe to a Plane where one did not. Experts attribute this to "unattainable parabolas within the harmonic progression." It is harder to establish an "arc" between two nearby Planes than it is to travel halfway across the Multiverse to a completely alien Plane. Whatever the reason — and whatever jargon one chooses to use — this seems to be a fact.

Spells pull power through from the formless chaos of the Space Between the Planes, shape it according to the patterns taught by the Temples, and manifest it on one's own Plane. These manifestations vary from phantasms, to bolts of energy, to the creation or transmutation of substances, to healing, to the opening of nexus points, to almost anything one can imagine.

### Magical Research

Few persons are born who can develop new spells or modify old, and these persons are believed "granted" spell-knowledge by the Gods Themselves. Temples do not encourage spell development and experimentation, because the practice is fraught with hazards. All the basic spells have already been invented, meaning that any spell development must occur in more difficult and dangerous areas.

Unknown limitations exist regarding the manipulation of the "points" and "connectors" of the Planes Beyond that can cause a spell to fail. The hazards of failed spells are significant: many will run out-of-control, threatening not merely the spellcaster, but the area surrounding the temple. An extremely common side effect of such failures is the production of volumes of a sticky pale-pink substance. Scholars believe that this adhesive entirely fills some "nearby" Plane, and "leaks through" quite easily. Such leaks are extremely difficult to stop once begun.

Spell experimentation also seems to attract unwanted other-planar attention. Where a spell cast in an orderly fashion seems to pass largely unnoticed, certain creatures and demons of the Planes Beyond are drawn by the poorly controlled flailing-about of spell experimentation. The hazards of attracting the attention of demons should not require further elaboration.

Spell development is necessarily restricted to the most learned scholars in the Empire. These mighty persons have been known to comment that by the time one has

learned enough to begin attempting to create new spells, one knows better than to try.

### Medicine

The physicians of the Five Empires are well aware of the theory of contagion. A sick person may be quarantined within his own room or house, and an infected locale may be burned by order of the authorities — sometimes with patients still alive within it. The "germ theory" is not known, however. Illnesses are spoken of as though they were low-level sentient beings: a malady "resides" in a person; it "touches" him and "travels upon his person;" it "strikes with malevolence;" and if it is cured, one says that it "became affrighted and has fled." Medicines are referred to as "poisons for diseases," just as arsenic is a poison for the human body.

Disease is thus not a part of the religious context. The Gods do not bring disease in retaliation for past sins. No one would think to pray for relief from an illness. Instead, sickness is a sort of invisible animal that "seizes its victims" and must be dispelled by specific "poisons" or by sorcery, just as one rids oneself of a larger foe. The Gods can indeed be called upon to help: they may be asked to weave a better strand into one's Skein of Destiny. They can cause one to find a good physician, find the money needed for a treatment or a spell, or see that an efficacious "poison" for the malady is obtained. This is seen as being much the same sort of divine assistance vouchsafed a warrior: he may be given a better weapon, the skills to defeat his enemy, or the luck to strike just at the right moment, but the God is not expected to strike the enemy down.

### Metaphysics

The universe, says the Engsvanyáli philosopher Pavár of Gánga, may be likened to a great tree extending from roots at the beginning of time to its highest fronds at the end. The Tree extends along the time-line from Creation to the Final Leaf at the Terminus. There is nothing before or after the Tree, and no possibility of there being other, similar "trees." Pavár does not speak of the origin of the universe itself, although creations and origins within it are copiously discussed.

#### *The Tree of Reality*

The trunk of the Tree of Reality contains those Planes of Existence that are primary and most probable. The larger branches are those major "bundles" of Planes which have split off due to events occurring at one or another "decision node." Lesser branches are minor time-lines, and these in turn are diversified into still smaller Planes as they spread farther and farther away from the main trunk. The leaves that grow from each branch are pocket universes, each with its own reality. Some are tiny "bubble-verses," while others are almost as extensive as those of the main trunk itself. Each has its own specific contents: suns, planets, creatures, and all the rest. Some are empty void; others are crammed full of matter. Between the Planes lies the amorphous void of the Space Between, filled with formless, roiling power.

At this point Pavár's metaphor falters: the branches of the Tree of Reality, he says, have a tendency to turn and grow back into the trunk or branch from which they split. They thus coalesce into the larger time-line again. Pavár likens this phenomenon to rivulets that wander away from a stream only to rejoin it later. Those leaves and branches that fail to re-enter the Tree become Shadow Worlds: Planes of Unreality that eventually become tenuous and dissipate into formlessness.

#### *The Many Planes*

Each part of the tree — the trunk, every branch, every twig, and even the smallest leaf — consists of infinite sub-Planes, like the layers of an onion. Each of these differs minutely from its neighbors. Some "decision node" originally caused them to diverge, but not enough to split them into separate "bundle-branches." The difference between two neighboring "layers" may be infinitesimal: on one such Plane a fruit-fly chooses the larger of two melons on which to feed, versus another Plane where it lands on the smaller. A leaf falls unseen in the forest on one Plane, while on another it stays on the tree for yet awhile.

The larger branches are quite distinct: e.g. a Plane upon which humanity did not survive the Time of Darkness, versus another on which no life at all ever evolved upon Tékumel; versus another where humankind dwells in a peaceful Utopia; versus still others where one of the nonhuman races holds sway. An infinity of Planes means exactly that: an infinity of possibilities, an infinity of realizations, an infinity of nodes and layers and branches. The human mind cannot conceive of infinity; yet we can name it, catalog it, and deal with it to some extent.

#### *Time*

Unlike in certain other doctrines, time is not a dimension. In a three-dimensional model, temporal duration may be considered a fourth dimension; in a four-dimensional universe, time can be the fifth, etc. The Tekumeláni do not hold this view; Pavár says time is a "piling up;" Súbádim the Sorcerer refers to it as a "density." Time is thus not a dimension in itself but rather the "duration" of the multi-dimensional whole. One can travel "crosswise" from Plane to Plane as far as one wishes, out to the enigmatic Pylons, where the Planes begin to drift and twist into patterns unbearable to the human eye. One can also journey backwards or forwards along the Tree's mighty trunk, or upon a single branch. Here there are limitations, for unguessable reasons: travel into the past is limited to about sixty thousand years, while one can visit the future (and there is an infinity of futures, requiring careful navigation indeed!) as far ahead as one wishes, out to the very apex of Time itself, the Termination, the end of the sidereal universe, where the College of the Undying Wizards sits brooding, bathed in the dull bronze light of the final sunset of the world. Beyond this none can go.

#### *Inter-Planar Travel*

The concept of a multi-planar cosmos is not new; philosophers of many places and times have postulated it before. Their musings would have remained idle theory

had not someone on Tékumel (or another of the "thin-skinned" Planes) discovered the means to achieve interplanar (and temporal) travel. Some ancient sage developed innate psychic powers and applied the techniques of "ritual magic" to open a "nexus point" between the worlds. Successors contacted and learned from such "Plane-traveling" races as the Mihállí, and, to some extent, the Chíma. These species possess senses different from our usual six, and their formulations of dimensionality are alien to ours.

#### *Nexus Points*

Nexus points are not creations of human magic but rather naturally occurring phenomena: when perceptible, they appear as shimmering, dull-gray ovals hanging in space. Some are large enough to admit three humans abreast, while others are too tiny to be entered at all. Some open directly into other worlds; others are twisted and dangerous, leading to terrifying, distorted places where nothing lives — not life as we know it, anyway. Some are fixed in relation to their own Planes, while others "drift" in the unimaginable tides of Other-Space. Still others are nothing more than weak points in the "Skin of Reality" that a mage can find and penetrate.

Some Planes have "barren" regions: "dead zones" where nexus points do not exist and interplanar energy cannot be employed, even by a highly skilled mage. Other areas are fertile, allowing power from the Planes Beyond to leak in easily, as water seeps through a cloth. Nexus points are found on every Plane but do not all lead to the same places: some take the mage only a short distance temporally, spatially, or across the Planes; others transport the traveler halfway across the Multiverse! Often one must "hop" from one Plane to a second, then to a third, etc., to reach a given destination. A nexus point may sometimes open of itself and "swallow up" the unwary. Great caution is advised: a nexus doorway may open into a "safe" location, or into solid rock or the heart of a sun! (Fortunately, there are spells that let the experienced traveler see what lies on the other side of a nexus point before venturing to open it.)

#### *Skeins*

The Skein of Destiny and the Weaver of Skeins are cultural metaphors employed by the Tsolyáni, but none would suggest that there are "real skeins." Tsolyáni favor these concrete representations of abstract concepts. For instance, within the Hall of the Eight Hundred Obeisances at Avanthár is a towering sculpture which manifests the splendors of the Tsolyáni Imperium, traces its origins back to the Gods, and sets forth details of its administration and military prowess — all in a 7 meter high "tree" of blue, red, and black glass, silver, sapphires, and golden nodules.

Just as this sculpture represents abstract concepts in a physical, artistic form, so the Weaver of Skeins and the Skein of Destiny represent a metaphorical form of the vicissitudes of life. And just as the Tsolyáni do not worship Hrúgga, so do they accept and employ — but not worship — the metaphorical Weaver.

#### Numerology

The Temples of Thúmis and Belkhánu, as well as those of the Dark Trinity explore the arcane associations of the Deities with the Secret Names of All Things through the practice of Numerology. The Arts of Knowing, Averting and Harmonizing are the means by which names are analyzed for their associations with the Gods. *Knowing* involves summing the values of the letters of a name and analyzing the results. *Averting* involves further summation until all the essence of a name is digested into one number that displays the God associated with that name. *Harmonizing* is a process of further arcane analysis, striving to reach the exact harmonic of the God with the Inner Eye of the Mind.

#### The Soul

Engsvanyáli theologians state that every living entity consists of five parts or "selves," each of which has a separate identity and a certain degree of independence from the rest.

#### *Bákte*

The first of these is the *Bákte*, the physical body. This is that part of a being which is born, lives, grows, dies, and returns to dust.

#### *Chusétl*

The "Shadow-Self," this is the sleeping counterpart of the waking person, the wanderer in dreams and illusions, and the far-traveler of astral projection. When the individual dies, the Shadow-Self perishes as well.

#### *Hlákme*

The conscious mind, the intellect, the "I-ness" of being. After death, the *Hlákme* remains in the tomb, hovering near its bodily shell forever in dreamless sleep unless returned to the corpse by necromancy.

#### *Pedhétl*

Termed "The Enemy," this is a mindless, inchoate bundle of raw instincts, lusts, fears and desires. It is the source of all emotion and passion and the motivating energy behind all action and ambition. The *Pedhétl* has been likened to a vessel which holds the individual's measure of other-planar power, it is the reservoir which one taps when one casts a spell. When the being dies, the *Pedhétl* returns to the "sea" of force which lies between the planes.

#### *Balétl*

The Spirit-Soul, it is the part of a being that journeys on after death to the Isles of the Excellent Dead and thence to the Farther Shores of the Paradises of Teretané. As it travels, the Spirit-Soul sheds its burden of identity and memory in order to be born anew upon ever more distant planes of consciousness. The spells of the medium are thus not efficacious if the Spirit-Soul has been too long upon its pilgrimage: it is impossible to contact one who has been dead for more than six months, although some notable exceptions have been recorded.

Of all the five "selves," only the last has any final goal or destination. There are those who claim that the *Balétl* undergoes a spiral cycle of rebirths before emerging again as an entity upon this Plane. Others hold that the Paradises of Teretané are the final haven, while yet others speak of an eventual amalgamation into the Perfect Light of Hnálla or the Ultimate Dark of Hrüü — whichever the spirit sought in life.

Note that there is no concept of "sin" or "damnation" in this system. The priests of Lord Belkhánu (the most reliable authorities on the Afterlife) do state, however, that the many stages of the Afterlife are but further "bubble universes" within the Sea of Being, and that not only the Isles and the Paradises but also the special heavens and hells established by the Gods for those devotees who have exceptionally pleased or offended them are but Planes like this one.

#### *The Afterlife*

The Tsolyáni are not much concerned with what follows Death, deeming the Temples of Lords Belkhánu and Sárku to be the appropriate custodians of such knowledge.

The heavens and hells of the Gods exist as Planes in themselves, as do the dim lands of ghosts and darkness, and those happier Planes called the Isles of Teretané, through which the spirit-souls of the dead must pass before being reborn into yet other incarnations. All exist, and all are reachable by those who know the way.

The priests of Lord Belkhánu speak of the Further Shores, the Paradises of Teretané. But none can tell the requirements for admittance there, and none can say with surety whether these are not simply further and further Planes Beyond.

There are scholars who claim that the traveling of the spirit-soul is circular: after a circumambulation of the eons one comes again to this Plane and is reborn.

Others describe the journey as not so much circular as spherical: one returns to this Plane, but each spirit-soul goes by a different great circle around the sphere.

A few, considered heretics by the adherents of Lord Belkhánu, claim that the journey is random and that each spirit-soul takes a random path of its own, some returning soon to this Plane, some after many centuries, and many never again.

One thing is certain: our advenrurings to the Isles of the Excellent Dead and our eventual destinations have nothing to do with our activities or qualities in this life. Not even the hierarchies of Lord Belkhánu speak of patterns or purposes in this matter. Not all of our piety or prayers, neither our deeds nor our failings, neither our wealth nor our stations, have aught to do there. Emperor and pauper, priest and warrior, slave and merchant, all travel thither alike and none can know the itinerary.

There are only two means of avoiding the journey to the Isles. One is to die utterly: to be slain by a God or Cohort, to be dispatched or ingested by a Demon, or to be killed by that terrible incantation known as the Gray

Hand. Thus, the destruction of the spirit-soul is one method of avoiding the Isles.

When this occurs, the mind is also annihilated, and the corpse cannot then be re-animated. Only if a Demon itself chooses to return the individual to perform some task can the spirit-soul return for a time, but those slain by a God or Cohort and those upon whom the Gray Hand has been used are gone forever. This is why the summoning of Demons and their ilk is so perilous: one risks not only life and limb in this Plane, but also one's future in all of the Planes of the hereafter! Can wealth and power be worth such a hazard?

The second way of evading the Isles is to be taken directly to one of the special paradises or hells of the Gods or Their Cohorts. Each Deity possesses a paradise for those who have striven ardently and well, and whose deeds have been so splendid as to come to the notice of even a God. Similarly, each of these Beings maintains a particular hell for those wretches who have angered Him or Her exceedingly and are deserving of Divine Retribution, just as a man may take special delight in smashing a little *Drí* which has had the audacity to bite him.

#### **Temple Rituals**

It is impossible to describe each ritual of each temple in detail, because each temple differs from city to city, time to time, place to place, and social rank to social rank. It is anticipated that many persons studying the theology and ritual of Tsolyánu will find this fact a disappointment. Unfortunately, to describe each temple in such detail would take a mountain of paper as high as the Golden Tower itself, and by the time such a work was completed its first pages would be obsolete.

The culture of the Five Empires operates without the homogenizing influence of instantaneous communication. All but the most urgent Imperial announcements are written on parchment, handed to runners or Imperial officers, and delivered as mail. Additionally, there is no central authority dictating creed and dogma within the temples. The Council of Priesthoods is more an administrative than a theocratic body, and each temple in each region holds dear its traditional practices of worship.

Thus regional traditions and influences predominate in most temples, and dictate everything from the theocratic titles of the priests, to the structure of its rituals, and the words chanted in praise of its God. For example, the matriarchal northern culture dictates a more dominant role for females in the temples than is present in the south. And however devoted to Vimúhla are the residents of both Tumíssa and Fasíltum, the temple of Vimúhla in one city is going to follow its ancient rites, regardless of what is being practiced by its distant sister.

It is possible, however, to outline the broad structure of Tsolyáni temple rituals, with characteristic examples where this is appropriate. Daily rites differ from temple to temple in ways that can often be determined by common sense alone.

### *Tunkúl-gongs*

Each temple possesses a strongly buttressed edifice containing its great cylindrical bronze bell, the *Tunkúl*. The *Tunkúl*-gongs are rung to announce the ceremonies, and the notes of the bells are recognized by the people of the city and are used to tell the time. The huge *Tunkúl*-gongs are hung vertically, and rung by means of long wooden strikers, akin to battering rams, swung on chains and padded to various degrees on the striking end. Teams of temple priests (usually junior Ritual priests and those born tone-deaf) grasp handles on either side of the striker and swing it against the gong. The proud, periodic calls of the *Tunkúl-gongs* are a hallmark of Tsolyáni cities, which are said to "ring with the voices of the Gods."

Each gong is constructed to "speak" in a tone characteristic of its Temple. The *Tunkúl-gongs* of the Temple of Dilinála are usually higher in pitch and lighter in tone than those of the other Temples. Those of the Temple of Hrü'ü are deep in pitch and rich in tone, rung by more heavily padded strikers to give a lower and subtler sound that lingers for a great while. And the gongs of Lord Sárku's Temple are the lowest of all, a great deep groaning, "BOOM." The gongs of His counterpart Lord Belkhánu have a sweet, distant call with a long, mellow ring. And as one might correctly guess, the *Tunkúl-gongs* of the Temple of Karakán have a loud, brash, "military" voice, accompanied by drums and trumpets challenging their worshippers to raise their own voices in praise of the God of Noble War.

Called by the gongs, the worshippers gather in the temple courtyard, and the priests begin the rituals.

### Music

There is usually music, provided by Ritual priests who choose musical specialties. Other priests enter carrying censers or images of the God or Aspect. Most Ritual priests remain in their specialty fields throughout their careers — Ritual musicians, cantors or celebrants, etc. — while advancing into the more significant roles within the worship according to seniority, skill, and the political machinations common to any large human organization.

### Incense

The worshippers shuffle in and seat themselves or kneel on mats, with the lower classes standing around the edges of the hall and in back. Since many temples are quite old, their halls are often smaller than would be ideal, so the press of the crowd can get quite intense. Given the great heat and humidity of most Tsolyáni cities, incense has both religious and practical application in these crowded halls.

There are many varieties of incense that have no particular religious significance and simply provide ambiance and "atmosphere." Others are unique to a given temple or a particular ritual, sometimes a characteristic blend of commonplace scents, others derived from particular flowers, barks, or herbs by secret methods. Geography is a significant factor, with incenses

derived from the flora of a particular area being expensive to import elsewhere in the Five Empires.

### Flowers

Along with music and incense, the temple may be adorned with flowers, in garlands and vases and piled as offerings on the altars. The "lightning-of-Karakán" flower decorates His temples, recognizable by its twisted "lightning stem" and red, pointed, poinsettia-like petals. Soft, grey *Tetél* flowers are sacrificed to Lord Thúmis and strung in garlands or worn as crowns by young girls and boys. Typically, flowers of blue, purple, or green will adorn temples to Lord Ksáru, Lord Hrü'ü or Lady Dlamélish respectively, but the particular blossoms employed will vary from place to place around the empire according to what is available in a given area.

### Inner Ceremonies

The body of each temple's ceremonies varies considerably, but includes praises to the God, the offerings of sacrifices, and requests for the favor of the deity after His or Her own fashion. When the chanting and music of the public ceremonies is complete, the common folk are free to partake of light refreshments sold in the temple courtyard, or to depart. Meanwhile, the highest individuals of each crowd are escorted inwards to the inner-public ceremonies. These inner-public shrines are available to the upper classes and also to those of the lower classes who can afford the copious bribes necessary to enter. These inner-public ceremonies are not to be mistaken with the inner-temple ceremonies, which are usually for temple clergy alone.

Within the inner temple are shrines to particular Aspects of the God. On certain holy days, a great ceremony might be held before that day's Aspect. And under certain astrological conditions a ceremony might take place before a certain shrine. Otherwise the Aspect worshipped is that considered the patron of the particular temple, city, or region.

### Regional differences

Worship and temple services differ from place to place and time to time around the Empire. For example, the upper classes do not labor, and their schools are underway the year around. Therefore, rituals and prayers for a successful school year, offered within the Temples of Lords Thúmis, Ksáru and their Cohorts, take place periodically as students enter the various levels of schooling throughout the year.

Among the rural classes who labor in the fields, the curriculum is guided by the harvest, so ceremonies for a successful school year take place only twice a year, after the harvest and after the planting, when new students enter the rural centers.

Among the coastal clans, the sea, and the movement of the schools of fish guide the curriculum instead. Like the field laborers, their ceremonies for a successful school year take place only two or three times a year, but these are at various times of the year as dictated by the currents, the weather, and the fish.

Hence to say that for the Temples of Thúmis or Ksáru that there is a "ritual for a successful school year" is to either be so vague as to be useless, or so complicated as to take excessive time to explain. The same holds true for many of the rituals observed by other Temples in other locations, and the student of such details is urged to contact the Temple in question regarding the particulars.

### Sacrifice

One sacrifices out of respect to the God, and the greatest sacrifice is Life, but each God accepts different forms of sacrifice. Lord Thúmis accepts *Tetél*-flowers, which interest no other God. Lady Avánthe takes many fruits and flowers, and sometimes seed. Lord Hnálla is held in special reverence for He is the mightiest of the Gods of Stability; He accepts sacrifices of white flowers, clear crystals such as quartz or diamond, and white stones.

After sacrifice, burnt offerings are reduced to ash, and flowers, fruits, vegetables, and meats will rot and be discarded or burned unless the priests of the temple act quickly to preserve or consume them (and for small, distant or impoverished temples this is sometimes necessary). Gems and coin are collected and added to the Temple coffers. The sacrifice of these items is significant as an act on the part of the faithful: the eventual disposition of the items themselves is not important to the God.

Sacrifices are conducted to appease the Gods and show respect, submitting oneself to the God by sacrificing something of real value. The Gods do not care about individuals and particular sacrifices, nor do They accept sacrifices "in exchange" for favors or blessings. If one's child is dying, sacrificing a dozen slaves to the Gods is not expected to make a difference. Instead, one sacrifices because such an act is what one should do, an expression of the place of humanity in the great Skein of All Things. Of course, this theological truth does not prevent the desperate and the uneducated from making special sacrifices in search of rewards and favor from the Gods.

### Secular Rituals

#### *Birth rituals*

All Tsolyáni births are registered at the Palace of the Realm, the bureaucratic offices of the Imperial government. If the family belongs to the upper classes or aristocracy, the infant's astrological chart is drawn up and the parents' clansmen begin to consider possible marriages for the child almost before the mother is out of labor. Birth festivities are elaborate, lavish, and as costly as the family's budget will permit: anywhere from 10 *Káitars* for a poor peasant to 10,000 or more for a scion of nobility.

The southern portions of the nation are generally patriarchal, and the northern portions of Tsolyánu and the nation of Yán Kór are generally matriarchal. Thus in the south the birth of a boy is celebrated by feasting, the giving of gifts by the parents to their clansmen and friends, and gifts by the latter to the infant in return. A girl born to a southern clan is given a less luxurious welcome into the world, but still provides her parents

with the occasion to spend some money, give a small feast, and give and receive gifts from relatives and friends. These emphases are reversed in the northern areas.

The actual enthusiasm with which a newborn is greeted is guided by these traditions, but not bound by them. The Tsolyáni enjoy celebrations and would rarely look askance at a southern clan who enthusiastically welcomed a daughter, or vice-versa. Additionally, clan-history and traditions are more significant than geography: if one is a member of a traditionally southern clan which only recently (a mere 250 or 500 years ago) established a presence in the north, then one will adhere to more southern customs than one's neighbors.

The middle and lower classes emulate the customs of the wealthy insofar as they are able. The birth of a slave child is nothing more than another entry in the owner's record-book, however — and perhaps a cause for a visit from the tax collector.

Precise birth-times are recorded by priests of the clan and family's temple, and a specialist is summoned to delineate each upper-class infant's character, potential, and Skein of Destiny based on astrological signs.

#### *Khatunjálim*

The Five Empires bestow only "pet-names" until puberty, when a child is inducted into his or her clan and given a name.

The name choosing-ceremony is called the *khatunjálim*. The "*-jalim*" suffix is an ancient Engsvanyáli root for "to choose, select," also found in the name of the Rite of Choosing Emperors, "*Kolumejálim*." "*Khatun*" is both the Engsvanyáli and Tsolyáni root for "name," and "*kolum*" is the base root for "to rule."

*Khatunjálim* are usually performed at puberty or slightly thereafter, varying slightly from temple to temple, clan to clan, place to place, and period to period. In Jakálla, for example, most clans hold *khatunjálim* celebrations featuring food, wine, and entertainment. The Ninth Form of dress is commonly used for family and clan celebrations, but dress as high as the Nineteenth Form would be *de rigueur* for very high clan, very wealthy, and very ultra-snobbish and fashion-conscious aristocrats.

The subject of the celebration receives good wishes and small gifts from relatives and friends, and a priest of their faith may be asked to offer prayers and a small sacrifice. Worshipers of Lord Vimúhla may sacrifice a lock of the youth's hair on a flame altar, the "gentle deities" may prefer the sacrifice of a bit of bread and a morsel of meat from the feast, etc. An elder chosen by the candidate, the parents, senior clansmen, or all of the above then reads the new name from a scroll, and this is ceremonially taken to the record room and inserted into the clan's membership records.

In other locales, faithful clans gather in the temples of Ladies Avánthe, Dlamélish, or their Cohorts for the ceremonial deflowering of their youths upon an altar while parents, friends, and the priesthood fondly watch and applaud. In less sophisticated areas, those coming of



age may be given a willing and experienced love-slave of their preference, specially trained in these arts. Lords Vimúhla and Karakán both hold endurance rituals, including long quests into the desert and ceremonial "duels" which the candidate always wins (but wherein they can gain an impressive scar).

Of particular note are the Tlakotáni, who honor the God-Emperor more than other clans. Even the most rural "farmer" Tlakotáni clansmen will have a symbol of the Seal prominently displayed in their clanhouses.

For a Tlakotáni *khatunjálim* a symbol of the Seal is set up in a large hall or an open field, or wherever the celebration is held. The candidate and his or her peers all join in singing the rituals of homage to the Emperor. Then they jump over a low bonfire or brazier of coals, and pass through a representation of the Jade Arch made of colored paper. The name is officially given, and a representative of the Omnipotent Azure Legion (a fellow-clansman, in most cases) is called upon to "deliver the name to Avanthár." (This may or may not be done in reality.)

In cases of very high and very wealthy Tlakotáni — those nearest the Imperial sub-lineage — Avanthár may even send a member of the Omnipotent Azure Legion (from the local Palace of the Realm) with a gift of a gold coin, a gilded scroll with the candidate's name inscribed and illuminated with colors, and a little cake of Imperial incense (of the kind used in the Hall of the Petal Throne itself.) If the child is heir to lands or estates, their title deeds and documents are displayed in the feast-room, along with hereditary possessions (weapons, armor, *Káing*-standards, etc.)

During these occasions, children are encouraged to decide upon their professions; betrothals are finalized; and acceptance into various religious sects takes place. Additionally, it is often during the *Khatunjálim* that a promising Imperial heir is revealed, which alters the course of the ceremony considerably.

These adulthood rituals usually take place annually and include all children coming of age in that year. The details of these celebrations vary from clan to clan, and city to city, and reflect the religious and cultural characteristics of the clan.

### *Marriage rituals*

Marriage rituals vary by place, faith, and clan in Tsolyánu. In Tumíssa, for example, the bride and groom drink wine together from the same vessel; in Fasiltum the nuptial pair walks around a glyph on the floor — drawn in colored chalk, the symbol stands for the security of the household and the clan; in Béy Sü the bride ritually feeds the groom from a golden plate, and he then does the same for her; in Jakálla the couple are sprinkled with a fragrant saffron-yellow pollen as a celebration of sensuality and fertility. As with adulthood rituals, the characteristics and traditions of the participating clans guide the celebrations. In the case of inter-clan or inter-faith marriages, the desires of all parties must be considered. Planning such events is thus a complicated task, but across the centuries every possible combination has

occurred at one time or another, and records of these occasions can be referenced for assistance.

### *Death Rituals*

The priests of Lord Belkhánu are charged with the interment of almost all followers of the Lords of Stability, and most of the worshippers of the Lords of Change as well. A priest of an individual's particular sect may participate in the funeral rites if the family desires this. The exceptions are the Temples of Vimúhla and Karakán (who see to the burning of their dead) and the Temple of Sárku who attend to matters in an entirely different fashion.

### *Children of Uncertain Parentage*

When children are born to persons who are not married, matters are subject to negotiation. If the woman is important to her clan or to her temple, she may insist on the children being members of her own clan. In the north, her voice will carry quite a bit of weight. If the father is an unknown (a slave, a humble guardsman, a fellow clansman, etc.) the child will probably be left to her without dispute. If she doesn't want the child at all, he or she may end up a "poor relation" clan-member, working in one of the clan's crafts or businesses.

If the father is better known or more important, the children may be put into his clan (again, this is more likely in the south). A particularly handsome child (male or female) may also be handed over to one of the parents' Temples as a ward, to be educated and brought up as a priest or priestess.

These and similar questions often come before the courts of the Palace of the Realm since clans and individuals may disagree.

### *The Disabled*

The disabled remain the responsibility of their clans or are turned out to beg at the temple gateways. The Temples of Keténgku and Avánthe are generous in taking in the disabled of their faithful and offering them sanctuary and care.

# The Temples

The Temples of the Twenty Gods revealed by the priest Pavár are discussed in the following chapters. Theological information is reviewed first, divided into the Outer and Inner Doctrines of the Temple. The involvement of the Temple in the affairs of day-to-day life in Tsolyánu is then examined, including politics, businesses and military and clan relations. A calendar of holy days observed by the faithful of each God is presented, including all holidays observed nationwide, but omitting many regional events. The traveler is advised to contact the local Palace of the Priesthoods to learn of upcoming regional holidays. The calendar is followed by a list of the God's Aspects, any Demons who serve the God, and the Magic of the Temple.

## Theology

The Outer Doctrines are taught to the laity and demonstrated through rituals. The Inner Doctrines are the more scholarly (or secret) teachings of the Temple, and are reserved for clergy. While elements of Outer Doctrine may be known to any educated Tsolyáni, even those not members of a given Temple, the Inner Doctrines are usually the private domain of the clergy of that God. The doctrinal elements presented for each Temple will differ according to that Temple's philosophies. So, one chapter may discuss the Numerology of the Temple of Hnálla, while another chapter may omit the Numerology of the Temple of Avánthe, for She cares not for such things.

Students are taught the Outer Doctrines of their Temples before even considering the priesthood, and most are taught the basic Outer Doctrines of the entire Pantheon. The uneducated, the lower clans, and particularly the rural peasantry may know very little of any Deities but those found in their own clan-houses. Even then, their beliefs may be a muddle of true doctrine mixed with local beliefs predating the Scrolls of Pavár. For example, it is not surprising to find farmers sacrificing a young *Hmá* to Lady Avánthe in the spring, even though the Goddess does not accept blood sacrifice.

## Secular Activities

Every Temple is involved with the greater society of Tsolyánu in a number of ways. Each Temple engages in business both directly, through its holdings of land and other property, and indirectly, through clans faithful to the Temple. Additionally, Temples may fulfill important societal roles, overseeing the production of particular goods or services.

## Businesses

Every Temple has a hand in the agricultural life of the Empire, and owns broad tracts of land that are worked by peasant clans traditionally faithful to the Temple. Many Temples sponsor other businesses, or are the primary Temple of clans with particular specialties.

## Politics

It is said that no gathering of three persons contains less than seven different, conflicting factions: each individual, each possible pair, and the group as a whole. This saying reflects humanity's tendency to factionalize every aspect of life, and it is not surprising to find theological and political factions within and between each Temple.

## Clans

The list of clans that include worshippers of each God and support the Temple is by no means complete, and features only the most well-known clans which support the Temple. Clans whose names are italicized are not completely ecumenical, worshipping some subset of the Twenty Gods. Clans in bold text reserve their worship solely for the God and His or Her Cohort.

## Holidays

So much of the life of each Temple is focused upon localized needs and interests that there are comparatively few celebrations for a given Temple which are known and celebrated all across the Five Empires, or even universally within Tsolyánu. In addition to the holidays listed, every Temple has many regular celebrations, of both Inner and Outer Rituals, all during the year. In the larger cities one can be assured that on any given day there is a temple somewhere that is holding a holiday celebration.

## Aspects

Due to doctrinal differences between the Temples, the Aspects of the Gods are represented in a number of different ways. Where a Temple enumerates Its Aspects, the Aspect's number is given if it is known. For any given Temple only those Aspects that are generally accepted by all the regional temples will be given. In some cases individual, smaller, and localized Aspects may be mentioned, but there are so many variations that not all of these can be presented.

Finally, many Aspects have "Titles," which describe the Aspect's role within the sphere of Its God. For instance Lord Aluésh, an Aspect of Lord Hrüü, is called "The Singer of Powerful Melodies." In most cases an Aspect's Title will be listed on a separate line from Its name. However, some Aspects are rarely if ever referred to without their Title, such as Lady Avánthe's Aspect, Lady Nyéles the Wise. When this is the case the Aspect's Title is listed with the Name. Over time an Aspect's Title might become all or part of the Name itself. Lord Hnálla's Second Aspect, Chiráshin Tuléngkoi, illustrates this: His Name is simply Engsvanyáli for His Title, "The Shining Sun."

## **Demons**

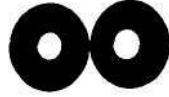
While the uneducated use the term "demons" to refer to almost any inimical or misunderstood phenomenon, the scholarly term refers to a specific type of creature, usually but not always native to the Planes Beyond. Demons are entities of Power, who draw some form of sustenance or energy from the Beings or Planes of their Patron Gods. The Scholar priests refer to the "Essence" and "Substance" of various demons, but these are inaccurate labels for poorly understood connections between a demon and its patron deities. Demons native to a Plane controlled by a particular God may be said to be of that God's "substance." Those whose goals and behaviors indicate an alliance with a given Deity are said to be of that God's "essence." But since the goals, alliances, and Planes of the Gods and demons are not truly within the grasp of mortal understanding, these terms are of little real value. What is known is simply that certain demons seem to ally themselves with or do the bidding of various Gods, and that these demons will usually respond more favorably to requests made by mortal worshippers of their patron deity.

## **Magic**

The mindset of the spell-developer affects the spell, hence spells tend to adhere to the interests of the Gods. A spell-developer is not going to be enthusiastic about using "ignoble" substances — a priest of Lord Hnálla is going to build spells using clear diamonds, quartz or glass, not red rubies. Finally, spells that do not "suit" a Temple will gradually disappear from the doctrinal education of its priests. Hence each Temple supports a collection of spells that tend to reflect its interests and philosophies.

# Hnálla

*The Supreme Principle of Stability, the Lord Whose True Name May Not Be Known, Master of Light, Foe of Change, The Illumination of All the World.*



Lord Hnálla seeks Light without Darkness, the refulgence of Essential Glory, and the ultimate presence of Changeless Radiance throughout the cosmos. He is the final goal towards which the other Lords of Stability strive, each in His or Her own less-perfect fashion. Lord Hnálla aids those who serve Stability, rewards those who establish and maintain the order of things, and provides for those who are industrious, pious, temperate, and of dignified mien.

Like a battlefield fought over by two ancient foes, the Universe is the focal point for the conflict of the two Great Principles: Stability and Change. The former strives for continuation, peaceful cycles of being, and continuing development to the final goal of utter changelessness. The latter seeks change, rebirth, violent alteration, and the ongoing destruction and rebirth of all that exists. This opposition is fundamental, eternal, and unforgiving; there can be no compromise. Should a balance occur, it is but for a moment, a teetering upon the brink of still more change, and even mightier conflicts along the path to the Goal.

Those who serve the Stability of Endless Light claim to have already won; Change, they claim, can alter all things but must in the end subside and become Stable. Darkness gives way to Illumination. The Supreme Principle of Change, Lord Hrü'ü, cannot gain victory. His transitions, meaningless flickering, and displacements cannot be Eternal by their very definition! If Change is eternal, then it is a Stable phenomenon, the very antithesis of what Lord Hrü'ü preaches! Thus Lord Hnálla seeks no other end but the maintenance of All That Is until the inevitable end of the One Light.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

#### Color

Lord Hnálla's color is a brilliant white, and clear substances and silver are also common.

#### Astrology

The heavenly body associated with Lord Hnálla is yellow-white Tuléng, the Sun.

#### Numerology

Lord Hnálla's number is one, signifying unity, power and the unification of all. One who would Harmonize with

the God must hold the letter "k" in the heart and mind, while gazing upon a diamond or pure transparent crystal.

#### Costume

Priests and priestesses of the God of Light garb themselves in vestments of purest white and skullcaps of silver. Their robes are adorned with polished silver plaques; golden medallions, glittering diamonds, and such pure crystals as will turn the light into a spectrum of a myriad hues. All colors are produced by Lord Hnálla's light passing through the world, and hence the spectrum, the rainbow, and the colors of the universe themselves are but the twisting and turnings of Light as it passes through the substance of the material cosmos.

Each of the fifty-one Aspects of the mighty Lord requires different garments, ornaments, and headdresses. Some require the priest or priestess to go nude, save for necklaces, anklets, bracelets and ropes of crystals hung about their person. Others require the wearing of elaborate costumes, with gleaming helmets, set with gems and adorned with the spectrum-like plumage of the beauteous *Khéshchal-bird*, and still more designs too numerous and grand to describe in words. The glyphs of the Aspects vary as well, each symbolizing the wondrous Being and Substance of Lord Hnálla's forms.

#### Rituals

Within the Temple of Hnálla are performed the most grandiose of all ceremonies, with bright white robes and crystal candelabra-style ornaments and lights. Many ceremonies are held out of doors, where sunlight striking the crystal ornaments and jewelry casts rainbow patterns all about.

The priests in their white robes pray in unison, marching out in the nave of the temple, burning the special *palán*-incense reserved only for this Temple and singing songs of praise.

There is no hymnal and the common folk do not participate in the song, choirs sing elaborate choral arrangements in ancient languages, such as Thu'úsa, Engsvanyáli, classical Tsolyáni, etc.

There are six basic daily ceremonies in the Temple of Hnálla. These are of course "outer" ceremonies, there being a wide variety of other rituals: those observed only on certain days, those observed only by certain temples, inner ceremonies, miscellaneous doctrinal rites at various times, etc. Do not succumb to the belief that the Temple of Hnálla ever rests! There are ceremonies at any given

moment during the day, and even rituals throughout the night.

Nonetheless, the *Tunkúl-gongs* ring six times throughout the day to call the faithful to prayers. These ceremonies take place at sunrise (The Coming in Glory), four *Kirén* after sunrise (The Expansion of Light), at midday (The Victory of the Master of Light), at the hottest part of the afternoon (The Ceremony of Brilliant Light), at sunset (The Encroachment of the Dark), and upon the rise of Gayél during the evening (The Viewing of the Creatures of Night).

The ceremonies of sunrise and midday are the most elaborate and joyful, and those at sunset and mid-evening the most somber, but all are grandiose in a manner characteristic of this mighty Temple.

The times of these ceremonies will differ from city to city by season and latitude, but all revolve around the rising and setting of the sun and the bright light of the day. A few of the more common names for these ceremonies are given, but these will vary from place to place: sometimes the names used are in Bednáljan or Engsvanyáli, sometimes the names are worded differently, etc. Worshippers of Lord Hnálla from distant cities will know by the time of day which ceremony is underway. Also, most local priests will understand if visitors refer to a ceremony as it is called in a foreign city.

#### *Death Rituals*

The Temples of Lords Hnálla and Thúmis bury their dead recumbent, with the body's hands crossed over its stomach.

The *Kòlumejálím*

It is in Béy Sü, the Center of the World and Capitol of the Cosmos, where the *Kòlumejálím* "The Rite of Choosing of Emperors" takes place. Lord Hnálla plays a major role, and many of His Aspects are concerned with specific rites and celebrations of the *Kòlumejálím*.

Imperial funerary rites involve Lord Hnálla's Temple only to a minor extent. Since the previous God-Emperor, Hirkáne Tlakotáni, was a worshipper of Lord Hnálla, the Temple was called in grand conclave to perform certain final rituals for His burial, but had He worshipped another, that Temple would have been called instead.

The last great Seal, "The Stone upon Which the Universe Rests," wished to be interred in Béy Sü, rather than in the catacombs below Avanthár. All of the Temples joined in transporting the sarcophagus to the Portal of the Land Beyond Life beneath the Necropolis of Béy Sü on the eastern side of the river, and so it was immured to await the End of All.

(Rumors have it that this circumstance was crucial to the escape of Prince Mridóbu Tlakotáni from the fortress of Avanthár. Thwarting then-Prince Dhich'uné's assassination attempt, Prince Mridóbu allegedly secreted himself within the very sarcophagus of the deceased God-King, having drilled concealed air-holes in the gilded exterior. Certain trusted supporters later freed him, or so the rumor has it. It is undeniable that after long absence Prince Mridóbu surfaced in Béy Sü in time to publicly

endorse newly-revealed Prince Táksuru Tlakotáni, a fellow Ksáru-worshipper, in his renegade bid for the Petal Throne.)

Following the interment, the High Priest of Lord Hnálla leads the High Council of the Priesthoods in the rites of the *Kòlumejálím*. The Council Hall itself is within the Temple of Hnálla in Béy Sü, where it remains sealed and silent until the death of a sovereign causes it to be used once again.

The Rite of Choosing, the *Kòlumejálím*, was established to strengthen and secure the Empire. Hereditary rule always fails because the children of a sovereign tend to become weak, foolish, and sapped by luxury and easy living. The Tsolyáni hold that an Empress or Emperor must be the strongest, cleverest, wisest, most ruthless, and most politically aware of all of the candidates.

All of the candidate heirs are summoned to the Temple of Lord Hnálla in Béy Sü where they take up lodging and gather their champions. Each is allowed a champion in as many as three contests since no one can be an expert in all skills.

On the date chosen for the *Kòlumejálím*, each candidate proceeds to the Temple of Hnálla in grand procession. Cohorts of troops, legions of musicians, contingents of priests and priestesses from each Temple, foreign ambassadors with their entourages, high nobles and notable persons, huge *Chlén-carts* bearing Imperial symbols on tall poles, choirs of children, and all of the inhabitants of the city join these processions according to their choices.

The *Tunkúl-gongs* roar, the crowds cheer, the trumpets shriek, and the gates of the Temple close as the candidates are taken inside. None may view the *Kòlumejálím* save the officials and priests appointed to do so; else there would be chaos. Singers, mimes, dancers, and sorcerers performing illusions and other tricks entertain the masses outside. Within, all is silent. The candidates stand upon the central dais in the Hall of Choosing, one by one, in order of their ages. Each declares his or her intention to accept the Gold, then lays a sword, a book, a white headband, and one purple *Dlél*-fruit upon the altar. One by one each candidate faces toward each cardinal point in turn, beginning with the north, and summons his or her rivals to appear.

The sequence of tests is arbitrary and selected by lot, as is the order and pairing of the heirs. The contests then take place before the Council. If a champion is called, they alone may enter the chamber to stand for their candidate. All others are excluded: no servants, no courtiers, no spouses or children. Only the guards of the Omnipotent Azure Legion are allowed. The tests are conducted with efficiency and speed to prevent rioting outside. Each candidate must enter all of the tests, using their three champions as best they can (in one or as many as three different contests).

When a candidate has completed a test, they leave the room by another door and are escorted, alone and unable to speak to their rivals, to a private chamber to wait. Two

new candidates are then selected and provided with weapons, books, or whatever is needed.

A loss in one trial does not mean that the *Kòlumejálím* is lost. Unless a candidate is slain or is so severely wounded that they call for the executioners, the contests continue. No physicians or healers are permitted, and a wounded candidate may have to endure many more tests with nothing but a simple cloth to stanch the blood. A candidate can declare themselves defeated at any time, of course, and is then executed by a speedy and relatively painless method.

The Council secretly records its scores for each test. When all of the contests are completed (usually 9, 10, or 12, depending upon the astrologers) the results are compared, and the heir who has won a majority of the contests is declared the winner. Abstention is not allowed. If there is a tie, the vote is taken over again. The contests themselves are never repeated. Should a tie persist, each council member draws lots against all the rest, and the winner then casts the deciding vote.

All of this is done with unutterable solemnity and dignity. The fate of the Empire may hang upon an unguarded word, a faulty choice, a parry when one should have struck, or some mistake in calculation.

Members of the Council cannot leave the chamber, sleep, or consume more than a loaf of *Dná-grain* bread and a cup of water until a winner is chosen. When all is over, the winning candidate is quietly conducted back into the Council Hall; the losers are led out one by one to face their doom. Most go bravely, singing their death-songs, but some have been known to require a squad of burly guards to bring them to their fates. Champions may choose to join their candidate, and many follow this noble path, but none are bound to do so. No one speaks until all of this has been finished, and the executioners have departed by another door. Then the hall explodes in applause, cheering, and shouts of "Long live the Seal!"

The *Tunkúl-gongs* sound again, and continue their wild outcry throughout the night and into the following day. Men and women dress in white — even those of faiths other than Lord Hnálla's — and there is feasting, drinking, and revelry on a scale no one could imagine. Usually five days and nights are passed while the sovereign-to-be makes final arrangements, says farewells, and prepares for the journey to Avanthár. Then the Temple's great, gilded palanquins are brought out of their storage chambers. A thousand slaves are selected to carry them, and on the morning of the sixth day the procession sets off toward the Citadel. All along the way folk stand to see their Emperor or Empress as He or She passes, high up like a God, dressed in Imperial finery and the colors of the Temple of His or Her faith. Thousands stand upon the hills behind, and the river is filled with boats and swimmers. Legion contingents march with the procession, each bearing its resplendent *Káing-standard*. Trumpeters, drummers, and dancers accompany the march, and caravans of carts laden with gifts and goods trundle along behind all. Even those who do not favor the Temple of the new Ruler join in the celebrations, for

who could be mean-spirited enough to dampen the revelry and the joy?

Upon reaching the village of Avanthár, on the eastern bank of the river, all disembark, and the new Ruler is escorted across the water by corps of soldiers from the Omnipotent Azure Legion. The Prelates, Legates, and other high persons of the State come down to greet the new Ruler, who is escorted up the many stairs into the Great Hall of the Petal Throne, where the Synod of the Court of Purple Robes awaits. The Sovereign greets these functionaries, advances up to the speaker's station just beneath the solid wall of translucent, carven petals of delicate-veined jade that make up the outer enclosure of the Petal Throne itself, and bows to the memory of their departed parent. No light burns behind the screen. Indeed, the Emperor's own hand will be the first to set flame to the lamp there.

The Supreme Commander of the Omnipotent Azure Legion then comes forward to divest the Emperor of all worldly garments, and He or She is led naked to the tiny door in the north wall. This leads into a labyrinth of passages and on into the Golden Tower itself. Here the Last Rites of Being Human are performed, and then the Servitors of Silence advance to escort the Emperor within. Once that door shuts, the Emperor is no longer a mortal, having become one with the Gods.

#### *Sacrifice*

Lord Hnálla is held in special reverence for He is the mightiest of the Gods of Stability. He accepts sacrifices of white flowers, clear crystals such as quartz or diamond, and white stones.

The Temples of the "Gentle Deities," Lords Hnálla, Belkhánu and Thúmis, have neither blood sacrifices nor carousals.

#### *Food Taboos*

The Temple of Hnálla ordains fasting as a penance for "ignoble" actions. Instructors usually order such penance for their students; by priests for penitents; and by individuals who seek absolution for themselves. These fasts can range from such simple measures as abstaining from "treats" to going for long periods with only a little water.

Some particularly religious individuals seek ascetic spirituality through long periods of fasting and prayer.

#### *The Afterlife*

Lord Hnálla promises His worthy devotees immediate translation into the Supernal Light of His Being, while His enemies are consigned to a Plane of Utter Darkness and Torment. Beyond these basic philosophies, one is advised to seek out a priest of Belkhánu for a thorough lecture concerning the Isles of Teretané and the Planes Beyond.

#### *History*

One of the most legendary emperors of Tsolyáni history worshipped Lord Hnálla. The fifth Seal Emperor, Trákonel I, "the Blazing Light," ruled from 139 to 195

A.S. (After the Seal). Emperor Trákonel sacked the cities of the One Other, repelled the fanatics of the Pariah Goddess, and drove the Hlüss from the southern shores of Tsolyánu. He laid the foundations of the shrine of Lord Hnálla in Béy Sü, and expanded the priesthood tremendously. Under his rule, monasteries, academies, and libraries were constructed all over the land. This same Emperor also developed the custom of Imperial seclusion within the fortress of Avanthár.

## The Inner Doctrines

### *Soul*

Of the Five Portions of the Soul, the Temples of Hnálla and Hrü'ü share an interest in the *Chusétl* (the Shadow-Self) and the *Balétl* (the Spirit-Soul), and their eventual dispositions in the Perfect Light of Hnálla (or the Ultimate Darkness of Hrü'ü). The journey itself does not matter, thus little of the theology of these Temples focuses upon particular behaviors on this Plane, excepting the overall desire for *lán* (noble) behavior as a means to the eventual end.

### *Language*

The Temple of Hnálla has no "secret tongue" (as does the Temple of Ksáru), but it does employ Thu'úsa, as an argot and as a "high tongue" (just as noble Engsvanyáli is the "high tongue" of the culture at large.)

Thu'úsa is a language originally spoken by a semi-tribal society in the Kurt Hills in Tsolyánu during the Time of No Kings. It has been resurrected by the Temples of Stability to write innumerable magical texts. Knowledge of Thu'úsa is usually limited to the higher clergy of the Priesthoods of Stability, but it is by no means "secret." Its peculiar text is written vertically and is referred to colloquially as "ladder writing."

### *Rituals*

While the Temple of Hnálla has no "secret" language, it does have inner ceremonies and inner rituals that are elaborate, lengthy (another characteristic of this Temple), and feature great amounts of sacrifice offered by the highest clans. People come for ritual blessings upon the new year, sacred relationships, clan contracts, and Imperial business, all of which are favored by the temple. All are brought within the temple for special consideration and blessings.

As with most of Pavár's Temples there are "inner rituals," and there are "Inner Rituals." The former are the private ceremonies conducted for the wealthy and powerful patrons of the temple, the latter are the purview of the priesthood alone.

## Temple Layout

The temples of Lord Hnálla are tall, high-arched, set with windows of colored glass and precious stones that transmit the Light in patterns and hues unimaginable to most mortals. Incense smokes upon high braziers of silver and filigreed gold; draperies and tapestries depicting the triumphs of the God hang from the pure white walls; mosaics of crystal and white marble swirl

across broad floors; stairways rise in stately grandeur to balconies and mezzanine floors, all the way to the dizzy, arching domes of the ceiling, decked with murals in all of the hues of the artist's palette. At the far end, the great nave ends before the altar dais. Stairways carpeted with white lead from either side up to the double-circle symbol of the God at the highest point in the chamber. Worshippers attired in white kneel here and there upon mats of carded white *Hmélu*-wool, adoring the Person of the Godhead. Silence is ordained for all, unless it is time for one of the six daily ceremonies. Then there is the sweet sound of the priests' chanting, the harmonious antiphony of the choir, the mumbling response of the devotees, and over all the deep, thunderous booming of the *Tunkúl-gongs* from on high in their mighty tower. Thus it is from one day to the next, from one century to another, for the many millennia since the founding of the Faith by the Beatified Pavár.

## Secular Activities

### Businesses

With its focus in the central valley of the Empire along the Missúma River, the Temple of Hnálla also has interests (through its faithful clans) in shipping along the Arjáshtra and Missúma rivers, trade between cities in the area (particularly Béy Sü and Jakálla), and the bureaucracy of the Empire (such as couriers and dignitaries traveling to and from Avanthár.) Economic changes affecting these interests would quickly come to the attention of this powerful Temple.

### Public Works and Services

The Temple of Hnálla's interest in shipping and trade in the Central Empire makes it an advocate on behalf of its clans urging the upkeep and enhancement of the *Sákbe*-roads in the area, and the maintenance of the rivers (dredging, etc.). Additionally, the sect called the Light of Wisdom Society employs the Temple's many shipping and mercantile contacts to distribute texts to distant rural areas. Otherwise, the Temple of Hnálla does not engage in many public works, leaving to Lord Thúmis His schools and to Lady Avánthe Her care for the indigent.

### Cities of Broad Influence

The Gods Hnálla, Karakán, and Avánthe are esteemed throughout the land, but are strongest in the central regions of Tsolyánu along the Missúma River.

In any sizable city there will be more than one temple to a given god. In Béy Sü, for instance, there are more than half-a-dozen temples to Lord Hnálla. In such a city, there will be a central, or largest, or most respected temple of all the temples to that God in the city. This is the temple referred to when reference is made to "the" Temple of Hnálla in a given city. Such temples are almost always traditional, conservative temples, devoted to the God or Goddess, and possibly one very popular and traditional Aspect. The smaller temples might be more "liberal" in their interpretation of doctrine (adhering to philosophies only five hundred or a thousand years old), and might

also be devoted to a particular, usually regional, Aspect of the God.

### *Béy Sü*

Within the Temple of the Illumination of All in Béy Sü is displayed the towering, 6-meter-high "fountain" of clear crystal, gold, pale ivory, and winking diamonds which depicts the entire theology of Lord Hnálla and the eventual victory of Stability.

Additionally, certain scholars of the Temple of Hnálla at Béy Sü have devoted themselves to the subject of the Fall of Éngsvan hlá Gánga and the rise of the Second Imperium.

### *Jakálla*

The Temple of Hnálla in Jakálla is famed for its Shrine of the Second Aspect, *Chírashin Tuléngkoi*, "the Shining Sun."

### *Sokátis*

In Sokátis a giant crystal called Méntukoi hiJér, "The Crown of Light", represents the Fortieth Aspect. On certain days the sunlight shines through a special window-shaft in this Aspect's shrine, illuminating the crystal like a veritable small sun itself. The priestesses bring small children who are in need of healing or solace to bathe in its rays and be blessed.

### *Thráya*

The shrine of Lord Hnálla's Thirty-Second Aspect, *Jérmochusùm*, "The Illuminator of the Dark," is particularly splendid.

### *Isle of Gánga*

While the Temple of Hnálla in Béy Sü is renowned for its research regarding the fall of the First Empire, more generalized studies of the twenty-millennium reign of Éngsvan hlá Gánga are best pursued in the Temple of Hnálla on the Isle of Gánga itself.

## **Politics**

It is said that no gathering of three persons contains less than seven different, conflicting factions: each individual, each possible pair, and the group as a whole. This saying reflects Humanity's tendency to factionalize every aspect of life, and it is not surprising to find theological and political factions within and between the Temples.

### **Internal Factions**

#### *The Pure Light Society*

This faction of the Temple of Hnálla supports Lord Thúmis' more pacifistic factions. Notable members

## **Clans**

### *Very High*

<i>Sea Blue</i>	Golden Sunburst	Might of Gánga	<i>Golden Bough</i>
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include High Prelate Chánkосу hiMaróðla, whose recent treatise on the *Kòlumejálím* was seen by many as an act of defiance against embattled Emperor Dhich'uné.

### *Light of Wisdom*

This sect works with the Temple of Thúmis to increase literacy by disseminating texts to rural villages, with the assistance of the Temple's faithful in the mercantile clans.

### *Companionship of Scintillation*

Devoted to the Priestly party and Service to the Emperor, these are intensely religious individuals dedicated to the Doctrine of Ultimate Light.

## **Temple Alliances**

The Temples of Thúmis, Keténgku, and Avánthe hold closely to the Temple of Hnálla, and one rarely finds these Temples in open dispute with one another. The Temple of Belkhánu has more interest in scholarly rather than political pursuits, and the Temple of Karakán often follows a militaristic path that diverges from the interests of Lord Hnálla. Alliances between Lord Hnálla's faithful and the Change Temples are rare, except that even Lords Hnálla and Hrü'ü will unite before that which threatens all the Temples, such as the dread Pariah Deities.

## **External Parties**

Following the long and fruitful reign of Emperor Hirkáne Tlakotáni, there were many representatives of His Temple, Lord Hnálla's, within the Royalist and Military parties of the Empire. Most have had a difficult time under the reign of Emperor Dhich'uné, and many of those who have survived are either openly or covertly involved in the rebellions that fracture the Empire.

## **Military Legions**

The Temple's affiliation with the Military Party through the Golden Sunburst clan dates back to ancient Engsvanyálu and was strengthened during the reign of Emperor Hirkáne. Golden Sunburst clanmembers in the Military Party often claim titles inherited from the First Empire.

### *Legion of Hnálla, Master of Light*

An ancient and excellent legion with a distinguished battle history, this legion's traditional *Kérdu* is Lord Aknállu hiTikéshmu, High Priest of Hnálla at Béy Sü. Lord Girigáshna hiVu'úrtesh, military priest of Béy Sü, actually serves as this legion's excellent commander.

### *Legion of the Mighty Prince*

The military groups that ally with Lord Hnálla are tied in to the Tlakotáni dynasty. The Tlakotáni groups are standoffish, and the military chain-of-command has to be balanced against social stratum.



*High*

White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle	<i>Emerald Girdle</i>
Standing Stone	Rising Sun	<i>Joyous of Vrá</i>	

*Medium*

Green Bough	<i>Green Malachite</i>	Ripened Sheaf	<i>Golden Dawn</i>
<i>Golden Sphere</i>	<i>Golden Sheaf</i>	<i>Golden Sapphire</i>	Black Pinnacle
First Moon	Moon of Evening	Golden Lintel	<i>Silver Lightning</i>
<i>Silver Collar</i>	Scroll of Wisdom	Weeping Stone	<i>Victorious Globe</i>

*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	<i>Broken Bough</i>	<i>Plume of White</i>
<i>Ivory Staff</i>	High Tower	<i>Flowering Life</i>	Flat Peak
<i>Blue Water</i>	Woven Whip	Round Rock	

*Very Low*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	Bright Sword	Flat Rock
<i>Granite Lintel</i>	Glass Spear	Turning Wheel	Collar of Bronze

**Holidays**

## 1 Hasanpór

## New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Hnálla join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

## 3 Langála

## Summer Solstice; The Feast of the Lighted Path

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

This longest day of sunlight is celebrated by the Temple of Hnálla in Béy Sü with the Feast of the Lighted Path. Rural celebrations take place all over the Empire from dawn till dusk, with much ceremony when the sun reaches its zenith. There are free foods and beer. Crops are laid on altars or in circles in fields. Flowers are floated down rivers. There is an underlying rural stratum of pre-Pavár beliefs which persists across all the nations, and many of these beliefs are reflected in these celebrations. One element present around Úrmish involves squeezing the juice of many fruits into a bowl from which everyone sips, and this is said to fertilize the land. The fruit of this time is not quite ripe, so one does not wish to drink too much.

## 1-10 Halír

## Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

## 4 Trantór

## Festival of the Shining Sun (southern)

On festival days of Lord Hnálla's Second Aspect, *Chiráshin Tuléngkoi*, "The Shining Sun", thousands of widows, widowers, and those whose Skeins have become tangled and sorrowful march in procession to His shrine and pay Him worship. Many miracles occur, souls are healed, and hearts are filled with joy.

## 12 Trantór

## The Circle of Life-Giving Light

In Béy Sü and Avanthár, the worshippers of Lord Hnálla celebrate the Circle of Life-Giving Light.

## 9 Firasúl

## Festival of the Shining Sun (northern)

Theologically identical with the celebration observed on the 4th of Trantór in the cities of the southern empire, the different dates for this celebration are the result of a doctrinal dispute now lost to history. As a result, however, the cities in the eastern and northern parts of Tsolyáni, such as Tsúru, Sokátis, Páya Gupá, and Khirgár, observe this festival on the 9th of Firasúl.

9) *Lésdrim*

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

10) *Dohála*

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

## Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

Joyous Singing of the Praises of the Emperor

In Béy Sü and Avanthár, the Intercalary Days begin with the Joyous Singing of the Praises of the Emperor, including religious rituals and public pageantry.

**Aspects**

Unlike most Temples, each of Lord Hnálla's fifty-one Aspects has a shrine in the temple, although in the smaller facilities these shrines may be no more than a candlelit sconce in a white stone wall. Celebrations, festivals and commemorations are held for Their worship, and differ from city to city and region to region. A few of the more commonly known aspects are listed below.

2) *Chiráshin Tuléngkoi*

"The Shining Sun"

This Aspect only accepts offerings of diamonds, crystals, and purest gold. He gives His devotees surcease from cares and freedom from fear and grief. His priests and priestesses go nude, save for necklaces, anklets, bracelets, and ropes of crystals hung about their persons, which make each motion glitter and flash. On his festival days, the 9th of Firasúl and the 4th of Trantór, thousands of widows, widowers, and those whose Skeins have become tangled and sorrowful march in procession to His shrine and pay Him worship. Many miracles occur, souls are healed, and hearts are filled with joy.

7) *Markhóm*

"*Tikákoï hiWadhél Pekhósun* (The Master of Transcendent Contemplation)"

His halls are filled with those who wish to meditate and consider the patterns of Reality. Each year the clergy of Lord Markhóm publishes volumes in the series titled "The Perfect Compendia of Answers to Questions of Life and Existence Most Vexing to Humble Beings." These tomes are filled with solutions to such riddles as "Why Misfortune?" and "Is Free Will Necessary?" and the like. Those of a philosophical bent can swim in a veritable ocean of wisdom.

9) *Parshálmokoi hi Elítlayal*

"The Teller of Skeins"

To Him come those seeking omens and advice. His clergy specialize in the interpretation of His signs, which are usually misinterpreted by the laity as mundane phenomena.

10) *Néktulen*

"He Whose Eyes are Fixed upon the Light"

The clergy of Lord Néktulen devote themselves to the worship, rituals, and praises of Lord Hnálla, and are composed largely of Ritual priests and priestesses. The Administrative clergy of Lord Néktulen often act as liaisons to the Temple of Lord Hnálla's Cohort, Lord Drá.

12) *Baján Ke'ún*

"The Guardian of the Imperium and Patron of its Armies"

Pictured as a stem-faced man of many years in white robe and cowl and bearing a mighty sword. He is favored in Jaikalór, where each month begins with celebrations and worship to this Aspect.

13-26) Aspects of the Stations of the *Kòlumejálím*

These obscure Aspects seem to have no other functions beyond Their tasks in the lengthy Rite of Choosing Emperors. At such times as this takes place, their images are brought out, anointed with perfumed *Purú-oil*, dressed in costumes of the richest materials, adorned with gems, and paraded through the streets for the crowds to admire.

32) *Jérmochusùn*

"The Illuminator of the Dark"

A militant Aspect that supports campaigns against the dwellers in lightless places, such as the Worm Lord and His Minions.

40) *Méntukoi hiJér*

"The Crown of Light"

On certain days the sunlight shines through a special window-shaft in this Aspect's shrine in Sokátis, illuminating the crystal of the Fortieth Aspect. Priestesses bring small children who are in need of healing or solace to bathe in its rays and be blessed.

**Demons**

The Entities of Light

These beings appear as great spheres of dazzling, insubstantial white light some three meters across. They are said to "speak without words" and do not bear weapons or tools. They accept offerings of magical items.

## Magic

### The Fulguration of Immanent Grandeur

This ritual fires a powerful bolt of light that damages only its target.

### The Globe of Distant Discernment

This psychic spell allows the spellcaster to project his or her vision across distances and through objects.

### The Inimitable Defender

This ritual spell creates a crystalline dome that impedes the passage of magical energy.

### Metastasis

This ritual spell teleports the caster elsewhere.

### The Negation of Instability

This ritual spell disenchantments illusions

### Peaceful Repose

This ritual spell wards off magical nightmares.

### The Power of Ultimate Perfection

This ritual dispels demons summoned by agents of Change.

### The Ritual of the Purified Sphere

Renders an area impassable to demons and, in some cases, priests of Change. The higher levels of this spell violate the Concordat when placed upon public spaces. This variant is thus reserved for private sanctuaries of Lord Hnálla such as Inner Libraries, monasteries, and other areas where Priests of Change should never be.

Each faith, indeed each individual temple, has its own set of traditional roles and ceremonies for the outer and inner rituals. Even within so venerable and powerful a Temple as that of Lord Hnálla, there is no one creed or ceremony which all of the Temples celebrate with uniformity. Local traditions and influences render each service within each temple quite unique. One could no more expect a "Blessing Upon the Mountains" ceremony in Úrmish upon the Flats of Tsechélnu than one would expect a "Celebration of the Returning Schools of Fish" in desert-locked Fasltum. Yet such ceremonies are deeply important to those living in the mountainous or coastal regions of the Empire, respectively.

Within each temple, however, the various rituals require celebrants. From the High Ritual Priest, who stands amidst a crowd of attendants beneath the emblem of the God during the most grand celebration, to the acolyte lamp-lighter scurrying to avoid the swift switch of her instructor, every ceremony requires the coordinated efforts of many people. Over time, such duties have been assigned a place in the hierarchy, and suitable individuals are identified to fill each role.

For example, the role of "Illuminator of the Face of Light" is a part of the morning rituals within the Temple of Hnálla. The role is fulfilled by a Second-Circle Ritual Priest or Priestess of middle to middle-low clan status, for it requires a facile tongue but also a familiarity with the kind of manual labor which might not be suitable for a member of a higher clan.

Every morning the "Illuminator of the Face of Light" walks up to the temple's statue of Lord Hnálla and polishes its face, then waves incense before it while reading or reciting ritual lines appropriate to the day and circumstance.

The "Illuminator" does not select the incantations; these are chosen by more senior priests based on their knowledge of the philosophies of the temple, the astrological signs, and other circumstances. The "Illuminator" does not polish the rest of the statue, this is done by other persons in other roles in the hierarchy.

Should the "Illuminator" be always prompt, well-spoken, thorough, and conscientious, then he or she may be promoted to other positions within the temple's Ritual hierarchy.

Such humble beginnings are the source for great achievements. Today's "Illuminator of the Face of Light" doubtless dreams someday of becoming the temple's High Celebrant. More likely, however, diligence and hard work might be rewarded with one of the important traditional roles of the high annual ceremonies, such as the "Joyous Singing of the Praises of the Emperor." Such roles are envied and respected, for only the best Ritual clergy are selected to fulfill them, and once appointed do not usually surrender these posts until they retire. While responsible for ordinary duties, appointees to roles in the larger ceremonies set aside their day-to-day tasks for a few weeks each year. They are accorded perquisite dignities and comforts as they prepare, and are borne upon splendid litters in the grand processions preceding

the actual ritual. Upon the conclusion of each year's celebrations the priest or priestess returns to his or her regular duties, elevated in status and respect among his or her peers.

Of such labor and rewards are whole careers well constructed, and such are the dreams of the Second-Circle "Illuminators of the Face of Light" dozing upon their dormitory mats at the end of the day's duties.

# Drá

*The Uncaring, Singer of the Hymns of the Gods*



Lord Drá is perhaps the most difficult Deity to comprehend. He represents the total disinterest of the Perfect Light in the phenomenal things of this universe. This almost mystical Deity believes that what occurs in this world has no Reality and the true goal must not be obscured by the tawdry veils of sense perception. His followers affect complete indifference to this world, and His most ardent adherents, the "Perfect Ones," train themselves to care nothing for their surroundings or even for their lives. They sit or lie as they are placed by the priests within the temples, are force-fed, and ignore hunger, thirst, pain, and all of the sensations of this existence.

Lord Drá does not care enough to aid His worshippers, and He does so rarely, carelessly and sloppily. He counterbalances the glorious and ever-advancing Perfection of His supernal Master with passive and utterly devoted worship.

Aside from His One Task of singing the Hymns of Lord Hnálla in the Halls of Paradise, Lord Drá has no part to play in the interactions of the Gods.

## **Theology**

### The Outer Doctrines

#### *Color*

White and Tan.

#### *Costume*

The priests and priestesses of Lord Drá wear part-colored robes of white and tan, and a variety of turban-like headdresses. The true ascetics of Lord Drá, known as the Perfect of Drá, wear nothing at all.

#### *Rituals*

The Temple of Drá is not prone to ceremonies of any kind, although there are occasional gatherings of non-adept worshippers. These are regular folks who, like many Tsolyáni, base their worship on the tradition and heredity of their clans and do not aspire to the devotions of the Ascetics. Lord Drá is rarely the primary God of a clan (most Tsolyáni favor a more active Deity), but tradition calls for Him to be worshipped, and so He is.

The clans offer support to the adepts of this Temple, who are those devotees striving for "The Perfection of Drá." Insofar as they fail in "perfection," these adepts maintain the Temple and support their more-perfect brethren with their labors.

Priests in the temples of Lord Drá carry out very simple rituals: incantation is followed by the sacrifice of flowers and other offerings, and then by a quite philosophical discussion of the characteristics of the God and His worship.

#### *Sacrifice*

Lord Drá accepts sacrifices of flowers and fruit, and gold with which to support the Temple, but He does not care about these things at all. Sacrificing to Lord Drá in order to gain His favor is as absurd as praying to Him in time of need.

#### *The Afterlife*

Those elevated to Lord Drá's paradise join the Eternal Chorus, singing the praises of Lord Hnálla, never flagging or lacking for words or requiring sleep, but singing continuously forever.

It is not agreed that Lord Drá bothers to punish those who fail in His worship, although some claim His hell is a place of perpetual distraction, of the desire to accomplish great tasks while being eternally interrupted by petty, mundane and stupid matters.

### The Inner Doctrines

For those who seek the Perfection of Drá, there is actually more to His worship than lay people initially perceive. Worshippers of Lord Drá seek to join with their God in the Hall of the Gods and join the Eternal Chorus in praising Lord Hnálla.

This is best achieved through obedience, and the adoration of light. The role of the individual, of the self, of anything apart from Lord Hnálla Himself is to stand and reflect His light, giving glory to the light itself. Lord Drá's philosophy is that His beauty is only visible because of the light of Lord Hnálla, so being the place the light strikes is a way to worship.

The Perfection of Drá, to which His devotees aspire, is to worship and reflect the Light as does their Lord.

## **Temple Layout**

There are very few temples to Lord Drá, and these are funded by Lord Hnálla's Temple and the donations of the clans. They are usually separate buildings within the precincts of the compound of a temple to Lord Hnálla, located on the southwest side and away from anything which might block the sun.

These small temples are very simple in their layout. Entering upon the north side, one finds oneself in a simple stone-flagged courtyard.

On the east side of the main courtyard are dormitories, kitchens, and storage rooms for the small contingent of temple personnel. On the west side are the stables, outbuildings, and slave quarters, although these are often unoccupied or used for additional storage by the Temples of Drá or Hnálla.

Straight ahead, doors open into a simple, well-lit hall in which worshippers can gather for the occasional ritual. It is semicircular in shape, with the southern wall curved to allow in the sunlight at all times through high, arched windows. Some have domed ceilings pierced with additional circular windows.

A raised dais at the back of this hall bears the symbol of Lord Hnálla and, beneath it, the symbol of Lord Drá, all done in translucent materials such as glass, quartz, or diamonds.

Behind this hall is a kind of patio upon which the Perfect of Drá can be found at all times, staring with blind eyes into the light of Tuléng. If the compound is walled, this patio is usually accessible through a postern door, allowing those who tend to the Perfect to enter and exit the temple compound more easily.

### **Secular Activities**

People whose clans worship Lord Drá are nonetheless a part of society, and participate in the activities of their clans. Those whose worship is more than merely traditional also see themselves as duty-bound to support their perpetually underfunded Temple.

### **Businesses**

The faithful of Lord Drá can be found in almost any trade in the Empire. Certainly there are a great many agricultural clans which traditionally worship Him, and every clan and business which is faithful to Lord Hnálla inevitably has a few of His Cohort's faithful in it as well. Insofar as many clans that worship Lord Hnálla are some of the most traditional and influential in the Empire (e.g. Golden Sunburst and Might of Gánga), the Temple of Drá is usually adequately supported.

The Temple of Drá is a superb source of fancy, complicated hymns to Lord Hnálla. These flowery, insubstantial songs are popular with a certain segment of the upper-middle clans.

### **Public Works and Services**

The Temple of Drá supports no public works, and is in fact the recipient of several public services.

### **Cities of Broad Influence**

#### *Usenánu*

#### *Tsúru*

#### *Haumá*

Lord Drá's greatest presence is in Usenánu, Tsúru, Haumá, and other areas of the Central Empire. His faithful are often agriculturists and farmers.

### **Politics**

#### **Internal Factions**

Even the Temple of Drá is not without its doctrinal schisms. Not all worshippers of Lord Drá desire to be naked, blind, and two-toned, burned black on the front and light tan in back.

#### *The Perfect of Drá*

The Perfect of Drá are the most visible and devoted of their faith, dedicated to the worship of Lord Hnálla at the expense of all else. Despite their ascetic lifestyle, however, they are people, and as people they can be demanding, self-righteous, arrogant, and even cruel, insisting that all things be attended to that they may more Perfectly worship. Although Lord Drá's doctrines and philosophy state that His Perfect require nothing, they in fact demand the support of many persons to achieve their Perfection, along with a serene and quiet setting in which to exist.

#### *The Mirrors of Perfection*

This party consists of priests of Lord Drá who believe in supporting the Perfect, and oversee much of their care. These priests and priestesses hold that to support the Perfect is an act analogous to Lord Drá's worship of Lord Hnálla, that they "reflect the reflection" of the Perfect as best they are able. Their ritual greeting, "I am a mirror of a mirror," illustrates their belief. They hold in veiled disdain those clergy of Lord Drá who are neither members of their own cult or Perfect.

#### *Illuminators of Understanding*

This sect works with the Temple of Thúmis, usually His Illumined sect, to promote Lord Drá. They publish flowery tracts of worship to Lord Hnálla, and recruiting new young priests and priestesses into the worship of Lord Drá.

### **Temple Alliances**

The Temple of Drá's primary benefactor is the Temple of Hnálla, which supports its Cohort in all ways: money, land, and personnel are donated to keep the Temple of Drá in good order.

Insofar as they can be considered "alliances," the Temples of Avánthe and Keténgku support Lord Drá's worshippers with medical attention and food when it is required.

Finally, certain sects of Lord Thúmis' worship, specifically the Illumined of Thúmis sect found in Páya

Gupá and occasionally elsewhere, cooperate with activist members of Lord Drá's clergy in the publication of holy tracts.

#### External Parties

The Temple of Drá has members in the Priestly and Royalist parties, but is largely unrepresented in the Imperial and Military parties.

#### Clans

Clans affiliated with Lord Drá are generally traditionalists: conservative clans with long (if not always glorious) histories of which they are quite proud. While all clans that worship Lord Hnálla will also contain worshippers of Lord Drá, the following clans are those that most actively support the Temple.

##### *Very High*

Might of Gánga

##### *High*

Emerald Girdle

Joyous of Vrá

##### *Medium*

Silver Lightning

Silver Collar

Victorious Globe

Standing Pinnacle

##### *Low*

Flowering Life

##### *Very Low*

Granite Lintel

### Holidays

Worshippers of Lord Drá participate in the various activities and celebrations organized by "ordinary" priests in most cases, or by the Mirrors of Perfection where a Temple of Drá is large enough to have such a group.

### Aspects

Lord Drá is shown as a lumpish, unkempt, and unremarkable man of middle years, dressed in tattered and dirty robes. He has no known Aspects.

### Magic

Few spells are developed in the Temple of Drá, but occasionally an imperfect servitor of Lord Drá has turned to the study of magic. The small collection of Temple spells focus upon attitudes of the mind and the worship of Lord Hnálla.

### Apathy

Psychically instills in its targets a lack of concern for the things of this world, rendering them unresponsive to

external stimuli. The most powerful varieties of this spell will slay their targets with terminal *ennui*.

### The Hymnal of the Lord of Light

These rituals cause the caster's face to shine, "reflecting Lord Hnálla's light" and incidentally illuminating the surrounding space. Creatures of Change and the Undead will be driven away by this shining source, which at its higher levels can be projected before the caster to pass through solid objects and even psychic barriers.

### Risibility

Psychically causes uncontrollable laughter, leaving those affected unable to act. The most powerful variation of this spell causes death from laughter.

Túrisan loved the morning best, particularly spring mornings like this one, with the scent of the flowering *gapúl-trees* wafting as gently as the morning light through the cantilevered crystal windows of the Temple of Drá. The middle-aged clansman turned his wash-bucket over to use as a stool. Ignoring the thin grey water sloshing about the cracked leather of his soles, Túrisan raised his face into the slanting light. Back at the humble Black Mat clanhouse his wife waited with her husband, a man whom Túrisan admitted he had never liked. They would bicker over the meager pay doled out by Lord Drá's tight-fisted clergy, and insist that Túrisan demand more for his labors — she in a caustic acid of sarcasm, and he in his oh-so-reasonable and condescending tone of heartfelt understanding.

Túrisan sighed. Their bickering was as much a symptom of their dependence and idleness as of any fault of his. His wife insisted that a good clans-woman had no business venturing out to seek employment, and what meager income she might supply was in any case hardly worth arguing over. His co-husband claimed always to be on the verge of a cunning financial victory with his trading and bartering down at the docks, yet he scarcely brought in two gold *Káitars* a year. Túrisan suspected that much of his income was diverted to the Clan of Joyous Draughts.

But not now, not now, thought Túrisan. He imagined their insistent images borne out of his body with his breath, and away on the breeze. His bones were settled comfortably on the bucket, his bad knee hardly noticeable. The perfume of the *gapúl*-flowers made its subtle way into his nostrils on a fresh, cool spring breeze. And the light, the gentle light, bathed his features with a soft caress. Soon he would fetch his brush and mop and finish scouring the floor of the Temple. It was enough, now, to have this moment of warmth and rest before the clergy awoke.

And for a moment there was nothing in Túrisan but breath and light and contentment, and even a little bit of joy.

It was a moment that did not pass unnoticed. Though he could not know it, his life would henceforth be just a little bit easier, his burdens and cares just a bit more bearable. And all, all, simply for a moment spent in the Temple of Drá, sincerely and unselfconsciously worshipping the light.



# Avánthe

*Mistress of Heaven, Maid of Beauty, Mother of Devotion, Helpmate to Hnálla, Goddess of Fertility*



Lady Avánthe seeks a smooth-running, well-ordered world, one in which all things flow gently along towards Lord Hnálla's final Perfect Light. On the way to the Perfect Light, She seeks a gentle patterned rhythm of cooperation, symbiosis, and tranquil cycles of being, a world in which all creatures flow along the lulling stream of time effortlessly, without stress or violence. Lady Avánthe assists many groups: women, those who aid their clan and community, devout pillars of society, supporters of justice, and those who struggle against the forces of Change.

While Lord Hnálla focuses upon the end of all things, the Goal of Perfect Light, Lady Avánthe focuses upon the day-to-day cycles of birth, marriage, age and death, renewal and expiry, the waxing and waning of life. Lady Avánthe is much closer to her worshippers than is Lord Hnálla, for it is She who oversees the growth of crops, the travels of the schools of fish, the turning of the seasons, and the vicissitudes of life. She is a Goddess of the events of life, and so She deals with beauty, fertility, adolescence and adulthood, the anxieties of the young and the aged.

It is to Lady Avánthe that nearly all Tsolyáni turn, Stability and Change alike, if the crops fail or the rains dry up, just as most adherents of Change turn to Lord Belkhánu for assistance in the disposition of the honored dead. Like Lord Belkhánu, Lady Avánthe's role in the life of all people transcends the theological distinctions made by the priests and savants.

Lady Avánthe's doctrines seek the maintenance of the cycles of life. Thus She seeks to quell disturbance, restore balance, and repair the persistent damage caused by the worshippers of Change.

## Theology

Lady Avánthe is charged with the rains, the harvests, and the periodicities of fertility, so She is to the common folk a Goddess of Nature. Her doctrines are not so simple, however, as those of the tribesmen of distant Nmartúsha who worship natural forces and events. She is a Goddess equal to any in Pavár's pantheon, and Her interests include the arts, the sciences of agriculture and animal husbandry, navigation and ocean travel, and much more.

## The Outer Doctrines

### Color

Sky-blue, royal blue, sapphire-blue, and gold.

## Astrology

Lady Avánthe is believed to watch the world "through the eyes of Shichél," the blue planet which is the fourth from Tuléng, Tékumel's sun. Special ceremonies take place in the Spring and Fall upon the dates of the heliacal rising and setting of Shichél, the east and west ends of Shichél's points of emergence along the horizon. These ceremonies take place out of doors, in the very fields upon which the Lady's blessings are desired. In the Spring, delicate blue flowers are piled in sacrifice; in the Fall, ripe blue *Dlél-fruit* are offered up.

Throughout the year, special evening ceremonies are held when Shichél rises and sets, except for those times when Tuléng occludes the planet's light. At these times the Lady is said to be "with Lord Hnálla," and these periods are held to be particularly blessed. Children born when Shichél is in the sky or "with Hnálla" are considered favorites of the Goddess.

## Numerology

Lady Avánthe's number is two, which is described by numerologists as being feminine, loving, secretive, cherishing and sincere. Her phonemic is "p." Those who would Harmonize with the Lady are advised to do so in pairs, male and female, as is the practice in the Temple of Dlamélish as well. These two should be surfeited with sex and not actively seeking one another during Harmonizing, for the process can be deleterious if interrupted or broken off too abruptly.

## Costume

Worshippers of Lady Avánthe wear kilts of sky blue, and Her priestesses usually go bare-breasted as a symbol of Her generous nurturance of all things. Full nudity is not uncommon, enhanced by sapphires and other blue gems strung on golden chains or worn on rings or slender coronets. On the other hand, the processions and pageants of the Lady feature grand, elaborate, and quite weighty costumes of gold, cabochons, feathers, and flowers, along with the ubiquitous *Chlén-hide*, painted a bright blue.

## Rituals

The Temple of Avánthe has regular daily ceremonies, and the great gongs boom at dawn, midday, and sunset. Her faithful also hold special ceremonies whenever the rain falls and, as the gongs call out, Her clergy rush forth with their arms up to accept the gift of precipitation. The celebrations of Lady Avánthe and Her Cohort Dilinála

are quite exuberant when contrasted with the solemnity of their colleagues.

### *Sexual Rituals*

The fertility rituals of Lady Avánthe are described as "flowing rivers of fecundity" and Her ceremonies are wild and joyous. Her counterpart in Change, Lady Dlamélish, celebrates the selfishness of pleasure, but Lady Avánthe celebrates the joy of pleasure as the gift of fertility, such as in Her annual "Revelation of the Maid of Beauty" held in Béy Sü. Her orgies are open and public whereas those of Lady Dlamélish are dark and closed.

Many of the celebrations and rituals of Lady Avánthe involve the performance of public sexual acts involving one or more participants. For instance, the coming of Spring and the sowing of the fields are celebrated with joyful sexual orgies. Both male and female devotees of Lady Avánthe participate in elaborate erotic dances.

However, it is by no means true that all of Lady Avánthe's celebrations involve sexual behavior. For instance, one common practice of the peasantry is for the eldest woman of a peasant clan to find a suitable stone in the fields that she paints with the blue of Lady Avánthe. Then she and the other women of the clan lay before the stone the first fruits of the harvest. Each type of ritual is seen as an equal and appropriate presentation to the Lady.

### *Death Rituals*

Worshippers of Lady Avánthe bury Her people with their hands at their sides, almost always under the aegis of Lord Belkhánu's priests.

### *The Three Sisters*

Three popular aspects of the Lady Avánthe are the Ladies Chikúna, Quyéla, and E'éth, who guide the cycles of the crops. Sacrifices and celebrations, such as those to Lady E'éth who brings spring rains, take place at the appropriate times of the year. These are referred to by the peasantry as the Three Sisters, who must be present within the cycle of each year for the harvests to succeed.

### *Curse*

Black hair and brown eyes are so prevalent that the occasional blue-eyed child is said to bear the "Curse of Avánthe," and is treated with suspicion. Legends and stories, even puppet shows, all present villains and monsters with eyes of blue. The ignorant and the rustic believe the blue eyed child to be impure, or an evil entity in the form of a child. The most wealthy clans can afford to have such children treated magically to alter the appearance of their eyes. Some attempt veils or other gambits to hide the blue eyes of a youngster, but such tricks often fail. Finally, some even resort to sacrificing or otherwise dispatching the youngster, or else gouging out the eyes.

### *Sacrifices*

As with the other Gentle Deities, Lady Avánthe does not accept blood sacrifice. Gifts of fruits and grains, flowers, and crafts are accepted. A celebration for Lady Avánthe might include a *Hmá* which is slaughtered and served up

to the crowd "in Her name," but this is not a "formal" sacrifice and the slaughter of the beast would not take place on temple grounds.

During the Time of the Usurpers there was an occasion of great draughts and floods plaguing the Empire, and during these dire times there were occasions of human sacrifice. In Jakálla a pair of young virgins were sacrificed to Lady Avánthe in an attempt to bring on the rains, and this displeased the Lady greatly, although how this is known to be the case is not recorded.

### *Food Taboos*

Priestesses of Lady Avánthe and Her Cohort Dilinála are prohibited from eating red meat while the moon Káshi is in the sky, and many of the worshippers of these two Deities are vegetarians who eschew not only meat but fish and eggs as well.

However, vegetarianism is not a doctrinal requirement of the priesthood, as Avánthe is a cyclical goddess who recognizes the place of all creatures in the cycles of life. To eat, and to be eaten, are both part of the rhythm which Lady Avánthe supports.

### *The Afterlife*

The paradise of Lady Avánthe is said to be rather like this world, but a place of peace and joy.

Her hell is a barren Plane in which there is no order, no pleasure, no predictable cycle of being, and no repose.

### *History*

Lady Avánthe's worship dates back to the time before the Priest Pavár set forth the roles of all the Gods. During the First Empire She was called Evuén, and Her doctrines were mixed with those of simple nature-deities, and included animal and human sacrifice.

Shortly after the Priest Pavár clarified these matters, the legendary Misuénde set forth the following in poetry:

*"The Goddess herself dwells beside a Pool of Cerulean Blue, Ever-Changing yet Ever-the-Same, Eternal, Contemplating her Loveliness in the Still Water*

*Warm Cycles of Tranquillity Flow from her Left Hand; Gentle Waves of Sweetest Joy Emanate from Her Right Hand*

*She Who Is Peace; She Who Is Adoration*

*Oh, Goddess, We Cover Thy World with Flowers; Oh, Mistress, We Build and Plant and Make Thy Abode a Paradise of Endless Being..."*

(Written during the Reign of the One Hundred and Nineteenth Priest-king of Gánga.)

### *Legend*

As part of the Epic of Hnúgga, the tale is told that he gambled against the Goddess Avánthe and "won the world, the two moons, and half as much again." Since it would have been ignoble to win so great a stake from the Goddess, Hnúgga nobly continued to gamble everything

on each play until he had lost it all back again "because it is not seemly for a mere mortal to o'ermaster the ever-living Gods."

### The Inner Doctrines

#### *Soul*

Just as Lord Belkhánu seeks a smooth flow of being from death through the Planes Beyond, so does Lady Avánthe seek a smooth flow of being from birth to death, the joy of companionship, a symbiosis with nature, and an end to selfish individualism. She thus prefers a gentler, milder focus upon the *Balétl* (the Body) and the *Pedhétl* (the raw emotions) than does Her counterpart in Change, Lady Dlamélish.

#### *Language*

The Temple of Avánthe is not known to have any "secret" languages aside from Thu'úsa, which is employed for ritual and academic texts.

#### *Rituals*

The Inner Rituals of the Temple of Avánthe do not differ greatly from the Outer Rituals, for secrecy is not part of the doctrine of this Temple. The Inner Rituals simply explore more deeply the theological ramifications of the Lady's worship, becoming more and more complex and intense as one progresses.

### Secular Activities

#### Businesses

Every Temple is supported by its agricultural interests, wherein Lady Avánthe is very powerful. Farmers of all faiths come to Her in times of difficulty, and Her priestesses bless the crops, heal illness, wipe out blights, and support the proper procession of the seasons. The Temple of Avánthe, therefore, has tremendous power even among those clans which support other Temples.

In addition to Her agricultural interests, the Temple of Avánthe has considerable support among the seafaring clans who fish and transport goods. She is also a favorite of the higher clans, whose interest in the Arts leads to generous support for Her Temple. Finally, a great many of the craftspeople of the Empire worship the Mistress of Heaven.

#### Public Works and Services

##### *Women's Medicine*

Gynecological and obstetric matters are handled by the priestesses of Lady Avánthe and Her counterparts in other lands. In these matters, Her priestesses occasionally work closely with priests and priestesses of Lord Thúmis' Cohort, Keténgku, for whom the healing arts are a specialty. Clergy of these Temples maintain healing wards on the temple grounds themselves, but also go out among the farms and villages to attend to peasants of the rural areas.

##### *Women's Advocacy*

The Temple of Avánthe is involved in supporting women who have been sexually or physically abused. In the matriarchal north of Tsolyánu and all over Yán Kór it is the truly unfortunate and stupid male who persistently abuses a clanswoman (*Aridáni* women can also turn to the Temple, but usually pursue the same secular reparations as would a male). If a victim brings the Temple of Avánthe in to seek resolution or restitution it is entirely possible that a persistent abuser will find himself *nakomé* (without clan), or even on the tall end of the Impaler's stake. In the patriarchal south of the Empire, such a man's fate would be only slightly brighter, but it is more likely that his clan might be able to pay *Shámtila* and then dispatch the fellow on a very long mercantile excursion.

##### *Animal Husbandry*

Lady Avánthe encourages respect for animals, and Her sanctuaries have stables and veterinary facilities as well as markets where the beasts can be bought and sold. No slaughtering ever takes place on Her premises (with the exception of old or wounded beasts which are gently put to sleep).

##### *Publications*

This Temple's involvement with fertility and agriculture has resulted in the production of valuable textbooks covering crop ailments and veterinary medicine.

##### Cities of Broad Influence

The Gods Avánthe, Hnálla and Karakán are esteemed throughout Tsolyánu, but are most prevalent in the central regions along the Missúma River. Such is Lady Avánthe's agricultural emphasis, however, that Her focus is not in any one city. Instead, the rural areas of the Empire are where She has the greatest influence.

##### *Jakálla*

The scholars of the Temple of Avánthe in Jakálla are acknowledged experts regarding the fragmentary materials of the Time of No Kings.

##### *BéySü*

Lady Avánthe operates schools of literature, the arts, and beauty because this Goddess celebrates beauty in many ways. These schools in Her temples in Béy Sü are exemplary. She is an elegant Goddess and Her sanctuaries and shrines are always gloriously maintained and trimmed. Her Emerald-and-Blue Shrine in Béy Sü is lit with panes of stained glass in the roof so that there is always an interlocking of colored shadows on the floor below. It is a beautiful place, enhanced with floral incense and streams of mist and sparkling lights floating through the air. All other Temples of the Lady strive to match the beauty of this shrine, each in its own manner.

## Politics

### Internal Factions

Lady Avánthe is, among other things, rather pragmatic in character, and the internal parties within Her Temple are not as "political" or "militant" as the internal parties of other Temples. Internal conflicts tend to be resolved cooperatively, due to a shared view of the world as a place where the cycles of being must progress smoothly.

#### *The Purity of the Land*

This sect is dedicated to the elimination of crop disease, and is composed primarily of scholarly and administrative priests with specialties in agriculture.

#### *The Joyous Burden*

This party seeks the enhancement of the capabilities of *Chlén*, such as greater strength and speed, intelligence and docility, greater fertility and survival of young, etc. It is a curious alliance of wealthy mercantile clans, the shipping and *Chlén*-raising clans (of course), and some of the lowest clans, such as Polished Stone, whose task it is to keep the Imperial *Sákbe* roads clean.

#### *The Girdle of Purity Society*

This small, militant sect desires a stronger hand for the Temples in the affairs of Empire and direct action in many matters. It occasionally allies with the Clan of the Sword of Righteousness of the Temple of Karakán.

#### *Company of the Eye of the Storm*

This is the most secretive, and most secret, of the internal factions within the Temples of Avánthe and Dilinála. Almost entirely comprised of female clergy, with all of Lady Dilinála's contingent members being mystics, this faction is entirely apolitical. Instead, these priestesses focus upon advancing the esoteric doctrines of their order, and upon the study of sorcery.

### Temple Alliances

Along with Her close alliances with Lord Hnálla and Lord Thúmis, Lady Avánthe also frequently joins with the Temple of Dlamélish in Tsolyánu, and those of Shiringgáyi, Mrettén, or Her counterparts in other nations. These latter alliances seek to support women, improve agriculture and the fare of fishers and farmers, and promote Her interests in fertility and fecundity.

### External Parties

Lady Avánthe's influence is broadly felt in agricultural areas, but She also has many interests in the politics of

the Empire. Many clans seek the good graces of Lady Avánthe's Temple, from the farming and textile clans to the craftspeople, the artists, the shippers, warehousing clans, the fishers and the net-weavers.

Within Avanthár and the precincts of Béy Sü, the Lady's political contacts push for tax reforms on agricultural interests, etc., but again in not so militant a fashion as other Temples. However, these groups do not lack effectiveness. The Court of Purple Robes always has influential members of Lady Avánthe's agricultural interests within it.

When, for instance, produce and grain need to be shipped across the country, the clans petition influential members of this Temple to petition Avanthár to favor their clan's contract over others. Such matters are quite complicated, with transportation clans seeking appropriate goods and prices, competing against other traditional transportation clans, upstart clans seeking to cut into their occupation, etc. Under such circumstances, the persuasion of Lady Avánthe's priestesses can make a great difference.

She does not have as much influence among the members of the Military Party (although She is nowhere wholly without influence), but she is well-represented in the Royalist and Imperial parties.

### Military Legions

#### *Legion of the Sapphire Kirtle*

##### 12th Imperial Light Infantry

Kérdu Priestess Dijáya hiQurrulúma of Tu'unmrá

The 12th Imperial Light Infantry is composed solely of lesbian virgins dedicated to Ladies Dilinála or Avánthe. Its general is a member of an old and noble family, senior High Priestess of the Temple of Dilinála at Béy Sü, and an advocate of complete female liberation.

#### *Eléchu of Usenánu*

30th Imperial Archers.

#### *The Legion of the Twelve Paths of Avánthe*

9th Imperial Slingers.

Kérdu Priestess Séa hiVáishu

Based in Petrís Layóda on the Isle of Gánga

This ancient legion of fanatic devotees of Lady Avánthe is composed solely of *Aridáni* women. Long inactive, it was recently revived and funded partially by the Temple of Avánthe and partially by the Governor of Gánga, the Lady Su'ésa hiNrashkéme.

## Clans

Clan names printed in plain text are completely ecumenical, with members from every Temple. Italicized clans are not completely ecumenical, worshipping some subset of the Twenty Gods. Clans in bold text reserve their worship solely for the Goddess and Her Cohort.

### *Very High*

Sea Blue	<i>Might of Gánga</i>	Golden Bough	
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*High*

<i>White Stone</i>	White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle
<i>Emerald Girdle</i>	Standing Stone	Rising Sun	<i>Joyous of Vrá</i>

*Medium*

Green Bough	Blue Kirtle	<i>Green Malachite</i>	Ripened Sheaf
<i>Golden Dawn</i>	<i>Golden Sphere</i>	<i>Golden Sheaf</i>	<i>Golden Sapphire</i>
Blue Shadow	Blue Stream	Black Pinnacle	First Moon
Moon of Evening	Golden Lintel	<i>Silver Lightning</i>	<i>Silver Collar</i>
Scroll of Wisdom	Red Eye of Dawn	Weeping Stone	Standing Pinnacle

*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	Broken Bough	<i>Plume of White</i>
<i>Ivory Staff</i>	Green Forest	Green Reed	High Tower
<i>Flowering Life</i>	Flat Peak	Sapphire Bird	<i>Blue Water</i>
Woven Whip			

*Very Low*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	Bright Sword	Flat Rock
<i>Granite Lintel</i>	Glass Spear	Turning Wheel	Collar of Bronze
Polished Stone			

**Holidays**

## 1 Hasanpór

## New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lady Avánthe join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

## 13 Shápru

## The Revelation of the Maiden of Beauty, Béy Sü

Rituals and orgiastic feasting proceed for three days, at the close of which one woman is selected as the day's Maiden of Beauty. Within a grove in an open courtyard of the temple, the woman is bathed and washed, anointed with *Purú*-oil and powdered gold and gems, and dressed in resplendent blue finery. After several hours of rituals, she is led within the temple, where particularly privileged priests of Lady Avánthe engage her in the rituals of sensual pleasure. Following this she remains chaste until it is determined whether she has become pregnant. A male child conceived in this manner is given to a privileged clan to raise as a worshipper of the Goddess. A female child is raised within the temple to become a High Priestess, and is always lucky and privileged. If the

Maid of Beauty does not conceive, or miscarries, it is considered bad luck and a bad omen for the year.

This day is also celebrated by worshippers of Shiringgáyi, the Salarvyáni counterpart to Lady Avánthe, who name it The Invocation of the Fertile Land.

## 3 Langála

## Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

## 1-10 Halír

## Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

## 9 Lésdrim

## Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on His own birthday.

## 10 Dohála

## Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

## Turugdáshe, Intercalary Days

In Béy Sü, worshippers of Lady Avánthe celebrate The Wearing of the Girdle of Fertile Loveliness with public rituals.

## Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

## The Elegy for Those of the Sea; Dháru, Komóre

In the coastal city of Dháru, the Elegy for Those of the Sea is conducted by the Temple of Avánthe.

Priests of the Lady Avánthe at the shrine of Her Aspect Qalái in Komóre gather to do homage, and to request "that the Universe may not be overturned, as was the Egg of the World."

**Aspects**

Lady Avánthe has 93 Aspects. The revered Priestess Teshkorúsa cataloged these during the Reign of the Priest-king Amukanátl, just after the Flower Wars and shortly before the end of the Engsvanyáli Era. While this work has long since disappeared, extracts are found in the *Volume of Sweet Endeavor*, the *Scrolls of Niukúmina*, the *Records of the Keeper of Blue*, and the *Book of the Spirits of the Fecund Earth*.

## 1) Sikkuné

Appears as an old woman wise in Her years, gentle of mien, kindly, courteous and noble. Her hair is white, Her robe is of blue, marked with symbols in the tongue of Thu'úsa. She consoles those who suffer family losses, those who mourn, those whose hearts are sorrowful, those who would commit suicide and so leave this world, and those whose Skeins are desolate and lonely. Her greatest shrines are at Béy Sü, Páya Gupá, Katalál, and Thráya.

## 2) Kátha

## "The Warrior Maid"

A fierce Aridáni warrior, She appears as a young woman in full armor, except for Her face which wears an expression of sweet joy. She is the patron of victories, of women who fight for their homes and dignities, of glorious singing of battle-songs, of repelling ignobility and sloth. She loves mighty Lord Karakán and also serves as the handmaiden of Lord Chegárra. Both male and female warriors attend Her rites. Her greatest shrine is in Khirgár, with others in Mrelú, Si'ís and Chéne Hó.

## 3) Tahelé

## "The Maid of Beauty"

She is the patron of young girls who would be beautiful, of sex and love and the burgeoning of pleasure between a

man and a woman. She shields a woman's beauty from harm, and holds back the advancements of age. It is customary for girls to wear a token of Her Aspect presented by a lover. Her image is that of a slender young woman, standing on tiptoe and reaching out with both arms. She grants favors to those who are ill-visaged and ugly, to those who are crippled and twisted, and to women who cannot find a mate. Her shrines are everywhere in the Empire and even beyond its frontiers, although the greatest stands in a village 37 *Tsán* north of Usenánu on the *Sákbe-road* to Béy Sü. There Her priests and priestesses dress Her golden image each day, anoint Her with *Purú*-oil and sweet perfumes, and give Her sacrifices of gentle blue flowers and fruits.

## 4) E'éth of the Rains

She brings the rain to water the fields; Her older sister Lady Quyéla fertilizes the crops, and Her oldest sister Lady Chikúna ripens the crops and causes them to be ready for the harvest. Lady E'éth has no shrines or images, but is worshipped in the fields by priests and priestesses specially trained in Her rituals. If She does not respond and rain does not come, farmers may then appeal to the Aspect Qalái, the Maintainer of Cycles.

## 5) Quyéla

Causes the crops to become fertile, animals (and people) to mate and bring forth offspring, and pollens to blow with Keréna the Wind. Quyéla's rituals are held in the fields at night, and the celebrants often become drunken and engage in wild orgies that result in the scattering of semen into the soil. She has a shrine in each village temple of Lady Avánthe where green stalks of grain are sacrificed. In the southwest, villagers often come to Her shrines to consummate their marriages before Her altar. Her images are various: sheaves of grain, statues depicting a sower bearing a sack of seed, statuettes of a young couple engaged in sexual congress, etc.

## 6) Chraikála

## "She Who Cares for Children."

Her images are simple globes of blue glass (about 3 inches in diameter) engraved with Her name in Thu'úsa script. A worshipper holds one of these globes to his or her breast and prays for aid. This Aspect finds lost children, helps sick babes, succors orphans and those in poverty, and also guides parents in matters of upbringing and discipline. Her greatest shrine is at Katalál, an addition built onto Lady Avánthe's temple there.

## 7) Nikoné

## "The Pillar of Purity"

She is the patron of those who have been raped or violated, those who suffer at the hands of a brutal spouse (either male or female), those who are wronged by law or government, and those who have been cursed by a sorcerer or a demon. She is depicted as a strong, athletic-appearing woman with the head of some sort of bird of prey. Some of Her statues have six arms, in each of which are symbols: a rod, a sword, a book, a bowl, a rube (purpose unknown), and a six-sided polygon of blue

ceramic. Her temples are found within most shrines to the Goddess all over the Empire.

#### 8) Chikúna

"The Ripener"

She sees to the passing of cycles, the re-emergence of Time, the ending of events, the excellence of finished Skeins, and the harvesting of crops. She is charged with the ripening of fruits and grain, the coming to term of pregnancies in both humans and animals, and the cutting of the harvests. Pregnant women frequent Her shrines, which are found in almost every temple of the Goddess across the Empire, leaving sacrifices of coins, flowers, and menstrual blood. When a woman gives birth to a male child, she leaves the umbilical cord upon a special altar in Lady Chikúna's shrine; a female child is honored by leaving the afterbirth, similarly. Rituals and prayers and feasting accompany these sacrifices. Those who have multiple births (twins, triplets) are seated upon daises covered with blue carpets, and their bodies are anointed with perfumes and oils and are displayed to the public in elaborate ceremonies. Lady Chikúna's greatest shrine is in Jaikalór, to which thousands of pregnant women make pilgrimages to ask Her favor.

#### 9) Aoméla

"The Maintainer"

She sees to the smooth running of society, the proprieties of the clans, the ties of religion and law and government. She is thus a frequent companion of Lord Chegárra, and Her stout, matronly images are often set beside His at yearly festivals. Worshipers who have been wronged by their clan or by the government come to Her shrines to appeal, and Her clergy may then take likely cases to higher courts, serving as unpaid lawyers. Her greatest shrine is within Lady Avánthe's temple in Béy Sü, where Her followers maintain a law school and library. Lady Aoméla was the special patron of the 52nd Seal, the Empress Aléya, the Damsel of Purity, who ruled from 1,872 to 1,931 A.S.

#### 10) Niluéilde

"Mistress of the Air"

She governs the Demons of the Air, who are Lady Avánthe's special creatures. When summoned correctly, She may bring Her strange warriors, who can only be seen as wraith-like, bluish-green patches of mist by such perceptive races as the Pé Chói, Ssú, Tinalíya, Hlüss, and Mihállí. She has no temples, and Her images are statuettes of azurite carved to represent a naked woman sleeping. Evocation is affected by special spells taught only within the Inner Temple, and only to women.

#### 11) Hlikársh

"Master of the Demons of Fire"

Lord Hlikársh oversees the Demons of Fire, who are specifically Lady Avánthe's creatures and have nought to do with the incandescent monsters of Lord Vimúhla. Lord Hlikársh represents the warmth of the home fire, the hearth, and the peace of good family company. His

demons can calm ferocious animals and drive away serpents and vermin. They are only evoked out-of-doors by specially consecrated priests (never priestesses.)

#### 12) Dedé

"Master of the Spirits of the Earth"

He represents the warm, enfolding, fertile earth — never the grave-earth and damp of Lord Sáрку and the other Lords of the Dark Trinity. He is the special patron of potters, brickmakers, stonemasons, farmers, and others who work in the soil. His temples are often found in remote corners of some village field: small, square buildings of sod or stone, in which a simple male statue made of mud (and left unbaked) is placed upon a dais. No fire or water is allowed into these little shrines, and sacrifices of carved bits of wood, clay pots filled with beer or liquor, and wrapped bundles of cloth are laid before Him. He seeks earth-magic: scrolls, spells, and other devices that deal with the working of soil, stone, etc. His celebrants sit naked in a circle, eat fresh bread, drink beer, and recite hymns to His glory. Sometimes He may then send His special spirits to aid His worshippers in some matter related to the earth.

#### 13) Jelél

"Goddess of Potence"

She aids men who have become impotent and women who are barren. Her images consist of a female organ made of light blue moonstone, and a male organ made out of lapis lazuli. Her shrines are found within the temples of Lady Avánthe all over the Empire, as well as in Mu'ugalavyá and Yán Kór. Prayers are said over the relevant image and a little golden pot of fresh milk is spilled over it.

#### 14) Keréna the Wind

She aids ships and sailing, but is treated with great caution, since She can also bring windstorms and cause vessels to founder. Her image is that of a young woman with raised wings that are feathered like a bird. She is the patron of things of the air: the Hláka, birds, and all aerial creatures of the hinterlands. Her shrines are round, so that the aerial creatures can never hurt themselves on the corners. They are filled with singing birds, which are never caged and come and go as they please. She is the favorite deity of sailors, and She is said to be a special friend of Lady Niluéilde, the Mistress of Air. It is said that Lady Keréna's clergy can bring about windstorms sufficient to sink ships and blow away armies, but She does not favor violence and rarely allows this.

#### 15) Chorisánde

"The Guide of Fools"

She is the patron of the mentally deficient, the deranged, and those who are born with mental defects. Her small shrines are built on the east side of a temple of Lady Avánthe in most large cities, and they function as hospitals for these unfortunate people. Her priests and priestesses are closely connected with those of Lady Balmé, the clergy of Lord Keténgku, and the healing arts.

Afflicted children are often brought to Her shrines and abandoned; they will be well cared for as long as they live. She is depicted as a motherly woman with heavy breasts. In Her arms she sometimes holds a babe. The clans and the Imperium both pay to support Her hospitals and staff.

#### 16) Bolénde

"The Lord of the Spirits of Water"

Like the Aspects Niluélde, Hlikársh, and Dedé, He is charged with the demons of a specific realm. He is the patron of those missing at sea, of ships that are becalmed, of the creatures of the water (both fresh and salt), of certain beings from other Planes where water is the medium of existence, and of sunken treasures. His images are shaped like swimming fish with high dorsal fins and long serpentine tails. His shrines are simple stone platforms, found along the banks of a lake, river, or ocean, and His only sacrifices are fresh fish (not crustaceans or eel-like creatures).

#### 17) Sunrudáya

"The Young Bride"

She is the blushing virgin in the marital chamber, the new spouse eager to please but unsure of Her skills, the anxious wife, newly expectant. She aids not only the wife but all members of a family with a new spouse. Following a marriage ceremony, Her clergy may present ritual gifts of *Dná*-grain and water to keep the new family from hunger. Her priests and priestesses will intervene upon request to help settle familial disputes, or simply to provide answers to questions of family life.

#### 18-24) Local Aspects

These Aspects are little worshipped, and scholars cannot even agree on all of Their names. They appear to be localized variants of others of the Lady's Aspects.

#### 25) Shaka'án

"The Little Girl Who Is Curious"

She appears as a child with overlarge and slanted eyes, and both represents children and protects them. Mischievous children and children who wander off and become lost are Her wards, and parents pray to Her when a child is missing and thank Her when a lost child is found. She accepts small blue and white flowers, but the greatest sacrifice She accepts are the toys of children, freely given. Such sacrifices are rare indeed, but bring the child to the favorable attention of the Temple. Such a child might, later in life, find his or her entrance into the priesthood mysteriously facilitated without remembering the reason why.

#### 26) Shuchéla the Virgin

She cares for youths undergoing puberty. Her priestesses provide counsel and medical aid to girls, and Her priests similarly guide adolescent boys. She has no shrines, but Her clergy are usually to be found on the staff of larger temples everywhere. Her images are of a young woman with Her hands down at Her sides. Symbols and special

talismanic marks cover Her body from Her chin down to Her knees, and She wears a head-dress of blue *Khéshchal*-plumes.

#### 27) Makórsa

"The Kind Protectress of Trees and Forests"

She guards trees (specifically old, gnarled *Gapúl* trees and tall *Tíu*-trees that stand alone) and is said to slay those who would cut them down wantonly, without replanting. She also sees to wounded animals and those who are wrongfully hunted (including slaves who escape abusive masters, and prisoners fleeing unjust imprisonment). She is thus the patron of foresters, hunters who would use their prey for food, and those who travel through the woods. Her shrines consist of small, wooden houses built on the brow of a hill in rural areas. Her image is a carved wooden statue of a tall, commanding woman with a bow and arrow. She accepts sacrifices of berries, roots, and wild honey.

#### 28) removed

The Twenty-Eighth Aspect has been expunged from all records for reasons no one knows.

#### 29) Kshésa

"The Knower of Cycles"

She holds the keys to those of the Planes Beyond ruled by Lady Avánthe. She is the patron of books relating to nature and its various forms, to the tranquil passage between the Planes, and to sorcerous spells guarded by the Temple. Her image, a prim scholarly young woman sculpted in blue faience seated cross-legged upon a dais, is found in the scholar's chambers of every one of Lady Avánthe's temples, usually on a shelf above the door. Students often sacrifice bits of fresh fruit to Her, along with a bit of incense. She is a friend of Lady Qalái, the Maintainer of Cycles.

#### 30) Nyéles the Wise

She is the patron of wisdom and intuition. It is customary to pray for Her aid whenever a woman needs to make a decision about something unknown or for which she lacks information. She has no shrines, but the priesthoods of Lady Avánthe's temples accept small sacrifices of money or gems from women who believe that they made a correct choice with Nyéles' guidance. She is pictured as a seated female figure with indistinct features and wrapped in a veil. These figurines, often of gold, are worn around the neck or set upon a little bedside table.

#### 31) Jogái

"The Songstress"

She is the Patron of music, both vocal and instrumental. Almost every woman who sings or plays an instrument in the Empire wears her tiny blue turquoise statuettes as amulets. Her likenesses vary: a lute-like *Sra'úr* for one who plays that instrument, a kneeling boy or girl for a singer, etc. Musicians squeeze their image of Jogái for luck prior to beginning a performance. Her shrines are



found across the Empire. Her clergy operate a music academy in Jakálla that is justly famous, and She has others at Béy Sü, Tumíssa, and Thráya.

### 32) Eluláiku

"Purveyor of Excellent Alimentation"

This male Aspect patronizes cooking, gourmet foods, and eating (but not gluttony). He is represented as a seated man with a tray of foodstuffs in front of Him or on His lap. He has no shrines, but every wealthy kitchen has a statue of Him. He accepts no sacrifices or prayers, but is said to relish a friendly thought while one is enjoying a good meal. The cooks of the Empire treat him as a patron saint.

### 33) Póndu

"Keeper of Scales"

He is shown as an old man holding a balance in one hand and a staff in the other. He sees to weights and measures, business integrity, proper practices, and honesty. Most markets and market police headquarters display His statue (often of blue pottery) prominently. Whenever a market opens in the morning, Lord Póndu is invoked, and a piece of incense is burned before Him; this is repeated when the market closes at night. He has shrines in many administrative areas of the larger temples.

### 34) Halél

"The Servitor of the Forlorn"

She leads unmarried women (mostly) to find spouses. She is depicted as a spider-like, six-legged, delicate being with bright blue eyes of sapphire or even blue diamond. Unmarried girls often place this image beside their sleeping mats and pray to Her before going to bed. Her shrines are found in most temples of the Goddess, and Her clergy often act as matchmakers. Curiously, She is also invoked when parents seek a child-name for a newborn.

### 35) Varému

"The Protector of the Small"

The guardian of small animals, pets, and even children, Varému responds harshly to their abuse: His statues are of dark bronze and depict a stern monster with fangs, a scythe-like weapon, and talons! His shrines exist in most temples of the Goddess and are usually filled with pets of all kinds. His clergy spends much time prosecuting those who harm, abandon, or mistreat animals. He accepts sacrifices of money and garlands of flowers.

### 36) Koruláinen

"The Giant Within the Earth"

She (It?) guards the secret treasures of the Temple of Avánthe wherever they might be. This creature is described as a furry, eight-limbed giant that smells of some vile substance, the odor of which causes unconsciousness. This Aspect is never invoked — and is rarely mentioned — but is said to know whenever a

shrine is being violated and arrives by itself. The Aspect Koruláinen has no shrines or special rituals.

### 37) Balmé the Healer

She is depicted as a human woman, kneeling with Her arms before Her, palms up. Her clergy work closely with the Temple of Keténgku to minister to the sick, especially among the low clans, *nakomé*, and the slaves. This attention is comprised of equal portions altruism and pragmatism: illnesses among the slaves and the poor can cripple a local economy, as well as spreading to the higher clans. The sick are often given amulets of Lady Balmé to wear about their neck. Hers as well are the priests and priestesses who run the hospitals where the disabled and mentally afflicted receive care.

### 38)-46) local manifestations of the Goddess

They are rarely known outside of their own limited regions, and Their names and descriptions vary from text to text and from scholar to scholar.

### 47) Ngacháni

"The Patroness of Mothers with Babes"

She is the helper of new mothers, especially those somehow isolated from the support of clan-sisters and -mothers. She soothes the sleeping babe and assures the flow of healthy mother's milk. Her shrines are mostly in the northwestern and western portions of the Empire, and Her priestesses will teach new mothers to nurse and hold children if they are ignorant of these skills. She is depicted as a large woman, seated and bent forward to nurse her child.

### 48) Njévra the Cold

He is the patron of ice, snow, and the cold that dwells in the north. He is depicted as a pale blue face of whitish-blue stone with eyes and mouth closed. He is not often invoked, and only one shrine is known: at Khirgár, possibly under Yán Koryáni, N'lüss, or even Lorún influence. No prayers or rituals are known. A form of this Deity is much more popular in Yán Kór.

### 49) Zerússa

"The One of Roads"

She guides travelers who have lost their way. She is usually portrayed on medals and in amulet form as a bent, ugly old woman leaning on a staff. She has no shrines but accepts offerings of food, wine, etc., from those who seek Her aid. Most caravans carry Her image, and She is pictured on the lintels of many *Sákbe* road towers.

### 50) Orodhún

"The Paragon of Unimaginable Allure"

She is the principle of beauty, of grace, of pure form and perfect dimensions. She is shown as an abstract triangle of blue sapphire stone, the better quality the more desirable. She is the patron of art, painting, sculpture, and physical perfection. Her clergy are chosen for their beauty; Her shrines are thus filled with lovely women and handsome men. Artists come to pray for the success of

their works, and nonhumans come seeking to create artistic works appealing to Human customers. She accepts no offerings except simple prayers. Her studios and academies are found in Thráya, Ferinára, Jakállá, Usenánu, Tumíssa, and Chéne Hó, but Her greatest shrine, with an extensive art school and museum attached, is in Béy Sü.

#### 51) Kandomél

"The One of Smooth Remembering"

He is the patron of gentle old age, tranquillity, and peaceful living. He is shown as a kindly old man, seated upon a low dais and holding three golden rings. He has very few shrines, the largest being in Mrelú. Lord Kandomél accepts offerings of money, golden beads, and gems, in return for which He is said to facilitate the vicissitudes of old age. Those who are tired of living can obtain gentle release from this life through special liqueurs dispensed by His priests and priestesses. He is said to be a close friend of Lord Belkhánu.

52-58) lost to history

No texts contain Their names, although scholars agree that They once existed and these slots were filled.

#### 59) Qalái

"The Maintainer of Cycles"

This Deity of indeterminate sex guards the smooth continuation of the universe from those who would upset it (such as Lord Hrüü). The Aspect is depicted as a broad-based pyramid of bright blue stone or ceramic; this is inscribed with symbols, spells, and talismans in the Thu'usa tongue. The Aspect Qalái needs no offerings, shrines, or priesthood, but pursues His, Her, or Its affairs far away among the Many Planes. Once a year, however, during the fifth Intercalary Day, the priests of the Lady Avánthe at the shrine in Komóre gather to do homage and to request that the Universe may not be overturned, as was the Egg of the World.

#### 60) Weltíga

"The Lady of Scrolls"

She is the patron of temple administration, records, scribal schools, and beautiful calligraphy. Her worshippers create elegant pictures using the letters of the Tsolyáni script; these are inscribed in colors of gold, silver, and powdered gems on vellum and are submitted to the temple authorities for judgment. Scribes of Lady Avánthe's faith often keep an image of Weltíga on their writing tables. She is depicted as a slim, pretty, nearly nude girl with long, curling tresses and a necklace of blue gems, particularly sapphires. Her shrines at Mekú, Úrmish, and Thráya also function as scribal schools where calligraphy in many languages and styles is taught.

#### 61) Nionél

"Patron of Fragrances"

She governs scents, perfumes, sweet essences, and cachets. The oil-makers and perfumers all have statuettes

of Her in their factories: She is pictured as a serpent-headed woman embracing herself. Her shrines are few; Haumá is perhaps the most famous. Here the *Purú*-oil so popular in Béy Sü is made, as well as a thousand perfumes. The only other major center for perfume in the Empire is at Púrdimal, under the patronage of Lord Ksáru.

#### 62) Mékhis

"Defender of Harmony"

His is a militant Aspect: the patron of legions such as Eléchu of Usenánu (30th Archers). He is shown as a many-headed, six-armed warrior, each head wearing a plumed helmet and each hand bearing a weapon. He represents the resistance of the forces of cyclical change to unplanned, chaotic change. His shrines are found wherever Lady Avánthe's legions are bivouacked. Just before a battle Her soldiers offer drops of their own blood, prayers inscribed on paper and dipped in blood, and small coins. Her main shrine is located in the temple of Lady Avánthe at Mekú. Smaller ones are found at S'ís, Tsurú, and Tumíssa.

#### 63) Cháith

"The Empress"

She patronizes those of Her worshippers who seek to rule. Her images show a rigid, stern-faced woman garbed in a blue robe, seated on a throne-like dais and crowned with an elaborate headdress of *Khéshchal*-plumes and gilded plaques. She is said to represent one of the ancient queens of the Engsvanyáli Priestkings, but it is not known which one. She guards palaces, gates, fortifications, and secure places belonging to Her worshippers, accepting sacrifices only of gold coins. She has a large shrine in the temple of Lady Avánthe on the east bank of the river at Béy Sü.

64-93) local or forgotten

It is impossible to be sure of the characteristics and identities of these Aspects. Often They are extremely localized, the result of a singular manifestation witnessed in a rural village, for example. Other Aspects so closely resemble more well-known manifestations of the Goddess as to leave some question as to whether or not They are the same or discrete, and thus Their status and even their number remain in question. One such Aspect is unnamed in the scholarly texts, but depicted as a mother with a child in Her arms, a ubiquitous theme in the Temple and bearing some resemblance to the Aspect Chorisánde.

Another such disputed Aspect is Tanulé, the Aspect of Female Beauty, the Maid Become Young Woman. Quite similar to Tahelé, She is pictured as a slim girl, with long black hair, triangular and piquant features, a retrousse nose, and wide cheekbones. The main difference between the two is that Tanulé represents the adult side of puberty and Tahelé the adolescent side. They stand on either side of the line that separates the full adult from the adolescent. Are they the same Aspect? Is there a third that represents the female at the juncture between the

two? Or are our simple human minds making distinctions that are meaningless to the Lady? Scholars may debate, but the truth remains with the Gods themselves.

Those with deeper interests in the Aspects of the Gods should consult the Scrolls of Niukúmina found in the great library of the temple of Lady Avánthe in Béy Sü.

### Demons

#### Spirits of Air, Water, Fire, and Earth.

Lady Avánthe's special creatures are wraith-like beings who appear as wisps of fog. They are indistinct to human eyes, but the perceptive Pé Chói, Ssú, Tinalíya, Hlüss, and Mihállí can discern them clearly. Each is associated with that Aspect of Lady Avánthe dedicated to their element: Bolénde, the Lord of the Spirits of Water; ; and Dedé, Master of the Spirits of the Earth.

The Aspect Niluénde is the Mistress of the Air and the patron of the Spirits of the Air. Her demons only accept as offerings spells drawn forth from the minds of those who summon them. These spells are taken seemingly at random, and must be re-learned.

Lord Hlikársh is the Master of the Demons of Fire. His demons are whimsical and may or may not aid their supplicants. They accept magical books, scrolls, or other items as sacrifices.

Lord Dedé is the Lord of the Demons of the Earth, who appear as rotund, jolly humans made entirely of rich, fertile soil from which tufts of grass and other plants sprout in profusion. These accept bread and beer, often joining in revelry with their Lord's clergy. They can cause barren soil to become fertile.

Lord Bolénde rules over the Spirits of Water, beings who exist on a Plane filled entirely with cool, water. It is brightly lit with golden sunlight as if blue sky was just overhead, yet there is no surface and no bottom to this ocean of fresh water. Sacrifices of fresh fish and certain summonings will bring His Demons, who are powerful and mercurial. They may aid those drowning and even rescue ships at sea, washing them up on some safe shore. However, they are easily angered, and may turn against those who summon them for vain, selfish or petty purposes.

### Magic

Magic in Lady Avánthe's Temple is directed toward the healing of crops, animal husbandry, and generally the restoration of things to their proper place in their cycles

The Temple earns some of its income by dispatching its priests and priestesses to bless the crops of the Lady's faithful. These blessings can include powerful magical spells such as Fructification for an additional donation to the Temple.

The Temple of Avánthe is also aware of dangerous spells which cause lethal cancerous growths to emerge and eventually kill plants or animals. Such spells are not at odds with the Lady's doctrines, for both growth and death

are part of the cycle of existence: nonetheless, the Temple frowns upon the use of such spells by its clergy.

Ritual spells cast by the clergy of Ladies Avánthe and Dilinála are accompanied by gestures which are particularly graceful and delicate. While all ritual spells include precise gesticulation, the spells of the Gentle Goddess and Her Cohort require special care. Just as Lady Avánthe oversees the necessary rhythms of life, so Her priesthood must carefully control the rhythms of spellcasting.

#### The Breath of the Goddess

This ritual has two variants. The *Exhalation* creates breathable air in the vicinity of the caster, while the *Inhalation* causes a popping explosion, like a small thunderclap, which can damage its target.

#### Climatization

This ritual creates an area of temperate climate which protects the caster from limited extremes of temperature. Unfortunately, it fails abruptly under greater extremes: cold such as is found atop the highest mountain peaks, and heat somewhat greater than the hottest day of Firasúl in Jakállá. Fortunately these temperatures are not usually immediately fatal.

#### Envenomization

A ritual which instills in its target a subtle but powerful natural poison. This poison lies dormant until the final utterance of the ritual, which can be withheld for nearly a *Kirén* before the ritual itself fails. Upon activation, the poison slays an average-sized person in mere minutes.

#### Fructification

This ritual is frequently employed for agriculturists. It causes plants to produce greater yields, and female animals to become ready for impregnation. The Temple also employs this spell for a fee upon willing sentient females who are having difficulty becoming pregnant. A powerful variant of this spell will also cause cancerous tumors to grow within the target, but this practice is discouraged.

#### The Hands of Krá the Mighty

This psychic spell can be used to crush targets of various types.

#### Seismism

This ritual causes earthquakes of various intensities. In 2366 the Temple of Avánthe in Usenánu was destroyed by this spell during a subterranean invasion of the city by forces loyal to Emperor Dhich'uné. Many priests and priestesses were killed, but the invasion was turned back due to the resulting collapse of much of the *Tsuru'úm*. The High Administrative Priestess of the Temple, believed to have been responsible for the Seismism ritual, was among those killed in the collapse.

### The Well that Waters the World

Opens a small ground-level nexus point to one of the Planes of Lady Avánthe which consists of pure, cool water. Pressure differences cause the water to flow forth gently. This water is quite drinkable, and the ritual does not produce enough water to imperil a ship of any sort, so that fresh water can even be made available at sea.

#### Zoification

This ritual causes plants to become animated and respond to the caster's will

As in the other Temples, each Ritual position has a name, and a role to which suitable individuals are assigned. For example, a second circle Ritual priestess might appropriately be appointed to one of many choirs as a "Singer of Purity." Every temple of any size has several men and women assigned to various positions within one or more choirs, and the "Singer of Purity" is usually a sweet-voiced young girl, whose tone has not been fully enriched to womanhood.

She would live in the dormitories with the other second circle Ritual priests and priestesses. She might share her bed with whichever priest or priestess found the arrangement agreeable; such matters are of no concern unless they become disruptive. In the morning she would awaken to the ringing of the gongs, or beforehand if she had duties in the morning choir. Lighting a small blue-glass lamp beside her mat, she would recite a morning blessing to Lady Avánthe or one of Her Aspects (possibly Lady Tahelé, a popular aspect for young women, or Lady Jogái the Songstress). Then she would straighten her belongings and mat before going off to make her morning ablutions.

She would then join her colleagues in a refectory, eating her morning meal of *Dná*-grain porridge, or fruit, or dried meat or fish, depending upon the season, all washed down with the ubiquitous *Chumétl* or water. Quiet, dignified conversation is usually permitted in such settings, although boisterousness or foolishness is not.

Her morning training would be a moderately small class, possibly a dozen other second circle Ritual priests, studying some aspect of ritual worship: songs of praise to the Lady, harmonious theology, musical instruments, etc. Once a Ritual priest or priestess has chosen a specialty, such as song, incantation, music, or dance, they rarely stray into other areas.

If her duties were in the midday choir, she would have time after classes to attend to one of the mundane chores by which the temple maintains itself. Depending on her clan and her bearing, these could be as menial as manual labor or could involve carrying messages about the temple.

Following a brief noontime repast of fruit and water, she would then participate in the Choir of the Midday Rituals as a Singer of Purity, which duties involve a brief rehearsal preceding the rituals, and then attendance and perfect performance in the ritual itself. Positioned either before the worshippers, or ensconced behind screens (depending upon the occasion), she would add her voice to those of the others in the choir praising and celebrating the glories of Lady Avánthe.

Following the midday ritual, she might then have a few moments of freedom. During the hot summer months, these would wisely be spent in the cool recesses of a lower library where she might pursue her studies, or she might doze upon her sleeping mat in preparation for some evening event. During the spring and autumn, she might shop the markets or stroll over to her clanhouse to visit her family. The winter months might find her avoiding the rains in one of the upper libraries, which

during the summer become too hot to visit for any length of time.

Following the mid-afternoon rest, she would attend her evening studies in theology, ritual dance, or song before adjourning for dinner in the temple refectory. Finally, the evening might be spent in meditation, the cultivation of her studies, or work upon the Labor of Reverence with which she might seek to achieve the Third Circle of the Priesthood.

With luck, persistence, and effort our second circle priestess might someday find herself leading one of the Temple Choirs, participating in one of the special celebrations of the Lady, or even engaged in keen political battles as one of the Chief Ritual Priestesses of the Temple itself! Her clan, her skill, and the whims of the Weaver of Skeins will all come together as Lady Avánthe intends.

# Dilinála

*The Lovely Maiden of the Turquoise Crown, Aid of Lovers, Solace to the Weary, Handmaiden of Avánthe and Spiritual Daughter of Hnálla*



Lady Dilinála is "Woman as Woman Alone:" femininity without the polarity of male versus female. She is the innocent virgin, the beloved daughter, the loyal sister, the platonic confidante to whom a lover may tell his yearnings, the wise woman of many years, the matriarch, and even woman in love with woman. She is woman looking inward to herself. Lady Dilinála is the patron of women's concerns such as menstruation, menopause, and childbearing, as well as women's roles in society. She is interested in women's power: the rights of clan-women, the careers of *Aridáni*, the fate of female warriors, and the roles of female leaders and rulers.

Lady Dilinála is interested in the unique concerns and goals of women in society, especially in activities unique to their gender. Girls coming of age who seek to understand the different roles of clan-women and *Aridáni* women turn to the priestesses of Lady Dilinála for advice. Women who have experienced discrimination, or who have been abused by their husbands or clans may seek the assistance of Her priestesses in bringing a complaint to the Palace of the Realm. Equivalent protection for men exists through the Palace of the Realm or the other Temples, but these organizations do not have the specific interest in protecting men that Lady Dilinála expresses towards women.

Lady Dilinála's priestesses seek to emphasize, protect, cherish, and celebrate those elements of Lady Avánthe's doctrines in which women are foremost. Where women are a part of society and guide the cycles of life, there the Goddess makes Herself manifest, furthering the goals of Lady Avánthe by supporting the unique contributions of women.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

#### *Color*

Blue and white are Her colors, reflecting the majesty of Lady Avánthe and the glory of Lord Hnálla.

#### *Symbol*

The Lady's symbol is that of a hand extended, palm down.

#### *Costume*

Her priestesses wear blue and white robes and small tiaras of emeralds, turquoises, or other blue gems.

### *Rituals*

Her *Tunkúl*-gongs ring out every two or three hours throughout the day, characterized by a high, musical tone. Her priestesses are trained in mime and religious drama so that they can portray the epic poems that make up much of their Outer Ritual presentation.

While the doctrines of Lady Dilinála preclude males from Her priesthood, Her worshippers include the men of many clans. Her Inner Rituals are barred to males, and those of Her Outer Rituals that males can attend do not present any of the substance of Her doctrine. Instead, the Temple conducts "secular" or "family" services, as well as welcoming all its faithful to the traditional holidays of the region: harvests, plantings, midsummer and midwinter festivals, etc. It is common that the men who accompany their spouses, out of duty and tradition, worship Lords Karakán or Chegárra. On the other hand, many males truly worship Lady Dilinála: they simply cannot participate in Her rituals any more than they can experience childbirth or menstrual cramps.

The Outer Sanctuaries are open to everyone, including males, and the Outer Rituals have elements common to many Temples. Beautiful women in blue and white robes perform chants and choruses. Icons and holy items are displayed to music and song provided by Ritual priestesses trained to that specialty. The burning of incense and the recitation of praises to the Goddess are conducted. Some special days include public processions where the image of Lady Dilinála (or an appropriate Aspect) is carried forth to song and revelry, and sweets are tossed to the children. Usually, however, the recitation of praises is followed by the presentation of sacrifices and the end of the family ceremony.

Low-clan women, and men and children may then depart, or retire to the outer courtyard where food-preparation clans sell refreshments. Women of high clan and lineage are escorted into a sanctuary for further rituals whose proceedings are not disclosed. Those outside can hear the music of the Inner Ceremony being performed, but cannot make out the words.

At the end of these Outer Rituals, most of the faithful depart, while the highest worshippers proceed even further into the temple, and can no longer be heard. Eventually, a small core group of the highest priestesses proceeds to the deepest, buried shrines of the ancient temples. It is a great honor to be inducted into the "Inner

Mysteries" of the deepest level of the temple. These ceremonies include ritual sexual acts and the use of drugs for spiritual revelation, but ought not be confused with the hedonistic practices of Ladies Dlamélish and Hriháyal.

#### **Sexual Rituals**

As with Lady Avánthe, the rituals of Lady Dilinála often involve real or depicted sexual acts. These are often part of the ancient epics which comprise much of the substance of the Outer Rituals, and where males appear in these epics, appropriately costumed women portray the male roles. Oftentimes this "costume" is nothing more than a symbolic emblem indicating that this character is male, rather than anything more elaborate.

Other rituals celebrate the sexual relationships between women, but these are usually part of the Inner Rituals.

#### **Sacrifice**

Blue and white garlands are popular, as are fruits arranged in colorful, geometric patterns and offered within wide, flat, circular baskets. Cabochons and sapphires are considered fine sacrifices. In coastal areas, blue and bright silver scaled fish are presented.

#### **Gender Restrictions**

All priestesses of Lady Dilinála are female, and are precluded from experiencing intimacy with males. Many are lesbian as a matter of doctrine, if not entirely preference, but others subsume their sexual lives to their roles in the clergy.

Those priestesses who are neither lesbian nor celibate must fulfill their needs alone or seek the assistance of female slaves or female peers. If a priestess joins the clergy, but later finds these strictures too difficult to endure, she can transfer to the priesthood of Lady Avánthe, the only circumstance where one can easily transfer between Temples. She could then have male lovers and bear children, fulfilling the role she desires.

#### **Food Taboos**

Priestesses of Lady Avánthe and Her Cohort Dilinála are prohibited from eating red meat while the moon Káshi is in the sky, and many of the worshippers of these two deities are vegetarians who eschew not only meat but fish and eggs as well.

#### **History**

Scholars believe that the worship of Lady Dilinála began with the goddess Dhalé, one of the ancient deities of the northern matriarchy of Éngsvan hlá Gánga. She represented women as rulers, thinkers, philosophers, and artists.

#### **The Inner Doctrines**

Lady Dilinála deals with very specific women's issues, feelings, and attitudes. It has been emphasized that Lady Dilinála is the Goddess of Lesbians, and this is true, but She is much more than that. She is the Goddess who celebrates the power of women. She is not a "matronly"

Goddess, for She does not celebrate household duties or mothering, or the "traditional" roles of women.

The other Temples, particularly those of Lords Thúmis and Ksárul, suspect and fear underlying goals of power and female dominance, pointing to the priestesses of Yán Kór as example of the dangers of matriarchy. Those priestesses of Lady Dilinála who deign to respond point out that the matriarchs of Yán Kór run everything, keeping stables of males for recreational purposes, without being particularly religious or lesbian. This has thus far failed to reassure the clergy of the other Temples.

#### **Rituals**

The Inner Rituals celebrate the sensuality and personal sanctity of women, and their independence from male domination. They celebrate freedom from the subordinate status of "good clan-girls" to which many women are relegated.

The women permitted to attend these festivals are expected not to discuss their content with those outside the Temple, and certainly not with males.

Those rituals of the Lady Dilinála that involve sexuality are not the hedonistic orgies of Lady Dlamélish, or even Lady Avánthe. Instead they portray sexuality as a part of woman-woman relationships: the affection between clansisters, the bond shared by *Aridáni* warriors, and even the relationships that bind Her priestesses to each other.

#### **Temple Layout**

The temple of Lady Dilinála is usually located within the same compound as that of Her Lady Avánthe. Its structure is unremarkable, having an outer courtyard before the temple's main hall, with hallways off to either side where the Goddess' Aspects have Their shrines. Beyond the main hall is a wide passage down which female worshippers pass to attend the Inner Ceremonies of the Outer Rituals.

The priestesses' quarters are located beyond the Inner Hall. Passages leading down from the Inner Hall open into the older shrines of the Deity, preserved for the Innermost Ceremonies and attended only by clergy of the Temple and select laity.

The Cohort's temple usually shares refectory space with the Temple of Avánthe, as well as storage facilities and slaves' quarters.

#### **Secular Activities**

##### **Businesses**

In addition to the usual agricultural and crafts clans which support most Temples, clans faithful to Lady Dilinála are notable for producing fine *Güdrü*-cloth and *Thésun*-gauze garments, as well as fine pottery and wines.

##### **Public Works and Services**

The Temple of Dilinála operates hospitals in coordination with clergy from the Temples of Keténgku and Avánthe.

The largest of these facilities is near Haumá, and all offer unique services to women, without regard for their faith. Girls who are coming of age can seek advice concerning menstruation and women's health if their clan is for some reason unable to provide answers to their questions. Likewise, these facilities provide midwives, childbirth, and child-rearing assistance, usually in coordination with the Temple of Avánthe.

Abused women or those who are victims of injustice can seek the assistance of Lady Dilinála's clergy in approaching the Palace of the Realm for redress. Often the Temple will seek to work with the woman's clan to resolve problems before seeking Imperial assistance. If this is not successful a priestess of Lady Dilinála will assist the victim, providing a voice and representation for lower-clan women who might be too terrified to speak.

Her clergy also helps fatherless children and widowed or abandoned mothers in an effort to ensure that no woman is oppressed, although other Temples have on occasion labeled their zeal "extreme".

The Temple of Dilinála also offers specialized training for women in such fields as administration, diplomacy, statecraft, tactics, and even warrior skills. These efforts are not meant to duplicate the efforts of the Temples which normally fill these roles: Lord Chegárra's role includes statecraft, and Lady Dilinála would not attempt to usurp it. Instead, Lady Dilinála's supplemental training addresses women's particular characteristics: warrior skills focused upon the smaller frame and lesser strength of women; the place of seduction in diplomacy; and the skills of the woman who would rule over men and must command their respect.

The legion headquarters of Lady Mríssa, in Tu'unmrá, maintains a full complement of trainers and fencing masters, skilled in developing outstanding *Aridáni*-warriors.

Training is coordinated with the appropriate Temples: a woman who worshipped Lord Chegárra would be guided to an instructor at the Temple of Dilinála by her own Temple. She would not seek instruction at the Temple of Dilinála of her own accord, as this would constitute a breach of propriety towards her own Temple, a circumvention of procedure, and would be considered impolite and possibly impolitic.

#### Cities of Broad Influence

##### *Katalál*

A small clan of the Lady's faithful in Katalál, the Devisors of Soft-Clinging Beauty, produces the best *Thésun*-gauze in the Empire, and other clans in that city embroider their product, make brocades, and manufacture the gold thread used in the priestly garments of most Temples.

##### *Béy Sü*

The Blue Kirtle clan here is renowned for their fine pottery, while other branches of the same clan make fine *Dlél*-fruit wine.

##### *Haumá*

The temple of Lady Dilinála in this city is the Empire's largest facility for treating the unique afflictions of females. Operated in concert with the Temples of Avánthe and Keténgku, it is the destination of many pilgrimages by women afflicted with chronic illnesses.

##### *Tsúru*

Lady Dilinála's priestesses in this city run a notably fine hospital, and also take in abandoned female children, who are raised as priestesses of the temple.

##### *Kerunán*

The residents of the Kerunán forests, the dense arboreal border between Tsolyánu and Salarvyá, include populations of Lady Dilinála's faithful who have been long overlooked by both nations. As a result, these people worship their own particular and rather nature-oriented variety of Lady Dilinála.

## Politics

### Internal Factions

#### *Sisters of the Cerulean Flower*

An activist group made up of *Aridáni* warriors, it collaborates with Lord Karakán's more militant elements in support of the Military Party.

### Temple Alliances

The Temple of Dilinála works closely with Her Lady Avánthe, of course, and also with the Temple of Lord Thúmis' Cohort, Keténgku, in the operation of hospitals around the Empire. Her clergy also work with the Temples of Karakán and Chegárra, and occasionally those of Lord Vimúhla and His Cohort, in matters concerning the training of *Aridáni* warriors and the coordination of military matters. Her priestesses also coordinate instruction with Lord Chegárra's clergy regarding the training of female administrators and rulers.

### External Parties

The Temple of Dilinála has some influence in the Imperial and Military parties, an area where Lady Avánthe's clergy show little interest. On the other hand, Lady Dilinála's Temple has somewhat less influence in the Royalist and Priestly parties, following the Temple of Avánthe in most things.

### Military Legions

#### *Legion of the Sapphire Kirtle*

##### 12th Imperial Light Infantry

Formed by Empress Sháira Sú "Divine Daughter of Thúmis" (945-984) to aid *Aridáni* women, the legion was the First Medium Infantry based in Béy Sü and saw action in the siege of the City of Sáрку. Emperor Nríga Gaqchiké "The Spider" (984-1010), a worshipper of Lord Ksáruk, sent the legion to Tu'unmrá, where it rebelled and fought on the side of the Warlord of the West in Civil War of 1010-1026. It was favored by Empress



Janulé, "She of the Blue Goddess" (1123-1125) but degraded and compelled to serve at Dlamélish' orgies by Empress Dashilúna, "The Green-Eyed" (1279-1306). The Legion fled to the Chákas and was disbanded by Tontikén Riruné "Slave of Demons (1308-1316).

It was rebuilt in modern times by Dijáya hiQurrulúma, Ritual High Priestess of the Temple at Béy Sü, and a tough lesbian general who offered to climb the Atkolél Heights herself to be with her troops. It is composed of virgins dedicated to Ladies Dilinála or Avánthe and who are mostly also lesbians. It fought valiantly in the Atkolél Heights and returned to be stationed in Chéne Hó.

#### *The Legion of Lady Mríssa*

19th Medium Infantry

Founded in 2346 and commanded by General Mríssa hiChagotlékka, of the Blue Stream Clan of Chéne Hó. She is a professional *Aridáni* warrior, tough and shrewd, a close ally of General Kéttukal and loyal to Prince Eselné. Her legion has seen action against bandit Pé Chói in the forests of Dó Cháka and fought on Mrigásh Field in Yán Kór. She commands 12 Cohorts officially listed as encamped near Khirgár, but is actually assisting Prince Eselné's rebellion. Lady Mríssa's legion possesses devoted followings of female warriors, many of which are quite fearsome and respected.

Clans

*Very High*

Might of Gánga

*High*

White Stone

Emerald Girdle

Joyous of Vrá

*Medium*

Blue Kirtle

Devisors of Soft-Clinging Beauty

Blue Shadow

Blue Stream

Silver Lightning

Silver Collar

Red Eye of Dawn

*Low*

Green Forest

Green Reed

Sapphire Bird

*Very Low*

Flowering Life

Granite Lintel

## Holidays

1 Hasanpór

The Welcome to the Returning Year, Jaikalór

On New Year's Day, worshippers of Lady Dilinála join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving and political pageantry. In Jaikalór, the rituals and feasting offered by the Temple of Dilinála are particularly splendid.

3Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on His own birthday.

10 Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

Ngaqómi, Intercalary Days

The Dance of the Flowered Crown, Haumá

This temple hosts grand public feasts which worshippers of most any faith attend (save possibly the Dark Trinity). The most beautiful and talented priestesses conduct the Dance of the Flowered Crown, considered by all but the most jaded eye to be one of the most graceful and exquisite of all Tsolyáni ritual dances.

## Aspects

Lady Dilinála is represented as a demure maiden of great beauty and chaste purity holding out her hands to comfort the worshipper.

She has only nine known Aspects, but only these five are Outer Aspects known to all Her temples.

Teshúna

"The Guardian"

Depicted as a robed woman, of middle years but quite hale, bearing a shield upon which the Symbol of Lady Dilinála is displayed. This Aspect is dedicated to protecting women from being misused, whether by clanspeople or by governmental authority.

## Milaléa

## "The Sister"

She is depicted as a young woman standing with her right hand extended palm-down, her head lowered demurely. She represents the purity of women's relations with other women, the bond of trust and love without emphasis upon sexuality.

## Mríko

## "The Advocate"

This Ritual Aspect represents Lady Dilinála in Her relationships with other Gods, an Aspect of theological importance but not the most popular with average worshippers. She is invoked on behalf of Her priestesses who work closely with other Temples.

## Ssáni

## "The Lover"

Appearing as an alluring young woman lying upon one hip, She is always depicted as wearing light *Thésun*-gauze garments, makeup, and jewelry that enhance Her appearance. She represents sexual relations between women, and lesbian lovers will frequently present each other with the gift of a locket or broach bearing Ssáni's image.

## Eshátl

## "The Champion"

She represents woman as defender and champion, the soldier's Aspect. Eshátl is portrayed as a nude human female with the head of a snake or *Sró*, mouth wide open, and sharp narrow fangs extended. Depending upon the legion, She will be armed with a sword, bow, or multi-bladed axe. She is considered a fearsome and cruel Aspect, for She encourages the amputation of male organs from enemy warriors following battle. This is not considered blood sacrifice, however: the Lady Dilinála's warriors may not have killed the foes themselves and do not offer these grisly trophies up to their God. Instead the rite is a celebration on the part of the warriors, as well as a means of intimidating their enemies.

**Magic**

## The Crown of Purity

A subtle variation upon the spell of Domination, this psychically enters the mind of the target to take control of those areas responsible for speech. Variants of this spell can command truthful replies from Humans, Ssú, *Ru'ún*, Undead, and even objects sorcerously endowed with speech. The most powerful versions of this spell can render their targets unable to communicate by spoken or written word.

## Encapsulation

This spell produces effects similar to that of a "Magnificent Ruby Eye," a small ovoid device of the Great Ancients which "freezes" targets in time so that

they do not age or decay. The effects of the Rituals of Encapsulation are temporary, and do not produce the diffracted ruby glow of items fully separated from the Planes of Time which give the Magnificent Ruby Eye its name.

## The Girdle of the Maiden

These rituals produce two effects, aside from the soft blue glow which encircles the torso of a target. Females affected by this spell are empowered as mighty warriors, while males are instead prevented from attacking females when bound by the Blue Girdle.

Aka'éla crouched behind an elaborate bench. Despite her training, her thoughts kept turning to Shána.

Arriving in Béy Sü, Aka'éla had sought the blessings of Lady Eshátl upon her mission. The lissome attendant of Lady Dilinála's Aspect, the priestess Shána Tlakotáni had captivated her. For several nights they had dined and loved. It pained Aka'éla that she would be reassigned followingtonight'smission.

Aka'éla's reverie was interrupted by the arrival of her target. A small, portly aristocrat of genteel tastes, Lord Méngan did not appear threatening or resourceful, despite her clanmaster's warnings. Silently, Aka'éla drew the slender garrote between her fingers and stepped towards him.

Suddenly a dreamy lethargy swept over her. She drooped towards the floor, the garrote falling from her limp fingers. "Careless!" her internal voice chided, "Of course Lord Méngan has a bodyguard!"

Then her training took over: her left hand described a glyph in the air, and she mumbled the word of dispelling energies. Awareness returned with an invigorating shock. Before her, Lord Méngan was turning; at her back Aka'éla could feel the energy of another spell building.

With a practiced twist, the sheathed daggers called "Springing Doom" slipped into her hands. Continuing her spell-induced slump, Aka'éla tucked into a ball, crossing her arms to fling a dagger at each of her foes.

Simultaneous cries indicated her daggers had not missed. Aka'éla rolled to her feet.

Lord Méngan knelt with a dagger in the left side of his chest. Even if wound was not mortal, he would soon succumb to the poison. Aka'éla turned her attention to the bodyguard.

Shána stood with fierce anger glistening in her eyes. With one glowing hand she pulled Aka'éla's dagger from her shoulder. The blade flashed and splattered into a silvery puddle on the floor.

"*Marékh*" whispered Aka'éla involuntarily.

"Yes, I am *marékh*" said Shána between her teeth, "and guardian of Méngan. Although we worship the Goddess and share a love, yet you will precede your prey to the Isles."

"Then our love was a trap?" accused Aka'éla, delaying her doom and shifting her weight. Rumors claimed the *marékh* guarded those whose lives and decisions formed the foci upon which the fate of the many worlds hinged. Little was known of the *marékh* or of how one was determined to require such a guardian, but dread tales had been whispered about their skills and powers. Although one of the finer assassins of the Black Y Clan, Aka'éla had no confidence of victory against a dread *marékh*.

"No, no trap," said Shána, "even now my affection hinders me. But though it breaks my heart I must..."

Her statement was incomplete when Aka'éla attacked. Thus had she ever greeted her fears and her loves.

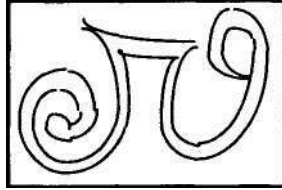
While the battle raged, Lord Méngan removed the dagger, countered its poison, and healed his punctured lung, a lengthy process complicated by the need to remain conscious. When he could breathe again, he rose to view the carnage.

His lifelong friend, Shána Tlakotáni, was dead upon the floor, scored with bloody wounds. Méngan's would-be assassin displayed the burns and lacerations of many lethal spells, her head thrown back in a painful rictus. They were wrapped about each other like lovers, the assassin's hands clenching weapons buried in Shána's back.

Summoning his abashed guards, Lord Méngan sent for his Eye of Revivification. Shána would not remain dead very long. And by interrogating the assassin, he might learn who had targeted him for death...

# Thúmis

*Lord of Wisdom, Knower of Arts, Hidden Seeker of Eternal Knowledge, Sage of the Gods*



Lord Thúmis seeks total wisdom, cognition without the limitations of ego, and an understanding of the Universe in order to serve the eventuation of Lord Hnálla's Changeless Radiance. He aids those who heal, teach, and study, and is the patron of teachers, scribes, mathematicians, physicians, and all those who work with their minds to serve their fellow man.

Lord Thúmis preaches wisdom, knowledge, and far-ranging experience for the cohesion and development of society. For Lord Thúmis and His faithful, knowledge and learning are means of supporting society and worshipping the Gods. Secrets and ignorance are shadows, flaws in the Light which threaten the Stability of all things. To serve society and order, these shadows must be eradicated through the illumination of teaching, learning, contemplation, and wisdom. Invigorated by the Light, society can better serve the Gods.

Like Lord Drá, Lord Thúmis gazes upon Lord Hnálla's Light with reverence. Unlike Lord Hnálla's Cohort, however, Lord Thúmis seeks to understand the Glory of Lord Hnálla completely and fully, to become part of the Light through understanding and teaching. As one grows in wisdom, one moves closer to Lord Hnálla's goal of the EndlessLight.

## Theology

The Crippled Priest, Pavár of Gánga, first developed the means of contacting the great, enigmatic interdimensional beings who are the Gods of Téकुmel. Pavár compiled a book of mysteries, now lost, and coordinated the doctrines still followed in all of the Human empires. Lord Thúmis seems to have been one of Pavár's principal sources of information about the laws of science and magic that operate in this dimension.

There is a fragment, purported to be in Pavár's own handwriting, preserved in the Temple of Eternal knowing in Bey SO that reads,

*"This Lord is cool and detached, clear and open to the intellect, full of knowledge and quick to reply... When one is in contact with Thúmis, it is as though one were being viewed by a Mighty Eye, as a man views the antics of the Drí, sympathetic and wise in an unemotional way, all-knowing and aware of the present and past, yet somehow concerned for Man..."*

With the subsidence of the mighty city of Éngsvan hlá Gánga, most of Pavár's knowledge, and that of his successors, was lost to the sea. During the ensuing interregnum known as the Time of No Kings, men who had some access to this lost knowledge began to style themselves "wizards" and "sorcerers" and to oppress the land. The worship of Lord Thúmis was preserved in the cities of Chéne Hó and Páya Gupá where His worship had been popular. When the organized worship of the Gods and Cohorts resumed under the Second Imperium, temples were erected to Lord Thúmis in Béy Sü, Jakálla, Jaikalór, and other great cities. The priesthoods gathered together the doctrines of Pavár once more. Contact was again achieved with Lord Thúmis and others of these deities, but this contact was much less complete than the method developed by Pavár and now lost.

## The Outer Doctrines

### Color

Lord Thúmis' color is the pearly grey known as "Suffused Wisdom."

### Symbol

A square in which the letter "Th" is centered. Often, also, an eye gazing forth, called "The Eye of Thúmis."

### Astrology

Lord Thúmis has domination of the light, bright sides of the planets and moons, and He is said to have authority over their astrological influences. The dark sides of the moons and planets are considered to be Aspects of Lord Ksáru. It is said that the natures of these two Deities war with one another, sometimes one getting the upper hand and sometimes the other. Eclipses, moon phases, the occultation of the planets by the sun, etcetera are all part of the eternal struggle of Light versus Darkness, Stability versus Change, played out in the heavens themselves.

### Numerology

Lord Thúmis' number is six: thoughtful, bright, clever and wise. Lord Thúmis is found by looking upon a grey or silver mirror, a moonstone, or a grey cloth inscribed with His name in black. His phonemic is "f," and it is well to keep this in mind! Too many have Harmonized instead upon the letter "Th" which is oft employed to represent Him in everyday symbology but beware! "Th"

represents not 6, as is proper, but 600, and constitutes a dangerous presumption upon the God!

#### *Costume*

All clergy wear grey robes and black skullcaps, with the symbol of the Eye of Thúmis embossed upon breast-plaques and sewn into the hem of their robes.

#### *Doctrinal Disputes*

With knowledge and the establishment of an organized religion came doctrine, and with doctrine came dispute. Various references to "The Mighty Eye of Thúmis" in the writings of Pavár and his colleagues led to the doctrine that "Lord Thúmis possesses the Eye to View the World," i.e. omniscience and omnipresence.

#### *The Doctrines of the Eye*

Dispute arose over the nature of this "viewing." Some say that the Eye of Thúmis is not a physical eye at all but rather an inherent presence of Lord Thúmis (a "viewing") in every particle of being. Others claim that Lord Thúmis does indeed possess physical eyes, but these are not manifest in this world but rather view it from His own. A third party takes the mention of "eyes" quite literally and theorizes that Lord Thúmis has physical eyes which manifest themselves at His will in this world. This sect points to the many miraculous appearances of the "Eyes of Thúmis" throughout history. They point to the eye-like impressions that magically appeared upon a bare cliff face overlooking the site of the battle of Chéne Hó in 2,019 A.S., to an eye-shaped stain upon a woman's shawl now held as a sacred relic in the Temple of the Eye of Thúmis in Páya Gupá, and to many other such "miracles."

These three doctrines have split the priesthood of Lord Thúmis since before the beginning of the Second Imperium and continuing to the present day: the "Immanence of the Eye," the "Transcendentalism of the Eye," and the "Phenomenal Manifestation of the Eye."

At times this has led to rioting and violence. More often it has cropped up as quiet intrigue, preferential treatment for one's own sect members, and discrimination against members of the other two sects. Attempts have been made to extirpate this ancient discord through the undertaking of Temple-wide projects designed to unite the following, such as the assembly of a great encyclopedia of knowledge, but the long-held rivalries are not so easily discarded.

#### *Emanation of Supernal Light*

There are several other doctrines of the priesthood of Lord Thúmis that may be mentioned. Some of these are almost as thorny as the Doctrines of the Eye, while others are shared by the entire faith. Firstly, there is the "Emanation of Supernal Light," which holds that all wisdom (and indeed even knowledge of our own being) has Lord Thúmis as its source, and emanates outward from Him like the radiance of the sun. Those who have "gone nigh unto the God" and "opened their intellects to His light" are able to gain knowledge more easily and quickly than those who have "shadowed" themselves with mundane matters. There is a strong strain of mysticism in this doctrine, and within the Temple of Eternal Knowing

in Béy Sü there are several adepts who accept pupils for training and who demand that real knowledge requires the renunciation of the material world.

#### *The Illumined of Thúmis*

Again, this doctrine becomes embroiled in the controversy surrounding the Doctrines of the Eye: immanence, transcendentalism, and physical manifestation.

One group of the "Illumined," as they call themselves, dwells in a craggy monastery in the Dó Cháka foothills and has adopted a practice very similar to that of the most devoted clergy of Lord Hnálla's Cohort, Drá. Members of this group face the sun from dawn until dark, believing that it is the visible source of Lord Thúmis' "Light." Most of these adepts are now totally blind. Others hold assemblies in which they sway and chant and pray for a manifestation of Lord Thúmis' "Light" upon the "Eye of the Mind." And those of a less-mystical bent believe that Lord Thúmis will reveal Himself only through knowledge, and they thus spend their lives studying and concentrating upon every intellectual and philosophical problem they can devise. The extremes of this group can be seen at Mrelú, where the priesthood of Lord Thúmis offers free board and lodging to any who can provide any item of knowledge not already recorded in their books — but if a visitor fails to add something to their store of learning they charge him exorbitantly, often resulting in the imprisonment of the luckless traveler as a debtor!

#### *The Perpetration of Sagacity*

One of the most prevalent doctrines — and one about which there is no dispute — is the "Perpetration of Sagacity," the employment of knowledge for societally useful purposes in this world. Lord Thúmis is the patron of teachers, scribes, mathematicians, physicians, and all those who work with their minds to serve their fellow man.

#### *Rituals*

Each Temple has its own roster of daily rituals, and these differ from city to city even within the same faith. These involve the presence of all priests and priestesses resident in the temple, and much chanting from "*Korínkoi hiHengándàlisa*" (The Book of Mighty Splendor).

This Lord's ceremonies take place at dawn, at dark, and late in the evening. These ritual ceremonies honor philosophy, nobility, and sacrifice, rather than songs in praise of knowledge itself or the recitation of some obscure list of facts. Armloads of the green-grey *Tetél*-flower are laid at Lord Thúmis' altar, along with a few select fruits (which differ from place to place and season to season).

#### *The Opening of the Eyes of Radiance*

Celebrated with the rising of the sun at dawn.

#### *The Purification of the Intellect*

A great midday ceremony.

#### *Following of the God*

Mid-afternoon ceremony. Just as plants turn their faces to follow the glory of Lord Hnálla, so must we all aspire to

"face the Light." Processionals visit the shrines of Lord Thúmis' Aspects.

#### *Purifying of the Lips of Thúmis*

Sunset rituals.

#### *Rising Unto the Planets*

Performed at the rising and setting of Tékumel's two moons, Káshi and Gayél. The particulars of the ceremony, and even the hall in which it is held (in larger temples) will vary depending on astrological signs, since Lord Thúmis is only represented by the lighted (full) side of astrological bodies.

#### *Visitations of the Night*

A ceremony which takes place about four *Kirén* past midnight. As with other Stability ceremonies of the Night, it involves "witnessing" the creatures and demons of Change (no actual demons are summoned of course!) The worshippers express their faith in Lord Hnálla's victory over darkness, with the assistance in this case of Lord Thúmis and His Cohort.

#### *Private Ceremonies*

Individual services are also possible for a donation to the priests. The poor may obtain prayer-scrolls from the horde of priestly scribes who sit in the outer courtyards, or who line the outer entrance halls and colonnades.

Wealthier persons can enter at almost any time of day (the gates of the temple are usually shut at night, except for a tiny postern), and a payment of a few *Káitars* will be sufficient to arrange for the personal mention of one's name and presence to the Deity. The side-shrines and other public worship areas can be visited and will also require small donations.

Those proceeding to an Inner Shrine will be expected to pay more, of course, and the ceremonies there are correspondingly more magnificent. Participation in the Inner Mysteries, held in the older shrines beneath the upper temple, is possible only for the most well-to-do. Even then, the most ancient and secret shrines and ceremonies are open only to high-ranking priests and worshippers of the highest clan status and Imperial position.

#### *Sacrifice*

Lord Thúmis accepts presentations of flowers and fruit. He is particularly fond of the *Tetél*, a flower with soft, grey petals and, from richer patrons, eye-shaped memorial objects made of gold, gems, and other precious substances. These last are inscribed with the donor's name and a request for intercession from the God. Lord Thúmis does not accept blood sacrifices of any kind.

Children will pray to Lord Thúmis for good grades in His schools, and parents will pray for wise children. The elderly pray for the return of youthful thought and memory. Each of these prayers has a ceremony that accompanies it, which differs from place to place.

#### *Studies*

##### *Alchemy*

This Temple studies alchemy, but it is often mixed and confused with sorcerous researches.

##### *Archaeology*

The Temple of Thúmis has mounted many systematic archaeological expeditions in order to both locate treasures of the Ancients and acquire knowledge of the past as well. In this they often cooperate with the Temple of Ksárul and with the Livyáni Temple of Qame'él.

##### *Historical studies*

The Temples of Lords Thúmis, Ksárul, and Their Cohorts are particularly interested in historical studies, although they focus more on the recording and review of historical facts than upon the analysis of those facts.

Researches into history and archeology have revealed the oldest worship of a being with the name of "Thúmis," found recorded upon a stone lintel from the period of the Dragon Lords.

##### *Linguistics*

With the multitude of tongues to be found in and around the Five Empires, the Temples of Lords Thúmis, Ksárul, Their Cohorts, and several of the Livyáni Shadow Gods pride themselves on having at least a word-list of every tongue on the continent, plus textbooks for the ancient and classical languages.

##### *Philosophy*

In discussions with the priests, students explore such esoteric subjects as "Why have the gods not formed a mutual heaven where their faithful can mix?" and "If the world is flat, where are the holes for the sun to go up and down?" and so on.

##### *Fasting*

The Temples of Lords Hnálla and Thúmis ordain fasting as a penance for "ignoble" actions, and fasting is employed by ascetics to achieve "spiritual purity."

##### *Death Rituals*

Worshippers of Lord Thúmis are buried with their hands crossed over their stomach, as are those of Lord Hnálla.

##### *The Afterlife*

Lord Thúmis provides His faithful adherents with a totality of knowledge and cleanses them of both ego and instinct, making them a part of His abstract wisdom.

His foes are cast into a Plane whereon no knowledge can be certain, where all is madness and ignorance, and yet where the individual will remain ever conscious of his loss.

##### *The Inner Doctrines*

##### *Soul*

Lords Thúmis and Ksárul emphasize the combination of the *Hlákme* (the Mind) with the *Chusétl* (the Shadow-Self).

### *Language*

Like the other Stability Temples, the Temple of Thúmis employs Thu'usa for academic and doctrinal texts. Otherwise, the Temple employs nothing akin to a "secret" language.

### **Temple Layout**

Wherever space permits, the temple of Lord Thúmis is built upon a high, flat-topped pyramid of masonry or brick. This great structure has two functions: to raise the temple up above the heat and dust of the surrounding city and also to create a feeling of awe in the worshippers. The temple proper is then constructed upon this platform, and ramps or staircases lead up to its surface from the street below.

At the head of these stairs the worshipper first comes to a closed porch or colonnade, where temple guards and low-level duty priests are posted to assist the worshippers and to protect the temple premises. Within, a pillared antechamber leads into a great central hall, often of several storeys in height. Here the worshipper finds a great image of Lord Thúmis, and here the public rituals are performed. Side halls and further colonnades lead off to smaller shrines of some of the particular Aspects worshipped in this temple, and there are usually gates barring the way to an Inner Shrine which can be visited only by persons of status. In some temples to Lord Thúmis, sweeping staircases lead up to a higher level where this inner shrine is situated.

At the back of the main hall and off the smaller shrines, there are staircases within the wall-thicknesses which lead up to priests' quarters on the upper floors. Living quarters are frequently built as side buildings on the pyramidal platform as well. Important assets, such as the great libraries, astrological observatories, museum-like Halls of Wisdom Made Manifest, temple schools, etc., are also constructed on the pyramid-top to the back of the central temple.

The pyramid itself often contains rooms and passages which lead to private shrines, cult rooms, storerooms and guardrooms, and eventually down to the ancient levels of the *Tsuru'úm*. During periodic *Ditlána* the Tsolyáni often pull down the superstructure of a temple and enclose it within a bigger and grander pyramid. By building a new shrine on top of the new construction, many of the older shrines are buried under layers of previous temple buildings. These are carefully preserved and maintained as secret inner shrines accessible only to the higher initiates.

If there is room in the city surrounding the temple, there will often be an outer compound, where further guard rooms, priestly quarters, administrative chambers for the recording and keeping of temple tithes and land grants, cookrooms, storerooms, etc. are to be found. If the city is too crowded to allow room for these outbuildings, as at Khirgár, they will be incorporated into upper or lower levels added on to the temple itself. Usually a separate, buttressed structure, the *Tunkúl* tower in Khirgár is instead built upon one corner of the pyramidal platform.

### **Secular Activities**

#### **Businesses**

The Temple of Thúmis is one of the primary sources of education in Tsolyánu, as well as being the publisher of all forms of books, scrolls, treatises, odes, poems, and proclamations. Additionally, its scribes and administrators are the most skilled accountants of the Temple hierarchies, accurately recording and calculating births, deaths, crop and animal productivity, and so on. Many scribes trained in this Temple are employed by the Palace of the Realm's tax-collectors and bureaucrats. In rural areas, the Temple of Thúmis often collects and maintains Imperial records on behalf of the Palace of the Realm, for a substantial fee of course.

#### **Public Works and Services**

##### *Education*

As with the other Gods, many of those who worship Lord Thúmis do so for traditional reasons. However, He is also a very popular Deity. His schools educate both Stability and Change worshippers, and thus are associated with many nostalgic reminiscences. He is also the natural Deity of the researcher, the explorer, and the pure intellectual, and His libraries are the haunts of Scholar Priests from all Five Empires.

##### *Libraries*

The Temples of Thúmis and His Cohort Keténgku function as the maintainers of the great libraries, which are the pride of the intellectuals of Tsolyánu. They are staffed by devoted curators who can, and indeed must, help visitors locate the documents they seek, for there is no formal organizational method to these libraries. Instead, the location of each document is known to some or all of the various curators, and new scholarly priests can take years or even decades to learn the library's inventory and locations.

The most important items within a library are preserved and protected by a variety of magical spells, some known only to the curator's staff and handed down from priest to priest for centuries. The commonly-known "Preserver of Wisdom" is employed, along with more powerful variants, to prevent the drying and decay of items, although few of these spells can thwart violent destruction by fire or flood. Other spells, some held quite closely by the Scholarly priests who serve as curators, will cause items to produce a great shriek or other sound if they are removed from the premises. One never knows for certain if a document is guarded by such a spell until one tries to steal it, and unsuccessful attempts will alert the custodians and guardians of the temple.

The other Temples often bargain and exchange services to obtain needed utilitarian spells of these sorts for their private libraries.

##### *Organizational sculpture*

The Temples of Thúmis and Ksáru have produced "sculptured analyses" of religious tenets, other-planar

wisdom, and even languages. The symbology of such sculptures is complex enough to allow the display of almost any type of organization once tradition has established the values of the elements. Learning to "read" such sculptures takes considerable time and training, and producing these works of art is the life's work of a few gifted and dedicated individuals.

### Cities of Broad Influence

Lord Thúmis is especially powerful in Páya Gupá, Béy Sü, and Sokátis.

#### *Jakállá*

In the *Tsuru'úm* beneath the city of Jakállá, the Temple of Thúmis maintains a small but important complex of libraries and teaching halls which comprise the priestly academy in that city. Incoming students touring the facility are presented with a story warning against meddling with that for which they are not prepared.

The story states that there was a mage who owned an Eye (one of the devices of the ancients) that created a simple nutriment, ) tried to modify it so that it would produce gold. Instead the reassembled Eye produced thick, pallid, pale-pink goo that stuck to everything — literally and permanently. His bones, together with a section of flooring to which he remained cemented for the rest of his life, are still shown to beginners visiting this complex in Jakállá.

In the Hall of the Extended Hand in this facility, physicians of the Gods Thúmis, Keténgku, and Avánthe endeavor to cure diseases and wounds which are unbeatable elsewhere.

#### *Páya Gupá*

The Temple of Thúmis in this city is home to a large and extensive observatory. Hemispherical, equinoctial, and zodiacal dials, devices for measuring the planets' azimuths, meridian circles, etc. Some of these measure 40 to 50 meters from side to side and stand 20 to 30 meters high.

#### *Béy Sü*

The Temple of Thúmis here is a large institution, with complexes in several parts of the city.

The Temple of Eternal Knowing is a magnificent edifice regarded as one of the premier educational institutions in the Five Empires. Preserved in Baraktán's Hall of Intellectual Joy is a fragment of parchment purported to be in Pavár's own handwriting which bears his description of Lord Thúmis. This same complex also houses a large observatory.

The Dome of Interacting Numerals is a center of mathematical studies for the Empire. Scholar priests aid engineers, astrologers, architects, and others with mathematical problems.

Notable scholars include Mriyán Kuyéng hiChánkunu, a Scholar priest versed in the theories of the Many Planes. He fills pages of parchment with drawings of spheres and circles inside other circles, interspersing all with casuistic

logic that boggles most readers. Curiously, he is rarely consulted by his counterparts in the Temple of Belkhánu, where such studies are emphasized.

The Sect of the Emanation of Supernal Light has followers of the doctrine of the Transcendentalism of the Eye in this complex. These worshippers believe that real knowledge requires the renunciation of the material world, and thus own no possessions and are totally dependent on charity for their survival.

Advocates of radical reform in the Temple have a strong following here in the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom.

#### *Mrelú*

The Temple of Thúmis in this city is a stronghold of a sub-sect of the Emanation of Supernal Light sect, subscribers to the doctrine of the Immanence of the Eye. This group believes that Lord Thúmis will reveal Himself to His followers only through knowledge; since Lord Thúmis is the world, to know the world is to know Lord Thúmis. These priests offer free food and lodging to anyone who brings to them new knowledge, but charge exorbitantly one who presents as new any knowledge which is found to already exist in their vast libraries. Those so charged often end up imprisoned as debtors!

#### *Thráya*

The House of Laying Out the Lands is a part of the Temple of Thúmis in this city which collects information from merchants and travelers in order to complete a geography of known areas of Téकुmel.

#### *Sokátis*

The Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom is popular among the youthful priests and priestesses of the temple school in this city.

### Monasteries

There are a multitude of large and small monasteries of Lord Thúmis scattered all over the Empire, clear out to the Dry Bay of Ssu'úm. Many of these operate in a clandestine fashion in order to remain free of disturbances, appearing to be simple agricultural villages populated by low-clan farmers. Only when they decide to reveal themselves might one learn that the old fellow combing *Hmá*-wool is actually the High Scholarly Priest!

#### *The Monastery of the Grey Cloak*

The Monastery of the Grey Cloak is an immense compound, containing many shrines, temples, and individual monastic buildings spread across several square miles. This monastery in Dó Cháka excels in classical linguistics, history, and religious studies.

One of the monasteries in the compound is the Monastery of the Sapient Eye, famed for its academic excellence. The Gallery of Gazing Forth by Night, located within the Monastery of the Sapient Eye, houses the best astronomers and astrologers of the Imperium.

Within this same facility's Hall of Mighty Tongues is displayed Vringayékmu hiKhorsán's wondrous exposition of Mu'ugalavyáni phonology and grammar, done in



smoky red glass, black onyx, and other precious materials. Nearby stands Priestess Fssu'úma hiNatéla's monumental representation of Ghatóni, all green-mottled stone, black velvet, and figured strips of brown *Chlén*-hide. Hórrí hiSayussár's analysis of Salarvyáni is also considered a masterpiece: a low pyramid of ebon glass, set with garnets, and looped with silver strands depicting the 214 conjugations of the obstreperous Salarvyáni verb.

A number of male and female monks of the "Illumined" sect are supported by the monastery, along with a few itinerant worshippers of Lord Hnálla's Cohort Drá. The monks of both the Illumined and of Lord Drá worship by staring unceasingly at the sun as the object of their devotions, although for somewhat different doctrinal reasons. The result in both cases, however, is that these individuals are totally blind and require the assistance of the Temple.

#### *Hauninngákte Monastery*

This Monastery is large enough to be treated as a small city unto itself, and is surrounded by a population of merchants, farmers and craftsmen who support the institution.

### **Politics**

The priesthood of the Temple of Thúmis is a complex institutionalized structure. As within most Tsolyáni Temples, the priesthood is usually divided up into five types: Ritual priests, Administrative priests, Scholarly priests, those involved in military matters, and the Lay priests.

#### **Internal Factions**

##### *The Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom*

Every Temple has within it those who may be classified as "conservatives," those who follow the "middle road," and those who advocate some type of reform or radical change. The Temple of Thúmis is no exception to this common human characteristic, and within the Temple hierarchy there are those who staunchly follow the old ways and the laws of the ancestors exactly as they were laid down. Their objective is the continuance of the status quo — if anything, a return to values which they somehow perceive to be slipping away. These are mostly followers of the Phenomenal Manifestation of the Eye doctrine. Those in the middle are often simply the time-servers, those who go along with their daily cares and perceive no great need to alter society one way or another. The "radicals" are more important: those in the Temple of Thúmis have established an Inner, secret society called the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom, made up largely of younger priests and priestesses, particularly those educated in the Temple school at Béy Sü. Another center of this group is at Sokátis.

The conservatives have sought to suppress this group, fearing violent collapse of the Concordat and civil war. The Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom states that it wants no violence (contrary to the pressures from certain other secret societies within others of the Temples of the Lords of Stability who approach advocating holy war). The

Brotherhood claims that they wish simply to establish the schools of Lord Thúmis on a broader basis and thus educate more Tsolyáni children in the Doctrines of Wisdom. They desire to expand their practice of medicine and science and thus entice more of the common folk to join the Temple of Thúmis (to the detriment of the other Temples of course). And they argue that only through a concerted campaign to indoctrinate, to obtain high posts, and to favor adherents of Lord Thúmis and the Stability Gods, etc., will they be able to bring about an end to the ancient worship of the Gods of Change.

In these plans they are joined by the Pure Light Society of the Temple of Hnálla, and by certain other secret societies in various priesthoods of the Cohorts. They are opposed not only by counterpart groups in many of the Change Temples, but also by the Girdle of Purity Society of the Temple of Avánthe and the Clan of the Sword of Righteousness of the Temple of Karakán, which wish to take stronger measures to extirpate the worship of Change.

The results of this struggle are not clear, but it is obvious that one of their first goals is the removal of the present High Princeps, Gámalu hiBeshyéne, whom they perceive as essentially conservative.

#### *Those Who Serve the Pearl*

Archaic: An ancient Llyáni sect of worshippers of Lord Thúmis, as He was perceived in those times.

#### **Temple Alliances**

The Temple of Thúmis works closely with the Temples of Avánthe and Keténgku on medical researches and practices. It cooperates with the Temple of Ksáruł on basic researches such as archaeological and historical studies.

The Temple of Qón's museum in Usenánu has a good collection of artifacts of the Great Ancients, and its priests work together with the clergy of Lord Thúmis on problems raised by certain devices. It is said that the brilliant young scholar, Lord Sanjésh hiKirisáya, is collaborating with the priests of Qón on a device intended to enhance communication with various Other-Planar races friendly to the Lords of Stability.

#### **External Parties**

The Temple of Thúmis is well-represented in the Priestly party, and has almost as much influence within the Royalist party. Its influence is somewhat less with the Imperial party, and almost nil in the Military.

#### **Military Legions**

##### *The Legion of the Lord of Wisdom*

22nd Imperial Heavy Infantry, Gámalu hiBeshyéne, Páya Gupá.

Formed by Lord Gámalu despite opposition from certain portions of the Temple of Thúmis. Composed of troops from fiefs around Páya Gupá, many of its forest-dwelling recruits required extensive drilling and battle practice.

Notable Persons

*High Princeps Gámalu hiBeshyéne*

Born at Petris on the isle of Gánga in 2,319 A.S., and raised as a minor noble's son. He studied astronomy and navigation, and served for some time as a merchant sea captain, an occupation not uncommon for the seafaring folk of the southern isles. He first came to Jakálla in 2,344 A.S. and somehow became involved with the Temple of Thúmis. He then led several mercantile expeditions to places as far away as Tsoléi. Upon his return to Tsolyánu, he devoted himself to the priesthood of Lord Thúmis and received rapid promotions. Eventually this led to his appointment as High Princeps, with the fief of Páya Gupá being given to him for personal revenue. He has since attempted several reforms, one of which sought to unify the Temple of Thúmis by commanding a codification of all knowledge into a great encyclopedia. He has also attempted to establish military legions devoted to Lord Thúmis, who does not have a particularly martial reputation. Gámalu is the patron and current high general of the Legion of the Lord of Wisdom, 22nd Imperial Heavy Infantry, based at Páya Gupá. He is opposed by rivals within the Temple of Thúmis who believe that Lord Thúmis has no interest in fielding a military force.

*Chiréne hiNemanánu*

Assisted Gámalu in his efforts to unify the Temple. A close and trusted colleague.

*Proctor Sanjésh hiKirisáya*

Sometime High Scholarly Priest of the Temple of Thúmis in Usenánu, Lord Sanjésh has gone into hiding since Emperor Dhich'uné assumed the throne and is believed to be assisting Prince Eselné's rebellion. He maintains a fief

to the southwest of Usenánu that has twice been given over as a command center to the Prince's generals. It is rumored that Proctor Sanjésh conducts researches into interplanar travel and demonic summonings considered inappropriate to one of his place and station, and that he maintains a secret cache of treasures and Devices of the Ancients. He became a figure of popular legend when he assisted in the campaign to break the siege of Tléku Miriyá. He is said to have thwarted Lord Fū Shi'ís Weapon Without Answer before the walls of Sunráya, and to have scaled the walls during the taking of Krú Sekká, reaching the top ahead of the dread general, Karín Missúm. Rumors have it that he was also responsible for uniting much of southeastern Tsolyánu in early rebellion against Emperor Dhich'uné, rallying the cities under the name of "The Young Master," and swaying the populations with his compelling speaking skills and charisma.

A contemporary figure of legendary proportions, it is unlikely that this unassuming and unprepossessing priest has in fact been responsible for all of the feats attributed to him. But until he resurfaces it is impossible to determine the veracity of the rumors that swirl about him.

*(The late?) High Scholar Visárga Kuyumaénish*

Dwells at the temple of Thúmis in Ssa'átis in Mu'ugalavyá. Scholar of Bednálljan history and uninterested in doctrinal disputes. He is skilled at identifying and using ancient artifacts, and scholars flock to his lectures in the Hall of the Four Niches in the Red Palace in Ssa'átis. Like Lord Sanjésh, he has gone missing since the death of the former Emperor, and his fate is unknown, but affairs in Mu'ugalavyá have been in an uproar since that nation's invasion of Livyánu following the plague of 2,366 and intelligence from Mu'ugalavyá is hard to come by.

**Clan affiliations**

Clan names printed in plain text are completely ecumenical, with members from every Temple. Italicized clans are not completely ecumenical, worshipping some subset of the Twenty Gods. Clans in bold text reserve their worship solely for the God and His Cohort.

*Very High*

<i>Sea Blue</i>	Might of Gánga	<i>Golden Bough</i>	
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*High*

White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle	<i>Emerald Girdle</i>
<i>Amber Cloak</i>	Standing Stone	Rising Sun	<i>Joyous of Vrá</i>
Staff of Beneficence	Grey Cloak	Grey Wand	

*Medium*

Green Bough	Green Malachite	Ripened Sheaf	<i>Golden Dawn</i>
<i>Golden Sphere</i>	<i>Golden Sheaf</i>	<i>Golden Sapphire</i>	Black Pinnacle
First Moon	Moon of Evening	Golden Lintel	<i>Red Eye of Dawn</i>

Scroll of Wisdom	Weeping Stone	<i>Victorious Globe</i>	
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*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	<i>Broken Bough</i>	Plume of White
<i>Ivory Staff</i>	High Tower	Flat Peak	Woven Whip
<i>Flowering Life</i>			

*Very Low*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	Bright Sword	Flat Rock
<i>Granite Lintel</i>	Glass Spear	Turning Wheel	Collar of Bronze

**Holidays**

Great holiday celebrations hosted by the Temple of Thúmis consist of the distribution of free food and drink, rich pageants and processions, lengthy ceremonies and offerings, visits by Imperial officials and persons of status, feasts, dancing, and mimes.

## 1 Hasanpór

*New Year's Day*

Worshippers of Lord Thúmis join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

## 18 Shápru

*Adoration of the Grey Veil*

In Sokátis and Páya Gupá, the Adoration of the Grey Veil is celebrated with rituals and offerings of flowers.

## 3 Langála

*Summer Solstice*

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

## 1-10 Halír

*Harvest Celebrations*

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

## 9 Lésdrim

*Emperor's Birthday (former)*

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

## 10 Dohála

*Accession Day (former)*

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

## 25 Dohála

*Festival of the Light of Wisdom*

In Tumíssa and Sokátis, the pageant of the Festival of the Light of Wisdom is cause for an ongoing and largely friendly rivalry between the two cities to see which can out-do the other in pomp and splendor. A great processional bearing a decorated litter (often several stories high) carries Lord Thúmis' image for a ceremonial "visit" to the temple of Lord Hnálla.

## Ikáner, Intercalary Days

*The Web of Wisdom*

In Mrelú, the Temple of Thúmis hosts the grand and dignified celebration of the Web of Wisdom, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all knowledge and all life.

## Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

*The Visitation of the Eye, Páya Gupá**The Joining of the Minds, Ninué*

The cities of Ninué and Páya Gupá hold particularly splendid celebrations on the final day of each year. In Páya Gupá the hierophants of the temple of Lord Thúmis celebrate the dignified Visitation of the Eye. In Ninué, the faithful conduct the more elaborate Joining of the Minds in the Refulgence of Sapience.

**Aspects**

In everyday iconography, Lord Thúmis appears as a seated scholarly man with a golden halo, a book-roll in one hand, and a Staff of Power in the other. Many of His 47 Aspects are also depicted holding the traditional Staff of Power of the Bednálljan kings, despite the fact that

Lord Thúmis was not worshipped until Engsvanyáli times. The hem of His robe is blazoned with stylized eyes, signifying omniscience and wisdom, as well as additional symbols of arcane and complex iconography. Mythologically, He is the Scribe of the Gods and is thus often shown as a seated, cross-legged scribe with a roll of parchment open on His knees, bareheaded or wearing a simple black skullcap.

All these forms of Lord Thúmis are considered by Tsolyáni theologians to be equally valid and identifiable Aspects, for He can appear at will in many such shapes. There are some forty-seven "usual" manifestations of this type, and about a score of "rare" or "unattested" forms.

Those interested in this topic may review "*Kháriyelyal hiHáva*" (Appearances in Mighty Glory) by Cha'ánya hiNáshomai in the library of the Temple of Eternal Knowing in Béy Sü.

#### 1) So'ónkum

"Victorious of the Far-Flung Ones, Victor Over the Snares of Hehekáino"

Source: *The Pandects of Grey Victory*

This Aspect of the Inner Doctrines appears as a grey-bearded scholar, unarmed, who yet conveys an impression of power. In legend He warns the hero Hrógga of the Snares of Hehekáino. Popular in Páya Gupá. Aids those who seek to disseminate wisdom through teaching. Researchers pray to Him for knowledge of all things, from arcane spells to the location of lost items.

#### 2) Armésh (also Arnésh)

"The Jeweled Serpent"

This Aspect appears as a gigantic coiling serpent with iridescent, many-hued scales. He is a "legendary" Aspect, who appears only in the myths and exhibits a protective nature. He fights to protect Hrógga from the Demon Qu'ú, known as He Who Would End Wisdom, and He restores life to Lord Qón's hero, Jajél, after the Battle of Dórudai Field. Worshipers of Lords Thúmis and Keténgku who are suddenly beset by misfortune will cry out to Armésh for protection. He is popular in the Central Empire, along the Missúma River, and has shrines at Béy Sü, Mrelú, and in Páya Gupá.

#### 3) Kakán

Described in *The Book of the Divine Eye*

A warrior, sometimes shown as human, sometimes as a beast-headed, armored, man who carries a mysterious staff. He is described as "one of many limbs and faces" when He shields Hrógga against the Dark Ones, minions of Missúm, on Dórudai Fields.

This legendary Aspect of the Inner Doctrines guides mythological Heroes, including Hrógga and Súbadim, on quests, and is said to have defeated the Foes of Stability on Dórudai Field. Lord Kakán lends curious and niggling assistance to the truly desperate. For instance, the dying who cry out to Kakán might open their hands to

find a small coin, sufficient for their clan-relatives to pay for their burial. Worshipped largely in Jakálla and Gánga, in other cities He is numbered the twenty-fourth Aspect.

#### 4) Kánukolum

A haloed, dazzlingly golden, manlike figure with hands like many rays of light. In the legends, He bestows the Orb of Eternal Light upon Hrógga. This resplendent figure is said to guide the planets and the moons through the sky, and He is prayed to by those who study astronomy and the mythology of the planets. Astrologers who would cast true horoscopes call on Him. He collects meteorites, and insofar as these are often made of iron they are welcome sacrifices in His shrines, for they will eventually be sold to the smiths of Lord Karakán's armorer clans. Such ores are believed to facilitate the creation of "enchanted" armor and weapons.

#### 5) Nrásh

"The Eye, The Observer of All the World"

In the legends, this Aspect is described as a single eye from which rays stream forth when Hrógga calls upon him in the Ebon Pyramid. He is always represented as a great eye, stylized slightly from Lord Thúmis' usual symbol. This mystical, esoteric Aspect is symbolic of celestial omniscience; a being that perceives Lord Hnálla in all of His Luminous Glory. He understands the skeins, the mysteries of the gods and their strivings, the Pariah Deities, and the Deities of Change. His worshippers meditate upon His Oneness and His Being in a sectarian practice called "looking into the Eye." Those who achieve communion with Nrásh perceive mighty visions that are almost impossible to cast into words, for they touch upon the God's own Ultimate Perception of the Universe.

#### 6) Khálesh

"The Decider"

from *The Book of the Stages of the Soul*

Appears as a handsome, portly man of middle age, seated upon a simple stool with a book or tablet open on his lap. He is usually shown bareheaded or wearing a flat, black cap. He oversees administration and wise government; stands for balance and moderation; despises inefficiency and sloppy work; and responds to those who pray for relief from bureaucratic errors and mismanagement. His statues are frequently seen in the scribal halls of the Palace of the Realm, in the Palace of Foreign Lands, and in other offices. He also has the task of punishing inept administrators, embezzlers, and the inefficient.

#### 7) Chokóth

"The Messenger, the Far-Wanderer"

From *The Tome of Gates*

He is the messenger of the Gods, the tracer of histories, and a patron of exploration, the study of foreign lands and cultures. He is a very helpful Aspect who carries messages between the Gods and among the Planes. In

the Legends of Dórmoron Plain and Dorodái Field, He carries messages between the camps of the battles. He is depicted as a tall, wiry, athletic, 30-year-old man, who wears leather leggings, a short leather kilt, and a hood-like headdress. People who need to carry messages or travel swiftly in times of crisis call on Him to facilitate speed. He is said to be married, having a wife and children whose names and powers are known only to scholars dedicated to the ancient legends (one of His children aids those who wish their cutting implements to be sharp).

Chokóth accepts rare coins, gems, and other small items brought back by explorers and scholars. His Aspect is found in all Temples. His "Hall of Past Excellences" at Mrelú is devoted to archaeology and anthropology. Other shrines specialize in knowledge of plants, animals, birds, fish, etc., and His clergy wear emblems on their costumes depicting their specialties.

#### 8) Feshmu'ún

"Tutor of the Gods, the Eternal Teacher"

*The Pandects of Grey Victory*

He is portrayed as a thin, elderly scholar with long grey locks bound in a single coil behind His head and one hand upraised as if lecturing. He patronizes the imparting of learning, schools, and research within the Temple. Temple instructors beg Feshmu'ún's blessing by sacrificing small token scrolls upon which Lord Thúmis' glyph is inscribed.

#### 9) Muór the Sage of Sages

From *The Treatise of the Illuminations of the Sages*

Depicted as an aged man standing in a long robe and black skullcap. He holds a rolled scroll in one hand and a staff with carved ornaments in the other. He represents scholarship and wisdom and is the Aspect most favorable to research, knowledge, and schools. He is propitiated by students each day in academies all across Tsolyánu. Boys give Him green buds of the *Tetél* flower; girls offer reed pens or small squares of paper upon which they have written His name and praises. Popular in Páya Gupá and ChéneHó.

#### 11) Tyélu

"She Who Guides"

*The Pandects of Grey Glory*

A smiling, pleasant young woman who helps students pass tests, find library references, etc. Librarians and sages burn incense before little grey stone statues of Her.

#### 12) Ferésh

From *The Book of Understandings*

Appears as a serenely beautiful woman, seated upon a high throne. Her eyes are closed, and Her hands lie relaxed and empty on Her lap. She is a patron of the arts: painting, sculpture, music, dance, mime, literature, and poetry. It is said that She looks only at Her own beautiful work and has no desire to see the uglinesses of the world.

Those who seek Her muse offer Her single red flowers symbolizing their lives and hearts. Many miracles are attributed to Her: strange but beautiful murals recently appeared on certain walls of Her temple at Jakálla, for example. Her help is essential in producing artistic excellence; it is said that without Her all productions are mediocre.

#### 13) Chuharém the Diviner

Portrayed as a stern man, dressed as a traveler but seated with a walking-staff across His knees, wearing a hooded cloak thrown back to reveal a black skullcap. His primary shrine is in Béy Sü, attached to the Hall of the Diffusion of Radiance. He stands for divination and the casting of fortunes. Those who seek to know their Skeins approach Him with gifts of grey opals and *Tetél* flowers. He can divine one's future course, but He may decide not to convey this knowledge.

#### 14) The Pearl-Grey Aspects

An Aspect or set of Aspects known only to the Inner Temple of Lord Thúmis.

#### 15) Óng

"Viewer of the Towers of the Gods Beyond"

Source: *The Pandects of Grey Glory*

An Aspect of the Inner Doctrines. Form and role unknown.

#### 17) Ne'éli

"Knower of the Joinings"

*The Pandects of Grey Glory*

Depicted as a thin-faced middle-aged man, this Aspect oversees the construction of Other-Planar connections and spells. Though a favorite of those few scholar-priests who endeavor to create new spells, Ne'éli rarely generates enough support for His own shrine in the temple.

#### 18) Majér the Maiden

From *The Book of Understandings*

She appears as a sweet-faced, pretty girl wearing a simple grey tunic and sandals. Lady Majér symbolizes youthful wisdom, coming of age, and the exploration of one's world, and beauty. Young girls offer Her *Tetél* flowers and patties of *Dmí*-sugar candy and pray for success and wise decisions in clan matters, in school, in adolescent love affairs, and the like. Particularly popular in Páya Gupá and Thráya. Mythological sister of Tolokkón.

#### 19) Kànokólúm

"Plotter of the Courses Amidst the Deeps of the Sky"

*The Pandects of Grey Glory*

Usually depicted as a seated elderly man gazing up towards the heavens. He holds symbolic icons which are not identified to outsiders. He deals with astronomy and astrology and aids navigators. He is most popular in

coastal communities, and nautical clans support His shrines in Jakállá, Gánga, Ngéshtu Head, and Penóm.

## 22) Bék

From *The Unique Tome of MarsúanKhá*.

Appears as a thin, strong-featured man, seated upon a stool. He has six arms spread out behind him like the rays of the sun. He wears a cowed cloak of soft, grey cloth, beneath which his eyes gaze piercingly down at the worshipper. It is written that he has "other eyes" concealed beneath his cowl, and "other limbs" as well. He symbolizes the mysteries of the Gods, meditation upon theological topics, the conundrums of time and space, etc. His priests and priestesses are celibate and live in ascetic isolation in remote monasteries. Worshipers ask him questions, to which his oracles give cryptic answers.

## 23) A'akán

"Alchemist of the Gods"

*The Pandects of Grey Victory*

Depicted as an old man with four hands, in which He holds a crucible, an alembic, a flask, and a scroll. Guides those who deal in chemicals and Pharmaceuticals.

## 26) Nrásh (also Shénj)

Found in *The Book of Gates*

Shown as a single eye, painted in silver and grey upon a white background: this is Lord Thúmis' Eye of Wisdom. It represents reasoning, discernment, the analysis of problems, and the mastery of difficult topics. Those who wish to solve puzzles or intellectual problems make pleas to Nrásh, and sacrifice pots of special porridge. His clergy donate these foodstuffs to hospices, travelers' hostels, and agencies aiding the poor. Popular in Haumá and also in Usenánu, where His sanctuary is considered one of the architectural marvels of the Empire, being carved out of a single block of grey marble.

## 31) Pohán

"Sage of *Lost Cities*"

*The Pandects of Grey Glory*

Finder of treasure, food, potable water, etc. in the wilderness. Shown as a man attired in rags, wearing a leather tunic, scuffed traveler's boots, and a flat cap. He carries a staff which is said to possess mysterious powers.

## 37) Tolokkón

Described in *The Book of Understandings*

Depicted as a strong, muscular, beautiful woman who wears a corselet, a helmet, and greaves of grey metal. Aids *Aridáni* women and female soldiers; also patronizes women's athletics and military deeds. Mythological sister of Majér the Maiden. Girls trying to decide whether to declare *Aridáni* status pray to Her and make offerings of silver coins. Additionally they may prepare a sweet grayish pudding called *Alétl*, a ritual meal consumed only

in ceremonies to this Aspect. Such phrases as "she could use a bite of *Alétl*" or "she has eaten only *Alétl* for days" refer to adolescent girls who are acting somewhat childishly, or who are agonizing over serious, adult decisions, respectively.

## 42) Thekkúsa the Artificer

From *The Pandects of Grey Glory*

A barrel-shaped, middle-aged figure, with long white hair tied in a knot at the back of His head, he makes devices and magical equipment, particularly glass vessels and tubing. Thekkúsa aids in experiments and "prevents unexpected results." He is the traditional Aspect of the glass-blowing clans of Stability, and even glass-blowers who worship Change will have His image in a niche above the doors to their workrooms.

## 46) Meshmúr

"The Molder of Flesh; The Healer of Entrails"

*The Pandects of Grey Glory*

One of the few Aspects of Lord Thúmis which is inhuman in appearance, looking somewhat like a snake with a large monocular head. With His single great eye, Meshmúr heals *internal* injuries, such as ulcers, cancers, and hemorrhages.

He is popular, with a shrine in most of Lord Thúmis' temples. There His statue is raised up on a pedestal or altar, His eye facing down towards the worshippers. He accepts the *Tetél* flower, and pots of finely-ground sweetened porridge. Pots of these porridges are available in the Temple courtyard for purchase at a premium price. When the pots are brought before Meshmúr, the Ritual priestess rings a bell and waves a censer on a long staff over the offering and the worshipper, while three or four junior celebrants quietly chant unending praises. After being offered to the God, the pot is then taken away by a junior priest and distributed to the poor, and to the sick in Lord Keténgku's hospitals.

His finest shrines are in Jaikalór, Thráya, and in the Central Empire.

Meshmúr and other healing Aspects of Lord Thúmis also appear in shrines within temples of Lord Keténgku. They are understood to be Aspects of Lord Thúmis, but as Healers they have a place beside Lord Keténgku. However, Meshmúr is depicted there simply as a smooth-faced, courteous man with grey hair, who though kindly is said to never allow ungrammatical utterances or rudenesses. Thus His priests help only those who are Stability worshippers and who are *lán* in their behavior.

He is also worshipped by some Scholar priests of Lord Thúmis, for He knows the biological skills of the Great Ancients which He might convey to His faithful, but this element of His nature is ignored in His shrines in the Temple of Keténgku.

**Demons****The Mighly Ones of the Pearl Mists**

These creatures are tall, three to four meters in height, and spindly. They appear muffled in grey cloaks as if cold, and fight only with sorcery.

**Horodái**

The Flowing Mouth, The Curious Hunger, Lord of the PallidGarden

This demon possesses the Powers of Engulfment and Transportation, and is of the Substance of Durritlámish. It manifests itself as a pallid grey-brown ooze. There is some question concerning its essence. Proctor Sanjésh hiKirisáya, sometime High Scholarly Priest of the Temple of the Thúmis in Usenánu, claimed that this demon was of the Essence of Thúmis, a concept revolting to the Temple. However it is undeniable that this creature possesses an open and affable nature and a sense of curiosity rivaled only by its incessant hunger. Unfortunately Proctor Sanjésh has gone missing lately and is presumed dead by the Temple.

**Magic****Magical Items***Tsévu*

Engsvanyáli *Ngásh*. A fruit often used in sorcerous endeavors because of its legendary associations with both Lord Ksáru and Lord Thúmis, also Lords Sárku and Durritlámish.

**Temple Spells***Alleviation*

These rituals cure invasive threats to the body, including contagious diseases, plagues, poisons, and even radiation sickness. Only the most powerful ritual will cure addiction to the deadly drug *Zu'úr*.

*Benignity*

Various creatures are psychically rendered neutral to the caster, and will not attack if not threatened. The most powerful version of this spell calms even the *Ssú*.

*Discerner of Enchantments*

The caster can psychically analyze and identify various spells. The highest levels of this spell will remove the Eradicator of Veracity spell of the Temple of Sárku, and will identify "eyes" of the Great Ancients, their functions, and their remaining charges.

*The Gate of the Grey Pentacle*

These rituals open Nexus Points of various sizes, which transport various numbers of targets randomly to different places and Planes.

*Guiding*

The caster is psychically imbued with increasingly detailed knowledge of the route to any destination. One variant of this spell also erases such knowledge from all its targets, rendering all "lost" for the duration of the spell. At its most powerful, this spell grants nearly "godlike" knowledge of the surrounding area.

*Healing*

These rituals heal damage to the body.

*Preserver of Wisdom*

These rituals preserve various books and scrolls from harm, destruction, and magical abuse. Lower circle rituals render scrolls and books water- and flame-proof, and restore ancient, brittle pages to strong, flexible usefulness. Higher-circle rituals prevent works from being transported through Nexus Points or being taken or read by anyone but their owners.

*Sagacious Acquisition*

These spells psychically enhance the target's ability to learn spells.

As a Second Circle Ritual Priestess of Lord Thúmis, Dletána hiChaisyáni participates in several of the daily ceremonies. But she must be roused early from her sleeping-mat in order to participate in the morning's "Opening of the Eyes of Radiance" with which the Temple begins its ecclesiastical day. Fortunately, she has arranged with a classmate, who takes part in the "Visitations of the Night," to awaken her before tottering off to sleep.

With plenty of time to dress and break her fast, Dletána arrives in the great nave early and consults with the morning's Chief Ritual Priest to learn whether the day requires any special rites. Dletána is a good student, conscientious worker, and member of a high clan. Her role as "Opener of the Eye of Dawn" is important and highly visible for one only of Second Circle, and her early arrival for the morning service is noted with pleasure.

As the ritual nears its beginning, our priestess trots up the narrow circular staircase leading up behind the left side of the great image of Lord Thúmis, in His Aspect as the youthful Scribe of the Gods. She emerges confidently upon a tiny unrailed platform seventy-five feet above the stone floor of the shrine. A crowd of mostly-elderly worshippers shuffles in for this early service, and Dletána remains shadowed at the top of the stairs so as not to draw attention. Scanning the crowd, she spots several uncles and aunts from her clanhouse, who seat themselves atop a thick layer of mats near the front of the hall.

Dletána fixes her attention upon the ceremony beginning below rather than allowing her mind to wander. To misperform her role, especially with clan-relatives in attendance, would be shamefully *bússan*, leaving her humiliated before both Temple and Clan. The Chief Ritual Priest himself performs the ceremony this morning, chanting praises to Lord Thúmis in all His Aspects and offering thanks, glory, fealty, and faithfulness to the God. The Choir of Rising Light pours forth a hymn as the Chief Ritual Priest presents the emblem of the God upon a tall pole for the crowd to view before presenting it to the celebrants upon his right. He

then repeats this with the stylized Ritual Staff of Power passed to the left, and both are carried forth and placed reverently in sconces in the hands of the seated Aspect of Thúmis.

Our priestess breathes deeply and evenly as her moment approaches; although experienced with this role, she becomes nervous anew each time. Through the windows across the hall, a mounting glow is becoming apparent. As the sacrifices of *Tetél*-flowers are being blessed and sanctified, she steps discreetly forward into her position. To her right, upon the other side of the face of the Aspect, Dletána's colleague precisely mirrors her motion as they take up ritual staves, laden with *Khéshchal*-plumes.

Our priestess and her male counterpart quietly position the *Khéshchal*-plumes to catch the very first glints of sunlight entering through the far windows of the temple. Below, the fruits and flowers, ritual medallions, and coins are ceremoniously carried to the Aspect in a wide, shallow basket, and there placed in His lap while all including the Chief Ritual Priest bow low or prostrate themselves before the God. A moment of silence ensues.

Then with one clear, powerful, and harmonious voice the Openers of the Eyes of Dawn cry out, "*Otuléngba*, Lord Thúmis! *Otuléngba*, Teacher of the Gods, True Sage of Wisdom!" So saying, they lift their staves, allowing the first light of morning to strike the jewel-encrusted eyes of the God, refracting and reflecting to scatter and dance through the incense-laden air of the nave. The faithful raise their hands and eyes to catch the colorful reflections, the light of Lord Hnálla made accessible to mere mortals through the intercession of Lord Thúmis. Below, the full complement of clergy takes up the praises to Lord Thúmis as Dletána, her duties fulfilled, steps back into the shelter of the doorway for the remainder of the ceremony.

Continued exemplary performance, hard work, and the quiet influence of her clanmaster will mark this young priestess for success within the Ritual hierarchy. Should she show as much political acumen as she does scholarly, the position of High Ritual Priestess of some small temple might be hers in a decade or two.



# Keténgku

*The Many-Eyed, Knower of All, Master of Scrolls, Physician of the Gods*



Lord Keténgku represents Wisdom Applied. He is the patron of scholars, physicians, apothecaries, scribes, architects, engineers, and all those who use knowledge for the benefit of society. He aids those who study mysteries, who use technology and the arts for the purposes of Stability, those who learn languages and travel abroad, and those who combat the egotistical doctrines of Lord Ksáru.

Lord Keténgku brings together the philosophies of His patron, Lord Thúmis, and Lady Avánthe, She of the Cycles of Life. Lord Keténgku is referred to as the Healer, but He is more than a simple physician. Lord Keténgku seeks to "heal" the damage brought about by the Lords of Change, using the knowledge and wisdom of Lord Thúmis to restore the cycles of life precious to Lady Avánthe. He is the Restorer of Order, where Lady Avánthe is the Maintainer.

The Temple of Keténgku focuses on healing, and the bringing of physical and spiritual harmony. Through the restoration of Order, he promotes the journey towards Lord Hnálla's goal of the Eternal Light.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

#### *Color*

Grey and white.

#### *Symbol*

A stylized silver eye.

#### *Costume*

Lord Keténgku's priests wear grey and white robes and skullcaps of cerulean blue. His priestesses are similarly garbed but have blue girdles of stiffened cloth or leather studded all over with many little silver eyes.

#### *Rituals*

The Temple of Keténgku conducts rituals every day in the morning, at noon, and at nightfall. At Púrdimal there is an additional mid-afternoon ritual specifically for those afflicted with tumors.

During these rituals, celebrants attempt the healing of several general conditions and diseases with prayers and incense, on behalf of those present. No attempt is made to heal individuals: as with the other Temples, the worshippers attend but do not participate in the ceremonies. Following the completion of the rituals, when those who do not proceed to the Inner Rituals have retired to the Outer Courtyard, worshippers who are

somehow unwell are given copies of short texts to memorize and recite at dawn and sunset in order to address their afflictions. For more serious illnesses a special ritual can be arranged, and offerings are always welcome.

#### *Healing the Sick*

Lord Keténgku is a popular, friendly deity, and many have drifted to His affable worship, especially as most people find themselves sick and in need of his intervention from time to time.

Only certain Aspects, many of which are only worshipped in specific places, cure certain ailments. Hence some injuries and illnesses can only be addressed following a lengthy pilgrimage to a distant city.

Outside the temple, in the outer courtyard, the sick are greeted by priests who listen to their complaints and offer recommendations for cures, suggestions for appropriate offerings, and instructions on where and how to present them.

The afflicted then proceed as directed to the shrine of the Aspect appropriate to their particular ailment, there to offer fruit, flowers, and some coins in sacrifice to the God. An attendant priest conducts a ritual before the Aspect, chanting in Engsvanyáli. After the brief ritual, the priest may also offer salves, potions, bandages, enemas, or other treatments. Experience and tradition have rendered many of these cures quite effective.

#### *Sacrifice*

Like Lord Thúmis, Lord Keténgku accepts offerings of fruit and *Tetél*-flowers, but He also accepts as offerings the bandages, splints, and canes which are used by the ill and injured during their recoveries.

In addition, the temple accepts *lesúnuyal*, special statues, sculpted by the artisan clans and mass-produced in various qualities specifically for sacrifice.

These are generally made of clay or pottery (terra-cotta or faience), but the wealthy may purchase *lesúnuyal* made out of silver or even gold. The figure is that of a standing, serious-faced man in middle age, wearing an ankle-length kilt and a single strand of round beads. The figure is depicted either as shaven bald, or wearing a simple skullcap, and his hands are folded across his breast.

After purchasing the statue, the worshipper can place a note within the hollow of the statue through the open bottom. These are usually either requests for healing, or words of thanks from one who has recovered from an illness.

The *lesúnu* is presented along with other sacrifices of fruit and flowers, and are kept for a time by the temple before being destroyed or recycled.

#### *Death Rituals*

The priests of Lord Belkhánu are charged with the interment of almost all followers of the Lords of Stability (although a priest of an individual's particular sect may also join in the rituals if desired by the family).

#### The Inner Doctrines

The Inner Doctrines and Inner Ceremonies of this Temple deal with the restoration of the cycles of existence so that all may proceed towards Lord Hnálla's Ultimate Light.

It is said that Lord Keténgku will even restore to life those who have been "unjustly" slain. The manner in which such a determination is made is an inner secret of the Temple, and is not shared even with the clergy of Lord Belkhánu. Few bodies presented for this inspection by Lord Keténgku's clergy are ever revived, and the Temple requires a substantial "donation" before rendering its services, regardless of the outcome.

The priests of Lord Keténgku who try to make this determination will inspect the body, and also magically interrogate the family and friends of those who knew the deceased. They touch the minds of these people and learn of the deceased's capabilities and characteristics before determining whether or not to proceed with the revivification.

#### Temple Layout

Lord Keténgku's temples are usually sited at the rear or side of the local temple of Lord Thúmis, and they often share gardens, refectories, and dormitories. The temple itself is architecturally an open rectangle, with colonnades all around. In the center are a fountain, an open-air altar, and statues of the Aspects of the Deity placed on plinths. Behind the colonnade, on all four sides, are little rooms for treatment, hospitalization, stores, etc.

#### Secular Activities

##### Businesses

The Temple of Keténgku runs many hospitals all across the Empire. In this effort the Temples of the Gods Thúmis, Avánthe, Dilínála and many of the other Temples assist them as well. There are a variety of these facilities, some which specialize in particular ailments: homes for the elderly; for those born disabled; for the Perfect of Drá and the Illumined of Thúmis; for those too wounded in battle to be cared for by their clan; and for the chronically ill.

These facilities care for the living with impartiality: worshippers of Lord Keténgku and worshippers of Lord Sárku, even those from other nations, are given equal care. Only the Undead are not welcome. In many cases, arrangements for support are made with other Temples:

the War Temples, the Military and Imperial parties, and the Clans of the wounded, for instance, support hospitals for wounded veterans.

##### Public Works and Services

##### *Education*

Followers of Stability may send their children either to a school run by the priesthoods of Lords Thúmis or Keténgku, or if they wish, directly to a more doctrinaire seminary operated by their own sects in which their specific tenets can be stressed.

##### Cities of Broad Influence

##### *Úrmish*

The temple at Úrmish has a special hostel devoted to "those who are spiritually lost," a hospital for the mentally ill and a monastery for those who seek solace from the world. The priesthoods of Lords Qón and Keténgku jointly operate this facility, "The House of Peaceful Dwelling," although it is physically located in proximity to the temple of the former. There are perhaps 300 attendants, physicians, etc., and over a thousand patients.

##### *Béy Sü*

The Temple of Keténgku in Béy Sü operates two respected schools, for architecture and for Imperial engineering (the construction of large Imperial facilities, including roads and buildings).

##### *Katalál*

A famous school for calligraphers is found just north of Katalál. This school run by Lord Keténgku's clergy will train practically any skilled calligrapher from almost any Temple, in exchange for tuition, which is often handled on a reciprocity basis. This is one of the schools which produce the Imperial calligraphers who work in gold leaf and gemstone inks to create important Imperial documents. Most occupational calligraphers will be of middle-clan status, but high-clan and very-high-clan members will also study calligraphy as an artistic pastime. It is common for nobles to exchange works of calligraphy as gifts, a line or two of classic poetry inscribed upon gold-trimmed vellum.

Victorious Globe and other clans have special inks which they hold as clan secrets. This includes "shadow ink," for instance, an ink which changes after drying to leave a graded shadow pattern. Other such inks are gemstone inks, particularly brilliant inks of unusual colors, etc.

##### Monasteries

There are a multitude of large and small monasteries of Lord Keténgku — most specializing in the healing arts — scattered all over the Empire, clear out to the Dry Bay of Ssuúm.

These monasteries are often hospices for the ill, the mentally deficient, those born disabled, etc. Any of the chronically ill or disabled who live in these facilities are

expected to support the monastery in whatever ways they can with labors or instruction.

Students who come to these monasteries quickly discover that there is much more that needs doing that the patients cannot accomplish. Instruction often takes place while both teacher and student go about the maintenance of the facility, preparing food, weaving mats and baskets, herding *Hmá*, etcetera. For the noble scions of the very high clans, such manual labor will be completely foreign: they may have gone their entire young lives having done nothing more strenuous than lifting a goblet to their lips. Such individuals are rarely found at these monasteries, choosing instead the more comfortable instruction to be found in the Temple schools. This is their loss, for the monasteries have produced some of the most brilliant in their fields.

## Politics

### Internal Factions

#### *The Staff of Mercy Society*

Healers, physicians, and apothecaries, the Staff of Mercy society is found all across the Empire. These are the scholarly and practical physicians of Tsolyánu, and they serve the God by healing, the analysis of medicines and treatments, and general philanthropy. Some solicit and coordinate contributions from clans to build infirmaries, poorhouses, fountains, and rest houses for travelers (facilitating Lord Keténgku's interest in those who travel and gather knowledge).

Monasteries run by the "Staff" are divided according to the ailments treated. Birth defects are treated in the one outside Páya Gupá; retardation and mental illnesses are dealt with in the big monastery near Thráya; tumors and internal conditions (blood, liver, etc.) are the specialty of the House of Beneficence near Jaikalór, etc.

### Temple Alliances

The Temple of Keténgku works with the Temples of Ksárul and Grugánu in medical researches, and is notable for usually extracting the better portion of its bargains with these secretive Temples. Lord Keténgku's clergy works extensively with the Temples of Avánthe, Dilinála, and Qón in the operation of hospices. His clergy and clans interact with midwives of many clans, pharmacists, and alchemists (including the alchemists of Thúmis), etc.

### External Parties

The Temple of Keténgku is quite influential in the Military Party, where it quietly urges restraint while coordinating battlefield treatment for upcoming conflicts. It is also influential with the ancient Royalist Party, but wields less influence with the Imperial and Priestly parties.

### Military Legions

A contingent of healers, led often by the worshippers of Lord Keténgku, will attend most battles. Lady Dilinála's priestesses, Lord Grugánu's healers, etc., will often join them.

## Clans

### *Very High*

Might of Gánga

### *High*

Emerald Girdle

Amber Cloak

Joyous of Vrá

Staff of Beneficence

Grey Cloak

Grey Wand

### *Medium*

Victorious Globe

*Granite Lintel*

Granite Lintel

## Holidays

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Keténgku join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

18 Pardán

The Offering of Wisdom

In Khéiris and Páya Gupá, worshippers of Keténgku present to the God newly-written books of quality and recitations of new knowledge gained in the past year in a ceremony known as the Offering of Wisdom. Scholars and physicians are honored for their achievements during the year. Following the Rituals of Presentation of the Offerings, grand feasts are held during which instructors of the young are placed on special high daises in recognition of their contributions to society.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

9 Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on His own birthday.

## 10 Dohála

## Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

## Turugdáshe, Intercalary Days

## Opening of the Eyes of Sagacity

Worshippers of Lord Keténgku in Chéne Hó celebrate the Opening of the Eyes of Sagacity with solemn rituals.

**Aspects**

Lord Keténgku is represented as a bald, seated scribe holding a book-scroll open upon his knee. He has four faces, however, one looking in each of the four cardinal directions, symbolizing His omniscience.

He has 27 Aspects whose worship is much more localized than that of the Aspects of other Gods. Financial and logistical considerations make it impossible to adequately treat all illnesses at all Temples of Keténgku, so over time certain individual facilities have come to specialize in certain types of treatments. The Aspects of Keténgku appropriate to these types of illnesses have thus become the special patrons of these temples.

**Khírgár: Vayatlanlé**

Devoted to the healing of large tumors, boils, excrescences, and cancers growing on external parts of the body. This Aspect also has a notable shrine in the city of Púrdimal, and tumors and internal conditions are the specialty of the House of Beneficence near Jaikalór.

**Páya Gupá: Guétl**

This Aspect is devoted to healing infusions of poisons and correcting imbalances of the body caused by systemic ailments. Given the Tsolyáni view of disease, these "ailments of the spirit," as they are called, may include everything from depression, to vitamin deficiency, to birth defects, though they are not termed such. Lord Guétl is the patron Aspect of both the Monastery of Keténgku located north of Páya Gupá and the temple in the city itself.

**Katalál: Ba'alán**

An Aspect appearing as a gentle man of older middle age seated (always) upon a stone, with His hands on His knees, leaning forward as if listening. Rings of silver about one hand in diameter are offered as sacrifice along with *Tetél* flowers in hope of having ailments of mental illness treated and cured.

His choir of young boys and girls recites from the rising of the sun to the setting of the first moon after sunset (whichever that is) every day. The setting of the moon is ritually greeted with shouts of joy from the children.

In addition to His largest shrine near Katalál, Lord Ba'alán has a large facility in the vicinity of the great

temple of Lord Belkhánu near Thráya. There those suffering from severe mental illness and disability are cared for and treated. Many of these are the very elderly who require care while waiting to embark upon Lord Belkhánu's voyage.

**Thráya: Shomóre**

Devoted to the diseases of women, this female Aspect of Keténgku is a woman of middle age, handsome and erect, Her hands always at her sides palm-forward. The afflicted kiss the palms of the hands and kneel beside the statue. Priestesses come out to attend and lead the woman within for consultation. Her priesthood is largely, but not exclusively, female, with men generally involved only in administrative functions rather than ritual or scholarly pursuits. Her surgeons are exemplary but, again, only for women's problems such as hysterectomies, breast cancer, and infertility. This Aspect's clergy work closely with their counterparts in the Temple of Dilinála in Thráya.

**Thomútha**

Lord Thomútha is depicted as a robed man of indeterminate middle years. His arms are joined in front of His breast, each hand gripping the opposite forearm above the wrist.

This rare aspect of Lord Keténgku is the counselor to male homosexuals and seeks to help them be satisfied with who they are. For some Tsolyáni, particularly in the patriarchal south of the Empire, patrilineage and the continuance of the male line is extremely important. As homosexual males come of age and discover their orientation, they often experience grief and distress in trying to accept that they will not have sons to carry on their lineage. The idea of seeking a female to bear their children solely for this purpose strikes most Tsolyáni as *bússan*, ignoble, and is not encouraged. The Aspect of Thomútha helps these men work through this grief to assume roles which support society, as "uncles," mentors, warriors, and the like. This process is assisted by the clan-structure that considers all the males of the clan "fathers" to children, regardless of biological paternity, and by the lack of homophobia in Tsolyáni culture.

For Tsolyáni lesbians, the entire Temple of Dilinála is available to offer support, and Lord Keténgku would not presume to infringe upon Her domain.

While male homosexuality is celebrated in the Temples of Dlamélish and Her Cohort Hriháyal, advice and counseling are not the forte of these Temples. There is not the explicit emphasis upon the role of the male homosexual in Tsolyáni society that exists for lesbians.

**Qoqákh**

He heals diseases and physical deformities, and is depicted as a leprous old man covered with warts and scars and wounds. These are the sacrifices which He takes from His petitioners in return for healing, but they are not believed to cause Him distress. He is universally prayed to by those mortally wounded and incurably ill.

## Magic

### The Bridge of Noble Passage

Various types of magical bridges, stairs, ladders, and platforms are created by these rituals.

### The Pearl-Grey Citadel

An impenetrable cylinder is created by these rituals, shielding those within.

### The Scrutiny of the Omniscient Eye

The lower-circle variants of this spell grant varying degrees of omniscient vision: targets of this spell can see in a full sphere, and can additionally see through some objects. Higher-circle variants allow for the manipulation of perceived objects with this spell, allowing for the removal of arrowheads from within a wounded person, for example.

Étan hiChorúna shouted "Dung!" quite loudly. In the garden around him, the other wards of the monastery did not even look up from their weeding. Étan's involuntary expostulations were no longer notable. "Bu... bu... bússan"

He had never thought he would long for his hot, uncomfortable pallet on the broad lower dais of the Hall of Rejudication of Borders. But he considered it better to be nobly engaged in Palace of the Realm in Béy Sü than squatting like a peasant here in an isolated monastery on the hot, featureless flatlands northeast of Páya Gupá.

"Nákome!" he barked, plucking the black, twisting *thékh*-weeds that sought to strangle the produce with which the Monastery of Keténgku supplemented its diet. But he knew that his clanmistress had been generous in dispatching the afflicted lad to this monastery of healing. It was a more generous fate than his Victorious Globe clan might have been able to afford.

"Come along, lad," called the elderly priest Ningáya hiKadárta from the shade of the doorway, "The planets will be soon in alignment." Étan stretched and grimaced, crossing the garden: the priest's exorcisms could be almost as unpleasant as weeding the garden. Then the old man leaned upon his arm and they made their way into the basement chamber.

"Wake up, lad, and let's see if the demons are gone. How do you feel?" Once again Étan had fallen asleep upon the altar during the lengthy, boring exorcism rites.

"Rested, honored priest," Étan replied, drawing a faint grin out of the old man. Étan had become something of a hobby of Ningáya's, and the old priest expended much more effort upon him than his clan's donations warranted.

"And the demons?" Ningáya peered hopefully into Étan's eyes, as if expecting to see vile creatures crowding each other aside to peer out, "are they still with you?"

Étan searched himself, and felt the *urge* stirring within him. "Still here, honored priest." The demons had seized

Étan months ago. He had fallen and struck his head and the demons had pounced. For days his own spirit had battled with the invaders, and Étan had raved and ranted in a fever upon his pallet. When the battle was over Étan was alive, but mischievous demons had occupied his soul like Emperor Dchich'uné's minions occupying Avanthár.

"You're sure?" the priest almost whined, "You have not uttered an epithet..."

Étan nodded ruefully, climbing off the stone table among the burned-out white candles. He was careful not to step upon any of the arcane symbols on the floor. Ningáya found his condition fascinating, intrigued by demons that did no more than force Étan to shout obscenities. After more than a year in their possession, Étan had come to be able to sense their presence even when he was not being made to speak. He did not want to speak now for fear of uttering another...

"Szi!!" he barked involuntarily. At his back, the priest Ningáya expelled an exasperated breath.

It seemed the demons still possessed him.

# Belkhánu

*Lord of the Excellent Dead, Master of the Paradises of Teretané, Opener of the Gates of Heaven.*



He is the Lord of Life After Death, the journey onward to the farther Planes and the eventual goal of Lord Hnálla's Perfect Light. Lord Belkhánu aids those who are close to death, those who mourn, those who would contact the Dead, those who fight against Change and those who are attacked by Lord Sárku's Undead minions, which are an abomination to Him.

Lord Belkhánu's doctrines urge people to be "at peace with their skeins," to nobly participate in the events of their lives as they pursue their Skeins of Destiny. Lord Belkhánu encourages "noble action," but does not urge a particular set of beliefs upon His followers. Instead, He counsels that each person should proceed "as their God would have it."

Lord Belkhánu pursues dual goals in Tsolyáni society. In life, Lord Belkhánu urges *lán* behavior and each person's acceptance of their Skein. After death, He guides the Dead down the safe paths to the Isles of Teretané, where they enter into the Planes Beyond. In both ways, Lord Belkhánu is the Guide and Guardian, the One Who Teaches the Right Path and assists those who travel thereon. Lord Hnálla's Perfect Light is, for Lord Belkhánu, the Final Oneness, the final coming together in perfection of all souls.

## Theology

Lord Belkhánu's sphere is not of this world at all, but rather that of the Isles of the Excellent Dead and the Paradises of Teretané. He desires the peaceful journeying of the spirit-soul on through the many realms of the Hereafter towards the eventual All-Goal of Lord Hnálla's final transcendental light.

### The Outer Doctrines

Lord Belkhánu deals entirely with the Dead and the passage from life to the Isles of Teretané, the passage from one Plane to another, and the coming of the final years.

### Color

This God's color is golden yellow.

### Astrology

Although no planet or moon is said to be His, it is not truly the case that Lord Belkhánu goes unrepresented in the heavens. He is a God of the spaces in-between, of the "nothingness of potential" between the Planes. Thus

His place in the Heavens is represented by the darkness between the worlds.

### Numerology

Lord Belkhánu's number is four, which is transcendent, mysterious, beyond this plane, Godlike and abstract. His mystics harmonize with Him by expiring the "q" which is His letter while focusing upon a golden mirror that is bathed in sunlight, or a flawless yellow gem.

### Costume

Priests and priestesses of Lord Belkhánu wear yellow robes and tall yellow headdresses, with a coif of gauze to mask the face.

### Rituals

Lord Belkhánu's rituals go on continuously, with cantors rotating in and out of the Perpetual Choir in shifts so that the flow of praise and worship is never interrupted. While the ceremony is continual, there are distinct rituals employing various holy relics and implements that are sanctified or referenced or presented for the adulation of the crowd. The rituals flow one into the other, distinguished by crescendos and interludes. The ritual moves about the temple in a rather complicated fashion, visiting various chambers and the halls of various Aspects, and in this way continue throughout the day.

In addition to the continual formal rites, there are always people engaged in smaller, private rituals about the temple: mourners gathered to remember their dead; discussions of philosophy taking place in different chambers open to the public or only to the priests of the temple; rites of particular sects; and funerary rituals; all take place in various chambers about the temple. A duty priest will greet visitors, check credentials, and route people appropriately.

On days holy to the Temple of Belkhánu the regular flow of worship is enhanced by the special celebrations and processions that go on beyond the walls of the temple. The Temple of Belkhánu observes many holy days particular to one city or another, such as the anniversaries of the deaths of significant people.

Despite all this activity, Lord Belkhánu's temples are not nocturnal. At night, the gates to the shrines are sealed and the majority of the temple goes to bed, with only those persons who are needed for the rituals remaining awake.

The Temple often employs its daily and annual cycles as a metaphor to illustrate their belief that the journey of the soul is cyclical, in a manner that is also in accord with the doctrines of Lady Avánthe.

#### *Funerary Rituals*

For the common Tsolyáni, Lord Belkhánu has become a cult God for funerary practices. It is not unusual for members of the other faiths to entrust their funerary arrangements to the Temple of Belkhánu. While clans usually have historical religious affiliations, they also include members of other faiths, and even individuals who neither know nor care very much about their particular religion. So long as they are happy and fed, being married and getting buried, many Tsolyáni are unconcerned with the particulars, and are perfectly happy to be buried by the priests and priestesses of the Temple of Belkhánu.

Tsolyáni citizens want a God to protect their tomb, a God who will protect their embalmed body, Deities who will oversee the tomb attendants and amulet-sellers. Lord Belkhánu fulfills these necessary roles, which matters more to most Tsolyáni than doctrinal differences.

Worshippers of Lord Belkhánu are buried with their hands crossed over their breasts, and other Temples have their faithful buried according to their own doctrines.

Among the Stability Temples, the Temple of Belkhánu usually buries worshippers of the Gods Thúmis, Hnálla, and Avánthe. Their own Temple most often buries worshippers of Lord Karakán. The Change Temples of Ksáru, Hrí'ü and Dlamélish will use Lord Belkhánu's services, but Lord Vimúhla's worshippers prefer their own pyres. Lord Sárku's worshippers rarely deal with Lord Belkhánu.

Lord Belkhánu is by no means macabre, however. His priests pursue more than burial and embalming, and His clans practice a variety of trades. There are many traditionally faithful clans that make amulets for the funerary rites, weave shrouds for the dead, or weep copiously for hire. These Tsolyáni are no different from other citizens who want to get married, raise a family, and so on, and who merely pursue the faith and the occupation of their forebears.

#### *Embalming*

For most Tsolyáni the Temple of Belkhánu is where bodies are washed and, if desired, expertly embalmed.

There are many different kinds of embalming. There is embalming that will preserve a body only long enough for a wake and burial, and other embalming that involve mighty spells and thousands of *Káitars* and preserve the body for thousands of years. The latter type is reserved for great Lords, Governors, and other mighty folk, who are interred in tombs constructed in the City of the Dead. Such tombs are grand and complex, varying in size and style according to the times.

#### *Tombs*

Modern Tlakotáni tombs are comparatively small trapezoidal buildings, with square-blocked walls that

slope slightly inwards. Fancy courtyards, which were popular only a few centuries ago, are no longer constructed. There is a door in the front that is always open, and inside is a single room where mourners and priests come to hold ceremonies for the dead. The actual tomb chamber is usually far below this room, at the bottom of a single long shaft which is solidly packed with rubble after the burial.

A multitude of tomb styles have been popular over the millennia. Complicated tombs with labyrinths, pyramids, courtyards, and gardens were constructed during the height of the Engsványáli Empire. Many bodies were transported down to the underworld, to a holy place near one of the ancient temples, and buried there. Those exploring the oldest *Tsuru'úm* can often find ancient temples, near which are catacombs jam-packed with desiccated corpses.

#### *High-Clan Funerals*

Great rulers, Governors, and Nobles will have arranged to have great books of their lives written; upon their deaths a copy is forwarded for inclusion in the Great Library of Avanthár. Such books are formulaic, grandiose treatises describing the mighty deeds, the deep piety, steadfast loyalty, unwavering dignity, and dauntless courage of the dead person. This story might be inscribed, in abbreviated form, in a stele over the doorway of the tomb. In truth, there is insufficient space in Avanthár's Library for all these works. After the subject has been long-forgotten, these books are probably recycled for the gold and gems adorning their pages.

#### *Middle-clan funerals*

The average merchant or middle-class person is buried in a small stone room, six feet long by two feet wide, with some of their prized possessions buried alongside. Lord Belkhánu's priests and various clans sell cult objects to bury with the dead, such as images of the Gods, little pots of oil and water, etc. Atop the little stone sarcophagus will be four to six feet of earth, and capping the grave will be a trapezoidal stone block bearing the clan and religious symbol of the dear departed. Oftentimes various clans claim certain areas of the Necropolis for their middle-class members. Blazing Sail clan, for instance, has an area accessed through a stone arch with their own particular shape of headstone. Others have their own customs.

#### *Low-clan funerals*

The fate of the average person is much less elaborate. When someone of low clan dies, the family will pay about ten *Hlásh* to have the person embalmed. This is usually accomplished with a quick-acting wax-like substance that prevents the body from decomposing in Tékumel's heat while the family holds a funeral. Then the body is wrapped in a sheet, placed on a bed, and borne across the river to the Necropolis. There the family pays another small amount and the body is buried in a grave that is already dug.

The grave-digging and burial clans in the south re-use the same graves again and again, since bodies decompose quickly in the heat and humidity of most Tsolyáni cities. In about 25 years the bones are decomposed, leaving

teeth and mere fragments, ready for another corpse: conceivably even the son of the previous tenant.

After forty days one holds an "after-funeral," a party celebrated for the relief of the soul of the dead. The journey to the Isles of Teretané is said to take forty days, at which time a pleasant memorial feast is celebrated for the departed soul. This tradition spans all faiths that employ Lord Belkhánu's services, with the regional variations.

#### *Coming to the Temple*

The duty priest or priestess greets those who come to the Temple of Belkhánu for funerary services and their needs are evaluated. If, as is often the case, the worshippers are of another Temple they will be asked if they wish the attendance of a priest of their faith, and if so a runner will be sent to fetch someone appropriate. There are numerous forms and rituals to observe, particular to the faith, lineage, and status of the mourning family and the dearly departed.

There are different classes, people, clans, and concerns that alter the way in which these ceremonies take place. The matrilineal and patrilineal differences between northern and southern Tsolyánu will alter the way in which ceremonies are handled for the genders. If a person is married to someone of a different faith, say a man who worships of Lord Karakán married to a woman who worships Lord Belkhánu, and the wife dies, then the husband may find that he wishes to proceed in a different manner than would her relatives. Priests of Lord Belkhánu are charged with the consolation and counseling of the mourners, and will work to resolve these differences.

Priests of Lord Belkhánu will come to the homes of the family of the dead for private ceremonies. One usually hires professional mourners, who come and wail and tear their hair with grief.

#### *The Interment of Priests*

The Temple of Belkhánu buries some of its priests in crypts in the catacomb. Often these are shelves in the walls off the tunnel, closed with a slab of stone. Sometimes these stones are marked, but as often as not they are only inscribed with colored chalks that are meant to wear off with time. This is because the doctrines of the Temple state that the body which is left behind is of no consequence, and it merely needs to be disposed of with dignity. Eventually it shall pass away, as do the chalk marks on the gravestone.

Once the relations are finished with a particular body, once the family no longer remembers the person, the body is allowed to fall into decay and dust.

The crypts tend to be elaborate and large, halls with statues of Lord Belkhánu and His Aspects. Inscriptions on the walls might note the life-stories of the occupants of their crypts, e.g. "This was my father, and he was an excellent potter. During his life he visited several cities, including the glorious capital of Béy Sü." etc.

#### *The Kòlumejálím*

When a God-Emperor dies, the Servitors of Silence carry His or Her body upon a golden bier to the shrine of Lord Belkhánu within Avanthár. There they wash the corpse, embalm it, and wrap it in finest *Thésun*-gauze and cloth-of-gold, and perform the first of many solemn funerary rites. In many cases, it is then borne to its last resting place in a sarcophagus of hardest stone in the catacombs below Avanthár. Some Emperors desire to be entombed elsewhere, as occurred with the last great Seal, the God-Emperor Hirkáne, "the Stone upon Which the Universe Rests." His desire was to be buried in Béy Sü, and this was carried out. All of the Temples joined in escorting the funeral bier to the Portal of the Land Beyond Life beneath the Necropolis on the eastern side of the river.

#### *Sacrifice*

Lord Belkhánu is not concerned with the things of this world, being focused upon the Planes Beyond Death. Hence He accepts few sacrifices and solicits none. Fruits, flowers, and gems of yellow and white are acceptable to Him, and are offered up freely by His followers.

His clergy are not so enlightened as their God, however, and need must attend to the day-to-day maintenance of His Temple. Hence they seek revenue, but the sacrifices of the populace do not suffice. This is why the fees charged for funeral services are so very high: hundreds of *Káitars* for the services surrounding the dignified burial of a member of a mid-level clan, tens of thousands of *Káitars* for high-clan members, and on upwards.

Additionally there are always 'inducements' necessary in order to procure space in the Necropolis, the timely services of the priesthood, to assure quality service, and avoid 'mishaps,' etc.

The Salarvyáni, who are not highly regarded for their wisdom, have one saying that is repeated in four of the Five Empires: "Do as you will in Tsolyánu, but do not die there!" As one might guess, foreigners incur additional "processing fees" when it is necessary for their Tsolyáni clan-cousins to bury them.

Finally, the Temple of Belkhánu sells little boats, images of Lord Belkhánu and His Aspects, votive candles, etcetera. These charms have no theological significance, and are considered merely superstitious icons for the common folk, and sources of revenue for the Temple.

It is through their funerary services and related ventures that the Temple of Belkhánu's true interest, the studies of the Many Planes, is supported.

#### *Fasting*

Fasting is considered an excellent means of purifying the body and "clarifying" the Spirit-Soul, and is used in preparation for certain rituals, studies, and spells. Penitents and ascetics practice fasting as well, in order to approach the God.



*The Tlakotáni Dynasty*

As He has become a cult God for funerary rituals, Lord Belkhánu is also the cult God of the Tlakotáni dynasty. Regardless of the faith of the Emperor or Empress, Lord Belkhánu takes care of their burial. Sometimes a particularly devout ruler will require that their own Temple handle the Inner aspects of the burial, but most allow Lord Belkhánu's clergy to handle all of the arrangements.

*War*

Lord Belkhánu has no interest in Change or warfare because this world is of no interest to Him. Lord Belkhánu's worshippers want peace and Stability because war and Change distract them into paying attention to this world. They do not involve themselves in the affairs of war, because they simply don't believe war is their concern.

War is not a matter of moral censure in Tsolyánu. From birth, children are taught that to die for a good reason is *lán*. One need not die as a hero with a score of dead at one's feet: death for a noble cause is sufficient and appropriate. Lord Belkhánu's philosophy of "nobly greeting destiny" reflects this cultural belief.

So Lord Belkhánu is only concerned with whether or not war will serve to support society. For instance, no priest of Lord Belkhánu would pretend diffidence concerning war against incursions of Ssú: the Ssú actively threaten society and so must be turned back. But wars for obscure economic reasons, for territorial concerns that seem meaningless, or for vengeance, these things do not concern the Temple.

*The Inner Doctrines**The Soul*

While His master, Lord Hnálla, is interested in the eventual disposition of the *Balétl* and *Chusétl* in the Perfect Light, it is Lord Belkhánu who seeks to ease the way for the transiting spirit. Thus this Temple is most knowledgeable in the Many Planes across which the spirit travels, but the Inner Rituals and doctrines focus upon the proper conduct and attitudes useful to prepare the Spirit-Soul for its eventual journey.

*Language*

Like those of the other Stability Temples, Lord Belkhánu's clergy employ *Thu'úsa* for doctrinal and academic texts. The Temple does not have a secret language of its own.

*Death*

Time is one aspect of the Planes, and death is merely another. What is death if everything exists throughout time? What is individuality in an infinite universe? Birth and death are only the transference of something eternal to another Plane. The individual is significant in the sense of being part of a larger universe, but no one soul is crucial or particular to Lord Hnálla's Final Light.

*Restoration to Life*

The Temple of Belkhánu is reluctant to employ its skills for the re-embodiment of the recently dead. Such acts run directly counter to the Doctrine of Acceptance, and too-closely parallel the ambitions of Sárku, Lord of the Never-Dying. On very rare occasions power, politics, or necessity may drive the Temple to reluctantly restore to life one who has died.

Such service is the most expensive available through the Temple, however. Fifty- to seventy-five thousand *Káitars* will be demanded for the Ninth-Circle Temple Spell of Re-embodiment. Two to three times that price is demanded for those who do not worship the *Tlomítányal*, the Gods of Stability! More often than not, mere coinage is insufficient to compel the Temple to take this step. The fate of the Empire, the secrets of the Ancients, the future of the Many Planes must be at stake before the Temple will attempt to restore to the Loom that which the Weaver has torn free!

*The Many Planes*

Lord Belkhánu's interest is in the Planes Beyond; He functions as a funerary God simply as a means of preparing His faithful for their journey. He perceives the infinite Multiverse, and many of His Aspects reflect this, while others represent more mundane matters.

The greatest scholars of the Temple believe that an infinity of Planes co-exist, like rivers across the land, or arteries flowing in a body. They lie in many-dimensional spaces, not all reaching the same end. Some taper off into nothingness, and some are very alien to anything a human can comprehend.

His Aspects who reach across the Planes deal with Nexus Points, and the ebb and flow of energy drawn from one Plane to another. They attend to the orderliness of the Planes as well. For instance, if a key figure is removed from a Plane at a crucial moment, the Plane can go awry, generating "side planes" which might re-join the "main" branch, or dwindle away into nothingness.

His scholars agree that, at times like these, Lord Belkhánu intervenes to maintain order, preventing the creation of Planes that do not serve Lord Hnálla's goal of the Infinite Light.

This deep and abiding interest in the Many Planes is not a secret. Rather, it is an element of the theology that is rarely ever a part of the lives of everyday Tsolyáni citizens. Lord Belkhánu's theology pursues the idea of death as a series of alternate Planes, rather than an experience occurring beyond all the Planes.

However, these questions never arise for the majority of priests of Lord Belkhánu, much less for the population as a whole. Only the most devoted of scholars and savants ever achieve sufficient comprehension of the Planes to begin to even ask the questions raised here. Of Pavár's Pantheon, Lord Belkhánu is the most learned in these matters, followed by Lord Ksáru, and then Lord Thúmis, but these topics still remain beyond the ken of most.

*Nexus Points*

The Nexus points used by sorcerers to cross from one Plane to another are described as "bridges" or "tunnels" between the Planes, but whether they cross a 'space between the Planes' is unknown. Does one jump' from one point to another on a piece of paper, or is the paper 'folded' and one simply crosses at the point of contact of one half against another? Whether or not any of these metaphors correspond to reality is unknown; all that can be agreed upon is that these simple human metaphors are wholly inadequate to the task of describing interplanar reality.

Such is the nature of movement between these Planes that one cannot easily travel to a Plane which is very close to one's own; the distinctions which separate the Planes are too fine. Instead, when one travels the Planes, one usually goes a very long way to someplace very different. And when you return, you're never sure you've come back to your original Plane. If upon one's "home" Plane there is a stone atop a hill in Ssórmu, but you return to a Plane where that stone is at the bottom of its hill, and this is all which distinguishes one Plane from the other, will you ever know the difference?

For while one can go back and forth in time, and span the cosmos of possibility, one can rarely travel precisely enough to return exactly to the place from whence one departed.

*The Pylons*

Finally, there seem to be barriers that prevent travel to particular areas. Where the deities or creatures that rule these Planes have them blocked off, the scholars of the Temple of Belkhánu talk about the Pylons or the Barriers. Whether or not these objects exist in reality, or whether these are simply human names for complex phenomena that defy human comprehension is unknown. The Pylons certainly exist in the sense that one cannot cross into the realities which the Pylons block: the Planes from which Téकुmel and its sun originated; the series of Planes where the Chíma rule; and others which are far out and away. One can travel the infinite possibilities of Téकुmel's reality, but one cannot pass Beyond the Pylons. The last who might have done so were the long vanished Lords of the Latter Times, and they either took their great knowledge with them, or left it to decay into uselessness.

*The Isles of Teretané*

Lord Belkhánu is particularly expert in matters of the Planes Beyond Death, and the trackways that the soul follows after leaving this Plane through Death.

A soul may spend eternity among the Islands of Teretané which, according to Lord Belkhánu's people, "are like islands, and the sea is not water." The soul travels from one island to another on "boats" or vehicles of some kind, and moves along the pathways on each island. Some of the islands are pleasant and peaceful, others are painful. Like islands in the sea the other islands are visible, one here and one there, some covered with mist and others clear. The souls travel to and fro, and no one

can say why some proceed along, and others travel to the Islands and remain.

Eventually, the souls "fade away" completely, and even the greatest spells of the Temple of Belkhánu cannot reach them. Some believe that the soul truly dissipates into nothingness, others that the soul simply loses its sense of personal identity, and no longer responds to the call of such spells because it no longer has a sense of self.

The path that souls take to and through the Islands is not set. Souls arrive here, there, and travel elsewhere, without any discernible pattern to their wanderings.

Daring or foolhardy explorers have attempted to travel to the Isles in their mortal form, but most have more sense. These adventurers are at the farthest possible limit of travel. Although one may traverse many Nexus points along the way, one never arrives in any form but spirit. Is the body present or lost, waiting on a previous Plane, or destroyed? It is impossible to say. Once there, many fear their souls will be drawn to remain, in a state between life and death, until the body perishes and they are truly dead. Only the truly desperate would ever attempt such a journey.

Upon arrival, one's perceptions are clouded, if the few tales of such journeys are to be believed at all. Things are blurred by a glamour and uncertainty, at least to those who have arrived without Death. The explorer calls out for those they seek, and meets creatures that may or may not appear in a physical form. Some have claimed to meet persons in their physical forms, others essences in mother-of-pearl and cloud, still others have heard voices or merely sensed presences, without seeing anything at all. Some recognize a soul by its aura or via some unknown manner, and they speak with that soul, though whether they speak with their mouths or with their minds is not known.

How anyone returns from such a journey is also unknown. Some tales tell of "awakening" in one's body on a previous Plane. Others claim to have wandered until more corporeal surroundings made themselves clear. A few braggarts claim to have "fought" their way back, although their foes and weapons are not described. Most believable are those who claim to have encountered some great, powerful entity that perceived them, recognized their dislocation, and replaced them upon their own Plane in an eye's twinkling. Certainly these must be the very servitors of Lord Belkhánu Himself, acting on His behalf to repair an obvious error in the cosmos.

*Paradises*

The priests of Lord Belkhánu speak of the Further Shores, the Paradises Beyond Teretané. None can tell the requirements for admittance there, and none can say with surety whether these are not simply further and further Planes Beyond. The situation is extremely confusing, and many scholars are at philosophical loggerheads with each other over the disposition of the paradises of the Gods.

It is said by some that the Gods and Goddesses have Their own paradises, and yet others will argue that this is not so, and still others that these exist, but that they are simply places among the Isles of Teretané. Lady Dlamélish claims a multitude of Planes of Paradise, devoted to every possible pleasure. Lord Vimúhla claims a single great paradise of a raging ecstatic flame in which His worshippers are burned forever in a flame of ecstasy. Lord Karakán claims an afterlife of panoply, pageantry, and military glory. Meanwhile, Lord Sárku's worshippers say that the Worm Lord provides His own special afterlife that has nothing to do with Teretané and "saves" His faithful from travel to the Isles.

Lord Belkhánu oversees traffic back and forth between all the Isles. He holds no sway over Isles 'owned' by other Gods, but He must see that worshippers destined for each of these Isles arrives properly.

Lord Belkhánu Himself claims a paradise that conveys ultimate and absolute peace to all portions of the soul; all the portions come together into a united being, perfectly stable in His world. There is no singularity or identity: you are One. For another tenet of Lord Belkhánu's faith is the belief that most people have missing parts, that all souls are incomplete so that most are unsatisfied with who and what they are. This lack explains unseemly ambition, greed, cruelty, and callousness: all are the acts of broken souls. When a worshipper of Lord Belkhánu is accepted into His personal paradise, the worshipper's soul becomes totally whole.

The process of Becoming One is an ecstasy, and Lord Belkhánu does not prevent those in His afterlife from fragmenting, in order that they may re-experience Becoming One again.

There are scholars who claim that the traveling of the spirit-soul is circular: after a circumambulation of the eons, one comes again to this Plane and is reborn. Their claim is that this is part of the cycle of re-experiencing Oneness, that refragmented souls follow the entire journey into Life and through Death. Others describe the journey as not so much circular as spherical: everyone returns to this Plane, but each goes by a different great circle around the sphere.

Others insist that Lord Belkhánu assures His devotees of an adventuring onwards, beyond the Paradises of Teretané, into Planes where the spirit-soul will be shown new and different delights and novel forms of being until the end of time, and that this journeying precludes a return to this existence.

A few, considered heretics by the adherents of Lord Belkhánu, claim that the journey is random and that each spirit soul takes a path of its own, some returning soon to this Plane, some after many centuries, and many never again.

However, few disagree that the antithesis of Lord Belkhánu's paradise is a mean and dreadful region wherein the spirit-soul goes round and round existing as always ugly and repulsive things — molds, fungi, vipers, and insects — always aware of its punishments and unable to gain its freedom.

What all of this does prove, to all Tsolyáni, is that one must never discuss the Afterlife with a Priest of Belkhánu without having cleared one's schedule for the remainder of the day!

### Temple Layout

While each temple of Lord Belkhánu is unique and distinctive (particularly the regional centers) there are certain elements common to all.

Gardens surround the central temple building, with winding paths and tinkling fountains. Around the perimeter of the outer wall are workshops, cookhouses, supply buildings, *Chlén* stables, slave dormitories, etc. The priestly dormitories are located behind the main temple.

The embalming shops are located at the back of the temple grounds, usually adjacent to a cluster of shrines where the Last Rites for the Dead are performed. Several simultaneous ceremonies often need to be held on holy days, as the clans often wait to bury the recently-dead until an upcoming holy day.

Inside the walls of the main temple is a square or courtyard, usually with a *Tunkúl* tower in one corner. Upon entering the vast lower concourse of the main temple, one finds shrines devoted to the funerary gods and cults. Within is the Great Nave of the temple where the Outer Rituals take place. Beyond the nave are elaborate inner temples, libraries, and residences, such as those of the High Priests.

At the back of the main temple building is a structure several stories high, consisting of floors of shrines to the Aspects of Lord Belkhánu. Some of these shrines are open to the sky, and some face particular directions, according to the necessities of doctrine. The raised main temple and the tower of Aspects form a good-sized "skyscraper," and these buildings tend to grow up rather than out. (In contrast to other temples, for instance those of Lady Dlamélish, which tend to be broad and flat, opening into many courts.)

Schools for young children are often (but not always) in separate buildings along the inner perimeter, in the vicinity of the priestly dormitories. More advanced scholars are often accommodated by research rooms off the libraries, but the instruction of the young takes place in these separate buildings. Actual priestly, theological training takes place in research and study areas off the back of the main temple.

Those who come to worship in a particular manner will be directed by duty priests to the appropriate Aspect. If one wishes relief from grief, for instance, they would first pass through the main shrine where they would pay their respects to the God, but they would then visit the Shrine of the Aspect Tronúa, who offers surcease from grief.

Deep within the temple are the schools and shrines devoted to the inter-planar aspects of the God, but the average person never even enters these areas, and the priests who work there rarely concern themselves with anything but their studies.

The catacombs beneath a temple of Lord Belkhánu usually go directly (for a catacomb) down to the tombs where the high priests of Lord Belkhánu are buried.

The Inner Temples of Lord Belkhánu are occasionally underground, relics that survive from the ancient times. Some of these places are so old that their necessary rituals are focused on a particular lost relationship between Lord Belkhánu and some other, ancient god.

## Secular Activities

### Businesses

The Temple of Belkhánu includes many administrators in the central empire, governors, merchants, and moneylenders. Moneylending is not part of Temple doctrine, neither is it actively inimical to doctrine, and the moneylenders tend not to be too pious. Instead, the children of former bureaucrats often grow up to find that the money of bureaucracy is easier to enjoy without the bureaucracy.

Finally, Lord Belkhánu's faithful are prevalent in all areas dealing with the Dead, and the disposition thereof. From the beggars by the piers of the ferry traveling to the Necropolis to the grave-diggers, professional mourners, tomb-robbers and Tomb Police, makers of figurines, votives, and amulets, shroud weavers, etcetera, the clans which worship Lord Belkhánu are ubiquitous.

### Public Works and Services

As has been explained above, Lord Belkhánu is present in all areas of secular life that involve the Dead and their burial.

As regards His study of the Planes Beyond, the Temple of Belkhánu in Thráya publishes a "roadmap" for travel from one paradise to another. This includes the charms and passwords between the Planes; how to control the demons of the Planes; how to gain favor aboard the ship to the Isles; shortcuts through the Isles, etcetera. It is worthwhile to note that some persons actually *have* returned to complain about the quality of these works and offer corrections.

### Cities of Broad Influence

#### *Thráya*

The mother temple of Lord Belkhánu's worship, ten to fifteen *Tsán* outside of Thráya, is the center of Lord Belkhánu's faith. This huge compound extends for a mile from corner to corner, with an extension forming the base of an ell which extends for another half-mile. From the *Sákbe* road to the temple, the way is clustered with caravanserais, rest houses, amulet sellers, makers of funerary equipment, refreshment vendors, etc., all representatives of lower-middle clans in Thráya and the surrounding agricultural areas.

A tremendous main gate, gilded and adorned with Bednálljan inscription and bas-relief, opens onto a colonnaded outer courtyard. The rows of pillars surround a huge cenotaph with a statue and stele pronouncing Lord Belkhánu's glories. Many doors go

off this long colonnaded hall to other halls that lead to outer funerary shrines. Off these are a whole series of auditoriums that have many smaller rooms along their sides, full of funerary workshops, manufacturers, embalmers, and other related facilities.

In this area there are many shrines to the funerary Aspects of Lord Belkhánu. They surround an immense roofed hall, several stories high and illuminated by broad windows of bronzed glass, where embalmers are trained and difficult burials and embalmings are conducted.

The actual temple is reached from a series of gates beyond the main colonnade that open into another series of halls, an incredibly vast and complex structure. There are gates and palace openings, dormitories and quarters, and structures devoted to various Aspects of the Gods. Courtyards several stories high are ribbed with the balconies of living areas overlooking gardens and statues. Workshops outside are full of supplies, the *Chlén* stables, and dormitories of the priests and priestesses who work there.

The architecture is Engsvanyáli at its base, with Classical Tsolyáni additions and everything in between. The regional southeastern architecture has a predominant tower style of a dome atop a trapezoid, capped with a tall pillar.

A veritable city unto itself, the Temple of Belkhánu draws visitors not only from nearby Thráya but from all over the world. Some come to worship, but many come to simply to view the grandeur of the place, study its art and architecture, and visit its vast libraries.

Visitors to the temple will often transport water from the courtyard home to dip shrouds, as a shroud dipped in such water is of course more holy. There is a *Tsuru'úm* that is only as old as Éngsvan hlá Gánga, newer than those that predate Bednálljan times, and lacks the great Bednálljan pyramid tombs of the oldest catacombs. It has its own Necropolis, to which many notable persons arrange to be shipped after death.

It is said that the earliest, private, secret temples of Lord Belkhánu are buried deep beneath the huge mother temple.

### Other Cities

Every city hosts at least one of Lord Belkhánu's temples, and other regional shrines to Lord Belkhánu exist around the Empire. Each regional center has a certain character or feature which sets it apart. Avanthár has a small temple in the fortress itself. Béy Sü, Úrmish and Usenánu all have significant temples.

Khírgár is in an area that is too hard and rocky for burial, so the dead are buried in caves in the mountains nearby. In Púrdimal the poor are dumped in the swamp, while the upper classes are buried comparatively far away in the foothills of the mountains.

### Other Nations

In Yán Kór there is a fine, elegant shrine in the city of Ebér. There are certain rites that are performed only

there, and certain nights of the year when it is said that Lord Belkhánu will reach through from one Plane to another and "bring back" one's long-departed relatives. It is a difficult trip, and many Yán Koryáni come all the way down from the northern portions of their nation. The Lorún of northern Yán Kór feel that the way to contact the dead is to reach this city, which they call "The Threshold," and so this city is the subject of many pilgrimages by the Lorún.

During peaceable times there is a lot of transit between Tsolyánu and Yán Kór by priests of Lord Belkhánu. Yán Koryáni citizens travel south to the shrine at Thráya, and Tsolyáni travel north to Ebér.

## Politics

### Internal Factions

Lord Belkhánu's worshippers do not tend to extremes, and so their internal factions are not as deeply divided as those in other Temples. Lord Belkhánu's focus on the Planes Beyond Death tends to render the affairs of this world less meaningful to His followers.

#### *The Golden Sphere of Eventual Transcendancy*

Moderates who stress a middle course between activism and pacifism. This faction believes that a relationship with other Temples and society is necessary in order for all to flourish, while failing to work closely together imperils everyone.

#### *The Group of the Amber Glow*

This academic faction devotes itself to theological and doctrinal studies and has little to do with the concerns of this world. They believe in devoting themselves solely to scholarship.

### Temple Alliances

The Temple of Belkhánu stands slightly apart from the politics of Empire, as its doctrines might suggest. The Temple does work closely with the Temple of Avánthe on matters related to the End of Life (which is part of the Lady's cycles), and with the Temple of Thúmis concerning their scholarly researches into the Planes Beyond. Occasionally the Temple's scholars have had to treat with the Temple of Ksárul for information, although that Temple always exacts its price. The Temple very rarely deals with the Temple of Sárku, as there is little concerning that Temple's doctrines which does not fly in

## Clans

Large numbers of agricultural clans in the center of the Empire follow Lord Belkhánu, and His temples in various cities are funded by the Temple hierarchy, the Clans, and then by the Empire. With the backing of some very ancient and powerful clans, the Temple of Belkhánu is wealthy and powerful. By burying the dead, comforting the bereaved, and offering reassurance concerning the Afterlife, the Temple garners immense monetary support.

Clan names printed in plain text are completely ecumenical, with members from every Temple. Italicized clans are not completely ecumenical, worshipping some subset of the Twenty Gods. Clans in bold text reserve their worship solely for the God and His Cohort.

the face of the doctrines of Lord Belkhánu. Needless to say the presence on the Petal Throne of a worshipper of Lord Sárku, Emperor Dhich'uné, "Eternal Splendor," has the Temple of Belkhánu rather displeased.

### External Parties

Lord Belkhánu is a powerful god in Tsolyánu because of His management of the day-to-day businesses of funerary rituals. The income from these ventures supports His clerics' interest in the esoteric natures of the Planes. Hence, Lord Belkhánu's Temple possesses power with many influential clans overseeing the interment of the Dead. The political power of these clans is considerable, but Lord Belkhánu's clergy have rarely exercised this influence.

The Temple is well represented in the Imperial and Royalist parties, as well as the Priestly party. It holds very little sway over the Military Party, having only one Military legion of its own and little interest in conquest.

### Military Legions

Lord Belkhánu's Temple funds few legions and controls only one. Few military officers are of this Temple, which lacks the strong tendency towards military action characteristic of the Temple of Karakán. His Cohort Lord Qón is more militaristic, for He is the Defender of the Gates, whose task it is to keep the way clear.

#### *The Legion of the Clan of the Golden Sphere*

13th Imperial Medium Infantry

Kérdu Changékte hiAmiyála of Thráya commands this medium-class legion devoted to Lord Belkhánu. These soldiers fight largely with the mace, as well as with short swords and spears.

### Notable Persons

#### *Lord Ónkone hiSarélke*

High Ritual Priest of Belkhánu, Jakálla.

Quite old, he holds the legendary Staff of Aryésu that is valued by the Blasphemous Accelerators. Apparently the Staff is necessary for command over the phenomena of the Unstraightened City. Unfortunately for the Accelerators, Lord Ónkone is quite aware of why they want it, and does not intend that they should get it. A scholarly, serious, and slightly senile individual, he is very pleasant and as bald as an egg.

*Very-High*

<i>Sea Blue</i>	Might of Gánga	<i>Golden Bough</i>	
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*High*

White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle	<i>Amber Cloak</i>
Standing Stone	Rising Sun	<i>Joyous of Vrá</i>	

*Medium*

Green Bough	<i>Green Malachite</i>	Ripened Sheaf	<i>Golden Dawn</i>
<i>Golden Sphere</i>	<i>Golden Sheaf</i>	<i>Golden Sapphire</i>	Black Pinnacle
First Moon	Moon of Evening	Golden Lintel	Scroll of Wisdom
<i>Red Eye of Dawn</i>	Weeping Stone		

*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	<i>Broken Bough</i>	<i>Open Sepulcher</i>
<i>Plume of White</i>	<i>Ivory Staff</i>	High Tower	<i>Flowering Life</i>
Flat Peak	Woven Whip		

*Very-Low*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	Bright Sword	Flat Rock
Glass Spear	Sinking Land	Turning Wheel	Collar of Bronze
Hand of Compassion	Wicker Image		

**Holidays**

There are many festivals for the dead, many of which are localized, and involve honoring the souls of the dead by laying offerings on one's grandparents' tombs and so forth. They actually have nothing to do with Lord Belkhánu's doctrines, but the temples tolerate them for the offerings they bring in.

## 1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Belkhánu join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving and political pageantry.

## 3 Langála

Summer Solstice, the Feast of the Lighted Path

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

## 19 Langála

The Passing Over of Souls

In Usenánu and Thráya, worshippers of Lord Belkhánu celebrate the Passing Over of Souls with rituals for the dead, particularly those who have died in the past year. This is a grand festival: there are great feasts and numbers of people selling candles to light for the souls of the dead. In the City of the Dead there will be food-sellers and drink-sellers catering to the clans that visit to celebrate their deceased and pray for their admittance into the paradises of their God.

## 1-6 Drénggar

The Crossing of the Planes

This celebration takes place in Thráya, Jaikalór, Jakálla, and Béy Sü during the first week of Drénggar, which period represents the time said to be required for "the Creatures of Light to cross from one side of Eternity to the other." Children born to Lord Belkhánu's clans during this week are said to have been "brought by His servitors," and the recently dead are all buried on the sixth day when the Creatures of Light are said to be in attendance. Outdoor ceremonies take place each day at the Temple of Belkhánu, followed by performances of epics and ritual dances, juggling, and tableaux. This culminates on the final night with grand ceremony and

all-night revelry, amply fueled by free food and a thin, tart yellow wine made in Thráya from unripe *Dlél*-fruit and spices.

### 7 Firasúl

The Salt Festival of Jakálla

Not truly a religious ceremony at all, this celebration has been adopted by the Temple of Belkhánu in Jakálla because of its close association there with the saltmaking clans. The Temple enjoys the donations of the large and powerful salt industry in Jakálla, whose clans ship products all over the Empire for the flavoring and preservation of food. The celebrations begin in the evening after the great heat of the day, and proceed until dawn. Great trays of sea-salt, pale yellow, white, blue and green in color, are displayed. The salt-ships are sailed in a regatta up and down the Missúma river and into the bay (to the delight of the harbormaster, who levies a fee for each passage). Ceremonies blessing the ships take place, with allusions to the Ships of Belkhánu employed for good measure. The populace indulges in food, beer and entertainment, without regard for the question of what Lord Belkhánu has to do with salt.

### 7 Pardán

Fete of Boats, Usenánu and Béy Sü

The night commemorates the Going Forth from Death into Life. While it is a ceremony of Lord Belkhánu, the clergy of Lord Qón, His Cohort, actually attend to the details. The canine-masked priests of the Guardian of the Gates of Hell sail in a splendid regatta down the Missúma River to portray the journey through the Underworld to the Isles of The Excellent Dead. Children line the banks to push little yellow paper boats out into the current, each bearing a waxen candle and a carefully penned letter to some deceased relative or friend. The mighty voices of the *Tunkúl*-gongs boom and roar up and down the river, dancers fill the market plazas, and the streets overflow with celebrants.

### 1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

### Trantór

Rite of the Golden Refulgence

This ancient and deeply religious observance held beneath Jakálla celebrates the Coming of the Gods and the Mastery of Light. Processions of Lord Belkhánu's clergy carrying golden lanterns descend into the Underworld, driving out the Darkness as did the Gods when they created the world. The ceremony itself takes place on various dates in Trantór depending on certain astrological signs known only to the Temple itself, occasionally even straying into late Halír or early Lésdrim.

### 9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

### 10 Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

### Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

The Transformation of the Spirit-Soul

On the last of the Intercalary days, worshippers of Lord Belkhánu in Thráya conduct the Transformation of the Spirit-Soul, ritually dispatching the souls of the year's dead to their new existences in the Planes Beyond. This is the greatest ceremony of the year, at once deeply religious and brazenly raucous. Everybody participates with food and drink, rituals and costumes. The Outer Courtyards of all the temples are open to the common folk, and food and cheap local beer are handed out free — great haunches of *Tsi'il*, grains, golden foods, and cheeses. The high clans have reserved places within the temple for the Inner Ceremonies. There are several hours of rituals of the Transformations of the Spirit-Soul, punctuated with breaks and feasting. Afterwards, the highest nobles are guests for the Inner Ceremonies. Beyond that, the Adepts of the Temple visit the deepest shrines where ceremonies are carried out before images of Lord Belkhánu that have resided there since the time of the Engsvanyáli. On this night alone, guests from other Temples and the families of the clergy are welcome to visit these innermost ceremonies.

### Aspects

Lord Belkhánu is most commonly depicted as a four-armed human being with a round, featureless head. In each hand He bears one of the Insignia of Paradise: a yellow gem, a staff, a bowl, and an orb of golden waves.

Lord Belkhánu has 67 Aspects, most of which are concerned with other-planar travel and describing the passages between the paradises. Not many of these more scholarly Aspects are known to the common folk.

There are rumored to be Aspects corresponding to those parts of Lord Belkhánu that guard the farthest Planes, the Barriers, the Pylons, and the distant River of Darkness which leads across the Planes. Lord Belkhánu guards those places and has with Him Lord Qón at all times. Together They prevent the entrance into Tékumel's Multiverse of those creatures which rightly belong elsewhere.

Like the Aspects of other Gods, the Aspects of Lord Belkhánu differ according to place and time and vary somewhat across the Empire.

## 3) Mrisó

"The Knower of the Planes"

He is depicted as a man seated cross-legged, peering up through a stylized Engsvanyáli navigational device. He is the patron of the Scholar-priests of Lord Belkhánu who study the Planes. These scholars work beneath a small statue of the Aspect, and often dedicate their works to Mrisó, or one of the other "Knowers."

## 4) The Knower of the Paradises

This Aspect represents the knowledge of the afterlife and the Paradises of the Gods. He is depicted as a robed figure standing with His hands out to the sides, palms forward. Within each hand is a single Engsvanyáli *Suór*. Those scholars who study the Paradises and the Theology of the Life Beyond Death usually wear an amulet of this Aspect and may dedicate their works to Him.

## 7) Tronúa

An unusual Aspect in that He/She has subforms — governing mourning, grief, consolation, and other emotions experienced by those who have lost a loved one. This Aspect is depicted simply as a peaceful, gentle, kind old man or old woman, depending upon the particular circumstances. His or Her clergy are those who visit the homes of the bereaved to counsel and comfort.

## 11) Konchékme

"The Guide to Teretané"

This Aspect knows the Way through the Isles and Beyond. He is invoked when friends and relatives of the dear departed wish assistance for the souls of their loved ones in reaching the Paradise of their God. Sometimes invoked when an individual lies comatose, in the hopes that Konchékme will guide their *Balétl* back to their still-living *Bákte*.

## 18) Aldeyá

"The Embalmer"

She protects and guides the dead immediately after death, and is depicted as a woman of middle years bearing a shroud in her hands. Her image is borne into the Necropolis or the crypts at the head of the funeral procession.

## 19) Hettáshte

"The Ferryman"

He is the navigator of the ship that bears the Dead to the Isles of Teretané, and is the subject of much of Lord Belkhánu's provincial metaphor. He is depicted as a squat four-armed man holding in His hands a tiller, a rope, a compass, and a sextant.

## 20) Mórskodel

Invoked at burial to take charge of the soul upon death, and also beseeched when one is seeking to locate the soul

of one who has been dead awhile. Depicted as a mummified yellow corpse.

## 28) Hayékka

"Cartographer of the Planes"

He represents knowledge of the Planes and is also said to assist the faithful by guiding them to the appropriate Aspect for their endeavors. He is also the patron of those who publish books and maps to the Planes.

## 36) Doluél

"The Guardian of the Tombs"

He is closely associated with the Cohort Qón, in that both protect the Necropolis and the Underworld. Lord Doluél is more passive, however, and cares not for the goods within the tomb, only that the body not be disturbed until the soul has completely departed. In most cases tombs are looted immediately after the burial or else not at all, and so Lord Doluél is invoked to protect the newly-buried.

## 41) Nentánte

"The Far-Voyager"

He visits far Planes, beyond the Pylons, and is the patron of those who would pass "beyond the beyond." People in terrible pain, suffering, or grief beg Him to remove them from the cycles of life entirely, out beyond the Barriers and the Pylons, that they may no longer suffer the endless cycle of Being. His clergy counsel the severely afflicted, those burdened by endless grief, and the self-destructive. They do not attempt to alter the path of one bent on self-destruction, but urge the individual to approach their destiny with dignity and noble behavior. Curiously, the calmness and self-assurance that dignity and self-acceptance lend often help the individual to pass through grief and return to the embrace of life.

**Demons**

Lord Belkhánu is not interested in Demons as such, but only in their capacity as potential guides to the Planes. Lord Qón, in His role as the Guardian, would have more interest in the inimical capabilities of various demons towards lost souls, or their capacity to guard the same.

**Voyagers of the Farther Isles**

These demons appear as scintillating golden insect-like creatures. They fly with dainty rainbow-hued wings and fight with slender lances. They enjoy offerings of yellow gems and gold.

**Spirits of Air****Entities of Light**

Lord Belkhánu's priests have been known to treat with these demons of Lord Hnálla and Lady Avánthe to solicit their aid in guarding the souls of the dead.



## Magic

### Aeriality

This psychic spell can lift and transport objects, at the highest levels moving quite a few items at once.

### Avulsion of the Spirit-Soul

Used only rarely by this Temple (for, like Revivification, it violates doctrine) this ritual ejects the *Bákte* of the target into an endless non-death in the Unending Grey. The Ritual of Re-embodiment can then embody some other *Bákte*, either that of a person dead less than a day, or that of a spellcaster desiring to occupy the new body. If the latter, the original body waits in a comatose state until the ritual is reversed with a spell of Disenchantment, and must be tended and exercised lest it perish, stranding the spellcaster in the new body. If the soul of a deceased person is embodied, a spell of Disenchantment would prove fatal if applied inadvertently or in order to remove some other spell.

### Etherealization

The caster's *Balétl* goes forth, leaving the body in a trancelike state, and manifests itself either substantially or insubstantially in a distant location, passing through non-magical barriers along the way, and even through Nexus points to other Planes. Disenchantment will return the *Balétl* to its body, but if it manifests substantially it is subject to physical damage, which erupts on the distant body. If slain in this state the caster cannot be revived.

### Re-embodiment

This ritual will install the *Bákte* of one recently dead into another body. Either a body must be purged of its own *Bákte* by the Ritual of Avulsion of the Spirit-Soul, or one may attempt this ritual upon an infant, whose *Bákte* is easily (but not always) dislodged. If the attempt fails, the invading *Bákte* is lost. If successful, the invading personality will grow within the new body. The Temple employs this spell very rarely, and charges heavily for the service.

### The Silver Halo of Soul-Stealing

This ritual is similar to the Ritual of Avulsion of the Spirit-Soul, sending the *Bákte* off into the Unending Grey. It differs in that it does not leave the body alive, and may be cast upon many targets simultaneously.

### Spiritism

The caster can speak psychically with the spirit of one recently dead and in some cases command truthful answers.

### Transmogrification

These are a set of powerful rituals for accessing and employing locations among the Many Planes. These rituals allow for precise access to a specific Plane; for the creation of small inter-Planar spaces where the caster can store objects or creatures; and for access to the Isles of the Excellent Dead.

## The Viaticum of the Yellow Robe

A ritual which purges an area of Lord Sárku's minions, and which can be cast upon an individual to prevent their ever being rendered into one of the Undead.

Petrál hiFershéna is a common Second Circle Ritual priest, an "Utterer of the Litanies of the Isles." Like a Singer of Purity in the Temple of Avánthe, this Petrál is a member of one of several groups, in this case cantors, who participate in a variety of rituals. At daily or evening rituals and funerals he joins other Ritual priests in proclaiming the catechisms of the God. These are often Engsvanyáli or Bednálljan, pronounced phonetically through long practice.

Should our priest desire to do so, the study of these ancient languages is strongly encouraged in both its written and spoken forms: traversing the Necropolis, these languages can be important in locating the graves of those long dead.

The Temple of Belkhánu is a fruitful place for study and advancement. Should one seek to exercise compassion, and comfort the grieving, many positions within the Temple beckon. If one is of a more scholarly nature, the Temple's analysis of the Planes Beyond is never complete. And, as with the other Temples, the highest levels of the Administrative and Ritual branches are fertile ground for politics and ambition. Finally, if one is a "time-server," interested only in a secure position and an unchanging, reliable routine, numerous administrative and ritual positions require merely close attention and a conscientious hand, without the burdens of politics or innovation.

With so many opportunities and such potential for variety, young Lord Petrál hiFershéna, Second Circle Ritual Priest of Belkhánu, could proceed from an "Utterer of the Litanies of the Isles" to one of a many of possible ends. Lord Belkhánu will provide guidance in the weaving of our priest's Skein of Destiny, if only he keeps his heart and mind open to the words of the God.

# Qón

*The Ancient One of Pleasures, Guardian of the Gates of Hell Against Those Who Would Come Forth*



Lord Qón protects the journeying spirit-soul against the uncharted thoroughfares and perils of the Hereafter and the Demons of the Dark. He also aids those mortals who are attacked by the powers of the Dark.

The guardian on the route after death, Lord Qón guides lost souls to the ferry that will take them to the Isles of Teretané. He lends courage to souls beset by demons during times of tribulation: children walking home past a cemetery pray fervently to him. Lord Qón clouds the minds of the underworld's creatures in defense of those who wander there.

He seeks to smooth the path of those who worship the Eternal Light of Lord Hnálla, easing the burdens of those who must contend against the Dark, and frustrating the plans of those deities who seek to establish their own rule throughout the Multiverse.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

Lord Qón is a defender of the underworld, the Stability Gods' defense against the Dark Trinity. He blocks demons and underworld creatures and the Pariah Gods. His abilities are great, and He has many secret techniques never revealed by His priesthood.

His daytime ceremonies are unexceptional, following the pattern of His Lord Belkhánu. His night rituals are illuminated by a buttery light, and accented with incense said to repel the Demons of the Dark, the Wanderers between the Worlds and the He'ésa. His libraries are filled with sealed tomes which can never be opened by any but the innermost of His own inner societies. Many of these libraries lie concealed beneath magical wards and disguises in the deepest Underworlds: e.g. the Yellow Halls below ancient Ch'óchi, the Labyrinth of Arched Glory below Thráya, etc.

### Color

White and yellow.

### Symbol

A stylized mace set vertically to ward off the dark.

### Costume

Priests and priestesses of Lord Qón wear yellow and white robes, *Chlén*-hide masks representing the Deity's

long canine jaws, and a thin gauze veil which conceals the face.

### Rituals

Before attending a ritual, worshippers bathe and rub their bodies with a yellow herb (rather like turmeric), and dress in a freshly laundered kilt of yellow and an overtunic of white. Families proceed together to the temple, carrying bouquets of yellow flowers and other items.

Processions of priests and priestesses carry images of Lord Qón in various forms into the temple of Lord Belkhánu, where He is placed before His Lord. Hymns are sung in Engsvanyáli, and offerings of yellow flowers, grain, fruit, and golden discs are made to both Deities.

After the ceremony, the clergy emerges from the Inner Shrine to offer each devotee a taste of a sweet yellowish paste that is claimed to ward off the powers of Change.

### Private rites

Morning ceremonies for the particularly faithful take place in a special room of the worshipper's clanhouse or dwelling. Offerings are made, and three or four lines of ritual are recited.

### Sacrifices

Sacrifices of incense, golden grain or other grains wrapped in yellow paper, yellow *Másh*-fruit, and discs of real gold inscribed with worshippers' prayers, are laid on a low table in front of the great altar at the rear of the main shrine of His temples. These usually beseech the guidance of Lord Qón on behalf of a spirit recently departed for the Isles, and sometimes the return to health of a spirit said to be "lost," the mentally disabled or ill, the chronically depressed, etcetera.

### Food Taboos

Priests of Lord Qón are ordered to avoid onions for doctrinal reasons. Those living near the seacoast also are commanded to avoid shellfish and wine made from the purple *Dlél*-fruit. Other alcoholic beverages are permitted, however, within reason, although Lord Qón's clergy are commanded to abjure drunkenness and licentiousness. These are considered the tools of the Emerald Goddesses, Ladies Dlamélish and Hriháyal.

Fasting is considered an excellent means of purifying the body and "clarifying" the Spirit-Soul.

### *Death Rituals*

The priests of Lord Belkhánu are charged with the interment of almost all followers of the Lords of Stability (although a priest of an individual's particular sect may also join in the rituals if desired by the family).

Lord Qón's clergy perform certain ritual roles in these funerals: they lift the deceased's body, touch the eyes and lips, and perform a rite called "The Releasing of the Spirit." This involves placing the corpse's hands over his or her heart, reciting the Litany of the Dead, and setting a candle of yellow wax by the deceased's right shoulder (to light the way to the Paradises in safety). Afterwards, if necessary, the corpse's hands are placed into the position favored by the doctrines of the deceased's Temple.

### *History*

As the Ancient One of Pleasures, the God Qón antedates Lady Dlamélish in the Pantheon of Lord Pavár. He is said to have governed the pleasures of the flesh before the Battle of Dórmoron Plain, when Lord Hnálla commanded all who followed Him to abandon physical enjoyment in order to prepare their physical and spiritual bodies for the conflict to come. Lord Qón guides the spirit-souls of those who are acceptable to the Gods to the Paradises of the Isles of Teretané, and He stands proudly at the entrance of the Way to the Isles. These paradises are the Pleasures to which He guides souls.

### *Legend*

Armésh the Jeweled Serpent, an Aspect of Lord Thúmis, restores life to Lord Qón's hero Jajél, after the Battle of Dórudai Field.

### The Inner Doctrines

The Inner Doctrines of the Temple of Qón involve the Meaning of Death, the Round (or Cycle) of Returning to Life, the Deflecting of the Forces of the Dark, and the Defense Against Those Who Would Lead to Dissolution. Little more is known because Lord Qón's clergy are sworn not to reveal anything beyond the visible, outer rituals to anyone not an initiate.

He is opposed to Lords Sárku and Hriüü, and, to some degree, also to Lord Ksáru. Lord Qón is more neutral to the One Other than the rest of the Tlomitlányal are, allegedly because of the role that deity played in the imprisonment of Lord Ksáru in the Blue Room. Lord Qón's shrines are thus often built near the secret fanes of the One Other in the Underworlds, and His priests indirectly help to guard them from looters and zealots.

His reach extends beyond Tékumel's plane into those planes ruled by beings and races friendly to the Lords of Stability.

### Temple Layout

Lord Qón's temples are usually rectangular, with the main entrance facing south, and contain many statues of Aspects, famed priests, and historical figures. There is usually an anteroom, with side rooms on both sides that lead to priestly quarters, refectories, storage areas,

workrooms, etc. Directly ahead of the visitor is an archway closed with curtains of white and yellow gauze, fringed with gold brocade.

The main ritual chamber contains a high altar at the far end, set with golden urns in which incense burns. Murals and bas-relief carvings cover the walls and ceiling, and the floor is almost always a mosaic of white marble and yellow jasper (or translucent yellow quartz in the case of the temple in Jakálla). Corridors lead off to smaller shrines devoted to whatever Aspects are locally popular. One or more doors at the rear, behind the altar platform, lead to further sanctuaries, to the inner temple libraries, and to entrances to the Underworld beneath (if any). Statues stand in niches around the main chamber of the great hall and along the corridors leading to the inner sanctuaries at the rear. Priests and priestesses come and go, and ritual recitations in Engsvanyáli, Tsolyáni, and even in Thu'úsa, are almost continuous. Against this droning background, the higher-pitched chanting of the priestesses rises and falls. Sacrifices are laid on a low altar table in front of the great altar.

On both sides of the main temple building, there are workrooms and storage chambers. The refectories and dormitories are usually at the rear of the temple, reached through a back gate. Palanquins, carts, and other larger items are brought into a larger walled courtyard at the side or along the rear wall of the temple proper.

### Secular Activities

#### Businesses

Lord Qón's clans are eclectic. In addition to sharing Lord Belkhánu's involvement in the interment of the dead, the interests of His clans include dealing in agricultural produce, transport, food preparation, pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and government bureaucracy.

#### Public Works and Services

The Temple of Qón operates many schools, teaching basic courses such as writing, mathematics, and history.

#### Cities of Broad Influence

Lord Qón is influential in Thráya, Jaikalór, Úrmish, Usenánu, Tsurú, and Si'ís. As with the other Cohorts, there are no cities in which He is the only (or even the major) Deity. His temples are usually built beside those of His master, Lord Belkhánu.

#### Avanthár

His shrine in Avanthár is small, jewel-like, and beautifully decorated. It is constructed of yellow jasper (some say it is carved of a single block!), filled with small, carved mythical figures that march around its walls from floor to ceiling. Incense burns before some of these at all times. The floor is of fine yellow and white mosaic, depicting the diagram of the Visitations of Power on Dórmoron Plain. At the far end is an elegant canopy carved of something that glitters, perhaps goldstone.

*Thráya*

The library of the temple in Thráya is famed for its specimens of beautiful Engsvanyáli calligraphy, as well as a number of rare historical, mythological, and literary texts in Engsvanyáli and Classical Tsolyáni.

The Temple of Qón at Thráya is renowned for "The Garden of Artákh," an outdoor astronomical "park" in a walled area just outside the city. Great sundials, towers, and other instruments of stone are used to measure the exact movements of the moons, planets, and other bodies. This was built under the patronage of Governor Artákh hiAmiyála, during the reign of Emperor Métlunel II "the Builder" (1202-1251 A.S.)

*Úrmish*

The temple at Úrmish has a special hostel devoted to "those who are spiritually lost." It is thus a hospital for the mentally ill, combined with a sort of monastery for those who seek solace from the world. This facility, "The House of Peaceful Dwelling," is jointly operated by the priesthoods of Lords Qón and Keténgku, although it is physically located in proximity to the temple of the former. There are perhaps 300 attendants, physicians, etc., and over a thousand patients.

The rituals of Lord Qón at Úrmish include rites that are aimed at restoring the mental health of those who have journeyed across the Planes and "seen the Unseeable." These rites are closed to the public.

*Jakálla*

The temple in Jakálla is rather cramped and small, but is said to connect with the underground passages of the *Tsuru'úm* beneath the city. The scholars of this place are famed for their knowledge of the demons and races that serve the Lords of Change. They are said to have devised spells to combat many of these creatures, and they are often summoned for exorcisms and "cleansing" of places inhabited by the Servitors of the Dark.

*Pála Jakálla*

The temple at Pála Jakálla is rather unnoteworthy. It tends mostly to administering the lands and revenues of the temple in the neighborhood of Jakálla and up the Missúma River.

*Sokátis*

The temple of Qón in Sokátis has a large library of materials relating to Salarvyáni and to the theological issues raised by the Salarvyáni goddess, Shiringgáyi. It also has atlases, travelers' accounts, and other works dealing with Salarvyáni and the lands to the east. Travelers and scholars gather here to discuss these matters, and leading authorities from this facility are summoned to Avanthár to report on Salarvyáni affairs. It is here also that the major work on the Nóm people of the far eastern ocean is kept, together with an account of the tribes of Rannálu and the isles of the northeastern sea.

The temple library also has a collection of scrolls and tomes regarding the different planes.

*Usenánu*

The temple at Usenánu is famed for its rituals of Repelling the Dark. Scholars from its academy are frequently summoned to participate in the exploration of newly discovered labyrinths and places of the Ancients. The museum here has a good collection of artifacts of the Great Ancients, and its priests work together with the clergy of Lord Thúmis on problems raised by certain devices. It is said that the brilliant young scholar, Lord Sanjésh hiKirisáya, is collaborating with the priests of Qón on a device intended to enhance communication with various Other-Planar races friendly to the Lords of Stability.

*Vrá*

The temple on Vrá contains several very old copies of the writings of Pavár. One of these, written on leaves of gold and ornamented with yellow gems, is said to have been rescued by divers from the sunken palace of the Priestkings itself. It possesses no known magical powers, but worshippers of Lord Qón believe it to be sacred, having been personally presented by Lord Qón to Pavár.

**Politics****Internal Factions***Group of the Amber Glow*

This scholarly group engages in theological and doctrinal studies of the Afterlife, the Planes Beyond, and the Journey of the Soul.

*Sect of the Golden Sphere of Eventual Transcendancy*

This sect urges a middle course of priestly activism, its members are loyal to its patron, Prince Rereshqála.

*The Guild of those Who Repel the Dark*

Devoted solely to Lord Qón and excluding even worshippers of Lord Belkhánu, members of this group specialize in exorcisms, combating demons and underworld creatures serving the Lords of Change or the Pariah Deities, and the "cleansing of the paths." They accept no one who is not brave, wise, and skilled in sorcerous lore.

**Temple Alliances**

The Temple of Qón works closely with the Temple of Thúmis on researches concerning the Many Planes, and certain devices of the Ancients. The Temple works with Lord Thúmis' Cohort Keténgku and with the clergy of the Ladies Avánthe and Dilinála, on those aspects of healing which concern the wandering of the soul and its restoration to the Cycles of Life. He works rarely with the Temple of Ksárul and even less frequently will cooperate with that Lord's Cohort Grugánu, as the tenets of these faiths conflict too directly with Lord Qón's own concerns. The price these Temples ask for their cooperation is usually more than Lord Qón's clergy care to pay.

**Military Legions***The Legion of the Clan of the Golden Sphere*

## 13th Imperial Medium Infantry

Kérdu Changékte hiAmiyála of Thráya commands this medium-class legion devoted to Lord Belkhánu. This military organization has existed in some capacity or another since the Engsvanyáli Empire, supposedly serving various regional rulers during the Time of No Kings. These soldiers fight largely with the mace, as well as with short swords and spears.

*The Legions of Defense Against Evil*

## 27th Imperial Medium Infantry

Led by Kérdu Mriyán Verússa hiNokkolél of Gánga and based in Tumíssa, this priestly legion has only been lightly supported by the Temple. The existing cohorts are experienced and skilled, but usually employed in defensive battles.

**Clans***Very High*

Might of Gánga

*High*

Amber Cloak

Joyous of Vrá

*Low*

Open Sepulcher

*Very-Low*

Sinking Land

Hand of Compassion

Wicker Image

**Holidays**

## 7 Pardán

Fete of Boats, Usenánu and Béy Sü

The Going Forth from Death into Life commemorates the sailing of the souls of the dead for the Paradises of Teretané with rituals and celebrations. The canine-masked Priests of Lord Qón sail in a magnificent torchlit regatta down the Missúma River to portray the journey through the Underworld to the Isles of the Excellent Dead. Notes to deceased relatives and friends are penned on yellow paper and folded into little boats. These are sailed out into the water, each bearing a tiny candle, to join the fleet of lights.

As a climax of the evening's rituals, priests of Lords Belkhánu and Qón carry forth an inscribed obelisk of wood and paper. A little girl is brought forth in the role of the Virgin of the Gods, and she sets the obelisk ablaze, symbolizing the victory of Life over Death. Afterwards she is dressed in finery and handed the ritual Scepter of Qón which she touches to the Imperial Seal. She is then

granted gifts and boons and, with a shout of "Existence ends not with death!" the celebration erupts into orgies and feasting.

**Vraháma, Intercalary Days**

## The Repulsion of the Powers of Change

This ceremony, held in the Inner Temples below Béy Sü, is focused largely on repulsing the creatures of Lord Sáрку and the Undead, who Lord Belkhánu particularly dislikes.

**Aspects**

Lord Qón usually is depicted as a six-legged beastlike creature, with a canine head and an open mouth filled with fangs. In His forepaws He bears two carved maces, and on His brow shines the double-circle emblem of Lord Hnálla.

He has 19 Aspects.

## 1) Améreth

An Aspect devoted to Pleasure, in a Spiritual-Transcendental form. This Form aids in the discovery of one's self and the coming-together of one's being. It makes you pleased with who you are and why you are here.

## 2) Masséfa

An ancient Form, perhaps taken from some Bednálljan deity. Depicted as a powerful 6-legged beast, in Its fore-claws It carries a golden disc, a mace, a pot, and a sword. These are said to be Its "weapons," with which It defeats the beings of the Underworld.

## 3) Nakhesú

"The Guide of Those Lost Below"

Depicted as a tall, humanoid warrior in full armor. The face is concealed, however, by the canine-mask favored by Lord Qón. Nakhesú has the power to find His way through deceptions, labyrinths, traps, and "Places of the Dark." He is especially popular with those who entomb the dead in subterranean catacombs.

## 4) Qazór

"He Who Flies Beyond the Pylons"

Favored by scholars of several of the Temples of Stability who experiment with Other-Planar travel. He appears as a "pleasing yellow flame," according to the sources.

## 5) Shinuéth

"The Unexpected Guardian"

He appears in many forms (a small boy, an old man, a lizard, etc.) when a worshipper calls out to Him for help or guidance. He is said to have spiritual and mental healing powers and is thus popular in various of Lord Qón's hospices.

## 6) Urádz

"The Wielder of the Mace"

Shown as a squat, humanoid warrior with what appears to be the head of some sort of beetle, Lord Urádz is called upon by warriors who fight Underworld or Other-Planar creatures. He is said to provide extra strength and/or accuracy with the mace, which Lord Qón favors.

## 7) Huróth

"The Watcher at the Gate"

He is pictured as a tall, cloaked, figure, His head hidden beneath a cylindrical horned helmet. He is said to stand at the Gates of Hell, the realms into which "ignoble" beings and vanquished creatures of the Dark are cast, "so that they may not come forth." Prayers and offerings are made to Him whenever a particularly ignoble person is buried or burned. Worshippers of Lord Qón carried out Lord Huróth's special rites when Emperor Tontikén Riruné "the Slave of Demons" (1306-1318 A.S.) passed away. His clergy has vowed (although not publicly) to do the same when Emperor Dhich'uné dies as well.

## 8) Nekkudlákta

"The One Who Sees the Paths"

Shown as a beautiful, winged maiden, this Aspect guides the spirit-souls of the dead through the Isles of Teretané to rebirth and the beginning of a new cycle of being. Those who are recently bereaved pray to Her and offer little stamped discs of yellow clay or even gold.

## 9) Sengélu

"The Ascetic"

This Aspect appears as a hooded man sitting cross-legged on a low stool, with bowed head and arms folded upon His knees. He is said to be "the Balm for the Spirit-Soul" and the "Alleviator of Suffering." He cares for those who are troubled, who feel guilt or depression, or who are unable to resolve life-crises. He is perhaps the closest thing the Tsolyáni have to "mysticism," since His devotees are enjoined to meditate in silence for long periods and contemplate the "Round of Being."

## 10) Janásh

"The Smiter of Those Who Should Be Gone"

He is shown as a heavy-set, naked warrior, who carries a stout club in one hand, and a small buckler in the other. It is said that those who make particular prayers to Lord Janásh have His protection against the Undead and other creatures raised by sorcery. His favorite opponents are certain Aspects of Lords Ksáru and Sárku, with whom He is often depicted in battle in temple murals, on pottery, etc.

## 11) Unúqa

"The Sage in Golden Robes"

A slender, youthful man who wears a yellow garment and carries a ritual staff and a closed book. He is popular

with those who seek to comprehend the devices of the Great Ancients. He is said to be very dangerous to seekers who do not truly love Lord Belkhánu with all their hearts and who simply seek knowledge for personal gain.

## 12) Ta'ésh

"The Illuminated One."

He is shown as a standing human figure with a head that is composed of a globe of yellow light. He is very popular in Thráya and Jaikalór, where He is the patron of libraries, ancient languages, and scholarship relating to the Planes Beyond. His worshippers jokingly state that He is of no use whatsoever in practical matters.

## 13) Ndájja or Bekhéra

The name is not known for sure, for this Aspect is fallen into disuse. In Engsvanyáli sources, this Aspect was said to be the particular spiritual guide through the Afterlife for "Emperors, Princes, and Kings." He had nothing to do with lesser folk and was considered, thus, to be worthy of Imperial worship only. When Gánga sank, His main shrine went down with it.

## 14) Paréva

"The Gentle One of Sorrows"

This Aspect is shown as a kindly, stooped, middle-aged woman wearing a robe and overtunic of white and yellow. She comforts children and widows who grieve for slain husbands, particularly soldiers or those who died combating the creatures of the Dark. She is said to appear in dreams to such mourners to reassure them that their loved ones are well on the way to Teretané and will await them there.

## 15) Enushú

"The Embalmer"

This Aspect appears as a six-armed man, with His face covered by a gauzy veil. He is said to stand at the head of the bier of one newly dead. He is the particular deity of embalmers and those priests charged with burial rites. It is said that His presence is announced by the fragrance of certain sandalwood-like herbs used in the embalming process. If the deceased is ignoble or unworthy, however, the smell changes to that of putrefaction, and Lord Enushú departs.

## 16) Malán

"The Immortal Path"

This Aspect occurs as a solid pillar of amber-hued stone. He stands at the many crossroads in the Afterlife and guides the dead on to their proper destinations. He is often accompanied by those Aspects of the other Lords of Stability charged with leading deceased worshippers directly to their particular paradises. It is written that He also stands at crossroads in the Afterlife to mislead and deceive those deceased who were ignoble or who served the Lords of Change, but this doctrine is not accepted by many priests of Lord Qón.

## 17) Damádh

"The Mighty"

This Aspect appears in many forms, usually large and fearsome beasts, demonic shapes, etc. He (It?) has the task of combating the most terrible demons of the Planes Beyond. He carries no visible arms and wears no armor, yet He is said to be "always puissant" and "ever-defended."

## 18) Nggálba

"The Sentinel"

This Aspect is depicted as a fierce humanoid warrior, although it is written that He also has special forms for the nonhuman races as well. He is the one who stood guard over the warriors of the Lords of Stability on Dórmoron Plain, as they slept before the battle. He carries a mace and a short spear, which is tipped with a brilliant diamond of yellow light. It is written that none could evade Him or deceive Him, and His masters' troops arose refreshed and ready for battle at the appropriate time.

## 19) Warghán

"The Light Behind the Light"

Depicted as a sort of yellow solar disc with seven rays extending downwards, this Aspect's nature and purpose are not known (or not revealed by the clergy of Lord Qón). It is likely that He has to do with perfecting His master's yellow light throughout the Multiverse.

## Hekkél

"The Descender of Steps"

Recent doctrinal disputes within the Temple of Qón mention this Aspect's name and title, but as the clergy of Lord Qón are not forthcoming about their Inner Mysteries, no more is known.

**Demons**

Lord Belkhánu's Voyagers of the Farther Isles also assist priests of His Cohort, Lord Qón. They serve as guides to those lost among the Planes, sometimes responding to the desperate cries of the woefully lost. They appear as insectoid humans with delicate rainbow-hued wings, shining with a golden light. They love gold and yellow gems, and fight off the Demons of the Dark with slender, transparent lances.

**Magic**

The spells of Lord Qón's clergy are, not surprisingly, focused upon the planes, including spells to locate and open Nexus Points, the "doors" between the worlds. Other spells allow the caster to move along time a step or two, or to step partially "off" the Plane, leaving only a tiny "projection" as a kind of "placeholder" until the caster sees fit to return. In addition, the Temple has several spells which have never been revealed to any but its innermost clergy.

## The Expediter of the Skein of Destiny

This set of rituals allows the caster and possibly certain colleagues to "step" forward in time a small distance.

## The Periplus of the Planes

A powerful spell which locates and identifies Nexus Points of a type specified by the caster. Priests of the Dark Trinity are never permitted to see this spell in action, for its higher-circle rituals convey detailed information about all nexus points in the nearby area, their dispositions, the worlds accessible, etc.

## Simulation of the Immovable

The caster is separated from the current Plane almost entirely: only a small "placeholder" remains behind. This "placeholder" is the projection of the caster onto the plane, and can resemble almost any object: the more skillful the mage, the more cunning and subtle the illusion. Be warned, however! If the projection is destroyed, the link to the caster's Plane is lost, and the sorcerer may wander endlessly between the Planes, unable to find his or her way back!



Molten sunlight soaked through the curtains shrouding the stifling litter. Qilái read in reverse the symbols identifying its owner as a noble member of the Standing Stone clan. A scratchy cushion made her leg itch as the bearers jostled their way through the unseen lanes of Jakálla. The thin *Thésun* fabric of her pantaloons was soaked with sweat, and droplets tickled down the small of her back, but she did not move to relieve her discomfort. To breathe was to drown in a hot soup smelling of street-sewage, sweat, and Mama Chúra's sweet-spicy *víndo*-flower perfume.

Qilái did her best to show no expression beneath the incessant gaze of Mama Chúra beside her in the litter. Despite her discomfort, Qilái dreaded the end of their journey. The cracked black-granite walls of the shabby Standing Stone clanhouse offered no comfort. Mama had a sharp tongue and a fierce temper, and despised disobedience and whining.

As always, Mama Chúra was the picture of composure. Dry despite the heat, smooth-complexioned, her black hair gleamed like night. Her understated gold jewelry bounced at wrist, ankle, brow and breast to the rhythm of the bearers' feet.

Qilái was covered with sweat, her hair plastered to her forehead, and her thin blouse sticking wetly to her flat, girlish chest. Although almost fifteen years old, Qilái had not yet blossomed into womanhood, and she feared that she would never be seen as an adult.

And this made her a favorite tool of Mama Chúra, and brought her again and again on this dread journey. Little girls enthralled old Havásu, the clanmaster of this mean Jakállan clanhouse.

"Lord Qón!" Qilái prayed silently, "Protect me!" But the god of her mother and fathers had not preserved them from Prince Mirusíya's troops, and seemed unlikely to save her now. Despoiled and orphaned, Qilái had been shuttled with other refugees from clanhouse to clanhouse, until she arrived in Jakálla. Here Mama Chúra, as she insisted Qilái address her, had found a use for her.

Outside the litter, the gate-guards challenged Chúra's majordomo and admitted them. Qilái's stomach knotted.

She would attend Mama Chúra through the pleasantries, kneeling bored and terrified on a tattered grass mat. Havásu would offer food and drink, servants would stoop and bend over the low tables. Qilái could eat if she dared, but would have no appetite.

Slowly her elders would move on to business. They would name high persons indirectly, and discuss their goals in oblique terms. Qilái knew none of the people who they discussed and did not understand terms of business, try as she might.

As the afternoon waned Old Havásu would grow restless. His lizard-like gaze would flick in her direction more and more. His answers would become curt, his decision-making sloppy, his hands would sometimes shake. As Havásu's bargaining strategies collapsed, Qilái fulfilled her purpose for Mama Chúra.

Then would come the moment she dreaded. Having extracted all she desired from the old clanmaster, Mama Chúra would yawn discreetly, or dab her dry forehead gently with a folded cloth. Havásu would make a show of concern and suggest that she retire for a time and rest.

He would, he assured Mama, take care of young Qilái in her absence.

The litter bumped gently to rest. Air that was only cool by comparison wafted in as the brocade was drawn back. Mama Chúra stepped gracefully forth and named expectantly to Qilái.

Qilái paled beneath her gaze. Her heart pounded in her chest. Clammy sweat trickled down her spine. She wished she had someone to talk to. She wished she could run away. She wished she could die.

She paused a moment, and a flicker of annoyance crossed Mama Chúra's face like lightning across distant clouds.

Numbly, Qilái stepped from the litter.

# Karakán

*Lord of Glorious War, Master of Heroes, High General of the Gods, Ultimate Warrior on the Final Day*



Lord Karakán serves Stability through the creation and maintenance of Order, War for the expression of Courage, War for the destruction of the Dark, and the victory of Light. He aids the valorous, those who oppose the adherents of Change, and those who battle to maintain Stability and society.

Worshippers of Lord Karakán see the world in terms of an ongoing struggle between Stability and Change, order and chaos, continuation of the cycles of life versus the onset of entropy and destruction. As the Deity of Soldiers, His doctrines stress the power of the Imperial state, expansionism through war, personal bravery, and feats of arms. Lord Karakán represents force that maintains Stability, the development of organizations that guard and protect Society and its governing forces, and the State.

Lord Karakán strives towards Lord Hnálla's Eternal Light, battling the darkness of Change to maintain the rhythms so beloved of Lady Avánthe. Human societies are tools in the hands of the Gods, and the stronger the society, the stronger the tool. Lord Karakán is the ultimate pillar of Stability; He produces greater and more permanent structures for the future.

## Theology

Some persons believe that War is anathema to Stability, and wonder how Lord Karakán can represent the attainment of Stability? Their answer is that Lord Karakán stands for the glories of War, but War for the sake of establishing a social order, War for the expression of each being's instinctive courage, and War for the destruction of the Dark and victory of Light. Where Society has succumbed, however briefly, to Change, Lord Karakán restores Stability, undoing what was done, unchanging what was Changed.

## The Outer Doctrines

Lord Karakán is a War God in no uncertain terms. His bright crimson ritual costumes, silver armor and swords, chanting, and military display are illustrative of war in the defense of nobility. War is not intended to serve destruction or greed, but instead to support Society.

His shrines are almost like fortresses, filled with soldiers and halberds and swords. His secret societies are all military in nature. Lord Karakán has no societal role aside from His dedication to War, but His Cohort Lord Chegárra aids and encourages wise rulership. Lord Karakán's academies teach swordsmanship, archery, and skill in halberd and saber, as well as providing advanced academies for siegecraft and battle tactics.

## Color

Lord Karakán's color is a victorious scarlet-red.

## Symbol

A stylized lightning bolt sometimes depicted as a sword. His faithful often employ a zigzag lightning-bolt gesture as a benefaction or greeting.

## Astrology

Scarlet Ríruichel, the red planet, represents Lord Karakán.

## Numerology

Lord Karakán's number is 3, which is male, mighty, vainglorious, brave, and adventuresome. One who would harmonize with Lord Karakán should hold the third letter of the Tsolyáni alphabet, "t," in their heart and mind and contemplate a sword, and in that way find Him.

## Costume

Priests and *Aridáni* warrior women wear red robes, or ceremonial armor of scarlet and gold, and tall golden helmets with fanciful scarlet crests. Other devotees wear scarlet garments, and bear Lord Karakán's emblem upon a breast amulet.

## Rituals

Lord Karakán's rituals are ponderous and military, and roar with trumpets and the thunder of the great *Korángkorèn*, the bronze war-drums that stand taller than a man.

Daily rituals include the "Adoration of Glory" at dawn, a noon prayer called "The Praise of Victory" before the midday meal, and an evening ritual called "The Sheathing of the Sword." Performed at home or at work, these ceremonies may consist of no more than a few muttered

words, a drop or two of water or wine spattered upon the ground, and Lord Karakán's *zigzag* lightning gesture made in the air; at the temple they are considerably longer and more complex, taking perhaps twenty minutes apiece. Every temple also has several other regular rituals, but these depend upon local tradition. Some rituals are dedicated to Aspects as well, and the temples are thus full of busy priests and chanting worshippers around the clock.

#### *Ritual Items*

*Aílur*: votive statues presented by successful commanders in memory of battles won, vows fulfilled, and heroic deeds. These are displayed in the Hall of Memory of the temple.

*Ri'ínür*. the silver sacrificial knife used by the ritual priests of Lord Karakán and His Cohort, Chegárra.

#### *The Kòlumejálím*

The final act of the "Rite of Choosing Emperors" occurs when the vanquished candidates are brought to the temple of Lord Karakán in Béy Sü to be sacrificed. These persons usually eschew the numbing potion that helps the less-courageous meet their fates, proceeding to the altar of Lord Karakán with their death-songs upon their lips.

#### *Sacrifice*

The Temple of Karakán holds regular sacrifices in order to uphold the glory of Victorious War and hence to maintain the structure of organized society. Sacrifices should be warriors (war-captives) if possible; slaves, criminals and others are considered almost "ignoble," although acceptable if nothing else is available. Victims are dispatched with a silver knife in the form of a lightning bolt (called the *Ri'ínür*). One stroke to the heart is auspicious. Fire — the province of Lord Vimúhla — is not employed, although some sacrifices are indeed fastened to lightning rods on the roofs of temples during storms, where Lord Karakán Himself may smite them! If not struck, they are later sacrificed with the *Ri'ínür*, although this is not considered a good omen. Those few who are struck but survive are considered the special ones of Lord Karakán. They are removed from their posts and their injuries are tended. They are brought within the temple, anointed with oils, dressed in red and gold finery, and sacrificed upon the altar with great grandeur and ceremony.

Bravery is the paramount virtue, and a victim who sings his or her Death-Song and walks willingly and unbound to the altar is much praised.

#### *Food Taboos*

Devotees of the war-temples of Lords Karakán, Chegárra, Vimúhla, and Chiténg eat fish only when necessity demands.

#### *Death Rituals*

The priests of Lord Belkhánu are charged with the interment of almost all followers of the Lords of Stability

(although a priest of an individual's particular sect may also join in the rituals if desired by the family).

Many worshippers of Lord Karakán have themselves cremated, though this is not a strict necessity of doctrine. If the bodies of Lord Karakán's faithful are buried, it is with their arms crossed over their breasts, like worshippers of Lord Belkhánu. Despite the Temple's preference for cremation, the High Priests, great Generals, and other high officers of legions may be embalmed and buried in a tomb in the Necropolis, secular glory winning out over religious observation.

Many of His devotees cause their biographies to be written by professional elegists, to be preserved for centuries in the libraries of the temple. These are usually formulaic in the extreme, but the rare volume is found which preserves valuable historic information.

#### *The Afterlife*

The heaven of Lord Karakán is martial and splendid, full of warriors and a sense of mighty deeds and brave causes. There, each soul is seated according to its courage and its deeds while alive. The blessed participate in endless battles against Change, wars wherein upon being defeated the warrior springs up whole to fight again, eternally, until being born again to fight in some later age. During breaks in the fighting these heroes feast and drink, recalling their victories during and after life, accompanied by Lord Karakán's "Heroes of Glory" and *Miyusál*.

His hell is a Plane of drab sameness, dull and bitter, full of petty meannesses and eternal failure and despair.

#### *Legend*

Lord Karakán is the Hero of the mythological Battle of Dórmoron Plain, wherein nine of the ten Gods defeated the tenth, Lord Ksáru, and imprisoned Him in the Blue Room.

#### *The Inner Doctrines*

##### *Soul*

Heroic Lord Karakán and fierce Lord Vimúhla seek the combination of the *Balétl* (the Body) and the *Pedhétl* (courage, ambition, even fear). The *Balétl* is the tool with which Lord Karakán's followers seek to achieve the goals of a courageous society, while the *Pedhétl* is the fuel employed by Lord Vimúhla's faithful to attain the matchless ecstasy of self-immolation in the purifying Flame.

##### *Language*

Thu'úsa is employed for academic and doctrinal writings, but the Temple of Karakán does not employ any secret languages.

#### **Temple Layout**

Lord Karakán's temples are simple in their design: within high outer walls, an outer courtyard-garden faces a colonnaded portico beyond which is a vast, cavernous hall. Mighty pillars support a domed, painted, and gilded

ceiling, and ancient banners, shields, and weapons line the walls. Behind this north-south hall a short passage leads to the inner shrine, where the image of the God stands high upon a dais and a series of pedestals.

Altars for offerings and sacrifices are ranked before the image. Murals and bas-reliefs of the God's heroic deeds upon Dórmoron Plain and other legends cover the walls.

Further rooms open off from each side of the main hall; these are used for various rituals. Smaller passages lead away from these to robing rooms, shrines for certain ceremonies, and "Halls of Memory," in which the relics of the legions, gifts presented by the Imperium and the nobles, etc., are displayed.

Some of Lord Karakán's temples, notably those at Béy Sü and Jakálla, have long, corridor-like halls filled with ranked standards, suits of armor used by great soldiers of the past, racks of weapons, and golden *Aílur*, votive statues presented by successful commanders in memory of battles won, vows fulfilled, and the like. In many temples, there is also a room devoted to memorial inscriptions and elegies of military commanders, presented and paid for by their clans and relatives. Lord Karakán values heroism, and the preservation of the memories of brave deeds is much stressed.

A separate building, always located within the outer courtyard to the west of the main temple, houses the smaller shrines of Lord Karakán's 56 Greater Aspects. These Aspects are specific manifestations of the Deity and each has a name, a place in the legends, and a specific purpose in the doctrines.

## Secular Activities

### Businesses

The Temple of Karakán is noted for the skill of its warriors, producing some of the finest in Tsolyánu. These persons may go on to become officers of the elite units or soldiers of the legions of heavy infantry.

The Temple trains its warrior-priests and legion officers in all of the "noble" weapons (daggers, short and long one-handed weapons, two-handed swords and axes, polearms, composite bows, and the crossbow.) It is considered eccentric and *declassé* for a person of high status to wish to learn arms other than these.

Upon special request the Temple has been known to train young men and women who are not of the faith. In these matters the Temple will be very particular, training only high nobles of other Stability faiths and the occasional worshipper of Lord Vimúhla. For the most part, such services are quite expensive and limited, and can be had more easily and cheaply from independent trainers found in the marketplace. These are usually retired soldiers of a variety of faiths, whose training can be quite exemplary. Buyers should check the references of such persons thoroughly before signing up, however.

## Public Works and Services

### Hirilákte Arenas

Lord Karakán is the patron of the gladiatorial arenas. The priests of Lord Karakán often administer the facilities, and stations to the God can be found within the arena. Usually the priests of Lord Karakán will start the day's activities with a brief ceremony honoring the Emperor, the State, and the Gods. Small shrines to certain appropriate Aspects will be found here and there about the Arena, for the use of the gladiators and the crowds. Other Temples may sponsor individual bouts when this is relevant, such as one of Lord Vimúhla's warriors versus some foreign war-prisoner.

The Temples do not sponsor everything that takes place in the arena, however. Duels are not sponsored, for example, and when two people desire to settle a dispute through a duel, their clans will approach the Arena administration and negotiate a time and fee for the event.

### Cities of Broad Influence

The Gods Karakán, Hnálla, and Avánthe are esteemed throughout the land, but are strongest in the central regions along the Missúma River.

### Béy Sü

It is in the sanctuary of the great temple of Lord Karakán at Béy Sü that prayers are made for Imperial victory in time of war, and here also the losers of the *Kólumejálim*, the "Rite of Choosing Emperors" are brought to be sacrificed whenever a new Emperor ascends the Petal Throne — regardless of the faiths of the contestants.

### Khírgár

The locale of the one of the primary shrines of Lord Karakán, this ancient city is built upon a hill, with the lower ward being a public area. Spiraling up to the crest one encounters old, narrow houses, built tall to conserve space. Atop the hill is an Engsvanyáli-era palace. Trade from Milumanayá, Yán Kór, and the Chákas passes through this city, and it serves as the northern bulwark of the defense of Tsolyánu.

## Politics

### Internal Factions

Within the Temples of Karakán and Chegárra are several "warrior orders." In other faiths these might be considered "secret societies," but the War Gods value *khomóyi*, noble action, and consider secrecy *bússan* for their adherents. With the exception of the Righteous Ones of the Arcing Shaft, these factions are not organized about particular arms. Instead, groups usually advocate a philosophy based on some aspect of *khomóyi*, asceticism, a noble lifestyle, participation in local society, etc.

### *The Clan of the Sword of Righteousness*

An open group, members are proposed and elected by each temple's "chapter," with preference being given to those who have done mighty deeds for the Empire. The exact rituals of initiation are not revealed, but it is certain

that they are painful and take about six days. Membership and rank within this society are openly displayed in the form of amulets, ornaments upon one's armor, and special helmet-crests. The benefits of membership are considerable: recommendations for promotion, a voice in Temple politics, co-operation with members in different clans and legions, respect, and social prominence. Unlike many other societies, the Clan of the Sword of Righteousness has no specific political direction, but supports military expansionism, and sometimes collaborates with the Incandescent Blaze Society of the Temple of Vimúhla towards this mutual goal. It does contain many conservative aristocrats of the great, old clans, and is strongly allied with the army and with Prince Eselné, one of its chief members.

*The Righteous Ones of the Arcing Shaft*

Inducts archers, crossbow-men, artilleryists, and, on occasion, slingers.

*Others*

These groups are too small to be represented in smaller temples, and their real influence over Temple affairs is negligible.

*The Brethren of Scarlet*

This is an exclusive faction, with its own private rituals and political network. While not powerful, members of this group do wield some quiet influence, and their word can resolve undecided issues of politics or career advancement.

*The Seekers of Foes*

The Seekers are a small, devoted sect that pursues their own particular theological agenda. Their behavior is often inscrutable to outsiders.

*The Soldiers of the Dawning Sun*

These are young, hotheaded worshippers, who urge political activism and military action.

*Weapon Instruction*

Members of the various societies of the War-Temples provide private instruction with masters of arms to their warrior-priests and legion officers. This training produces some of the finest warriors in Tsolyánu.

**Temple Alliances**

The Temples of Karakán and Chegára often cooperate with the Temples of Vimúhla and Chiténg to encourage the expansion of the Empire. In addition, Lord Karakán's Temple will support the healers of Lord Keténgku and Lady Avánthe when they care for wounded soldiers during wartime.

**External Parties**

In addition to its great influence in the Military Party, the Temple of Karakán has influence in the Royalist and Imperial parties, but is rather lightly represented in the Priestly Party.

**Military Legions**

The Military Party is the backbone of Lord Karakán's support in the Empire, as it is for His counterpart in Change, Lord Vimúhla. The Military Party is comprised of various groups within the clans of Sea Blue, Golden Sunburst, Golden Bough, and almost all of Blade Raised High, along with army officers from other clans. The Temples back the Military Party with income from their vast tracts of agricultural land along the Missúma River from Avanthár to Jakálla.

Among the leaders of the most prestigious legions listed, it is common for the legion's *Kérdu* (General) to assume the name of the legion itself. Thus the *Kérdu* of the Legion of Lady Mríssa adopts the name "Mríssa" regardless of her original, "civilian" name.

*The First Legion of Ever-Present Glory*

High General Kéttukal hiMraktiné, Clan of Sea Blue.

*Chúlin the Foreigner*

33 Medium Infantry, Púrdimal,

The General of the Legion of Chúlin the Foreigner, Lord Chúlin, is originally from Háida Pakála.

*The Legion of Lord Khariháya*

14th Crossbow-men, Tumíssa

*Kérdu* Ekúne hiBosúga, Red Sun Clan

*Legion of the Khirgári*

7th Medium Infantry, Khirgár

*Kérdu* Gúsha hiVordésa, Golden Sunburst Clan

*The Flotilla of Hagárr of Paránta*

1st Imperial Marines

*Kérdu* Hagárr hiChunmíyel, Red Sky Clan, Penóm

*Legion of Lord Káingmra*

8th Artillery, Béy Sü

General Káingmra hiZhnáyu, Golden Bough Clan

Legion of the Wind of Iron

10th Crossbow-men, Aukésha

*Kérdu* Kálmuru hiKharsáma, Iron Fist Clan

*Legion of Mnáshu of Thri'il*

10th Medium Infantry

General Korúnme hiChaishyáni, Golden Sunburst Clan, is originally a foreigner.

*Legion of Lady Mríssa*

19th Medium Infantry, Tu'unmrá, Aridáni

*Kérdu* Lady Mríssa hiChagotlékka, Blue Stream Clan

*Legion of Echoing Stone*

11th Heavy Infantry, Thayúri Isle

*Kérdu Ri'isma hiZayúvu, Might of Gánga Clan*  
*Legion of Sérqu, Sword of the Empire*  
 14th Heavy Infantry, Jakálla  
 General Sérqu hiChaišhyáni, Golden Sunburst Clan  
*Squadrons of Tlanéno the Steersman*  
 3rd Marines, Jakálla

*Kérdu Tlanéno hiVorodláya, Golden Sunburst Clan*  
*Golden Sunburst Legion*  
 11th Medium Infantry, Tumíssa  
 General Znayáshu hiVrazhímü, Standing Stone Clan, is Tsémel of the Temple of Karakán in Tumíssa and controls this Temple-funded legion.

### Clans

Those faithful to the Temples of Karakán and Chegárra include some of the most ancient and noble clans of the Empire.

Clan names printed in plain text are completely ecumenical, with members from every Temple. Italicized clans are not completely ecumenical, worshipping some subset of the Twenty Gods. Clans in bold text reserve their worship solely for the God and His Cohort.

#### Very High

<i>Sea Blue</i>	Golden Sunburst	<i>Golden Bough</i>	<i>Blade Raised High</i>
	<i>Sword of Righteousness</i>		

#### High

<i>White Crystal</i>	Red Sword	Red Sun	Red Mountain
Red Stone	<i>Purple Gem</i>	<i>High Pinnacle</i>	<i>Sweet Singers of Nakomé</i>
<i>Standing Stone</i>	<i>Rising Sun</i>		

#### Medium

<i>Green Bough</i>	Green Malachite	<i>Ripened Sheaf</i>	<i>Black Pinnacle</i>
<i>First Moon</i>	<i>Moon of Evening</i>	<i>Red Flower</i>	<i>Scroll of Wisdom</i>
<i>Weeping Stone</i>			

#### Low

<i>Blazoned Sail</i>	<i>Broken Reed</i>	Broken Bough	Iron Fist
Iron Hand	Plume of White	Ivory Staff	<i>High Tower</i>
<i>Flat Peak</i>	<i>Woven Whip</i>		

#### Very Low

<b><i>Woven Mat</i></b>	<b><i>Scarlet Mantle</i></b>	<b><i>Arch of Heaven</i></b>	<b><i>Bright Sword</i></b>
<b><i>Flat Rock</i></b>	<b><i>Scarlet Planet of Knives</i></b>	<b><i>Glass Spear</i></b>	<b><i>Artificers of Iron</i></b>
<b><i>Turning Wheel</i></b>	<b><i>Collar of Bronze</i></b>		

### Holidays

1 Hasanpór  
 New Year's Day

Worshippers of *Lord* Karakán join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

25 Didóm

The Litany of Noble Deeds, Khirgár, Béy Sü, and Avanthár

With great pageantry, legions are consecrated and ancient heroes are remembered with parades, incense, and chanting. Presentations and awards are made for soldiers who have executed deeds of valor or nobility within the past year. In Avanthár and Béy Sü, this ritual is particularly splendid, featuring day and evening processions of golden-armored warriors, with sunlight and torchlight glinting from exquisitely polished weaponry. The sacrifice of captured enemy warriors continues throughout the day.

### 3 Langála

#### Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

#### 1-10 Halír

#### Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

### 18 Trantór

#### The Might of Heroes

Adulthood rituals, military displays, martial religious rituals, and festivities include the consecration of young men and *Aridáni* women as new warriors in the faith. Music, drums, and massed choruses of singers accompany these inductions, which include bloodletting, deeds of courage, and abstinence. The celebrations in Béy Sü are especially impressive, but this day is observed across all of Tsolyánu. Similar rituals titled The Singing of the Splendors of Battle take place in Yán Kór on the following day.

### 9 Lésdrim

#### Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

### 10 Dohála

#### Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

### Vraháma, Intercalary Days

The Celebration of Splendid Victories in Jakálla is notable among Lord Karakán's military processions which take place throughout Tsolyánu during the Intercalary celebrations. The military procession through Jakálla's streets to the Palace of Ever-Glorious War includes such numbers of marching troops that the Missúma River is said to tremble within its banks to the rhythm of their marching feet.

### Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

#### Obeisance to the *Lord of War*, Khirgár

In Khirgár and elsewhere throughout Tsolyánu this day is observed by worshippers of Lord Karakán and His Cohort Chegárra as one of rededication of oneself to the will of the God of Noble War. The celebrations in Khirgár include military pageants and displays. In Ke'éér, capital of Yán Kór, a similar celebration called the Propitiations Before the Lords of Battle adds the sacrifice of prisoners to the roster of events.

### Aspects

Lord Karakán is shown as a youthful champion with a head rather like that of a hawk, winged, and armed with a shield and sword.

His 56 Aspects are military in character: "The Striding Force," "The Mighty Legion of Armor," "The Thunderbolt of Power."

#### 3) Mikkáshu

"The Shield of Scarlet"

The worship and functions of this Deity are almost forgotten, except near His last remaining shrines around Mekú. Over the past millennium Ajjón of the Silver Helm, a lesser Aspect once limited to Thráya, has gained prominence, and the priesthood of Thráya have recently petitioned the High Council of the Priesthood to replace Mikkáshu with Ajjón, relegating Mikkáshu to the status of an un-numbered lesser Aspect.

#### 14) Orkútai

"The City-Destroyer"

Depicted as a great three-headed bird of prey. Generals of artillery and sapper legions make offerings to Him, even if they themselves serve some other Deity.

#### 18) Nagotái the Upholder

He is depicted as a squat, dwarf-like figure upon amulets worn for luck, and upon the lower panels of the Hall of the Petal Throne in Avanthár. He guides leaders, plans strategy, and protects worshippers against the powers of the Dark.

#### 19) Jajkúru

"The Victor of Ships"

Depicted as a wooden beam banded and studded with reinforcing iron, this Aspect oversees naval matters, the exploration of the oceans, and battles at sea. Defends the faithful from storms, lightning, and thunder, of which Lord Karakán is the patron.

#### 26) Chayenggúr

"The Blade-Bearer"

Depicted as a naked youth leaning upon a huge two-handed sword, He is the patron of young men and women who are entering adulthood and who wish to engage in a military career.

## 28) Rayéshtu of the Many Swords

A six-limbed, scaled, serpentine creature favored by Shén, Pé Chói, Páchi Léi, Hláka, and other friendly nonhuman races which choose to worship within the Humanhierarchies.

## 29) Faishán

"The Pinnacle of Victory"

Represented as an armored warrior woman carrying a spear and a sheaf of lightning-bolts, she is a favorite of the Temple's large contingent of *Aridáni* warriors.

## 34) Mórša

"The Doom-Singer"

An abstract, squarish block of red sandstone, He sees to the entrance of Warriors into Lord Karakán's Glorious Paradise.

## 40) Niyónu of the Hand of Gold

Guides the families of soldiers and oversees the welfare of their children, particularly their education. He searches amongst the living and the dead for warriors missing in battle. Popular with worshippers of Lord Karakán who themselves cannot serve in battle.

## Localized Aspects (un-numbered)

These Aspects of Lord Karakán are not recognized by the central Temple hierarchy, but can have significant regional or cult followings.

**The Pillar of Iron**

Depicted as a simple cylindrical pillar of iron, this Aspect is popular with teachers and military instructors in Lord Karakán's Temple. This Aspect assists in developing rigid discipline and perfect obedience to commands.

**The Mighty Legion of Armor**

The patron of heavily armored units, His symbol, an armored fist, is emblazoned upon the breasts and shields of many such soldiers.

**The Silver Blade**

Depicted as a two-handed-swordsman.

**Ajjón the Silver Helm**

Popular in Thráya and elsewhere.

**The Striding Force**

Shrines in Haumá and Tsúru

**The Radiant Sword**

Shrine in Khirgár

**The Illuminator of Lightnings**

Rural shrines.

**The Thunderbolt of Power**

Rural shrines.

**Demons****The Heroes of Glory**

These legendary minions of Lord Karakán are amicable and kindly towards man. They stand taller even than the N'lüss, some 2.5 meters or more, and resemble slender, humanoid warriors in gleaming, magical steel armor. They fight equally well with one-handed longswords or with longbows.

**The Warriors of the Scarlet**

Appearing as vague, fluttering banners of scarlet (some claim that they appear as flame), they can be summoned into battle only by priests of Lord Karakán or His Cohort Chegárra. When they appear they utter their battle cry of "Osiggátle!" and charge directly into the enemy without pause or consultation. They vanish the instant that victory is achieved (or upon those rare occasions that they are dispelled or destroyed).

**Miyusál**

Female warrior-demons who fought for Lord Karakán upon Dórmoron Plain, they attend Him and His heroes in Paradise, fighting and drinking alongside His chosen. Like the Heroes of Glory, they stand over two meters in height, but unlike them they are not "amicable and kindly towards man," being instead stern, terse, and, in battle, merciless. They are striking in appearance, handsome rather than beautiful, muscular and well proportioned for their height. They shun armor as a weakness, but fight attired in scarlet kilts or nothing at all, employing immense two-handed swords and long, barbed knives. They occasionally claim the wounded males of the enemy as exchange for their assistance, and these are never seen again.

**Magic**

Lord Karakán and Lord Chegárra are not strong in the more recondite areas of magic. Their spells are usually meant to aid the warrior in some fashion, and many of Their devotees consider sorcery somewhat "ignoble." Both Temples do have powerful contingents of military magicians, however, since battlefield magic is a recognized part of warfare on Tékumel.

**The Glorious Call**

This psychic spell encourages warriors to greater feats of valor by reducing fear and enhancing exhilaration and confidence. Variants of this spell can increase fear and anxiety, causing warriors to flee.

**Higher Mastery**

Psychically enhances warrior skills by focusing concentration and increasing mind-body coordination. Warriors who have studied with a weapon will become superb, while even untrained warriors will be able to wield unknown weapons with competence.



### The Perfected Gem of Obliteration

Other-planar energies are focused and concentrated by this ritual to create an artificial gemstone. Tuned by the caster to a particular type of target (i.e. "servants of Change," "Ssú," or "Salarvyáni,") this gem will detonate if touched by a creature of the targeted type before dissipating at the end of the spell's duration.

### The Replication of Heroes

This ritual will produce *doppelganger(s)* of the original target(s), including variously accurate copies of the original's possessions. While the spell lasts the original and the copy will both believe themselves to be the "authentic" individual: after the spell ends the original target will retain the memories and experiences of both. Higher levels of the ritual allow for additional targets, numbers of copies, and equipment.

The song of battle carried Tlakár hiFershéna forward as the Legion of Ever-Present Glory charged Prince Mirusíya's forces outside Béy Sü. The fivescore troops led by *Kási* Tlakár ran exhilarated, relieved of the agonized waiting that preceded battle. Whether life or death awaited them, at last they were in action.

Tlakár's first foe was a lad whose undisciplined slouch identified him as a soft point in the line. His eyes remained wide with surprise as Tlakár opened him up and knocked him down. The boy's blood still flew through the air as Tlakár dispatched his next opponent with two quick strokes.

A veteran fighter, Tlakár lost himself in gore and glory. His trained reflexes commanded his fate; his distaste at facing fellow Tsolyáni in civil war was forgotten. His foes became merely threatening targets to be dispatched. Only the vision of his lover, the Lady Hekélla hiTsánune, teased its way into his awareness during the brief lulls in battle. The High Scholarly Priestess of the Goddess of Pleasure, she awaited his victorious entry into the city of Béy Sü.

Tlakár's unit fought ferociously, working their way through the first line of defenders and into the second. But around him other squads faltered, and his own was surrounded by opposing forces. With the unemotional detachment of the experienced tactician, he realized that his unit was doomed. Fully engaged in battle, little energy was left for despair.

Only long familiarity with the nuances of Tsolyáni swordplay could have indicated to Tlakár the incipient opening in the line. Experienced battle-intuition hinted that one of his foes was about to shift left, and that the other would lean right. Heart hardened to his doom, Tlakár leapt twisting and slashing through the gap! Across a narrow verge of trampled cropland waited the enemy command camp!

### The Swift Thrust of Death

This ritual produces a glittering bolt of other-planar energy, screaming forth to blast a hole through the target. Higher levels of this spell produce more deadly missiles, in greater number.

### Tremulation

The very air is vibrated within the area of effect of this ritual so that objects are shattered and bones break.

### The Weapon of the Prince of Valor

Enchants steel weapons so that they may cut through spells of Warding protecting one's foes.

### The Winged Disc of the Lord of the Sun

This ritual creates a flying oval platform which hovers above the ground and moves under the mental direction of the caster. This platform works only over fairly level ground, and will not cross chasms, rocky terrain, or water, but comes gently to a stop.

He charged into the sinister whisper of steel swords being drawn, the weapons of generals and nobility. Against such, his hardened *Chlén*-hide sword would be useless, but Tlakár threw himself into the command officers like a madman. By chance the closest officer was the legion's Herald. His steel blade was wasted on an unskilled master: he died without striking a blow. Tlakár ducked, retrieved the steel blade, and rolled beneath a tent flap to evade his foes. He rose, and a huge bull of a man loomed up before him: Prince Mirusíya's legendary general Karín Missúm, whose name meant "Red Death."

Missúm's overhand chop sliced a hole in the tent's awning, slowing his blade just enough for Tlakár to parry. The powerful blow drove his looted blade down against his shoulder, but Tlakár instantly sprang forward and hammered his sword hilt into Missúm's helmet. The general dropped stunned to the ground. Tlakár leapt forward, his sword raised.

In the shaft of sunlight streaming through the ripped awning stood a man almost as broad-shouldered and powerful as Missúm, a striking figure in shining armor of precious steel and gold, chased with blue.

This could be none other than Prince Mirusíya Tlakotáni himself, High Prince of the Empire. Their eyes locked, and for one eternal moment Tlakár had a vision.

Prince Mirusíya was draped in gold, standing before a golden door from which purple-robed servitors emerged to prostrate themselves. The Prince entered the Golden Tower, followed by the servitors, and the door shut seamlessly.

The vision ended. Dropping his sword, Tlakár threw himself face-first upon the ground.

Around him appeared the boots of the Prince's guards.

"Hold!" he heard Prince Mírusíya call out, as Tlakár awaited the fatal blow.

"Soldier, speak!" commanded the Prince, "Having won through my army, you do not strike?"

"Mighty Prince," replied Tlakár, stumbling on the high pronoun of Imperial address, which he had never believed he would need, "It is *bússan* for one such as me to presume to strike thee. I am not worthy to touch thee."

After a pause the Prince said gravely, "Such nobility. When Tsolyáni battle Tsolyáni, diamonds cut diamonds: their luster is *khomóyi*." Then to the others, "Take him, lift him up. Let me look upon him."

Arms seized and lifted Tlakár to face the stem visage of Prince Mírusíya Tlakotáni.

"I pledge that you will die the noble death of a warrior," intoned the Prince, "and I will tell you also this: look upon me. You look upon the face of a God. It has been made clear to me who shall be Tsolyánu's Emperor. I shall recount your noble action to the Gods. What is your name, soldier?"

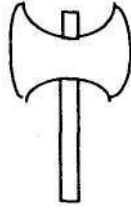
Pride and despair warred in his heart as Tlakár replied, "*Kási* Tlakár hiFershéna, Legion of Ever-Present Glory, of the Clan of the Red Sword."

"Tlakár hiFershéna, you honor your clan, lineage and legion. Go, now, to your destiny."

So saying, the Prince turned away, and Tlakár was led off to the prisoner's corral.

# Chegárra

*The Hero-King, Swordsman of Glory, the Victorious Lord*



Lord Chegárra is "Courage Applied," the experienced warrior of many battles, the resourceful ruler, and the sagacious statesman, the patron of armies. He aids warriors in battle, generals who marshal the forces of Stability, those who face the Dark courageously, and those who rule justly and well.

Lord Chegárra is war for the defense of society, statecraft, and rulership. His is the role of War for the Establishment of Social Order in which war and battle are good, noble, and proper. He is the king who rules from on high, establishing society and nobility. Lord Chegárra advocates heroism, the rule of wisdom, and valor in battle.

Lord Chegárra emphasizes the principles of rulership, political acumen and governance in order to support the State. The assaults of Darkness can best be turned back, and Lord Hnálla's Eternal Light brought about, through just governance of the tools of statecraft and war.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

#### *Color*

White and red

#### *Costume*

Priests of Lord Chegárra wear red and white-checked robes over silver armor, and helmets of bronze or gold. He accepts as priestesses only *Aridáni* warriors, and these dress much like the priests, although there are differences in detail.

#### *Rituals*

His rituals take place during the day, with a very few evening rituals on special occasions honoring particular ancient rulers and nighttime battles.

#### *Sacrifice*

Both Lord Karakán and His Cohort, Lord Chegárra, accept human sacrifices on specific, limited occasions. Lord Chegárra observes the ritual doctrines of Lord Karakán in this regard.

### *Food Taboos*

Devotees of the War-Temples of Lords Karakán, Chegárra, Vimúhla, and Chiténg eat fish only when necessity demands.

### *Legend*

During the Battle of Dórmoron Plain, Danúo, His legendary Shield-Bearer, served Lord Chegárra. Danúo was said to be an ordinary human, neither Aspect nor Demon servitor, yet he stood with Lord Chegárra even during the Siege of Black, when all other mortals fled in terror. It is said that Danúo dwells in Lord Chegárra's Final Paradise and at times will lend to His Lord's faithful his golden armor, his shield Chonkótuel, and sword Arosuél.

### The Inner Doctrines

The Temple of Chegárra does not enjoy secrecy, considering it ignoble in all but the most necessary circumstances. Thus there is no mystery about the Inner Doctrines of this Temple: they concern the theological connections between the doctrines as set forth by the Priest Pavár and the laws employed by the State. The scholarly priests of this Temple are renowned for their knowledge of Pavár's writings and their ability to interpret these writings as regard issues of Imperial law.

## Secular Activities

### Businesses

Clans faithful to Lord Chegárra include many of the professional (rather than clerical or slave) scribes, whose skill at illuminating manuscripts makes them valuable in producing Imperial documents and pronouncements. Clans that make parchments of all types, inks and dyes (including dyes made of crushed gems used for some of the most important documents), are all part of Lord Chegárra's faithful, as well as the agricultural clans necessary to every Temple.

### Public Works and Services

#### *Statesmanship*

The Temple operates academies of statecraft that have libraries of history, tomes of rulership, and vast collections analyzing historical decisions. The emphasis

within these libraries is on governance, and not the particulars of military strategy and command. The Inner Doctrines of governance are taught only to the highest clergy of Lords Chegárra and Karakán. Not even those of Lord Hnálla learn the Inner details of rulership, because Lord Chegárra emphasizes the Military State rather than the Imperial State. Thus His Inner teachings are unnecessary for a simple governor, or city headman.

#### *Weapon Instruction*

The War-Temples provide private instruction with masters of arms to their warrior-priests and legion officers. Only the "noble" weapons (daggers, short and long one-handed weapons, two-handed swords and axes, polearms, composite bows, and the crossbow) are taught. It is considered eccentric and *declassé* for a person of high status to wish to learn arms other than these.

### **Politics**

#### **Internal Parties**

Internal factionalization is frowned upon within the Temple of Chegárra. Factions do emerge as disputes are discussed and settled within the Temple, but these do not organize into permanent secret societies as in other Temples.

#### **Temple Alliances**

The Temple of Chegárra eschews formal alliances with other Temples, choosing to maintain "good relations with all parties." In practice, this Temple has an easier time maintaining these good relations with the other War-Temples and Stability Temples.

#### **External Parties**

Lord Chegárra has tremendous support in the Military Party. General Kéttukal and other high generals adhere to His doctrines of absolute, unflinching bravery. The Imperial and Royalist Parties respect the Temple of Chegárra's devotion to leadership and statescraft.

#### **Military Legions**

##### *Omnipotent Azure Legion*

Many of the military personnel of the Omnipotent Azure Legion are the faithful of Lords Chegárra and Karakán. This remains true despite the circumstances surrounding Emperor Dhich'uné's assumption of the Petal Throne, and the subsequent installment of His supporters into positions of leadership throughout the Imperial administration. Leadership, Stability, and the preservation of the State are more important to Lord Chegárra's doctrines than the particular route that the Emperor may have followed to power: thus His faithful truly serve the Petal Throne and the Seal of the Imperium.

##### *The Legion of the Wind of Iron*

10th Imperial Crossbow-men, Thri'íl

This new Legion was raised by funds from the Temple of Chegárra and is led by *Kérdu* Kálmuru hiKharsáma of

Aukésha. The troops are drawn from all around the Empire but are composed of members of the Iron Fist and Iron Hand clans, and originally based in the northern mountains around Aukésha.

##### *The Cohorts of Lord Chegárra*

12th Medium Infantry, Thráya

General Burusháya hiKáikune, Patriarch of the Red Sword Clan

##### *Legion of Giriktéshmu*

23rd Archers, Jakálla

General Giriktéshmu hiKoyúga of Jakálla, Red Sun Clan

##### *Legion of the Clan of the Inverted Hand*

27th Light Infantry, Kurt Hills

General Ka'á hiSrügáshchene, Clan of the Standing Pinnacle

##### *Legion of Mirkitáni, Hero of Victories*

7th Heavy Infantry

Led by General Mirkitáni vuMakkocháqu, Joyous of Vrá. His sister is Siónu vuMakkocháqu, the wife of Lord Kéttukal hiMraktiné.

##### *Battalions of Srüma of Vrá*

39th Medium Infantry, Vrá

General Srüma hiHoqqulén, High Pinnacle Clan

#### **Clans**

*Very High*

Golden Sunburst

Blade Raised High

*High*

Red Sword

Red Mountain

Red Sun

Red Stone

*Medium*

Red Flower

*Low*

Iron Fist

Iron Hand

*Very Low*

Scarlet Mantle

Scarlet Planet of Knives

Artificers of Iron

## Holidays

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Chegárra join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

25 Didóm

The Litany of Noble Deeds, Khirgár, Béy Sü, and Avanthár

With great pageantry, legions are consecrated and ancient heroes are remembered with parades, incense and chanting. Presentations and awards are made for soldiers who have executed deeds of valor or nobility within the past year. In Avanthár and Béy Sü, this ritual is particularly splendid, featuring day and evening processions of golden-armored warriors, with sunlight and torchlight glinting from exquisitely polished weaponry. The sacrifice of captured enemy warriors continues throughout the day.

3Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

10 Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

Turugdáshe, Intercalary Days

The Commemoration of Ruling in Splendor, Hekéllu

Great military leaders, governors, and of course the Emperors of Tsolyánu are honored in these particularly notable rituals, including a procession of the proud *Káing*-banners of the mightiest legions.

## Aspects

Lord Chegárra is shown as a bearded soldier of early middle years, fully armored, and often seen striding forth over the bodies of slain demons. He has 33 Aspects.

## Hmára

She is portrayed as a queenly, powerful woman with crown and *Káing* symbols. She oversees the legal functions of the State, and stands for Imperial Justice and the Imperial Legal system. Her emblem embosses the lintels above the doors of the halls of private and Imperial jurists.

## Qorushái

He deals with military law and legal matters involving the legions. Generals pray to Him before Imperial Military trials, or when dividing loot after a battle. He governs the *Qadárni*, the individual combats-of-honor which are conducted prior to great battles. Portrayed as a warrior, usually with a long, narrow, diamond-shaped shield in one hand, and a sword in the other.

## Mi'irésh

Governs internal affairs, the operation of roads and traffic, and commerce between Imperial citizens. He oversees the enforcement of the basic laws of commerce, including market laws. His image of a stern-faced warrior bearing a rod and a red gemstone (signifying rule and trade) is embossed above the offices of the guard in most Tsolyáni marketplaces.

## Hórgoma

This Aspect deals with bravery in the face of destruction, and heroism as sacrifice for the Imperium. The Imperial award "Chegárra Hórgoma" is granted on behalf of the Imperium to civilians who display exceptional valor and service to the Emperor.

## Ajnélqa the Besieger

Ajnélqa oversees artillery and the machines of war, the trebuchet, ballistai, etc. Portrayed as a man with golden-red skin and bright red-gold armor, whose helmet covers His face. In His hands He bears the tool which artillerists use to set their engines.

## Ngísurra

This mythological Aspect marshaled the Legions of Karakán and Stability on Dórmoron Plain. He said to have been a real, human warrior "wearing the Aspect" of Lord Chegárra, and is depicted attired in Bednálljan armor.

## Magic

Lords Karakán and Chegárra are not interested in the more recondite areas of magic. Their spells are usually meant to aid the warrior in some fashion, and many of Their devotees consider sorcery somewhat "ignoble." Both Temples do have powerful contingents of military magicians, since battlefield magic is a recognized part of warfare on *Tékumel*.

## The Gauntlet of Might

These rituals summon forth a metallic gauntlet that aids in battle. This gauntlet can either be worn upon the fist

of a warrior, or may fly forth independently to strike a target.

### The Harness of the God-King

These rituals summon forth the gold-chased armor of Danúo, Lord Chegárra's legendary Shield-Bearer at the Battle of Dórmoron Plain, as well as his shield, Chonkótuel and sword, Arosuél. All are imbued with other-planar power, and Arosuél is itself a living entity with powers and skills of its own. Only a skilled and noble warrior may seek to employ these powerful items.

### The Valor of the Divine Kingdom

The target of this spell is psychically invested with a magical valor and charisma, becoming a fearless warrior whom all will obey in deeds of bravery.

J'grék-Chá shivered as he waited for the human he had met in the Temple of Chegárra. In Shényu, the sun could slay humans foolish enough to go out at noon. Here it failed to warm the lawn atop cliffside fortress of Avanthár. J'grék swished his tail impatiently as he saw the frail human approach.

"Greetings J'grék," it wheedled obsequiously. "You bring news?"

J'grék had joined the diplomatic voyage to Tsolyánu in hopes of returning with elevated status. But he had lost a number of status-fights during the intervening months, and now dwelled dangerously near the bottom of the Shén hierarchy. Reluctantly J'grék had turned to the humans for an advantage, joining the Temple of Chegárra, their god of courage. There he had met this creature with the unpronounceable name. He? She? Human gender puzzled J'grék but the creature was clever and had suggested a means for J'grék to advance in Shén hierarchy. It was not particularly courageous, and J'grék had to reveal the Shén diplomatic plans, but it would have to do.

J'grék bobbed his head in the human gesture of affirmation, and removed the scroll from the leather pouch slung across his torso. He handed it to the human, who inspected the top briefly.

"This will work to our advantage, yes, thank you."

"My price," growled J'grék. He was irritable from the cold and from the necessity that drove him to betray his brethren in the egg-group.

"K'chár-Khá will be dead by morning, fear not," whispered the human in its feather voice, "and it will look entirely natural."

J'grék nodded with satisfaction, "The means?"

"You know I cannot say," it replied. "But you will be satisfied."

It turned back towards one of the entrances leading down into Avanthár. J'grék strode towards another and was almost there when a sound made him turn. The human was speaking loudly to someone hidden in its entranceway. It gestured wildly, just as two crossbow

bolts emerged from the entrance like bats from a cave. They caromed off the human's warding spell.

The human named to flee when a dark figure leapt forth and ran him down. As the human tried to rise a knobbed tail lashed out viciously. The human's torso exploded, one arm flying completely off. Its remains slumped to the ground.

Covered in blood, K'chár-Khá stared at J'grék-Cha across the expanse of lawn that separated them and roared a primal challenge. Human soldiers arrived, but did not dare interfere as the Shén charged each other across the sward.

"The human skulking-killer, I kill it to protect myself, yes? And the one I shall not name, ptá!" K'chár-Khá spat in Shén fashion, a vile spray of saliva, "It was not Shén, did not deserve to live."

The humans looked at the blood-covered saurian towering over them in the torchlight. The two creatures had battled fiercely and the survivor was not uninjured, although he seemed to ignore the gaping claw-marks and the shattered scales. The human officer of the watch was faced with the choice of attempting to detain the Shén ambassador or accepting his story.

The result was a foregone conclusion, and K'chár-Khá grinned at the flimsy resolve of these flimsy creatures.

# Hrü'ü

*The Supreme Principle of Change, Master of Negation and Non-Being, Opponent of Permanence, Dispenser of Calamities, the Lord of Confusion.*



Always does Lord Hrü'ü pluck that string within each creature's heart that thrums to the call of Change and is impatient with the silence of tranquillity. Lord Hrü'ü benefits society by destroying the old so that the new can be built. He brings destruction, rebirth, and destruction, preventing the stagnation of stasis. But His are not the cycles of Lady Avánthe, for even regular cycles fall to His efforts. He glories in Change without cessation, never-ending, random and unpatterned, always roiling and shifting. Lord Hrü'ü aids those who fight for Change, those who attempt to undo the social order, those who bring about their own glory with no thought of others, and those who are of a secretive and grasping nature.

Lord Hrü'ü's worldview is not as straightforward and tangible as those of other Gods. Where Lord Sárku is the God of tombs, Lady Avánthe is the Goddess of cycles, and Lord Belkhánu is concerned with the transition of the soul, Lord Hrü'ü's position is apparently one of Chaos: the Master of Confusion, the Lord of Change. He is present not only in the overt collapse of stable structures, but also in the uneasy feeling that things aren't right. He delights when things malfunction without apparent reason. He revels in the continuous breaking down of what seems to be.

Lord Hrü'ü seeks the Dark, an end to Choate form, a negation of this world of phenomena, and a return to the Nullity that existed when Time was not. Once this Nullity is achieved, He will then bring forth a new and chaotic beginning, and this in turn must be brought down, destroyed, and replaced with another Being, and so again and again for all time to come.

## Theology

Lord Hrü'ü is considered to be a great God, foremost of the Change pantheon, as Lord Hnálla is great among the Stability Gods. Neither Lords Hrü'ü or Hnálla are the "leaders" of their respective pantheons, however; such limited hierarchical concepts are not applied to the Gods by the theologians of Tsolyánu. Rather, Lord Hrü'ü and Lord Hnálla are the most "pure" in their powers and ways of being. The Gods epitomize themselves, and these Lords epitomize Godhead.

Concepts such as "friendship" or even "hierarchy" do not apply: only mutual interests and goals serve to ally the Gods. Only power itself, the real and immanent power of the God to exercise His Will without hindrance, determines which of the Gods is greatest. One God follows the Will of another only because it suits Him to

do so, or because He does not desire to object. No human concepts of "duty," "respect for position," or other such ideas apply.

## The Outer Doctrines

Despite the doctrinal contradiction it suggests, history indicates that Lord Hrü'ü apparently wants the Empire to survive. Time and again His Temple has allied with others to maintain the Empire, when His inaction or opposition could have toppled it. But if Lord Hrü'ü epitomizes Change, why does He maintain the Empire?

The answer is that the Empire must serve some unknown purpose. Possibly the Empire will serve greater Change later on; possibly Lord Hrü'ü's scope is too broad for human understanding, and He works towards gigantic, unknowable, interplanar goals. Possibly humans are being gifted enough time to understand His doctrines and properly worship Him before Change consumes them. True understanding of these theological questions are reserved for those who struggle and sacrifice to gain them, and who serve the God's purposes.

Although most people are not motivated by abstract goals, some scholars serve Lord Hrü'ü in the hopes of just such rewards. Those who obey Lord Hrü'ü and the commands of His Temple may learn secrets. In contrast with these Mysteries, even Lord Ksáru's secrets are mere trinkets of knowledge concerning the workings of this device or that spell. To Lord Hrü'ü's faithful comes understanding of the relationships of Change, coincidence, reality and unreality.

And material profits do flow from this knowledge. Those who serve the Temple properly may come to possess gems, gold, armor, and other items of wealth. Lord Hrü'ü cares not for such things except as the means to an end. If such trinkets will secure the obedience of His worshippers, then the gifts of wealth flow easily.

## Color

Lord Hrü'ü's color is a deep purple, verging on black.

## Symbol

A circle of purple with a scarlet slash running down across it from left to right.

## Astrology

The dark planet Zirúna governs Lord Hrü'ü's rituals, but He also has influence over the dark faces of the planets, along with Lord Ksáru.

### *Numerology*

Lord Hrű'ü is represented by the number 7, which is dark, malignant, cold and turgid, but ever moving. To Harmonize with this Lord is difficult and dangerous, but may be accomplished by gazing upon a purple amethyst within a dark room, while keeping the letter "Ts" in mind.

### *Costume*

When not on Temple business, priests wear a collar of purple and a kilt, either of which may be adorned with Emblem of Hrű'ü, the purple circle with the red slash. Laypersons simply wear something purple in order to show their religious affiliation.

Priests and priestesses working in the temple don a full-length priestly robe. When dressed for rituals, Lord Hrű'ü's celebrants conceal themselves beneath purple robes. They wear masks of velvet and *Chlén*-hide shaped into the bestial likenesses of His Aspects and His demon servitors.

There are innumerable different ritual costumes, and they are chosen for a given ritual by lot or by chance. One kind of common Great Ritual costume has skulls and tassels. Other costumes can consist of different kinds of demon-masks, some of them very tall, with *Khéshchal*-plumes and regalia in the back. Other costumes have scales and strange, abstract faceplates. The costumes do not correlate to the station or rank of the priests as they do in other Temples. Lord Hrű'ü's masks are all different and are owned by the Temple rather than the individual.

Lay priests usually wear headgear, or a cirlet, or a more elaborate collar to distinguish them from both the Temple priesthood and the laity. Otherwise they dress in ordinary Tsolyáni garb, usually sandals and a kilt.

### *Sacrifices*

The Temple of Hrű'ü celebrates Change: fierce transition, selfish power, and personal hedonism are central to many doctrines. However, this Temple has only one yearly ritual involving blood sacrifice. Ordinarily, worshippers present ritual items constructed for sacrifice in colors of gold and purple and purchased from clans dedicated to their manufacture.

### *Rituals*

All of Lord Hrű'ü's rituals take place at night. When the moons are both down, then comes the thrumming boom of the deep *Tunkül*-gongs. Magical grey "corpse lights" are lit in the windows of the temple, which frighten many Tsolyáni.

As the public shuffles into the temple for the Outer Rituals, incense is burned, and chanting and a thin, dolorous music can be heard. Often ritual items are sacrificed during these ceremonies, items constructed for this purpose in colors of gold and purple. They are placed on the altar, the priest chants and passes his hands over them, and then they are accepted into the temple, never to be seen again.

During these nighttime ceremonies, certain groups of priests stand in various places to "guard entrances into

the plane," and to "preclude the goddess." Presumably this refers to the rapacious Goddess of the Pale Bone, but none know for certain. These priests are always in odd-numbered groups, usually three, five, or nine, and they stand in particular but ordinary places throughout the temple. These priests have no more knowledge of why they are in their places than that they were instructed to be there.

In fact, most of the priests conducting particular rituals in the temple will not be aware of the meaning, history, or theology behind the ceremonies. One is told to participate in a ritual, but not told the ritual's meaning or the meaning of the role. The innermost members of the Inner Circles may have discovered the historical reasons for the establishment of various rituals, but this information is unimportant. After a temple adopts such traditional rituals they are difficult to stop, even assuming the temple wished to do so. It is often the case that once a ritual is established it persists, simply a part of the culture and character of a particular temple.

### *Death Rituals*

The Temples of Change believe that an individual's belongings must be provided in the grave. Clothing, jewelry, weapons, furniture, money, and books are all laid beside the corpse in the inner tomb chambers. This belief expresses itself most grandly in the tombs of the wealthy, but even the poor may have a copper or silver bracelet, a bit of pottery, etc. placed beside them in their humble graves.

### *The Ten Rites of Training*

Priests who would advance from circle to circle within the Temple of Hrű'ü must complete the Ten Rites of Training. Some of these rites are mundane, such as the writing of scholarly reports and the achievement of other educational goals; others are more arcane, such as the Meditation Upon the God. There are always ten rites, but they can vary from temple to temple around the Empire.

The tests are conducted in one after another of the secret rooms in the labyrinth below Lord Hrű'ü's temple. Some of the rooms have names, such as the Hall of Visions, the House of Inner Destruction, and the Place of Flatness. Sometimes the names correspond to the rituals conducted within, and sometimes not. Candidates are placed alone in these chambers, garbed in only a simple robe, and given a test.

Often the test is a task or a riddle that lacks an obvious solution, and the acolyte often does not know whether they have passed or failed except by whether or not their career progresses thereafter. Those persons who succeed progress according to some inscrutable criterion of the temple hierarchy. Others who fail are sent back to the academy to try again.

Those who repeatedly fail the Rites are not always expelled from the priesthood: they may simply be left at their current level of advancement, or they may eventually get another chance. This depends both on how the Inner Circle of the Temple perceives the candidate and his or her performance, and on certain random factors as well.



*Afterlife*

In the paradise of Lord Hrű'ü, the worshipper is made part of the ceaseless, random Chaos of this Lord, delighting in the alterations and combinations of his perpetual beings and becomings forever.

Lord Hrű'ü's special hell is an everlasting terrible stasis, a consciousness of existence, yet a sameness and an ennui which cannot be described.

*History*

The first records of the worship of Lord Hrű'ü are found in the now-ruined cities of Hmakuyál and Ngála.

*Legend*

The magic Chariot of the Gods is Lord Hrű'ü's vehicle which can enter many Planes of Reality at the same time. According to legend, Lord Hrű'ü provided this chariot in which Lord Ksárul rode during the conflicts leading up to Dórmoron Plain. With it, Lord Ksárul believed it impossible that He could be caught. When Lord Hrű'ü left Lord Ksárul, He took the chariot with Him. Its loss forced Lord Ksárul to stop and make a stand in the place called Dórmoron Plain, hence the battle.

While Lord Ksárul possessed the chariot, the war had been a power struggle of the Many Planes, with Lord Ksárul attempting to establish control of this Plane and then that one. Had the chariot not been withdrawn, His followers say, Lord Ksárul could have reached various planes and allies that would have turned the tide permanently in His favor.

Lord Hrű'ü's power is thus very great: He was able to provide this chariot, and He was able to take it away again. The Temple of Ksárul has never forgiven Lord Hrű'ü for this perceived betrayal. However, Lord Ksárul's people do not maintain this as a long-standing feud since the two Temples otherwise have many more immediate areas of agreement. And of course Lord Ksárul's priests believe that eventually He will displace all the other Gods and then have His revenge.

A consistent theme to such legends as *The Lament to the Wheel of Black* is that one God or another owns the various magical devices and weapons that play roles in the battle. For instance, some of the recensions say that Lord Ksárul owned the Wheel of Black itself, while others say Lord Hrű'ü, and still others say differently. The Inner Temples of Hrű'ü and Ksárul say nothing publicly, of course.

The details of the mythology of Dórmoron Plain differ from Temple to Temple. It is important to keep in mind that mythology is not theological doctrine; it can vary wildly or be altered in the retelling to suit both the teller and the audience. Therefore, each Temple claims a pivotal role in the battle of Dórmoron Plain.

*The Inner Doctrines*

Lord Hrű'ü destroys, but He builds at the same time, and then He destroys and builds again. Like Lady Avánthe, Lord Hrű'ü is a Lord of Cycles. However, Hers are stable

cycles, such as the crops, the coming of day and night, and the orbits of the planets and the moons.

Lord Hrű'ü deals in things that happen by chance or by apparent coincidence. His motives and actions are discernible only on a very broad scale. One discerns His handiwork only when one steps back and says, "Ah, here is the hidden connection between events, and here is how things truly operate."

Lord Hrű'ü's apparently random influences are unpatterned only on the surface. He is not obvious in what He does. He attends to intangibles and abstract concepts, and is considered the most powerful of the Change Lords by the priests and Temples, the Master of Change. He has much power forward and backward across the planes, and the other Temples fear His power, and thus He rules.

Lord Vimúhla deals in violent Change, the destruction of cities, burnings and war. Lord Sárku deals with the survival of the intellect that He feels should see and experience Change, even the Change of one's own decay and decomposition.

Lord Hrű'ü, in contrast, does not require an audience for His Change. He acts through farfetched coincidences and arcane and very odd events. Thus, His Temple emphasizes the Doctrine of Absolute Obedience to His commands and the commands of His priests, for it is not necessary that His worshippers understand the God's will, only that they fulfill it.

*The Coming Forth of Universal Diversification*

This doctrine is the basic tenet of the Temple, the idea that in the Final Judgment, all will fragment and diversify until no two things are bound. Chaos will then rule, at the end of time. This is Lord Hrű'ü's goal towards which all His faithful strive.

*The Soul*

The Temples of Hrű'ü and Hnálla share an interest in the *Chusétl* (the Shadow-Self) and the *Balétl* (the Spirit-Soul), and their eventual dispositions in the Ultimate Darkness of Hrű'ü (or the Perfect Light of Hnálla). The journey itself does not matter, and thus little of the theology of these Temples focuses upon particular behaviors on this Plane, excepting the overall desire for *lán* (noble) behavior as a means to the eventual end.

*Patterns*

The patterns of Lord Hrű'ü are a patterned appearance on the surface of a random and chaotic reality. Yet, beneath both the illusory pattern and its underlying chaos are Lord Hrű'ü's inscrutable and unknowable goals, leading all to the Coming Forth of Universal Diversification.

*Heresy*

Heresy in the Change Pantheon is not considered an immediate cause for ecclesiastical intervention: the Tsolyáni enjoy entertaining controversial notions under certain circumstances, though they are quite skeptical of them. This tolerance is due in part to the Immanence of the Gods: anything grossly heretical can safely be

dismissed as nonsense if it does not fit with what is observably true. If a "heretical" concept became popular enough and did not directly contradict doctrine, it might be adopted by the priesthood. Persistent and baseless heresy is, of course, dealt with through the ecclesiastical courts in much the same manner as in other Temples.

One example of how new concepts gain acceptance is the shrine of the Aspect Kánkubel the Muck-Eater in Khirgár. Worship of this Aspect grew up five or six hundred years ago, following several unusual occurrences in the vicinity. The local temple quickly divided into those who interpreted the events as a Manifestation of a heretofore-unknown Aspect, and those who denied the events any theological relevance. The believers eventually won a limited victory, with the temple of Lord Hrű'ü in Khirgár permitting a shrine to this new Aspect to be established, but worship of Kánkubel has not spread much beyond Khirgár. The shrine to Kánkubel in the underworld below the temple of Lord Hrű'ü in Khirgár is quite magnificent, yet the temple of Lord Hrű'ü in Jakállá has no such shrine, and the priests there are unlikely to have ever heard of Kánkubel.

So the Temple of Hrű'ü (and in fact every Temple) is different from place to place and changes over time. Theologians and laity may examine a particular event, manifestation, or religious experience and their conclusions may become doctrine. An idea is set forth, and for reasons ranging from theological necessity to political expedience it may gain acceptance. From there it may spread to become universal doctrine, or remain, like Kánkubel, a regional curiosity.

### Temple Layout

Each temple of Lord Hrű'ü presents two or three stories set back from each other in a stepped-pyramid arrangement. On the ground level at the back of the temple are the dormitories, refectories, slave quarters, business areas, storage, and administrative areas.

The exterior of a temple of Lord Hrű'ü is rather plain by Tsolyáni standards, symbolic of the secretive nature of this god. Aside from a few lines of glyphs up under the corbels of the arches, the front and inside of the temple are monumental and blank-walled.

Inside, Lord Hrű'ü's temples appear quite ordinary. Where the layperson visits the temple, it is laid out in a regular, sensible manner. The uppermost interior is arranged in a very straightforward, symmetrical fashion. The platform of the temple pyramid is usually fifteen or twenty feet high, with a central stairway leading up from an outer courtyard. Colonnaded halls extend away to either side while the temple continues on directly ahead into smaller chambers set side by side. The great Outer Aspects will have Their shrines in these chambers, while the darker, Inner Aspects will have Their shrines beneath the temple.

Beneath these upper levels, in the labyrinth where most of His inner shrines are located, one finds the most dangerous, misleading, and unnavigable catacombs of the Second Empire.

This design adheres to Lord Hrű'ü's doctrine of a reality which appears placid and smooth on its surface, but roils with Change just beneath: chaos hidden by a facade of complacent order. So a temple of Lord Hrű'ü appears symmetrical on the surface; a room over here, a room over there, often displaying similar decorations from temple to temple. But a few levels beneath the surface appear all varieties of unplanned-looking designs: stairways that go nowhere; daises that rise and fall; rooms that appear and disappear due to revolving walls; and sheer, precipitous pits which open off of stairways, halls, and around sudden corners.

Quite visible amidst the central nave in the temple of Lord Hrű'ü is a stairway leading down. For several levels, this passage opens upon large halls and underground residence areas where many of the priests live while on duty. Eventually, the way splits into staircases that go down into the underworld at many angles. One can become quite lost, traveling up, down, and around, coming to places where there is no staircase, or no passage, just a dead end. Other passages proceed more directly, but end in a drop of a hundred feet. And there are rooms with traps: doors that seal, ceilings that fall, and hallways whose walls bear beautiful, mirrored bas-reliefs that close snugly together after the pressure-plate in the floor triggers the hidden mechanisms. Priests are only taught routes appropriate to their station and must guide the rare visitor. Only the highest priests know the full complexity of these labyrinths.

There's always a "public way" that the laity travels for the great ceremonies in the Y-shaped shrines. This passage is wide and high, with priests standing guard at the intersections to make sure no one becomes lost in the labyrinth.

The public ceremonies are very frightening and impressive, with abundant use of magic and illusions, light, smoke, odors, and visions. The worshippers are suitably impressed before they are brought back out again.

The guarded side-passageways lead to shrines of the secret and less-known Aspects, and laypersons consider it a great honor to be brought to these places. A high noble who donated fifty thousand *Káitars* for a gold image of a favorite Aspect would be taken within and shown the shrine, and this event would be a source of legitimate pride. The noble could thereafter be expected to wear the image of the Aspect on a tunic or kilt, or to sport a helmet with the Aspect's glyph on it. To know the secret of the Aspect's shrine, to have been there and seen it, to have traveled the labyrinth and returned, these are marks of honor among the worshippers of Lord Hrű'ü.

### Shrines

The Inner Shrine of a temple of Lord Hrű'ü is always Y-shaped in accordance with Temple doctrine. At the end of each branch of the Y are identical shrines, and ceremonies are conducted apparently at random in one or the other of the two shrines, another indication of Lord Hrű'ü's penchant for unpredictability in life.

## Secular Activities

The Temple of Hrű'ü is wealthy, but spends its funds carefully. Its devoted followers have always been strong politically. All during the long reign of Lord Hirkáne, a worshipper of Lord Hnálla, Lord Hrű'ü has always been respected because He is Lord Hnálla's counterpart, and first among the Lords of Change.

Agricultural and business relationships fund the Temple. It has a great power-base in the northwesterly cities and along the eastern bank of the Missúma River, and clans faithful to the Temple traditionally are forced to tithe. These clans also vie with each other to pay for a new temple or a new image of the God. Clans succeeding in securing these contracts will then gain relationships: Lord Hrű'ü and His priests know the intricate relationships that go deep into society, and sometimes they can "pull strings" that nobody else can pull.

For example, the Black Hood clan recently endeavored to establish a new business in Khirgár. They had few local contacts, and the local governor and businesses were hostile. The Black Hood clan contacted the Temple of Hrű'ü, which in turn had certain contacts in the Palace of the Realm in Khirgár. Suddenly doors opened, property was available, and licenses of trade were granted. Certainly the gratitude of the Black Hood clan in Khirgár will make itself evident through generous donations to the Temple for some time to come. More important to the Temple of Hrű'ü, the socioeconomic fabric in the city of Khirgár was shaken up and altered by the incursion of this new business. Thus is the Lord of Chaos pleased.

## Businesses

There are several areas in which Lord Hrű'ü has evolved into a local "cult" God, and in these places the local agricultural and business clans have large proportions of Lord Hrű'ü's followers.

The agricultural clans of Lord Hrű'ü's Temple are often found in Mrelú, along with the faithful of Lord Ksáru. In Púrdimal there is a large faction of His worshippers, as well as along the east bank of the Missúma River from Béy Sü down past Usenánu. Several towns in the area around Haumá have significant factions devoted to the Lord of Chaos.

## Public Works and Services

While its doctrines are quite arcane, the Temple of Hrű'ü participates in the day-to-day life of Tsolyánu, as do all Temples but that of Lord Drá. Thus, it uses its wealth and influence in a number of ways which benefit the public: roads are maintained, taxes are levied on behalf of the Empire in remote and rural areas, and basic schools are operated for the children of its faithful.

Lord Hrű'ü's Temple also acts as broker in many areas of Tsolyáni living: He is influential and powerful, and His clergy make it their business to know those who can "arrange" things. Business-people of all faiths seek as best they can to maintain good relations with the Temple of Hrű'ü, for His assistance is often necessary when no other influence can prevail.

As might be expected, Lord Hrű'ü's Temple is philosophically very much in favor of *Ditlána*, the Tsolyáni custom of occasionally razing and rebuilding entire cities. His Temple is influential in proposing, planning, and executing *Ditlána*, and generously funds such efforts.

## Cities of Broad Influence

Lord Hrű'ü's worship is greatest in Púrdimal, Mekú, and Mrelú.

### *Hmakuyál*

Ancient and ruined Hmakuyál hosts the worship of two of the powerful Lords of Change, Ksáru and Hrű'ü. Built into a deep declivity in the landscape, much of the city is subterranean and there are few of the proud pyramids and obelisks common elsewhere in Tsolyánu. The dread "Beast Without a Tail" is said to dwell in caverns far below this ancient city. Here also the followers of the Lord of Change are said to maintain a secret headquarters for the initiates of their Inner Doctrines.

It is said that a special Plane of Reality is available to the Temple of Hrű'ü via the city of Hmakuyál. Such Planes are often used as private strongholds, secure storehouses, places to celebrate special Aspects of the Gods which do not occur on Tékel's plane, and even as prisons. They are limited in size to the dimensions of the temple located thereon. It is well known that the Temple of Vimúhla has such a plane that is accessible from a location west of Tumíssa. In the case of the Temple of Hrű'ü, the existence of such a plane is not confirmed, as none who visit it ever return.

### *Mekú*

This city's governor recently assaulted another of the strongholds of Lord Hrű'ü's faith; the local temple was razed to the ground. Known as the "Disposer of Mekú," his attempt to purge the Dark Trinity from the city stemmed from what he perceived to be the usurpation of the Petal Throne by Emperor Dhich'uné. While the worship of Lord Hrű'ü has both figuratively and literally "gone underground" in that city, one cannot expect that a place with such a strong historical attachment to the Supreme Principle of Change will readily give it up. Only the hindrance of Rebel Prince Eselné's army has prevented the Emperor from moving upon the city to replace its Governor, who has so blatantly breached the Concordat with his rebellion. One can expect Mekú to remain a bastion of the worship of Lord Hrű'ü long after its current Governor has himself experienced his final Change.

### *Jakálla*

Lord Hrű'ü's subterranean temple in Jakálla rambles for many hundreds of meters through mighty halls, apartments, barracks, refectories, dungeons, robbing rooms, libraries, outer sanctuaries of His various Aspects, ceremonial chambers, and so forth, before finally reaching the Y-shaped twin Inner shrines peculiar to this sect. Here, in a welter of gleaming gold, purple amethysts, indigo star-sapphires, eddying blue clouds of

*Vrés*-incense, and the tremulous shimmer of a thousand candles, the demon-masked hierophants of this mighty God celebrate the rituals of the Coming Forth of Universal Diversification.

#### *Khírgár*

Notable in *Khírgár* is the shrine of Lord *Kánkubel*, "the Muck-Eater." This Inner Aspect of Lord *Hrű'ü* is not generally found elsewhere. There are small followings in *Púrdimal* and *Penóm* due the transfer of worshippers from *Khírgár* to those cities during the centuries during which Lord *Kánkubel*'s faithful strove for the acceptance of this Aspect.

#### Monasteries

Priests, ascetics, and holy people staff hidden monasteries to Lords *Hrű'ü* and *Ksárul* deep beneath *Hmakuyál*. The House of the Purple Tapestry is a monastery of Lord *Hrű'ü* used for training of advanced-level followers, usually Ritual priests destined for advanced posts. It has absolutely no political interest at all. It also has a residential section for the ascetic monks who wish to pass beyond the veils and illusion of this reality and meditate upon the reality of Lord *Hrű'ü*. These monks never emerge once initiated into the monastery.

The Cusp of Night Society, a faction within the Temple of *Hrű'ü*, maintains a monastery somewhere in the far northeast where they concentrate on training individuals for special purposes. Candidates have their minds molded for "complete uniformity" with the goals of the Temple, and are then sent off on important missions.

#### Other Nations

Lord *Hrű'ü* is not as influential beyond *Tsolyánu* as other Gods, having few counterparts in other nations. Certain of the *Livyáni* Shadow Gods have common beliefs, but these arcane deities keep mostly to themselves. The omnipresence of Lords *Vímúhla* and *Hrsh* in *Mu'ugalavyá*, and the iron grip of Lady *Shíringgáyi* upon *Salarvyá*, leave Lord *Hrű'ü* almost entirely unrepresented among the natives in those nations.

To extend Its influence, the Temple seeks to establish acceptable relationships in foreign countries from which it can continue to press for Change. Such goals are naturally rather threatening to established powers in these nations, and Lord *Hrű'ü*'s Temple progresses slowly. During the reign of Emperor *Hirkáne Tlakotáni* the Temple of *Hrű'ü* actually held several ambassadorial positions, as the Emperor was happy to export some of His potential difficulties to other countries.

In many smaller nations, such as *Jánnu*, *Kilalámmu*, and (prior to the arrival of the Baron *Aid*'s forces) *Pijéna*, the Temple of *Hrű'ü* has been quite successful in organizing alliances among the local chiefs and barons of the area. In this the Temple competes with the Temples of *Ksárul* and *Sárku*, as well as with the *Salarvyáni*, all of whom seek to organize the disarrayed factions to their particular advantage.

It is important to keep in mind, as well, that Lord *Hrű'ü* seeks both destruction and creation. The tiny nation of *Pijéna* was almost nothing until the Temple of *Hrű'ü* sent ambassadors and advisers to oversee the establishment of governmental structure. As a result, the Temple of *Hrű'ü* enjoyed considerable control of the government. While consolidating and building *Yán Kór* from a collection of regional warlords, Baron *Ald* seized control of *Pijéna* and tossed out the *Tsolyáni* advisers, much to the distress of the Temple of *Hrű'ü*.

Some of these advisers were reassigned to the smaller states of the far east like *Jánnu* and *Kilalámmu*, where they are doing much the same work of building up government structures. Some of these regions are very badly organized, with local kings and warlords but no uniformity of power.

The goal in each of these ventures is the development of centralized power structures where none existed, followed by the overthrow and destruction of these nations. Thus does Lord *Hrű'ü* draw order out of chaos, and then dash it away again.

#### Politics

Despite its secretive nature, there is a clear Inner hierarchy in the Temple of *Hrű'ü* — much clearer than that of Lord *Ksárul*'s Temple, where the lowly priest lighting the hallway lamps might be the person who runs the temple, and all the High Priests and Celebrants in fact wield no power. While the structure is clear, the individual members of the Inner Circle are not normally seen. An average worshipper will never see the temple commandants, who remain secluded in the deep Inner Sanctuaries beneath the temple.

#### Internal Factions

##### *The Cusp of Night Society*

The dominant faction in the Temple of *Hrű'ü*, the Cusp of Night Society seeks the dissolution of all societal structure through political action. Along the way, it seeks to replace the worship of the Lords of Stability by the Rule of Change, employing force if need be.

Beyond *Tsolyánu*, the Cusp of Night seeks to establish Lord *Hrű'ü* as the master of all *Tékumel*, behind whatever throne there is in every country there is. This is not the goal of uniform worship, for that would be contrary to the God. Instead, the Cusp of Night wants uniform control. They want to have power through Change. And, should they someday succeed in this goal, they will then destroy the structure themselves, for that is the will of the God.

The Cusp of Night often supports the *Ndálu* Clan of the Temple of *Ksárul* in mutual quests for political power. The *Ndálu* Clan is very aggressive and the Cusp of Night is happy to take a back seat to their ambitions. The Cusp of Night is very powerful, and has many adherents in the Court of Purple Robes in *Avanthár*. These agents never like to be visible, and exert their influence "from behind the throne."

*The Triple-Y Society*

An extremely secretive Inner-temple society, nobody knows what they do, who the members are, etcetera. Their meeting places are rumored to be deep beneath the temple, beyond three deadly "Y" passages. Members will know, or be able to discern, the correct branchings to take to reach the conclave: certain death awaits those who make the wrong choice.

The Triple-Y Society is concerned with power, high-level inter-Temple relations, international intrigue and ambassadorships, and both the breaching and maintenance of Imperial Security. Individuals are often unaware of their own involvement until they have risen quite high within the Triple-Y Society: mind-bars and mind-control are used to block the memories and control the actions of their agents. Only when one has become quite powerful in the Temple of Hrű'ü without apparently having ever been approached by the Triple-Y Society does one begin to suspect that one is already a member.

*Servants of Darkness*

Little is known about this ferocious military sub-sect which sports solid steel armor.

*Temple Alliances*

The Gods exhibit "alliances" based on the confluences of mutual interest. The Dark Trinity of Lords Ksárul, Sárku, and Hrű'ü is an example. They are the Gods who are most closely allied in the way They operate. Lord Sárku deals in labyrinths, tombs, and the Undead, the perpetuation of the mind and the intellect. Lord Ksárul deals in the intellect, hoarding secrets in dark places concerning the mysterious inner-workings of the world. Lord Hrű'ü deals in mysteries and deception, the illusion and unpredictability of Change, and knowledge of the inner workings of the world.

Lords Hrű'ü and Sárku have common ground in that Lord Sárku deals with matters of the intellect and perceiving Change. Lord Sárku strives to observe Change endlessly. Lord Hrű'ü wishes to perceive Change, but is concerned only with His own intellect and perception, not with the intellect of the mundane creatures of this world. Although His priests sometimes use the Undead as guardians of their tombs, that is less a theological than a practical matter.

Additionally, Lord Hrű'ü desires intellect that brings about Change: the unpredictable Change whose secrets only He knows.

The Gods cooperate insofar as they have mutual interests, so that among the Dark Trinity, Lords Hrű'ü and Ksárul are usually most closely allied: both value knowledge, secrets, and the inner workings of reality. Lord Ksárul's interests focus upon things of mundane reality: power, magic and magical devices, alchemy and science, and politics. Lord Hrű'ü is interested in much broader concepts such as reality, unreality, and the complex interplay of the elements of reality.

The priesthoods of the Dark Trinity also have common political grounds. The Temples are related through the

interlocking political structures of the Empire, and their clans frequently overlap.

Within the cauldron of Tsolyáni politics almost any alliance of Temples can occur, even those combining Change and Stability. Lord Hrű'ü's Temple even allies with that of Lord Hnálla in urgent matters concerning the maintenance of the Empire.

*External Parties*

The Temple of Hrű'ü maintains many powerful positions within the Court of Purple Robes in Avanthár, and in the Palace of the Realm. Unlike those of the Temple of Ksárul, Lord Hrű'ü's representatives are not "secret:" they are clerks, administrators, and leaders who are known to be members of the Temple of Hrű'ü, and their duties and titles are clear. What is not clear, what Lord Hrű'ü seeks to conceal for His own purposes, are the connections between these individuals and those around them. He seeks the secret influence of known power, the unpredicted outcome, the unsuspected control. So the clerk who worships Lord Hrű'ü may be known to serve a certain powerful person of the court, but the fact that this clerk has the ear of a certain other high lady will be a closely-held secret. He will not be unfaithful to his patron's interests, for that would be ignoble: rather, he will be a secret resource for those who wish to favorably influence the lady in ways which do not conflict with the interests of his own lord.

*Military Legions**The Legion of Deep Purple Dark**16th Imperial Heavy Infantry*

Kérdu KuréshuhiVíridun, High Priest of Lord Hrű'ü at Mekú, formerly of the Sweet Singers of Nakomé. Now stationed at Mrelú, four cohorts.

The personal bodyguard of the Disposer of Mekú (the traditional title of the Governor of that city). This is a political alliance rather than a theological one, as are many of the arrangements in Tsolyánu. The first "Disposer" was an Engsványáli autocrat who was sent to Mekú to set things right during the First Imperium. He did this and managed to establish a power base which continued on down until the Tlakotáni period. The Tlakotánis broke the dynasty, took the title, and put a family of their own in charge.

The Legion of Deep Purple Dark was never considered a very good unit, funded as it was by a Temple not known for its military prowess. At the time of the Legion's creation, the priests of Lord Hrű'ü were concerned about their lack of influence within the Military Party. Fearing complete exclusion from the Milumanayá expedition, the Temple of Hrű'ü sent several "advisors" into the area. Trying to gain some military control they dispatched the Legion of the Deep Purple Dark and worked hard to recruit new soldiers. They were fairly successful in this venture, but this political victory did not produce a particularly good legion.

Following the razing of the Temples of the Dark Trinity in Mekú, survivors of this legion were withdrawn to

Mrelú and placed under the command of Kuréshu hiVíridun, who had retired from his command of the Sweet Singers of Nakomé some years ago.

*Kérdu* Shrúka hiVravodáya, Clan Patriarch, of Khirgár, formerly Fasítum, these tough desert fighters are devoted to Lords Hrú'ü and Wurú.

*The Legion of the Clan of the Sweet Singers of Nakomé*  
12th Imperial Heavy Infantry

## Clans

Hereditary support by clans in certain parts of the country maintains this Temple, which is rarely joined by new members. It is a very frightening Temple, for one of its mainstays is obedience without explanation. It is a dark and secretive Temple.

*Very-High*

Sea Blue	Golden Bough	<i>Cloak of Azure Gems</i>	
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*High*

White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle	<i>Great Stone</i>
<i>Dark Fear</i>	<i>Dark Water</i>	<i>Dark Moon</i>	<i>Dark Flame</i>
Standing Stone	Rising Sun	<i>Iron Helm</i>	

*Medium*

Green Bough	<i>Black Stone</i>	Ripened Sheaf	Black Pinnacle
First Moon	Moon of Evening	Golden Lintel	Scroll of Wisdom
Weeping Stone	<i>Black Hood</i>	<i>Black Mountain</i>	<i>Black Monolith</i>

*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	<i>Broken Bough</i>	Open Hand
High Tower	<i>Deep Flowing Water</i>	Flat Peak	<i>Black Hand</i>
Woven Whip			

*Very Low*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	<i>Nighted Tower</i>	Bright Sword
Flat Rock	Black Earth	Glass Spear	Turning Wheel
Collar of Bronze			

## Holidays

### Annual Astrological Events

Human Sacrifices, Púrdimal, Mrelú and Mekú

These annual public human sacrifices take place upon different dates that vary from city to city and are announced by the temple's priesthood based upon the arcane interpretation of astrological events. In a horrible and frightening ritual, the sacrifices are immersed in a translucent fluid that compresses them until the bones break and the body is reduced to a uniform mush. Magic methods are employed to keep the victims alive until the

very last moments despite their injuries. The Hehegánu are invited, as are other nonhuman races, and it is thought that these rituals go back to the pre-Pavár gods.

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Hrú'ü join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

### 13 Fésnu

Recognition of the Vicissitudes of Endless Time, Púrdimal

Worshippers of Lord Hrū'ū and Wurú conduct somber rituals.

### 1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

### 9 Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

### 10Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

Turugdáshe, Intercalary Days

The Rising Tide of Darkness, Penóm, Púrdimal

Worshippers of Lord Hrū'ū engage in the necromantic rituals celebrating the Ever-Nearing Cessation of Being which the God promises at the end of time.

Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

The Dedication of the Changes of the Year, Sunráya

Held to honor the Change representative in changing from one year to the next, and to glory in how the advancement of years demonstrates continual, unceasing change in all things.

## Aspects

Lord Hrū'ū is usually depicted as a bulbous, featureless circle of purple from which eight slender arms extend outward like the rays of the sun. In each of these He holds the insignia and devices of His power: swords, lamps, a barbed hook, a scroll, etc.

He has 78 Aspects, divided into two categories, Inner and Outer Aspects. Outer Aspects are well known to the laity, and Their shrines are accessible in the upper portions of the temple. Only the clergy knows Inner Aspects and certain privileged members of the laity, and their shrines are found only in the labyrinth beneath the temple.

## Gyánu

Originally worshipped as a Bednálljan deity, Lord Gyánu was recognized as the Fifth Aspect of Lord Hrū'ū by the Priest Pavár in his Inimitable Scrolls.

## Kaishmá

"Lord of the Deep Purple Dark"

An Outer Aspect, He appears as a ferocious beast, a great, scaly, toad-like monster with bronze teeth. He uses the dark to kill. Since Lord Hrū'ū lacks a specific war aspect, this is the Aspect of the Temple's meager military contingents. Lord Kaishmá does indeed represent "change by force," but not necessarily military violence.

## Ordunásh

"The Other One"

An Outer Aspect, He is the Aspect of Change brought about by accidents, and those who have had or who wish to prevent accidents seek His favor. Pregnant women often sacrifice to Lord Ordunásh seeking to prevent miscarriage, and in this one can see how Lord Hrū'ū cooperates with Lady Avánthe. Both are Deities of growth and destruction. Likewise, those who wish to have a calamity occur (presumably an enemy) will make sacrifice to this Aspect. The appellation "The Other One" is an indication of the God's dualistic nature, and is unrelated to the dread Pariah god, "The One Other."

## Pémesh Tashqá

"The Cloud-Maker"

This is the Outer Aspect of fogs, mists, and smokes. Military units seeking concealment sometimes call upon this Aspect. In the *Tsuru'úm*, He can produce dense mists, but not poisonous gases. He can produce these fogs and mists quickly, and make them last a long time. Once, a ship sailing out of Jakálla harbor bore a priest of Lord Hrū'ū whose concealed mission was to frustrate the ship's voyage to Livyánu (for reasons known only to the Temple, or perhaps only to the God). The ship sailed for days through alternating patches of fog and sunlight, quickly losing its way when the fogs interfered with its navigation. When, after many days, its supplies were extremely low (most voyages to Livyánu resupply at Penóm or Ngéshtu Head) the mist miraculously cleared... and the ship found itself sailing serenely back into Jakálla harbor, much to the bemusement of the Harbormaster.

## Ngél

"The Dreamer of Transformations"

Depicted as a sweet, pleasant young person of one's opposite gender sleeping upon one side, offering dreams full of hidden messages. Young acolytes invoke Lord Ngél before sleeping, and keep images of this Outer Aspect beside their mats in order to learn while they sleep. The dreams granted by Lord Ngél are powerful and compelling, and can be difficult to tell from reality, even upon awakening.

**Choggóth, Netánbo, and Kórga****"The Demon Generals of Lord Hrű'ü"**

These Aspects of Lord Hrű'ü are the commanders of The Dark Ones of the Beyond, the Singers of the Black, and Those Who Dwell in Purple, respectively. These are not human Aspects, and they are not described, or even truly part of the Temple doctrines. These, and others like them, appear to be Lord Hrű'ü's Aspects to the various Demon Races of the Many Planes, and there are doubtless many other Aspects that command the obedience of many other races.

**Hikána****"The Spool of Glass"**

An Inner Aspect, His nature is unknown. Lord Hikána is depicted by a spool-like structure about three feet high formed of deep purple glass. No one knows what this Aspect desires or does, but regular rituals are conducted to Him. During the ceremonies certain objects are brought forth: the sphere, the orb, the flat plate, a hand made of a certain plaster-like substance, and other items. At the end of the ritual the hand is crushed and destroyed, and no one knows why.

**Kánkubel****"The Muck-Eater"**

The Inner Aspect Kánkubel first emerged five or six hundred years ago. Lord Kánkubel is popular in Khirgár and has a following in Púrdimal, but is unknown elsewhere.

**Aluësh****"The Singer of Powerful Melodies"**

Like Lord Drá, the Inner Aspect Aluësh is a celebrant of the God, and is depicted as singing the praises of Lord Hrű'ü. He sings compelling, powerful songs that cause people, animals, and creatures to listen, understand, and obey. He is apparently related to the demon Lelmiyáni.

**Shiggéth Chá****"The Swimmer"**

This Inner Aspect is said to swim the seas of Time and Space without boundaries. He is portrayed as a dead-looking fish with pale, pupilless eyes. He is said to be able to take persons to certain places only He can reach, planes beyond even Lord Belkhánu's powers. If He so wished, His adherents claim, He could even swim "around" the dread Pylons, but He does not so desire.

**Demons****Demon Legions**

The Dark Ones of the Beyond, the Singers of the Black, and Those Who Dwell in Purple are a few of the Demon Legions commanded by certain Aspects of Lord Hrű'ü, and they are particular enemies of Lord Qón. These creatures are servants, subjects, and allies of Lord Hrű'ü, and they obey His will in many ways, not merely as

military contingents. Among them they have their own rulers after their own fashions.

Agreements supported by the Concordat prevent these and other legions from being summoned into Tékumel's plane. However, a wrong step in the *Tsuru'úm* can often cross a thin border separating the Planes, where such legions "wait just beyond the wall."

**Marássu**

The Ever-Nearing Pursuer, Master of the Fourteenth Circle, He Who Dwells in the Unending Grey, Singer of Silences, One Who Does Not Turn His Face

He is of the Substance of Hrű'ü and the Essence of Wurú, and his powers are Inculcation, Elicitation, Pursuing, and Desiccation. He is mightily tall, thin, and gaunt, yet no lineament of his can be seen with clarity as he is hooded and covered in cerements. This is necessary, for to see his form is to die. His Secret names are Ti-Sharvúu, Ti-holmúu.

**Ka'íng**

The Striker of the Spheres, Ruler of the Twenty-Second Circle, Master of Artful Demise

This creature is of the Substance and Essence of Hrű'ü, and his Powers include Guarding, Favoring, Emulation, and Decardilization. He appears as a great standing monolith of ebon basalt.

**Giritlén**

The Eater of Souls, Lord of the Sixteenth Circle, One Who Howls Below

He is of the Substance of Hrű'ü, but the Essence of Ksáru. His Powers are Consuming, Beclouding, Disincarceration, and Imparting. He appears as a ghastly multi-limbed terror beheld in a flickering dim light amid noisome stenches.

**Hrgásh**

The Blind One, Ruler of the Second Circle, Eyeless Drinker of Life

He is of the Substance and Essence of Hrű'ü and he is never summoned.

**Chríya**

The One Who Skulks

This minor demon is of the Essence of Hrű'ü. His Power is that of Avoidance. He appears as a small lizard-like creature, with a long toothy mouth, many eyes, a spiny back, and black fur. His glyph is often inscribed upon warrior's shields to turn back blows. His secret name is Usunggáhla.

**Narkonâa**

The Beetle, Lord of the Thirtieth Circle, Master of N6-Tikún, Servitor of Prince Origób

He is of the Substance of Wurú and the Essence of Hrű'ü, and his Powers include Abstertion, Manducation, and



Artifice. He appears *as a* scuttling black beetle with wing-cases that shimmer like ebon jewels. His Secret Names are Jegéth, Uriyó, Ahuné, Vióthetl, and Ptén.

#### Zanátl

The Secret Foe of All Being, Lord of the Forty-Fourth Circle, Servitor of Origób

He is of the Substance of Ksáruł, but the Essence of Hrú'ü. His Powers are Phantasms and Imparting. He appears only as strange shifting patterns of light and darkness and terrifying hallucinations.

#### Durún

The Beast, The Steed of Lord Hrú'ü, Master of the Fourth Circle

This demon is of the Substance and Essence of Hrú'ü and his sole Power is that of Seismism. Many cubits high is he, feathered as a bird of prey, with a beak of black, and a long tail whose touch leaves the dust of death. His Secret Names are Rláth, Thékkè, Ghù, and Ne'epón.

#### Chóm

The Unthinkable

He is of the Substance of Hrú'ü and the Essence of Dlamélish. His only known Power known is Obnubilation, although there are certainly others. He appears as a towering humanoid form of black and purple, but to set eyes upon him is to lose one's mind and knowledge of self. He resides in a fastness upon a dark plane, and within his tower writhe the souls of those whose minds he has consumed, locked in an eternal orgy that brings only despair and despondency.

#### The Demons of the Dark

These squat, amorphous, mottled beings resemble dull green shellfish and have an appetite for steel and copper. No traces of these metals survive their passing, even when imbued with magic, while gold or silver remain untouched. Little more is known of The Demons of the Dark; those few witnesses who survived were far away from where the Demons arrived, and fled immediately.

### Magic

#### The Amethyst of Expurgation

A ritual which dispels demons summoned by Stability.

#### Confusion

Psychically causes its victim to become dangerously confused.

#### Congelation

The various rituals of this spell allow increasing range and control of its freezing effect. A very skilled spellcaster can use this spell to construct bridges and walls of ice, while in the hands of the incompetent this spell can wreak disaster. In 2363, the Temple of Ksáruł in the Foreigner's Quarter in Tsámra was severely damaged when a sorcerer of the Blue Lord attempted to

steal this spell for his Temple. Losing control, the priest enshrined an entire wing of the Temple in bitterly cold ice before priests of the Temple of Hrú'ü could be summoned to counter the spell. Only the greatest sorcerers can use this spell to chill a glass of wine to a temperature ideal for imbibing, and the Lady Mnélla of Jakálla prides herself on this delicacy at her famous revelries.

#### Decorporealization

This ritual places people and items slightly out-of-phase (technically, somewhat *gréł*) with the Plane. The target and its environs will perceive each other only as a vague, pale outline, and be unimpeded by most solid surfaces. While walls and boulders cease to impede the target, so do floors and the ground cease to support them. The target must be advised therefore to remain in motion, lest they sink through supporting surfaces. The degree *gréł* to which the target is moved varies, and two decorporealized targets will not necessarily find themselves in parallel positions. Should this happen, the targets could interact normally with each other. Under extreme circumstances, a target can be moved so far *gréł* as to be completely undetectable and irretrievable.

#### The Nightmare of Terror

Psychically reduces its victim through the gradual application of nightmares.

#### Transfusion

Ritually creates a phantasm possessed by the spellcaster's *Hlákme* and *Baled*, leaving the *Bákte* unattended.

#### The Vindication of Instability

This ritual renders an area impassable to creatures summoned or created by servants of Stability.

#### Viscosity

A ritual spell that opens the earth to various degrees.

As a Second Level Ritual Priest, the "Attendant in Purple," Náru hiCháika had participated for several months in the Outer Rituals of the Temple of Hrū'ū. She had performed well at the mundane tasks, usually the bearing of censers, the steady presentation of ancient ritual texts from which the higher Ritual Priests read, and the frequent post "Barring the Entrance of the Goddess." One never knew what to do until the ritual was about to begin, for the Chief Ritual Priests of the temple selected the rituals with apparent randomness. She had discovered that the best way to quickly learn her required part in each ritual was to empty her mind, using the meditative techniques she had learned in the basic classes on magic that everyone took as a child. Then, when one of the higher-circle ritual priests instructed her in her responsibilities, she would *become* the role: thinking nothing, doing nothing but what was proper and required for the role.

In due time, her studies and her performance had succeeded in bringing about her promotion to the Third Circle of the Ritual Priesthood. Already, she had completed a Labor of Reverence and several of the other Rites. Now, however, she faced The Meditation Upon the God.

#### The Meditation Upon the God

One of the Ten Rites of Training for the next Circle, the Meditation Upon the God requires acolytes to meditate upon Lord Hrū'ū's power and teaches lessons in obedience and mystery. This Rite is present in all Temples of Hrū'ū.

Náru was led into a dark room and seated before a great amethyst crystal resting on a pedestal. In the silence, she emptied her mind in order to meditate. Time passed. Alone, she meditated for days and days in the darkness, hearing nothing. Sometimes she turned, to find that a small bowl of thin broth had appeared silently within the door to the room. Occasionally, she rose to use the pot in the comer, always finding it clean and empty. After an unknown time, her endurance was stretched to its limit: she was as tired as if she had slaved for days, yet she was stiff from long immobility; she was bored, and yet continually fraught with anxiety and fear of failure. She did not know how many days had passed, how long it had been since she had eaten, or whether it was night or day. For all she knew, she was forgotten within the bowels of the temple, or the city above her had fallen to the forces of rebel Prince Eselné!

Her heart heavy with despair, Náru was about to depart in failure — when in a whisper she heard the voice.

A chill like icy, black water spilled through her body, and the hairs on her limbs stood on end. She did not move, although her eyes widened in something like terror, but also like awe. There was never any doubt that this was the voice of some mighty being, never a sense that anything human was behind it. She could not have said whether her ears "heard" the voice, or whether it was present in her mind alone.

After a moment of terror, she understood the voice, which said to her, "Go out, and you will come to a certain

street." She found that she knew precisely which street was meant. "There you will find two children playing," the voice continued, neither loud nor soft, masculine nor feminine. It spoke, or whispered, "Kill them."

Though terrified, Náru was also disturbed by this command wondering, "Why should I do this?" Doubts filled her. Astonished at herself, she blurted, "Are you the God, or are you a demon come to torment me?" Her voice was as loud as a thunderclap in the small room.

A moment of silence passed, and then the loud, quiet voice said, "Go, and do it."

Although faithful to her God, Náru was also confused, for she knew that Lord Hrū'ū's doctrines did not call for the sacrifice of men or women. She had never shed blood in her life, how could she do this thing? Unable to stop herself, she again asked, "Why?"

The voice responded, quietly but implacably, "Do not ask: go, and do the thing I have commanded."

She rose, and opened the door to the room. The dim hallway deep beneath the temple seemed brightly lit by the single torch at the base of the stair. Even the other branch of the tunnel, which had seemed a mouth of utmost blackness when she had passed it before, now clearly led to a dark door some distance away. By the time she had climbed to a level where sunlight poured in a distant window, her eyes were weeping from the glare.

She knew she must act immediately, this very day, to obey the voice. Náru strode unopposed and unnoticed from the temple as her eyes adjusted to the light of day, and soon found herself turning to enter *the street*. A chill of foreboding gripped her. Motion in the shadows resolved itself to the sight of a boy and a girl playing with bits of colorful pottery in the dirt, chattering quietly to each other. She moved forward, but they did not notice her. Here was the place; now was the time. Nonetheless, the young acolyte hesitated.

Náru returned in anguish to the room beneath the temple. When the door shut, she turned to the crystal and cried "Why did I have to do that?" Her hands could still feel the throats of the tiny children, her shins were sore with their futile kicks.

The voice answered immediately, quietly, and without emotion, "Do not ask. There is a certain boat sitting at the pier." Again, Náru realized that she knew exactly what was described, and she clapped her hands to her ears as if she could shut out the implacable *voice*. Relentlessly, it continued.

"Go and knock a hole in the hull, so that when the fishermen board their vessel the hole will be submerged, and the fishermen will go out into the water and their boat will immediately sink and drown them."

She was full of anguish, and cried "Why?" and Lord Hrū'ū said "Do not ask: go, and do it."

Náru's mind whirled in confusion. She could see, as clearly as if it had already occurred, the desperate faces of

the peasant fishermen as the black water crawled into their mouths and consumed them. The faces of the dead children rose up in her eyes; somehow, she knew their names: Jómu, the boy! Tsa'á, the girl! Dead! Dead as if they had never been!

Weeping, she rose and left the room, the temple, and the priesthood.

Ashamed, Náru returned to her clanhouse, following thereafter a secular profession in mercantile trade. She knew she had failed to overcome her human limitations in demanding a world in which things were intelligible. She had fallen short of the glory of the God.

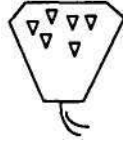
Lord Hrű'ü is not intelligible. He does not seek to be intelligible. He is Change, Change which is Unknowable.

Lord Hrű'ü, however, does not lack motive. He knows the two children, and He knows too the acolyte, weak of will and beset with doubts. When the children's bereaved father loses interest in his position as a buyer and seller of goods; and when by an unknown coincidence Náru accepts the newly-opened position; and when in turn she serves the Temple of Hrű'ü through transactions different than those her predecessor would have accomplished, then is Lord Hrű'ü pleased and His purposes served.

Having failed to succeed in the priesthood, Náru hiCháika believes the deaths of the two children were a tragic waste. Her limited human ego does not see that their deaths served the God, and not her ambition in the priesthood. So she lives out her life in guilt over their deaths, hating them for their part in her failure, and hating herself for hating them. She is never aware that she serves the God, and eventually dies a miserable and unfulfilled creature. But these things are of no concern to the God.

# Wurú

*The Many-Legged Serpent of Doom, the Unnamable, He Who Appears Where Chaos Dwells*



Lord Wurú is the antagonist of Stability, and He aids those who promote Change and overturn permanency. He acts as the catalyst that brings about Change of many types. He assists those who combat the forces of Stability, sending His serpentine minions to help His devotees or creating darknesses to blind the foe.

Lord Wurú is the exact opponent of Lord Qón. Within the maelstrom of the Ultimate Chaos of His Lord are all things and all possibilities, and anything less is a clotting of perfection, an unnatural stagnancy of what should be. To Lord Wurú, objects and systems are failures of existence to comprehend Chaos. The Round of Returning to Life is an abomination in His eyes, the Skein of Destiny a wishful projection of mundane needs and desires upon the random events of existence. Only the Chaos Beyond Chaos, the Perfect If, and expresses the world as it should be.

Lord Wurú seeks the defense of the powers of Chaos, the destruction of Stability, and the uprooting of What Is, rendering it into Chaos pleasing Lord Hrü'ü. Just as a man might smash two boulders together in order to reduce both to dust, so does Lord Wurú turn Stability upon itself to bring Chaos. The things of existence are tools of their own destruction: nations pull each other down to do His bidding; continents grind themselves into sand; and every particle of matter achieves its destiny when it shatters into nothingness. Those things that aid His goals are protected, just as a woodsman protects an axe while with each blow wearing down its blade. Lord Wurú aids those who assist Lord Hrü'ü and destroys those who resist. Thus does He strive towards the Coming of Universal Diversification so desired by His Lord.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

#### *Symbol*

A stylized serpent's head with tongue protruding

#### *Costume*

Both priests and priestesses of Lord Wurú wear parti-colored mauve and purple robes, with hoods of black velvet.

Lord Wurú's theology is very structured and wrapped in mystical content, and this is reflected in the elaborate costuming doctrines of the Temple. The donning of certain garments is specified for various rituals and at

various times. These garments are said to connect the wearer with the Great Dark, the Outer Powers beyond the Pylons and the Gates. The doctrines are very mystical and mysterious.

#### *Sacrifices*

Blood sacrifices are as rare as in His master's Temple, at least in the Outer Doctrines. He accepts black flowers, vines, and fruit, silver, lead, platinum, and certain other metals, but he does not accept gold, iron, or copper.

#### *Rituals*

Doctrines regarding rituals, food taboos, and dress are known to change as one moves deeper into the priesthood of this Temple, although the variety of doctrines are apparently the same from one location to another. As with other Temples, there are mundane public rituals for the common folk, but His Inner Rituals are most terrifying to behold.

Many of Lord Wurú's rituals are conducted in pitch darkness, His priests working almost by touch. Many of His highest Ritual priests are said to be blind from years of living constantly in lightless underground chambers.

Not all of Lord Wurú's servitors are so arcane, however. Priests of the Temple of Wurú are renowned for their recitations of the classic tales, particularly the Hymn to Mü'ükané, and other epic poems. For such holidays, the temple remains dignified and dark, but is still a place of beauty and grandeur. In the Outer Courtyard, haunches of *Hmä* and *Hmélu* sizzle upon spits for the common folk, while the nobility sample delicacies upon the upper steps of the many-tiered daises. Amidst somber music, the Ritual priests of the Temple act out the ancient stories in pantomime and verse. While Lord Wurú's rituals are esoteric and secret at the same time, confounding even members of the Temple, still His priests and priestesses are Tsolyáni, and love pageantry and show.

#### *Ritual Items*

Priests and priestesses of Lord Wurú carry slender stiletto-like daggers called *Timuél*, which are frequently poisoned. These are usually "dress" weapons, not intended for actual use.

### The Inner Doctrines

#### *Rituals*

Lord Wurú's "demonic" Aspects emerge in His Inner Rituals, bringing death, plague, and noxious gases.

Strange and unimaginable darkneses attend Him, and in the pitch darkness the hands of His black-robed priests bear a nacreous purple glow. The Ténturen provides long, mournful chords of accompaniment to these rituals, while a faint, otherworldly incense brings on dizziness and disorientation. Only the Innermost members of the Temple ever see these rituals.

#### *The One Other*

Lord Qón and Lord Wurú are two sides of the same coin: the soldier of Lord Belkhánu, the warrior of Lord Hrüü. Both treat with the One Other: Lord Qón appreciates the assistance of the One Other in the imprisonment of the Prince in the Blue Room; Lord Wurú seeks to use the Pariah Deities as tools towards His master's goals. Once that measure of usefulness is expired, however, Lord Wurú can be depended upon to turn upon all former allies.

### **Temple Layout**

The layout of the under-temples of Lord Wurú is always mysterious, but patterned. Those versed in the doctrines of the Temple must employ their knowledge to find their way through these passages. Those who fail will find themselves lost in a maze or within a trap of some sort. The easier, upper levels of these Underworld passages are usually designed to deter, rather than injure. But the deeper one progresses, the more lethal is the outcome of a wrong turning.

### **Secular Activities**

#### **Businesses**

Lord Wurú's clans participate in the same spectrum of businesses, (crafts, trade, farming, and administration) as do most other clans. While Lord Wurú's doctrines speak of the destruction of all things, His faithful are often merely traditional worshippers, participating with the rest of the Clan in the Temple rituals without any real concern for applying their teachings in day-to-day life. Thus, in the northwest and central portions of the Empire, one may find worshippers of the Many-Legged Serpent of Doom happily selling their wares in the marketplace, neatly toting up sums in a ledger, or baking bricks on the muddy river flats, with no more thought for the annihilation of all things than to swat the *Chri*-flies buzzing about their heads.

#### **Public Works and Services**

As with other Temples, basic schools in reading, calligraphy, mathematics, music and magic are available for the education of the young. Lord Wurú also shares His Master's interest in *Ditlána*.

This Temple is also noted for the expertise of Its scholars of the ancient texts. Some of the finest Scholarly priests have emerged from the Temples of Wurú in Khirgár and Púrdimal.

### **Cities of Broad Influence**

#### *Púrdimal*

Deep beneath the temple in Púrdimal, the grey-skinned half-human Hehegánu have been known to participate the rituals. Their roles are separate from the functions of the human priests, part of certain ancient traditions dating back to the Latter Times.

#### *Mekú*

This temple is very old, and the labyrinth beneath it is extensive and highly dangerous, possessing sophisticated traps and guarded, secret shrines. The large, sprawling surface temple has its own surface labyrinth of galleries, courtyards, passageways, gardens, and stairs winding up or down to other levels. Empress Aléya (1,872-1,921 A.S.) who had a particular aversion to being lost in mazes despoiled much of this labyrinth. Emperor Gyésmu Dalísan is said to have permitted its reconstruction in return for the secret application of certain life-extending spells.

#### *Sokátis*

The activities of the Temple of Wurú in Sokátis are somewhat more hidden than elsewhere. Through the temple in Sokátis Lord Wurú's priests seek to follow and counter the efforts of the priests of Lord Qón, who is popular in this region.

### **Politics**

#### **Internal Factions**

There are known to be internal factions and parties within the Temple of Wurú, such as branches of the Cusp of Night and Triple Y societies of His master. Little is known about sects that are unique to the Temple of Wurú, however. Various factions are known to have established territories in the Underworld from which to defend the shrines and crypts of Lords Wurú and Hrüü against the assaults of Stability. Members of the more fanatical factions believe their cause is deeply important to the fate of the Universe. To show their devotion to their master they will scour their flesh with abrasives, paint themselves with acids, and take other painful measures. These factions are suspected of cooperating with certain sadomasochistic sects within the Temple of Hriháyal.

#### **Temple Alliances**

The Temple of Wurú is considered somewhat standoffish by the other Temples, for His priests are merciless in the execution of agreements. They will form alliances and will adhere to all terms, but will also terminate the alliance as soon as they have achieved their own goals. The Temple of Wurú works with the other Temples of the Dark Trinity (and, it is whispered, cooperates secretly with the Pariah Deities upon occasion), but does so only on It's own terms. This strains relations with the other Temples, particularly the Temple of Ksáru, which pursues its alliances in a similar fashion.

## External Parties

Lord Wurú is influential in the Priestly and Imperial parties, but not as strong in the Military and Royalist parties.

## The Underpeople

There are races of beings upon Tékumel who have formed a loose alliance that they term the "Underpeople." These are creatures whose interest in, and hold upon, the structures commonly referred to as "civilization" is weak for one reason or another. Some of these beings are disinclined to organization and cooperation. Others are sedentary or slow to reproduce, long-lived but detached from those for whom a century is not merely a period of deep meditation. Still others are simply trapped, culturally, physically, or mentally, in the dark depths of the *Tsuru'úm*. The Temple of Wurú makes use of some of these, the Hrá, Tsógggu, and the Ngóro, as underworld allies. They help these creatures organize, and feed their resentment and bitterness against the surface-dwelling races, employing them as guardians and patrols to protect the underground shrines of their Lord and His Master. Like all other tools, these creatures are intended for use against the structures of Society on behalf of the goal of complete Chaos.

## Military Legions

### *The Legion of the Many-Legged Serpent*

20th Imperial Medium Infantry, Hekéllu

Kérdu Yamáshsha hiKorokól of Hekéllu was a staff officer under Lord Kéttukal, and is a competent if somewhat inexperienced officer. These warriors fight with long swords and crossbows, and eschew any shields.

## Clans

*Very High*

Cloak of Azure Gems

*High*

Dark Fear

Dark Water

Dark Moon

Dark Flame

Iron Helm

*Medium*

Black Hood

Black Mountain

Black Monolith

*Low*

Deep Flowing Water

Black Hand

*Very Low*

Nighted Tower

Black Earth

## Holidays

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Wurú join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

3Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

13 Fésru

Recognition of the Vicissitudes of Endless Time, Púrdimal

Worshippers of Lord Hrü'ü and Wurú conduct somber rituals.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

29 Lésdrim

The Expurgation of Tranquillity, Mekú

The Showing of the Pandects of Objurgation, Fállí, Vrusáemaz

A large, public observance, its effects are widespread and thus make it worthy of note. The ceremonies in the outer courtyard and subsequent public processional serve to mask dark, unknown rites conducted beneath the temple. Vague feelings of anxiety and dread emanate from the temple and permeate the city, leaving residents and even animals edgy and irritable. Many of the city's permanent population make a point of visiting countryside villas or dropping in on rural acquaintances rather than remaining in the city this day.

Demon-masked celebrants issue forth from the temple in grand processions. Palanquins carry magical images of the Gods that appear to rum and speak to viewers and exude magical clouds of gas.

Within the Inner Temple a giant demon-masked stone image of Wurú is magically made to open its mouth, and clergy of this Deity celebrate rites within the very mouth

of the God. Two great pillars of fangs support the open mouth and tremendous wings wrap around from the face to become the walls of the hall. Inside the mouth, upon an altar constructed on the tongue of the God, ritual sacrifices are "disconnected." This process divorces sacrifices of all contact with any Plane and consigning them to the Utter Chaos Between the Planes. Statues of vaguely humanoid demons with long triangular heads surround the hall. Priests wear tall headdresses with long demon masks that reach to their chests. High clan-masters who worship Lord Wurú and high clergy from the Temple of Hrü'ü attend, and special members of Lord Sárku or Lord Ksárul's priesthoods might be invited to attend.

This day is also observed by worshippers of the Livyáni deity Vrusáemaz in the city of Fállí, where the Showing of the Pandects of Objurgation results in similar side-effects for the residents of that city.

#### 10 Dohála

##### Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

##### Vraháma, Intercalary Days

##### The Entrance into the Mouth of Demons, Mekú

Celebrants conduct rituals in the sanctuaries of the Temple of Wurú and then lead dark processions into the underworld beneath the temple, there to engage in further rituals best left unknown.

### Aspects

Lord Wurú is pictured as a great serpent with many centipedal legs, antennae, and six staring eyes. All of His 18 Aspects are in some way a servant of Lord Hrü'ü, but His means are varied. He can be the staunch guardian, the trickster, or the mystic voyager.

#### M'chét Kanggé

##### The Wanderer of the Black

Bipedal, gaunt, long-legged, and somewhat grayish, this Aspect lopes through the Planes and frequently can be called upon to help adherents of Change who are in the Underworld. He may answer questions with the truth, or with fatal lies. He will lend help, but in His own way, and will not explain His motives.

#### Siunéth

##### The Pleasant One of Mazes

This Aspect can be summoned, and called upon to find things or people that are lost. The common folk go to His shrines in search of lost valuables or children, and offer up black flowers (of which there are only about three or four species) as sacrifice.

#### Neshkéth

##### The Old Wise One

The librarian of dark places, He sees to the maintenance of books and secret scrolls in the dark. One must pass through His guardians in order to enter His subterranean Temple libraries. His demons are not directly violent, but which will lead, chase, or carry one off into deep places from which escape is difficult. He can appear in any guise, and will pleasantly mislead those who would mishandle His goods. He is usually kind to worshippers of the Gods Hrü'ü, Wurú, and Ksárul, and less so to those of Lord Sárku.

#### Chiú Knésh

##### Sentinel of the Farther Caverns Beyond the World

He watches for the Coming of the Dark Gods, the Pariah Deities who dwell beyond the limits of time and space. He appears as a shrouded corpse or a statue of a man all withered away, sitting cross-legged and staring out into the universe.

#### Diéllunak

##### The Bleak Goddess of Changes and Perturbations

She is a Goddess who appears in many forms, including nonhuman ones, and She can cause changes in the direction of water flow, the temporary bending of tunnels so that they link to new passages, and the twisting of things into new patterns. She can both rescue and mislead those lost in the underworld. Her changes are direct, but subtle: a corridor which used to go straight now bends slowly around 180 degrees; deep in the night the river reverses flow unnoticed until by morning a ship finds itself upstream of its starting point; a clansman finds himself lost far across the city, yet claims to have only just left the clanhouse.

#### Semúnu

"A Short and Long Creature," The One Who Takes No Prisoners

This Aspect is not a worm or insect, but a serpentine thing with legs or cilia, and very ugly. He may appear if one robs a tomb or a shrine, or defiles a holy place. He guides people to places where all is dark and nothing can be seen.

#### Tikkúththu

##### The Quintessential Guardian

The eater of those who violate the shrines of change, this Aspect resembles a head on legs, with innumerable sharp fangs and teeth. He is indefatigable, inexorable, sees in the dark, is impossible to kill, and will follow those who rob from the shrines until they reach the surface. He will pursue even those of Lords Ksárul or Sárku if they violate the places of Lord Hrü'ü.

#### Mkt'káne

##### The Knower of Legends

This Aspect knows the stories, mythology, and history of the Temple. A slender, elderly man, He can be approached within the temples of Lord Wurú upon the surface. Offerings of black fruits, vines and flowers,

silver, lead, or platinum are acceptable, and may elicit stories, or the gift of a book recounting histories and legends. Legends of Hrúgga are popular requests, and all such tales are different. The information He reveals is often relevant to the listener, with an element of truth and with two or three different meanings. Many have asked Lord Mkt'káne where Purdánim, the Lost City of Nayári, can be found, and each has received a different answer that was so carefully phrased that it can never be said to be true or untrue. Most of the appearances of this Aspect are illusions cast by the priests to satisfy the common folk and garner donations for the Temple. Sometimes, however, these illusions have not been cast, and those manifestations are judged to be real.

#### Mekhmués

##### The Finder

Thin, long, and furred, Lord Mekhmués slinks through tombs and *Tsuru'úm* corridors (no matter how narrow, unless barred by sorcery or by the Demon Tkél). He hunts Stability creatures and intruders in the Underworlds and consumes their skins or external integuments without damaging their internal organs. The wounds he inflicts can only be alleviated or cured by the most powerful sorcery.

#### Demons

##### Marássu

The Ever-Nearing Pursuer, Master of the Fourteenth Circle, He Who Dwells in the Unending Grey, Singer of Silences, One Who Does Not Turn His Face

He is of the Substance of Hrü'ü and the Essence of Wurú, and his powers are Inculcation, Elicitation, Pursuing, and Desiccation. He is mightily tall, thin, and gaunt, yet no lineament of his can be seen with clarity as he is hooded and covered in cerements. This is necessary, for to see his form is to die. His Secret names are Ti-Sharvüü, Ti-holmuu.

##### Gurushá

The Starveling, Lord of the Thirty-First Circle, He Who Hungers Ever

He is of the Substance of Wurú and his Powers are Ingurgitation, Denuding, and Transportation. He is a gaunt red-eyed humanoid of charcoal-black skin, wrinkled and knobbed. His Secret Names are Orúsu, Ninggitú, Chalélsu, and Razzáu.

##### Néré

The Many-Bodied, Lord of the Fortieth Circle, He Whose Breath is Venom

He is of the Substance of Lord Wurú and the Essence of Lord Sáрку, and his powers include Defilement and Pestilence. He appears as a tangle of blackish, yellowish, greenish-brown pods, sacks, and stalks connected by sticky fibers and ganglia. His Secret Names are Fiyú, Tettukánétl, Quriktáhl, Imónü, Re'á, Otlúng, and Siyusháá.

#### Narkonáà

The Beetle, Lord of the Thirtieth Circle, Master of Nò-Tikún, Servitor of Prince Origób

He is of the Substance of Wurú and the Essence of Hrü'ü, and his Powers include Abstertion, Manducation, and Artifice. He appears as a scuttling black beetle with wing-cases that shimmer like ebon jewels. His Secret Names are Jegéth, Uriyó, Ahuné, Vióthetl, and Ptén.

#### Mikoyél

The Formless, Lord of the Thirty-Second Circle, One of Knives, Servitor of Origób

This demon is of the Substance of Chiténg and the Essence of Wurú, and its Powers are Transformation, Raising, Obnubilation, and Imparting. It appears only as a dull reddish blur which floats in the room. It's Secret Names are Lésme, Akhizón, and Dméggha.

#### Magic

##### Amorphia

These terrifying rituals render an area completely unto Chaos. Some rituals create "pools" of non-order, others moving walls or threads of un-being. Creatures who come in contact with these lethal phenomena will be wholly destroyed or may suffer at best the loss of a limb. Nothing engulfed by the chaos emerges again.

##### The Eater of Souls

These hideous rituals summon forth various demons of Lord Wurú, who pursue their named targets for a time before departing this plane. The demons must be directed against an individual by name, and woe upon the sorcerer who does not have an individual's true name at hand when directing the demon: if thwarted by this or by other means, certain of these demons return to direct their wrath against the caster! The demons themselves are unpleasant but unprepossessing in appearance, resembling small dolls, staffs, or even tall, black-colored *Ru'ún*, and wielding such swords, barbed whips or maces as they bring with them. Should these demons defeat their target foes they take only a short time to devour the victim's body, rendering the individual totally unrevivifiable or contactable by any means. They are destroyed utterly.

##### The Grey Hand

The spell of the Grey Hand is unique to this Temple and psychically scatters the target's atoms in a manner pleasing to Lord Hrü'ü. The residual grey ash is quite resistant to spells of Revivification and Re-embodiment.

Tk'ttrr gripped the rail with a right lower-arm, and the rigging with both left arms. His black, chitinous lower legs were spread wide, forming a tripod with his weighty tail. Only by being lashed to the deck itself could he possibly be more secure as the ship rolled through the channel by Ngéshtu Head.



"Hoi! Seaman! Lashings to the deck!" he called, but the surly fellow sauntered past, ignoring him. Queasily, Tk'ttr closed his second and third eyelids, but the heaving water looked no better through the nictitating membranes. He breathed deeply, making the salty air whistle through his leg-spiracles, and thought of home.

Many young ones agreed to enter Human society, observing the fast-breeding Soft Ones. Entering Tn'iss'ssa he had joined the nest of Wrrú, the Human nest closest to, but still woefully misperceptive of, the Black Old One.

But Tk'ttr had somehow offended a Human priestess, whose position in their inscrutable social hierarchy was superior to his own. Now he found himself dispatched to the nest of Wrrú in the distant city of Tsá'ra. By ship!

By ship! The nonboyant Pé Chói loathed the ruthless and unforgiving ocean, but these fecund Soft Ones valued their lives less than the Pé Chói. Eggs came infrequently to the People, blessings upon the finest nests, cherished and preserved. Not cast forth on patchwork bundles of driftwood as bait for the *Ákho!*

In his musings, Tk'ttr closed all four eyelids, but that worsened his vertigo. He re-opened them just as the square-rigged *Tnék* rounded the western point of Ngéshu Head. Above, the lookout gave a shout.

The Humans scurried desperately, seizing poles and weapons. Dark Mu'ugalavyáni eyes peered over shields mounted at the rail of the raider. As the ships closed, a flight of enemy arrows leapt forth to clear the deck of defenders: Tk'ttr's hard black chitin remained unscathed, although arrows embedded themselves all around him.

The ships collided, and the raiders swarmed across. Tk'ttr seized objects in his four hands: two belaying pins, a metal rod with some kind of hook at the tip, and the lid of a barrel. The Mu'ugalavyáni raiders swept towards Tk'ttr, who struck out with all four arms.

Now Tk'ttr hewed a forest of Human limbs, slamming clubs and rod into the softest of spots, and blocking their slow, predictable blows with the wooden lid. Red Human blood gouted forth, screams rose, the stink of their wastes assaulted his nostrils, and bodies hurtled over the rail to twitch facedown in the water. Tk'ttr fought fiercely but easily, feeling the satisfaction of striking at Humans. They seemed blind to certain directions and angles, leaving them vulnerable to his blows.

After a time Tk'ttr faced no further foes. The beaten raider was rowing rapidly away. Emerging from his daze of battle, the Pé Chói gazed about.

The Humans wrapping dirty cloths about the wet wounds in their soft flesh were peering at him in awe. His keen hearing perceived their whispers: "He never moved," "He never flinched," "He stood like Thénu Thendráya Peak and the storm clouds broke about him!" Tk'ttr could only gaze speechlessly at the soft, stupid, inscrutable creatures.

When at sunset the oceans finally calmed, Tk'ttr's terror subsided sufficiently to allow him to shift his footing. His claws withdrew from the holes they had dug in the hardwood of the deck. He returned cautiously to his cabin, climbing carefully along the gently rolling deck, never taking a step without both strong, lower arms gripping something secure.

While the rest of the long journey was miserable, the Humans treated him respectfully thereafter. When once more he stood on dry land he gazed about at the noisome crowds of Tsá'ra. What a species, he thought, whose lives are so cheap that it admires those who slaughter its own.

# Ksárul

*Ancient Lord of Secrets, Doomed Prince of the Blue Room, Master of Magic and Sorcery, Knower of the Inner Names of All the Worlds, He Who Confronts the Inner Being of Reality, the Rebel of the Gods.*



Lord Ksárul is like Lord Thúmis in that both Gods quest for knowledge, yet the Blue Lord is unlike the Grey, for He holds that wisdom has no meaning in the abstract, nor need it be written into books for all to see, or used for the benefit of society. Lord Ksárul seeks knowledge for the sake of power, power that is the individual's greatest instinctive goal. Indeed, if a society is to exist at all, it must be for reasons of individual aggrandizement, and the ultimate final "good" is the victory of Lord Ksárul.

Thus, Lord Ksárul aids those who would learn forbidden secrets, those who would contact the dwellers on other Planes, those who seek knowledge, and those who would serve Him against the forces of Stability.

The way in which the worshipper of Lord Ksárul views the world was well-stated by the noted scholar of the Blue Lord, Tsémel Qurén hiKétkolel, High Ritual Priest of Lord Ksárul in Béy Sü, in *The Book of Ebon Bindings*,

*"We must learn who and what we are in order that we may dominate our environment and our fellows. To do otherwise is to become a slave to those who would then enforce their will upon us. To study, to learn, to practice the Arts — these things must be for the benefit of the self. The faithful of Lord Ksárul is the one who outwits the warrior, rules the peasant, and stands behind the throne of the king."*

Lord Ksárul seeks to establish rulership and society as a tool towards His own ultimate victory, so that His Godhead continues even after the Final Change to be wrought by Lord Hrü'ü. Magic, science, technology, and wisdom are all means to this end, the tools of the wise. To triumph, the individual employs these tools, and not the heavy swords of war, not the plows of the peasants, nor even the edicts of kings. Sensual pleasure can be enjoyed by the wise man, but it must be tempered with the clear perception of one's goals. Life after death is possible for the wise man as well, but mere continued consciousness in the tomb can give but poor satisfaction. The half-life of the Undead is not enough. Raw violence, too, can be used, but again it should not be purposeless, and it must bring about those changes that will gratify the ego. Even the Final Chaos of Lord Hrü'ü can and must be ruled and shaped by the ego, as a ship is guided through the storm by the hand of her steersman.

## Theology

The theology of the Temple of Ksárul is particularly difficult to describe since the very keynote of this Temple is "Mystery." Most of His true doctrine is concealed from outsiders. His greatest shrines lie either in the labyrinths beneath the oldest cities or else in remote and inaccessible jungles and mountains. His true priests go masked. And His most important tenets are couched in the secret language invented by His worshippers long ago, the arcane and complex "Tongue of the Priests of Ksárul."

## The Outer Doctrines

It is of course understandable that the doctrines of the Lord of Secrets should make little logical sense to those not privy to His Mysteries. The Outer Doctrines are only a shell meant to satisfy the uninformed, while the priests of the Inner Sphere pursue their own goals.

## Color

Lord Ksárul's colors are the shining silver of His unknowable Intellect, the black of Lord Hrü'ü, and of course deep azure, an indigo-purple reminiscent of the Blue Room in which the God is said to lie sleeping.

## Symbol

The symbol of Lord Ksárul is the beetle, often pictured emerging from a crescent, representing the Lord's emergence from the Blue Room.

## Astrology

The dark sides of all the planets and moons of Tékumel's system are deified as Aspects of Lord Ksárul, and He is said to have authority over their astrological influences. Lord Thúmis has dominion over the light, bright sides of these planets and moons. It is said that the natures of these two Deities war with one another, sometimes one getting the upper hand and sometimes the other, resulting in eclipses, the new and waning moons, etc.

## Numerology

Lord Ksárul's number is 8, which is devious, calculating, powerful in knowledge, selfish, and unknown. This Lord's Temple is expert in Harmonizing, that is, sensing the power and vibrations of the integral Universe and setting one's soul to vibrating accordingly.

To Harmonize with Lord Ksárul, one sits upon a deep indigo mat in a blue room, within the magical diagram called the Interlocking Squares of Djaréva, with candles that are filled with a chemical that makes them glow blue (or a lantern with blue glass windows). One faces west, which is the direction of Lord Ksárul's sleeping place, and holds one's hands to the north and south. Then one takes the sound "77" (the letter representing Lord Ksárul's numerical value) into one's heart and mouth. One utters "tlaaaaaah!" in a soft and expiratory fashion until one's breath is gone. Then one repeats the process, visualizing the numeral and the "77" over and over until the harmonic is achieved. With some this requires fasting and penance, with others only repetition; a few succeed immediately, but such are rare.

#### *Costume*

Priests of Ksárul wear black robes, smiling masks of silver, and squarish headdresses of black velvet. His priestesses are similarly attired, but their masks are of black wood. Like all else within the Temple, attire has symbolic significance. The black robes denote the approach of the dark, the descent into the lightless and soundless void. The squarish headdress signifies the four quadrants of the universe. The smiling silver mask worn by his priests is both an imitation of Lord Ksárul's patient, emotionless, and totally inscrutable being, and also a concealment of his identity from the intrusion of others. The metal silver symbolizes the slumberous gleam of the hidden intellect. The priestesses' masks of black wood depict the belief that the thoughts and minds of females are a softer yet more intricately intertwined substance. Each priestly vestment is embroidered with the verses of the Ritual of Obeisance to the Unknowable Dark in black thread upon black cloth. Priests and priestesses also wear robes, stoles, pendants, and other items that further denote their precise offices within the Temple.

The elaborate robes and mask of the Temple are only worn for the performance of rituals and services to the God. Beyond the temple grounds the clergy of Lord Ksárul go garbed as other Tsolyáni, with only a beetle-and-crescent brooch, or a kilt patterned in indigo-blue to demonstrate their faith.

#### *Rituals*

The rituals of the Outer Doctrines of Lord Ksárul are by no means as mysterious or deadly as those of the Inner Sphere. Many of the great clans of the Imperium participate in His nightly and annual celebrations. Priestly processions and ritual acts, such as garbing an image of the God in ceremonial robes, display more pomp and circumstance than the other members of the Dark Trinity prefer.

Lord Ksárul's ceremonies occur at night, with the last performed just before dawn and the first just after sunset, according to timing set by the Temple. Spaced about every three hours, the rituals occur simultaneously throughout the Empire, although the rituals themselves differ from place to place.

#### *The Ceremony of the Opening of the Dark*

A sunset ritual that celebrates the onset of Lord Ksárul's Dominion of the Night with proud processions and the ringing of the *Tunkúl-gongs*

#### *The Awakening in Azure*

The ritual of the Awakening in Azure is conducted when full twilight has come over the land and Lord Ksárul's assumption of power is complete.

#### *Ritual of Obeisance to the Unknowable Dark*

A basic catechism of the Temple, it sets forth the obedience of the worshipper to the Will of the God and the basic tenets of the faith. Its words and steps are memorized by all beginning students and embroidered in black thread upon the black ceremonial robes of the priesthood.

#### *Victory of the Master of the Planets*

A midnight celebration of the full victory of Lord Ksárul over the entire universe, as doctrine states will occur at the End of Time.

#### *The End of the Rule of Night*

Each day at dawn the *Tunkúl-gongs* signal the End of the Rule of Night and the retreat of Lord Ksárul's forces before His enemy Lord Hnálla, represented by the sun. This is not a dour ceremony, however, for although the Temple of Ksárul is not a temple of Cycles, like those of Lady Avánthe or Lord Hrü'ü, still this ritual recognizes the inevitable return of Lord Ksárul just as the Night will inevitably follow the coming Day.

#### *The Keys*

The Outer Doctrines say that each of the Ten Walls which imprison Lord Ksárul has a "Key," and that it was a condition agreed to by all of the Gods that these Keys should be concealed somewhere in Tékumel's universe. It was further stipulated that these Keys must have physical form and must be accessible to humans and lesser beings. The reasons for these conditions are not known — or, rather, are known only to the Gods.

Three of these Keys have been located: one is in the High Temple of Ksárul in Béy Sü; another was recently acquired by the Temple from a certain young priest of Ksárul; and the third is kept in a crystal case in the Hall of Dripping Doom in the House of Tenebrous Sighs in the Palace of Bássa, King of the Black Ssú, on the other side of Tékumel.

The locations of the other Keys are not known, although recent attention has been focused upon the mountain valley of Kashkomái, two days' march northeast of Sokátis. There, the locals claim, the apocryphal "First Founder" is said to have built his home; magical towers appear and vanish, the dread One Who Is is held at bay, the Goddess of the Pale Bone strives to enter Tékumel's plane, the One Other lures the foolish with traps and treasures, and the Wards and Keys to Lord Ksárul's chamber lie scattered like seashells on a beach. As with Dórmoron Plain in Mu'ugalavyá, these claims made by the local inhabitants must be taken with a grain of salt, and a firm grip on one's purse. "Authentic" Wards and

Keys, pieces of Lord Ksárul's own ancient armor, and Hrúgga's very codpiece can be bought for only a few *Hlásh* in almost any marketplace in Tsolyánu...

#### *Sacrifices*

The faithful of Lord Ksárul sacrifice small statues of blue clay or stone, depicting victorious poses from Dórmoron Plain (and never the sleeping posture imposed by His imprisonment). Wealthy persons present Lapis and sapphire statues. These sacrifices are presented once a year, usually at times traditional to the Clan.

There are localized differences as well. For example, in Púrdimal the lowest clans sacrifice thin bluish-black wafers colored with dyes and spices. These wafers are edible, but are not considered particularly tasty. Such regional customs occur everywhere throughout the Empire. The most mundane sacrifices include the deep purple *Tsévu*-fruit, and a few rare varieties of local flowers which bear black petals.

#### *Blood Sacrifice*

Lord Ksárul demands human sacrifices only upon rare occasions, in order to "enhance the interrelationships of the planes." Human sacrifice is not a common practice of His Temple, and almost never occurs as part of the Outer Doctrines.

#### *The Afterlife*

Lord Ksárul promises His faithful the Circle of Sapphire, a place of close proximity to the God, the presence of eternal, pulsating might and power, where the spirit-soul shall perpetually rejoice in its personal knowledge and its victory.

The hell of Lord Ksárul is a land of strange and whimsical punishments, in which the spirit-soul wanders disconsolate and helpless, with neither knowledge nor power, unable to aid itself or to prevent in its humiliation and torment.

#### *History*

Lord Ksárul was first contacted during the reign of the 22nd scion of the Empire of the Fishermen Kings. His role in the Pantheon of Change (the *Tlokiriqaluyal*) is that of the Knower and the Worker of Transitions. Following contact, the mysteries and doctrines of His recondite faith spread throughout the realm of the Fishermen Kings. For a time there were religious persecutions and wars between the Red Robes of Lord Vimúhla and the silver-masked Black Robes of the Doomed Prince. It was during this time that the complex hieroglyphic script and language of the Tongue of Ksárul was created for secret communication.

Yet, there are hints that Lord Ksárul was known and worshipped long before even the lost empire of the Fishermen Kings. The fragmentary records of the Empire of Llyán of Tsámra contain references to a mysterious "Blue Lord," and several of the Shadow Gods of Livyánu (Kikumársha, Qame'él, Ru'ungkáno, The Horned One of Secrets, The One of Fears, and Vrusáemaz) have similarities to the Doomed Prince. The origins of Lord Ksárul's worship may date back even to the Time of

Darkness when mankind still had access to the ancient sciences and technology. Legend has it that, in earlier ages, the priests of Lord Ksárul were able to construct mutated creatures from the bodies of both the living and the dead: e.g. the *Hrá*, the *Qól*, the *Mrúr*, and certain others. The power of spell-creation, the construction and repair of "Eyes" and other devices, the art of writing "Books of Power," and other skills were also theirs. Some say that certain of these attainments are still known, hidden away from jealous eyes in the remote temples and monasteries of Lord Ksárul's Inner Sphere.

The Outer Doctrines were first formulated by the Priest Pavár, who was the founder of the pantheon which now pervades Tsolyáni life. The Scrolls of Pavár described the *Tlomitlányal*, the Five Lords of Stability, and the *Tlokiriqáluyal*, the Five Lords of Change. Pavár set forth the roles and the relationships which each of these Deities sees for their devotees in the many Planes: how each God must be served and how life is to be lived.

#### *Legends*

##### *The Battle of Dórmoron Plain*

This formative legend of the Temple is recounted in the majestic *Lament to the Wheel of Black* and the *Song of the Reaper of Sighs*. Many important mythical figures from the Legend of Dórmoron Plain have helped to form the character of modern Tsolyáni culture. Viridáme, one of the followers of Lord Ksárul at the Battle, is a lineage-namesake (e.g. the renowned priestess Kálusü hiViridáme, whose reputation for sorcerous skill precedes her throughout the Empire), and many other names and elements of Tsolyáni culture have their origins in this legend.

It is said that during the battle of Lord Ksárul against the rest of the Gods, Humanity was called forth as one among many minions in the struggle. For his assistance in this conflict, Man was granted the Power of Enchantments.

As the Gods of Change perceived Lord Ksárul's true ambitions they withdrew their support one by one. Lord Vimúhla left Lord Ksárul first, becoming angry with His arrogance. Lord Hrü'ü withdrew, reclaiming His Chariot, which forced Lord Ksárul to make a stand upon Dórmoron Plain. Lady Dlamélish, said to have been Lord Ksárul's lover, was the last to withdraw Her support from Him, and when She departed She retained His gift of the Ebon Dagger.

Legend has it that there are planes upon which the Battle of Dórmoron Plain still rages endlessly. Occasional unlucky inhabitants of Tékelmel who are drawn through into these dimensions find themselves used as warriors: killing and being killed, then being revived again and again to fight on against the demonic foe until the end of time.

When Lord Ksárul was captured and imprisoned, the Nine Gods and the One Other erected walls around the Blue Room to prevent Him from escaping or His followers from rescuing Him. His prison is a "pocket dimension," a tiny universe hidden between the larger dimensional matrices. A few humans who have achieved

spiritual rapport with Lord Ksárul report that this "place" appears as a sort of chamber hung in flickering blue velvet and lit by sconces of azure flame. In these visions, Lord Ksárul himself appears as a human youth sunk in stasis-sleep upon a couch draped in indigo-purple. He is robed in black velvet, and upon His breast lies an ebon staff tipped with a glittering blue gem in the shape of a great beetle. His lips are curved in a perpetual smile, soft, dreaming, moonlike, yet somehow impersonal and emotionless. All of this is perhaps only a "seeming," an illusion which makes the vision comprehensible to human eyes and not necessarily "reality..." if indeed there be a single "reality" for all beings alike.

The "walls" of the Blue Room are not material walls but rather barriers incomprehensible otherwise to our limited human perceptions. In order, from innermost to outermost, these walls were erected by the Gods Hnálla, Hrü'ü, Karakán, Vimúhla, Thúmis, Sárku, Avánthe, Dlamélish, Belkhánu, and by the One Other. The Cohorts of the Gods either play no role in this part of the legend, or are named only as "assisting" Their Masters in the forming of these walls.

The Outer Doctrines hold that although the Doomed Prince lies sleeping, yet His intellect continues to control great powers and is operative in this universe. His abilities are weakened and diffused by His imprisonment, yet so great are His faculties that even in bondage He is mighty. Were He to be freed, He would again challenge the authority of the Gods, and this time He would be victorious in the Last Battle of the World. His allies await Him on many planes to be called back to join again in the conflict.

#### *The Visitations of Girigámish*

The legend of the Visitations of Girigámish speaks of this priest of Lord Ksárul whose adventures took him to the Nine Pylons of the Barrier Gods, the Gate of Iron Fangs, and the River that Flows into Eternity.

#### The Inner Doctrines

Outwardly, this Temple adheres to the structures and patterns of the other Temples of Tsolyánu: certain clans support the rituals; vast tracts of lands are operated in Lord Ksárul's name by fief-holders, tenant farmers, or slaves; and there is the usual progression of Circles within His priesthood, etc. Yet the true power structure, the Inner Sphere of the Temple, is unique.

Certain priests and priestesses of very minor rank are in reality the masters of the Inner Sphere, the tightly organized secret society within the Temple that maintains Lord Ksárul's secret doctrines and implements His true plans and goals. A complex cell-like structure ensures secrecy, and the Inner Doctrines are communicated to those in the Outer Sphere (and thence to outsiders) only indirectly and with great circumspection. Funds are diverted from the income of the Temple for the Inner objectives, and often those in the Outer Sphere are unaware of their true purposes as they go about the tasks set forth for them by the Temple.

#### *Doctrine*

The Inner Doctrines of the Temple of Ksárul cannot be ascertained with any certainty, due to the secrecy in which they are maintained. There is a speculation to the effect that Lord Ksárul is not really imprisoned at all but has voluntarily "withdrawn" in order to strengthen his powers, and that one day He will return to conquer all of the worlds. Another hypothesis holds that the legend of the Blue Room is but a fabrication put forward by Lord Ksárul's minions themselves, and that in reality He continues to operate in this world under a variety of names and guises. Still another theory states that He has abandoned this series of dimensions entirely and has nothing more to do with Tékumel, and that only His allies and His worshippers continue to hold His order together for greedy motives of their own (this is perhaps a rumor favored by His foes). None of these statements are anything more than conjecture, however, since the priests of the Inner Sphere are totally close-mouthed and secretive, their lips and minds sealed even from the highest agents of the Imperium by magical wards and by the convoluted labyrinth of the Inner Sphere structure. All that can be known with certainty is that the Inner Sphere has very real goals both inside and outside of Tsolyánu; that there is some form of cooperation between the Inner Sphere and certain secret societies within the Temples of Sárku and Hrü'ü; and that there is rivalry with the other Gods.

#### *Keys and Wards and Plaques*

The Keys and Wards are the legendary treasures sought by every priest and priestess of Lord Ksárul. According to these legends, two Wards protect each of the Ten Keys apiece, and all the Keys and Wards are disguised as mundane items and hidden upon every Plane. However, while there are infinite Planes, there are only Ten Keys and Twenty Wards: each Ward and Key are the planar manifestations of the ten incomprehensible extraplanar devices created by the Gods.

Known only to the Inner Sphere of the Temple of Ksárul is the fact that there is a instructional plaque which accompanies each Key and its two Wards. While the Keys and Wards are unrecognizable, the Plaques are not disguised. Written upon a red-gold metal that is quite hard, the plaques contain instructions, usually in Bednálljan or Llyáni. There are "original" plaques, written in the squarish writing of the Ancients, but made of the same substance. Who the translators of these ancient plaques may have been is lost to time, as is the means of producing further translations upon this unknown alloy. It is said that the Temple of Ksárul in Sokátis recently came into possession of one of these plaques, which was then smuggled to safety prior to the capture of that city by the rebel Prince Rereshqála Tlakotáni in 2367.

The inscriptions upon each plaque are quite detailed. The information includes which God erected the wall to which the Key is applied; the guises under which the Key and its Wards are hidden; the means by which the Wards may be rendered safe, once discovered; and directions, often given in Other-Planar angles and landmarks, to the

Wall itself. The plaques may be found in the vicinity of the Key and its Wards, but many have been dislocated down through the ages.

Finding such a plaque is only the first step on a long and perilous road for those who would attempt to loose Lord Ksárul's bonds. Only the most learned of scholars, less than a dozen in a generation, will even be able to interpret the Other-Planar directions on the plaque. Should these academicians be somehow persuaded to set forth on a quest which crosses the perilous spaces between the planes, they will be opposed along the way by those who would not see Lord Ksárul set loose, and by others for whom the possession of a Key or Ward is a prize in itself.

Yet there can be no doubt that the only paradise greater than that awarded by Lord Ksárul to those who tear down one of the walls surrounding the Blue Room is that which He will grant the valiant soul who finally sets Him free. But to earn the gratitude of the Sleeping God, one risks the wrath of the others...

#### *The Soul*

Lords Ksárul and Thúmis emphasize the combination of the *Hlákme* (the Mind) with the *Chusétl* (the Shadow-Self)- Lord Ksárul preaches wisdom, knowledge and far-ranging experience for personal, egotistic goals and the eventual release of the Doomed Prince from bondage.

#### *Studies*

The Outer Doctrines of Lord Ksárul command that knowledge and science be acquired wherever possible. Thus, Lord Ksárul's Temple engages in vigorous researches into the sciences and arts. These researches are complicated by many factors, however: clans and other powers may oppose researches which might threaten their traditional livelihoods; the malleable nature of reality does not encourage the development of scientific methodology; noble persons hold minutiae and detail-work beneath them, the domain of scribes and clerks; and the other Temples find Ksárul's priests to be stingy research partners. Thus true discoveries are rare, and their acceptance by the society at large is doubtful.

#### *Alchemy*

Temple studies in alchemy are often mixed and confused with sorcery, making true advances rare.

#### *Genetics*

It is said that the priesthoods of Lords Ksárul, Grugánu, and The Homed One of Secrets in Livyánu know, or perhaps once knew, the techniques by which strange monsters and genetic sports could be created, possibly utilizing devices left by the ancients. It is thought that this is the origin of such creatures as the *Qól*, the hideous, serpent-headed guardians of the secret places of the Underworlds.

Many of the larger temples of this faith are rumored to possess operational facilities for the creation of such creatures and the repair of devices of the Great Ancients. Junior members of the priesthood are not permitted to know of them, of course, and new recruits have their

minds magically barred until their competence and trustworthiness has been assured. Presently, these workshops are places where the most educated priests and priestesses work to repair or analyze devices of the ancients.

#### *Historical research*

The Temples of Thúmis, Ksárul, and their Cohorts are particularly interested in historical studies, although they focus more on the recording and review of historical facts than upon their analysis.

These Temples have also mounted many systematic archaeological expeditions in order to both locate treasures of the Ancients and acquire knowledge of the past as well.

#### *Linguistics*

With the multitude of tongues to be found in and around the Five Empires, the Temples of Thúmis, Ksárul, their Cohorts, and several of the Livyáni Shadow Gods pride themselves on having at least a word-list of every tongue on the continent, plus textbooks for the ancient and classical languages. The language of Bednálljan Salarvyáni is employed by the Temple of Ksárul (and other Temples of Change) as the accepted language of scholarship, literature and diplomacy.

#### The Secret Tongue of the Priests of Ksárul

The Priests of Ksárul constructed the complex hieroglyphic script and language known as the Secret Tongue of Ksárul during the time of the Fishermen Kings. This artificial argot was used for secret communication during the wars between worshippers of the Red Lord and the Blue, and has remained the private property of the Temple of Ksárul ever since.

Its script consists of three separate symbolic systems used simultaneously: a phonemic alphabet to aid in pronunciation, a corpus of ideographs that carry the root-meanings of the lexicon, and an inventory of symbols that represent grammatical elements (prefixes, suffixes, infixes, etc.). A "word" is thus made up of an ideograph, several phonemic letters (one can insert as few or as many as one thinks necessary — less in the case of a common lexeme, more in the case of a rare one), and further grammatical elements in an outer ring to indicate the usage of the word in the syntactic matrix. There are thousands of magical, historical, scientific, etc. texts in this "language".

#### *Organizational sculpture*

The Temples of Thúmis and Ksárul have produced "sculptured analyses" of religious tenets, other-planar wisdom, and even languages. The symbology of such sculptures is complex enough to allow the display of almost any type of organization once tradition has established the values of the elements.

#### *The Halls of the Priesthoods of Shadow*

These halls are a special inner shrine devoted to an individual temple's local Aspect of Lord Ksárul, having to do with shadows, darkness, and night. This is the special sanctuary of the Inner Sphere of this temple, and its location is held secret even to Inner Sphere members

of other temples of Ksárul (although it is difficult to know who these people are). Here the grandeur and strategy of the individual temple is planned and celebrated, and special traditional rituals are observed which have only tangential relation to the doctrines of the greater Temple.

#### *Rituals*

The farther one descends into the labyrinth within and beneath the pyramidal base of the temple, the more secret and esoteric the rituals of the Blue Lord become. The Demons of the Dark are propitiated here, and the Dwellers in Shadow receive the minds and wills of hapless victims as nourishment, and the Nine Inner Aspects are worshipped in ways that are best left described.

#### *Acts of the Velvet Dark*

Performed within the antechambers adjacent to the Inner Shrine of the Temple of Ksárul, the replica of the Blue Room which is located in the subterranean labyrinths beneath the temple. The priests and priestesses performing these rituals dwell all their lives in total darkness and never emerge into the light.

#### *Stridor unto the Encroaching Nullity*

This is a ritual of the Inner Temple whose meaning is unknown. It is also said to be an effective replacement for the Ritual of Summoning of the Demon Llyanmákchi. Both types of Ritual of Summoning are expensive, complex, and difficult to perform, but the Stridor is less archaic.

### **Temple Layout**

Like most other Tsolyáni religious edifices, a temple to Lord Ksárul consists of an outer walled court with a *Tunkál* tower in one corner. On both sides of a central plaza within these walls there are administrative chambers for taxes, tithes, records, schools, storehouses, guest houses for visiting priests and clan chiefs who follow Lord Ksárul, and other such areas. To the rear of the main temple are its dormitories, cookhouses, and other secular buildings.

The temple itself stands upon a flat-topped pyramid, with stairs leading up the south side to the north (in accordance with obscure elements of doctrine). Unlike certain other temples, which are built quite high and which have swooping peaked and gabled roofs adding to their awesome height, the temple is of modest height, though not so low as the one-story temples of Lady Dlamélish. Usually, two or three levels of temple are topped with rather conservative sloped and tiled roofs which flare only slightly at their bases.

The outer gates of this upper temple open into a series of pillared halls. Engravings lining the walls and pillars depict the Legend of Dórmoron Plain. These halls open upon small courts, porticoes, and arcades, and then into further pillared chambers, further courts and galleries, and at last into a rather small, dark shrine at the very back of the temple.

This shrine is a replica of the Blue Room, draped in blue velvet and set with scintillating diamonds and crystals. Lord Ksárul is represented as a young man asleep upon a couch, a secret smile upon His face. Worshipers are not permitted to enter this chamber, but remain in an antechamber where priests and priestesses perform rites and receive offerings.

If one follows other routes through the maze of interlocking halls and courts, one comes to the smaller shrines devoted to the Greater Aspects of the Doomed Prince. There are sixty-two Aspects, each representing an aspect of Lord Ksárul's being, a specialized and focused facet of Him. Not every Aspect will have a shrine in every temple.

Hidden in some alcove, there is always one secret stairway down into the pyramid itself, for it is in the darkness below that further rites are performed. The farther one goes down into the labyrinth, the more secret and esoteric this Lord's rituals become. Below these lower shrines, there is always another replica of the Blue Room, reached only through a series of secret passageways and guarded by every creature known to the ancient sages.

Below this, still farther into the labyrinths, the devotees of the Inner Sphere commemorate the doctrines of the Doomed Prince with ceremonies that have never been witnessed by any outsider since the days of the First Imperium. According to the Inner Doctrines, any who violate this secrecy must be slain, even if it takes a thousand, thousand years. None have ever escaped vengeance.

### **Secular Activities**

The Temple of Ksárul is careful to maintain excellent relations with the Imperium. Taxes and tithes are scrupulously reported and paid, lands are surveyed and kept up, records are meticulously maintained, and whenever the Imperium has called upon the Temple for aid, it has been given unstintingly. Only in this way, perhaps, can the Temple continue to exist, for the temporal power of the Empire is very great, and an alliance between the other Temples and the Imperium would soon see the end of Lord Ksárul's worship in Tsolyánu. At the very least, a breach between the Temple and the Imperium would result in the confiscation of the vast lands and wealth of the Temple and drive it underground. The Imperium thus winks at the existence of the Inner Sphere and does not chum up the already-muddy ground of Imperial politics.

While monasteries devoted to Lord Ksárul exist, and devote themselves exclusively to His worship, most adherents to His faith must content themselves with more mundane occupations. His temples exist in both urban and rural areas, and as part of the societal fabric must support themselves and contribute to the society. Therefore, the Temple of Ksárul has an interest in a number of business and charitable institutions around the empire.

## Businesses

Lord Ksárul's worship is most popular in the west-central portions of the Tsolyáni Empire, between the Missúma River and the Chákan Forest, especially the northern parts of that region. These areas include vast tracts of *Dná*-grain fields managed by the Temple, the so-called Swamps of Ksárul in the region around Púrdimal which produce *Yáfa*-rice, and minerals and gems mined from mountainous area around Thénu Thendráya peak.

## Public Works and Services

Much of the schooling of the worshippers of the Lords of Change is done through the great educational complexes of the Temple of Ksárul. Followers of Change may send their children either to a school run by the priesthoods of Lords Ksárul or Grugánu or, if they wish, directly to a more doctrinaire seminary operated by their own sects in which their specific tenets can be stressed. Students belonging to the sects of the Lords of Stability are rare in these schools, preferring instead to attend their own institutions in the Temples of Thúmis or Keténgku.

The greatest of the schools run by the Temple of Ksárul is the Hall of Sapphire Glory at Mrelú, in which the outer learning of the Temple is made available to the scions of the nobility and wealthy clansmen from all over the Empire. There are smaller schools at Mekú, Púrdimal, Béy Sü, and other major centers throughout the land.

Literacy, foreign tongues, mathematics, philosophy, astronomy and astrology, history, ancient learning, and other subjects are taught, and there are specialized courses in theology (not open to those who are not worshippers of the Doomed Prince), music, the recitation of epics and praises to the Emperor, poetry, and other arts. If the student is a priest or priestess of Lord Ksárul, he or she may go on to the Inner Hall, where various forms of magic, the Tongue of the Priests of Ksárul, necromancy, geomancy, divine interpretations, and other less-savory topics are available. Once devotees of the other Lords of Change have completed their studies in the Outer classes, they return to their own temples for specialized instruction.

## Cities of Broad Influence

Lord Ksárul is particularly popular in the cities of Mrelú and Púrdimal, and He also has power at Úrmish and Butrús in Pán Cháka. His adherents are scattered throughout the other great cities of the south, and He is weakest in the north and in the east.

Like every other Temple in the Empire, however, each individual temple operates with a great degree of independence. Thus each temple has its own character, appearance, and traditions.

### *Púrdimal*

The Temple of Ksárul in Púrdimal is as grand and beautiful as any of the temples to this God. Constructed of granite mined out of the mountains surrounding Thénu Thendráya Peak, the low, square structure glows a characteristic purple as the light strikes it. Hard, dark *Tíu*-wood and silver emboss the furnishings and

doorframes, and inlaid polished marbles of deep blue and sapphire lend a somber tone to the interior.

### *Powerful Members of This Temple*

#### Saku'ú hiFershéna

A priest of the 14th Circle, a military priest of the Temple and *Kérdu* of the Legion of the Prince of the Blue Room, 35th Imperial Medium Infantry, based at Púrdimal. This Legion has eight Cohorts and one in training. The Ndálu Clan supports it, and General Saku'ú is almost certainly a member of this group. He is 49 years old, married to an Aridáni woman who serves as one of the Captains (*Kási*) of his Legion, and has one son, about ten years old. He is of the Dark Flame Clan. Physically, he is rather squat, hairy, and voluble, with beetling black eyebrows — all a sign of ancient Salarvyáni blood. General Saku'ú is working hard to develop both military skill and also the fanatic zeal which he feels necessary for a Temple Legion of this kind.

#### Chitlásha hiTlélsu. Cloak of Azure Gems Clan

A high-circle scholarly priestess of Ksárul and doubtless a member of the Ndálu Clan and the Inner Sphere, she is suspected of being a *Marékh*, one of the special guardians of the Imperium. A powerful and beautiful sorceress, she appears to be in her late twenties, although records of her activities in the Empire allegedly extend back for several decades. She is said to be a direct descendant of Suchlésa Talésha, the handmaiden to an Engsvanyáli empress who is notable in history for her influence from "behind the throne."

Lady Chitlásha lives with her husband (a dilettante and self-styled demonologist) and two children in a fief to the east and north of Púrdimal. She and her family have been unaccounted for since the revelation of Prince Táksuru Tlakotáni in Béy Sü during the Intercalary Days of 2365-66. Some reports have her imprisoned in the crypts beneath Avanthár for rebellious activities against the Emperor. Others have her a refugee with her family upon another plane, waiting for her chance to return and lead Prince Táksuru's forces in a victorious claim upon the Petal Throne.

#### Lord Héketth hiBurusá. Clan of the Black Hood

Scion of the old and noble Black Hood clan of Púrdimal, he is of the Twentieth Circle, a warrior, and *Kérdu* (General) of the Legion of Héketth of Púrdimal, 17th Imperial Heavy Infantry. Lord Héketth is a tough, seasoned warrior born in 2317, dark complected and nearly bald (which may bespeak inbreeding with the Old Ones of Púrdimal). He is difficult to approach, given to bitter rages, and drinks more than is good for him. His generalship is considered quite good, however. He may be a secret member of the Inner Sphere of the Temple of Lord Ksárul, but outwardly he gives no sign of much religious devotion. His legion is was based at Jakálla, but moved north to Béy Sü in 2367 to support Prince Táksuru Tlakotáni in his rebellion against Emperor Dhich'uné.

### *Mrelú*

The temple of Lord Ksárul in this city is home to a large and extensive observatory, with hemispherical,



equinoctial, and zodiacal dials, devices for measuring the planets' azimuths, meridian circles, etc. Some of these measure 40 to 50 meters from side to side and stand 20 to 30 meters high.

Also part of this temple is the Hall of Sapphire Glory, an educational complex in which the outer learning of the Temple is made available to the scions of the nobility and wealthy clansmen from all over the Empire.

#### ***Powerful Members of This Temple***

##### Lord Mríktoken hiSsanvúsa, Standing Stone Clan

Over seventy years of age, Lord Mríktoken is hereditary guardian of the Azure Robe of Hmakuyál, Senior Ritual Priest at Mrelú. He is a stick-thin, grim-visaged, grey-haired oldster, totally devoted to the Lord of the Blue Room, and probably a member of the Inner Sphere and Ndálu Clan. He is a renowned scholar of the Engsvanyáli language, and he often consulted with the author of the recent and much-abridged translation of the Book of Ebon Bindings. His advice was granted upon acceptance of a guarantee of proper safeguards against misuse of the Book, and hence that translation of the Book of Ebon Bindings is entirely emasculated. The sorcerous incantations contained therein are incapable of summoning any but demons of the most minor sort, and these should be controllable by any priest who is capable of interpreting the instructions and organizing the resources to conduct the ceremonies.

##### *Mekú*

The temple of Lord Ksárul in this city hosts a well-respected school for worshippers of Change. Many of the offspring of the upper-middle and middle clans in this area of the Empire attend this facility for advanced outer-temple schooling.

##### *Béy Sü*

The temple of Lord Ksárul in Béy Sü is both large and opulently outfitted, as befits a temple in the capital of the Empire. It hosts a Temple School second in quality only to the Hall of Sapphire Glory in Mrelú. Within the Archive of the Left Hand, one of the larger libraries in this temple, is stored a copy of the Engsvanyáli recension of the Book of Ebon Bindings.

#### ***Powerful Persons of This Temple***

##### Prince Táksuru Tlakotáni (nee hiViridáme)

A man of excellent background, well educated and urbane, he was raised a Viridáme of the Cloak of Azure Gems Clan since his birth in 2340. He stands five-ten, stocky and muscular, with a strong jaw, heavy eyebrows, and short hair. He is a very serious, decisive man.

As a member of the noble hiViridáme lineage in a high clan, Prince Táksuru was educated in the best Temple Schools in Hmakuyál and Béy Sü, and trained hard in arms, tactics, sorcery and combat.

Following his *Khatunjálim*, Táksuru hiViridáme disappeared for several years, likely for training in one of the secret monasteries of Lord Ksárul. Thereafter he traveled extensively, visiting such distant locales as

western Livyánu, the Naqsái lands, Háida Pakála and Salarvyá.

Upon returning home in 2362, Táksuru took up residence in Bey SO, venturing forth to Avanthár and the monasteries of his Lord outside Thri'íl. Finally, during the Intercalary Days of 2365-6, Táksuru hiViridáme was presented in Béy Sü by the Baron Áld, the Temple of Ksárul, and certain others as a Prince of the Imperium, son of the late Emperor Hirkáne Tlakotáni and heir to the Petal Throne of Tsolyánu.

Prince Táksuru has always been skillful at utilizing those around him to good effect. He forms good working teams and organized forces. He's not an exceptional debater, or an eloquent speaker, but he is a good planner and tactician. Despite his youth, his self-assurance allows him to stand up to the experts and the elders and assert his positions.

##### Prince Mridóbu Tlakotáni

Raised as an Imperial Prince in the Fortress of Avanthár, Prince Mridóbu Tlakotáni was a consummate politician and administrator during the reign of his Imperial Father, and a favorite of the Royalist Party.

He disappeared during the usurpation of his father's throne by his half-brother, Prince Dhich'uné Tlakotáni, now the Emperor "Eternal Splendor." Prince Mridóbu was believed dead until he surfaced during the Intercalary Days of 2365-6. He apparently escaped death in Avanthár by hiding in his father's sarcophagus when it was transported to Béy Sü for interment. Compounding the surprise his reappearance fostered, Prince Mridóbu immediately endorsed his newly revealed half-brother, Prince Táksuru Tlakotáni, in the latter's claim upon the Petal Throne.

But his brush with death had not dulled Prince Mridóbu's taste for intrigue. During the spring of 2366 the Council of the Priesthoods in Béy Sü unexpectedly dispatched a messenger to Avanthár bearing a challenge to the Emperor's rule by Prince Táksuru Tlakotáni. Whether Prince Mridóbu manufactured this proclamation as a ruse is unknown, but he turned events to his advantage.

Having served Emperor Dhich'uné's purpose by helping him achieve the Throne, the Baron Áld had been betrayed in late 2365, and his Yán Koryáni forces attacked by Imperial troops. Seeking vengeance, the Baron and a select squad accompanied Prince Mridóbu, entering Avanthár disguised among the entourage that accompanied Prince Táksuru's challenge to the Emperor.

Even as the hapless messenger was prostrating himself before the Petal Throne to deliver Prince Táksuru's challenge, Prince Mridóbu was leading the Baron and his troops up through the interior of the Fortress of Avanthár. Following the secret passages only he, an Imperial Prince, Worshipper of Lord Ksárul, and lifelong resident of Avanthár could have known, the squad emerged within the Golden Tower itself.

Despite this secret advantage, Prince Mridóbu's coup was only successful because, unbeknownst to all, Emperor Dhich'uné had secretly departed His Imperial Seclusion

in the Golden Tower to celebrate certain arcane rites in the City of Sárku. Finding the Golden Tower unoccupied, Prince Mridóbu seized the throne, proclaiming himself Emperor under the throne-name "Risen to Rule."

His rule was short-lived, however. Only days after installing himself upon the Throne, Emperor Mridóbu was taken by surprise when from the bowels of Avanthár itself a hideous legion issued forth. Undead warriors, demons, and loathsome creatures of the Dark swarmed up the stairways, manifested in clouds of inky blackness, and poured through the very walls, summoned to purge Avanthár of all opposition to the Worm Prince. Emperor Mridóbu's aides and functionaries were torn to shreds by the steely claws of Undead creatures, engulfed whole by ichorous demons, and hurled bodily from windows hundreds of feet up the face of the Fortress.

Once again Mridóbu Tlakotáni is missing and presumed dead. At present only the Gods themselves know his fate.

#### Tsémel Qurén hiKétkolel. Clan of the Great Stone

High Ritual Priest of the temple of Lord Ksárul at Béy Sü and exalted Performer of the Ceremonies of the Opening of the Dark, Chief Celebrant of the Ritual of Awakening in Azure, and Master of the Halls of the Priesthood of Shadow, Lord Tsémel Qurén hiKétkolel controls the Temple of Intricate Offerings with a firm hand, despite the recent troubles in that city.

#### Lady Kálusü hiViridáme

A friend and onetime lover of the Baron of Yán Kór, accomplished sorceress and likely a *Marékh*. She has been acting as liaison between Prince Táksuru and the Baron of Yán Kór since the latter departed Tsolyánu for Yán Kór following Emperor Mridóbu's brief and tragic reign.

#### *Hmakuyál*

In the ancient subterranean city of Hmakuyál, the Temple of Ksárul maintains a secret headquarters where new initiates to the Inner Doctrines receive their rites. Additionally, the steady stream of pilgrims to this city seems to indicate that one of the Temple's educational monasteries is located here. And it is rumored that, in deep caverns below the city, priests of Lord Ksárul summon the dread Beast Without A Tail to do their bidding.

These secret facilities are known only to select members of the Temple's Inner Sphere. Meanwhile, Lord Ksárul has a public temple in the city of Hmakuyál as do the other Gods.

The public temple's College of Mirrored Radiance specializes in academic and theoretical studies, including magical research and theological education.

The debaters of its House of Cerulean Clarity are respected throughout the Empire. This large and well-funded academy includes among its staff experts in Llyáni, Bednálljan, and Engsvanyáli researches. It is reported that studies are also made here of the records and artifacts of the period before the Time of Darkness

and the Latter Times but, if so, the prelates of the Doomed Prince's Temple reveal their findings to no one.

Within the Colonnade of the Ambages of the Blue Room is rumored to be a display of several organizational sculptures of a quality equal to those displayed within the Hall of Many Tongues in the Monastery of the Grey Cloak of Thúmis in Dó Cháka. However, the priests of Lord Ksárul do not easily grant permission to view them.

#### *Powerful Persons of This Temple*

Scholarly Priest Mritisé hiChirkésu is perhaps the greatest living scholar of the period known as the Three States of the Triangle.

#### *Jakálla*

In the endless labyrinth beneath the city of Jakálla lie treasures that tempt many foolhardy adventurers to despoil the subterranean tombs and shrines. In an effort to frustrate these individuals, the Temple of Ksárul excavates circuitous and featureless mazes, laden with deadly traps.

The subterranean Shrine of the Azure Orb is located beneath the necropolis outside the city of Jakálla, where it is guarded by the Undead, the hungry creatures of the maze, and other, still more terrible, sentinels. Nearby, the sepulchers of the Pontiffs of the Temple of Lord Ksárul were once splendid, but the sacerdotal line stretches back through history to the lost, dusty reigns of the Engsvanyáli Priestkings, and the older catacombs are ghost-ridden indeed.

#### *Hauinngákte Monastery*

In the mountains to the east of Thri'íl, the worshippers of Lord Ksárul maintain a secret academy available to and known only to the most dedicated and devout of Lord Ksárul's scholarly priests. The paths traveled to the monastery by its initiates are hedged about with traps, snares, and illusions, and both human and nonhuman guards.

#### *Úrmish*

#### *Butrás*

#### *Penóm*

#### *Sokátis*

Many of the clans and tradespeople in these cities are worshippers of the Dark Trinity. The temples of Lord Ksárul are quite well maintained, but are not administrative or theological centers after the fashion of Hmakuyál.

#### *Thénu Thendráya Peak*

This tall, slender mountain is an inter-planar "lightning rod," seeming to attract Other-Planar power to its stepped plateaus as honey draws *Chrí*-flies.

It is in most ways an ordinary, if exceptionally tall mountain, and there are Tsolyáni who live upon the slopes and farm its upland valleys. For several hundred feet up from the foothills one can find game, forests, river sources, and hunter's crofts. The former Emperor even

attempted to build a Sákbe road up the side of the mountain, but the shifting waterways of the mountainside cliffs undercut even the carefully-laid arches and aqueducts that the Imperial engineers had laid.

But the mountain has a history of Other-Planar "discharges," natural events producing "rips" in the Skein of Reality and tremendous bursts of power. Legends claim that the undying Wizard Súbadim maintains a residence there, searching the mountain's slopes and cliffs for shards of the Egg of the World.

Such a setting naturally attracts the sorcerers and scholars of the Temple of Ksárul, who are rumored to maintain a monastery somewhere among the cliffs and crags. The locals will also warn the incautious and curious of certain other, unnamable deities whose priests and demons inhabit the treacherous purple cliffs. For only a few *Hlásh*, these same peasants will provide maps of safe routes up the mountain to Súbadim's house, spells of dismissal for the mountain's many demons, and amulets and charms guaranteed to offer perfect protection... at least, no one has ever returned to claim a refund.

#### *Chaigári Protectorate*

It is believed that the Refulgent Blue Curtain society of the Temple of Ksárul maintains secret monasteries somewhere in this area, but no precise locations are known. These monasteries are devoted to secret studies and all knowledge attained is dedicated directly to the God. Spies caught attempting to learn the locations of these monasteries or winkle out their secrets would be dealt with most severely.

#### **Politics**

The Temple of Ksárul has many facets. Outwardly, it is a staid and loyal servant of the Imperium. Within, there are currents and cross-currents. A newcomer to the priesthood may be left alone to pursue his way up the slow ladder of the Outer Sphere or, if he is seen to be useful, he may be approached by members of one or another of the secret societies (or even by members of one pretending to be members of another!), and even those who would remain aloof may find themselves thrust willy-nilly into the maelstrom of Temple intrigue and Imperial politics. It is almost impossible to ascertain who is a member of one of these societies and who is not. If one wished to contact the Ndálu Clan, for example, one would have a difficult time identifying a member unless that person wanted to be found, and no way thereafter to confirm that person's membership.

If one is asked to join the Inner Sphere, it is wise to consider whether one has the stamina and willingness to sacrifice personal goals for the total submission and arcane objectives of the Lord of the Blue Room. For while the Temple is dedicated to selfish gain, this must be achieved within the context of the greater good of the Temple. One who sought only to exploit the Temple for their own gain would naturally be rebuffed and rejected. As a member of the Inner Circle, one is subject to the edicts of the Temple; personal gain must be achieved consistently with these endeavors.

#### **Internal Factions**

##### *Ndálu Clan*

This clan represents the Inner Sphere and seeks power through political intrigue. Of the Temple's secret societies, this clan is the most dangerous to the Imperium. Its members are in communication with the Cusp of Night Society of the Temple of Hrü'ü and the Copper Tomb Society of the Temple of Sárku. This coalition supports the overthrow of those who serve the Lords of Stability and also those who require the purification of the universe by Lord Vimúhla's flames. The Ndálu Clan believes that the universe must be readied for Lord Ksárul's return: the worship of the Lords of Stability must be expunged, and the forces of both the Light and Flame must be dispersed. The Temple of Ksárul must be expanded into a monolithic theocratic state according to their doctrine, "The Land Repurified." They urge strong political activity, the removal of opposition by any means feasible, the support of missionaries, etc.

The Ndálu Clan is suspected of receiving aid in the form of magical devices and necromantic research from certain of the temples of the Shadow Gods of Livyánu, particularly Kikumársha, Qame'él, Ru'ungkáno, The Horned One of Secrets, The One of Fears, and Vrusáemaz. All of these temples share theological roots with the Temple of Ksárul and political goals with the Ndálu Clan. Of course, these Temples undoubtedly seek the overthrow of the Tsolyáni Empire for reasons of their own, and not simply for the establishment of a theocracy of Lord Ksárul in Tsolyánu.

Another ally of the Ndálu Clan is the Black Y Society, a clan of professional assassins. As professionals, the Black Y Society will work with anyone who can pay for their services, but its leaders seem to have a natural affinity for the objectives of the Ndálu Clan.

##### *The Society of the Blue Light*

This society gathers knowledge for personal and collective power. It seeks no political involvements. Its doctrine, "The Land Restored," holds that Lord Ksárul can best be served by the acquisition of knowledge and that it is the duty of its members to rebuild Lord Ksárul's ancient power. This, they claim, cannot be done through political intrigue and assassination — but rather through the slow gathering of science and technological knowledge. When Lord Ksárul returns, they argue, He alone will know how His powers must be used, and it is not for mankind to attempt to alter the current state of things and inadvertently frustrate His goals.

Moreover, no harm can be done by allowing mankind to possess this knowledge in the interim, since all temporal matters are but ephemeral and transitory, and when Lord Ksárul comes He will sweep away all worldly things and reorder the very fabric of the universe to suit His needs. The knowledge which mankind had before the Time of Darkness must thus be restored in expectation of His return. The Society of the Blue Light has never refused Imperial demands for knowledge and is considered politically harmless.

*The Refulgent Blue Curtain Society*

This party seeks the return of Lord Ksárul to dominance over the Gods and gathers secret knowledge to be used towards that end. Like the Society of Blue Light, they seek the acquisition of knowledge — but only for the service of the Blue Lord. To share knowledge with any other party is to aid the God's enemies. Taking the epics of the Battle of Dórmoron Plain quite literally, they state that He will need all of His powers in order to defeat His opponents, and thus all knowledge must be kept secret for Him and Him alone. They carry out their research in remote refuges sealed away even from others within the Temple of Ksárul. One of these places lies somewhere beneath the crags near Thénu Thendráya Peak, while it is said that another is hidden in the Chaigári Protectorate. The Refulgent Blue Curtain Society rejects any cooperation with other Temples, and for this reason their doctrine is called "The Land Refused." They have been known to steal books and devices, or destroy them if need be, in order to keep them from their opponents, and they have thus created almost a separate temple within the Temple.

*The Inner Sphere*

The Inner Sphere is the common name for that portion of the Temple of Ksárul that actually runs the temples and sets policies for individual temples and the priesthood at large. Members of the Inner Sphere usually have mundane roles within the Temple — Third Circle Ritual Priestess, Master of the Administrative Scribes of The Hall of the Hand Which Moves, etc. — while actually holding high leadership posts within the Inner Sphere.

Secrecy so clouds the workings of the Inner Sphere that various elements of its structure can only be guessed at: that it has factions of its own; that certain priests and nobles are members of those factions; the relation, if any, of these to the known factions of the Temple of Ksárul such as the Ndálu Clan, etc. The prime requisite of membership to the Inner Circle is secrecy, and few details have ever escaped.

Once a student has been accepted into the Inner Sphere, he or she may disappear for years at a time — and may never emerge again, at least not in the guise in which their friends and clanspeople had known them! Membership in the Inner Sphere thus calls for great personal sacrifice and a willingness to submit to the dictates of the Doomed Prince. Relatively few students are willing to undergo the rigors of this training, followed by the complete submission then demanded by Lord Ksárul's priests. For this reason, perhaps, Lord Ksárul's sect attracts a great many itinerant scholars, students who seek learning within the Outer Sphere but who are unwilling to undergo the dangerous and demanding instruction which would bring them into the Inner Sphere.

*Temple Alliances*

Among the Lords of Stability, Lord Ksárul shares an interest in knowledge with the Temples of Thúmis and Belkhánu. These parallel interests are drawn into conflict by Lord Ksárul's grasping, secretive nature. The

philosophies of Lord Thúmis, which call for the dissemination of knowledge to all, are directly opposed to the secrets of Lord Ksárul. Lord Belkhánu's interest in the maintenance of the Many Planes conflicts sharply with Lord Ksárul's desire to bring all under His control.

So while Lord Ksárul is frequently forced by necessity, logistics, or politics, to cooperate with these Stability Temples in various researches, these are uneasy and swiftly-dissolved ventures.

*The Dark Trinity*

The Temple of Ksárul is so closely allied with the Temples of Hríü and Sárku that their union is named the Dark Trinity. For although they are all Temples of Change, the cold intellect of Lord Ksárul has little in common with the mindless destruction of Lord Vimúhla or the selfish hedonism of Lady Dlamélish.

*External Parties*

When Prince Mridóbu resided there, Lord Ksárul was a powerful influence in the Fortress of Avanthár. With the usurpation of the throne by Prince Dhich'uné, Prince Mridóbu's followers fell far out of favor. And after Prince Mridóbu briefly seized the throne in 2366, his followers were tossed bodily from the upper windows of the Fortress by Emperor Dhich'uné's avenging forces of Undead.

*The Priestly Party**The Royalist Party*

Lord Ksárul is quite influential among the Priestly and Royalist parties, both of which embrace their Engsvanyáli and Bednálljan heritages.

*The Imperial Party*

Lord Ksárul's influence is felt in the Imperial Party, but the Temple's present influence is exerted by those who support, or feign their support of Emperor Dhich'uné.

*The Military Party*

This party has not been greatly influenced by the Temple of Ksárul, although the Temple's covert hand is felt everywhere throughout the Empire. Nonetheless, the Temple of Ksárul supports several Imperial Legions with its funds, and fields one or two of its own Temple Legions.

*Military Legions*

Militarily, the worshippers of Lord Ksárul have never been particularly strong; the very nature of his faith seems to demand this. Even so, however, certain Legions are devoted to him.

*The Legion of Héketeth of Púrdimal**17th Imperial Heavy Infantry*

Originally at Púrdimal, they have relocated to Jakállá, where they were situated during the late '50s. A good but not outstanding legion, officered by the ancient traditional ruling family of Púrdimal. Funded in part by the Temples of Ksárul and Grugánu.

*The Legion of the Night of Shadows*

15th Imperial Medium Infantry.

Commanded by Kérdu Fereshmá'a hiKúrodu

Based in Jakálla, this is a new legion that was established by the secretive Ndálu Clan.

*The Legion of the Prince of the Blue Room*

35th Imperial Medium Infantry

Kérdu Tsémel Saku'ú hiFershéna of Púrdimal

This priestly legion is backed by the Ndálu Clan and has been indoctrinated as fanatical warriors.

**Clans**

Much of the Temple's support comes from a small number of ancient, wealthy clans, based in the cities of Mrelú and Púrdimal, although with branches in other places as well. Some of these are the Clan of the Black Hand, the Dark Moon Clan, the Great Stone Clan, the Dark Flame Clan, etc. These clans trace their ancestry back to the Period of the Fisherman Kings or even farther, and they are by nature a proud and secretive lot. Their income is derived from the rich lands around Mrelú, Púrdimal and Úrmish, and the clan chiefs have never been slow to lavish donations upon their Temple and those who serve it.

*Very High*

Sea Blue	Golden Bough	<i>Cloak of Azure Gems</i>	
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*High*

White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle	<i>Great Stone</i>
<i>Dark Fear</i>	<i>Dark Water</i>	<i>Dark Moon</i>	<i>Dark Flame</i>
Standing Stone	Rising Sun	<i>Iron Helm</i>	

*Medium*

Green Bough	<i>Black Stone</i>	Ripened Sheaf	Black Pinnacle
First Moon	Moon of Evening	Golden Lintel	Scroll of Wisdom
Weeping Stone	<i>Black Hood</i>	<i>Black Mountain</i>	<i>Black Monolith</i>

*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	Open Hand	High Tower
<i>Deep Flowing Water</i>	Flat Peak	<i>Black Hand</i>	Woven Whip

*Very Low*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	<i>Nighted Tower</i>	Bright Sword
Flat Rock	Glass Spear	Turning Wheel	Collar of Bronze

**Holidays**

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Ksárul join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

10 Shápru

Visitations of the Dormant Lord

Celebrated by worshippers of Lord Ksárul in holy temples deep beneath the city of Mekú.

3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

## 1-10 Halír

## Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

## 9Lésdrim

## Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

## 10 Dohála

## Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

## Ikáner, Intercalary Days

## Putting on of the Raiment of the Doomed Prince

Worshippers of Lord Ksárul begin the Intercalary Days with this ritual, which is referred to as The Ritual of the Garbing of Ksárul by the more orthodox worshippers of the Blue Lord.

This celebration begins with a grand processional bearing a four- or five-foot image of the God through the streets. Acrobatic and musical entertainers of clans traditionally faithful to this Temple (such as Black Stone or Dark Fear) lead the way, accompanied by jubilant junior Ritual priests bearing special standards seen only on this day. Sweets and tiny silver coins bearing Lord Ksárul's crescent-and-scarab emblem are tossed to the children thronging the route.

The *Tunkúl*-gongs ring as the image is borne triumphantly into the temple's outer sanctuary at the end of the procession, and where the mood becomes dignified and somber. The Outer Ritual involves dressing the image of the God in vestments and jewelry. Priests mime the actions of combing the hair and anointing the feet of the image. Certain chants are undertaken and symbols held up before the crowd. Eventually the demon Lelmiyáni appears represented by a young girl who, like the demon, plays the flute. After a time she departs and the rituals end with cries of praise to the God Ksárul.

This is of course the public celebration, and there are doubtless secret rituals taking place beneath the city at times throughout the Intercalary days.

## Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

## The Celebration of the Drawing Aside of the Azure Veil, Butrús

Publicly observed by the temple in this city alone.

**Aspects**

Lord Ksárul is shown as an intelligent young man of slender build with a smiling, yet emotionless, face,

dressed in black velvet and carrying a staff topped by an azure beetle.

Some of the Shadow Gods of Livyánu resemble a few of the Greater Aspects of Lord Ksárul, although it is considered impolite to point this out to their faithful.

He has 62 Aspects. Many temples have local Aspects, unimportant variations upon the primary Deity: Lord Ksárul the Younger, a proud, arrogant youth; Lord Ksárul the Elder, a mysterious figure, guiding all from behind the scenes with a powerful and inexorable hand. Common local Aspects such as these are not to be confused with the powerful Local Aspect of Ksárul that larger individual temples worship.

## Chópruna

## The Dweller in Shadow

This Aspect is pictured with the head of a serpent, much like the dread *Qól*. Lord Chópruna is said to deal with Underworld beings, including the *Qól*, the *Hrá*, and other genetically mutated creatures.

## The Knower of Skills

Thin and skeletal, Lord Ey'ún possesses an egg-shaped skull with impossible, unclear features, and eyes that are only dark patches. Lord Ey'ún is agile, and demonstrates His skills through nimble gestures of spellcasting. He manifests to aid worshippers of the Blue Lord, whom He instructs in the use of machines of the Ancients and the creation of spells.

## Gorrúgu

## The Master of Black

Black and amorphous, a being of darkness, He is never seen and cannot be described. He cloaks all with darkness, and moves through darkness. He can render a space completely dark even in full sunlight. Lord Gorrúgu creates complete secrecy, and facilitates escapes, attacks, and conspiracy between anonymous parties, etc.

## Te'ekúna

## The Wanderer Below, The Finder of the Way Below

A strangely misshapen and hunchbacked humanoid form, Lord Te'ekúna finds passageways, dark places, tunnels which would otherwise be overlooked. He is not cooperative, and does not lead supplicants to their destinations without appropriate offerings. These offerings include black flowers, or a silver dagger or staff wrapped in black velvet.

Gayél

Káshi

Ríruchel

Shichél

Ülétl

Ziúna

Each astrological body has a dark side: where green Gayél has Lady Dlamélish's favor, its dark side belongs to Lords Ksárul and Hrü'ü. Purple Zirúna is Lord Hrü'ü's in all ways. Each of the other bodies in turn surrenders the influence of its dark side to Lord Ksárul or Lord Hrü'ü, or to both.

#### The Nine Inner Aspects

The appearances and theology of these Aspects of Lord Ksárul are known only to the Inner Temple. One discovers that one is rising through the Temple ranks when one is brought before these Inner Aspects: a touch upon the sleeve by a masked priest, a gesture to follow the others inward at the end of the Outer Ceremonies, and one enters the Inner Temple of the Priesthood. These Aspects have powers to touch the mind and wrench the soul, completely controlling a worshipper and speaking through them. These Aspects may bestow upon Their most faithful worshippers Their Semblance, and this powerful individual becomes as one with the Aspect.

#### The Local Aspect

Having to do with shadows, darkness, and night, the Local Aspect is present in the largest temples of Lord Ksárul, secret and unique to each. One of the few facts known about any of the Local Aspects is that in Púrdimal the Local Aspect oversees the interests of the Hehegánu, the half-human Underpeople of that city's swamps and *Tsuru'üm*. Otherwise, all that is known is that the Local Aspect of the larger temples, such as those in Hmakuyál and Mrelú, pursues the interests of the individual temple.

#### Mentutékka

This unusual Aspect of Ksárul deals with forest creatures, and presents a strangely warm countenance of the Blue Lord. The Aspect Mentutékka appears in shades of dark blue — a pool of blue shade, rather like the deep shadows under trees — and not in any human form. He takes care of forest creatures, and is one of the few nature-oriented Gods of the Pantheon. Lord Mentutékka is said to love nocturnal animals, burrowers, and creatures of the deepest forests, such as the *Mnór*, the *Sró* and the *Dzór*. Some theologians insist that Lord Mentutékka is merely a foreign nature-deity incorporated into the Temple during its founding days, and not truly an Aspect of the God. But the majority holds that this incongruous Aspect merely indicates that our simple human perceptions cannot succeed in truly understanding the Gods. The fact that Lord Mentutékka's warm love of the forests and its creatures does not fit our perception of Lord Ksárul as a hard, cold deity of power and intrigue proves only that our perceptions are limited.

#### Demons

Many demons are said to be of Lord Ksárul's Essence or Substance. These demons are somewhat more practical — it would not do to say "safe" — for the highest priests of Lord Ksárul to summon, being His allies, servants, or slaves.

#### Ge'én

The Eater of All, Master of the Realms of the Decay of the Body and Despair of the Soul, Lord of the Twenty-Third Circle, Right Hand of Lord Grugánu, Chanter of the Threnody of Lamentation for the Doomed Prince Ksárul

He is of the Substance of Lord Ksárul, but the Essence of His Cohort Grugánu. His Powers are Rendering and Transportation. He has a flat, oval head with a wide mouth, whitish-grey eyes, and a columnar slimy black torso hung with tentacles.

#### Húrsha

He Who Is Curious, Ruler of the Forty-Eighth Circle

He is of the Substance and Essence of Ksárul. His Powers are Slaying and Warring. It is possible that this is the demon known as Chargál in some ancient texts. Húrsha was a liegeman of Ksárul upon Dórmoron Plain, and is very curious-natured, occasionally accepting tasks that intrigue him for little or no recompense. His secret names are Hmé, Ta'éq, Wnó, Prá, Chü, and Inggonú.

#### Chéssa

The Vile Crone, Mistress of the Twenty-Eighth Circle, She Who Dwells in Reeds

She is of the Substance of Ksárul and the Essence of Grugánu. She has the power of Zoification and appears as a great-limbed tree. Her secret name is Nu'ún.

#### Zanátl

The Secret Foe of All Being, Lord of the Forty-Fourth Circle, Servitor of Origób

He is of the Substance of Ksárul, but the Essence of Hrü'ü. His Powers are Phantasms and Imparting. He appears only as strange shifting patterns of light and darkness and terrifying hallucinations.

#### Héssa

The Little One, Master of the Nineteenth Circle, He Who Is Ever Present

He is of the Essence of Ksárul, but unknown Substance. His Powers are Diminution, Incursion, and Penetration. He is very tiny, as a *Drí* or a grain of *Dná*. His secret names are Kashíkka and Diulágga.

#### Giritlén

The Eater of Souls, Lord of the Sixteenth Circle, One Who Howls Below

He is of the Substance of Hrü'ü, but the Essence of Ksárul. His Powers are Consuming, Beclouding,

Disincarceration, and Imparting. He appears as a ghastly multi-limbed terror beheld in a flickering dim light amid noisome stench.

Njénü

He of the Everlasting Dream

He is of the Substance of Sárku, but the Essence of Ksárul. His Powers are Soporiferousness and Envisioning. He appears as a scholarly man of sophisticated mien. His secret name is Eridé.

Mishomû

Steward of the Palace of Relinquishment of All, Master of the Fifteenth Circle, Servitor of Prince Origób

He is of the Substance of Sárku and the Essence of Ksárul. His Powers are Reverberation, Stridency, Thundering, and Imparting. He appears as a black, vermiform creature, glistening with putrid slime.

Erbulé

He Who Comes Without Summoning, Master of the Twentieth Circle, Servitor of Prince Origób.

He is of unknown Substance, but the Essence of Ksárul. His Power is that of Expunging. He is flat and insectoid, brownish-black, with seven writhing tentacles depending from his mouth. His secret name is Ha'oggü.

Uní

The River of Mud, Master of the Thirty-Ninth Circle, Servitor of Prince Kurritlakál

He is of the Substance of Hrü'ü and the Essence of Ksárul. His Powers are Effusion, Transmutation, Engulfment, and Saturation. He appears as a great pool of sodden, mildew-smelling ooze, black and yellow and mold-white. His secret names are Jigáretl, Múùshigga, and Zmakká-Ludé.

Llyanmákchi

She of the Twisted Visage, Mistress of the Third Circle

She is of unknown Substance and Essence, but her summoning involves several elements of the Blue Lord's faith. Her Powers include Imparting and Marshaling. In appearance she is an old woman of deformed visage, and she assumes other bestial shapes. Her secret names are Kuyós, Gjmém, Chájjeth, and I'í.

Demon Races

The following races of demons were summoned to assist Lord Ksárul during His battle upon Dórmoron Plain.

#### *The Demons of the Dark*

Beings of the Substance of Ksárul, who live beneath a dim red sun and who are stinking and hideous to look upon.

#### *The Nation of Invisible Seekers*

Invisible demons of the Substance of Ksárul.

#### *The Dwellers in Shadow*

Minions of Llyanmákchi and creatures of the Substance of Ksárul, these shaggy, blue-grey, spider-like creatures stand two meters tall and smell like rotting meat mixed with vinegar. These creatures despise the light and prefer to slip unseen (but usually not unsmelled) from shadow to shadow. Llyanmákchi may call them forth. These creatures are summoned to receive the minds and will of human sacrifices as part of the Inner Rituals of the Temple, but will accept blue gems and other items when summoned upon lesser occasions.

#### *The Spirits of the Aerial Realm of Tu'unkélmü*

High flying and voracious demons of the Substance of Ksárul and the Essence of Dlamélish who populate the endless Abyss Between the Worlds. In the Legend of Gratstsátla they are said to have mated, laid leathery eggs upon the slopes of Thénu Thendráya Peak, and hatched young.

#### *Shuóleth*

Subterranean demons of the Substance of Ksárul.

Planes

Certain Planes of Reality are "owned" by one or another of the Gods or their demon servitors. It is not known whether these concepts truly apply or are anthropomorphism to explain that that is beyond human comprehension. Likewise, the "descriptions" of the following Planes, associated with Lord Ksárul and His demon allies, may simply represent all the sense that limited human perception can make of them, and their underlying "reality" may be very different indeed.

#### *The Land of Oélem*

The vast swamp-paradise of the demon Rü'ütlánesh, shrouded in darkness, always grey and wet. Venomous creatures writhe in the mud or scuttle across clumps of trees and bushes. Fleshy pods, sometimes laced with pulsing grey-green veins, sag from damp branches, bursting when touched to release penetrating spores or caustic juices.

#### *The Land Below the World*

A cold, dry wind claws perpetually at the desperate brown vegetation of this mountainous, rocky landscape. It is home to several strange demon races, some of which are benign to travelers, and some aggressive.

#### *The Unending Grey*

Fog and cold. Floating forever. Death, despair, and non-consciousness.

#### *The Plain of Not-Remembering*

No visitors can remember what this place is like, but those who have survived it return pale, gaunt, and terrified, many with their minds destroyed and eyes staring wildly.



*The Citadel of Sighs*

A great labyrinth located in the middle of a windy, endless desert. It does not appear to be occupied by any living thing, yet one senses always that one is observed. Noises which cannot always be attributed to the wind skitter through the shadows and in the corners behind.

**Magic****Temple Spells**

Characteristic of the Temples of Ksáru and Grugánu is the inability of witnesses to remember the details of Temple spells cast by their most skilled sorcerers. Witnesses can recall generalities, knowing that a spell was cast and that it involved words and gestures, but will not be able to remember the words themselves, nor imitate the gestures.

*The Affable Blight of Lord Uní*

This ritual summons the virulent bluish-white mold of Lord Uní, Demon Lord of the Thirty-Ninth Circle, to infect a target. Living creatures struck by this spell die horribly and immediately, rotting into foul liquids almost as fast as they can fall screaming to the ground. Once the mold infests an area, it will infect any who come into contact with it. Any items contacted with this mold will host it, and infect any who touch the items.

*Antechamber of the Blue Room*

The target of this spell is transported to the Antechamber of the Blue Room, beyond which mighty Lord Ksáru lies in His eternal, enforced sleep. Those who do not worship the Blue Lord become slaves and servants of His servitors in the Antechamber, never to be seen upon their home Plane again. Should a devotee of Lords Ksáru or Grugánu, or one of Lord Ksáru's foreign representations, be accidentally struck by this spell they will be immediately returned to the time and place from whence they came, sometimes healed of injury, sometimes granted subtle boons, but usually just as they departed. Attempts to deliberately cast this spell on a known worshipper of Lord Ksáru have been known to fail spectacularly.

*The Azure Scarab*

This ritual concentrates magical energy into an artificial gem, allowing the caster to later draw spell-power from it in excess of their own *Pedhétl*. If removed too far from the caster, the gem will explode.

*Comprehension of Devices*

This spell grants to the caster an "intuitive" understanding of what a Device of the Ancients (or even a more mundane device) does. Sometimes this knowledge is too vague to be of use, such as the realization that an object is "a tool." In other cases, detailed understanding is achieved, and the most powerful versions of this spell allow the caster to repair or even build new copies of the item. The Temple of Ksáru charges heavily to repair such items for others,

and will only do so under the proper political circumstances.

It is rarely possible for any of this knowledge to be expressed by the caster except by using, repairing, or fabricating the device in question: the spell seems to carry a subtle "mind-bar."

One variant of this spell allows the caster to deflect the effects of the small, oval, devices known as "eyes."

*The Food of the Ssú*

This ritual creates a patch of the deadly purplish vegetation native to Tékumel.

*The Obsidian Obelisk*

Impenetrable stone barriers of various sizes and shapes can be created with this ritual, some equipped with doors that only the caster can open. The most powerful versions of this spell are said to create permanent blocks of this magical barrier, but this rumor circulates only among the most scholarly of Lord Ksáru's faithful and none admit to possessing such a powerful variant of the spell. If cast under cramped conditions, an explosion can occur.

*The Replication of the Mighty*

Variouly accurate *doppelganger(s)* may be created of the target sorcerer(s), and these can move and cast spells individually, each believing itself to be the original. When the spell ends, the original retains the memories and experiences of all copies.

*The Web of Refulgent Command*

The caster psychically takes control of various creatures and automatons of the Great Ancients.

**Magical Artifacts***The Tome of Mournful Cogitations*

Translated by Nirodél hiRarenésha in 111 A.S., and found in the collection of Prince Rereshqála. In it, the author states that the demon Ge'én is actually an Aspect of Ksáru. For this, Priest Nirodél hiRarenésha was declared apostate by the Synod of the Hierarchy of Lord Ksáru in 599 A.S, and most of his books were then destroyed or sealed. Contains the Minor Litany of Calling used to summon the demon Chríya.

*The Glyph of Present Defense*

Common protective symbol employed by priests of Change.

*Tsévu*

Engsvanyáli *Ngásh*. A fruit often used in sorcerer's endeavors because of its legendary associations with Lords Ksáru, Thúmis, Sárku, and Durritlámish.

*Amulet of the Sword of Ri'tlánen*

Made according to the rites of the Temple of Ksáru, this magical charm is still in use today and is available in most cities for a few thousand *Káitars*.

"Your position is compromised, Vajésh hiSsórvu," intoned the voice from the darkness. "You cannot return to your prior role." Deep beneath the Temple of Ksárul in Béy Sü, Vajésh scowled within her mask of *Tü*-wood, at once irritated with the ritual adornment and grateful for it. Although hot and uncomfortable, the mask preserved her careful facade of absolute obedience.

"Inscrutable superior," she addressed the darkness from beneath one soft blue sconce, "I yearn to serve our Lord Ksárul through further exercise of my role as body-slave to the High Scholarly Priestess of Lady Dlamélish. Certainly youth and ignorance lead me to believe in error that my carefully-cultivated position may yet be of service to the Temple." There, she thought, that was nicely phrased. Vajésh did not enjoy acting as a slave, but Lady Hekélla hiTsánune was powerful within the Temple of Dlamélish in Béy Sü. Such a fount of Temple intelligence could lift a junior priestess of Lord Ksárul several Circles.

"Only obedience is necessary, never approval," the voice rang expressionlessly as ever through the darkness. "Nonetheless, your new role will engender your approval. Dismiss the feeling. Do not let it twist into pride or hamper complete obedience."

Vajésh worked to suppress both curiosity and approval as her assignment was described. Such responsibility indicated that she had already been advanced in the hierarchy of Circles! As warned, pride began to swell within her.

Outside the doorway of the offices of the High Scholarly Priestess of Dlamélish, Vajésh paused to don her ecclesiastical mask of black *Tü*-wood, before clapping twice for attention.

Her old partner, Dháru, who had remained as Hekélla's body-slave these many months, opened the doorway. He carefully did not look up or acknowledge her. He led Vajésh into the antechamber and silently offered her *lās* tea, which she refused by ignoring it. As he stepped through the inner doorway to inform his mistress, Vajésh caught sight of her replacement, a demure and comely lass of no more than fourteen summers who knelt nude upon the slaves' mat in the corner. Old Dháru must be quite pleased with his new apprentice.

He reappeared and held aside the hangings, admitting Vajésh into the presence of her onetime mistress.

Lady Hekélla hiTsánune, High Scholarly Priestess of the Goddess of Pleasure, regarded her unexpected visitor with a polite but vaguely bored curiosity. "If you would please state your purpose, I am quite busy."

"High Lady," Vajésh began, "What I say is for your ears alone." She cocked her head very slightly towards the slaves squatting in the corner.

Lady Hekélla's eyes flashed surprise: Vajésh knew from experience that she was unaccustomed to noticing her slaves, much less to considering their gossip. After a moment she absently gestured her slaves away.

"Lady Hekélla," Vajésh began once they were alone, "a recent visitor to the Temple of Vimúhla did not entirely pass unnoticed."

Her prior-owner's slack-jawed stare evoked a grim smile within Vajésh's mask. In the intervening months Hekélla must have come to believe her escape was complete. She paled visibly as Vajésh continued, "The visitor assaulted a priestess and disrupted an important ritual, a grave violation of the Concordat. But the Temple of Vimúhla has been quite busy with Prince Mirusíya's recent assumption of the Throne, so no investigation has yet been launched."

Hekélla had recovered somewhat, and could see where this was going. "What do you want?" she asked bitterly.

"The trail has grown cold," continued Vajésh, recalling the efforts she had undertaken to ensure so. "With an understanding between us, it will remain cold. On the other hand..."

"By the Lady, you blackrobes tricked me!" cried Hekélla, striding forward and grabbing a fistful of fabric. A moment later, she found herself facedown on the floor; one arm twisted painfully back, her shoulder pinned between Vajésh's knees.

"I regret this, and if you will forswear further such indignities I will allow you to rise," said Vajésh calmly, relishing the experience. Hekélla had little choice but to agree.

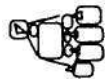
"The Temple of Ksárul could not anticipate your actions," Vajésh continued as Hekélla rose stiffly, "but one makes a poor soup who does not occasionally stir the pot. When we knew your lover's fate, we arranged to have you informed. You should be grateful to my Lord Ksárul. The Ecclesiastical Court would certainly be grateful to hear from His Temple." Vajésh paused to let her old mistress absorb this information before asking, "Are we of an understanding?"

Drawn and pale, Hekélla hiTsánune nodded grimly and rubbed her twisted shoulder. Both she and Vajésh knew that henceforth the High Scholarly Priestess of Dlamélish was a bought creature, serving her Goddess but doing the bidding of the Temple of Ksárul. Undoubtedly, such an arrangement would take her far: the Temple of Ksárul had little use for a mere black piece on the *den-den* board. But Vajésh's former master would henceforth be a tool, no matter her station.

And Vajésh hiSsórvu would be the hand to wield this tool for the Temple. She allowed herself a small grin within her wooden mask: she approved of this assignment very much.

# Grugánu

*Knower of Spells, Applier of Arts, True Servitor Who Seeks the Countenance of His Lord, Black Sword of Doom, Reader of the Incantations of the Dark*



Lord Grugánu adheres always to Lord Ksárul, for therein lies His own power and glory. It is said that He now keeps watch just outside of the Ten Walls that hold Lord Ksárul prisoner in the Blue Room, and He always seeks the Keys that will free His master from that place which is not a place.

Lord Grugánu differs from Lord Ksárul in the depth and detail of His knowledge. For Lord Grugánu, the spells of the Underworld, the magical powers of the mighty wizards, and the secrets of the Many Planes are of paramount importance. While Lord Ksárul Himself knows all these things, the Blue Lord does not focus upon them alone. Like all Cohorts, Lord Grugánu extends the power of His God, emphasizing one element among the many. And, like the other Cohorts, the philosophers believe that Lord Grugánu is constrained from His own individual Godhead, absent Lord Ksárul's influence, by some element of His nature, or indeed by the very laws that hold the Many Planes in balance. As always, these speculative anthropomorphisms may have no relevance to the truth of matters beyond the ken of humankind.

Lord Grugánu combs the Planes for knowledge and sorcery that may aid His Lord. To this end He assists His own and Lord Ksárul's followers in their quests for knowledge and power. Lord Grugánu may provide His special devotees with the understanding of magical devices, and assist in the creation of spells.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

Lord Grugánu is depicted as one of the allies of the Doomed Prince. In the *Lament to the Wheel of Black*, Lord Grugánu is depicted as Lord Ksárul's charioteer, as the rememberer of spells to whom Lord Ksárul turned at the Place of Reviving, and as His aid and comfort upon Dórmoron Plain. Lord Grugánu has a knowledge of magical spells that surpasses even that of His master. He has the ability to move freely between the dimensions, and is the overlord of many creatures and beings that dwell in the Underworlds.

### Color

Black combined with a blue so deep as to be nearly indistinguishable from black.

### Symbol

Lord Grugánu's emblem is an open hand, with claw-like fingers outspread as if to seize or strike.

### Costume

His priests and priestesses wear black and purple robes and tall headdresses of soft black velvet with His symbol worked upon them in silver.

### Circle

The Circles of the Temple of Grugánu are actually meaningful and straightforward, in contrast to those of the Temple of Ksárul. Each circle clearly delineates and controls what its participants may know, enter, or learn. People conceal their Circle membership, for it actually indicates his or her status quite precisely.

### Rituals

The Outer Rituals, intended for the public, consist of plays, shows, and the retelling of the tales. Magical displays take place and refreshments are served. There is always drama, featuring demons and monsters battling the heroic forces of Lord Grugánu's warriors.

His priests have the power to make the audience feel cold and frightened or warm and comfortable, as is appropriate. Lord Grugánu remembers epics known only to His Temple, preserved and embellished for His own faithful, as the Rememberer of the Gods.

Lord Grugánu's Temple usually holds only one ceremony per night, a very elaborate midnight event. Priests silently enter a shrine filled with worshippers, solemnly bearing the standards of their God and holding forth holy items. After solemn opening rituals, other priests trained as mimes and dancers depict legendary tales to the accompaniment of strange, eldritch music. The effect is frightening and elaborate, as the mimes dance with strange, bird-like motions. Occasionally there are ritual antiphonies, where the worshippers participate by giving rote responses.

The Innermost of the Outer Rituals feature spectacular magics and grand rituals, but remain as devoid of true content as the rituals for the masses.

### Sacrifice

Lord Grugánu is not averse to human sacrifices. According to the Temple, these serve to "align the interplanar forces."

### Food Taboos

The followers of Lord Grugánu utilize the onion in certain important rituals. It is also used as a teaching aid when describing to children the nature of the Many Planes.

## The Inner Doctrines

The goals of the Inner Temple of Grugánu are to be familiar with the Powers of Darkness, and the Spells of Potency over Entities that dwell in darkness, just as Lord Grugánu is familiar with the dread lands of Qélem.

### *Libraries*

Lord Grugánu is the Knower of Spells, and His temples are full of hidden libraries holding books locked with magical seals. These secret libraries are only open to members of the Inner Sects and Circles of Lord Grugánu's faith.

### *Rituals*

The rituals of the Inner Temples differ greatly and are held secret.

Dark, mysterious, and complex, these rituals delve deep into the fabric of the Tsolyáni soul, intricate and full of symbolic meanings. There are songs sung in unknown languages, sometimes even in meaningless syllables. With dramatic lighting, costume, and dance He oversees the epic retellings of dark and sinister tales.

His ceremonies are recited in a tongue known only to His highest Ritual priests. The darker rituals are said to take on some of the horror inherent in the rituals of Lord Sárku and His Cohort, Durritlámish.

### *The Speaking of Names*

The Naming the Secret Names of Lord Grugánu includes not only His secret ritual Names but those of His demons as well. No one has any idea of their meaning, and only the very innermost priests attend this ritual. These names bring one closer to the God and offer Him praise. The ritual is carried out in concentric circles of eleven, twenty-two, and forty celebrants. The eleven priests chant the Secret Names from ancient texts and plaques, throwing incense onto a central fire where it burns dark blue and purple. These are the very innermost circles, populated by the oldest and most powerful priests, skilled in the ceremony itself. Each of the innermost of the eleven have only a partial list of all the Names, so that no one person has more than one-eleventh of the names of the God.

### *The Unveiling of the Way*

This is a major ceremony conducted once or twice a year in only the greatest of Lord Grugánu's shrines, such as that in Hmakuyál. A group of priests enter the inner sanctuary and open a magical gate leading to an endless labyrinth of corridors, which are not upon this Plane. Beyond all of it is a glowing tiny light that is said to be Lord Grugánu's power. Some priests have entered that gateway, returning with an Aspect upon them, or in different physical forms. Others have entered and returned unchanged, having seen nothing of consequence. Some who entered have never returned at all.

### *The Confrontation With Those Beneath*

Several of the more horrible rituals of Lord Grugánu, these celebrate His power over the underworld creatures: the *Qól*, the *Nshé*, and the *Sagún*, etc. Blood sacrifices

are laid before a black opening into the Underworld. The blood flows freely into the depths while rituals are conducted and heavy bronze gongs are rung within the chamber. Commanded to come forth with offerings from the catacombs and praise for the God, His creatures emerge with treasures, books, scrolls, devices of the ancients, and other items.

### *The Unsealing of the Gates of Night*

This is a temple holiday during which many of Lord Ksárul's ancient demons are summoned and fed.

### *Studies*

#### *Genetics*

It is said that the priesthoods of Lords Ksárul, Grugánu, and The Homed One of Secrets in Livyánu know, or perhaps once knew, the techniques by which strange monsters and genetic sports could be created, possibly utilizing devices left by the ancients. This is the suspected origin of the Q61, the hideous, serpent-headed guardians of the secret places of the Underworlds.

#### *Historical studies*

The Temples of Thúmis, Ksárul, and Their Cohorts are particularly interested in historical studies, although they focus more on the recording and review of historical facts than upon the analysis of those facts.

These Temples have also mounted systematic archaeological expeditions both in order to locate treasures of the Ancients and to acquire knowledge of the past.

#### *Linguistics*

With the multitude of tongues to be found in and around the Five Empires, the Temples of Thúmis, Ksárul, Their Cohorts, and several of the Livyáni Shadow Gods pride themselves on having at least a word-list of every tongue on the continent, plus textbooks for the ancient and classical languages.

## Temple Layout

The temples of Lord Grugánu are always square (never oblong or oval in shape) and His shrines are kept in shadow. The inside shrines are dimly lit, from a distance or obliquely. There are pitfalls and traps set here and there to discourage the uninitiated from exploring.

## Secular Activities

### Businesses

Clans faithful to this Temple are active in the preparation of certain kinds of valued and important wines, a matter of long-standing tradition rather than religious doctrine. The Dark Fear Clan branches in Mrelú and Púrdimal make some of the finest dark wines.

### Public Works and Services

Followers of Change may send their children either to a school run by the priesthoods of Lords Ksárul or Grugánu, or if they wish, directly to a more doctrinaire

seminary operated by their own sects in which their specific tenets can be stressed.

### Mysteries

Lord Grugánu's Temple is occasionally deputized by the Empire to investigate Imperial mysteries. When Emperor Tontikén Riruné, known to history as "The Slave of Demons," disappeared in 1318, it was the Temple of Grugánu that conducted the exhaustive investigations into His fate. More popular with Emperors of the *Tlokíriqaluyal*, still the Temple of Grugánu is employed even by the most staunch Stability Imperiums, for He has the most extensive and reliable network of contacts among the Many Planes, and is thus best at resolving such mysteries.

### Politics

The Temple of Grugánu rarely cooperates or coordinates with other Temples, and even with the Temple of Ksáru it is reserved.

The Temples of Grugánu and Wurú are rumored to maintain relationships with priests of certain of the Pariah Deities, but this is never spoken aloud.

### Internal Factions

There are many secret, esoteric, scholarly, and recondite Inner Sects of the Temple of Grugánu. They have their own rituals and even their own spells, none of which are revealed to outsiders. Individuals are inducted into the Inner Sects through secret rituals, and endure many restrictions upon their ability to discuss what they learn, including magical mind-bars and the threat of punishment.

### External Parties

The Temple is quite influential in the Priestly party, and has open members in various high administrative positions of the Palace of the Realm and the Court of Purple Robes. Lord Grugánu is also believed to have secret members everywhere, infiltrating the institutions of other Temples with carefully placed moles. Since such activities directly violate the Concordat, the Temple's spies are kept unaware of their own roles through the careful application of powerful mind-barring spells.

This Temple has only average representation in the Royalist and Imperial parties, and very little influence over the Military party.

### Military Legions

Militarily, this Temple has never been strong. Only one general of the Empire, Mriggadáshu hiTekkú'une of the Clan of the Dark Moon, is a worshipper of Lord Grugánu. He disappeared after the governor of the city of Mekú leveled the temples of the Dark Trinity and their Cohorts in 2365, following the assumption of the Petal Throne by Emperor Dhich'uné. He reappeared in 2366 in Béy Sü to angrily take up the cause of rebellion on the side of Prince Táksuru.

### *Legions of the Deep Purple Dark*

#### 16th Heavy Infantry

Founded by Emperor Nríga Gaqchiké in 1009, the Legion is the hereditary guardian of the Disposer of Mekú. Revived recently by Prince Mridóbu.

### *Regiment of the Knower of Spells*

#### 5th Imperial Crossbowmen

Kérdu Mriggadáshu hiTekkú'une of Mekú commands this mediocre priestly legion, comprised mostly of city guards. Presently stationed in Béy Sü but normally located in Mekú.

### Clans

#### *Very High*

Cloak of Azure Gems

#### *High*

Great Stone

Dark Fear

Dark Water

Dark Moon

Dark Flame

Iron Helm

#### *Medium*

Black Hood

Black Mountain

Black Monolith

#### *Low*

Deep Flowing Water

Black Hand

#### *Very Low*

Nighted Tower

### Holidays

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Grugánu join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

## 2 Halír

The Night of Power, Mrelú

Worshippers of Grugánu conduct rituals and sacrifices in public ceremonies held within the Great Hall of the Temple of Grugánu. More elaborate private ceremonies take place deep within the temple.

## 9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. . Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

## 10Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

Ngaqómi, Intercalary Days

The Unsealing of the Gates of Night, Úrmish

Ceremonies are conducted deep beneath the temple, during which many of Lord Ksáru's ancient demons are summoned and fed.

## Aspects

In form, Lord Grugánu is only partially human. He is shown as a hulking, anthropoidal, half-human figure mostly concealed in black draperies, with a head like a small, vicious, buzzard-like bird or serpent.

Lord Grugánu's 27 Aspects deal with the dark and the Underworld and His magical abilities are tremendous. His most powerful priests are a match for the mightiest spellcasters of any Temple.

## Nisház

"The Emperor of Tombs"

Appears as a mighty king, dressed in black and purple, bearing a great mace that "sees" foes of Change.

## Mehlé

"He Who Protects Fools"

This Aspect aids sorcerers faithful to Lords Grugánu and Ksáru in the casting of complex spells and the performance of necromancy. Appears as a serious, middle-aged man with jet-black eyes that have no whites.

## Damans

"The Lovely Guide"

Appears as a thin and pretty girl. She appears in the Underworld to lead lost followers of Stability into traps and pitfalls. She is malicious and deceptive.

## Mo'óth

"The Breathtaking One"

Said to fill and completely block Underworld corridors with its hulking, wet and glutous form in order to suffocate parties worshipping Stability.

## Vyér

"The Guide of the White Staircase"

A young, handsome, boyish human, He is affable towards all, but leads astray those who do not worship Lord Grugánu. He guides only worshippers of Lord Grugánu through the Planes Beyond. He can find and open Nexus Points leading to specific destinations.

## Ókh

"The Warder of Devices"

He appears as a gigantic, powerful, scaled creature that has knowledge of treasure troves in the Underworlds and the Planes Beyond. Said to be worshipped by the present-day Dwellers of the Planet Ziúna.

## Cháshiq

"The Whisperer of Spells"

Appears only as a changing pattern of purplish light and shadow. Responds to worshippers with whispered instructions and incantations for advanced spells. Often His voice cannot be clearly heard, and the spell can fail with possibly disastrous consequences. He is dangerous, and strikes with purplish electrical bolts when enraged by worshippers who bicker or demand too much.

## Tekóth Dmúnu

"The Opener of Gates"

Thin and skeletal with a long, inhuman skull, He opens gates into Regions of the Planes Beyond that cannot normally be found or traversed (and are even unlisted in Wába's Almanac, the mythical tome of planar travel). Accepts human sacrifice in exchange for His assistance.

## Ghóruq Dzèè

He manifests as a horrid, grave-smelling thing like a great purplish fungus. When offered magical items, books, etc., He, or It, may heal or revivify injured or dead persons who truly worshipped Lord Grugánu or Lord Ksáru. Loves to gamble, and may demand "double or nothing" wagers.

## Akhunóm

"The Sword-Bearer"

He appears as a powerful warrior in glittering black and purple armor. He Bears Lord Grugánu's Sword of Doom and either fights on behalf of Lord Ksáru or hands Him the Sword of Doom when combat is joined. Mentioned in the Lament to the Wheel of Black as serving upon Dórmoron Plain

**Mbéth**

"He Who Returns"

Described in the Book of Descents as a hideous, scuttling, scorpion-like creature, black and slightly furry with long, globular eyes on stalks, antenna-like fronds of spider webs, and tubular mandibles that can both bite and suck. Frequently moves invisibly, silent but for a faint breathless brushing sound. First mentioned in *Bednálljan* tomes, possibly even earlier. Found in the tombs and Underworlds where water is present. It appears only to high-circle priests of Lord Grugánu and repels both Pariah Deities and servitors of the *Tlomitlányal*.

**Khájju**

"The One Who Yearns"

Described in the Scroll of Turning as adopting the shapes of the Aspects of other Deities and accepting their offerings before flapping away shrieking. He or It can thus look like an Aspect of any of the *Tlomitlányal* or *Tlokíriqaluyal*, and perhaps even as an Being of other pantheons, such as the Livyáni Shadow Gods or even the Pariah Deities. His masquerade can be detected and repelled by certain amulets and spells, and each Temple has Its own. Once Lord Khájju has stolen another Deity's offerings, the worshipper is left to face the wrath of the God so cheated, for Lord Khájju always contrives to make the summoner appear to have offered nothing.

**Demons****Ge'én**

The Eater of All, Master of the Realms of the Decay of the Body and Despair of the Soul, Lord of the Twenty-Third Circle, Right Hand of Lord Grugánu, Chanter of the Threnody of Lamentation for the Doomed Prince Ksáru

He is of the Substance of Lord Ksáru, but the Essence of His Cohort Grugánu. His Powers are Rendering and Transportation. He has a flat, oval head with a wide mouth, whitish-grey eyes, and a columnar, slimy black torso hung with tentacles.

**Chéssa**

The Vile Crone, Mistress of the Twenty-Eighth Circle, She Who Dwells in Reeds

She is of the Substance of Ksáru and the Essence of Grugánu. She has the power of Zoification and appears as a great-limbed tree. Her secret name is Nu'ún.

**Mi'royél**

The Infant Who Eats Its Mother, Ruler of the Thirty-Fourth Circle, Servitor of Prince Origób

This creature is of the Substance and Essence of Grugánu, and its powers include Refluence, Prorogation, Parablepsis, and Aberration. It appears as a great crawling worm, all of black and sickly blue, with pallid white eyes and a drooling unformed mouth. Its Secret Names are Qákh, Nmódha, Chué, and Zumír.

**Qu'ú**

He Who Would End Wisdom, Master of the Forty-Fifth Circle, He Who Roars

This demon is of the Substance of Chiténg and the Essence of Grugánu, and his Powers include Numbing, Gifting, and Imperceptibility. He appears as a shambling, multi-headed *Sró*-like creature. In legend, this demon fought the Lord Thúmis upon Dórmoron Plain in that God's Aspect of a bejeweled two-legged serpent. His Secret Name is Tirrgáschè.

*The Citadel of the Twelve Pylons of Ta'lár*

The Forty-Fifth Plane is named for this mighty fortress established upon its dark crags, which is also called the Labyrinth of Elongated Shadows. The Demon Qu'ú rules on behalf of Lord Ksáru over a place where Tékumel's physical laws function feebly: here natural lights glow weakly and magical ones not at all.

Lord Qu'ú is a capricious demon, and those who arrive here without the protection of a priest of Lords Ksáru or Grugánu may be attacked by Qu'ú's insectoid minions, or returned to their place of origin bearing a green gem. This must be discarded immediately, as it will shortly "hatch" into one of Qu'ú's demons.

Servitors of the Blue Lord and His Cohort are welcome here, however, and those who arrive under the protection of Their faithful may rest, heal themselves, or even be guests at one of Lord Qu'ú's feasts. Even Lord Grugánu's most arcane worshippers fear this latter fate.

**Magic****The Attainment of Enlightenment**

The caster psychically taps into Lord Grugánu's vast knowledge of spells, with the effect that he or she temporarily gains the ability to cast an otherwise-unknown spell. Inasmuch as this rapport with Godhead is beyond the control of mere mortals, the spell gained thereby is completely random, save that higher-circle variants in turn grant knowledge of higher-circle spells. This temporary knowledge cannot be recorded or conveyed to others, but dissipates after a short time or once the spell has been cast. Devout and powerful sorcerers of Lord Grugánu have sometimes been granted spells unknown to any Temple.

**The Invigorator of Blades**

These rituals invest various weapons with glowing other-planar energy, and, when used effectively against a foe, the victim will suffer damage from the violent discharge of these energies into their body.

**The Labyrinth of Shadows**

These rituals dispatch their target(s) to the Citadel of Elongated Shadows ruled over by the Demon Qu'ú.

Chírísan paused beneath an awning and surreptitiously checked his coin-pouch: his single *Káitar* was reduced

to a *Hlásh* and two copper *Qírgal*. Chírisan's low Graven Image clan was poor, and Chírisan labored long and hard on the *bas*-reliefs that were his trade. When the clanhouse delivered his quality stonework ahead of schedule, the clanmistress had gifted Chírisan with a gold *Káitar* as a reward.

But now his purchases of gifts and clothing were complete, and just in time: his meeting with the Lady Ishénla was this very evening.

Chírisan stepped carefully from the hired litter that had cost him his last silver *Hlásh*. By boarding at the carter's clanhouse he had saved a copper, but more importantly avoided his own clan's gossip-mongers. A litter comprised unseemly ostentation for a low clan-lad like himself.

Now he was surrounded by ostentation. The courtyard of the Golden Bough clanhouse was larger than the entire grounds of his clan. He determined not to gawk like a peasant at the surrounding splendor. So finely was the help attired that he could not tell slave from servant. One bowed and gestured, and Chírisan followed him within the clanhouse.

He was guided through opulent halls to a door marked with the welcoming "clear skies" *Méshqu-plaque*, and ushered into the plush receiving room of a large suite. He sipped water from a delicate glass and reviewed his appearance, brushing wrinkles from the new and expensive fabric.

Ishénla hiQórridu swept in, petite and graceful, greeting Chírisan warmly. Behind her, Lord Hérje hiTsánune stepped through the doorway, a stocky, powerfully-built man whose muscles bunched and rippled as if to tear free of the fine fabrics of his tunic.

Chírisan felt a touch on his arm. "Come," said Ishénla, "a meal is prepared, our first together of many." Gruff Hérje nodded and gave the shy smile Chírisan loved.

The meal was delicious but complicated, and Chírisan had a hard time juggling conversation and remembering his courtesies. Hérje, as usual, said little. But Ishénla guided the conversation with grace and ease. At first Chírisan had thought her questions no more than spun *Dmí-sugar* confections, but soon he sensed a sharp mind within Hérje's First Wife. Her questions were carefully teasing out of him answers more revealing considered together than individually. Were he dissembling, inconsistencies and hypocrisies would have been exposed by keen interrogations couched amid polite inanities.

Suddenly Chírisan found himself grinning broadly at across the table at Hérje. Ishénla looked from one to the other, and cocked an eyebrow in question.

"Everything Hérje said about you is true," Chírisan stated bluntly. "And you could winkle secrets out of my Lord Grugánu, and make the God like it!"

Ishénla laughed and covered her face shyly with one hand. "Forgive me, Chírisan," she replied, "but I hope you understand that as First Wife, I must interrogate his suitors most thoroughly."

"I fear I will bore you," said Chírisan, "I am of low clan and uncomplex. You will not find in me a tale of adventure or intrigue. I am like a window opening on an alley, once you have looked through me you have seen all there is to see."

Ishénla smiled before replying, "If what Hérje tells me is true, the view is more interesting than a mere alley, whatever your clan." Then she nodded kindly, and offered him a glass of the deep purple *Drónu* wine.

The dinner had gone well. Ishénla stood in the courtyard with Hérje as Chírisan climbed a bit unsteadily into his hired litter. "He is a kind and noble man, I will look forward to his joining us," she said.

Gruff Hérje ducked his head and smiled in the shy way she found so endearing.

"This is going to be fun" she exclaimed, kissing her husband warmly, "Oh, I just love weddings!"



# Sárku

*The Five-Headed Lord of Worms, Master of the Undead. Guide into Darkness, the Demon-Lord of Decay, the One Who Comes Forth from the Tomb.*



Lord Sárku seeks a slower, colder winding down into Lord Hrüü's final Nullity: the slow and certain encroachment of Death upon the Domain of Life. His realm is the Necropolis, and there He aids those who serve His Undead legions, those who worship the intellect and care little for the needs of the body, and those who send the living down to Him in the unutterable stillness of death.

Lord Sárku holds that life and death are only two aspects of the same being, and the latter is the more perfect because it endures — the urgent demands of the living exist no more in the grave. To the Worm-Lord, life is but a brief orgasmic spasm before the long, dusty eternity of the tomb.

The one condition of Lord Sárku's faith is the survival of the intellect and ego, which must continue to live and have awareness even in the sepulcher. The other demands of the body do not persist after death, but if the intellect has cognition throughout all eternity, it can witness and savor the final victory of the Dark.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

The Temples of Sárku and Durrítámish are obsessed with secrecy, so it is difficult to assess their philosophical and theological premises. The priesthood itself is elaborately structured, with many secret rituals and secret societies entwined amongst complex theological schisms.

To the Tsolyáni, Lord Sárku is a necessary facet of the cycle of Life and Death. Just as Lady Avánthe rules the round of fertility, growth, and living things, so does Lord Sárku take charge of the remains of those who have died. Lord Sárku does not deal with the Spirit-Souls of the deceased; those belong to Lord Belkhánu and His Cohort, Lord Qón, who see to the continuing pilgrimage of each Spirit-Soul through the Planes of the Afterlife. The domain of the Worm Lord is that of corpses, the grave, the process of decay, and the eventual Change of all things into putrefaction and dust, ready for the Weaver of Skeins to take them up again and weave more of the Fabric of Time.

Of the Dark Trinity, Lord Sárku is the most difficult to understand. His taste for death frightens many, but He is in many ways a companion to Lords Ksárul and Thúmis inasmuch as He is a God of intellect.

Lord Sárku has little to do with the causes of death. He is not a warrior like Lord Karakán, whose violence is

meant for the stabilization and structuring of the world, nor is He an insensate destroyer like Lord Vimúhla, whose Flame is intended to burn, ravage, and effect Change in its most drastic form. Indeed, had it not been for one persuasive element of His doctrine, Lord Sárku might have remained a minor Deity, concerned with corpses, funerals, embalming, and the tomb. Yet early in the Age of the First Imperium and certainly by the dynasties of the Kings of the Mask of Night and the Omnarch of Urúkkha, Lord Sárku's teaching had started to include a promise that has tantalized humankind ever since the race began — the promise of real, physical immortality.

Immortality is one of the most tempting of all of humankind's legendary goals. To live on, to possess an eternal body, a mind with which to perceive, and a will! It is this that attracts so many to Lord Sárku's otherwise rather mournful faith.

### Color

Lord Sárku's colors are the brown of the earth of the grave and bone-white, making it easy to distinguish His clergy and pious members of His clans from the colorful majority of the folk of the Five Empires.

### Symbol

A wavy black or copper line with a red circle at one end, signifying the Eternal Victory of the Worm.

### Astrology

The yellowish-tan face of Ülétl is Lord Sárku's astrological representative. The planet's rising is sacred to Lord Sárku and celebratory rituals are performed in His temples each evening.

### Numerology

Lord Sárku's number is five, the number of this God's many worm-heads, and related to death, earth, filth, sorrow, and decay. To Harmonize with the God, one must gaze upon a skull in a room with an earthen floor, preferably a tomb or a grave, while uttering and holding in mind His letter, which is "*Ch*."

### Costume

Priests of Lord Sárku wear earth-brown robes with whitened armor, and priestesses don a bodice of grave-hued cloth. Both wear copper ornaments and headdresses of skulls. His clergy (and on festival days, His lay worshippers as well) paint their faces with white pigment in the form of grinning skulls.

### *Rituals*

The rituals of the Worm Lord are varied. Some involve only incense (*olúrash* — the "sweet death"), litany, and ritual gesture; others demand dead flesh, tithes of copper, gold, and gems, and other less savory ceremonial substances and implements.

The rituals of the Worm Lord are celebrated mostly at night, usually in the underground shrines below the Upper Temple, and often in secret. Worshippers are divided into classes: the low laity, who are not taken below ground; the high laity, who are escorted into the dimly-lit subterranean shrines for grand occasions; the elite, who are classified in groups according to their preferences and needs, and who are permitted to witness some of the more clandestine ceremonies; and the Inner circle, which consists of those non-priests permitted to partake of the Worm Lord's special sacraments. As always, the more one contributes to the Temple the farther into the Inner rituals one proceeds. The sacrifices to the Worm and His demons range from beautiful to hideous.

### *Symbology*

Lord Sárku's faith is rich in symbolism. The Worm Himself has five heads, and thus the "pattern number" of Lord Sárku is five. In Tsolyánu it is the custom for quintuplets to be handed over to the priesthood of Lord Sárku to be raised as His, whatever their original clan or their parents' faith. His worm-insignia appears on temples, houses, fabrics, and pottery, and His ritual gestures are seen in every street and marketplace in Tsolyánu.

### *Sacrifices*

Copper is a metal much beloved of Lord Sárku, and His adherents treasure it highly and employ it in their ritual vestments and weapons. He abhors iron and steel, but He does accept gold and silver, albeit somewhat grudgingly. His gems are yellow and brown: topaz, amber, and the like.

Like certain others of the Lords of change, Lord Sárku accepts living sacrifices, although not as frequently as the Temples of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg, or even that of Lady Hriháyal.

### *Food Taboos*

In the Temple of Sárku, fasting is considered an excellent means of purifying the body and "clarifying" the Spirit-Soul. Ascetics and mystics employ it as a means of achieving closer spiritual rapport with their God, and by the young as a means of achieving closer adherence to the words of their instructors.

### *Death Rituals*

In the event that one's service to the Worm does not rate the perpetuation of service after death (and, indeed, the magic necessary for such an honor makes it a rare event despite what those who would recruit new members might imply), the Temple of Sárku buries an individual's belongings with them in an appropriate grave. Clothing, jewelry, weapons, furniture, money, and books are all

laid beside the corpse in the inner tomb chambers. This belief expresses itself most grandly in the tombs of the wealthy, but even the poor may have a copper bracelet or a bit of pottery placed beside them in their humble graves.

### *The Afterlife*

The paradise of Lord Sárku is called the Wastelands of the Dead, and might well seem a Hell for those who do not serve Him: it is an endless consciousness in death, a serving of the Tomb-Lord and His minions, and a continual ghastly joy, like the grimacing of a skull.

The hell of Lord Sárku is one of terror and pain: the gnawing of the worms upon the flesh, the sight of one's limbs withering and crumbling in the grave, and the frenzy and agony of waking to find oneself buried alive — over and over again for all eternity.

### *History*

The first record of the worship of Lord Sárku is recorded on monuments from the Kraá Hills and Dó Cháka dating back to the earliest years of the First Imperium, or just prior.

### *Legend*

The Fount of Evídlu is the primary source of the River of Death in the Wastelands of the Dead. When the Sorcerer Isínju erred in summoning the demon Srúkárúm to destroy the City of Nine Walls, the price he paid was to be bound to the Fount of Evídlu until the wizard Kcharáнду found him and slew him out of pity.

### *The Inner Doctrines*

#### *Inner Rituals*

The Worm Lord's rituals are performed according to fixed sequences and cycles, and those attending include not only the living and the Undead, but also creatures of the Underworlds: the huge and terrible *Hrá*, the flying *Vorodlá*, who are modified Undead, and a dozen other types of beings. Several of Mighty Sárku's Demon Lords require sustenance, and sacrifices are thus fairly common, though not a daily occurrence. Most victims are slaves or war-captives, although the Worm Lord's clergy have sometimes been accused of kidnapping their foes for this purpose. The Concordat between the Temples governs what occurs above ground, but events in the subterranean depths proceed unhampered by law.

It is hinted that some of the Inner rituals of Lord Sárku involve acts of necrophilia. The actual definition of necrophilia is blurred by questions of how one classifies Undead participants.

#### *Magical Rituals*

It is important to distinguish between religious and magical rituals. Magical rituals undertake to bring about particular results — the summoning and binding of a demon, for example. Religious rituals seek to propitiate the God, to honor and worship Him and beseech His indulgences. Religious rituals often employ one or more magical rituals to accomplish their task of worship. Some of the magical rituals employed by worshippers of

Lord Sárku (and, indeed, other priests of Change) are set forth below.

The Litany of Absolution from the Taints of Life

A basic preparatory ritual, it cleanses and readies the spirit, focusing the mind upon the passage down into death. It is used in many basic rituals, and in the summoning of demons, including Gereshmá'a, Srükárum, Marássu, and Erbulé.

The Diagram of the Rising Up of the Dead

A glyph common in the Temple of Sárku, and used in the summoning of the demon Gereshmá'a, among others.

The Station of Kelúo

A ritual performed about a dark, arcane diagram.

Rituals of the Quintessence of the Dark

Still used by the Temple of Sárku, a basic ritual of the Temple.

The Ceremonies of the Priest Naratlün

Described in a manuscript in the Temple of Lord Sárku in Béy Sü, this was apparently Engsvanyáli in origin, celebrating the Coming Forth of the Worm Lord.

**Ritual Devices**

The Kü'núr

The copper sacrificial knife of the Temple of Sárku, a metallic weapon sanctified to the God for the express purpose of human sacrifice and thereby prevented from interfering in the magic of the rituals.

The Ta'ón

Another copper blade employed in a wider variety of rituals conducted in the Underworld, similarly sanctified. Clans faithful to the Temple of Sárku practice secret methods of hardening copper to nearly the strength of steel, and ritual blades are usually treated in this fashion.

To misuse sanctified weapons — to use them outside their specific rituals and to use them for purposes beyond those of their consecration — shatters the sanctifying spells and usually results in the demise of the abuser.

*Change*

A common question voiced by acolytes debating theology in the dormitories after hours is that of Lord Sárku's position as a servitor of Change. His goal seems to be the un-changing continuation of life, even beyond Death: is this not Stability?

The answer is that Lord Sárku's "Change" is longer and slower than that of Lord Hrü'ü, but it is nonetheless Change. Lord Sárku is Lord Hrü'ü's witness to the Change taking place throughout Time. He sees Change occur by maintaining continuous awareness. He is not concerned with the condition of the individual witness — the body can rot away to nothing, so long as witnessing takes place. In this He is not unlike Lord Drá, who witnesses the glory of Lord Hnálla.

It is also true that the Undead experience Change. Not merely because their bodies slowly but inevitably decay to nothing across the ages, but because the perpetuation

of intellect brings Change to the mind. Certain sects within the Temple of Sárku, such as the tiny Gem of Amber Society, believe that the Change wrought upon the intellect by its perpetual act of witness is the true goal of Lord Sárku. By watching the rise and fall of nations and empires and the brief, painful lives of humanity and its allies upon the face of the world, the mind is tempered and polished into something beautiful to Lord Sárku.

Finally, Lord Sárku resists the dictates of those like Lady Avánthe who promote the Stable Cycles of life. He will be there to witness and celebrate the coming of Entropy. By breaking the Cycle of Life and Death, the worshipper of Lord Sárku defies Stability and witnesses the glory of Lord Hrü'ü.

*The Undead*

Immortality is not achieved without sacrifice, however. The Master must be served, both during life and thereafter, and the Undead must obey in every word and deed. Moreover, there is no guarantee that even assiduous devotions will result in an eternity of unimpaired existence; most of the Undead retain only portions of the abilities they had in life. The causes are not known, or are not revealed by the Worm Lord's Scholars, but most of the Undead are little more than walking shells, such as the zombie-like *Mrúr*. At a higher level are the *Shédra*, who possess some willpower and intelligence, while a select few become *Jáigi*. These last are Lord Sárku's elite. They possess all of their faculties and their bodies are usually not physically decayed, although they may have a puffy, pallid look. Some exude a faint stench of the grave, but others are said to be as presentable as they were in life.

A day or two of time is needed to produce a *Mrúr*, three or four days are necessary for a *Shédra*, and an involved series of rituals and ceremonies lasting a month or more are required for a *Jáigi*.

Beyond the *Jáigi* there are said to be still higher levels. Ancient Llyáni myths speak of the *Hotékpu*, the Undead aides of the Worm Lord at the Battle of Dórmoron Plain.

The details of these matters are kept secret. For example, no one knows how long the Undead "live." Some claim to have encountered *Shédra* and *Mrúr* attired in Engsvanyáli armor and cerements, while a few unattested reports describe still-older specimens garbed in tattered raiment reminiscent of the First Imperium. No accounts of specimens from still earlier periods have been proved.

It is said, though none can say for sure, that every Undead is a possession of Lord Sárku. Whether reanimated by His priests or those of some other faith, they are empowered nonetheless by the Lord of the Undead, and they will not act to thwart His plans under any circumstances.

It is important to note that there is a clear distinction between the Undead and demons. For example, demons of the Substance or Essence of Lord Sárku will be thwarted by the boundaries of the Interlocking Squares of Djaréva. The Undead, however, are mere physical beings and will cross the same boundaries unimpeded.

### *Proscribed races*

Since the Ahoggyá have a taste for human flesh, they are barred from the precincts of the Cities of the Dead, and are never permitted to join the priesthoods of Lords Sárku or Durritlámish.

### *The Soul*

The immortality Lord Sárku offers is not that of the Spirit-Soul, not some pleasant paradise in the Afterworld. The Spirit-Soul may continue its journey through the Planes of the Afterlife, but the self, the consciousness of identity, memory, and rational thought, that which the Tsolyáni name the *Hlákme*, remains behind. Lord Sárku's gift combines the *Hlákme* and the *Bákte*, the physical body, and allows both to live on, aware and active, for centuries, perhaps millennia. The body does suffer some decay, but its muscles are powered by energy from one of the Worm Lord's Planes, remaining serviceable, albeit not very pretty.

Of all the five "selves," only the *Hlákme*, the Conscious Mind, is of interest to Lord Sárku. For devotees of the Lord of Worms, thus, the rejoining of the Mind and Body in the tomb is nothing horrid or grisly, but rather a necessary means of preserving the personality and intellect in a conscious state for all time.

### *Language*

All important texts are written in the Tongue of the Lord of Worms, a language possibly derived from that of some ancient people of the Chákas. A few inscriptions in it have been discovered in Dó Cháka and the Kraá Hills. It is vocalized only by the priesthoods of Lords Sárku and Durritlámish for high rituals and for the transmission of secret information and necromantic sorcery. It is common in manuscripts, being written in vertical columns in copper ink upon black-dyed paper with ochre, white, gold, and deep scarlet illuminations. The script consists of 2,120 individual glyphs, all of which are incomprehensible to an outsider. None but the Inner Circles of the clergy of the Worm Lord and His Cohort are ever allowed to learn anything of the Tongue, and newcomers are carefully, and sorcerously, screened before being accepted for tuition. The grisly fate of one pretender is still celebrated in the Jakállan ballad "The Five Suppers of Ra'inátlehiTékkol."

### **Temple Layout**

Temples of Lord Sárku are physically similar to other Tsolyáni shrines, but there are differences. There are no external courtyards or outbuildings — all is included within the central edifice itself. The temple rises as a single trapezoidal monolith of stone, usually dark brown in hue, topped by jagged towers and swooping eaves arranged without symmetry or apparent plan. This is said to be deliberate — both a strategic measure to confuse would-be invaders, and an expression of the philosophy of Change as disorder, or the effects of these and other philosophies.

The high outer walls are covered with panels of murals or bas-reliefs depicting processions of rulers, nobles,

soldiers, and ordinary folk — all approaching Lord Sárku's sanctuary. For "each returns to Him in the end, and *this* is the True Beginning," as it says in the Prologue to *The Book of Rust-Brown Glimmerings*.

Inside the massive copper-bound gates, an antechamber opens into a columned hall, filled with clouds of yellow-brown incense smoke, grotesque idols of the Worm, and banners of amber and ochre hung from the ceiling far, far above. Worshippers drift to and fro like wan ghosts among the earthen-robed clergy. Officiants, their faces and hands daubed bone-white, chant litanies before each shrine to one of the Greater Aspects, and the whole room takes on a hazy, coiling, nightmarish appearance that defies description.

In the center of this hall stands a dais upon which a huge copper horn, two man-lengths or more long, is blown by a leather-lunged servitor. This is the *Nórnemokoi hiChrányel*, "The One Who is Mournful of Life." Its anguished sobbing notes stress the futility of ephemeral existence, the end of all things mortal, and the return unto the Tomb. From time to time, the great *Tunkúl* gong of the temple thunders and shudders overhead. Here and there, grieving mourners squat beside the ochre-wrapped corpse of some relative. The dead are often brought thus, in hopes of Lord Sárku's favor and their eventual resurrection as Undead with eternal "life" to come. It is whispered that most such cadavers are used as food, however, for the monstrous creatures who guard the labyrinths below the temple.

From this upper hall, galleries lead off toward the rear of the building, where the dormitories, kitchens, robing chambers, storehouses, schools, libraries, and other mundane functions are located. There are usually two or three floors of such service areas, constructed in a three-sided square around the main nave.

At the far end of the great hall, staircases lead up to a mezzanine: a pillared gallery that runs all along the back of the chamber. Along its length are shrines to the more important Greater Aspects, more candelabra of massy copper, urns of fuming incense, priests in elaborate ritual vestments, and thronging worshippers. A doorway leads back from the center-rear of this balcony into a narrow inner shrine, where the First Aspect of the Worm Lord coils in all His repulsive splendor. This chamber is as far into the temple as most laity ever reach. Here are celebrated the public rituals, e.g. "The Touching of the Worm of Copper" on the 19th of the month of Didóm.

Copper-sheathed gates open out of the shrine chamber into staircases and passages leading down into the real temple below: the catacombs, the labyrinths, the ancient shrines buried far beneath the modern streets, the innermost sepulchers of the dead (and the Undead), the fanes where Demon Lords of the Planes Beyond may be summoned, the silent tombs of the pontiffs of the Worm who have passed away before, and eventually to the Holy of Holies, that Place Wherein the Worm Comes Forth. Only the priests of the highest Circles may venture there.

## Secular Activities

### Businesses

The clans that have traditionally served Lord Sárku include the usual large population of agricultural clans, necessary to feed the Temple and the Empire. In addition, however, large portions of Lord Sárku's faithful concern themselves with the Necropolises and the Dead.

For while Lord Sárku's tenets embrace life after death and the perpetuation of the Self, still almost all of His faithful will die and proceed to the Planes Beyond. But where the faithful of His counterpart in Stability, Lord Belkhánu, engage in funerary trades, Lord Sárku's clans concern themselves more with the maintenance of those already dead. Clans with a tradition of service as tomb-guards, and others traditionally involved in tomb-robbing both worship the Lord of Worms or His Cohort. Clans who sweep and replaster the crypts prepare the mausoleums to be resting places for the posterity of the former residents. And guides wait at the ferry-slips of the Necropolis, just like their father and grandfather did, to lead visitors to the tombs of their dead relations in exchange for a few copper *Qirgál*.

### Public Works and Services

The Temple of Sárku supports the Empire with agriculture and taxes. It runs Temple schools, but most worshippers of Lord Sárku send their children to the schools run by the Temple of Ksárul. Copper works maintained by Lord Sárku's clans are located in the Kraá Hills, forestry in the Chákas.

### Cities of Broad Influence

#### *The City of Sárku*

Lord Sárku's Temple is fortunate in having an entire Tsolyáni city as its headquarters: the City of Sárku, in the rugged Kraá Hills in northwestern Tsolyánu. Within its sere-brown walls, only those clans, traders, and even Imperial Legions are permitted whom the Grand Adept of the sect approves.

This accords with the treaty made in 975 A.S. between the priesthood of Lord Sárku and the Empress Sháira Sú, "The Divine Daughter of Thúmis" (945-984 A.S.). In 973 A.S., Her troops besieged the city, later reaching the inner enciente of walls that surround the Five Hills upon which the Temple of the Worm Lord squats. After two years of siege the city still held out, aided by hordes of Undead minions and creatures from the depths of the labyrinths below the Temple. Further fighting would obviously have weakened or even divided the Empire, leaving it prey to external foes. The Empress thus agreed to a treaty that limited the power of the Temple, forbade the use of Undead soldiers anywhere except as sanctuary guardians within the City of Sárku itself, and blocked the expansion of the sect for half a millennium thereafter. Later, Emperor Dúrumu, "The Copper Blade of Sárku," attempted to remove some of these strictures, but in this He was thwarted by the Temples of Stability, who grew strong during the latter years of His reign.

Termed "The Capital of Sárku" by many, it is a city even more devoted to its patron deity than is the city of Fasftlum to Lord Vimúhla. With the ascendancy to the throne of Lord Sárku's Prince Dhich'uné, the moniker gains greater significance.

It squats upon its five hilltops like a spiny beast, its high-pinnacled, sepulcher-hued Temple of the Worm Lord overtopping the arched and buttressed ramparts which defied the legions of the Empress Sháira Sú.

The dungeons of the Five Palaces of the Worm of the City of Sárku are a place so grim as to defy description.

Beneath the Temple of the Worm-Lord is the fabled "Well Which Pierces the World." Lining this spiral staircase like burgeoning grapes on a vine are storehouses and armories sufficient to outfit half the legions in the Empire in steel armor and weapons. The canny priests have refused to bring their contents forth into the light of day for over 2,000 years. Not even when the forces of Empress Sháira Sú besieged the city did the Grand Adept of Lord Sárku permit his own troops, the Battalions of the Seal of the Worm, to make use of these weapons and armor.

#### *Penóm*

The Temple of the Fourth Worm in Penóm has been rumored to be a major holding place for the Shédra legions of the Armored Visions of Death.

#### *Béy Sü*

In Béy Sü the City of the Dead lies on the eastern shore of the Missúma River across from the City of the Living. Except for a few temples, monasteries, and the grim Tólek Kána Pits, there are no residences or other buildings on the eastern bank.

#### *Jakállá*

Beneath the city of Jakállá are subterranean shrines to all of the Gods of Pavár's Pantheon, and more than a few others as well. While the Temple of Sárku has a large area beneath the City of the Dead on the eastern side of the Missúma river, it has an additional location of import. Coursing through the labyrinth beneath the city is the Equnoyé River, "The River of Silence." In the midst of one dark branch of this river is a small island topped with a large but plain sepulcher or mausoleum. Within this place dwells Srukárum, master of Dread Sárku's Undead legions. It is of course to oversimplify to say that he "dwells" here: such a mighty demon, much more powerful than the demon Quyó whom the Livyáni revere as a goddess, exists at once on many planes and in many times. Yet it is undisputed that this being has decided that some part of himself shall be present at all times in this island shrine beneath Jakállá.

As described in the dread Book of Ebon Bindings, this Demon is one of the most "reasonable" and "rational" of Lord Sárku's servants, and courageous or foolhardy adventurers have been known to set foot upon this island and leave again to tell the tale.

But he is nonetheless a demon, and none should consider approaching his island under any circumstances. Those

who would do so cannot hope to depart without making a tremendous sacrifice of some sort, and often not of one's own choosing. Lord Srukárum might demand the very soul of such a petitioner, despite being presented with a score of other sacrifices or heaps of great wealth.

#### *The Kraá Hills*

The region in and about the Kraá Hills has historically been devoted to Lord Sárku, with some of the oldest records of His worship dating from this area. Residents of the area are of a decidedly rural class, with the exception of High Nobles who vacation and hunt the excellent ranges of the Hills. Worship of Lord Sárku in this area has a decidedly different flavor than within the arcane temples of the cities.

#### *The Chákas*

Another ancient stronghold of Lord Sárku's faith, the ancient Íto Clan once ruled this area as an independent fiefdom. Tracing their lineage back to Bednálljan times, the Íto have a subtle and powerful hold over practically all matters of import in the region. In 2045 the Íto Clan engineered an uprising in the Chákas which the Emperor Gyésmu, "The Iron Fist," spent many years suppressing.

During the reign of Emperor Durúmu, "The Copper Blade of Sárku," an uprising of Pé Chói in this area was mercilessly repressed with great loss of life. The race-memory of the Pé Chói leaves them bearing resentments towards the Temple of Sárku even to this day.

#### *Temple of Sárku*

Located about 100 *Tsán* west of the dread City of Sárku, the Temple of Sárku is the ancient stronghold of this faith, dating from the first days of His worship during the earliest years of the First Imperium. Its Undead servitors tend the Temple, and guard its vast storehouses of ancient artifacts and knowledge.

#### *Úrmish*

This city contains a very old and powerful sanctuary to Lord Sárku, a monastery of Scholar priests of His faith, and a library that dates back to the Engsvanyáli era.

#### *Sokátis*

The former Governor of this city, Mizhék hiKaloné'i, was also the Black Stone Clanmaster in Sokátis. He was a longtime opponent of Emperor Dhich'uné despite their mutual worship of the Worm Lord. In 2366, he dispatched the Legion of the Phalanx of Lord Durritlámish of the Rotted Face (6th Medium Infantry) to join the ecumenical army of the rogue General Arumél hiTánkolel in breaking the siege of Tléku Miriyá and rescuing then-Prince Dhich'uné's rival, his half-brother Mirusíya Tlakotáni.

Having achieved the Throne, in 2367 Emperor Dhich'uné removed the Governor forcibly from his position and replaced him with a puppet, which was in turn deposed by the invading forces of rebel Prince Rereshqála Tlakotáni in the fall of that year. Lord Mihék's whereabouts remain unknown, but it is unlikely he will

be seen again during the reign of Emperor Dhich'uné, "Eternal Splendor."

#### *Jaikalór*

#### *Hmahiyál*

#### *Púrdimal*

#### *Thri'íl*

These cities host a comparatively large number of worshippers of the Worm Lord, including monasteries in Hmakuyál and Púrdimal. Near Thri'íl and the Pass of Skulls in the northeast is a monastery operated by the Brethren of the Amber Coiling, a particularly devoted sect of the Temple with a greater propensity for human sacrifice than the faith at large exhibits.

#### Powerful Persons within the Temple

##### *The Emperor Dhich'uné Tlakotáni, "Eternal Splendor"*

No discussion of important personages within the Temple of Sárku could possibly overlook the reigning Emperor of Tsolyánu whose throne-name is "Eternal Splendor."

Sorcerers whisper of some form of direct identification with the Worm Lord by the youngest son of the former Emperor Hirkáne Tlakotáni, "The Stone Upon Which the Universe Rests." Emperor Dhich'uné is said to have an Aspect of Lord Sárku upon Him and that is a very dangerous thing. There are many within the Temple of Lord Sárku itself who fear Him for that reason. He is too involved with the God, they say, and may be unpredictable, impolitic, and dangerous. This does not suit the motives of the priesthood.

It is prayed by all adherents of Stability, and even many of those of Change, that this Emperor's reign will not be marked by the horrors which occurred during the reigns of prior worshippers of Lord Sárku, such as Emperor Hehejállu "The Dark Moon" (709-801 A.S.) and Emperor Dúrumu "The Copper Blade of Sárku" (1,747-1,809). The deeds of these two rulers are the subject of a lengthy cycle of folk epics dealing with events of unparalleled vileness and abomination. The truth of these apocryphal tales cannot be ascertained.

The brief period since the Emperor ascended the throne at the beginning of 2,365 A.S. has not provided an opportunity to evaluate His rule in a clear light. Certain factions refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Emperor's rule, claiming that the ritual *Kòlumejálím*, "The Choosing of Emperors," was not correctly carried out (and in truth the Emperor won these contests by default as none of the other candidates were able to attend). So the months since the Emperor's ascendancy have been marked by strife and turmoil within the Empire, as various of the Emperor's half-brothers and -sisters express their claim to the throne, raise armies, besiege cities, and assault the seat of Empire, mighty Avanthár itself.

Prince Mirusíya of the city of Fasíltum has, predictably, claimed to secede from the Empire and the Emperor has not seen fit to reassert His rule over it at this time, preferring in His Imperial wisdom to allow its inhabitants

to "bake in the midst of the Desert of Eyági like a *Chrí-fly* in a kiln."

A new claimant, one Prince Táksuru, an accomplished diplomat and statesman and worshipper of the Doomed Prince Ksáru, has been revealed in the city of Béy Sü, and holds that city against the forces of the Emperor.

Prince Eselné barrels back and forth between Páya Gupá, Béy Sü, and Usenánu like an enraged *Chlén* caught in a pit, and has lately set up his headquarters in the former fief of an inconsequential nobleman just south of the city of Usenánu. There he glares south at the newly-roused forces of the eldest of the former Emperor's offspring, Prince Rereshqála, who had until this point in his life claimed no interest in Imperial politics. Roused from his Imperial slumber by an impassioned attraction for a priestess of Ksáru, he has raised this low-clan woman up to become his First Wife. This frustrated the schemes of his half-sister Princess Ma'in Krüthái who had sought a marriage of alliance with her half-brother Prince Rereshqála in order that together they might have a powerful claim upon the throne.

*Emperor Tontikén, "The Slave of Demons" (1306-1318)*

A mediocre Emperor, He was believed to have been possessed by an Aspect of the God. He disappeared abruptly, and was never found. The folktales claim that a demon "as tall as the Golden Tower" appeared suddenly, tearing the top off the Golden Tower like a lead seal torn from a bottle of wine and removing the Emperor as if He were the cork. However less colorful the actual circumstances of Emperor Tontikén's departure, He was nonetheless quite thoroughly gone.

*Emperor Durúmu, "The Copper Blade of Sárku" (1747-1809)*

Also said to have been possessed by an Aspect of Lord Sárku. Raised certain Undead legions, which had such unpleasant repercussions that subsequent Emperors passed Imperial laws prohibiting Undead troops.

## Politics

### Internal Factions

*The Copper Tomb Society*

Politically active, it often allies with the ambitious Ndálu Clan of the Temple of Ksáru. These clans press for involvement in the political process, attempts to obtain important posts, the acquisition of more power, lands, and the perquisites for the sect, and the support of whatever Imperial heir displays favor to the cause.

*Brotherhood of the Victory of the Worm*

This faction cares little for this world and devotes itself to the rituals of the catacombs, collaboration with the dwellers of the Demon Planes, and necromancy and sorcery in their service of the Worm Lord. Members eschew wealth and power, retain no personal possessions, wear the brown robe and skull-white face paint of the initiate priest constantly (even while asleep, it is said), and marry only mates who are as dedicated as

themselves. The political masters of the Five Empires consider this sub-sect harmless.

*The Brotherhood of the Amber Coiling*

This faction follows the Worm Lord's rituals, taboos, and tenets to the letter, believing that thereby they will be chosen for eternal life, not as *Mnúr*, *Shédra*, or even *Jáigi*, but as some still higher and more perfect form of Undead, which they term "the Glorified Immortals." The Brethren operate one of the more remote monasteries in the mountains northeast of Thri'íl. They are distinguished by copper-sheathed demon-masks, headdresses, constantly-worn copper sacrificial knives (the *Kü'núr*), and by an over-eagerness to sacrifice unwary visitors to the Worm-Lord. Their remoteness from the populous areas of the Empire was perhaps all that preserved them from Imperial retribution during the reign of the prior Emperor.

*The Gem of Amber Society*

One of scores of small groups dedicated to the furtherance of one or the other elements of Lord Sárku's doctrine. In this case, the Gem of Amber Society holds that the role of Lord Sárku's faithful, both living and Undead, is to stand outside the concerns of the world as observers. They are not impartial, for it is their role to celebrate Change on behalf of Lords Sárku and Hrü'ü, but they are not to attempt to alter or influence events. The activists of this group seek quietly to gather the resources to raise up their members, one by one, as Undead, so that the witness of Change can continue throughout time. The most dedicated members of these groups live as ascetics, supported by others in their sect or by their clans. Most, however, are ordinary Tsolyáni who traditionally follow this particular tenet of the faith.

The Gem of Amber Society and other such groups are considered politically harmless.

### Temple Alliances

As a member of the Dark Trinity, the Temple of Sárku has traditionally worked with the Temples of Hrü'ü and Ksáru in matters ranging from the mundane to the arcane, from scholarly research to Imperial politics. These three Temples often cooperate to form a considerable power bloc.

Emperor Dhich'uné's ascendance to the Petal Throne has actually served to weaken the Temple of Sárku's traditional alliances, at least for the near term. The Temple of Ksáru is split between supporters of Emperor Dhich'uné and those internal factions which support each of its two Imperial Princes. The Temple of Hrü'ü has not revealed any Imperial Heirs of its own, and is therefore split between those who support the current Emperor and those who do not.

Meanwhile, the Temple of Sárku is itself quite isolated. Assumed to stand behind their Emperor, the reality is that the Temple itself has splits in its support for the Emperor, although those who might oppose Him are careful not to speak openly of their concerns. Meanwhile, no other Temple has been able to unify itself behind the Emperor sufficiently well to support Him completely, and thus no

other Temple will cooperate with the Temple of Sárku for fear of their own internal political repercussions.

Thus the Temple of Sárku has found itself dragged forth into the bright light of Imperial politics in a time of civil war by the actions of Emperor Dhich'uné. It is unlikely that the Temple will be able to elicit support from other Temples until such time as all civil strife has been suppressed.

#### External Parties

Normally the Temple of Sárku is quite influential among the Priestly and Royalist parties, who support its scholarly researches and appreciate the Temple's concern for tradition. The Temple has been the strongest member of the Dark Trinity within the Military party, fielding several legions, and under the influence of then-Prince Dhich'uné the Temple supported the expansionist interests of the Imperial party.

Under the present circumstances it is impossible to categorize the Temple's alliances, constrained as it is by its association with the Emperor and the schisms among all of its potential allies.

#### Military Legions

##### *The Legion of the Scales of Brown*

##### 9th Imperial Heavy Infantry

Kérdu Mriyán Sikún hiKhanúma of Mekú

The legion is based out of Khirgár and was reactivated through the influence of then-Prince Dhich'uné, who was its patron. It is rumored that several cohorts of Undead

#### Clans

Clans faithful to Lord Sárku pursue many occupations, from simple farming to embalming and professional mourning. Certain of the God's clans pursue unique occupations, however, and these are examined below.

##### *Very High*

Sea Blue	Íto**	Golden Bough
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##### *High*

White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle	<b>Domed Tomb</b>
<i>Black Y Society*</i>	<i>Relievers from Life*</i>	<i>Whispered Fear*</i>	<i>Dark Fear</i>
<i>Dark Water</i>	<i>Dark Moon</i>	<i>Dark Flame</i>	Standing Stone
Rising Sun			

##### *Medium*

Green Bough	<i>Black Stone</i>	Ripened Sheaf	<b>Glory of the Worm</b>
Black Pinnacle	<b>Copper Door</b>	First Moon	Moon of Evening
Golden Lintel	Scroll of Wisdom	Weeping Stone	<i>Black Hood</i>
<i>Black Mountain</i>	<i>Black Monolith</i>		

"auxiliaries" have been organized in the catacombs beneath the City of Sárku. It is also rumored that it was this devoted legion which rid the Golden Tower of Prince Mridóbu's forces in 2366.

##### *The Battalions of the Seal of the Worm*

##### 9th Imperial Medium Infantry

Kérdu Mriyán QurrúmuhiKhanúma, City of Sárku

A good priestly legion with some experience, it participated in many *Qadárni* battles and raids during the war with Yán Kór. It has been significantly strengthened since Emperor Dhich'uné assumed the throne.

##### *The Armored Vision of Death*

##### 29th Imperial Medium Infantry

Kérdu Mriyán Arkútu hiKúrodu, Penóm.

Formed by then-Prince Dhich'uné and stationed near Penóm, three Cohorts of *Shédra* and a detachment of *Vorodlá* are said to have been housed in the Temple of the Fourth Worm.

##### *The Legion of the Peaks of Kraá*

##### 12th Imperial Archers

Kérdu HáikonhiVórudu, City of Sárku

Another ancient legion reactivated by the Temple of Sárku under Imperial edict. Its general was commandant of the Temple of Sárku's guards. This legion uses poisoned arrows, and wears brown-lacquered armor with skull helmets. It is composed of mountaineers from the Kraá Hills.



*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	<b>Open Sepulcher</b>	Open Hand
High Tower	Flat Peak	<b>Black Stone Tomb</b>	<i>Black Hand</i>
Woven Whip			

*Very Low*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	<i>Nighted Tower</i>	Bright Sword
Flat Rock	Glass Spear	Turning Wheel	Collar of Bronze

*\*The Black Y Society*

*\*The Association of Relievers from Life*

*\*The Clan of Whispered Fear*

Assassination is generally considered *bússan*, ignoble, by members of the Five Empires. However, tradition dictates the professions and trades available to members of each clan. Some clans pursue crafts, such as pottery or the weaving of mats. Other clans provide services, such as food-serving or tomb-cleaning. The assassins' clans, then, are accepted as traditional killers-for-hire, with a history extending back to the First Empire. Their members are not considered ignoble when they strike from darkness, for this is their traditional role in society.

Members of these clans are often worshippers of Lord Sárku as well as the other Gods of the Dark Trinity. The assassin clans maintain a working relationship with the Temple of Sárku because the Temple provides them with the "Worms of Death." These are vicious flesh-burrowing worms, rendered dormant and sealed into clay "coins," and are supplied to the assassin clans in return for certain unnamed favors. These and other assassins' weapons such as "The Springing Doom" — a spring-loaded stiletto concealed in a forearm sheath — are both ignoble and illegal for anyone but a member of the assassins' clans to carry.

\*\* *Íto*

These are the ancient lords of the Chákan Protectorates, worshippers of Lord Sárku and His Cohort Durritlámish. The clan is limited to the Chákas, but has clanhouses in the City of Sárku, Mekú, and Púrdimal. They are viewed as a potential source of trouble by the Imperium due to their ongoing desire for autonomy. They are not so headstrong as the Vríddi, and certainly they are closer allies to Emperor Dhich'uné than many clans in the Empire, but this simply provides additional leverage with which to press for their own autonomy.

## Holidays

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Sárku join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

25 Shápru

The Descent into the Tomb Forever, City of Sárku

Rituals for Lord Sárku and His Cohort Durritlámish are carried out in some of the city's most ancient underground shrines.

19 Didóm

Touching of the Worm of Copper

Throughout Tsolyánu and Yán Kór, worshippers of Lord Sárku conduct rituals and visit to the mausoleums of the Cities of the Dead, where one's ancestors are venerated. Families of Nobles visit the Shrine of the First Aspect of Sárku to touch the coiling five-headed copper worm therein.

3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

10 Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

24 Dohála

Unknown Occasion

This date was significant enough in 2366 to prompt Emperor Dhich'uné to leave the Golden Tower and go to the City of Sárku to celebrate religious rituals. His brief vacancy would have gone unnoticed except that his half-brother, Prince Mridóbu Tlakotáni, chose that day to invade the Golden Tower. Within days Prince Dhich'uné returned and reclaimed the throne with the help of his Undead. This may not be a fixed holy day, but only a particularly auspicious day in the astrology of the Temple of Sárku.

Vraháma, Intercalary Days

Night of Worms, City of Sárku

The dread Night of Worms is celebrated with rituals in the caverns deep below the ground. Public rituals and festivities in the largest, uppermost, caverns mask secret and terrifying rituals in the deeper chambers of the Temple of Sárku.

Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

The Libation Unto the Final Master, Dó Cháka Protectorate

Public celebrations involving processions and rituals.

## Aspects

Lord Sárku is represented as a mighty serpentine form having five vermiform heads, each with a gaping, suckered maw. A mass of coiling tentacles hangs beneath each head, and these each bear a symbol of the grave: bones, rotted cerements, skulls, and corpse-candles.

He has 108 Aspects divided into Greater and Lesser Aspects. The Greater Aspects must have a shrine within all major temples to Lord Sárku. The Lesser Aspects are recognized by all the temples of Lord Sárku throughout the Empire, and in other lands as well, but may not always have a shrine in the temple. Other Aspects are localized, archaic, known only to priests of the Inner Temple, or are the subject of disagreement between factions within the Temple.

Greater Aspects

1) *The First Greater Aspect of Sárku*

A monstrous vermiform creature with five questing heads.

2) *Chmúr of the Hands of Grey.*

Little is known of this Inner Aspect, but He protects graves and catacombs and exists in crumbling tombs. Some claim that "Chágh Umér" and "Chmúr" are both names for one of the early predecessors of Lord Sárku from the days before the Priest Pavár brought

enlightenment. Others point to the Engsvanyáli onomatopoeia "*Chmúr*" the sound of something soft and wet bursting open, as being the source for this Aspect's name.

3) *Siyenágga*

"The Wanderer of Tombs"

He pursues those who have violated the Worm Lord's sanctuaries, in order to wreak horrid vengeance. He wanders to and fro in the darkness of old cemeteries, flitting from tomb to tomb, destroying trespassers and would-be tomb robbers. Marketplace merchants will sell amulets of protection from this frequent bogeyman in tales used to frighten children.

4) *Ha'ótl of the Tattered Shroud*

Skeletal in appearance, Ha'ótl takes charge of burials and the disposition of the corpses of the poor and low-clan. When the poor are interred, He oversees the celebrations.

5) *Ku'ún*

"The Corpse-Lord"

Ku'ún is depicted as a tall, gaunt, wasted figure, wrapped in tattered cerements. He has a long face of human form, with a severe hawklike visage and black empty sockets instead of eyes, and is depicted as reveling with the dead. He represents the deceased in the Judgment Hall of the Worm, wherein the deeds of the newly-dead are weighed by Dijátl the Copper-Clawed. He sees to corpses in the Underworld, protecting those of Lord Sárku and claiming the untended bodies of those who served Stability for His own.

6) *Dijátl the Copper-Clawed.*

He weighs the deeds of the newly-dead in the Judgment Hall of the Worm, and based on His judgment, Lord Sárku Himself then metes out the Pleasures and Punishments of the Sepulcher.

7) *Akhmér*

"The Visage in the Mist"

Haunts lonely places and whispers to those contemplating suicide.

8) *Naupál of the Blackened Lips*

Governs certain rotting diseases and stinking tumors. The Tsolyáni view diseases as "invisible animals" or demons, and term the various medicines used to treat them as "poisons for the sickness." This Aspect rules certain groups of these demons and commands them to do his bidding.

9) *Záidza*

"The Princess of Liquescent Mold"

Carries away the little children who have died in their sleep.

10) *Awéth*

"The Paladin of Skulls"

The form used in legend by the Worm Lord to hoodwink Lord Hrúgga.

#### Lesser Aspects

##### *Guru'úmish*

A Mu'ugalavyáni Aspect of Lord Sárku favored by the rural nobles of distant Gashchné and said to dwell in a temple amidst the Plain of Towers.

##### *Mshéqw*

"The Bloated One of the Sea"

An Aspect of Lord Sárku worshipped in Salarvyá and coastal Tsolyánu and Yán Kór. The *Roll of the Worm Lord* claims that Mshéqw dwells in the sea and appears as a great bloated corpse. It is said to wreck ships, but can be propitiated with handfuls of small copper ingots tossed forth before a voyage.

##### *Mrúgga*

"Divine Angel of Darkness"

She flies invisibly, washing over people to bring a cold, terrible fear of dead things and the Undead. Sounds and smells accompany Her apparition, and She frequents deserted, untended cemeteries.

##### *Véshkuru*

"Lord of Copper, The Smith of the Weapons of the Worm, Lord of Bonds"

A great, hulking creature without a humanoid form, His job is to build for Lord Sárku. He appears in *The Book of Entering the Tomb* pouring molten copper into molds. He is the special Aspect of mines and miners, smiths, and workers in copper. In the Kraá Hills, His faithful know the secret means for forging copper harder than iron, to nearly the strength of steel.

##### *Batha'ák*

"The Eye of Eternity"

This is the contemplative Aspect of Lord Sárku, much adored by such mystical sects as the Gem of Amber Society. It is depicted as an eye atop a pyramid, representing the contemplation of all the Universe from the Beginning to the End of Time. The faithful of Batha'ák produce philosophical treatises concerning Reality and Nature. It figures prominently in *The Book of Entering the Tomb* where Its pyramid "spans the Abyss Beyond the Pylons." Elsewhere It is described as "facing the College at the End of Time across the Abyss of All the World."

##### *Njéng*

"The Spy of Sárku"

A slime-like substance which oozes through the catacombs and watches without eyes. In *The Book of Entering the Tomb* it is said to destroy "those who violate the Lair of the Worm." It knows the catacombs and the location of all things, although it finds living beings swift and difficult to track. When appeased with sacrifices of

lives and copper, It will lead priests of Lord Sárku to items (but not creatures) within the tombs. It flows like water through the *Tsuru'úm*, and appears to be an ordinary puddle when quiescent.

##### *Albél*

"The Pursuer, The White-Haired Woman of Doom"

Clans around the Kraá Hills and the Chákas worship this female Aspect of Lord Sárku, depicted as an aged, white-haired and skeletal woman. Albél follows Lord Sárku's enemies and can breathe upon the recent dead to create *Jáigi* out of dead females. In *The Book of Entering the Tomb*, She is said to wander, whispering and moaning, through the tunnels of the cemeteries. She gives hope to clan-parents whose daughters have died, who seek Albél's intervention to give their daughters existences beyond Life.

##### *Chágh Umér*

This is not a Khíshan name (Khíshan being the family of languages including Tsolyáni and Yán Koryáni) but is derived from Nuru'ársh. Described in *The Roll of the Worm Lord* as an Intellect of the Farthest Planes, this Aspect of Lord Sárku sees and knows all events lost in the branches of time and space. His noncorporeal intellect travels the Planes seeking to understand Eternity.

##### *Óghur*

"The Restorer of Bones"

A common northerly Aspect, worshipped in Yán Kór, but with shrines as far south as Béy Sü and Thri'íl. He wanders the battlefields and the cemeteries, bringing the bones and bodies of the dead back together to facilitate their raising as Undead. His faithful believe that in order to properly witness as Lord Sárku desires, the body needs to be as whole and coherent as possible.

##### *Ésh Akté*

"She Who Brings Back Those Who are Gone"

She finds people and creatures who are lost, restoring the Undead to their beloved relatives and friends. In *The Five-Sided Tome of the Putrescent One*, She appears as a young, pale, beautiful girl, wandering the tombs and catacombs. Pallid and deceptively mild, She finds dead bodies, or Undead creatures wandering lost, and brings them gently back to the Temple of Sárku, where they participate in the great necrophilic orgies of the deepest of the Inner Temples.

##### *Vína Néleth*

Portrayed in *The Five-Sided Tome of the Putrescent One* as a delicate, lovely maiden with ice cold-flesh and no breath or heartbeat, singing a fearsome "song" which can be heard at a distance through the *Tsuru'úm*. She recovers those who have wandered from Lord Sárku's faith, seducing them back into the Temple. If they will not return, She punishes them in ways too horrible to describe.

**Demons****Gereshmá'a**

He of the Mound of Skulls, Nighted One of the Lonely Tomb, Minion of Lord Origób the Undying, Selector of Those Who Shall Dwell in the Unending Grey, Princeps of the Legions of the Mantle of Vipers.

He is of the Substance of Sárku and the Essence of Durritlámish. His Powers are Transformation, Dispelling, Visitation, and Ingurgitation. He appears as a great, many-limbed beetle-like being, with a segmented body and wing-cases in rust brown and yellow.

**Kurritlakál**

The Eater of Skins, Cracker of Bones, Father of One Thousand Progeny, Spawn of Durritlámish, One Seated Upon the Shore of the River Which Flows to Eternity

He is of the Substance of Durritlámish and the Essence of Sárku, and his Powers include Gifting, Consuming, Sundering, Comminution, and Descrying. He has a great globular body like a bloated *Atlún* spider borne by myriad stunted limbs. His face hangs like a bulbous, sagging parody of a human countenance. His Secret Names are Ba'án, Siúhsa, Tlé-knáù, and Edduélmigà.

**Srükárum**

Lord of the Legions of the Despairing Dead, Castellan of the Citadel of Sighs, Warder of the Gates of Skulls

He is of the Substance of Sárku and the Essence of Durritlámish, and his sole Power is Conquest. He appears as a skull-faced warrior in copper and gold bearing a two-handed axe. It is whispered that this demon resides beneath the city of Jakállá, on a lonely island in the midst of the subterranean River of Death.

**Quyóve**

She of the Obelisk, Mistress of the Fifty-Third Circle, One Who Consumes the Organs of Men, Demoness of the All-Seeing Peak

This demon is thought to be of the Substance of Sárku and the Essence of Dlamélish, and her Powers include Elicitation, Gathering, Commingling, and Restoration. She is never seen, and always sends her worm-like servitors. She is worshipped as the Goddess Quyó in northern Livyánu. Her Secret Names are Dlévunè, Alésha, Vadhúib, Eshmigétl, Orúú, and Qá.

**Servitors of Quyóve**

These minions of Quyóve appear as black, sinuous, headless things that writhe and drip and crawl. These creatures possess the power of Penetration, and tendrils of these servitors can lodge in the hair and skin and slay the evocator after the summoning is ended.

**Ku'éth**

The Wrinkled One, Master of the Seventh Circle, Terrible Vision of the End of Life

This demon is of the Substance and Essence of Sárku and his powers include Raising, Entombing, and Warding. He appears as a wattled scabrous visage. His Secret Names are Ba'alán, Tlés, Chrái, Pu'ún, and Eútl.

**Ktélu**

He Who Cannot Be Gazed Upon, Lord of the Forty-Third Circle, One of Enhanced Putrefaction, Servitor of Sárku

He is of the Substance and Essence of Sárku and his Powers include Putrefaction, Vitalization, Ascertainment, and Effusement. He appears as a whirring tatter of brown, black, and grey rags. Her Secret Names are Arayá, Neké, Pór, Theshkólu, É, Lanmidánte, and Vnátl.

**Njénü**

He of the Everlasting Dream

He is of the Substance of Sárku, but the Essence of Ksáru. His Powers are Soporiferousness and Envisioning. He appears as a scholarly man of sophisticated mien. His secret name is Eridé.

**Neré**

The Many-Bodied, Lord of the Fortieth Circle, He Whose Breath is Venom

He is of the Substance of Lord Wurú and the Essence of Lord Sárku, and his powers include Defilement and Pestilence. He appears as a tangle of blackish, yellowish, greenish-brown pods, sacks and stalks connected by sticky fibers and ganglia. His Secret Names are Fiyú, Tettukánetl, Quriktáhl, Imónü, Re'á, Otlúng, and Siyusháà.

**Nyerebó**

The Spreader of Darkness and the Reaper of Gloom, Master of the Forty-Second Circle, Servitor of Srükárum

He is of the Substance and Essence of Sárku, and his Powers include Undamning, Seancing, and Elicerement. He is humanoid though huge and broad, with a face like a fierce wooden image. His Secret Names are Túù, Uó, Gdéth.

**Ssüssü**

The Eater of the Dead, Lord of the Twenty-Ninth Circle

This demon is of the Substance of Durritlámish and the Essence of Sárku. His powers are Implacability, Immobility, Intrepidity, Aeriality, and Necrosis. He appears as a huge ophidian beast, apodal and squamous, with an elongated jaw filled with many rows of teeth like chips of chert. His Secret Names are Rssá, Nthé, Ashúshná, and Hà-éssu.

**Shenésa**

Mistress of Gereshmá'a, Ruler of the Ochre Plains, She Who Hosts.

She is of the Substance of Vimúhla, but the Essence of Sárku, and her Powers include Visitation, Gifting, Burning, and Disinvigoration. This demon appears in the guise of a woman of middle years dressed in

contemporary fashion and of charming mien. She can appear without summons, and generously invites persons to visit her upon her lonely plain of yellow sands and twisted black trees. Her home seems charming and beautiful while one stands at her side, yet let one wander aside and all things are seen to bear pleasant façades which hide nacreous, twisted and vermiform natures. She is generous, yet capricious, and a short visit to her plane can result in many years having passed upon one's return. Her Secret Names are Báu, Kes'ár, and G'élts.

## Magic

### Magical Items

#### *The Worms of Death*

The tenth-level temple spell of Vermiculation causes the Worms of Death to become dormant within its circle of effect. The Worms can then be encased in soft clay "coins" which are hardened and sold to the assassins' clans, providing a substantial income for the sorcerous academies of Lord Sárku and His Cohort.

These discs are about 2 cm in diameter and 50 mm thick. When the "coin" is broken, the worms emerge and bore into any warm body nearby, where they consume the internal organs and grow to considerable size (1 or 2 m long). Death results in 10 minutes unless the victim is promptly treated by a competent physician or by certain magical means. It is from these worms that the Tsolyáni idiom "to bestow the coin" comes, signifying "to condemn to certain death."

#### *The Station of Kelúo*

A magical diagram made of red chalk or blood mixed with the grease of some being, human or animal, which has perished in fire. It is seven cubits in length, angle to base. It is used in the summoning of the demons Gereshmá'a, Jnéksha'a, Mrúgga, and Shenésa, among others.

#### *Tsévu*

Engsvanyáli *Ngásh*. A fruit often used in sorcerous endeavors because of its legendary associations with both Lord Ksáru and Lord Thúmis, but also Lords Sárku and Dumitlámish.

#### *Undead*

There is some overlap between the Undead created by Lord Sárku's powers and those created by the Temple of Ksáru. Devotees of these sects are usually able to agree in advance as to who will summon and control these spectral beings. On those rare occasions when there have been confrontations, the Undead have usually allied with their proper Lord, Mighty Sárku, and His minions.

### Temple Spells

#### *The Bulwark of Amber*

This ritual creates a magical amber-colored shell around the caster which deflects hostile directed spells, augmenting the caster's own *Pedhétl* with some of the energy of the hostile spell.

#### *Depuration*

This ritual transforms steel into the copper so beloved of Lord Sárku. Its most powerful variant is used to create an enchanted copper which is as effective as the enchanted steel employed by other Temples.

#### *Domination*

These psychic spells have a variety of effects, depending on the particular spell cast. Most affect the target's memory, causing them to forget periods of time ranging from a few hours to a few weeks (referred to as "mind-bars"). However, one powerful variant will send a group of targets off to accomplish a task with single-minded fanaticism. Yet another will set a magical trap in the mind of the target which slays any who would attempt to Disenchant it, as well as slaying the target.

#### *Eradicator of Veracity*

This spell disguises the true nature of its target beneath a fiction created by the caster.

#### *Hebetation of the Intellect*

These rituals dislodge the *Hlákme* of one or more targets for various lengths of time, leaving the body in a mindless, comatose state. The most powerful form of this spell permanently dislodges a target's entire personality, allowing the *Hlákme* and *Balétl* of one newly dead to take up residence in the body.

#### *Necrofacture*

These rituals create low-level Undead, *Shédra* and *Mrír*. These creatures are mindless, unable to use magic or emerge into bright light, and obey the commands of the caster. A high-level variant of this spell will restore to consciousness a dead priest of Lord Sárku or His Cohort, who will retain all of his or her abilities and act independently. All of the Undead created by these rituals will remain active until destroyed, they cannot be merely Disenchanted. The most powerful ritual transforms the caster into a *Shédra* for a period of time, after which he or she reverts to life.

#### *The Summoning of the Spectral Hosts*

These rituals produce a mournful, hissing call which is not always audible to human ears. Various numbers of Undead arrive to do the caster's bidding.

#### *Vermiculation*

These rituals will summon either the Worms of Death or the Worms of the Night, which latter are insubstantial and difficult to see or contain. These worms will eat their way into living flesh, bringing death in minutes. The most powerful ritual will summon the Worms of Death and render them dormant, allowing them to be encapsulated in clay "coins" which the Temple sells to the Assassins' Clans.

Chatán risked death by slipping into the Inner Temple of Sárku, the Lord of the Undead, but the bland life of a Second-Circle Ritual Priest sometimes needed a seasoning of danger. Bearing long tapers, brown-robed figures ghosted across the marble floor beneath Chatán's hiding place, lighting lanterns made of yellow glass and copper, the metal holy to Lord Sárku. The only sound was the hollow plunking of a *Ténturen* being tuned for the night's ceremonies, and Chatán breathed as quietly as he could.

Peering into the shadowed chapel vault not far above, Chatán searched for the Undead *Vorodlá* and clawed *Biridlú* said to guard these shrines, poised to swoop on leathery wings to seize trespassers. He reassured himself that barely a hand could fit through the stone latticework which hid his alcove, while he could always escape into the tunnels.

Chatán had discovered the tunnels leading to the subterranean Inner Sanctuary as a lonely child-acolyte, newly dedicated to the Temple by his proud clan. Lost while exploring his new home, the young boy had feared the monsters rumored to guard the Underworld. Instead he had found this, the most holy shrine of the Temple, and during the years since he had never dared return. Chatán had held his secret close, telling no one and remaining a solitary child, alone in the boisterous confines of the acolytes' dormitory.

An uninspired student, he had mastered only the simplest spell of Illumination before being dismissed from magical training, and had ended up a Ritual temple guard, an honorable if unexceptional service.

Then, today, a curtained palanquin had arrived in the temple courtyard accompanied by a great retinue. Chatán was serving as "Opener of the Way of Bones," the grand title bestowed upon bored junior priests positioned to either side of the Temple doors. Thus he observed powerful Lord Jayárgo, the heavysset High Priest of the Temple, who hurried out to do his anonymous guest's bidding like the least acolyte.

Such an important visitor hinted that a ceremony of great consequence was due to take place in the subterranean Inner Shrine. Grand celebrations had been anticipated for the Five Holy Days ever since Lord Dhich'uné, a priest of this very Temple, had succeeded in last summer's Rite of Choosing Emperors. Curiosity allied with boredom to defeat caution, and when his shift ended Chatán used his Illumination spell to return through the dark tunnels to this secret observation post.

Now the great doors of the Inner Temple swung wide below Chatán, admitting distant chanting and the play of dozens more yellow copper lanterns. The brown-robed servitors disappeared like *Epéng*-beetles exposed to a sudden light, sweeping silently into doors hidden in the walls below. Then a long shadow marched into the entrance ahead of a lone figure, the Herald of the God in copper armor, skull-helmet, and *Khéshchal*-plumes, who cried out according to doctrine,

"*Otuléngba*, all Hail!"

*Otuléngba*, to the Crypt of Glory!  
The Lord of Worms draws near!  
The End of Life approacheth!  
Give praise, give praise,  
to the Lord of Life-Beyond-Death,  
He Who would Witness Forever,  
Celebrant of the Righteousness of Being,  
And the God of Might and Majesty in the Tomb!  
All Hail!"

The Herald struck the floor five times with the *Ka'ing*-staff of Lord Sárku, displaying the God's five-headed glyph, and strode forth into the Inner Shrine.

The entrance processional took nearly an *Kirén*, so great was the pageantry. Yellow light glittered off the copper armor of the standard-bearers who followed the Herald. Ritual priests marched slowly in, playing mournful horns, gongs, and drums. Chatán recognized priests who normally officiated over the daily ceremonies taking up positions of minor consequence at the sides of the nave. Some carried ancient texts and holy items, others waved smoking censers of *ólurash*, which burned with the scent of mildew and decay. The highest priests of the entire City of Sárku, the center of Lord Sárku's worship in the Empire, were participating in this ceremony, and a chill crept up Chatán's spine at the implications of such a gathering of power.

When all had arrived, the Doors of Copper and Bone opened at the back of the altar and the Celebrants emerged. Lord Jayárgo's features were hidden by a stylized skull-mask embossed with copper, but Chatán recognized him by his great height and girth. He and several other Celebrants assumed their positions and turned back to face the great doors as the High Celebrant emerged from the darkness. He was a man of moderate height and apparent youth, unmasked, handsome and graceful, clad in the fine brown robes of the Temple, accented with copper pectorals and blue-and-gold-trimmed plaques.

As the crowd below fell as one upon their faces Chatán was stunned to realize that the High Celebrant was none other than Emperor Dhich'uné Tlakotáni!

Now the blood flowed like ice through Chatán's veins. The Temple punishment for spying upon the High Rituals was merely death: this was as nothing to the Imperial punishment for spying upon the very Emperor Himself! Chatán hardly dared breathe for fear of the spells undoubtedly defending the Emperor, whose guardians must even now must be scanning the hall for spies! Hungry *Vorodlá* and dread *Mrúr* must be lurking nearby, ready to pounce at the least hint of trespass!

Icy beads of sweat trickled down Chatán's face as he watched the ceremony below, too terrified even to wipe them away. As Lord Jayárgo and the highest Ritual priests carried out duties normally assigned only to youngsters like himself, Chatán was listening intently for the shuffling approach of the Undead guardians of the Inner Shrine.

*Tunkúl*-gongs crashed as five-score human sacrifices were led in, men and women of good health and great

beauty staring blankly through the drugs which rendered them passive. At the altar, priests of Lord Sárku wielding the jagged ritual knife named the *Kü'núr* gripped each victim's arms as the throat was cut, and steadied the wilting bodies so that their blood filled broad copper bowls. Lord Jayárgo was among the Celebrants who gathered around the corpses, making ritual gestures as the mournful horns wailed. Then did the first sacrifices rise, animated by the powers of Lord Sárku, God of the Undead, to take up the *Kü'núr* themselves and sacrifice more of their drugged comrades in an ever-growing choreography of slaughter.

Eventually, only five groups of five sacrifices remained alive, positioned before the great doors of bone. These were the select, and numbered not a few fanatical volunteers performing their ultimate act of worship. The voice of the Emperor Himself rose to recite the ritual names of Lord Sárku, calling out again and again until it seemed that the very rocks joined their voices to His.

The torches and lanterns seemed to dim, and the air to grow chill. From the darkness of the opening behind the altar emerged a being of terror, a writhing worm as tall as five men, glistening with a mucous that spat and hissed upon the stone floor. The groping mouth leaned forth, and a goblet of slime struck one of the sacrifices — who fell, screaming, as his arm boiled away to reveal the white gleam of bone. Then Chatán was moved near to madness with horror, as the Emperor Himself unexpectedly transformed, flickering and shifting into the appearance of a five-headed vermiform being still taller and more terrifying than the great worm rearing up behind the altar. Chatán's mind whirled and he would certainly have cried out, but at that moment something flickered in front of his vision, and his throat was gripped with pain.

Lungs full to bursting, unable to scream, Chatán clawed at the strap around his throat as something slammed down on his spine and his head was jerked violently backwards. As his vision dimmed, he kicked frantically and hit the wall, sliding sideways and sprawling his assailant upon the floor. The pressure on his throat persisted and his consciousness was slipping away, when a sudden flash of light illuminated the grimacing visage of Chatán's murderer, who was pointing a small object through the latticework into the hall below. Then all was darkness.

Light and sensation returned well before Chatán realized that he was awake, laying upon some kind of table. Awareness grew slowly into memory, and his hands surged to his throat to find...

"Looking for this?" a voice asked, as a figure swam into view. Lord Jayárgo stood over him, holding a twisted leather strap from one finger, a clasp on one end. This was what had been viciously fastened about his neck, and...

"Where am I?" Chatán croaked hoarsely. The flesh of his throat felt dry but undamaged.

"In the temple," Lord Jayárgo replied, "All courtesies must be extended to he who saved the Emperor. Ah,

come, do not look so surprised — the magical energies of the Illumination-spell that you cast alerted every mage in the Imperial entourage to your presence. That fool's destructive device was turned back upon him only with the aid of your warning."

"Who would attack the Emperor?" blurted Chatán in confusion. He did not remember casting a spell, but there had been a flash of light just before the blackness.

"We did not know, but we surmised that you might have gotten a look at the assassin, who left no remains. By scanning your memories, we learned who the assassin was, and identified the parties behind the plot. They will swiftly be dealt with.

"As for you," Lord Jayárgo continued, "you are to be treated with honor. In addition to saving the Emperor, you have been a direct agent of the God Himself."

With difficulty, Chatán rose upon one numb, tingling elbow and gargled, "My lord?"

Oh yes, didn't you suspect? Lord Sárku has influenced your life. Finding that shrine, eluding its guardians, these things are impossible for the child you were, or are yourself. No, indeed, your defeat of that assassin reveals the God's hand!" Chatán was startled as Lord Jayárgo laughed aloud, "Oh, to have observed his consternation when he found you already in his hidey-hole, gawking like a lad who snuck into the *Hirilákte* arena. Doubtless he waited in a quandary, afraid to reveal himself by attacking you, yet unable to depart without accomplishing his mission." The High Priest composed himself, dabbing at his eyes with a sleeve. "This would be instructional for those who claim Lord Sárku has no sense of humor."

But what is to become of me, Lord?" asked Chatán, his mind awhirl with Lord Jayárgo's claims.

"You? Why you must be assigned duties appropriate to one of your station and character. You are a special servant of the Worm Lord. It won't be quite what you're used to, but I think you will grow to enjoy your new role in the temple."

Confused, Chatán could only gasp, "My Lord, I thank you for restoring me to life, but I..."

We needed your memories, boy, not your life!" roared Jayárgo, laughing again. Then he leaned close, a grave countenance upon his face. "No indeed. Oh, you're quite dead."

To his stricken look, Jayárgo replied, "Come now, don't look so shocked! Believe me, death is no impediment to success in the service of Lord Sárku. You've led a lonely life under the burden of Lord Sárku's favor. Now, you will enjoy long and companionable service as one of the Undead servitors of the Lord of Worms. The best part of your life now begins... after your life has ended!"

Chatán's vision swam, and he slid back upon his pallet to the roars of Lord Jayárgo's laughter.

# Durritlámish

*The Black Angel of the Putrescent Hand, He of the Rotted Face, Opener of Catacombs*



Lord Durritlámish marshals the Undead and serves His Master in the places of the Dark, the catacombs that lie beneath the ancient cities. He aids those who serve the Undead, those who join with the Dwellers of the Dark, those who protect the tombs and necropolises, and those who sacrifice their victims to Him in the Orgy of Inimitable Demise. Lord Durritlámish is a demonic God, with necromantic powers to create, guide, and empower the Undead.

His doctrines stress the Worm Lord's hegemony over the catacombs and the creatures that stand sentinel there. He is master of the Undead, *Kérdu* of the Worm Lord's legions, and Himself the seniormost guardian of all that pertains to the Worm and the Tomb. His priesthood is often charged with the protection of the necropolises, and the Tomb Police are often worshippers of Lord Durritlámish.

Where His Master, Lord Sárku, seeks the perpetuation of Intellect beyond the Grave in order to Witness the Unfolding of Change, Lord Durritlámish is He who sees to the disposition of Lord Sárku's Undead. The Lord of the Rotted Face protects the catacombs in His Master's name, bringing forth the dwellers therein to repel the forces of Stability.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

Both the Temples of Sárku and Durritlámish are obsessed with secrecy, making it difficult to assess their philosophical and theological premises. Important texts are written in the Tongue of the Lord of Worms, an arcane language perhaps once spoken by some lost civilization in the Chákas.

### Color

The black of the tomb, the brown of the grave, as well as the purple of Lord Hrü'ü's Hegemony of Change.

### Symbol

His symbol is a stylized image of the legendary "Vessel of the Vision of the World" in which all the Skeins of Destiny of every creature in the universe throughout all time and space may be seen.

### Costume

His priests and priestesses wear brown and purple or brown and black robes, brown lacquered armor (or leather bodices in the case of females), and skull-faced

headdresses. The clergy paint their faces grey to resemble corpses.

### Rituals

The Outer Rituals of Lord Durritlámish follow patterns akin to those in other Temples. For the average worshipper, great ceremonies are held in the main nave of the temple followed by refreshments and socializing in the courtyard.

The wealthier middle clans proceed inward, for "private" ceremonies featuring occasional magical apparitions, the appearance of Undead, and drugs and music to dazzle the senses and swell the temple coffers.

### Sacrifices

Copper statuettes, an export of the City of Sárku, are used as sacrifices all over the Empire. Usually Lord Durritlámish's Outer Temple seeks no blood sacrifices.

### The Inner Doctrines

#### *Proscribed races*

Since the Ahoggyá have a taste for human flesh, they are barred from the precincts of the Cities of the Dead, and are never permitted to join the priesthoods of Lords Sárku or Durritlámish.

### Rituals

Deep beneath the temple are held the true Inner Ceremonies. Only clergy of the Temple and particularly wealthy and powerful laity ever attend these rituals.

#### *The Ritual of the Tomb*

The worshippers, mostly priests and priestesses of the Temple and certain wealthy or powerful laity, are ritually sealed into a tomb wherein they lie and assume the guise of death, wearing white clay makeup and dressed in funereal finery. Priests walk among them in the closed darkness, chanting and touching them with cold skeletal fingers. Actual Undead may participate as priests in these ceremonies, and necrophilia can be an element of the ritual. After experiencing the thrill of "being Undead," these worshippers are led back up and fed ritual foods to return them to "corpse life," as the Undead term the Living.

#### *Orgy of Inimitable Demise*

Everyone who takes part in this ritual will die, and will rise as Undead and move among the Undead. Clergy representing Aspects of Lords Sárku and Durritlámish have the task of introducing the new Undead to their ancestral Undead friends and relatives. After a time, the



participants are restored to actual life, unless they choose to remain Undead. Those who have participated in this rare and powerful ritual bear a special amulet whose meaning is known only to others like themselves.

Participants in this ritual include only high-circle priests and priestesses of the Temple, and the most powerful, high-clan worshippers.

Recently the Temple of Karakán, objecting particularly to necrophilic practices, claimed that this ritual was fraudulent, and that neither death nor Undead were truly involved. In a cunning move, the Priesthood of Durrítlámish opened its doors and offered the complainants a chance to participate in the ritual and prove their assertions. The Temple of Karakán declined the offer; and has not further prosecuted its ecclesiastical complaint.

#### *Sacrifices*

The Inner Temple does not seek blood sacrifice as such, but it does accept many even more gruesome offerings. The remains of those long, long dead may be dedicated to Lord Durrítlámish, and some persons come to Him to die and be revived as Undead — possibly not of their own volition. Whether these are "blood" or "human" sacrifices is difficult to define.

### **Temple Layout**

On those occasions when a temple of Lord Durrítlámish does not have its own compound, it can be positioned on any side of the Temple of Sárku. It is usually a long, narrow building, with an upper basilica behind which stairways descend to lower basilicas. At the end of all these halls is an opening (always referred to as a "door") that either goes straight down or descends at a sharp angle into the "underworld." This is sometimes an entrance to the real *Tsuru'úm*, but sometimes descends into a "ritual underworld" which is only a part of the temple itself. The concept of going downward is foremost, for to advance is to descend. Lining the sides of this passage are frescoes and hideous murals depicting the Worm Lord and His Cohort.

### **Secular Activities**

#### **Businesses**

Many clans traditionally faithful to Lord Durrítlámish specialize in the manufacture of the religious icons of the Temples of both the Worm Lord and His Cohort. This is a very productive enterprise, considering all of the robes, weapons, sacrificial statuettes, and ritual implements necessary for the temples in the Empire and beyond.

In the Kraá Hills the Clans of Lord Durrítlámish wield secular power, raising the nuts and fruits that are a valued export of the region. Textiles are similarly the demesne of His clans in the Kurt Hills and the Chákas.

#### **Public Works and Services**

The most notable public service performed by the Temple of Durrítlámish is its support of the Tomb Police of the

Necropolises of the major cities. Low and mid-level urban clans faithful to the Lord of the Rotted Face are proud when one of their own becomes an honored member of the Tomb Guard.

#### **Cities of Broad Influence**

Lord Durrítlámish is most popular in the cities of Komóre, Íto, Penóm, the City of Sárku, and Sokátis. In other cities, Lord Durrítlámish's Inner Rituals are out of the public eye and rarely viewed by anyone but high Temple members.

### **Politics**

#### **Internal Factions**

Various minor factions within the Temple focus upon particular elements of the role of the Temple of Durrítlámish. These factions dedicate themselves to service in this world, as Tomb Police, comforters of the dead, liaisons to the Underworld, etc. Several factions maintain relationships with the Undead, making the deceased a part of the community of the Temple.

#### **Temple Alliances**

The Temples of Wurú and Durrítlámish ally in the defense of the Undead and the creatures of the Underworld, while their Lords attend to more mystical matters. They remain neutral to Lord Ksárul and His Cohort, as those Temples see all things, even the Undead, as items to be used and discarded. The Temples of Lords Qón and Durrítlámish maintain an odd, uneasy alliance insofar as they both desire to maintain the sanctity of the Underworld.

#### **External Parties**

The Temple of Durrítlámish serves the interests of the Temple of Sárku in all things. Therefore its representation in the political parties of the Empire is usually not of note. However, it does have its own influence among members of the Priestly party. Its emphasis upon the rituals and traditions of the Underworld can at times cause friction with some of the more "progressive" elements of Lord Sárku's Temple who may attempt to infringe upon tradition for reasons of expedience. At such times the Temple of Durrítlámish may find itself allying with other traditionally minded groups against its Master's Temple to defend the sanctity of the Underworld, the Undead, or the Necropolis.

#### **Military Legions**

*The Phalanx of Lord Durrítlámish of the Rotted Face*

6th Imperial Medium Infantry

Kérdu Mriyán FashránuhiNokórof Sokátis.

Dispatched in 2365 by the former Governor of Sokátis, this traditional priestly legion joined the ecumenical army of the rogue General Arumél hiTánkolel to break the siege of Tléku Miriyá and rescue then-Prince Dhich'uné's rival, his half-brother Prince Mirusíya Tlakotáni. When Emperor Dhich'uné replaced the Governor of Sokátis with one more suited to His liking, He ordered this unit

disbanded. It had meanwhile taken refuge in the valley of Kashkomái to the east-northeast of Sokátis, resisting disbandment by refusing to return to receive its orders.

#### Clans

*Very High*

Íto

*High*

Domed Tomb

Dark Fear

Dark Water

Dark Moon

Dark Flame

*Medium*

Glory of the Worm

Black Hood

Black Mountain

Black Monolith

*Low*

Open Sepulcher

Black Hand

Black Stone Tomb

*Very Low*

Nighted Tower

#### Holidays

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Durrítlámish join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

25 Shápru

The Descent into the Tomb Forever, City of Sárku

Rituals for Lord Sárku and His Cohort Lord Durrítlámish are carried out in some of the city's most ancient underground shrines.

3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

#### 9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

10 Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

#### Ngaqómi, Intercalary Days

The Pageant of Death

Through the streets of many cities march festival processions dedicated to the Lord of Worms and Consciousness After Death. With participants carrying yellow paper lamps, dressed in outrageous and colorful costumes exaggerating the styles of past ages, and tossing brown sugary candies to children along the route, the pageant is a favorite among the common folk all across Tsolyánu.

#### Aspects

Lord Durrítlámish is depicted as a rotted corpse seated upon a throne of bones, holding a bowl in one hand from which smoke arises.

His 16 Greater Aspects are particularly repulsive, and Their ceremonies are not for the fainthearted.

##### 1) Hoggách

Appears only as a horrid, putrescent stench, this Aspect warns Lord Sárku of the approach of foes, including other Gods or beings from the Planes Beyond. He slays by overpowering victims with the fetor of death. The *Book of Tenebrous Places* indicates that He is worshipped in a special shrine within the City of Sárku.

##### 2) Nri'íkh

Described as a commanding, powerful skeletal general in helmet, breastplate, and greaves who marshals the forces of the Undead against those of Stability. The *Book of Tenebrous Places* describes His leadership of the lesser demon races and Undead upon Dórmoron Plain.

##### 3) Bázh Akhár

An ancient form of Lord Durrítlámish worshipped in the Shrines of Quyó in Heméktu in Livyánu, as well as in the City of Sárku. He appears as a brown, shriveled, rotted corpse dressed in robes the color of grave-earth. Master of Putrescence and decay, powerful among the worms and vermin who dwell beneath the ground, He can command legions of tiny, horrid creatures to do His bidding.

## 4) Adhém

A fleshless skull that appears and disappears at will in dark places, lonely catacombs, and the mausoleums of the dead, the *Book of Inimical Sendings* claims that Lord Adhém protects the Undead from being hurled from their graves and destroyed by the forces of Stability. The Brown Order of Hormúgga in the city of Tsa'avtúlgü in Salarvyá holds Lord Adhém in special reverence.

## 5) Mwákh

Appearing as a gibbering, nocturnal, skeletal creature, this Aspect hovers around lonely gallows and places of execution waiting to take away the bodies of the newly dead to reanimate them for His own Undead. The *Book of Inimical Sendings* urges relatives to retrieve the corpses of their kinsmen before sunset, lest Lord Mwákh claim them for His own.

## 6) Nekhtávra

This Aspect is described in the *Teachings of Mru'únish of Khéiris* as a bloated corpse who governs the Undead of the seas and oceans. He appears with His minions whenever a ship sinks in "Lord Sárku's Waters," these being certain reaches of the oceans, including the Deeps of Chanayága off Point Dásht, and the Pentrútra Deeps near Ke'ér in Yán Kór.

## 7) Dókh Omér

This Aspect appears as a skeletal hand, which walks upon its fingertips, scuttling around the dark labyrinths beneath the City of Sárku and other shrines in the Kraá Hills. The *Teachings of Mru'únish of Khéiris* warn that He throttles intruders who violate the tombs and catacombs.

## 8) Ghenésh

A pustulent corpse dripping ichor, this Aspect is seen walking the deepest levels of the tombs and ruined temples where Lord Sárku is worshipped. The *Book of Tenebrous Places* asserts that Ghenésh oversees the creation and reanimation of the Undead, their feeding upon the living, and their training as Servants of the Worm.

## 9) Jewéth

A fleshless bird-like thing that flies upon decaying, membranous wings about the cemeteries, *Tsuru'ám* and Cities of the Dead. This Aspect feeds upon those who sleep unprotected in such places. Lord Jewéth also warns tomb-guardians of approaching tomb-robbers and the servants of Stability. The *Book of Inimical Sendings* describes certain amulets that can blind this Aspect to the approach of such persons.

## 10)Ghotné

The *Scrolls of the Windy Sea* describe this Aspect as a horrid, snouted black beast which snuffles through the ruins and empty buildings upon the deserted islands near Gunúrum Isle, off the coast of Salarvyá. This dread and powerful tusked creature is rarely seen and can disappear at will, but attacks and mangles unwary sentries, sleeping travelers, and others who set foot upon His islands.

## 11) Nrgé Cháth

A powerful Aspect which guards the Palace of Black Qárqa near the Salarvyáni city of Tsa'avrúlgü. It appears as a great puddle of black putrescent fluid that flows quickly to engulf Its victims. The *Scrolls of the Windy Sea* assert that It likewise guards Qárqa's Palace in the realm of the Lords of the Ghastly Dead.

## 12) Pakhán

The tombs of important Adepts of Lord Sárku and Durrítlámish are defended by this Aspect, which appears as a greasy-looking grey-brown splotch of mold hanging on the walls, among other more "natural" growths, or within empty coffins.

## 13) Roqáv

This Aspect appears as a web-like substance hanging from the ceilings and walls of ancient caverns and catacombs. It drifts or falls upon unwary passersby, gathering into a ball and swarming up the wall to escape, travel, or take Its place high up in the darkness. The *Book of Inimical Sendings* describes the invocation employed by high-circle priests of Lord Durrítlámish to summon and command Lord Roqáv, which is accomplished with certain herbs and smoky incense. Those with the power and the knowledge can set Lord Roqáv upon their foes in the Underworld.

## 14) Chágh

Seated upon a throne in small shrines to the side of Lord Durrítlámish's main temple, the Aspect of Chágh appears as an Undead figure in rotted cerements and grave-clothes. He answers prayers from those who are devoted to the Worm and to the Corpse-Lord, granting death to those who seek it, promises of eternal life to those who yearn for it, guidance to those who would find their ancestors in the Cities of the Dead, and weapons to those who would battle Lord Qón's minions.

## 15) Khóm Dlá

A huge, beetle-like creature with a carapace of brown chitin, Khóm Dlá eats the bodies of dead foes, or fouls them so that they cannot be revived. His bite liquefies internal organs and turns flesh to slime in a rapid process of decay. His sects in the City of Sárku, Penóm, Mrelú and other cities worship Him in special shrines deep within the recesses of the Temple of Durrítlámish.

## 16) Orghésh the Unseeable

The Unknown One, never seen, never described, but said to have tremendous power over the Undead. Special priests and priestesses who have "heard His call" attend his shrines within the Temple of Durrítlámish throughout the Five Empires. These persons die after a brief period of service, covered with rotting buboes and great boils, in an ecstasy too powerful to describe.

## Demons

### Gereshmá'a

He of the Mound of Skulls, Nighted One of the Lonely Tomb, Minion of Lord Origób the Undying, Selector of Those Who Shall Dwell in the Unending Grey, Princeps of the Legions of the Mantle of Vipers.

He is of the Substance of Sárku and the Essence of Durrítlámish. His Powers are Transformation, Dispelling, Visitation, and Ingurgitation. He appears as a great, many-limbed beetle-like being, with a segmented body and wing cases in rust brown and yellow.

### Kurritlakál

The Eater of Skins, Cracker of Bones, Father of One Thousand Progeny, Spawn of Durrítlámish, One Seated Upon the Shore of the River Which Flows to Eternity

He is of the Substance of Durrítlámish and the Essence of Sárku, and his Powers include Gifting, Consuming, Sundering, Communion, and Descrying. He has a great globular body like a bloated *Atlán* spider borne by myriad stunted limbs. His face hangs like a bulbous, sagging parody of a human countenance. His Secret Names are Ba'an, Siúhsa, Tlé-knàù, and Edduélmigà.

### Srükárum

Lord of the Legions of the Despairing Dead, Castellan of the Citadel of Sighs, Warder of the Gates of Skulls

He is of the Substance of Sárku and the Essence of Durrítlámish, and his sole Power is Conquest. He appears as a skull-faced warrior in copper and gold bearing a two-handed axe.

### Kekkéka

Servitor of Kurritlakál, Tormentor, Master of the Forty-Ninth Circle, One of Many Barbed Hooks

This demon is of the Essence of Chiténg and the Substance of Durrítlámish, and his Powers are Punition and Extraction. He appears as a small, pallid man, with a globular head with no eyes, ears, or nose, and a smiling lipless mouth. His Secret Names are Dugó, Thú, Gluír, Wésh, and Areksónbe.

### Ssüssü

The Eater of the Dead, Lord of the Twenty-Ninth Circle

This demon is of the Substance of Durrítlámish and the Essence of Sárku. His powers are Implacability, Immobility, Intrepidity, Aeriality, and Necrosis. He appears as a huge ophidian beast, apodal and squamous, with an elongated jaw filled with many rows of teeth like chips of chert. His Secret Names are Rssá, Nthé, Ashüshná, and Hà-éssu.

### Horodái

The Flowing Mouth, the Curious Hunger, Lord of the Pallid Garden

This demon possesses the Powers of Engulfrnt and Transportation, and is of the Substance of Durrítlámish without doubt. It manifests itself as pallid grey-brown ooze. There is some question concerning his essence. Proctor Sanjésh hiKirisáya, sometime High Scholarly Priest of the Temple of the Thúmis in Usenánu, claimed that this demon was of the Essence of Thúmis, a concept revolting to that Temple. However it is undoubtable that this creature did posses an open and affable nature and a sense of curiosity rivaled only by its incessant hunger. Unfortunately, Proctor Sanjésh has gone missing lately and is assumed dead by the Temple, so it may be some time before this mystery is resolved.

## Magic

### Entombment

These rituals create a hollow, within a nearby area of unworked earth or stone, in which to entomb the target(s). Those so encased will suffocate unless quickly exhumed.

### Necrophobia

A targeted being or area is imbued with psychic energies that cause uncontrollable fear. Individuals affected by these spells will either flee at the sight of Lord Sárku's servants, or will find themselves unable to enter an area protected by this spell.

### Putrefaction

These fearsome rituals, which condemn living creatures to a horrible rotting death, become both more powerful and subtler at the higher circles. Lower-circle variants cause their targets to simply rot instantly, while the highest-circle rituals act slowly, imbuing an individual or an area with an infectious plague of gangrenous decay.

Su'unkáda híChashmýdu was tired. He felt his years upon him. Soon, soon, it would be time for his Five Selves to part ways, some here, some there, some to the Isles and some to dust. Soon.

But possibly not soon enough.

The relocations forced upon him by the ouster of Emperor Dhich'uné from the Golden Tower had been particularly tiring. Su'unkáda had always been proud of his ability to remain outside of the political circles through which people like his friend Jayárgo moved. Politics was most times a distraction and occasionally an inconvenient necessity to his goals as a scholarly priest. So during Emperor Dhich'uné's brief tenure on the Petal Throne, Su'unkáda had laid low, keeping to the Durrítlámish Temple libraries and pursuing his arcane and largely inexplicable interests.

Now he'd been forced to relocate again, to forsaken Fasílrúm of all places! Here at least he was treated with the tremendous respect due a notable person in unexpectedly bad surroundings. The Temple facilities where he lectured and researched on embalming methods were comfortable, but limited. And it was a long climb, in this city of tall, narrow structures, to the room he used as his study. The only benefit was that the dry heat did wonders for his circulation.

The aging priest sat for a moment, resting and breathing heavily. When he had regained his composure, he reached for the metal box resting on a padded wood pedestal. It was a nondescript rectangle of beaten copper with a small, hinged door on one side. Carefully, almost reverently, Su'unkáda opened the door.

For the first time in a long while, an eye looked out.

"Horodái," Su'unkáda breathed affectionately.

Then a grayish-brown wave bulged from the small door and engulfed him.

Su'unkáda sat in a garden of grey pseudopodia adorned with brown, quivering florets. Small creatures, too noisome and quick to examine closely, scurried by. A lovely young woman, Mu'ugalavyáni in appearance, but startlingly human for all that, bent over him and held forth a drink. Su'unkáda took the cold glass from her cold fingers. The drink was delicious and refreshing as always, although it was the color of old blood.

"You are aging?" asked Horodái, beside him. Actually, Su'unkáda reminded himself, Horodái was *everything* in this place, except possibly his human wife and the small offspring scurrying past. He allowed those to exist out of affection. But all else — the gazebo, yonder, the flowers, the very air he breathed — these were all *Horodái*.

"Yes," nodded Su'unkáda in reply, "You recall our human lives are brief."

"Why, then," squelched the humped, half-human figure that Horodái courteously manifested as a point of reference for the old priest, "do you waste so much of your time in mad pursuits? This?" The table next to

Su'unkáda squirmed and manifested a *den-den* board, one of Su'unkáda's favorite pastimes.

"Why?" repeated Su'unkáda, "I suppose... because it's fun." He felt uncharacteristically like a sheepish child.

"Fun." stated Horodái breathlessly. After a pause he repeated, "Fun."

Su'unkáda peered into the eyes that stared unblinkingly back at his. For a moment it occurred to him just how... *inhuman* was the creature in whose care he resided, and he shuddered involuntarily.

Then he shook himself and looked down at the board. He had some time before he needed to be back in his study. He wouldn't be missed.

"Care for a game?" he asked the demon.

# Vimúhla

*Lord of Fire, Master of the Flame, Power of Destruction and Red Ruin, Maker of Thunders, Ail-Consuming One, The Catharsis and the Cleanser through Flame, the Flame Cupped Within the Lamp, the Burning Foretold, the Blaze Contained, the All-Cleansing One*



Lord Vimúhla touches that part of each being's spirit that longs for violence and obliteration, the "simple and direct solution" to problems, the wiping-away of all the encroachments of time and reality by the most direct, pure, and final method: the Flame. The Flame Lord aids those who fight heroically and fanatically for Change, those who start conflagrations, and those who revel in destruction and pillage.

The core of Change is immediate, final, and yet always undergoing transformation, beautiful and glorious in its deadly power, consuming all else, eternal even while shifting from moment to moment, the immanent but nevertheless transcendental victory of the Flame. Matter and substance are "impure," only raw energy is "pure." The catharsis of annihilation is pleasure; existence is pain. True victory and glory is to be but an ephemeral, scintillating spark in the heart of the Inferno, then to know no more save the terrible burning joy of unity through annihilation.

Lord Vimúhla seeks the annihilation of all matter and the Final Conflagration, after which the cosmos must be reborn in the heart of the Flame, as Lord Hrü'ü decrees. Lord Vimúhla is violence, catharsis, and rebirth through the cleansing transition of the Flame.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

How can human beings ever hold to the tenets of Lord Vimúhla? Are they not utterly opposed to the idea of "society," the foundation stone of mankind's existence? Constant destruction cannot be reconciled with the survival even of the individual, much less of the state, the family, or any other social grouping.

The violence of Mighty Karakán, the Lord of War, and Lord Vimúhla's counterpart among the Deities of Stability, can be countenanced to establish a nation, to defend one's people, and to glorify those who fight for the survival of whatever one holds dear. Not so the insensate, terrible, purging of the Flame. Should not a devotee of Lord Vimúhla eschew all social relationships,

run wild in a frenzy of burning and destruction, and end by sacrificing himself or herself in the incandescent heat of the Flame?

The answer one hears from Lord Vimúhla's priesthood is based on the cosmology of the Engsvanyáli Priest Pavár. He speaks of Lord Vimúhla's relationship to the other nine Gods and Their Cohorts in Scroll LXIV, Stanzas 12-32:

*"When the Immortal Gods strode forth upon the land, when the mountains walked, when the seas rose in towers of raging steam, when rivers of scarlet stone flowed forth from the heart of the world, the Maid of Beauty, Great Avánthe, came before the other Gods. She held up Her left hand to Lord Hrü'ü and Her right hand to Lord Hnálla, and She said: 'Let not Lord Vimúhla have His way for yet a time, O Gods, for there are threads within the Cosmic Skein that must still be woven, pictures within the tapestry that are still to be made manifest, patterns that are unfinished and only dimly seen! O my Brother and Sister Gods, harness the Flame! Let Us cause the Flame to be pan of Us, yet not to consume all that We have wrought! The supernal Glory of Our creation cannot be perceived if all is to be raging conflagration!'*

*"The Gods took counsel amongst Themselves. They hearkened to the words of the Maid of Beauty. They saw that Their tapestry was indeed shriveled in the Flame; They foresaw that Their handiwork would be undone. Then did They summon Lord Vimúhla, who raged upon the land and upon the oceans, and They spoke thus: 'Hold Thy hand, O Flame Lord, for a time! Eternity is long and Thou shall still lay Thy obliteration upon the Skein! Yet We, too, must have Our way for yet a time, for there are threads within the tapestry which must be seen, as must all things created. Be of Us, under the banner of mighty Lord Hrü'ü, upon the left hand, or under the standard of Lord Hnálla upon the right hand! Be not apart from Us, for all together do We form a Perfect Whole. What You desire shall be Yours, but not alone, and not until We have ruled in this place*

*for the aeons that are appointed to Us! If the limbs and head and heart of a being all act without obedience and counsel, then that being perishes. O Flame, there are many Planes and many Stages of Being, and You shall rule Your part of them. We do not permit that You should rule them all!*

*"Lord Vimúhla roared, I hear, yet I obey You not. What Lord Hrüü seeks, I provide most perfectly. And He dealt blows unto the lands, and He smote the mountains with fists of fire, and He was wroth with anger.*

*"Then did the Gods use Their powers and Their Words. They pleaded with the Flame Lord, and in the end They fought Him. They bound the Flame with the waters of the seas; They silenced Him with the all-covering earth; They cooled Him with the wind-driven mists and the pale curtain of the rains; and They held Him with the chains of Their Beings. And still They promised Him a place amongst Them, for He could not be denied. Thus it was in the Time of the Gods."*

The doctrines of Lord Vimúhla therefore urge fire and destruction, but He is "the Flame Cupped Within the Lamp," "The Burning Foretold," and "The Blaze Contained." His followers are enjoined to wait for the Time of Conflagration to Come. Whenever the Lord of Destruction is unleashed, they are instructed, they may do as their Lord has commanded. If a city is rebellious, the devotees of the Flame may burn it; if a foe arises, he is to be purified in the Fire; if a land is sunk in the apathy and prosaic tranquillity of Stability, it is their task to Change it through the means given to them by the Flame Lord. All must be done, indeed, with the cooperation and consent of the Whole — the pantheon of the Gods — but Lord Vimúhla is only leashed and not imprisoned or even made docile. When the occasion demands, the Flame shall be brought forth to rule. Indeed, in the end of all things, the compact states, all that exists is to be the portion of the Flame Lord, a reward for His patience for a time.

Lord Vimúhla's tenets are seductive to those captivated by fire and blood, and many Tsolyáni children play at being a wild, undisciplined fighter of the Flame Lord. But this Temple actually demands loyalty and instant obedience, and the kind of courage found only in the greatest warriors. One gains the power to bum and consume, but one is part of a combined religious order and military fraternity. Lord Vimúhla will consume all things in the end, but the priests of Lord Vimúhla would be one of the first to object to any worshipper who attempted to rush Lord Vimúhla's plans. Flame requires fuel, fuel requires time to catch and grow, and according to the doctrines of Lord Vimúhla the time is not yet ripe for the "flowering of the flame."

Therefore, it is not theologically necessary for a devotee of the Flame to devote his or her life to acts of conflagration, or to end that life in self-immolation. Most worshippers of Lord Vimúhla are fairly average individuals: agriculturists, traders, craftspeople, officials, bureaucrats, and whatever other professions their clans

encompass. Aside from a predilection for military service, it would be difficult to characterize devotees of the Flame as particularly violent or destructive. In all ages and locales people tend to leaven the stringencies of theological dogma with the softer, less purposeful, and more human-directed needs of the society in which they live. One thus sees little difference between an "average" worshipper of Lord Vimúhla and a follower of Lady Avánthe, Lord Thúmis, or any of the other Deities. Except for a touch of flame-orange in the costume, an amulet or other token of the faith worn about the neck or on an arm, and in some regions, facial tattoos which proclaim religious allegiance, most members of the faith resemble in every other way the other citizens of their communities.

His is a fearsome religion emphasizing fire and human sacrifice, but even more frightening is His Cohort Lord Chiténg, whose Aspects embrace not only fire, but pain. Both, however, are part of the greater society, and temper their doctrines with pragmatism and perspective.

#### *Color*

A reddish flame-orange.

#### *Symbol*

His symbol is a stylized flame with three tongues.

#### *Astrology*

The blood-red face of the swift moon Káshi is Lord Vimúhla's astrological representative.

#### *Numerology*

Lord Vimúhla's number is nine, which is fiery, flaming, destructive, transitory, violent, and final. His worshippers greet each other with a three-fingered salute in which the thumb and smallest finger touch across the palm, and this represents the "three threes" of Lord Vimúhla. To Harmonize with the God, one must sit naked before a bowl of flames, either perfumed wood or flaming scented oil. In one's heart one must hold His letter, which is "s," the sound of burning flesh, and this must also be upon one's lips in an expiratory manner, "Ssssssss..." until one's breath is gone.

#### *Costume*

His priests wear flame-orange robes, armor, and headdresses crowned with lacquered *Chlén*-hide flames. His priestesses are garbed in flame-orange skirts, collars of garnets and gold, and lighter coronets of gold with flame symbols engraved upon them. Both males and females leave their hair loose and unbound.

#### *Rituals*

The daily rituals of the Flame Lord begin at dawn with the thunderous booming of the *Tunkúl-gongs* and proceed until roughly two hours past sunset.

#### *The Opening of the Eye of Flame.*

This dawn ceremony is celebrated much the same way all across Tsolyánu. The booming of the *Tunkúl-gong* and fragrant incense accent ritual processions of lower-circle priests and priestesses. They conduct a chanting,

drumming progress towards the rising column of flame behind the altar. On nights when Káshi is full, animal sacrifices, but not usually human ones, accompany this dawn ceremony.

#### ***The Brightest Gaze.***

This noon ceremony consists of further rituals, readings from the texts of the Outer Temple (much taken from the Scrolls of Pavár, and other common catechisms), and ceremonial refueling of the Flame.

#### ***The Power of Burning.***

The mid-afternoon ceremony is similar to the previous ones, but more perfunctory and conducted without much celebration. In smaller temples it is omitted entirely and is combined with the sunset ceremony.

#### ***The Visible Glory***

As soon as the last vestige of the sun disappears below the horizon, this feast begins. Meat, bread, and certain vegetable and fruit dishes are served to all of the clergy and their guests. Copious largesse is provided to the poor, who congregate at the temples to receive it. On days when Káshi is a new moon, a sacrifice or two are usually offered on the Flame Altars: often war-captives, felons, or purchased slaves, but sometimes slaves donated by wealthy patrons. The pomp and ceremony of the celebrants, music, drums and gongs, processions of robed and costumed dancers, and the screaming, writhing human sacrifices make for an exciting spectacle.

#### ***The Closing of the Eye.***

About two hours after sunset, when the sky is completely dark, this long, slow chanting ceremony begins. It is rather dream-like and beautiful, with flute music and tinkling bells. It ends with incense and colored smoke accompanying ritual dramas and epic poetry.

#### ***The Sacrifice of the Stone Flame***

An annual ritual presided over by the High Ritual Priest of the Temple, who dons filmy, flimsy garments of red *Güdrú*-cloth and carries a curved ritual wand.

#### ***Sexual Rituals***

The Temples of Change are not all concerned with violence and sex. Fierce transition, selfish power, and personal hedonism are indeed central to many doctrines, but the Temples of Lord Vimúhla and Ksárul have no sexual rituals (although Lord Vimúhla's Cohort, Chiténg, does).

#### ***Ritual Items***

##### **The Flame Opal**

The smoky, dark-red Flame Opal, a secretion of a tree in the Páchi Léi forests of Pán Cháka, is much desired by the priesthoods of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg.

##### **Tetkúmne**

One of the items used to perform human sacrifice in the Temple of Vimúhla is the *Tetkúmne*. This metal weapon has been consecrated to the God expressly for conducting ritual sacrifice and is thereby prevented from interfering in the magic of the rituals. To employ this weapon in any other manner shatters the sanctifying spells, and results in the demise of the defiler.

#### **Sacrificial Site**

The raging furnace into which sacrifices are hurled is called the Sacred Flame of Lord Vimúhla. This is usually an opening at the top of a large outdoor pyramid, flanked by pillars and reached by a steep flight of steps. There may be a table-like sacrificial altar placed on a landing between the topmost step and the lip of the furnace, with channels to drain away the blood of those sacrificed with the *Tetkúmne* before being given to the Sacred Flame.

#### ***Military Priests***

The Temple of Vimúhla insists that all temple soldiery undergo training as acolytes, achieving first level priesthood, followed by a special indoctrination as military priests, before they can become Soldiers of the Flame. This is necessitated by the doctrinal requirement that all participants in ritual observances, such as the grand military parades common to this temple, be trained ritual priests.

#### ***Sacrifice***

Animal sacrifices — *Hmélu*, *Hmá*, great *Tsi'íl*, and others — are always available in the markets near temples to the Flame Lord to be used as sacrifices. War captives and slaves (those too old or infirm to work — or those bought and given to the Temple by devotees) are also immolated in the great fire-pits that stand before the altars. These people are usually drugged to make them cooperative and even exhilarated with the proceedings. It is estimated that some 25,000 human sacrifices are made each year in Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá to Lord Vimúhla and His cohort, Lord Chiténg.

Human and animal sacrifices can be conducted either through bloodletting followed by immolation or through direct immolation of humans. It is possible, but often difficult, to directly immolate living animals.

Private parties can offer sacrifices at any time, and there are special chapels for this purpose. Slaves and captives are either kept available in pens or else can be quickly procured from the nearby markets.

Legion officers, nobles, etc. are only sacrificed with the blessing of the Imperium.

Nonhumans are only rarely sacrificed, these being either war-captives, or nonhuman slaves whose owners have taken a particular dislike to them.

Undead are usually just exterminated and are not considered worth sacrificing since they have no life force to offer to the Flame.

Sacrifices to an Aspect may involve the special properties of that Aspect. Major sacrifices are not offered to them since they are the same as the God Himself.

#### ***Food Taboos***

As with the War-Temples of Karakán and Chegárra, devotees of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg eat fish only when necessity demands.



### *Death Rituals*

Devotees of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg hold that the deceased's belongings must perish with him or her in the Flame, ensuring that these possessions will be ready to hand in these deities' special paradises.

### *Afterlife*

Lord Vimúhla possesses a Plane called the Halls of the Ever-Blazing Flame, where his adherents experience forever the one supernal moment of ecstatic annihilation in the Flame.

Those who have served Lord Vimúhla ill are removed to the Outer Portals of Kelkúun, a region all clammy and dim, dripping with cold, where no fire will burn and there is no light.

### *History*

The Dragon Warriors of N'lüss worshipped a deity much like the Flame Lord long before Pavár came upon the scene. Spreading down from the mountains of the far northwest, these ferocious fighters established an empire in what is now Mu'ugalavyá and Tsolyánu, although ancient Livyánu managed to hold them at bay. The clans descended from the Dragon Warriors continued to worship the Flame throughout the First Imperium, and when Pavár formalized the complex relationships of the Ten Gods and discovered the existence of the Cohorts, these clans turned to Lord Vimúhla without hesitation. Political power came and went, dynasties rose and fell, and eventually Éngsvan hlá Gánga sank beneath the southern sea, but this loyalty endured. After the Time of No Kings, the Tlakotáni clan of Tsolyánu founded the Second Imperium. Although much else has changed, still the West remains largely devoted to the Flame Lord.

### *Recent History*

The Temple of Vimúhla is politically powerful within the Five Empires. Its adherence to violence and indiscriminate destruction makes it somewhat suspect, of course, and governments consider the Temple of Vimúhla a dangerous ally indeed. Revolts and attempts at local autonomy have checkered its long history, the most recent being the uprising of the more fanatic younger members of the Vrídidi clan at Fasíltum in 2346. This resulted in an Imperial *coup-d'état*, some executions, and the imprisonment of the Vrídidi leader Elára hiVrídidi, her half-brother Qárras hiVrídidi, her clan-cousin Chekkutáne hiVrídidi, and many others in the Tólek Kána Pits at Béy Sü — later to be transferred to the grim dungeons below Avanthár.

In 2357 the Vrídidi clan brought forth an Imperial Prince as claimant to the Petal Throne. Tórisu hiVrídidi was no more than a *Dritlán* of the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation, a notable soldier with skills at diplomacy, until the Temple of Thúmis attempted to gain advantage in the political game of the empire by revealing their candidate, one Surundáno, a priestly clerk in the town of Haumá. Under the throne-name Prince Mirusíya Tlakotáni, the former Tórisu hiVrídidi demonstrated sophistication, military acumen and diplomatic talent, making him attractive to both the Royalist and the

Military parties alike. Prince Surundáno didn't stand a chance, and soon was allowed to fade back into obscurity with his quills and scrolls in Haumá.

Prince Mirusíya's arrival on the scene disrupted the proposed alliance between Prince Eselné and his sister Princess Ma'ín Krúthái. The War Temples of Karakán and Chegárra split with the Temples of Vimúhla and Chiténg in their support in the anticipated *Kòlumejálím*, but Mirusíya proved adept at securing the support of the western clans of Lord Vimúhla and the eastern Vrídidi and their allies.

Subsequently, both Princes Mirusíya and Eselné strove to demonstrate their prowess in several military actions against Milumanayá, Yán Kór, and Saá Allaqí, which featured the capture of the cities of Sunráya and Tléku Miriyá by Prince Mirusíya.

Tléku Miriyá turned out to be an elaborate trap set for Prince Mirusíya by Lord Fú Shi'í, advisor to Baron Áld of Yán Kór. Once Prince Mirusíya was within the city, Lord Fú Shi'í turned against it the "Weapon Without Answer," an ancient and powerful engine of destruction. The entire city of Tléku Miriyá was magically emptied of its population, who were banished to a dark and distant magical plane. The Prince was gone for more than a year until he and his army were rescued by some of his most ardent supporters who braved the perilous paths of the Many Planes.

Upon battling his way back to Tsolyánu, Prince Mirusíya discovered that his half-brother, Prince Dhich'uné, had seized the throne in his absence, aided by Baron Áld of Yán Kór. In uncharacteristic fashion, Prince Mirusíya consolidated his forces in the desert city of Fasíltum for many months, issuing forth only once to attempt a swift infiltration of the Golden Tower and returning in defeat. It is said that the Lady Elára hiVrídidi has been freed from the dungeons in Avanthár and stands at Prince Mirusíya's side, advising his councils. Others say quietly that this woman is a fraud and an impostor who has played upon the Prince's emotions in order to seize power. Meanwhile, the Empire remains in the grip of civil unrest.

### *Legend*

Lord Vimúhla was the first of the *Tlokíriqaluyal* to leave Lord Ksáru at the Battle of Dórmoron Plain due to the latter's arrogance and pride.

A consistent theme to such legends as *The Lament to the Wheel of Black* is that one God or another owns the various magical devices and weapons that play roles in the battle of Dórmoron Plain. Lord Vimúhla's weapon, Flamesong, was taken away and hidden following the battle, and is rumored to have resurfaced in recent times. Supposedly the Pariah Deity called the One Other, gave Flamesong to Lord Vimúhla.

### *The Inner Doctrines*

#### *Soul*

Fierce Vimúhla and Heroic Karakán seek the combination of the *Balétl* (the Body) and the *Pedhétl*

(courage, ambition, even fear). The *Balétl* is the tool with which to achieve the goals of an ultimate victory, the *Pedhétl* in order to attain the matchless ecstasy of self-immolation in the purifying Flame.

#### *Language*

Ancient N'lüssa, the tongue of the Dragon Warriors who were the first worshippers of Lord Vimúhla, is important to the rituals of this God.

A large number of sorcerous and demonological texts have been based on the historical worship of Lord Vimúhla and His Mu'ugalavyáni variant Lord Hrsh. These are written in Classical Mu'ugalavyáni, which is rather closely related to Engsvanyáli and written in a similar script.

#### *Rituals*

The Inner Rituals of the Ever-living Flame are celebrated in secret subterranean fanes beneath the main temple. Only the Innermost clergy and a handful of the highest nobility may participate in these rituals.

#### *Cosmology*

Most of the thinkers in Tsolyánu believe that Tékumel is a flat island floating inside a black sphere — an attempt by Lord Hrü'ü to contain and stifle the glorious light of Lord Hnálla. This island is longer from north to south than from east to west, leaving room on the latter two sides for the rising and setting of the celestial bodies, which spend the night or day "enjoying the favors of their patron Gods in the paradises beyond Teretané." The savants of the Temple of Vimúhla, on the other hand, see Tékumel, its sun, and its sister planets as an oval cosmological "leaf which spirals down in a long autumnal flutter towards a final ecstatic annihilation in the Supernal Flame.

### **Temple Layout**

The temples of Lord Vimúhla are architecturally different from those of most of the other Deities. A temple to the Flame Lord is often surrounded by semi-fortified walls, within which are courtyards, barracks for the temple guards, priestly dormitories, kitchens, storehouses, a stout tower for the huge *Tunkúl*-gongs that announce the rituals, and other public areas.

Inside stands a tall, truncated pyramid, upon the flat top of which is a steeper trapezoidal building. This upper building contains the main shrine, plus smaller sanctuaries to several of the Flame Lord's 87 Aspects. The only temples to have shrines to all 87 Aspects are those in Tumíssa and Fasíltum. This upper temple also includes sleeping quarters for the highest echelons of the clergy, administrative chambers, cloisters for the senior scholars, and other more practical rooms. In most cases a temple sits upon the leveled and filled-in ruins of older temples, left over from prior *Ditlána*. Passages and galleries lead down to the buried, secret shrines below. Public sacrifices and rituals are performed above, but the Rituals of the Ever-Living Flame are celebrated in these subterranean fanes.

The Sacred Flame of Lord Vimúhla is located in different places atop the pyramidal base, depending upon contemporary doctrinal and architectural trends at the time the particular temple was built. In Tumíssa, for example, the Sacred Flame tops the main temple building, making it the highest point in that city, and the flame and smoke of the furnace can be seen for quite a distance. In other cities, the Sacred Flame tops a second pyramidal tower built upon the base to the south of the main temple. In Haumá, the Sacred Flame is contained within the main temple itself, part of the central shrine of the God beneath a great circular opening in the high, vaulted ceiling. This opening allows the smoke and great heat to escape.

### **Secular Activities**

#### **Businesses**

The Temple of Vimúhla and its faithful clans are involved in many businesses tied to the operation of the armies of the empire. From mining, to the forging of weapons, to the textile clans that provide the uniforms, pavilions, and banners of the many legions, clans faithful to Lord Vimúhla control the greater part of the production, along with clans faithful to Lord Karakán and the War Gods' Cohorts.

#### **Public Works and Services**

The Temples of Vimúhla, Karakán, and Their Cohorts require that every soldier in the legions belong to the First Circle Priesthood at least. To this end, they operate schools in every city and town across the Empire. Children from any faith are welcome to attend the basic classes prior to indoctrination as an acolyte of the Temple. These classes appeal to the more pragmatic and less scholarly clan-parents. They offer the most rudimentary reading and writing skills along with simple mathematics and basic fighting and tactical disciplines, but are rather short on general theology, the arts, and dogma.

Not to be overlooked, of course, is the tremendous contribution of the War Temples to the safety and defense of the Empire, including such mundane efforts as the establishment and maintenance of military barracks, and overseeing the upkeep of the roads and rivers so that they are available for transport in time of need.

#### **Cities of Broad Influence**

##### *Fasíltum*

Discussion of the cities where Lord Vimúhla holds sway must begin with legendary Fasíltum, home of the proud Vriddi clan. It rises from the desert like a mirage of red sandstone straddling the important trading route directly east of Béy Sü in a line towards Hekéllu. Probably descended from some offshoot enclave of the Dragon Warriors, this city is the center of Lord Vimúhla's worship in the east. Its large temple of Vimúhla has shrines to all 87 of the Flame Lord's Aspects.

White marble glyphs in Classical Tsolyáni march in serried rows upon bands of black diorite upon the

battlements. Fasíltum has earned the name "The City of the Chiming Skulls" due to the number of convicted felons whose heads sway from silver chains along the ramparts. When the arid breezes blow off the dunes of the desert, the skulls dance together among bells of glass and metal, making a funereal and wistful music of which the Vríddi overlords are quite proud.

Their sand-locked isolation has engendered a fierce independence in the citizens of Fasíltum, expressed most recently when Elára hiVríddi attempted to lead her clanspeople in revolt against the Empire during the reign of Emperor Hetkoláinen, "He Whose Glory Never Ends" in 2340. The incipient rebellion was suppressed only with great difficulty. Such is the power of the Vríddi and the importance of Fasíltum to the empire that she was spared the "high ride" and instead imprisoned in the Halls of Eternal Waiting beneath Avanthár.

Recently, Prince Mirusíya Tlakotáni has made this city his stronghold in his rebellion against the Emperor Dhich'uné. Raised as a Vríddi until his revelation as a Prince of the Empire, Mirusíya has always been an ardent worshipper of Lord Vimúhla and a favorite son of Fasíltum. Enhancing his power in the city is the rumor that Prince Mirusíya somehow went forth among the Many Planes and returned with Elára hiVríddi. Although this fantastic tale seems unlikely, it cannot be doubted that Lady Elára does stand at his side as his consort, and counsels many of his decisions. Whether she escaped her imprisonment beneath Avanthár or was rescued by Mirusíya, she appears not to have aged at all during the twenty-five years of her imprisonment.

Local worship of Lord Vimúhla is so fervent as to border on fanaticism, and the pride of the Vríddi is so intense that duels are more frequent than *Shámtla* when a clansperson suffers an insult. Visitors to Fasíltum are forewarned, therefore, to tread lightly and study their etiquette, lest a careless statement lead to disaster!

The Vríddi of Fasíltum are eminently powerful in their own city, but are comparatively rare elsewhere.

#### *Tumíssa*

Mighty Tumíssa is the western stronghold of Lord Vimúhla's faith in Tsolyánu. More cosmopolitan than isolated Fasíltum, it is a city influenced by several of the faiths of Change, with portions of the populace devoted to Lady Dlamélish and Lord Ksárul, as well as a respectable representation of the rest of the Pantheon's adherents.

Along the southern bank of the island city of Tumíssa, the Temple of Vimúhla looms above all other temples in this district of the city, and it is large enough to sport shrines to all 87 of Lord Vimúhla's Aspects.

The scholars of this temple are acknowledged experts in the study of the period of the Dragon Warriors.

#### *The First Temple of Lord Vimúhla*

Also called "The Temple in the Chákas," this most ancient of all temples devoted to Pavár's pantheon dates back to the time before even the founding of the Dragon

Warriors. So powerful were the ancient priests of this God that they managed to remove the temple entirely from this plane to a small pocket plane of its own. There it is not subject to the mundane assaults of the passing armies of the transient empires that rise and fall while the Might of Vimúhla only grows greater.

#### *ChemHo*

#### *Khírgár*

These cities are acknowledged as regional centers of the Flame Lord's faith, particularly Khírgár, the northern bulwark against incursions into Tsolyánu.

#### *Jakállá*

Deep, deep below the city of Jakállá in the *Tsuru'úm* below even the Bednálljan levels, in the ruins of the Dragon Lords, stands the ancient shrine to Lord Vimúhla, a blackened tower of monolithic stones surrounded by a moat of leaping flames. The only access is a rail-less bridge less than a meter wide that arches high above the roiling inferno. Tales of a treasure of fire opals within this temple — enough to buy a kingdom — are tempered by the demon Jnéksha'a "The Scythe of Flame" whose presence renders the treasure inaccessible.

#### Other Nations

#### *Mu'ugalavyá*

Lord Vimúhla's worship is the predominant religion of Mu'ugalavyá, although the highest clans there have turned to the beast-headed Lord Hrsh. Mu'ugalavyáni temples to Lord Vimúhla and Lord Hrsh are wealthier than others, and their clergy receive certain preferences. Hrsh is considered by Tsolyáni theologians to be an altered form of the Flame Lord with an admixture of Lord Karakán and possibly Lord Ksárul. There are temples to Pavár's other Deities in the cities of Mu'ugalavyá, but in more remote towns and in the countryside it is difficult to find a shrine to Lady Avánthe, Lord Hnálla, or even others of the Lords of Change.

#### *Livyánu*

This ancient nation resisted the onslaught of the Dragon Warriors and the enlightenment of the Priest Pavár. Her Shadow Gods are only distantly similar to Pavár's Gods and Cohorts. Still there is a clear relationship between Livyánu's Lord Ru'ungkáno and the Flame Lord that both hierarchies acknowledge. There is little direct cooperation, however.

#### *The Northeast States and Salarvyá*

Lord Vimúhla exists in various forms in Salarvyá, Jánnu, Kílálámmu, and the Northeast States. Temples to Lord Vimúhla *as such* are rare outside of larger cities such as Tsatsayágga, Koylúga, Chame'él, and Héru; the Flame Lord is almost unknown anywhere east of Tsa'avtúlgü. Throughout these vast regions the Goddess Shiringgáyi rules. Wherever the writ of mighty Éngsvan hlá Gánga once ran, thus, one finds worshippers of the Flame Lord, while beyond, in such places as Tsoléi, the Nyémesel Isles, and other distant lands, there are hints of His

doctrines in the tenets of the local deities, but no direct correlations.

## Politics

### Internal Factions

No group composed of human beings, or even of the nonhuman races existing side-by-side with mankind upon Tékumel) is ever completely uniform in its activities and objectives. Over the millennia, the majority of those who serve Lord Vimúhla has always been largely traditional "worshippers" at best: "time-servers," as they are called by more strict devotees, "rationalists" and "realists" as they would name themselves.

Within each local temple, the situation is similar. The clergy becomes structured and bureaucratized, the professions of faith little more than ritual, the teachings only so many memorized words. Even those whose claims of faith are strong would certainly refuse to take up a torch and set fire to their city or hurl themselves into their own sacrificial flames.

The Temple itself fosters the relaxed application of the theology. In order to play a role in the politics of the State, one must be acceptable to the State. Temporal power means more benefits for the Temple, more worshippers, more lands and slaves and goods. The senior priests defend this by saying that more shrines, more armies, and more wealth bring enhancement to the faith of the Flame. The broader and more puissant one's base, the greater one's Temple and the more glory to one's God!

There are others, the "activists," who proclaim an adherence to the violence preached by the scriptures of the Flame Lord. These form semi-secret societies within the priestly hierarchy. They are known, tolerated, manipulated, and useful to the sect as a whole. When strong action is wanted, these zealots are available to implement it. Should the Temple be censured for a breach of the ancient Concordat, these persons can be held up as scapegoats. If a military mission calls for daring, self-sacrifice, and blind loyalty, these groups can be summoned to undertake it. In turn, they strive against the "time-servers" for political power within the Temple, and the balance sways now this way and now that.

### *The Incandescent Blaze Society*

The most powerful of the "activist" groups within the Temple of Vimúhla is the Incandescent Blaze Society. This ambitious party urges violent action and intrigue, but has little in common with the activist groups of the Dark Trinity. Militaristic, it sometimes collaborates with the Sword of Righteousness Clan of the Temple of Karakán in supporting expansionism. The higher Circles of the great temples at Tumíssa, Fasítum, and Katalál are heavily infiltrated by members of this sect-within-a-sect, and its agents frequented the halls of Avanthár and the Governor's palace at Béy Sü as well under Emperor Hirkáne. These zealots hold to the ancient tenets of the Flame — destruction and annihilation — but they temper these with a shrewd understanding of political necessities. They are barely tolerated by the Imperium —

and by the lords of the Four Palaces of the Square in Ssa'átis in Mu'ugalavyá — but they do occasionally prove useful, and their fanatical devotion makes them excellent assassins and soldiers. As might be expected, the best of the Lord Vimúhla's Legions are riddled with followers of the Society.

### *The Order of Devouring Conflagration*

Less known and much less numerous than other secret societies are the devotees of the Order of the Devouring Conflagration. Members are usually priests (and a few priestesses). They hold that the scriptures enjoin burning and devastation, and to live as normal citizens is to live a lie. Therefore it is the duty of true believers to remain within the temple precincts until such time as Lord Vimúhla shall summon them to carry out the wholesale burning and destruction that will be His reward at the end of time. The members of this group are often charged with the dreadful duties of performing the human sacrifices that are the hallmark of the High Rituals of the Flame.

### *The Scroll of the Blaze Revealed*

A very small number of persons follow the Scroll of the Blaze Revealed: a schismatic party of extremists who lead an ascetic life within the walls of certain monasteries hidden in the Chákan forests, in the mountains north of Béy Sü, and in the wilds of western Mu'ugalavyá. This sect, founded by one Késhkuru Gama'án in late Engsvanyáli times, holds that its members must remain aloof from the mundane world. Outsiders — even other followers of Lord Vimúhla — who penetrate its sanctuaries are slain, and it is believed that each member must also choose a time to sacrifice himself or herself in the ever-living Flame. Some say that this is done by casting lots, while other sources indicate that each follower's fate is determined astrologically by comparing certain features of the person's horoscope with the positions and aspects of Tékumel's second and smaller moon, Káshi, whose reddish hue identifies it as the "planet of Lord Vimúhla."

### *Weapon Instruction*

Members of the various secret societies of the War-Temples provide private instruction with masters of arms to their warrior-priests and legion officers. Only the "noble" weapons (daggers, short and long one-handed weapons, two-handed swords and axes, polearms, composite bows, and the crossbow) are taught. It is considered eccentric and *declassé* for a person of high status to wish to learn arms other than these.

### *Other Nations*

#### *Yán Kór*

In Yán Kór there is a further secret society, the Three Fingers of the Flame, which bears a resemblance to the Incandescent Blaze Society, but which combats all of the other groups on various little-understood theological grounds. This has taken on political overtones in the light of the recurrent war between Tsolyánu and Yán Kór. The Baron's equivalent of the Omnipotent Azure

Legion, the Sürgéth, uses members of this small society as assassins and spies.

#### *Mu'ugalavyá*

There are branches of all the secret societies (except the Three Fingers of the Flame) in Mu'ugalavyá. The degree to which these cooperate is not known, but both the Tsolyáni and the Mu'ugalavyáni governments suspect collusion, something that is now high treason on both sides of the border. In addition, there are several further small societies within Mu'ugalavyá, some of whom are politically oriented, while others tend to favor one or the other type of asceticism, withdrawal from the world, mystical perceptions of the Flame, and sacrifice of either themselves or others or both.

#### Temple Alliances

The Temple of Vimúhla and that of His Cohort Chiténg often ally in military matters with the Temples of Karakán and Chegárra. Since the death of the Emperor Hirkáne Tlakotáni this alliance has been riven by the civil unrest gripping the Empire. Each of these Temples is itself split between those who would serve Emperor Dhich'uné (or at least the Petal Throne) rather than destabilize the Great Nation, and those who would see their Temple's Imperial Candidate as Emperor.

In addition to its military alliances, the Temple of Vimúhla works with the Temples of Dlamélish and Chiténg to assure morale among the forces, and with the Temple of Keténgku to arrange for medical services.

#### External Parties

The Temples of Vimúhla and Chiténg join with those of Lords Karakán and Chegárra to form the bulk of the Military Party in the Empire. This party plays the Imperial and Royalist parties off against each other, and does not often interact with the Priestly Party.

#### Military Legions

The armies of both Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá are strongly influenced by the devotees of Lord Vimúhla, as might be expected of a warrior tradition devoted to

fighting and destruction. In Tsolyánu this is balanced by the worshippers of the War-God of Stability, Lord Karakán, while in Mu'ugalavyá it is the somewhat-less-violent sect of Lord Hrsh that prevails. Since most of the clans send their progeny to the Temple of Vimúhla for schooling, it is easy for the hierarchy to separate out those young people who show military promise. The best of these are funneled into certain units devoted to the temple (e.g. in Tsolyánu, the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation, the 18th Medium Infantry). Others are employed as temple guard contingents, while those who have little penchant for battle and tactics are educated as clergy or sent back to their clans.

#### *The Legion of the Searing Flame*

10th Imperial Heavy Infantry

Revived by Prince Mirusíya in 2355. A powerful legion comprised of many of the Vríddi of Fasíltum and loyal to their Prince.

#### *The Legion of the Storm of Fire*

21st Imperial Medium Infantry

*Kérdu* Karín Missúm of the Clan of the Golden Sunburst of Hekéllu

These famed warriors are now in Fasíltum, where they are one of the primary forces of Prince Mirusíya.

#### *The Legion of the Black Band of Mírizha*

42nd Imperial Medium Infantry, Chéne Hó

*Kérdu* Mírizha of N'lüss is a fanatic worshipper of Lord Vimúhla.

#### *The Legion of the Citadel of Glory*

13th Imperial Crossbowmen

*Kérdu* Tsúmikel hiTengtláku, Governor of Tumíssa

Formed partly by the Temple of Vimúhla and partly by the Governor's Red Sword clan, this is another legion of the famous Tumíssan crossbowmen.

#### Clans

Lord Vimúhla is popular among the military clans and in the north, particularly in Khirgár, near the N'lüss territories where the Dragonlords once reigned.

#### *Very High*

Sea Blue	<b>Vríddi</b>	Golden Bough	<b>Sword of Fire</b>
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#### *High*

White Crystal	Red Sword	Red Sun	<i>Red Mountain</i>
<i>Red Stone</i>	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle	<b>Sweet Singers of Nakomé</b>
Standing Stone	Rising Sun		

*Medium*

Green Bough	<i>Black Stone</i>	<i>Red Sky</i>	<i>Red Star</i>
Ripened Sheaf	Black Pinnacle	First Moon	Moon of Evening
Golden Lintel	Scroll of Wisdom	Weeping Stone	

*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	<i>Broken Bough</i>	<i>Iron Fist</i>
<i>Iron Hand</i>	Open Hand	High Tower	<b>Eye of Flame</b>
Flat Peak	Woven Whip		

*Very Low*

Woven Mat	<b>Red Moon</b>	Arch of Heaven	Bright Sword
Flat Rock	Glass Spear	<i>Artificers of Iron</i>	Turning Wheel
<b>Standing Reed</b>	Collar of Bronze		

**Holidays**

## 1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day, the Purification of the Flame

Celebrations in Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, and Yán Kór include rituals, displays, miracles, and both property and human sacrifices, and seek prosperity in the coming year. Outdoors, atop the great temple pyramid, the Sacred Flame blazes high in the air as priests dressed only in loincloths hurl sacrifices screaming into the flame. Celebrants fall writhing to the floor in religious ecstasy. Fanatical worshippers can be seized with passion and hurl themselves directly into the fire.

## 22 Didóm

The Conflagration of All

The worshippers of Vimúhla and Chiténg in the cities of Tumíssa and Fasíltum celebrate with rituals and sacrifices. This ceremony coincides with the Livyáni celebration of the Raising of the Flame by worshippers of Ru'ungkáno in the city of Sraón.

## 3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

## 1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

## 9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

## 10 Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

## Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

The Armageddon of All the World, Tumíssa

The Celebration of the Wrath of the Flames, Fasíltum

The Kindling of the New Fires, Mu'ugalavyá

In each city and nation where Lord Vimúhla holds sway, this day is observed with pageantry, rituals, and sacrifices symbolic of the End of All Things and Lord Vimúhla's promised reward.

**Aspects**

Lord Vimúhla is usually depicted as a cone-shaped being with stylized flames in place of arms and legs, surrounded by black clouds shot through with orange-red lightnings.

He has 87 Aspects, the following being the most popular Outer Aspects.

## 1) Jmár

Lord of Flame

Shown as a pure red-orange Flame without face, eyes, or other physical features. Worshippers meditate upon the clean, cathartic power of the Flame, offering specially purified oil and tiny sticks of *Tíu*-wood as fuel. Some devotees scarify their limbs and cheeks with burn-marks, using thin wire brands heated in this Flame until they glow red. Lord Jmár is very popular at Khirgár and in the north, though not in Fasíltum. His ceremonies, detailed in *The Treatise of Bright Burning*, encompass great temple processions, human sacrifices, and military panoply.

### 2) Pa'lákh

#### The Swath of Red

Depicted in *The Treatise of Bright Burning* as a mighty, armored - and masked being who carries a scythe-like sword in one hand and a stylized bolt of flame in the other. Soldiers devoted to Lord Vimúhla, especially those who seek victory or martyrdom, worship him. His festivals in Si'ís and Aukésha are very popular with veterans and true devotees of the God — and incidentally with the Incandescent Blaze Society.

### 3) Methqázh

#### The One Who Is Seen Burning from Afar

This Aspect is portrayed as a geometric symbol for light and fire, never as a person. He it is who is said to light the sun, the planets, and other celestial bodies, and His home is said to be the moon Káshi, which He rules. He appears in the Legend of Dórmoron Plain as the light that guided Lord Vimúhla's armies to attack the forces of the Dark Trinity.

### 4) Dumúggash

#### The Spirit of Battle

Depicted in *The Treatise of Bright Burning* as a naked man wielding a curved sword and a round shield. His face is contorted with battle-lust, and his body is twisted in a contortion of violent combat. He is the Aspect appealed to by soldiers about to go into battle. He stands for the highest forms of martyrdom to the Flame, and His clergy specialize in mystical interpretations of the universe, the life and death of worlds, the voyaging to the Planes of Fire, and the Passage into the Blazing Paradise.

### 5) Valédh

#### The Flayer

Personal victory and the trampling into ashes of one's foes are the domain of this Aspect, depicted as a warrior wearing a flayed human skin and dancing in wild exultation. In one hand He holds a bowl of flame, and in the other an axe or sword. He symbolizes battle-victory and the destruction of one's enemies. When a city is taken by Lord Vimúhla's legions, a heroic soldier is chosen to wear the skin of an enemy leader and perform a ritual dance in the central square. His fellows stroke his limbs, pour perfumed oil over him, and offer him coins and gifts.

### 6) Dikkómtla

#### The Blazing Trident

Depicted in *The Treatise of Bright Burnings* as a trident whose three branches end in blades shaped like flames. He is said to bring victory to armies that have become dispirited and of low morale. A priest attired in armor and a masked helmet carries the trident into battle, leading the troops in one last wild attack that must result in victory or death. If the battle is won, the trident-bearer is praised, celebrated, and thereafter treated with special respect by his or her comrades. If the attack fails, the trident-bearer's last responsibility is to break the trident and die with it.

### 7) Menuméng

#### The Dark Flame

This Aspect stands for invisible burning, the power of heat without visible fire. Images of this Aspect show a headless seated man, with arms that have no hands but which end in stylized flames. Those who require heat without fire worship him: e.g. those who use sunlight to tan hides, those who dry fabrics in the sun, those who melt ores, etc. He is worshipped largely by artisans and is especially popular in Béy Sü and various other urban centers.

### 8) Pùrukasái

He is seen as a human soldier in full military panoply but with a head that is composed of a single bright-burning flame. He also appears in the *Book of Burnings* as "a roaring three-fingered jet of flame like the flue of a blacksmith's clan when the blooms of metal are being harvested." He delights in large explosions and the destruction of cities. Sappers and siege troops pray to him before setting fire to mines or firing incendiary ammunition. Many soldiers who do not worship Lord Vimúhla make offerings to Lord Pùrukasái in battle when appropriate.

### 9) Korogách

#### The Defender

Depicted in *The Book of Dealings* as a contorted, burning human face within a stylized glass lantern. This Aspect stands for the presence of light in darkness: the appearance of fire in the Underworlds, tombs, and catacombs. Those who traverse such places take along a bit of extra fuel as "food" for this Aspect. If one addresses Him properly and feeds Him, Lord Korogách will provide protection and illumination in dangerous places.

### 10) Nmén

#### The Drinker of Sacrifices

Shown as a tower of fire that roars straight up, He has no face or other features. He is depicted in this form in every temple, and in some temples His shrine presents an actual column of flame that is kept burning with special fuels. This Aspect consumes human (and other) sacrifices offered to the God. It is said in *The Book of*

*Dealings* that through His "mouth" the spirits of the wretched victims must pass to be received in the Fires of Paradise.

### **Demons**

Jnéksha'a

Ruler of the Thirteenth Circle, Charred One, Ravener of Cities, Exulter in Fiery Death, He of the Molten Face, The Scythe of Flame

He is of the Substance of Vimúhla and the Essence of Chiténg, and his Powers include Burning and the generation of Flame-gems. He appears as roaring flame that fills the hexagonal pattern into which he is summoned. He appears as his terrible Aspect, The Hideous Charred One, to claim those who have offended him.

Tkél

Ruler of the Eleventh Circle, Guardian of the Gates of Flame, Supreme One of Doors, Warder of the Walls and the Pylons and the Portals, He Who Seals With Fire

He is of the Substance of Vimúhla and the Essence of Chiténg, and his powers are Barring, Sealing, Contusing, and Dissection. He is a carapaced quadruped with long thick front legs, short rear legs, a triangular head, and burning eyes. His Secret Name is Shrejjárshu Who Is Impervious.

Hrè-Nirú

These minions of Tkél are of the Substance of Vimúhla and the Essence of Chiténg, and appear as flat sheets of flame flowing along the ground consuming things at Tkél's behest.

Nurgáshte

Who Defends Against Death

He is of the Substance of Vimúhla and the Essence of Hrí'ü, and his Powers include Avoidance and Repulsion. He is a powerful warrior in black, gold, and scarlet with a hideous beastlike face. He must not be summoned with his demon-brothers Nimuné and Niritlál.

Ssüdünè

The Ravener, The One Who Melts, Flamesong

She is of the Substance of Chiténg and the Essence of Vimúhla, and her Powers are Ebullience, Calcination, Inflammation, and Impassioning. She appears as a pillar of flame and also as a beautiful woman in flame colors with red hair.

Shenésa

Mistress of Gereshmá'a, Ruler of the Ochre Plains, She Who Hosts.

She is of the Substance of Vimúhla, but the Essence of Sárku, and her Powers include Visitation, Gifting, Burning, and Disinvigoration. This demon appears in the guise of a woman of middle years dressed in

contemporary fashion and of charming mien. She can appear without summons, and generously invites persons to visit her upon her lonely plain of yellow sands and twisted black trees. Her home seems charming and beautiful while one stands at her side, yet let one wander aside and all things are seen to bear pleasant façades which hide nacreous, twisted, and vermiform natures. She is generous, yet capricious, and a short visit to her plane can result in many years having passed upon one's return. Her Secret Names are Bão, Kes'ár, and G'élts.

Mrúgga

He With Scales of Fire, Ruler of the Twenty-Fourth Circle

He is of the Substance and Essence of Vimúhla, and his powers include Enragement, Febrifacience, Deflagration, and Incendiarism. He appears as an iridescent squamous creature like unto the renowned Flame Dragons of the Time of the Dragon Lords. His Secret Names are Trübéth, Sa'áq, and Tlonétl.

Flame Dragons of the Time of the Dragon Lords

Appearing as three-meter-long iridescent flying reptiles, these minions of Ssüdünè and Mrúgga breathe tongues of fire in battle as well as wielding short spears and one-handed longswords. Their fearsome aspect is enhanced by smoldering red buboes and thorny protuberances rising from the sides and back of their flat, ancipitous heads, and by a ridge of raised spikes along their backs.

Haichútl

Minions of Mrúgga and of the Substance of Vimúhla, these are creatures dwelling within the hottest incandescence, and which burn all they touch.

Kholúr

Possibly these are the modern Chóhlu'arth. They are of the Substance of Vimúhla, but are otherwise unknown.

Chóhlu'arth

Minions of Mrúgga of the Substance of Vimúhla, these are the bronze-armored, dragon-headed warriors described in the "Book of Burnings".

### **Magic**

The Temple of Lord Vimúhla excels at spells connected with fire, ravening energy, and destruction. The magic needed for battlefield healing, the treatment of burns, and other flame-related matters is also a specialty. The Temple has little competence in sorcery dealing with the Undead, the acquisition of knowledge, or other areas that are logically the provinces of other Deities.

Sorcerers devoted to the Flame Lord or His Cohort Chiténg employ secret magical spells to turn themselves into living balls of flame during battle, disrupting enemy ranks and causing great chaos that their comrades turn to their advantage. This is considered an act of great bravery, as the flame often consumes these sorcerers when the spell ends. It is believed that these valiant souls



are delivered directly into Lord Vimúhla's special paradise.

#### Magical Items

##### *The Image of the Eye of Flame*

An oval with sharp corners, drawn in powdered bone and grease, much in the shape of an eye. The pupil consists of a vertical bar drawn in scarlet. Used in the summoning of the Demon Jnéksha'a.

##### *The Station of Kelúo*

A magical diagram made of red chalk or blood mixed with the grease of some being, human or animal, which has perished in fire. It is seven cubits in length, angle to base. It is used in the summoning of the Demons Gereshmá'a, Jnéksha'a, Mrúgga, and Shenésa, among others.

#### Temple Spells

##### *Barring and Broaching*

These rituals seal various-sized entrances and doors against passage, or else open entrances so sealed.

##### *The Bolt of Immanent Immolation*

This ritual summons a bolt of lightning to strike one's foes, being inclined towards those in steel or other metal armors.

##### *The Carpet of Conflagration*

These rituals open a small Nexus Point to one of Lord Vimúhla's planes of molten lava, causing a channel of flaming destruction to pour forth.

##### *Devitalization*

These spells psychically rob the target's *Bákte* or *Pedhétl* of their basic life-energies, weakening their physical or magical abilities.

##### *Devotion to the Flame*

The targets of these spells are placed into a psychic state of battle-madness, driven to fight without reservation until victorious over all foes, or slain.

##### *Inexpungability*

These rituals imbue an edged weapon with the magical ability to reflect the blows of other edged weapons. Such blows struck against one so shielded inflict damage upon the attacker.

##### *The Infrangible Incandescent Orb*

These rituals create a sphere of opaque flame that hides the caster and damages all those it touches. Missiles and spells can be fired blindly through the orb, often igniting when passing through. The most powerful variants of this spell allow for those inside to see out and fire missiles and spells accurately, and to move up and down through air and earth in some limited fashion. This spell is suspected of being combined with that of Devotion to the Flame to produce the secret battlefield spell that turns the caster into a living, raging fireball upon the field.

##### *The Panoply of Iron*

These rituals shroud their targets in a glowing red "armor."

Armékh hiNarkoná'a stood in formation beneath the blazing sun while the seemingly endless litanies poured forth from the altar to Valédh the Flayer. He awaited the clarion signal announcing the final portion of the daily ritual and the dismissal of the troops. Thereafter, his aching arms would soon be free of their burden. Holding up his legion's *Káing* in the blazing sun was tiresome work, and Armékh was sure that the brocade was becoming heavier with each passing moment.

While he waited, he chided himself for not joining the Administrative priesthood, as he had intended as a lad. But the persuasive words of a clan-uncle, combined with a certain unfamiliarity with the sums and figures the Priesthood would require, had lured him into his uncle's Legion instead. Now he found himself surrounded by young men and women eager for war and glory.

Armékh did not desire glory, because he did not wish to be hacked to pieces by Mu'ugalavyáni raiders or slaughtered by Emperor Dhich'uné's troops during another of rebel Prince Mírusíya's futile assaults upon Avanthár. Despite the fact that the warlike Temple of Vimúhla was the traditional faith of his clan of Red Sun, Armékh desired only safety and security. So Armékh cultivated his *Kási's* favor and pursued the position of standardbearer, and eventually herald. With his uncle's help, he hoped to achieve the rank of junior officer on the command staff before ever seeing battle. Lost in his musings, Armékh hardly noticed as the Antiphonal Choir of Red Destruction began its last canto.

He was consoling himself with the saying, "In a collection of fools, the cunning man rules," when the trumpets called forth the end of the ceremony. He was only a moment off the initial step, an error he was sure none would notice in the crowd. He marched eagerly toward the welcoming darkness of the temple in almost-perfect formation with his colleagues. In his mind was fixed the image of a dewy cup of cold *Chumétl* in the restful coolness of the lower refectory.

In the shadows of the doorway waited the Herald of Legion, a slender but strong young man of good clan and powerful connections. He carried orders, for the Legion: the forces of rebel Prince Eselné were nearing the city of Béy Sü. All units were to be equipped for battle before the walls at first light.

The Herald noticed with distaste one standardbearer who was out of step. Recalling his early days as a standardbearer, the Herald became indignant. This fellow insulted the dignity of the *Káing*-standard!

A word to the squad's *Kási*, thought the Herald, and that fellow would be on the front line of Prince Mímsíya's forces, the first to fall before the onslaught of the foe. The Herald grinned, congratulating himself for avoiding such a fate by working his way into the command-staff. Soon that standardbearer would be down in the barracks in a cold sweat of terror, while the Herald could look forward to a cool cup of *Chumétl* in the refectory, and the safety of the command tent for the morning's battle.

# Chiténg

*Lord of Red Spouting Flame, Drinker of Blood, Reaper of Cities, and Cohort of Vimúhla.*



This Deity spreads death and devastation by the Flame, as does His Master, but Lord Chiténg focuses on group action and societal violence, and He is thus closer to mankind's needs than the pure annihilation of the Flame of His Lord. He is the patron of the armies of Change, the besieger of cities, and the overseer of torments. Lord Chiténg aids those who combat Stability, those who besiege and devastate and plunder, and those who inflict atrocities. Lord Chiténg emphasizes the pragmatic, cruel, and vicious side of the Power of the Flame, with less emphasis on His Lord's mystical nature.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

#### *Color*

Lord Chiténg's adherents sport orange-red combined with the black of mighty Lord Hrü'ü.

#### *Symbol*

The God's symbol is a stylized depiction of Lord Chiténg's two-handed sword, "Bloodsong," which He wielded in His Master's service upon Dórmoron Plain.

#### *Costume*

His priests wear orange and purple robes, full armor, and helmets of iron. He accepts as priestesses only those women who are hardened *Aridáni* warriors and who are lovers of cruelty and bloodlust. These dress in costumes similar to their male counterparts.

Several of the religious rituals worshipping Chiténg may involve sexual acts, especially acts of sadistic behavior.

#### *Rituals*

Lord Chiténg enjoys masochism, fire, burning, destruction, and the tearing down of all things, spiritual as well as physical. But He is more complex than mere destruction, for Lord Chiténg is not some mere fire-demon but a God. His rituals take place during the day when the sun is high and the heat is intense. Pyres of perfumed wood are ignited in public places and captives are brought out and cast in, where they writhe and scream and perish in the flames, often with pieces cut, carved, and sliced away moments beforehand.

But Lord Chiténg is also the One who metes out the destruction dedicated to Lord Vimúhla, and by this stratagem contains Lord Vimúhla's lust for the Final Flowering of the Flame, as called for by All the Gods in the Time before Time.

His ceremonies are lavish and popular, and this Lord's worshippers receive plenty of food and liquor when in attendance.

#### *Cannibalism*

Ritual cannibalism is rarely practiced, but is a part of the year's special festivals. The Outer Rituals usually involve the consumption of ritual substances representing human flesh. Wealthy patrons are often allowed to believe that their special private ceremonies are Inner Rituals, and that the various meats provided are actual human flesh. Whether or not this is truly the case is unknown.

#### *Sexual Rituals*

Several Inner Rituals of this Lord involve sexual acts, invariably combined with sadomasochistic techniques to bring about the pain that Lord Chiténg enjoys. The Company of the Orange Band almost always oversees these celebrations.

The Outer Rituals may also include sexual acts, but these have less doctrinal than commercial significance, presented, as they are to wealthy patrons whose desire to witness "Inner" ceremonies must be appeased without truly revealing the Temple's Inner doctrines.

#### *Sacrifice*

The raging furnace into which sacrifices are tossed is called the Chalice of Fire of Lord Chiténg.

#### *Food Taboos*

As with the War-Temples of Karakán and Chegárra, devotees of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg eat fish only when necessity demands.

#### *Death Rituals*

Devotees of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg hold that a deceased's belongings must perish with him or her in the Flame, ensuring that these possessions will be ready to hand in these deities' special paradises.

*Afterlife*

Lord Chiténg's paradise is a realm of flame called the Halls of Burning Victory.

**The Inner Doctrines**

The Inner Doctrines of Lord Chiténg involve this God's service to His Lord Vimúhla. Lord Chiténg establishes the perspectives in which Lord Vimúhla's burnings can be understood by society. Lord Chiténg attends the worshippers of Lord Vimúhla, ensuring rewards for burnings that appease His Master. While Lord Chiténg maintains the societal purposes behind the sacrifices to Lord Vimúhla, He also appeases and calms His Lord by ensuring a steady flow of destruction and ruin. Otherwise Lord Vimúhla would unconcernedly consume all surrounding Him, meaning that His worshippers would be first destroyed. Lord Chiténg urges the goal of an eventual conflagration. But He also builds society, rules and laws (albeit quite harsh), and establishes rituals. These He creates for His Lord's eventual destruction, in order to meanwhile maintain a steady flow of propitiation to the Lord of Flame.

**Secular Activities**

The bureaucracies and police of Mu'ugalavyá and Tsolyánu often employ this God's devotees as professional torturers and executioners. In order to be conducted properly, executions must be carried out by a *Mríkh* assigned from the Company of the Edification of the Soul. This Tsolyáni custom has a counterpart in Mu'ugalavyá, where the Mourners in Sable, the special guards of the Temple of Hrsh on the island of Mu'úgalla and that nation's secret police, serve as executioners and societal members of the Flame Lord.

**Businesses**

Clans faithful to Lord Chiténg include agriculturists, and more than the usual share of soldiery, police and guards.

**Public Works and Services**

Worshippers of Lord Chiténg include guards and torturers employed in the prisons of the Empire, many of whom are members of the Legion of Kétl.

**Cities of Broad Influence***Jakállá*

In the *Tsuru'üm* beneath the city of Jakállá are shrines and temples devoted to all the Gods of the *Mítlányal*, and more. Notable among these is the temple of Lord Chiténg because it is circular in shape, a design otherwise ignored by the architects of the other Gods' temples. Various theories exist as to why this ancient structure was built in circular fashion, but none have fully explained the anomaly.

The theories claim that Lord Chiténg prefers a round temple because it does not have corners to "trip up" the God. His monumental round temples can be found beneath Jakállá and elsewhere. In the Underworld, the temples are often carved-out circular chambers

containing circular raised daises upon which is a pit of flame. Beyond the circular chamber are the images that are usually of reptilian-style flaming demons.

**Politics****Internal Factions***Company of the Orange Band*

This company joins with the Temple of Hriháyal in sadistic orgies. Large orgy-celebrations take place in which both sacrifices and participants may perish.

*The Company of the Edification of the Soul*

A small and tightly knit faction devoted to Lord Chiténg and containing some worshippers of Lady Hriháyal as well. Although this clan is among the lowest in social prestige, its members are jealous of their prerogatives and permit no outsider to perform their unpleasant tasks.

A *Mríkh* (literally "a group of four") from this faction is legally required in order to question or punish a malefactor. It is unlawful for any other group (excepting the Omnipotent Azure Legion and certain Temple inquisitorial bodies) to carry out such punishments within the Empire. Whenever a formal interrogation or execution is to be held, therefore, it is necessary to summon representatives of the Company of the Edification of the Soul even though this may involve a delay of days or even weeks. Members of a *Mríkh* who worship Lord Chiténg will wear orange-red robes and *Chlén*-hide-masks shaped like the stylized lizard's head of their Deity. If a *Mríkh* is unavailable, an appointed Imperial executioner is acceptable, but the *Mríkh* provides a level of religious, social, and cultural "sanction" on the execution.

A favored spell of the *Mríkh* is Punition, which subjects its victims to burning agony without causing any visible sign of affliction.

*Weapon Instruction*

Members of the various secret societies of the War-Temples provide private instruction with masters of arms to their warrior-priests and legion officers. Only the "noble" weapons (daggers, short and long one-handed weapons, two-handed swords and axes, polearms, composite bows, and the crossbow) are taught. It is considered eccentric and *declassé* for a person of high status to wish to learn arms other than these.

**External Parties**

Like the Temple of Vimúhla, the Temple of Chiténg wields most of its influence with the Military Party. Unlike the Temple of Vimúhla, the Temple of Chiténg has some influence, however small, with the Priestly Party, a result of alliances with the extremely political Temples of Dlamélish and Hriháyal.

**Temple Alliances**

In addition to its obvious affiliation with the Temple of Vimúhla, the Temple of Chiténg works closely with the Temple of Hriháyal, Cohort of Lady Dlamélish, through

both the Company of the Orange Band and the Company of the Edification of the Soul, to pursue interests common to both groups.

### Military Legions

*The Legion of the Givers of Sorrow*

8th Imperial Heavy Infantry, Butrús, Pán Cháka and Chéne Hó

Kérdu Tséme! Korikáda hi Kurúshma, High Priest of Chiténg at Butrús

Devoted to Lord Chiténg, it suffered heavy losses during the Mu'ugalavyáni invasions which followed Emperor Dhich'uné's ascension to the throne.

*The Legion of Kétl*

Prison guards sponsored largely by the Temple of Chiténg but including members of all faiths. It is an ancient and honorable police unit, usually charged with Imperial and provincial prison duties. The Legion of Kétl is not employed as local police forces, not as Sákbe Road guards, not as tomb guards, etc., but only as wardens of Imperial prisons and Imperial prisoners in provincial jails. This legion has very few battle honors, for its main strength is in the prisons. It is allowed to exceed the usual limit of 20 Cohorts per Legion, and its strength varies between 12,000 and perhaps 20,000, including all ranks, such as scribes, supply officers, transport officers for supplies and felons, etc. Most of these people are not "soldiers" or "warriors" in any sense of these words, but are functionaries and bureaucrats.

### Clans

Lord Chiténg's followers are drawn from the same areas and clans as those of Lord Vimúhla, and membership in one or the other faith appears to be a matter of personal preference, family tradition, and clan predilections.

*Very High*

Vríddi

*High*

Red Sword

Red Mountain

Red Sun

Sword of Fire

Sweet Singers of Nakomé

*Medium*

Red Sky

Red Stone

*Low*

Broken Bough

Iron Fist

Iron Hand

Eye of Flame

*Very Low*

Red Moon

Artificers of Iron

Standing Reed

### Holidays

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lord Chiténg join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

3Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

19 Pardán

The Litany of Blood-Song, Sword of the God, Chéne Hó

Notable during this day of rituals and sacrifices is the Recitation of the Litany, in which a chorus of warriors around a roaring conflagration chants the Saga of Blood-Song from memory. Adolescent male and *Aridáni* female warrior-candidates enact the scenes of the saga in ritual and dance before the flames, each step and posture of which is choreographed and has meaning within the saga. The battle scenes are conducted with actual weapons and costume armor, and blood can be spilled if any motion of the dance is less than exact in its precision. It is expected that participants stoically bear any wounds incurred, but deaths among the participants are rare due to the months of grueling practice that precede the ceremony. Although by no means the only coming-of-age ritual in this Temple, participants who complete the dance are considered as adults and are usually accepted into even the most elite units appropriate to their clan. Only participants within the dance can go on to become cantors of the Litany itself, and this is occasionally the route by which some enter the Ritual priesthood of this God as well.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

18 Halír

The Gushing Forth of the Flame

Performed annually on this date at Chéne Hó, Fasíltum, and other cities unless the green moon, Gayél, is full, on which occasions the celebration is postponed until the next new moon of Káshi. Ten to twenty human sacrifices may take place during the Inner Ceremonies, and the celebrants consume certain portions of the victims to

increase their priestly power. Hearts, male sexual organs, biceps, and thigh muscles are roasted with spices and served at a feast following the sacrifices. This private feast is accompanied by rhythmic, wailing music, cymbals, drums, the clashing of metal finger-rings, and special hymns sung only on this night. Youths and maidens, nude except for orange-red body paint, masked helmets, and other jewelry, dance wildly until they fall foaming at the mouth.

### 9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on his own birthday.

### 10Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

Vraháma, Intercalary Days

The Offering Up of the Sword of Fire, Chéne Hó.

Worshippers of Lord Chiténg in the Mu'ugalavyáni city of Chéne Hó conduct exuberant rituals to the God, culminating in the consumption of a steel sword in a brilliant crimson flame. Whether the curved, consecrated weapon held aloft at the ceremony's end is actually consumed by flame, accepted by the God, or simply caused to vanish in a dazzling bit of illusion is a question unknown to any but the Inner Ritual Priests in this temple.

Chitlásha, Intercalary Days

The Seeding of the Land with Flame, Katalál

Rituals and sacrifices surrounding this celebration take place within the temple compound, following which a procession of torch-bearing warriors stream forth from the gates and race wildly through the darkened city. All who they encounter, of any faith, are expected to offer up ritual gifts to satiate the God and the gifts are burned on the spot. Throughout the day, peddlers sell small flammable items such as wooden charms and paper figures expressly for this purpose. Should one be so hapless as to have nothing to offer, items such as personal jewelry, articles of clothing, or even locks of hair sliced off with a *Chlén*-hide dagger can be demanded.

### Aspects

Lord Chiténg is depicted as a mighty warrior covered with lizard-like scales and with a lizard's head. He has two huge opalescent eyes, and flames pour from his maw. He is often shown in battle wielding his terrible two-handed sword, "Bloodsong."

He has 20 Aspects.

### 1) Marghél the Burner

Represented as a single towering pillar of fire, Lord Marghél is the Aspect of spontaneous combustion and unexpected burning or fire.

### 2) Sadhúa

The Torturer

Appears as a heavy human figure, round-faced with a rather peaceful appearance. When His eyes open they are seen to be full of red fire. He is charged with inflicting pain upon all enemies who fall into the hands of the God. Many foreign nations, Stability clans, and even members of the Dark Trinity are counted as enemies of Lord Chiténg.

### 3) Pokhótl

A monstrous great toad-like creature in shape, but consisting entirely of fire, it is said in *The Book of Burning* that this Aspect oversees the rapine and burning of cities. His priests placate Him with the sacrifice of model buildings in various traditional shapes, made of clay moistened with human blood. He incinerates these, but offers few favors in return.

### 4) Ninormé

Lord Ninormé appears as a ball of orange light that hovers over battlefields and scenes of carnage. He is said to guide the spirit-souls of slain worshippers of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg through the dark and miasmal Planes of the Lands Beyond, directly to the Paradise of the Flame Lord. In *The Articles of Arú Tetlákte the Mourner* it is written that only prayer and true belief can summon this Aspect — no offerings are needed or accepted.

### 5) Biyü the Inextinguishable

The legendary Aspect of Lord Chiténg who stood guard over Lord Vimúhla's sleeping form just before the Battle of Dórmoron Plain. He protected His Master against the "night-beasts" of Lord Ksárul and saved the Flame from being extinguished by sorcery. See *The Articles of Arú Tetlákte the Mourner*, as well as the Khéiris redaction of the *Lament to the Wheel of Black*, cantos 236 and 237.

### 6) Pirágh

The Harbinger of Scarlet Doom

This Aspect appears in the form of a young and vigorous man, attired in a simple red-orange robe, barefoot, bareheaded, and without weapons or possessions. This person wanders through a war-torn land, visiting army encampments, cities, towns, fields full of crops, etc. In *The Book of Burning* it is said that He assesses the value of these things as sacrifices to His grim Master and apparently reports on these to Him. Seeing Lord Pirágh is ill luck — a belief that has caused any number of harmless, innocent young men to be killed over the years, when anxious soldiers and frightened civilians suspected them of being Him. The Mu'ugalavyáni call Him Fara'ákh, and list Him as the fourteenth of Lord Chiténg's Aspects.

## 7) Imósh

## The Lord of Ashes

Appears as a charred corpse, covered with blisters and burn-marks. His hands and feet appear to have been burnt off completely, and he staggers along on the stumps of his legs, wandering howling through battlefields and places of desolation. He is charged with the removal of spirit-souls from those who are so badly burned that they cannot survive. If these persons worshipped Lords Vimúhla or Chiténg, He hands their spirit-souls over to Lord Ninormé (cf. above) for transmission to Paradise. If they are devotees of other Deities, He attempts to carry them off to the Burning Hells.

## 8) Neé

## The Warden of the Third way

Nothing is known about this Aspect, except that the priests of Lord Chiténg in Tumíssa venerate Him (It?) excessively and make sacrifices of orange flowers and young female children to Him. The mythological role of this Aspect is unclear, although He may be one of the protagonists of the Hymn of Mü'ukané.q.v.

## 9) Akhádz

## He Who Rises

This Aspect is described in *The Book of Burning* as dwelling upon the peaks of high mountains and wandering in lonesome solitude through the "Wastes Between the Worlds." Lord Akhádz' mythological role is that of a messenger and a scout for His Master. He carries a Staff of Conflagration and a Shield named "Scudding Cloud of Dark-Red Flame." He has the task of clearing away hidden enemies from His Master's path, seeing what lies ahead, and "ensuring the final Victory of the Flame."

## 10) Metlák

This Aspect appears as a fine tracery of orange flame that surrounds the fingers of a priest who evokes Him properly. With this "Glove of Fire," the priest can cause agony so terrible that none can withstand it. This punishment is meted out to those who have been disloyal to Lord Vimúhla or to Lord Chiténg. Torture is repeated at irregular intervals, interspersed with periods of healing and rest, during which the victim is lulled into the belief that all is over and he has been forgiven! Then the pain begins again. It is written in *The Excellent Treatise of Partition of Arkhóne the Unwise* that one of the ancient Bednálljan heroes, Muídhím of Purdánim, endured more than 40 sessions with Lord Metlák before he died.

**Demons**

## Jnéksha'a

Ruler of the Thirteenth Circle, Charred One, Ravener of Cities, Exulter in Fiery Death, He of the Molten Face, The Scythe of Flame

He is of the Substance of Vimúhla and the Essence of Chiténg, and his Powers include Burning and the

generation of Flame-gems. He appears as roaring flame that fills the hexagonal pattern into which he is summoned. He appears as his terrible aspect, The Hideous Charred One, to claim those who have offended him.

## Tkél

Ruler of the Eleventh Circle, Guardian of the Gates of Flame, Supreme One of Doors, Warder of the Walls and the Pylons and the Portals, He Who Seals With Fire

He is of the Substance of Vimúhla and the Essence of Chiténg, and his powers are Barring, Sealing, Contusing, and Dissection. He is a carapaced quadruped with long thick front legs, short rear legs, a triangular head, and burning eyes. His Secret Name is Shrejjárshu Who Is Impervious.

## Qu'ú

He Who Would End Wisdom, Master of the Forty-Fifth Circle, He Who Roars

This demon is of the Substance of Chiténg and the Essence of Grugánu, and his Powers include Numbing, Gifting, and Imperceptibility. He appears as a shambling, multi-headed Sró-like creature. In legend, this demon fought the God Thúmis upon Dórmoron Plain in that God's aspect of a bejeweled two-legged serpent. His Secret Name is Tirrgáschè.

## Kekkéka

Servitor of Kurritlakál, Tormentor, Master of the Forty-Ninth Circle, One of Many Barbed Hooks

This demon is of the Essence of Chiténg and the Substance of Durritlámish, and his Powers are Punition and Extraction. He appears as a small, pallid man, with a globular head with no eyes, ears, or nose, and a smiling lipless mouth. His Secret Names are Dugó, Thú, Gluír, Wésh, and Areksónbe.

## Hrè-Nirú

These minions of Tkél are of the Substance of Vimúhla and the Essence of Chiténg, and appear as flat sheets of flame flowing along the ground consuming things at Tkél's behest.

## Ssúdüne

The Ravener, The One Who Melts, Flamesong

She is of the Substance of Chiténg and the Essence of Vimúhla, and her Powers are Ebullience, Calcination, Inflammation, and Impassioning. She appears as a pillar of flame and also as a beautiful woman in flame colors with red hair.

## Winged Serpents of Conflagration

Minions of Ssúdüne, these creatures are of the Substance of Chiténg and the Essence of Vimúhla.

## Mikoyél

The Formless, Lord of the Thirty-Second Circle, One of Knives, Servitor of Origób

This demon is of the Substance of Chiténg and the Essence of Wurú, and its Powers are Transformation, Raising, Obnubilation, and Imparting. It appears only as a dull reddish blur that floats in the room. Its Secret Names are Lésme, Akhizón, and Dméggha.

## Magic

### Calcination

These rituals cause holes of varying sizes to be instantly, silently, and flamelessly burned through targets.

### The Fist of Fire

These rituals open a small, aimed nexus point into one of Lord Chiténg's magma Planes. Various sized globs of lava rocket forth under great pressure, damaging targets with impact, heat, and adhesion.

### Punition

These spells subject their targets to psychic torture by creating incredible burning pains without causing any visible damage. Employed by the *Mríkh* of the Company of the Edification of the Soul for torture. The most powerful variants of this spell can either render a target immune from pain for a time, or can slay instantly.

Something was wrong in the clanhouse. Stocky, gray-haired Marála hiTsurúne could sense it. Never wedded, she had adopted the small Scarlet Sail clanhouse as her charge, and she had not lived in the building every day of her life without acquiring a sense of how it should feel. Instinctively she called Kara, a faithful old Mu'ugalavyáni slave, and told her to follow. The dark, taciturn slave obeyed silently.

Marála tracked the wrongness like a hunting-bird, following her instincts. In the kitchen two slaves looked up when their stern overseer entered and returned quickly to their cooking. Marála wondered that they could not tell. She followed the sensation around a pantry and stopped.

The postern normally used for bringing out kitchen slops was open. Marála realized she had sensed the changed airflow, and the distant sounds from outside. But she was unprepared for all the blood on the corpse lying just inside.

Although not particularly pious, Marála muttered a prayer to Lord Chiténg. Then she addressed Káru. "Dismiss those two. We must work quickly." Marála did not want the clanhouse shamed by an investigation, which the Imperial Police would surely conduct.

They dragged the corpse back along its bloody trail to some bushes by the black granite wall. The shrubs obscured a gap the servants used to reach the neighboring Standing Stone clanhouse for barter or gossip. Cautiously they slipped through to investigate.

An eerie silence emanated from the clanhouse looming above them. The dead woman had evidently fallen from a balcony before crossing the yard. They dragged the corpse to the great bloody stain among some decorative rocks below.

She told Káru to return to the kitchen and wash the floor by the postern door: it was not necessary to command silence from the canny old woman. Marála planned to pour water on the bloody trail, hoping the mud would not show the bloodstains when the investigators arrived.

She had just returned through the gap in the wall with a bucket of water when a young girl looked down from the balcony, her eyes wide with shock.

"Mama?" she asked.

Marála's journey through the clanhouse had been a nightmare. Everywhere bodies were strewn and beaten, but although dead and bruised there was no blood. In a large reception room she had found Havásu, the clanmaster, naked and beaten almost beyond recognition by the same large cudgel that had slain his household. Cowering on the balcony was Qilái.

There was no question that she was not responsible. Despite her claim to fourteen summers, the orphan girl looked no more than twelve. Alone in the house, she was uninjured.



Marála had secreted the girl back to the clanhouse, avoiding the prying eyes of the clan-gossips. When the carnage was discovered they would have plenty to yammer about without involving the child.

Later, officers of the Omnipotent Azure Legion had talked to all the noble persons, but the Scarlet Sail clanswoman and her slave had been beneath notice.

Havásu, the clanmaster, had dealt in bad business, many said afterwards, and Chúra hiTikánte was considered second only to the Imperial Princess Ma'in Krúthái in her selfish lust for power. It was assumed they had simply made one too many enemies. No mention at all was made of a young girl who might have been present.

Some time later, Marála introduced Qilái as her newly arrived clan-niece from distant Khirgár.

Marála came to visit the temple shortly after Qilái achieved the circle of junior Ritual priestess of Lord Qón. "You have come far," the gruff, stocky woman stated, "Your mama must have been of good lineage." She rarely broached the subject of Qilái's life before that day.

Qilái shuddered and turned away. Marála regretted her words and was about to change the subject when Qilái spoke.

"The woman who leapt to her death was not my mother," she said, the first words she had ever spoken on the subject.

"Leapt? Did she flee the killers?" the gang of brutes had never been caught.

"There were no killers," said Qilái quietly, "I killed them."

Marála said nothing, but her face held a look of rare astonishment.

Looking into Marála's eyes, Qilái continued. "I prayed for their deaths, and the God granted my prayer. Mama Chúra," she shuddered at the name, "thought demons had come, and leapt from the balcony in terror."

And Marála, sensing in her own fashion the rightness of what had been said, believed her.

"Never refer to that *bússan* woman again," Qilái continued, taking the rough hands of the stern old matron in her own. "My first Mama died long ago and far away, something terrible happened that I can't remember. But you came. Lord Qón gave us each other, and I serve him with gratitude. You are my Mama, given me by the God, and my heart sings to see you."

Just then a cinder or a dust mote landed in Marála's eye, and she had to turn away. When her vision cleared the mother and daughter talked of other things.

# Dlamélish

*Green-eyed Lady of Fleshly Joys, Mistress of Demons, the Obsidian Princess of Lubricious Delights*



Lady Dlamélish is the Goddess of immediate gratification in all its myriad forms, through all the senses, taken to their limits. In many ways the Lady Dlamélish is the antithesis of Lord Sárku, for She seeks not to witness Change, but to experience perpetual stimulation as Change progresses unheeded. She seeks the existential reality of the Now, Change as it occurs at every moment, and the pleasures and pains of sense perception.

She is the Ultimate Hedonist who cares nothing for others or for society. Only the self matters, and although She follows Lord Hrü'ü in seeking Ultimate Change, yet She must savor every moment along the way.

She desires to attain the heights of ecstasy, the depths of sensuality, and the purely egoistic joy of perceived experience, plucking at the strings of the body and the mind for the selfish exploration of perception. She aids those who seek sensual pleasure and immediate gratification, those who engage in Her orgies and Her ceremonies in the service of Demons of the Dark, and those who are hedonistic, selfish, and uncaring of others.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

#### *Color*

The Lady's colors are emerald green and silver.

#### *Symbol*

Her symbol is an emerald green drop falling into a silver pool.

#### *Astrology*

Emerald green Gayél, the larger moon, is said to be Her domain, and is believed by many to be the location of Her Emerald Paradise.

#### *Numerology*

The Lady's number is 10, which in Tsolyáni is written as a 1, the self, and a decade symbol, representing all. The self experiences all in a manner which is lascivious, female, wild, carefree, duplicitous, and unbound. Her phonemic is "b." Those who would Harmonize with the Lady are advised to do so in pairs, male and female, as is the practice in the Temple of Avánthe as well. These two should be surfeited with sex and not actively seeking one another during Harmonizing, for the process can be deleterious if interrupted or broken off too abruptly.

#### *Costume*

Her priestesses dress in revealing and lascivious robes of emerald green, wear tiaras of silver, and hang tiny silver bells from their wrists and ankles. Her priests are the dregs of humanity, dissolute youths, depraved old men, and capering legions of perverted brutes that serve at Her orgies. All wear some version of emerald and silver livery.

In the rituals, the state of dress or undress of Her clergy is dependent solely upon the rituals underway. Priestly garb is rarely worn in public, save when one is on the way to or from the temple. Normally, Lady Dlamélish's clergy are distinguished only by a large medallion or intricate collar bearing the emerald drop and silver oval symbol of the Goddess, and green clothing. Silver arm and ankle chains are common.

#### *Rituals*

##### *The 34 Unnatural Acts*

Despite the vast range of different gratifications offered by the Temple, all of which are no more and no less important in doctrine, one type of activity has gained such importance that it has become the cornerstone of worship. This is, of course, sex. A prime drive of humanity, sex offers a wide range of pleasurable stimulation through all of the senses.

When one wishes to worship the Lady, one goes to the courtyard set aside for Her desired Aspect, and performs the appropriate supplication. Materials necessary for the ritual are provided, although a donation is usually required. Paraphernalia may also be purchased at the market in the courtyard at the front of each temple.

As She is the Goddess of sensual pleasure, many if not all of Her rituals and celebrations involve sexual acts of varying complexity. Some of the more "intense" rituals of the Emerald Lady may include sadomasochistic or self-abusive acts, but the most extreme rituals of this type are the domain of Her Cohort, Lady Hriháyal. Many assert that the pain of these acts serves to enhance the eventual pleasurable experience, while others claim that pain itself is a sensation to be savored.

Sexual pleasures can be combined with other pleasures, eating, drinking, etc., to explore further facets of sensuality. Some favor chemically-induced states through the use of aphrodisiacs, perfumes, and narcotics in conjunction with sex. Her faithful from the wine-producing clans hold inebriation and sexual arousal to be the best combination, as is to be expected.

*Ritual Items*The Obsidian Dagger

Granted to the Emerald Goddess by Lord Ksárul prior to the Battle of Dórmoron Plain, some claim that this powerful magic weapon was a lover's gift. The last of the Gods to do so, when Lady Dlamélish reluctantly left Lord Ksárul's side, some say that She kept the Obsidian Dagger and turned its powers against Him to build Her wall of His prison. Others insist that She destroyed the Dagger rather than wield it against Him, and this is how the legend is portrayed within this Temple's Outer Rituals.

When the Outer Rituals portray the legend of Dórmoron Plain, a consecrated ritual dagger is employed as the Obsidian Dagger. Made of chipped obsidian, this is set with green gems and chased with silver. This tool of the Outer Rituals is not to be mistaken with the *dirídza* used for Inner Ritual sacrifices, especially since this Obsidian Dagger is shattered at the end of the ritual.

The Dirídza

The *dirídza*, a consecrated dagger with a chipped obsidian blade of terrible sharpness, is used upon those rare occasions when the Inner Rituals of the faith call for blood sacrifice (usually only when the summoning of a demon is required). Similar to the sacrificial knives of Lords Sárku and Vimúhla, these *dirídza* are magical in nature as well as treasures in their own right, with ornate jeweled hilts carved with the Lady's symbols. These priceless works of art make up part of each temple's treasure.

Incense

The Temple of Dlamélish employs many varieties of incense, most alleged to possess aphrodisiac qualities. Agricultural clans faithful to the Emerald Goddess collect local herbs and extracts to create these fragrances, employing secret processes in their preparation. In addition to their use in the rituals, these are exported for profit across the Empire and to other lands.

*The Doctrine of Endless Pleasure*

Lady Dlamélish encourages Her worshippers to strive for sensations of their own choice, without consideration of anyone else, family or friends, inferiors or superiors. No worshipper of Lady Dlamélish should remain in any undesirable situation, but should seek to experience total pleasure at all times. She has no desire to further the will of Lord Hrü'ü in His endless dance of creation and destruction; rather, She teaches that the individual's needs supersede those of society.

This principle of Self over Society is at the root of the theology of the deities of Change. The worshipper of Lady Dlamélish is instructed to decide which of the various available delights are most personally gratifying as well as most easily attained and pursue them at once, letting no one stand in their way. It is understood, however, that the mortal world is one of toil and suffering, restricting one's ability to be gratified. This is acceptable only while the amount of suffering is less than the amount of pleasure. Every worshipper seeks to reduce their suffering to the lowest possible level while

achieving the maximum gratification. This attitude is realistic, and also creates anticipation, which can actually enhance one's pleasures.

Ultimately, the goal of the Goddess is total enjoyment, completely and endlessly. Since this is not humanly possible, the Lady's doctrine commands the active pursuit of pleasure suitable to the individual's rank, station, and taste. Seizing all attainable pleasure within pragmatic limits is a prime point of the Lady's dogma.

*The Undead*

Lady Dlamélish is interested in the continuation of the intellect, rather like Lord Sárku. However, She is interested in warmth and beauty, and the full use of the senses to feel pleasure, not the dull, cold, Undead state beloved of the Lord of Worms. Where Lord Sárku seeks the Perpetual Witness of Change, Lady Dlamélish and Her Cohort seek the Unending Experience of Change. Since even the most cunningly wrought of Lord Sárku's *Jáigi* experience the world through senses blunted by Death, the Lady does not urge Her faithful to seek Life After Death, for what would be the purpose of existence without pleasure?

*Sacrifice*

Sacrifice is performed to make up for any past slight, or to gain favor in the eyes of the Goddess. Silver coins, changed from gold *Káitars* by moneychangers outside the temple, and *Tikánta* blossoms are the usual sacrifices for the Lady. *Tikánta* blossoms are large, waxy-surfaced flowers with tight overlapping petals forming a cup shape. They are translucent green, with a button-like center of tiny seeds that emits a sweet yet pungent odor; popular perfumes and incenses are made from this flower. One may also seek a priestess in the interior of the temple where special sacrificial chambers are located. The offerings there are eels or other snake-like animals, especially favored by the Lady, which are magically imprinted with a message and then killed. The animal's spirit goes straight to the Lady with the message. Such powerful magics are time consuming, of course, as well as tiring, so the priestess must be compensated accordingly. Other than this instance (and the rare occasions of demonic Inner rituals) there are no blood sacrifices in the Temple of Dlamélish.

*Death Rituals*

The Temples of Change believe that an individual's belongings must be provided in the grave. Wealthy followers of Lady Dlamélish and Her Cohort Hriháyal carry the idea farther: they often add the deceased's concubines and slaves to the rest of the tomb furnishings, slaying these wretched persons and laying the bodies around the bier just as the deceased would have enjoyed seeing them in life.

*The Afterlife*

The paradise of Lady Dlamélish is the Emerald Kiosk, a place of unutterable pleasure and ecstatic release. To know forever in every nerve the heights of orgasm and physical stimulation is Her promise.

Her hell is a Plane upon which there is no desire at all -- or perhaps knowledge of desire and the inability to fulfill it -- an endless ennuui.

#### *History*

Lady Dlamélish first appeared in Her present form early in the reign of the Engsvanyáli Priest-Kings, at a time when the vestiges of the Bednálljan Empire remained. Fierce fighting was seen among the religions of the Fisherman-Kings and the new, zealous worshippers of the Lords of Change. It is during this time that the old religions labeled the new with derisive titles that still exist today. "Princess of the Damned," "Harlot of the Five Worlds," and "Mistress of the Thirty-Four Unnatural Acts" are just a few examples of these titles. Eventually the might of the old Engsvanyáli Imperium prevailed, and the new religion replaced the old. The Bednálljan Goddess of Sex, who may well have been the deity worshipped by the infamous Empress Nayári of the Silken Thighs, may be construed as a version of Lady Dlamélish. Jakállá is where Lady Dlamélish was first worshipped, and is considered the capital of Her religion, with Hmakuyál being also of importance.

The Empress Dashilúna, "The Green-Eyed," 38th Seal Empress of the Imperium, was a devotee of the Lady Dlamélish, and wore an emerald and silver tiara. This has now been found among the Imperial regalia and is reputedly endowed with magic. A great many gems were added to this crown, making it very costly.

#### *Legend*

Lady Dlamélish's titles "Mistress of Demons" and "Obsidian Princess" refer to Her part in the Battle of Dórmoron Plain. As Mistress of Demons, She was given control over Lord Ksárul's demonic legions. She "marshaled the host," as the Engsvanyáli put it, before She defected. Lady Dlamélish was the first to join Lord Ksárul and the last to leave Him. Indeed, there are vague legends connecting them as lovers. In order to position and command the demon forces, He gave Her the Obsidian Dagger, a tremendously powerful magical weapon. This is where She gets this title, and why obsidian is the sacred material of the Her religion.

Legend states that when Lady Dlamélish left the Blue Lord's side. She magically shattered Her dagger stating, "I will not strike a blow against Lord Ksárul," and remained neutral thereafter. It is also said that some demons still worship Her and that She still controls the demon hosts.

It is not known whether the Obsidian Dagger still exists, but it is speculated that anything shattered by magic can be made whole again by magic.

#### *The Inner Doctrines*

##### *Soul*

The Lady's pursuit of pleasure is based on the Tsolyáni belief that the living entity is composed of five parts or selves, each part a separate entity, and independent to some degree from the others. These break up at the time of death. Therefore, the current awareness, the self, is

destroyed by death, never to return as the same consciousness. Even though the priests of Lord Belkhánu state that the spirit-soul travels to other planes of existence or to paradises promised by the worshipper's Deity, the journeying soul is devoid of past memory. Thus the underlying principle of mortal existence should be the enjoyment of the *now*, while one is in full possession of one's senses and abilities.

Thus, Lady Dlamélish stresses the combination of the *Bákte* (the Body) and the *Pedhétl* (the Enemy, the raw lusts and drives of the individual). Her concern is not with eternity at all, but with the existential, the hedonistic Now, the attainment of immediate and personal gratification, and the exposure of the five parts of the soul to the unique perceptions of this existence.

#### *Rituals*

Most of the public rituals of this Temple are performed at night.

##### *The Defloration of Youths*

Known as the Rites of Chulétha in some of the ancient texts, this is a common opening ceremony in the Temples of Dlamélish and Hriháyal.

##### *The Undergoing of Myriad Final Joys*

Held at midnight in the great temples to Lady Dlamélish in the cities of Tsámra and Purdánim, it's Inner-temple rituals include the summoning of Rū'ütlánesh, the One of Mouths.

As part of this summoning, the Litany of Summoning from the Book of Presences is incanted in Bednálljan Salarvyáni:

*"Otuléngba*, all hail!  
*Otuléngba*, all glory  
 Victory upon the Night of Power!  
 Mastery unto the One Who Comes Forth!  
 Eater of Entrails, One of Mouths, Famished One!  
 We call unto you! We supplicate you!  
*Otuléngba!* Great Rū'ütlánesh!  
 Homage unto your eternal power!"

##### *The Visitation in Green*

An image of the Goddess in Her guise as a young courtesan is robed in fine clothes and jewelry while Her praises are sung.

##### *The Honoring of Gayél*

Conducted when the bright green moon first appears in the night sky, this Outer Ritual is one of the most popular with the common folk, and involves the presentation of such myths as *The Lament to the Wheel of Black* in mime, music, erotic dance, and stylized combat.

##### *The Ritual of the Transience of Life*

This ritual takes place at midnight and consists of the devotee sitting before an emerald flame (usually a small lamp with an emerald-green glass cover) and meditating on how ephemeral life is. It is at this ritual that many divine inspirations or visions are revealed.

## Temple Layout

The architecture of temples to Lady Dlamélish follows the usual Tsolyáni patterns, except that each is rarely more than one or one-and-a-half stories tall, and instead consumes a comparatively larger area. The main temple is set on a base or platform that is usually triangular in shape, and only about two man-heights tall. Where the platform does not meet the feet of the temple walls, statuary and obelisks with carved inscriptions are placed. The temple is entered through large doors set atop the platform, after ascending the broad staircase that spans three-fourths of the front of the platform. The temple is essentially a series of courtyards interconnected by colonnaded halls. Frescoes and murals decorate the hallways, and columns depict stories and myths of the Goddess.

The main courtyard hosts a large market wherein one can purchase any manner of items, both those related to worship of the Goddess and such everyday items as clothing and jewelry. With the exception of attractive *Khéshchal*-birds or small pets, this is not a market for livestock, slaves, or "durable goods" — these are found in the secular markets elsewhere in the city.

At the rear of this main courtyard, connected by roofed and pillared ascending halls, is the public ceremony room. This is basically a huge theater, open in front. This is where large offerings are performed, as well as singing, poetry reading, storytelling, and tapestry viewing.

Behind the main courtyard and the theater are the shrines of the Aspects. These are comprised of numerous small courtyards, built close together, and reached by stairs from the central colonnades. They are floored in stone and open to the sky. Some are empty; some contain gardens, and some statuary. Others contain erotic or instructional art in pottery or stone. Mosaics, wall friezes, and murals are also used, constructed to endure the weather. Usually the art in the room will indicate the nature of the rituals to be conducted there.

Small, windowless rooms are found off both shrine courtyards and the interconnecting halls. These are used for private meditation or for preparation for more elaborate rituals. Temple acolytes and lower-circle clergy are happy to assist the lone worshipper to commune with the Goddess, if one lacks a partner or the proper number of persons for a particular act. The number of shrines and their available services vary from place to place. Which Aspects are worshipped is a matter of wealth, temple pre-eminence in the community, and the nature of the region. There can be quite a difference between regions; an Aspect of importance in Jakállá may be unheard of elsewhere. Aspects become better known as more time and money are spent on supporting Their shrines.

The Inner shrines are protected and separated from the rest of the temple by stout walls. Access to this area, which also contains most of the temple's wealth in the form of art, is through enclosed halls around the outside. These halls also connect with the main courtyard, and

with service buildings in the back. Temple guards are found everywhere, particularly in the vicinity of the entrances to the Inner shrines.

The third section of the temple is the main or public shrine. This is an enormous hall that is totally enclosed except for small clerestory windows near the roof. The main entrance faces the front of the temple. This is where the Outer ceremonies are performed. When one enters this hall, one's senses are assaulted by the dizzying richness of the surroundings. Elaborate pillars and priceless statues dazzle the eye as one proceeds along either the central or side aisles. Jeweled murals and reliefs in the sacred colors of silver and emerald decorate the walls leading to different levels of daises where people of high rank can view the ceremonies.

High above are galleries filled with richly costumed tableau actors, who freeze and then move slowly into another position, illustrating mythological scenes. Lamps and *Güdrü*-cloth screens, as well as sunlight brought through mirrors light the hall. Priests rearrange these mirrors to change lighting and perspective, creating an air of unreality, of being not of this world but of the Goddess's. In the dim, high galleries, acolytes play sensuous music and ritual songs. The hall is redolent with the smell of aromatic incenses, and the fruit and flower offerings, as well as the perfumes of the aroused worshippers.

At the far end of this hall, a complex altar arises from a series of platforms, pedestals, and railings. This altar is elaborately carved, encrusted with jewels and precious metals, and crafted by great artists. Behind or beside the main altar is the image of the Goddess, cast in silver or carved from chalcedony or another white stone. She is shown in a dancing pose, a voluptuous young woman with green eyes. She holds her silver oval and emerald drop symbol in one hand, and an enormous phallus in the other. Jewelry is inlaid at Her ears, nose, throat, breast, waist, arms, and ankles. Surrounding this are huge tableaux, hundreds of interlocking figures performing various acts of devotion to Lady Dlamélish. Strange, other-planar beings descend over the heads of these figures guarding and defending them. Supporting figures of the Lady Hriháyal, and the Goddesses' favorite demon servitors surround the main effigy, as well as sculptures of various priests, kings, and others paying homage. All is carved from white marble or green jasper, chrysolite, or malachite.

Beneath the main shrine are the secret labyrinths of the underworld, cut from level to level, shrine to shrine, out of the debris of the previous city leveled during *Ditlána*. These catacombs may be multileveled and can be reached by secret entrances from the main shrine, sometimes through a series of interlocking tunnels. Here are the private chambers of those who conduct the old rituals — including the secret demon-worshipping ceremonies for Inner devotees and high clan officials.

Also in the underworld are the sacred shrines preserved from the ravages of time and war. These shrines date back to the First Imperium, to Engsvanyáli times, and possibly even to the reign of the Fisherman Kings. These

shrines and their rituals are preserved and guarded by squads of fifty or sixty people who remain for weeks at a time in these small, deep, hidden chambers. The *Tunkúl* gong in the main temple is rung and the echo is carried below by a series of pipes to a room where other priests strike a series of gongs that echo further below, alerting the clergy performing the ceremonies.

The under-temple also houses its share of strange creatures who guard certain hidden rooms used by the highest ranking priestesses in complete secrecy. Mammoth doors descend from the ceilings to ensure privacy. Anyone caught in an area where they do not belong usually ends up as a sacrifice at the next demon summoning, if they survive the guardians!

Lastly, connected to the back of the main temple are several blocks of service buildings needed to maintain the complex. These have street-level entrances and rise taller than the shrine areas. Here are the dormitories, barracks, schools both magical and mundane, libraries, kitchens, and storerooms. The great *Tunkúl*-gong tower is usually here as well, behind and to the side of the main shrine. The servant and slave quarters are on the lower floors, the regular clergy above that, with those of the highest rank within the temple residing on the upper floors. The delivery entrances are in the rear.

## Secular Activities

### Businesses

Within the large central courtyard near the front of each Temple of Dlamélish, one can buy ritual items such as fruit and flowers for sacrifice, love potions, aphrodisiacs, and every imaginable sort of sexual device. Because the Goddess is interested in the beautification of the body in all ways, the latest in cosmetics, perfumes, and jewelry are available, both foreign and domestic. The finest cloth is made into exquisite garments by artisans affiliated with the Temple. Most urban fashions start here due to the rich patrons' love of new and different ways to enhance and display themselves. This market courtyard provides money not only for the local temple but also for the merchant and artist clans traditionally connected to this faith. Market fairs on celebration days are colorful explosions of buying and selling, and special items and novelties are displayed.

The Temple maintains houses of leisure where one can relax in a less pious atmosphere. These establishments are usually run not only through the Temple of Dlamélish but through the temple of Her Cohort Hriháyal, and also by clans affiliated with these two temples. Those built for the upper classes usually have elegant gardens with hidden alcoves.

Other clans faithful to the Green Lady produce Pharmaceuticals with an emphasis on entertaining drugs and aphrodisiacs.

### Public Works and Services

Music, entertainment, drugs, and dance are the purview of the clans faithful to the Emerald Goddess. In addition, the Temple of Keténgku often trades with Her clans that

produce incense, perfumes, and drugs to obtain the herbs and ingredients necessary to produce various medicines. Some clans have adopted trade and transport of these goods as well, leading to an interest in the upkeep of the roads and the maintenance of the *Sákbe* road-guards.

## Cities of Broad Influence

### *Jakállá*

The sinuous Goddess of Pleasure, Lady Dlamélish, has long been the favorite Deity of the lords of sybaritic *Jakállá*. The House of the Pleasant Hour in *Jakállá* is renowned for its opulence and imaginative services.

Beneath the city of *Jakállá* is an Inner temple of Lady Dlamélish. Not so large as the nearby subterranean temple devoted to Lord Hrüü, it is nonetheless sizable, with a greater vertical expanse. Each level is well guarded. On those nights when the moon *Gayél* is full, Her orgiasts come to dance before their Goddess, while farther down in the maze Her priestesses call forth the demon *Rüütlánesh*, "The One of Mouths," and make appropriate sacrifices. These rituals have been touched upon in the renowned "Book of Ebon Bindings." The author, foolish as he was to place any of these secrets in writing, was nonetheless sensible enough to withhold many critical and gruesome details, lest a hapless reader recklessly attempt the rituals. It is unfortunate that such steps were insufficient to preserve the author's soul from the hell in which it doubtless writhes for having so offended the Gods by his indiscretion at setting down such secrets at all!

Also beneath the city of *Jakállá* is the tomb of *Mnekshétra*, lesbian mistress to Queen *Nayári* of the *Silken Thighs*. The tomb area opens off the labyrinthine halls of the *Tsuru'úm* onto the Hall of One Thousand Columns. Each column is carved with the likeness of one of the Queen's male lovers and each is said to contain the corresponding lover's remains as well. Beyond this hall is another intricate labyrinth that eventually leads to an elegant chamber built to look like an open courtyard. In the midst of this is a bathing pool into which it is perilous to gaze. Off this courtyard are sleeping apartments, furnishings, and all the trappings of a princess. Further on behind secret and trapped doorways is the tomb itself. Within a crystal sarcophagus the beautiful *Mnekshétra* sleeps attired in all her regalia and insignia of power. One who knows the *Pandects of Impunity* can only open the tomb safely. These are either hidden within the myriad chambers of the tomb itself, or lost amongst the anonymous scrolls of the Temple of Dlamélish in *Tumíssa*. Failure to correctly open the tomb is rumored to cast one back in time to face the wrathful *Nayári* herself, surrounded by her guards, sages and nonhuman minions.

### *Thráya*

### *Béy Sü*

### *Hmakuyál*

These cities are renowned as centers of Her worship, and some of their proud clans trace their lineages back to the First Empire and beyond.

*Sokátis*

The Green House of Bountiful Gardens is a high-clan establishment run by the Temple of Dlamélish, featuring elegant gardens with hidden alcoves. For the more-jaded, the Temple of Hriháyal in the same city runs the Cage of Silver.

**Politics**

The Temple of the Green-Eyed Lady is set up along the same Engsvanyáli-derived principles as the rest of the Tsolyáni Temples. Administrative priestesses maintain the Temple bureaucracy. Ritual priestesses perform the ceremonies to praise and placate the Goddess, and lead the worship. Scholar priestesses engage in magical endeavors and researches. Warrior priestesses of this sect are always devotees of the 34th Aspect, Lord Mrikáya. These last are not very numerous. The clergy of various Aspects usually identify closely with those they serve; for example the devotees of Lady Moróva are usually quite fat. Roughly 60% of the clergy are female, and women occupy many of the upper echelons. The Temple of Dlamélish is like any other, populated by both the truly devout and the time-server.

**Internal Factions**

The twenty Temples all have secret societies that rally the support of the clergy and faithful for a particular point of view. In most cases, differences in interpreting theology or dogma provide the basis for these societies. This is not the case in the Temple of Dlamélish, where Her 101 Aspects clearly delineate Her goals and ideals to those who would worship Her. This leaves little room for theological strife within the Temple. Also, this Temple has few traditional alliances with the other priesthoods. When the considerations of the Temple's hierarchy run parallel with others, they will help only enough for the immediate need at hand.

*The Orange Band*

Primarily a "corridor" group between the Temples of Dlamélish and Hriháyal and the Temples of Vimúhla and Chiténg. Members of this faction explore their Temples' common interests in the application and experience of pain in all its manifestations.

*The Order of Argent*

This faction is devoted to the rituals of Lady Dlamélish and the service of Her demons, and sees to their financing (the cost of securing such sacrifices as beautiful youths and heaps of emeralds being not insignificant, this is no small task). This society is joined by practitioners of the sorcerous arts to further the magical knowledge of the Temple. The Order of Argent has both Inner and Outer circles of members and doctrines.

*The Society of Emerald Radiance*

This faction desires only to practice the hedonistic sensualism called for by the Goddess. They are apolitical and cater to the pleasures of the worshippers. This society often acts as a public-relations organ for the Temple.

*The Society of the Emerald and Silver Crown*

Activists who work with counterparts in other Temples of Change, and occasionally even with Lady Avánthe's Girdle of Purity Society. They take care of political necessities, sending representatives to Avanthár to promote the Temple to the Imperium in order to gain Imperial posts and legions.

The dispensation of promotions within the Temple is under their control, as are relations with other Temples.

It has been said that the goal of the Emerald and Silver Crown society is the destruction of clan and family structure in Tsolyánu so that life can be totally devoted to licentious and sensual pleasures.

During the reign of the Empress Dashilúna, the Emerald and Silver Crown society served as Her personal intelligence arm, and thus it remains powerful to this day.

This faction was historically opposed by Lady Avánthe's Girdle of Purity society, but this changed following the conversion of Princess Ma'ín "Kruthái" Tlakotáni to the Temple of Dlamélish from the Temple of Avánthe. These societies now occasionally work together to advance this candidate. Princess Arimála Tlakotáni, of the Temple of Avánthe, seems disinclined to advance toward the Petal Throne, preferring instead to live in virtual house-arrest in Tumíssa, where she dabbles in sculpture.

*Ritual Factions*

A devotee may join one of the 10 to 15 minor societies that form around the interests of one or another Aspect of the Goddess. These groups are usually led by a priestess or priest and perform the rites at the correct time and place. These minor societies exist to observe the weekly, monthly, and annual rituals of the Aspect.

**Temple Alliances**

The Temple of Dlamélish cooperates with the Temple of Avánthe (and that of Shiringgáyi in Salarvyá) on issues of concern to women. The Temple of Keténgku solicits the Lady's pharmaceutical clans to provide the ingredients for various medicines. Many small agricultural clans have worshippers of these two Deities who forage for or cultivate the herbs and other ingredients used to make both perfumes and poultices. The War Temples work with the Green Lady to provide entertainment for the troops, and many Tsolyáni claim a father who worships Lord Vimúhla and a mother who serves Lady Dlamélish.

**External Parties**

The influence of Temple of Dlamélish with the Military Party results from its frequent coordination with the War Temples. The Temple is also influential with members of the Royalist Party. The latter are proud of their pedigrees which, like the worship of the Emerald Ladies, extend back to the time before the First Empire in the cities of Jakállá and lost Purdánim.

## Military Legions

*The Legion of Káikama*

36th Imperial Medium Infantry, Béy Sü

*Kérdu* Káikama hiMrachiyáku, White Stone Clan

Supported by the Temples of Dlamélish and Hriháyal, this legion is comprised largely, but by no means exclusively, of homosexual male and *Aridáni* lesbian officers. Lord Káikama is himself homosexual, a devotee of Lady Mrikáya with a taste for young men. In addition to being warriors of quality, many of the members of these legions are Ritual priests and priestesses who participate in the orgiastic ceremonies of the Goddess. Having proved itself during the war with Yán Kór by defeating a much larger Sa'á Allaqiyáni force in the Dry Bay of Ssu'úm, this legion won its Imperial charter only recently.

*The Legion of the Translucent Emerald*

32nd Imperial Medium Infantry, Hekéllu

*Kérdu* Shrikomé hiTlashésha of the Green Reed Clan was charged with raising another legion for Lady Dlamélish and assembled this force, which has seen little action, during 2357.

*The Legion of Mnáshu of Thri'il*

Mnáshu hiChaisyáni, General of the Imperial Legion

A worshipper of Lord Karakán and an acquaintance of Lady Anka'á hiQolyélmú, High Priestess of Hriháyal in Avanthár.

*The Legion of Mengáno the Jakállan*

Imperial artillery legion

*Kérdu* Méngano hiHarisáyu

## Notable Persons

*Princess Ma'in Tlakotáni*

Called Ma'in "*Kruthái*" ("Elegant of Beauty") the princess was born in 2336. The seventh child of Emperor Hirkáne, she was originally a worshipper of Lady Avánthe who turned to Lady Dlamélish's worship sometime around her twentieth year. Rumor has it that the Princess fell victim to the effects of a particular type of Eye of the Ancients, but there is no way of learning the truth of such gossip. Of medium height, the Princess is very beautiful, with a heart-shaped face possessing a wide mouth, high cheekbones, large expressive eyes, a widow's peak and long, wavy hair.

Her plans to ally with her brothers Eselné, Mirusíya, and Rereshqála in order to seize the throne have been frustrated time and again, and she spends much of her time in her palace in Jakállá, throwing huge parties and wild orgies. She has been reputed to dispatch unsatisfactory lovers through defenestration.

## Clans

Clan names printed in plain text are completely ecumenical, with members from every Temple. Italicized clans worship some subset of the Twenty Gods. Clans in bold text reserve their worship solely for the Goddess and Her Cohort.

*Very High*

Sea Blue	Golden Bough	<b>Jade Diadem</b>	
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*High*

<i>White Stone</i>	White Crystal	Purple Gem	High Pinnacle
Standing Stone	Rising Sun		

*Medium*

Green Bough	<i>Black Stone</i>	Ripened Sheaf	<b>Green Kirtle</b>
Black Pinnacle	First Moon	Moon of Evening	Golden Lintel
Scroll of Wisdom	Weeping Stone		

*Low*

Blazoned Sail	Broken Reed	Open Hand	<b>Green Forest</b>
<b>Green Reed</b>	High Tower	<b>Green Stone</b>	<b>Green Emerald</b>
<b>Green Opal</b>	Flat Peak	<i>Sapphire Bird</i>	Woven Whip



*VeryLow*

Woven Mat	Arch of Heaven	<i>Nighted Tower</i>	Bright Sword
<b>Green Pyramid</b>	Flat Rock	Glass Spear	Turning Wheel
Collar of Bronze	<b>Emerald Circlet</b>		

**Holidays**

1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lady Dlamélish join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

3 Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate the Summer Solstice with ceremonies appropriate to their various Temples.

9Drénggar

Enhancement of the Emerald Radiance, Jakálla

Shortly after the celebrations of the Unveiling of Beauty by Her Cohort Hriháyal, Lady Dlamélish's worshippers in Jakálla celebrate the Enhancement of the Emerald Radiance with rituals, feasting, and orgies pointedly more spectacular but somewhat less sanguineous. Elsewhere in the Five Empires this feast day is observed by worshippers of Lady Dlamélish and Her foreign counterparts in celebrations that, while exuberant, cannot match those held in Jakálla itself.

1-10Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

9Lésdrim

Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on His own birthday.

10 Dohála

Accession Day (former)

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

Ikáner, Intercalary Days

The Entering In Unto the Goddess, Jakálla

The City of Pleasures outdoes itself with the mighty celebration that dates back to Empress Nayári herself. Beginning on this day and continuing in one form or another until the end of the first day of the New Year,

Jakálla becomes a city of green-lit streets, dancing priests and priestesses in emerald robes, parties, festivals, and orgies. To be sure, solemn and important ritual events take place during this period as well, but the lay-person would be hard-pressed to determine where ritual observances of the Emerald Goddess cease and raucous celebrations begin. The Temple of Hriháyal punctuates the festivities on the third Intercalary Day, Ngaqómi, with the splendid Feast of the Many-Colored Lanterns, and the entire city joins in for the ecumenical celebration of The Masque of the Old and the New Year on Chitlásha. The Intercalary celebrations hosted by the Lady Mnélla of Jakálla, a longtime friend of the Princess Ma'ín Krüthái, are legendary.

**Aspects**

The depictions of Lady Dlamélish are varied: a wanton maiden, an *Aridáni* warrioress glowing in the sensual pleasures of carnage, and a bestial, obese human female with a head like a sort of monstrous crocodile.

She has 101 Aspects, plus some others that are known only to the Inner Circles of Her Temple. Taking into consideration these Inner Aspects, it is possible to say she has the most aspects of any God of Pavár's pantheon, exceeding even Lord Sárku's 108. The Greater Aspects are recognized, despite regional differences, throughout the Imperium. Minor Aspects usually show more specific forms and are not as generally well known.

Almost half of the Emerald Aspects are devoted to sexual gratification. Her Aspects and rituals include heterosexual and homosexual acts; a wide variety of positions; sex between young and old; sex between those of various stations and ranks; masturbation; and relations during pregnancy, menopause, and menstruation. In the western part of the Empire near the Chákas, Her Aspects also encompass Pé Chói and other species sexually engaged among themselves, as well as interspecies relations. There is even an Aspect that depicts a man and woman in congress who have the same face, illustrating one enjoying his or her inner self separate from the physical self: in other words, knowing and loving oneself.

3) Arko'éla

Lady of the Joys of Drink

Her most notable features are Her large, expansive, and very well rounded breasts that are said to "go on forever." Her joy is not merely in becoming drunk, but in finding delicate liqueurs, fine wines, and cordials that will draw men out into Her servitude of pleasure. She deals with delicate wines and brandies, and is the "Patron of the *Tshóridu*." She is popular in Púrdimal, where this wine

is produced in quantity. She is known to draw men into a web of erotic lust, and uncontrollable passion, leading them on with touch and taste and smell into complete servitude.

#### Meshmúra of the Divergent Skeins

The Aspect of luck and gambling, She urges Her faithful to abandon property and gamble it away. Those who follow this path are not sold into debtor's slavery, but are instead made slaves of the Temple.

#### Vioséna of the Pleasures of Fragrance

A connoisseur, She deals in fragrances, especially those that encourage lasciviousness and passion. Her scents are so subtle that they can only be felt, not "smelled." Those who experience Her scents pass into a drugged stupor of ecstasy and uncontrollable passions. During the reign of the Empress Dashilúna, Lady Vioséna's addicted slaves were caged and displayed at Imperial feasts. Great lords and ladies gone missing for some time would turn up in these cages, slathering and drooling, roaring for more and enjoying every moment of their debasement. Such practices are no longer openly conducted.

#### Nitósa of the Stirring Image

She is interested in sculptures, drawings, and paintings of delicate erotic art. She seeks not the crudity of the low, but images of subtlety and power that arouse simply by viewing. Her statues display symbolic eyes (not to be mistaken with Lord Thúmis' eyes) that stand for the lascivious eyes of the viewer, long and painted. She is always portrayed in diaphanous garments, in an erotic pose, but never nude. Her goal is to entice.

#### Teshkána the Musician

This Aspect is depicted as a nude young woman who sits cross-legged playing the *Ténturen*, a very ascetic Aspect for this Temple. Her slaves, persons rewarded in Paradise with this honor, pluck the frets of the *Ténturen* while She plays the strings. Her music is said to cause ecstatic comas and even to kill with the finesse and delicacy of her erotic sounds.

#### 8) Shu'uré

##### She of Grand Exhilaration

A regional Aspect with a significant following only among the youth of the wealthy urban clans of the Central Empire, Lady Shu'uré is the Goddess of risk-takers and gamblers-with-lives. Her youthful adherents will engage in a variety of breathtakingly dangerous stunts, from combating the *Tsi'il* in the Hirilákte Arena, to leaping into the Missúma river from the bluffs north of Jakálla, to whatever other daredevil acts have captured local fancy. It is considered ignoble and foolish to actually get killed in these pursuits, and Her worshippers actually take great care when planning and executing their devotions. Still, every year one or two youths from Jakálla, Béy Sü and even staid Usenánu "go to the Goddess," and injuries are frequent. Lady Shu'uré does not seek death, of course, but the particular thrill of life

placed at risk, and the vigorous orgies that follow. She is depicted in the stele which line Her shrines as a female face contorted in an expression of fear or astonishment.

#### 18) Nisimáya

##### She of the Well of Virile Waters

The Well of Virile Waters returns potency and vigor to anyone who has lost them for any reason, including age, illness, or curse.

#### 19) Moróva

##### The Aspect of Eating

She is popular in agricultural areas and is depicted as a person so immensely fat that Her gender is unrecognizable. The figure holds mounds of food in either hand, and a contented smile adorns Her round face.

#### 34) Mrikáya

##### She Who Takes Pleasure in Battle

Her symbol is the emerald crescent moon surmounted by a silver drop. Worshippers of a martial bent especially revere her.

#### 48) Góriku

##### The Gourmet

Lord Góriku is the counterpart of Lady Moróva, the Aspect of cooking who seeks to prepare a sensual feast. Like Lady Moróva, is popular in agricultural areas, and He is depicted as an immensely fat man attired in an apron. He has been adopted as the cult God of food-preparation clans, and a small statue of this Aspect is found in kitchens of quality all across the Empire, without regard to the faiths of the cooks within.

#### Ma'ásha of the Ecstatic Union.

This Aspect is dedicated to pleasing the opposite sex. To men she is female; to females she is male. He or She wears green robes, appearing subtly different to each gender.

#### Pashélla the Sensuous Beauty

This is the Aspect of erotic music and dance. She wears enticing and revealing clothing, always bejeweled, on her fingers, toes, lips, hair, and ears. It is said that if she appears in a dream you will be rendered impotent because you will expend your life's energies on Her.

#### Qodhúr the Potent One

Aspect of fertility and potency, He is "tremendously potent" and can bestow priapic powers upon men. All women will be drawn to one so blessed by His "magical scent."

#### Dletára

##### The Goddess of Reflected Pleasures

Lady Dletára celebrates the particular joys of erotic unions between persons of the same sex, as well as the exploration and arousal of that which is pleasing to

oneself in another. She is depicted as two persons entwined in an embrace so that their gender is obscured. Homosexual lovers will often present each other with a pendant of this Aspect made of green stone or emerald.

#### Tlakéla

##### The Goddess of Pleasing Powders

She is the Aspect of recreational drugs, depicted as a woman with seven pairs of hands, each of which contains a different gem: pearl white, green, dark red, yellow, etc. She also wields daggers, and emblems that relate to various drugs. Each drug so depicted is said to have unique flavors, and marvelous effects on the mind. She does not favor the lethally addictive *Zu'úr*, however: all Her drugs are meant to enhance life, not end it.

#### Choyá

##### The Goddess of Lascivious Music and Drinking

She deals with drunken revelry, and is portrayed as an entwined couple each holding a cup in one hand. She is the drunken Aspect, and also the Aspect that endorses sex enhanced by drinking.

#### Med'dá

##### The Aspect of the Ultimate Now

Depicted as a beautiful female, Her statues and images are said to "only persist for an instant." Her statues are believed to be "renewed every instant" by the power of the Goddess, and are never the same from moment to moment. She endorses enjoying the instant, the now, and Hers is as nearly a mystical Aspect as this Temple offers, for Her faithful meditate upon the pleasure of the moment. The ultimate goal of Her priests and priestesses is the ability to find ecstatic pleasure in every breath, every step, and every waking thought.

#### Morótha

##### The Restorer

She restores sexual desire to those who have lost their desire or become jaded. She endorses the use of tools, implements, oils, etc., in order to urge sexual involvements. She is also the Aspect who is urged through prayer to move reluctant lovers to engage in their first sexual experience.

#### Snarél

##### The Goddess of Enhanced Beauty

Lady Snarél is the Aspect of those who are plain or ugly, for She is the Goddess of that which through cosmetics becomes beautiful. Unattractive people, men and women, sacrifice large, phallic fruits and vegetables to Her in hopes of becoming more attractive. She is very kind to the unattractive, and blesses their lives with the perception of small, unique pleasures. She also aids the shy and unsocialized to experience life and pleasure.

#### Shoén

##### The Goddess of Pleasing Illusions

Lady Shoén is the Aspect of erotic deceptions, arousing forms of hypnosis, bemusement, and carelessness. She causes one to feel emotions and experiences that have no cause and can be confusing. In many cases this is therapeutic, bringing catharsis to those who have locked away their emotions. Those who are unsuccessful in life and in love turn to this powerful Aspect, whose spiritual and mental powers bring them relief from their cares.

### Demons

#### Quyóve

She of the Obelisk, Mistress of the Fifty-Third Circle, One Who Consumes the Organs of Men, Demoneess of the All-Seeing Peak

This demon is thought to be of the Substance of Sárku and the Essence of Dlamélish and her Powers include Elicitation, Gathering, Commingling, and Restoration. She is never seen, and always sends her wormlike servitors. She is worshipped as the Goddess Quyó in northern Livyánu. Her Secret Names are Dlévunè, Alésha, Vadhúib, Eshmigétl, Orúú, and Qá.

#### Servitors of Quyóve

These minions of Quyóve appear as black sinuous headless things that writhe and drip and crawl. These creatures possess the power of Penetration, and tendrils of these servitors lodge in the hair and skin and can slay the evocator after the summoning is ended.

#### Ngüngéthib

Leman of Rü'ütlanesh, She Who Copulates with Three, Lady of the Fifty-Second Circle, One Whose Arms are Deadly

She is of the Substance and Essence of Dlamélish, and her Powers include Gifting, Enrapturement, and Compression. She appears as the evocator's vision of the perfect creature of sexual desire.

#### Pa'íya

She Who Drinks the Substance of Men, Ruler of the Thirty-Seventh Circle

She is of the Substance of Hriháyal and the Essence of Dlamélish, and her Powers include Disinvigoration, Abscission, Obturation, Eduction, and Gifting. She appears as a creature of ultimate sexual desire. Her Secret Names are Kimuléth, Avazél, Sharváè, and Diyánü.

#### Chóm

##### The Unthinkable

He is of the Substance of Hrü'ü and the Essence of Dlamélish. The only Power he is known to possess is Obnubilation, although there are certainly others. He appears as a towering humanoid form of black and purple, but to set eyes upon him is to lose one's mind and knowledge of self. He resides in a fastness upon a dark plane, and within his tower writhe the souls of those

whose minds he has consumed, locked in an eternal orgy that brings only despair and despondency.

### Marágggu

#### She of Sweet Deception

It is believed this demon is of the Substance and Essence of the Emerald Lady. Her Powers of Inclination, Enrapturement, Delusiveness, and Metagrobolization reinforce this view. She appears as a lissome human woman with the head of a hook-beaked beast and four arms.

#### The Spirits of the Aerial Realm of Tu'unkélmú

High flying and voracious demons of the Substance of Ksáru and the Essence of Dlamélish who populate the endless Abyss Between the Worlds. When summoned, they bargain for gold, silver or other precious metals.

## Magic

### Concupiscence

This ritual causes incredible ecstasy in its target, leaving him or her senseless. The most powerful variety of this ritual results in death from ecstasy, and is a preferred method of death for the worshippers of the Emerald Goddess and Her Cohort. When Her priestesses and priests come to the end of their lives and are at risk of losing their health, beauty, or sexual ability, this ritual dispatches them happily to the paradise of the Goddess.

### The Emerald Paramour

This ritual summons a minor demon of the Emerald Goddess, which assumes the caster's own species, with an attractive appearance and of an appropriate gender to tempt the caster's target. Anyone who succumbs to the creature's enthrallment will vigorously strive to remain with the demon, fighting off comrades if need be. Anyone drawn into the demon's embrace wastes away over the next few hours, and those who perish in this fashion can only be restored with the Ritual of Re-Embodiment of the Temple of Belkhánu.

### Emulation

This ritual alters one or two targets to resemble other beings. The number of targets and the degree of alteration possible vary with the skill of the caster.

### Enthrallment

This spell imbues its target with a psychic aura making him or her more attractive to others of the same species, but not actually altering his or her appearance. Those captivated by the target can be easily persuaded to share secrets or behave according to the target's wishes. A variant of this spell works in reverse, rendering the target extremely undesirable to others.

### Imbition

The caster of this ritual can attempt to absorb the energy of spells directed against him or her, briefly storing the energy for use in his or her own spells. This endeavor is

risky and leaves the caster quite vulnerable, thus failure to adequately capture and channel the spell power can result in damage over and above that normally done by the hostile spell. A high level variety of this spell allows captured energy to be channeled to the caster's colleagues.

### The Polychrest of the Third Octant

These spells psychically channel life-energy to and from various targets. Variants can be used to increase the target's endurance with energy from the Planes Beyond, or to drain a target so that they are helpless but aware.

### Potence

The Rituals of Potence will enable various numbers of targets to perform sexually for various lengths of time, no matter how often they are called upon. Those with sufficient means may hire a priest of the Temples of Dlamélish or Hriháyal to conduct these rituals, netting a healthy income for the Temple. A variant of this spell renders its target not only sexually impotent but incontinent as well, leaving the target unable to perform their regular duties.

### Rejuvenation and Senescence

These rituals alter the ages of their targets. The most powerful variant magically extracts any desired amount of the target's lifespan, concentrating the extraction into a small, wrinkled mass. Should this object be subject to Disenchantment, or should more than a few meters distance separate it from its owner, the mass will dissipate, instantly restoring the target to their true age. Attempts to reapply this spell can easily be lethal to the target.

The High Scholarly Priestess of the Temple of Dlamélish, Hekélla hiTsánune, stood over the body of the fallen priestess of Vimúhla. The etheric vibrations of Hekélla's spell were quickly absorbed by the greater magics being conducted above, where the Cupped Hands of Flame awaited the heart of her lover as sacrifice. Desperation bordering on madness had led Hekélla here, within the blistering bowels of the Temple of Vimúhla, to shatter the sacred Concordat of Peace between the Temples.

In stunned detachment she watched herself drag the priestess into a side chapel. Hekélla stripped the woman, donning her elaborate ritual costume and mask. With luck, the priestess would not be noticed until she awoke. By then Hekélla would have rescued Tlakár, or died.

Merely a *kirén* had passed since her body slave had stunned her with the news, had dared speak unbidden to the High Priestess which she served. "Ma'am," the slave had groveled, pressing her face into the floor at Hekélla's feet, "I bring news of yer lover."

Hekélla had seized the slave, whose eyes mixed terror with cunning, and demanded what she knew of Tlakár hiFershéna. "We talks, ma'am, we slaves. An' one come now, who knows who ye seek, an' say they got him fer sacrifice at the Temple o' the Flame!"

And Hekélla had come at a run, crossing the Courtyard of Palaces of Béy Sü in a concealing cloak, to enter the Temple of Vimúhla along with the humble worshippers. Only a *kirén* had passed, but it was a lifetime for Hekélla, who now gambled hers to save her lover.

But Hekélla shoved these fears aside, for now was the time for action. With grave concentration, she gave herself over to the Spell of Ascertainment of Thoughts.

Her magical perception revealed a vista of worry and fear. Although magically asleep, her victim knew something was wrong. Hekélla brushed through these concerns as through cobwebs, to seize upon her goal: the rites for the twilight Ritual of the Visible Glory underway in the shrine above. But a shock ran through her as she learned that her victim's role in the sacrifice was to bear the sacrificial blade to the High Priest.

"Do not do this my lady!" Tlakár's voice emerged from beneath the helmeted priests, "It is *bússan!* This is my place, this is my skein!"

A securing pin snapped, and with his freed arm Tlakár heaved all three priests to the floor in a tangle. He sat up and seized Hekélla, pulling her close.

"My love, do not do this. Do not deny me my noble fate! I cannot flee like a coward: it is *lán* that I should die a warrior!" In his eyes she saw no fear, only fierce determination and a kind proud joy.

As the three priests rose again to seize him, Tlakár shoved her away and cried, "Run, now: RUN!"

As further priests and guards approached, Hekélla dropped the *Tetkúmne* and fled.

In her stolen robes Hekélla hoped the tall *Chlén*-hide mask would obscure her stature as well as her face. Ten paces across the sanctuary the High Priest conducted the ritual. Behind him, the curved wall of the Cupped Hands of Flame, decorated with fierce demonic frescoes, shielded priests and congregants from the worst heat of its contained flame.

Hekélla's heart skipped a beat as a junior priest approached bearing the *Tetkúmne*, the sacrificial blade of this Temple. Some claimed touching the *Tetkúmne* was instant death for all but Lord Vimúhla's clergy. Yet her life was already wagered: it was time to throw the *Kévuk*-dice. Reaching forth with assumed confidence she carefully lifted the blade from its golden tray. Death did not instantly follow. Emboldened by her survival she turned... and froze. For even now Tlakár was being placed upon the altar.

Pale and dressed only in a cloth clout, Tlakár sang his death-song as he was laid down. Flame-helmeted priests fastened his wrists and ankles as the flames roared and drums boomed. Hekélla braced herself to strike with the *Tetkúmne*, to scatter the priests, and sever Tlakár's bonds. Then the spell "Visitations of Other Planes" would hurl Tlakár and herself through a magical exit to an unknown and possibly deadly destination. For good or ill, they would be together.

As she shifted her grip upon the *Tetkúmne* to strike, the High Priest turned to her impatiently. Tlakár followed the High Priest's gaze, and his eyes widened in surprise. Then Hekélla realized with horror that her fingernails were still painted the green of her Goddess Dlamélish, appearing almost black in the red glare of Lord Vimúhla's flame. Such colors had no place in this temple! Tlakár peered through her mask, into her eyes. Recognition flared, and he gave a great cry of "NO!"

All eyes turned to him, as he shouted, "No! Do not do this!" Sacrificial resistance was ignoble, but not unusual. As the High Priest turned to assist his attendants in restraining the screaming Tlakár, Hekélla stepped up to the altar to strike.

# Hriháyal

*The Dancing Maiden of Temptation, Harlot of the Five Worlds, Mistress of the Thirty-Two Unspeakable Acts*



Lady Hriháyal outdoes even Her Mistress as the Supreme Orgiast. She is the Overt Performer, the Hedonist of Mysteries, and the Mistress of the innate urges of sexuality. She is the Patroness of the Ancient Mysteries, as well as the Patroness of Gambling. Lady Hriháyal supports those who engage in public debauchery, those who are given to greed and avarice, and those who serve Her Mysteries.

In Lady Hriháyal, the desires of Lady Dlamélish are taken to their physical extremes, to the Unknown and the Unexplored. She is a sensualist who embraces the Physical Now, the Bodily Experience, and the Horizons of the Perception of Self. These are not merely the sensations of pleasure and pain, but even the perception of one's own bodily workings: the movement of fluids within the body, the state of one's organs, and the perception of bodily scents. Life is temporal, and we soon proceed to the Planes Beyond where the senses of existence are exchanged for new perceptions. The followers of Lady Hriháyal believe that experiencing the Physical Now in the many and changing forms provided by Lord Hriüü best serves the Goddess.

Lady Hriháyal seeks to indulge the extremes of Sensation and explore how one relates to these events — To mingle the Self and Ego into the river of sensation. Lady Hriháyal seeks always to experience sensation with the intensity and passion of one who knows that death awaits in the morning, or one born blind, newly healed of their affliction and given sight for the first time. She seeks always to experience the new, the extreme, and the unexpected.

## Theology

### The Outer Doctrines

Lady Hriháyal is the Goddess of all acts of extreme sensation, including pain. The public and private rituals of this Goddess commonly involve not merely sexual acts, but acts of sadomasochistic, bestial, and xenophilic behavior. Indeed, advancement within the Temple hierarchy is measurable by one's having participated in the various roles of a succession of increasingly imaginative sexual rituals known as the "Thirty-Two Unspeakable Acts."

The rituals of these Mysteries date back to deities worshipped in Bednálljan times and were incorporated into Her rituals during the Engsvanyáli period.

### Color

Green with black, purple, or silver.

### Symbol

Her emblem is a silver oval with a wavy emerald line drawn through it horizontally.

### Costume

Her priestesses wear diaphanous robes of green and purple, anklets and bracelets of silver chain, and headdresses of silver shaped like coiled serpents. Her priests, like those of Lady Dlamélish, are a motley lot. They go garbed in green and purple robes, tunics, or kilts, wear silver headdresses carved in a variety of fantastic conceits, and bear obscenely shaped and decorated staffs.

### Rituals

Rituals within the Temple of Hriháyal are underway continuously, and there is little emphasis upon regimented daily observances. There are regular services in the Outer sanctuary at daybreak, sunset, midnight, and upon the rising and setting of Her Patron's moon, Gayél, but these rituals are shoddily observed and no more rigorously attended. Her clergy, focused as they are upon self-indulgence, will as often as not be engaged elsewhere in the Temple when a particular service begins. Likewise, Her clergy may at any moment be summoned in to serve in a different ritual, and must obey.

### Sacrifice

The Goddess accepts as sacrifices such green, silver, and purple jewelry and flowers as are fitting. She also accepts ritual sexual performance before Her appropriate Aspect. She accepts blood sacrifice from Her clergy during certain rituals, but not by laity before the altars of Her shrines.

### Studies

Those few of Her priests who pursue intense scholarly endeavors describe as pleasurable the investment of the mind into the rewards of study. Some of Her clergy even practice asceticism as a means of experiencing the "pleasures of denial." It is scholars such as these who develop most of the spells and potions of this Temple.

### Death Rituals

The followers of Lady Dlamélish and Her Cohort Hriháyal often add the concubines and slaves of the deceased to the possessions placed in the tomb. These

persons are slain and arranged about the bier just as the deceased would have enjoyed seeing them in life.

#### *Afterlife*

Lady Hriháyal rewards Her most faithful worshippers in life in the Pavilion of the Dancing Maiden, where unending lusts are satisfied forever.

#### The Inner Doctrines

##### *Secret Names*

Lady Hriháyal has thirty-four secret names, which are revealed individually, and only to Her greatest worshippers.

##### *Rituals*

This Temple has many sexual rituals, but these rituals and acts convey no real sense of emotional involvement. They concern pleasure and sensation for its own sake, without any particular depth of emotion between the participants.

##### *The Rituals of the Aspects Iyéth and Onuqáimu*

Held on the 3rd and 13 of every month, respectively, these are rituals dedicated to Lady Hriháyal's Aspects of homosexual relations. Persons who are homosexual and persons who are heterosexual are all participants in these Acts, for the Lady cares not for individual desires and lusts, but for the Acts themselves.

##### *The Thirty-Two Unspeakable Acts*

These important rituals date back to the pre-Bednálljan deities who were revealed by the Priest Pavár as unclear perceptions of this Goddess. Members of the Inner Temple may witness, join, or be compelled to participate in performances of the Unspeakable Acts in Her secret shrines in certain of the Underworlds.

The culmination of the Final Act is the subject of many rumors. The participants are variously said to be sacrificed to a demon while at the heights of sexual ecstasy; to be consumed in a raging emerald flame in a crescendo of all-encompassing pain and pleasure; to be consumed alive by Her Aspect Nukhér; and to be borne bodily away to Lady Hriháyal's Pavilion, there to engage forever in Her Ultimate Debauch. Outsiders are prohibited from these rituals, however, so its true culmination remains a mystery to most even within Her Temple hierarchy.

As with other Temple rituals, the Thirty-Two Acts differ from temple to temple, based on ancient traditions and regional character. While each temple's traditions differ, the Thirty Two Acts always involve one or more of several common elements.

##### Bestiality

Even the monstrous *Chlén* may be included in these vast orgies.

##### Compulsion

Any member of the Temple, regardless of their Circle, may be suddenly summoned and ordered or compelled by magical domination to participate in the rituals. Rumor has it that anyone caught outside the protection of the

Concordat may also be "kept" for use in these or other rituals.

##### Coprophygy

Normally inedible and revolting substances are ecstatically consumed by Her most debased and perverted worshippers. Individuals from the entertainment clans that are faithful to this Goddess are occasionally hired to perform these and other depraved acts for the enhancements of the grand fetes of the wealthy.

Barbed whips, chains, and ropes are employed in sadomasochistic rituals designed to explore the most challenging extremes of physical sensation.

##### Incest and Pedophilia

Catamite boys, children, and one's immediate relatives participate in these rituals.

##### Masturbation and Fetishism

Commonly numbered as the 27th Act, the experience of self-stimulation with unusual objects is celebrated. Statues are said to move and grow warm when embraced by the Lady's celebrants during this ritual, and even ceremonial stone shields are somehow employed to great advantage by Her worshippers.

##### Necrophilia and Cannibalism

The dead are both participants and refreshments in these terrible rituals, which also include participants who are consumed alive.

##### Piercing

Needles are driven through all parts of the body, including barbed lances passing through the torso. Worshippers experience ecstatic joy and fierce pain simultaneously, and are sometimes kept alive by magical means rather than being allowed to perish.

##### Xenophilia

The Shén and Ahoggyá are frequent participants, while Tinalíya, Pé Chói and Pygmy Folk are rather difficult to locate when word of this Ritual reaches their ears.

##### The Thirty-Second Act

There are only a few people who are known to have performed all but the Final Act, and they are held in high esteem. It is believed that those who achieve the Ultimate Glory of participating in all Thirty-Two Unspeakable Acts will join with an Aspect of the Lady Herself, and be translated directly into the Green Paradise of Lady Hriháyal.

#### **Temple Layout**

The temples of Lady Hriháyal are one-storied like those of Lady Dlamélish, a labyrinthine series of passages with shrines to different Aspects. Passages go up and down and around in a mad tangle, both for doctrinal and architectural reasons. Lacking multiple stories, causeways may proceed up and over ancient and traditional worship halls when it is impossible to find or build passages around or beneath. The Inner Shrine is a

sunken square room filled with images, statuary, incense burners, and celebrants.

There are always celebrants present in the shrines. When the *Tunkúl*-gongs sound, the celebrants for the next ceremony remain while others present may leave. Whether engaging in various acts or facilitating the worship of the laity, no shrine goes unattended.

## Secular Activities

### Cities of Broad Influence

#### *Jakálla*

The rituals celebrated by the Temple of Hriháyal in the city of Jakálla are considered to be the most intense and terrifying of all.

#### *Ngála*

Amid the swamps of the Flats of Tsechélnu are the ruins of the ancient city of Ngála. Here the worshippers of the Lady Hriháyal gather for terrifying and lascivious rituals. Here also is where the Goddess is rumored to manifest Herself and engage in ferocious orgies with Her demonic lovers before throngs of assembled faithful.

#### *Béy Sü*

Misélna hiQúrrodu (also hiQóruđu, as she sometimes spells her lineage name differently, to distinguish it from others), White Stone clan, is the High Ritual Priestess of Lady Hriháyal in Béy Sü, and sometime lover of Prince Eselné. Following their affair, Prince Eselné was ill for a long time and she was assumed responsible. Lady Misélna worships Lady Hriháyal, but is uninterested in sadomasochistic or fetishistic practices. She is always attended by large coterie of persons when moving about.

## Monasteries

### *The Monastery of Aládh*

The Monastery of Lady Hriháyal, on Thayúri Isle near the city of Tléku, is a pre-Engsvanyáli palace frequented by the Empress Nayári. It now serves as a training center for those Ritual priestesses who are dancers of the Aspect Aládh. Some whisper that this is but a seeming, and that this monastery is instead a center for Lady Hriháyal's most devoted and politically active followers. Claims are made that the assassins' clans and certain figures from the Temple of Chiténg have visited this facility.

### *The Monastery of Ke'él*

Lady Hriháyal's Aspect of Keyél has a special monastery and academy in the mountains northeast of Thri'íl. The Engsvanyáli, who called this Aspect Ke'él, began the practice of sending gifted Ritual musicians of the Temple here study, practice, and hone their musical skills. This Monastery is said to have unusual arcane relationships with the Monastery of Lord Ksáruł rumored to be in this area.

## Politics

### Temple Alliances

The Temple of Hriháyal has, in addition to its devotion to Lady Dlamélish, certain affiliations with the Temple of Chiténg. These share an interest in the application of pain, and the Lady's largely-female hierarchy complements Lord Chiténg's male-dominated one. There is not-infrequent fraternization between the members of these two faiths, and the Temples themselves often find areas in which they can cooperate in political and other pursuits.

### Clans

*Very High*

Jade Diadem

*High*

White Stone

*Medium*

Green Kirtle

*Low*

Green Forest

Green Reed

Green Stone

Green Emerald

Green Opal

Sapphire Bird

*Very Low*

Nighted Tower

Green Pyramid

Emerald Circlet

## Holidays

### 1 Hasanpór

New Year's Day

Worshippers of Lady Hriháyal join others in celebrating with feasts, gift-giving, and political pageantry.

### 3Langála

Summer Solstice

Residents of all the Five Empires celebrate with ceremonies appropriate to their various temples.

### 2 Drénggar

The Celebration of the Unveiling of Beauty, Jakálla

Worshippers of Lady Hriháyal in Jakálla open a week of feasts and orgies with the celebration of the Unveiling of Beauty. Primary rituals, sacrifices, and orgies (and these



events often coincide) are held this day, with Inner temple services and private parties continuing throughout the week.

### 9Drénggar

Enhancement of the Emerald Radiance, Jakálla

This grand debauch marks the end of the week of festivities in Jakálla.

1-10 Halír

Harvest Celebrations

Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Livyánu celebrate the beginning of the harvests with feasts and celebrations.

### 9Lésdrim

The Emperor's Birthday (former)

Formerly the Birthday celebrations for the Seal Emperor Hirkáne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration on His own birthday.

10 Dohála

Accession Day

Formerly the day of the celebration of the Accession of the Seal Emperor to the Petal Throne. Emperor Dhich'uné has not to date reinstated this celebration.

Ngaqómi, Intercalary Days

The Feast of the Many-Colored Lanterns

The Temple of Hriháyal punctuates the famed Intercalary Day festivities in Jakálla with the splendid Feast of the Many-Colored Lanterns. Part of a series of celebrations hosted by the Temples of Dlamélish and Hriháyal, it carries partygoers from the prior day's Celebration of Splendid Victories in the Temple of Karakán neatly into the following day's Masque of the Old and the New Year.

## Aspects

Lady Hriháyal is pictured as a voluptuous dancing maiden holding a curved dagger.

She has 34 known Aspects, but it is said that Her Inner Temple venerates several more. She is one of the most active of the Gods, manifesting with unusual frequency, either physically or in spirit, to participate in Her beloved orgies.

1) Niyunén

Giver of Unlooked-For Wealth

This Aspect is common to all of the temples of Lady Hriháyal, and is frequently in the prayers of *Tsahltén* and *Kévuk* players. Her images have two faces, and are portrayed as back-to-back statuary or upon ceremonial coins sold by the Temple. On one side She is depicted as a very young and beautiful human female, with great glowing eyes and full lips. On Her other side is the visage of an older woman, Her face sorrowful and lined with misery but still commanding and matronly. She is

usually portrayed nude with Her hands outstretched palm up toward the worshipper. One hand is empty, and the other drips coins and gems. During festivals, Her image is carried forth in the processions, and tiny copper coins (with a few silver and gold thrown in to lend excitement) actually spill forth from Her "giving hand" for the pleasure of the crowds. At such times loud musics are played, and vigorous sensual dances are performed. Those who take chances with investments, who travel on risky ventures, and who seek luck, worship her. Her largest shrines are in Béy Sü and Jakálla.

2) Aládh

She Who Dances, the Dancer of Ultimate Temptation, the Lady of Sensuality and Rhythm

This Aspect's doctrines are set forth in *The Tome of the Epitome of Paradise*.

She is depicted as a carefree, youthful, athletic, and beautiful girl in a traditional dance posture: balanced on one leg, the other up, arms up over her head, eyes shut in the ecstasy of Her dance. Mothers pray to Lady Aládh to make their daughters beautiful, nimble, and talented. Entertainment clans faithful to Lady Hriháyal and to Lady Aládh in particular perform the legendary erotic dances for the wealthy in their great palaces. Her devotees use the expression, "a coin for Lady Aládh," which means "in order to succeed you must train and prepare as best you can." Her dancers study in one of Her many schools, which exist in temples to Lady Hriháyal in every sizable city all across Tsolyánu, Yán Kór, Mu'ugalavyá and Salarvyá. In addition to very popular shrines in Jakálla, Penóm, and Béy Sü, She has a monastery on the Island of Tléku.

Her special sacrifice is a drink of powerful and expensive spirits and ground emeralds, mixed specially for Her. An impotent version of this drink is sold in the courtyard of the Temple for the sacrifices of the common folk, but Her ritual dancers drink a potent variety that is said to imbue them with the Spirit of Aládh. Through these and other means She teaches Her dances to Her worshippers. When Her spirit manifests fully, She can inspire an entire audience of men and women to physical ecstasy with the performance of Her dancers.

She is the special Aspect of the spells of the Dance of the Emerald Goddess. Just as Lady Aládh's worshippers can be so possessed by Her rituals that they dance until they collapse, so can these rituals render their victims helpless.

3) Shóhla

The Priapist, She Who Lusts

From *The Dark Tome*.

Sometimes portrayed as a thin, childlike girl, small breasted and very slender with long hair down to below Her hips; sometimes as a complex emerald green glyph upon a silver teardrop. Carefree, pleasure-driven, and orgiastic, Her specialty lies in bringing about orgasms that are maintained for very long periods, some so prolonged and ecstatic that they are life threatening. For

offerings of green gems mingled with green flowers and incense, Her priests will provide chemicals which, when applied, ensure the enduring performance of males. Those who are impotent apply these ointments and dance in Her processions and pageants to regain their virility. Her clergy then join in frenzied congress with those so revived. Most popular in Jakálla and the southern Empire.

#### 4) Keyél

From *The Tome of Sweet Sounding Beauty*

(also called Ke'él, which was Her Engsvanyáli name)

A pretty, agile-looking maiden who carries a *Sra'úr* and a scroll. She wears high-laced sandals, a green kilt, and a circlet of silver. Lady Keyél is the patron of singing and music, both erotic and also the classical epic modes. She is the one to whom mothers pray when their children (both male and female) wish to study music for the first time. Her shrines are found in all major cities, but Her musical academies are popular in Jakálla, Béy Sü, Thráya, and Chéne Hó. She has a special monastery and academy in the mountains northeast of Thri'íl.

#### 5) Chío

Found in *The Book of Entertaining Badly*

She favors fetishes, particularly certain inanimate objects. She will grace statues and other devices with temporary warmth and animation, and a passion for Her worshippers. She is the particular Aspect of the Twenty-Seventh Unspeakable Act. Her offerings are of silver rings, quite unprepossessing.

#### 6) Balóth

The Glutton

From *The Pandects of Heléth Nikóme*.

A huge, fat, sexless slug-like creature, devoted to food and eating. Sacrifices of delectable sweets and the finest dishes are offered at the beginning of feasts in clanhouses that worship the Goddess. Priests shaking rattles and bells dance across the feast hall to offer special treats to important diners. The Aspect Balóth is said to have blessed the feast when one or more diners pass into unconsciousness from overeating! This Aspect is worshipped primarily in Jakálla and Penóm.

#### 10) Onkané

The Lover of Self

Described as "The First of the Three" in *The Book of Sendings*.

He is depicted as an epicene, beautiful youth who lies in a languorous posture, full-length upon a richly caparisoned dais atop an altar. He is shown wearing a long robe, with hands hidden beneath the folds. Lord Onkané is the patron of narcissism: the worship of self-sex and self-lust. Flutes and trumpets announce His entrance into a party, and His clergy carry His palanquin around the hall, while singers extol the joys of the love of the self. Other priests then carry in mirrors and lanterns

filled with fragrant oil. He is associated with the Aspects Beletkané and Mettukoné.

#### 11) Beletkané

The Lover of the Opposite

Described as "The Second of Three" in *The Book of Sendings*

Depicted as a statue with a male and a female side, appropriately robed and coifed. His/Her arms embrace the opposite sides of His/Her own body. This Aspect stands for heterosexual sex and the joys of lust. Drums and gongs and braying horns announce His/Her coming, and at feasts servants and dancers welcome Him/Her with praise and join in clamorous congress before the altar. He/She accepts bright green flowers, incense, *Purú* oil, and tiny goblets of intoxicating *Tsuhóridu* of a special type that is said to drive drinkers mad with concupiscence. He/She is associated with the Aspects Onkané and Mettukoné.

#### 12) Mettukoné

The Lover of the Other

Described as "The Third of Three" in *The Book of Sendings*

Depicted as a masked, robed figure with no visible physical attributes. This Aspect is devoted to the love of species other than one's own, to incest and socially unacceptable lovers (e.g. nonhumans, corpses, etc.). The Aspect Mettukoné's effigy is brought into feasts seated upon a throne covered with emerald green *Thésun* gauze and emblazoned with the emblems of the Goddess. Those who wish to proclaim their unusual passions come forward to offer garlands of flowers, tiny bottles of perfume, and strips of green cloth on which the supplicant has written the nature of his or her affection. This Aspect is associated with the Aspects Onkané and Beletkané.

#### Iyéth

Described as a sub-Aspect of Mettukoné in *The Book of Sendings*

Sometimes given separate status as an Aspect, sometimes counted as a Child or sub-Aspect of the Aspect Mettukoné, the Deities Iyéth and Onuqáimu are always treated as single entities. Lord Iyéth is portrayed as a pair of handsome human males, and represented as varied types, unlike Lady Onuqáimu's reflective duality: muscular paired with slight, heavy embracing average-sized, etc. His shrines are always kept away from those of His Lesbian Sister Lady Onuqáimu. Usually She is on the north end of the temple, and He on the south, but this is not a matter of doctrine, only that they be separated. Worshipped in Jakálla, Penóm, and other southern cities, plus Béy Sü and a few other places. He is invoked at the popular orgies held on the 3rd of every month by priests dressed in special green and silver costumes. Some of these dress as men, others as women.

*Onuqáimu*

Described as a sub-Aspect of Mettukoné in *The Book of Sendings*

Portrayed as a rather skinny, bony young woman engaged sexually with Her own double. She worships Herself as woman's pleasure in woman's pleasure, and is worshipped by both lesbians and female masturbators. Women will present silver rings depicting Her entwined image to prospective lovers, who accept the proposition with the ring and wear them on the middle or index fingers of the right hand. This custom is usually restricted to those who worship one or another of the Change Deities, even if one or both do not worship the Emerald Goddess or Her Cohort. Her shrines are always kept separate from Her male counterpart, Lord Iyéth. Lady Onuqáimu is worshipped in large shrines in Jakálla, Béy Sü, and Mrelú. She is invoked at orgies on the 13th of every month, where masked priestesses perform before initiates. She has many magical implements that She uses, including perfumes and incenses, and Her priests sell these items in the temple.

## 14) Mornén

From the popular and richly illustrated *Book of Displaying Joy*, found in all libraries of the Temple of Hriháyal as well as within the private libraries of Her faithful clans.

Lady Mornén is depicted as a drunken maiden, dressed in nothing but ribbons and jewelry, who sits upon a silver throne sprouting curious implements and devices. She is the paragon of inebriation, the drinker and user of powerful drugs, essences, perfumes, and condiments. Her orgiasts consider it excellent to drink themselves unconscious during Her celebrations. Libations of wine or other liquors are poured out before Her altars, and Her worshippers wallow naked in this liquid before Her.

## 18) Kilitána

Delight in Pain, the Masochist, Sister of Dalénth

From *The Scroll of Deep Green Verdigris*

The masochistic Aspect of the Goddess (called Sénth in the Inner Mysteries) appears as a robed and hooded female figure, hands hidden in long sleeves at Her sides, standing with head bent in what appears to be submission. At Her feet are flat bowls containing skulls, blood, hooks, knives, and other implements of torment. It is said that those who kiss the lips beneath the cowl are fated to delight in physical suffering and humiliation. Her devotees cut off bits of their own flesh to offer to Her; She, in return, is said to provide ecstasy. She enjoys the tortures, although She does not appear or manifest in orgies at the same time as the Aspect Hajjána.

## 19) Hajjána

Delight in Others' Pain, the Sadist

From *The Scroll of Deep Green Verdigris*

The sadistic Aspect of the Goddess called Lady Dalénth in the Inner Mysteries and described as the Sister of Lady

Kilitána. She appears as a towering woman of gleeful mien, vivacious and curvy with cruel oblique eyes in a triangular face. She is nude and paints Her body in intricate designs. In Her strong hands are a rope, a whip, and barbed pincers. At Her feet are bowls of skulls, blood, and what appear to be bodily organs. She enjoys sophisticated and painful devices and engines of torture, barbed penetrative objects that expand within, etc. She can be male or female but rarely manifests physically, preferring apparently to manifest Her spirit in Her priests or priestesses, often several at once. Her orgies culminate in the deaths of sacrificial victims, usually but not always human. She has demon followers who can bestow the intense physical suffering in which She delights.

## 20) Lusánesh

From *The Book of Emerald Scintillations*

(also named as Lusánish)

Portrayed as a human male, female or hermaphrodite, whose nude body is covered with shaggy fur. Patron of Bestiality, this Aspect's orgies take place in open courtyards when the green moon Gayél is full. Numbers of youths and maidens gather with their favorite pets to partake of certain drugs and engage in wild cavorting orgies. Popular in Jakálla, Usenánu, and, uncharacteristically, in Katalál — a city which does not otherwise share Jakálla's hedonistic reputation and heritage. The Aspect Lusánesh is not a sadist and severely punishes those who harm animals during these orgies.

## 21) Okókh

The Coprophage

From *The Tome of Slow Substances*

Portrayed as a plain cowed female figure who never shows Her face, She causes unpleasant foods and substances to seem pleasant to those who offer them up to the Goddess. She grants ecstasies to those who perform physical perversions upon themselves or others. Eating, smelling, touching, and feeling the forbidden and the strange are Her domains. She is also the poisoner, and devotes special ecstasy to those who die consuming Her powerful and lethal poisons. Lady Okókh is the special patron of the Temple's contingent of coprophages and those who drink or bathe in urine. Even within the Temple of Hriháyal, She is not considered a pleasant Aspect. Her shrine is usually in a separate part of the temple where others are not permitted to enter and Her worshippers must display special talismans to the temple guards in order to be admitted. Like other Aspects of Lady Hriháyal, She invests Her spirit within Her priests, but She does not provide or support the creation of poisons, only their employment as tools of special sensation. She is worshipped in Jakálla but has little following elsewhere.

## 22) Eshqúra

The Lover of All Things

From *The Dark Tome*

Shown as a small, delicate, beautiful woman with six arms, sitting cross-legged and wearing only a tasseled kilt-like skirt. Each hand holds a covered vessel, usually of gold. She is the patron of odd sex, various fetishes that appeal to some devotees. Each vessel is said to contain a symbol of Her strange temptations, but since these are always covered, no one knows for certain what the bowls hold. Her followers are those devoted to certain fabrics or leather, various types or articles of dress, coprophagy, and many other fetishistic items. In some Temples She is numbered as the 23rd Aspect.

## 25) Virála

From *The Book of Emerald Scintillations*

A splendidly costumed girl who holds mysterious emblems in Her four hands. Her eyes, set in a delicate triangular face, are considered especially entrancing and hypnotic. She has the power to intensify all sensations, both pain and pleasure. She also governs the Circle of Love, a mystical diagram inside of which the celebrants of Lady Hriháyal's orgies sit to prepare themselves for their rituals.

## 29) Chemésh

From *The Book of Emerald Scintillations*

(also referred to also as Shémesh in the northern part of the Empire and in Yán Kór.)

This Aspect manifests as almost any creature of any gender (even all eight of the Ahoggyá genders), but when human She is depicted as an elegant woman in Her thirties seated quietly on a throne, cupping a green flame or gem in Her hands. Specializes in sex between nonhumans — and between humans and nonhumans. She can imbue different species with attraction for each other, and Her select worshippers display a secret sigil of green soapstone that allows admission to Her special worship chamber. She can give a human the illusion of being a Pé Chói engaged in sex, likewise an Ahoggyá, a Tinalíya or a Nininyál (Pygmy Folk). The Pé Chói do not find Her interesting because they say there is something "missing" and all-too-human about this Aspect, but the Shén and Ahoggyá are amused by Her orgies. The Tinalíya tend to flee before Her priestesses can compel them into Her services! Her rituals are kept secret and can only be attended by those who have reached high rank in the temple — and those whose predilections make it impossible for them to enjoy anything else.

## 33) Nukhér

From *The Scroll of Kurritlén the Endurer*

(called Nuchér in the rural parts of the Empire)

A slim, pale, intensely sensuous-looking maiden with very long hair, called Atalén in the Inner Mysteries. She

is usually nude except for emerald bracelets and a silver collar. Her smile reveals sharp pointed teeth inlaid with tiny green emeralds that She uses to castrate males. She is the patroness of necrophilia and cannibalism, and war-prisoners, slaves, or even unfortunates captured in the Jakállan *Tsuru'úm* may be eaten alive by Her worshippers. The culmination of Her orgies is the procession into Lady Hriháyal's Innermost Shrine, where the Goddess Herself awaits to perform the 32nd Unspeakable Act, which inevitably results in the death of the celebrant. Her countenance then is so totally alien and fearsome that Her victims cannot flee or resist. This Aspect has shrines in Úrmish, Tumíssa, Béy Sü, and Jakállá. Additionally, the Empress Dashilúna is said to have erected a shrine to this Aspect within the fortress of Avanthár itself.

**Demons**

Rü'ütlánesh

The One of Mouths, The Terror of Qélem, The Hairy-Legged Mouth

He/She/It is of the Essence of Hriháyal and his/her/its Powers include Gathering, Translating, Depriving, and Gifting. He/She/It hates aught that is woven, and items in which two things cross one another. He/She/It is described in the Scroll of Inimical Sendings as a great open abyss, full of a lolling black tongue of horror, spiked with fangs two cubits in height, drooling ichor and with a breath like the winds out of the pits of Qélem, yawning and breathing with the susurros of a tempest, dark unto lightlessness and a greed and a hunger greater than all the worlds, an eagerness to feed and a yearning to come forth into this plane and devastate it from one end of the cosmos to the other. His/Her/Its Secret Names are Neskolém, Vayoném, and Hikótumè.

Pa'íya

She Who Drinks the Substance of Men, Ruler of the Thirty-Seventh Circle

She is of the Substance of Hriháyal and the Essence of Dlamélish, and her Powers include Disinvigoration, Abscission, Obturation, Eduction, and Gifting. She appears as a creature of ultimate sexual desire. Her Secret Names are Kimuléth, Avazél, Sharvâè, and Diyánü.

Uléla

Maid of Despairing Delight

Little is known of this demon, whose salacious image appears to those who succumb to the Dance of the Emerald Goddess.

**Magic**

Worshippers of Lady Hriháyal are not usually given to sorcerous endeavor. Those Temple spells that exist have emerged from the doctrinal preferences for self-pleasure, knowledge of the physical self, and the experience of extremes.

### The Dance of the Emerald Goddess

These spells psychically persuade their targets to follow an illusion of a beautiful and desirable person, a powerful and tempting demon, or an image of the Aspect Aládh Herself, and to do that being's will. One variant of this spell is so effective in producing passionate desires that the victim falls helplessly to the floor.

#### Diminution

These rituals employ this Temple's emphasis upon knowledge of the physical self to reduce one in size to varying degrees. Lower-circle rituals leave the caster's clothing and possessions unchanged, but higher-circle rituals can encompass one's possessions, and even other beings, reducing all to a very small size.

#### Obturation

These rituals close off a creature's bodily orifices, causing swift death. Particularly powerful rituals will even seal off the valves of the heart, causing instant death!

Amáru was dying. He lay day after day upon the scratchy pallet of woven grass, and the air washed in and out of his lungs like a turgid tide. If he tried to move much or stand up his heart would pound and his vision blur and go black. So he didn't try to move much.

His room had a window through which sunlight came. He knew he was dying because sometimes *Tuléng* shone in slantwise, and sometimes it shone in straight, and sometimes it shone not at all but gave way to the impenetrable blackness of night. And these things happened without order, seemingly one moment after next, as he slipped in and out of consciousness.

For all that, dying wasn't so bad. After sixty-seven years of hard labor, the calm quietude of extended bedrest was a nice change. Although Lady Hriháyal commanded the experience of all sensation, he mused, the one Amáru had experienced most was bone-tiredness. Now he was numb, almost without sensation, except for those of heat and sweat and the itch of incipient bedsores on his back. But these latter concerned him not at all, for he knew he would be dead before they could cause much more trouble.

Once when he awoke his daughter Nelú was in the room. He recognized her voice as she spoke.

"*Nakomé!*" she cursed, "Clanless-one! Foul buggerer of *Ssú!* Your elder lies here awaiting death and you can say such things about him!?" Amáru regretted not having heard what had been said that so upset his normally reserved little girl.

"Mama, I meant no harm! Grandfather will journey to the Isles, there is no ignobility in such a fate!"

"*Chá!* You are Pé Chói! Hard-shelled and unfeeling!" her voice quavered. Amáru tried to draw a breath to interject something, but could no more speak than open his eyes. Distressed at being left out of the conversation, he consoled himself that he couldn't have much longer to wait now.

"Grandfather Amáru was a good and noble man, but he did not live by the Lady's precepts. He completed none of the Acts; he experienced no wealth of sensation! The Grand Pain, the Endless Debauch, these things are necessary to achieve Her Paradise!"

Now Amáru recognized the culprit - Nashár, his youngest grandson, as arrogant and superior a little snot as the Lady had ever allowed exist. He yearned to lash out, to strike at the lad the way he had when the boy had been nicknamed *Hmá*, after his habit of bleating for his mother. Amáru tried angrily to reach, to roll, but managed only to stir slightly, and his breathing became ragged.

"Your Grandfather still lives! Do not speak as if he is not here! And when he lived," Amáru wryly noted her contradiction, "he was a faithful worshipper of the Lady!"

Nashár began to speak, but his mother was just getting started. "Oh, he was not a *priest*," she fairly spat the word, "like you, spending your days copulating with every *Shén*, *Hmá* and *Hmélu*, beating each other with whips, and mouthing each others' organs. But he *lived*, oh how he lived every day!"

There was a pause, and Amáru heard her weeping. When she spoke again her voice was choked.

"You live always in that wretched temple, telling yourself that you experience the fullness of sensation. But where is the risk? You worship Change, but your life is predictable and safe! Your grandfather took *risks!* He fathered me, and your uncles and aunts! He fought in wars and skirmishes - ah, you didn't know that? He was wounded, and saved a man's life, old Hárchar. You wonder why that old sea captain ventured so far inland every few years? It was to visit your grandfather, who had saved his life during a grand adventure when they were both young. To Livyánu he sailed, and Tsoléi, aye, places whose names are myths to you, and at half your age!

"And he lived every one of those days like a roaring flame: he sucked in his life and he consumed it! He loved Mama, he loved me, oh we knew it everytime he held us. He roared with laughter, he drank like a fish, he danced like a demon."

She punctuated her speech with a stentorian blow of her nose. Amáru hoped she'd finish soon, as he felt his consciousness slipping again.

"Your grandfather worshipped the Lady in his own way, but he worshipped Her the best. Better, by far, than *you*, oh great and mighty priest of Hriháyal."

A nice eulogy, he thought sleepily, who could ask for more? But Amáru felt one thing more before he slipped into unconsciousness. It was the soft, firm grasp of his hand, taken by hers and kissed.

"I'm sorry, Mama," said Nashár, "I know you loved him, and you're right. I spoke ignobly. Grandfather was truly *lán*. I'm sorry."

Amáru knew he was going to die then, because the astonishment of hearing that boy apologize for the first time in his life was bound to kill him.

He slipped into a dreamy semiconsciousness. There were a few more sensations, but nothing to rouse him. His perceptions ebbed, and darkness beyond darkness closed in.

His heart stopped. His breathing ceased. Unheard around him, kinsmen wept. Deep within him, his five selves parted, never to be rejoined again. Amáru hiVáisoner was dead.

And then...