

An Excursion Into Old Ch'óchi

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This adventure was written for the Tirikélu rules system, but can be easily adapted to others.

Introduction

While at leisure in Ch'óchi, in Mu'ugalavyá, the protagonists see a number of interesting statuettes and pots for sale in the bazaar. The people selling these are obviously from remote rural areas. It is possible to get guides to take one to where these artifacts are found - a journey of some days, and not an excursion for the faint of heart!

The guides are not Fungus Eaters, since this is the eastern fringe of the forest. These people are sophisticated, but sullenly distrustful of strangers. They dislike authority, and prefer to protect the lost ruins as a source of plunder for themselves. They will initially agree to a fee of 50 káitars to lead a party to the ruins, payable half in advance. They advise taking food for a round trip of eight days, plus the time the party intend to spend at the ruins.

In fact they will dawdle about getting to the ruins, taking perhaps five or six days, and then will insist on extra payment of a further 50 Káitars. If the characters stand firm, the foresters will pretend to resentfully back down but then just desert them in the night. In extreme circumstances, they will lure characters into traps so as to inflict potentially infectious injuries.

The foresters' arrows are all coated with faeces, causing blood poisoning if a -5 Stamina check is not made. This causes the infected character to lose 2D20-Stamina Hit Points each night for 1-6 days. Spears are sometimes treated with a plant-derived narcotic, which also has a reduced effect if mixed with food. Subject to a -5 Stamina check, this causes hallucinations (if critically failed), loss of balance (-5 from Melee if ordinarily failed) or slight nausea (-5 initiative on ordinary success).

Terrain: Jungle. Very thick, creepers and dense undergrowth. High trees with overhanging foliage. Plumed birds give eerie cackling cries, and serpents slither around the boughs. Jakkóhl and Kurukú are glimpsed occasionally, but the absence of herd beasts makes it difficult for an untrained hunter to live off the land.

Weather: Humid, the sky overcast much of the time by leaden looking clouds. If lost in such a region, it would be difficult to know which way to go. Direct routes are in any case usually impractical, owing to the frequent rivers and tracts of waterlogged ground. In the worst areas, it can take a day to hack through ten Tsán of undergrowth.

The Ruins

First sight of the ruins is a higher, creeper-twined pylon emerging out of a high bank. Trees and richly colored flowers actually grow out of the stepped sides of this building. Characters who succeed on a -5 Intelligence/Reasoning check (modified for Architect) will recognize that it is in fact a gate tower that would once have formed part of the city wall. The interior contains little of interest, but excavating the soil that fills the topmost floor will uncover several antique glazed pots worth perhaps a káitar each (four or five times that if sold non-locally). These have simply been "planted" by the guides.

The Old City

It might take a day to find more interesting areas of the city to explore. The central plaza is an area of higher ground surrounded by thick vegetation, so that anyone hacking their way through will suddenly be confronted by a number of high stepped pyramids, emerald under a mantle of moss, rising against the grey sky.

Climbing the side of the main building, a -5 Intelligence check will discover that the creepers are not so old and thick as most of those covering the ruins. This building has been visited by someone within the last couple of months.

At the top, the temple building having collapsed, the stonework has been broken through into the stairwell shaft. The surrounding masonry is fire- blackened, the residue of ash seeming oily and aromatic. An alchemist would recognize that some kind of narcotic weeds have been burned here, probably on a regular basis. (The foresters burn the weeds so as to send narcotic smoke down into the Feshénga den within the pyramid. They do this whenever they want to loot a few pots or other ancient trinkets. The Feshénga make excellent guards, and the foresters are careful to keep them fed.)

A Lord of Ancient Ch'óchi

Ka-Sayil was a king in ancient times, slain by his own people. His revenant haunts the ruins, occasionally manifesting in his former image (a short, proud man in fine vestments) or as a Hú bat (the sacred totem of his dynasty). More often he appears as an inhuman creature of ragged darkness, eyes like pools of blood, with wide musty wings and four taloned arms. Sometimes he can be seen momentarily crouched atop the ruins, wings folded, a brooding shadow in the arc of the red moon. According to folklore, his touch rips out the victim's heart and any who look him in the eyes lose all memory of themselves and become like newborn children.

Ka-Sayil Claws ATTACK 27 damage 1D10+5 (four times/round) or Howl AA 4/3 Evade 10 +8 initiative Hit Points 40 [-/-/-] * Unaffected by non-metal weapons. * Regenerates all damage except that done by magical steel.

The forest people who make a living out of these ruins believe in placating Ka-Sayil with "tribute", usually in the form of a tithe of one-tenth of their gold and a dish of honey-liquor placed in front of his bat-altar each new moon. It seems to work.

The Underworld

The first stage is a narrow stairwell from which rises a fetid animal reek. This leads past the Feshénga den (eight adults, nine young, plus eggs) to an ancient ossuary where the tombs still hold pots, talismans, terracotta figures, grave trinkets. And bones.

At the lowest level of the ossuary is a stone plug which will obviously take serious excavation of a day or two. Beyond it lies a shaft to the high priest's tomb.

High Priest's Tomb

This is a large chamber with an oppressive chthonian heaviness to the air. It is dominated by the granite sarcophagus, some 15' by 8' by 6', set in the middle. (By alternate heating and cooling, this could be cracked open within a day.) Around the walls stand carved figures with upraised polearms. The principal defence, however, lies not in such symbolic guardians but in the flock of Biridlú that have lain dormant for millennia in the stone vaulting of the chamber. These will swoop to harry intruders, then retreat to their lairs in the walls to recover before making further sorties.

Biridlú Bite ATTACK 16 damage 1D6+3 or Envelop EVADE 10 damage 1D6, 2D6, etc (half armor) AA:3/2 +5 initiative Hit Points 13 [-/-/-]
 * Always get surprise unless victim makes -10 Psy Ab check.
 * Envelop attempt can only be parried by steel edged weapon.
 * Blunt steel and all chlén-hide weapons score half damage.
 * Missiles score quarter damage unless steel-tipped.
 * Regenerate in six combat rounds.

The sarcophagus contains the long-decayed body of the priest, clad in ceremonial armor of exquisite workmanship. This is heavily enchanted (see below). In the cadaver's right hand is clutched a scepter in the form of an "egg" of blue-black stone held by a "claw" of translucent pearl-white jade. In its left is a circular throwing-disk of sharpened steel.

Armor All apparently of golden metal, blue-enameled and jeweled; equivalent to light enchanted steel. Helmet in the form of a beast's maw, gives +3 Mag Res. Red-jeweled pectoral adds +3 to Stamina. Left vambrace set with a blue gem gives +3 Dexterity. Right vambrace set with a blue-green gem gives +3 Strength. Breastplate in the form of folded bat wings curled around body gives immunity to fire. Belt/kilt set with three red gems gives immunity to surprise. Greaves in the form of claws give +20% to movement.

Scepter Can be used to communicate with another person whom the wielder has previously touched with the scepter. Operates over any distance, but can only be "set" to one pair of people at a time. Use of the scepter is fatiguing: multiply distance by time, each 100 Tsán minutes costing one point of Stamina for 1-6 hours.

Throwing-Disk An enchanted steel weapon with a range of 25m. It confers +2 to Missile Value, hits for 1D6 and then returns to the user's hand. However, its major purpose was to exact retribution against transgressors in the faith, and thus when the target is named out loud it will invariably hit (unless fumbled) and score 3D6 damage. This weapon can be Evaded.

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