

# The Circle of Columns

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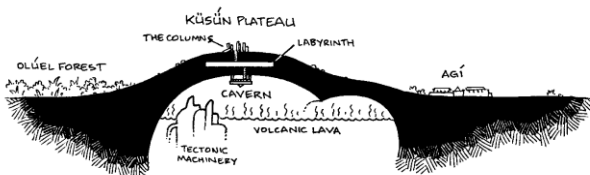
Not Yet Approved by the Tékumel Foundation

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The adventure was originally a Kickstarter stretch goal, released before the publication of our Béthorm: Plane of Tékumel RPG. It is designed without specific game mechanics in mind. GMs may fill in whatever specifics are needed to run this adventure using their game system of choice. The creature descriptions include a 'danger rating' in ( ) after their name, indicating the number of beginning player-characters it should take to exactly match one of those creatures in combat. Those GMs who run this scenario using one of the available Tékumel gaming systems may of course use the appropriate creature stats.

The adventure is set in the northwestern frontier of the Empire of Tsolyánu, from M.A.R. Barker's world of Tékumel.

The reason for the PCs coming to this place is also left open-ended. It is up to the GM to work out reasons and motivations to bring the PCs here.



## GM Only Background Information

The hill on which the Circle of Columns is found was formed by a series of lava bubbles.

The underground 'labyrinth' was a religious site for the followers of an early form of the worship of Vimúhla, the Tsolyáni deity concerned with fiery violence and destruction.

The rooms in the labyrinth were set up as tools to educate new priests, but they can be dangerous to uninitiated intruders. Different rooms subject

visitors to different flame-related hazards: fire, heat, dryness, smoke, steam, light, and pain.

As a result, the creatures in this adventure don't reside in the rooms, which are just too inhospitable. They live in the corridors. The 'outer' parts of the labyrinth are inhabited by wild, natural creatures who have taken up residence there. The 'inner' parts of the labyrinth are patrolled by ancient guardians.

An 'inner' admin/ritual office (room 7) holds the big treasure... but not the site's greatest secret!

## Player Research

This information is available to PCs who do their research:

*"This site dates from at least the Engsvanyáli times, and may possibly be even older than that. There is some possibility that this is connected with the One Other, although only an expert would know for sure. It consists of a circle of pillars, some of which have fallen over the ages (similar to Stonehenge on Earth, except that the pillars are carved columns rather than crude stone monoliths). There is an underworld under this; the opening to the underworld is so well known that any child from the local area could lead you to it. The opening leads to a circular stairway that leads down into a labyrinth; it is said that if you find your way to the bottom of the labyrinth, you will find a great cavern that is filled with molten lava." [Excerpt from Gazetteer for the Northwest Frontier Map Set, by Thomas Thompson and M.A.R. Barker, © 1986 M.A.R. Barker]*

[GM: The One Other is one of the 'Pariah Gods' – beings so anathema to human survival that their worship has been outlawed by the Tsolyáni Imperium. Note that the speculation about this site being connected with the One Other is inaccurate. But don't tell the players this, they'll have to figure it out for themselves!]

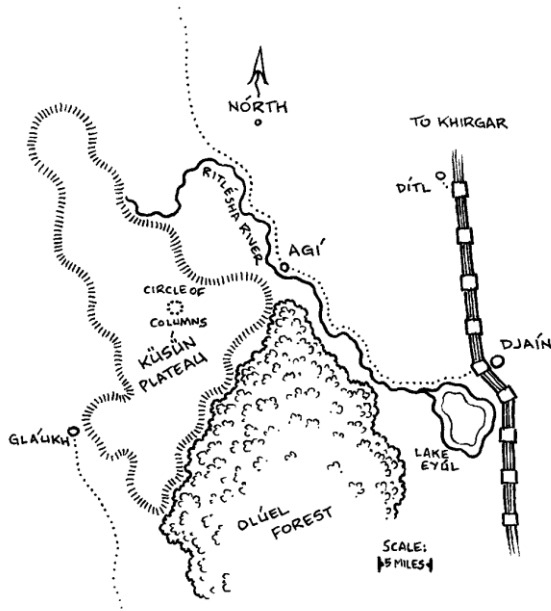
## At The Entrance

The eponymous columns stand atop Kúsün Plateau in northwestern Tsolyánu, about 100 Tsán (133 km) southwest of Khirgár. There are nine columns in all. Characters with temple education, particularly those who worship Vimúhla or his cohort Chiténg, may be reminded that nine is Vimúhla's holy number. They are

badly weathered, but were clearly carved. Scholars who study the time of the Dragon Lords may recognize the carvings as being representative of that period. They stand in a circle, though only four are still relatively intact; the rest are all partially or completely toppled. This appears to be due simply to the passage of time.

The entrance stands open to the elements.

### The Kūsūn Plateau



### Inside the Labyrinth

The walls throughout this labyrinth are covered in Ancient N'lūssa, accompanied by scenes of war and monsters. There is a recurring circular design, the significance of which is unclear. It represents the lava bubble beneath the site, but there'll be no way for the PCs to learn this until they reach the end of the adventure.

Apart from rooms 1, 2, and 5 no illumination is provided, except for the magic torch found at location 9.

Each of the room entrances are marked with a rune in the Tongue of the Dragon Lords (ancient N'lūssa), carved into the floor just outside the archway into the room. Those who can read this language, or who are versed in the history of the Dragon Warriors period, and particularly those who worship Vimúhla or Chiténg, may be able to guess the proper chant to suppress that room's trap effect. They also know not to abuse this

knowledge, for example by stealing all the gold from Room 4. Such abuses anger the god Vimúhla sufficiently to attract his wrath: offenders immediately suffer a fiery punishment ranging from severe burns to incineration or worse.

Anyone who figures out the chant can teach it to their companions, but their companions may repeat it incorrectly unless they can speak ancient N'lūssa.

### Map Key

#### 0) Entrance

This is where the PCs first arrive, after descending the spiral stairway from the surface. There is an empty torch sconce here, in the middle of the western wall.

#### 1) Firelight Room

When the PCs peer in from the hallway this room appears empty and dark. Flickering red, orange, and yellow light dazzles them the moment they step inside, however. They will have difficulty keeping their bearings unless they can overcome their disorientation. The characters remain dazzled, with somewhat impaired vision, for perhaps half a minute after leaving the room. Characters who shut out the light by blindfolding themselves or other means will have slightly less difficulty navigating the room, and won't have impaired vision upon leaving it.

#### 2) Heat Room

This room's floors, walls, and pillars glow red-hot. This is obvious to anyone peering into the room from the hallway. There are nine unheated 'stepping stones' in the room, however. If a PC touches a hot part, they suffer minor burns. They must leap from step-stone to step-stone to avoid this. Light boots or sandals provide initial protection, but they will burn away after a couple of contacts with the heated surfaces.

#### 3) Smoke Room

This room is full of vision-obscuring smoke. The PCs can see this smoke before entering the room, although it is contained within the room by an invisible and intangible barrier. If they PCs don't hold their breath while passing through the room, they begin coughing. They must also close their eyes or risk being temporarily blinded by their own tears as their eyes react to the smoke. Coughing isn't harmful in itself, but the sound of it will attract the creatures from areas D or F –

which could be especially bad if the PCs also can't see.

#### **4) Desiccation Room**

The sandy floor of this room partially hides many red-gold coins, several of which are visible when the PCs first peer into this room. If they pause for only a moment, a PC can grab a handful of 1d10 gold Káitars worth of coins – but the extreme dryness of the room quickly leaves them extremely thirsty, slightly impairing all of their actions until they are able to take a drink. If they stop to grab up a lot of coins, they receive 1d10+10 Káitars worth but their skin becomes badly dried and cracked, causing them a small amount of physical damage in addition to becoming thirsty.

#### **5) Flame Room**

Carvings decorating the walls of this room, some of which are visible before the PCs enter, depict tales of the torrid love-affair between the god Vimúhla and Dlamélish, the goddess of sensuality. PCs who step into the room are immediately engulfed in green flames and suffer a small amount of fire damage. Armor will protect a character from some of this damage; heavy armor stops most of it. Perceptive characters may notice that these flames have no effect upon their equipment, and thus may not be 'real'. If a PC reacts by standing still, 'accepting the flames' embrace' as it were, the flames on that character go out and never harm them again. If a PC keeps moving, the flame damage continues for as long as they remain in the room.

#### **6) Steam Room**

This room is full of steam. The PCs can see this steam before entering the room, although it is contained within the room by an invisible and intangible barrier. The PCs are engulfed in the steam the moment they step into the room; it feels like a sauna. If they disrobe and relax for 15 minutes, they become invigorated – gaining a slight bonus on all of their physical abilities for the rest of the adventure. If they remain fully clothed, they suffer heat exhaustion - suffering a slight penalty on all of their physical abilities for the next 15 minutes.

#### **7) Office**

This room was the office of the priestly administrators of this site, and is conspicuously *not* marked by a N'lüssa rune. Peering inside, the

PCs can see that it contains the remains of ancient furniture and tapestries, all rotted. Some treasure was left behind here by an ancient explorer, which the PCs easily find if they conduct a search: a copper jeweled necklace worth 8 Káitars, a 14 carat tourmaline, a 90 carat Nha shell, a 4 carat Chrysoberyl, a 11 carat amber, a 12 carat amber, a 1 carat Chet'ú shell, a 17 carat garnet, and a 9 carat Glass Coral plus 4950 gold Káitars in cash, and an Eye of Joyful Sitting Amongst Friends.

This ancient technological device, looking like a metal eyeball with a little button in the back, causes those within a 15' diameter area centered on a point within 30' the user to become neutrally friendly toward the user for 10 minutes unless they resist its magical effect. Those affected will neither attack the user, nor issue commands to others to do so. This Eye does not create real friendship nor a desire to aid the user, nor does it immobilize those affected or leave them defenseless. An indicator by the button shows that the device's battery contains enough power for 43 uses, and an inscription in Bednálljan identifies it to anyone who can read that language. Its function may be determined through research, if its name is known, or otherwise through experimentation.

#### **8) Pain Room**

This room is dedicated to Vimúhla's cohort, the lesser god Chiténg – the patron of torturers, amongst other things. Upon peering into this room, the PCs can see that it is full of instruments of torture. When anyone enters, these 'tools' stand at attention (or open to admit a victim, etc. as appropriate for the given implement). If a PC tortures one of their companions while both are in the room, that PC gets healed for half as much damage as they choose to inflict on that companion (rounded up). This process can be repeated as many times as desired, for as long as the PCs remain in the room. Any PC who leaves the room without participating, either as giver or receiver of pain, suffers damage equivalent to a light sword blow - and then the 'tools' animate again as if to remind the PCs of their duty to Chiténg.

#### **9) Ever-Burning Torch**

A burning torch lies on the floor, on a spot that has become blackened and charred over the centuries or millennia since it fell here. This simple magical item was once used for illumination by

the priests who tended this site. The enchantment upon it enables it to burn with the strength of a typical torch, but it will never burn out and cannot be extinguished by any means short of disenchanting it.

### 10) Stairway Down

This stairway is similar in construction to the one which brought the PCs down from above, only this one goes down. A hot breeze wafts up from below.

At the bottom of the stair is an observation deck, which hangs down from the ceiling above – supported by the four stout pillars at its corners. The four sides of the observation deck are open but for a stone railing, and visitors can peer over the edge to see lava bubbling in the huge volcanic chamber below.

A strange rhythmic thrumming wafts up from a great silvery edifice which protrudes from the lava sea. This 'building' is in fact a cluster of tectonic machines of the Great Ancients; its purpose is to keep the lava bubble from bursting, while draining energy from it to power other unknown machinery elsewhere on the planet. Access hatches in its side may lead to a trove of technological treasures within...

Some of the lava is cooled and walkable, but there is no easy way to get down to it. As the PCs consider these extremely difficult obstacles, weighing them against their hope of breaching a trove of ancient artifacts of incalculable value, a swarm of large vaguely reptilian creatures rise into the air on membranous wings, dripping lava. These are undoubtedly demons from another plane, servitors of Vimúhla and guardians of his secrets, and far beyond the capabilities of our brave heroes. The PCs have time to retreat safely to the stairway where the demons will not pursue them, but surely our heroes will return one day to claim this mighty prize!

### A) Gíriku: "the Flying Reptile" (1.8)

These large, bluish-green nocturnal flying reptiles have long beaks set with three rows of needle-pointed teeth. Their bite deals the same damage as a typical sword. Their natural armor is equivalent to plate mail. They have six eyes and can see well in the dark. They also have a musty, repellent odor; anyone standing next to them suffers a small temporary penalty to all of their skills due to this hideous stench. They have no

room to fly in these tunnels, and thus must crawl on the ground at half the speed of a man.

Three of these creatures are simply lost in the maze, and have made an impromptu nest here. They have collected a wooden club and a plain, medium suit of Tinalíya armor.

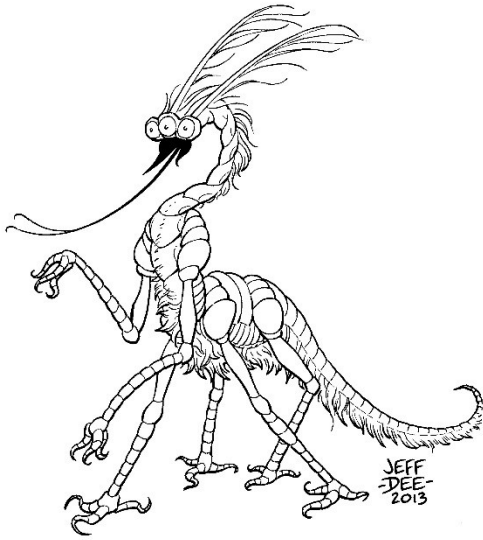
### B) Nothing



### C) Hyahý'u: "the Whooper" (.5)

These six-limbed, man-sized animals run in packs and make a weird "hyaa-hyuu" sound which gives them their name. They are covered with ragged, grey-black fur and have three eyes beneath a crest of sticky, spiny excrescences on top of their long, lozenge-shaped skulls. Their bite deals the same damage as a typical sword, and their fur provides them protection equivalent to leather armor. They will fight humans only if they outnumber the party, otherwise they will flee. They will always run away if the party contains a Páchi Léi. They have a special dread of this nonhuman species.

Eight of these creatures are simply lost in the maze, and have made an impromptu nest here. They've collected some worthless junk, but nothing that remotely qualifies as 'treasure'.



#### D) Dnélú: "the Concealed Leaper" (1.7)

These hairy, man-sized, six-legged, reddish-brown creatures have slender, rod-like antenna and a barbed, prehensile tongue, with which they attempt to grapple and drag a victim into their lair to feed upon him at their leisure. Their bite deals the same damage as a typical sword, and their light chitinous shell provides them protection equivalent to leather armor.

Four Dnélú have made a permanent den here, which looks like a pile of dead grass and leaves propped up against the wall of the passage. There is only a 15% chance that they will attack parties of 6 or more that they hear outside their den, but when they leap out they automatically gain surprise. They will certainly attack if players disturb their lair. Inside their den they've collected a light axe, and a suit of regular heavy armor.



#### E) Hli'ír "the Unendurable Face" (3.1)

These mad, man-sized creatures are hideous to look upon, and anyone who does may go insane – particularly if the Hli'ír surprised them. Insane characters have an 80% chance of attacking their allies, else they simply gibber. This insanity is permanent, and requires a magical cure. An opponent may attempt to attack a Hli'ír without gazing upon it, preventing the chance of insanity, but at the cost of a serious combat penalty. It is likely that this creature exists only partially on Tékumel's plane and the "madness" it causes is the result of its powerful telepathic ability, which does not jibe with human (or other Tekumeláni creatures') mental frequencies. The Hli'ír often seem to dash about aimlessly or insanely: there is a 30% chance each combat round that the Hli'ír will rush by its opponents without engaging in melee. Its real shape, purposes, feeding habits, etc. are all unknown. They have quick initiative, their senses seem to be rather acute, and they are somewhat resistant to magic. They fight without weapons, and yet they're able to deal damage equivalent to a normal sword. Their hide protects them like leather armor. They are resistant to non-metal weapons, though a blow from a heavy mace or club may stun them for a few moments.

This is the lair of two Hli'ír. They have a copper jeweled hairpin, a copper jeweled armband, an 8

carat malachite, 230 gold Káitars in cash, and an Amulet of Finding Treasure in the Underworld.

This last item looks like a small obsidian beetle. Upon the user's mental command, it infallibly guides them to the largest hoard of treasure within 150' of their present position. The amulet then crumbles to dust, however.



#### F) Kurukú: "The Small Giggler" (.7)

These small, quick, chestnut-brown-colored creatures have six legs, as do many of Tékumel's fauna, and they also have a pair of small hands just beneath their blunt, anthropoidal snouts. They range from two to four feet in height. The Kurukú rarely attack humans except in large bands, and flee if approached. They do try to snatch bright objects from passing travelers, however (with a skill equivalent to a professional pickpocket), running off with these and giggling in a very human fashion. Their bite inflicts damage equal to a lite melee weapon, and their hide gives them protection equivalent to leather armor.

This is a lost raiding group of seven creatures, without any den or nest. They carry nothing valuable, just a few odds and ends of useless junk.

#### G) Nothing



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#### H) Thúnru'u "the Eater of Eyes" (5.9)

Thúnru'u are relatively common creatures since the Lords of the Latter Times found them useful. The Thúnru'u is humanoid but large - about 7-10 feet tall. It is usually a mottled grey, and its skin looks moist, doughy, and blubbery. It possesses two saucer-like eyes, a greyish-yellow beak, and rolls of skin which hang down from its heavy, muscular limbs like billows of flesh. It is not fast, but it is surprisingly agile for a being so huge and unwieldy-looking. Thúnru'u are used by mages and various temples as servitors. They can be controlled by certain spells and magical devices, and they are repelled by Tsúral-buds (which also function as a mild aphrodisiac for humans). Thúnru'u live comfortably in dark, dank places, eating small animals and insects. They thus make excellent treasure- and tomb-guardians. For unknown reasons, Thúnru'u have a taste for small watery spheres and hence hunt and kill the creatures known as Káyi, humans, and other animals in order to eat their eyeballs. They fight without weapons, yet deal damage equivalent to a greatsword. Their hide protects them like chain armor.

There is a lone wandering Thúnru'u here, carrying a large steel shield, a 6 carat tourmaline, a 13 carat tourmaline, and 800 gold Káitars in cash.



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### 1) Sagún "the Fungus" (2)

This creature is an ambient fungus developed by the Lords of the Latter Times as a guardian for underground storehouses. Standing about 8 feet tall, this convoluted, pale-bluish-grey, leafy-looking creature sways forward upon its mobile stalk to strike with woody appearing claws, dealing damage equivalent to a longsword. Its hides gives it protection equivalent to chain armor. It is minimally intelligent and mobile but moves very slowly. It can also emit spores in a 15' diameter cloud centered on itself. If a character breathes the spores they germinate in the lungs causing death within 2 combat rounds unless cured. Magical alleviation (Cure Disease) is the most effective cure, although medicament-sprays are known to the better apothecaries. The Eye of Healing is effective as well.

This is the lair of two Sagún. They have 1 gold Káitar and a 6 carat Chrysoberyl between them.

# Circle of Columns Labyrinth Map

