

# Issue Two | Winter 2001

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(1997 Tékumel Convention Scenario) by Robert A. Dushay

## Author's Introduction

I wrote this for Dexcon/Dreamation (a pair of conventions in New Jersey) and played it once, in 1997. After my successes with *A Matter of Honor* and *Against the Grain*, I wanted to write something that used a bit more background material and character interaction. I tried a few experiments with this scenario. First, the characters are mostly middle-aged and older men, with absolutely no traditional adventuring skills. No sorcery, and no combat skills. Second, there is no map. I didn't think one was needed. Third, a lot of this scenario depends on "winging it". There are a lot of random events that players have to deal with, and how the plot works out depends heavily on what the players do.

I think I tried to run it at U-Con, but if it was scheduled, it wasn't played there, for whatever reason. I can't run it at future U-Cons, because it bears a strong resemblance to the LARP that was put together in 1999 by Bob Alberti, Joe Saul, and possibly others. Great minds think alike? Or is this just a common situation?

The characters were generated using Gardasiyal, but I'm not going to include them here. From the descriptions included below, suitable scores can be generated for any system fairly easily. I'd think this scenario would work very well for Tékumel Over The Edge (TOTE).

So, for your enjoyment, I present ...

# Unwelcoming Party (1997 Tékumel Convention Scenario)

## Teaser

Your years of service to the Petal Throne are over. Now you must help host this final party, while simultaneously keeping an eye on the new Worm-boys so they don't loot your chambers. Luckily you'll be heading back to Tsolyánu with the former Legate very soon, because this new Legate looks like an unpleasant supervisor. This is a diplomatic adventure, where etiquette and conversation may be your deadliest weapons.

[I also wrote a second teaser if I was going to present this scenario at a non-Tékumel oriented convention.] You have spent many years in service to the Petal Throne, working for the Legate to Tsatsayagga. He is being replaced, and the new legate seems rather nasty for the job. Good thing you're leaving. Tonight is your farewell party, and hopefully all you'll have to do is be diplomatic, and keep the new legate's worm-boys from looting your chambers. This is a diplomatic adventure, where etiquette and conversation may be your deadliest weapons.

## The Party

You are all residents of the Tsolyani legate in Tsatsayagga, the capital of the Ebon Empire of Salarvya. Most of you are members of the legate's staff. When you heard of the ascension of Emperor Dhich'uné, you knew that the legate, Dlekku hiTankolel, was going to be replaced eventually, and that would mean the end of your job unless you could convince the new legate to appoint you to some position. The God-Emperor did not appear to be in a hurry to appoint a new legate, so you began to hope you would keep this cushy post after all...until last week.

The new legate to the Ebon Palace arrived last week. Of course, one would expect some tension between the new arrivals and the present staff, but the tension is thicker than raw Chlén-hide. Oludún hiSayúncha is a worshipper of Durritlámish of the Rotting Face, and Legate Dlekku has a strong dislike of this temple. To make matters worse, Oludún has gone out of his way to be rude and abrupt, and his personal guard are barely civil. Further, the squinting, yellow-skinned, bandy-legged house sorcerer of the new legate is both repulsive and frightening. Strange noises and weird smells emanate from his chamber...ah, so you've heard.

At first, it appeared that all of the current staff were to be evicted immediately. This is an unwise and hasty move for a new administrator from Tsolyánu, who must expect to spend four to six weeks within easy reach of a latrine as he becomes acclimated to Salarvyáni cuisine. Although the immediate eviction was not carried out, Legate Oludún has shown ignoble haste by permitting Legate Dlekku only one week to prepare his final farewell celebration. The past week has been spent in a flurry of preparation (and packing). Happily, the day after the party, most of the former residents will be boarding the ship "The Roseate Eye of Tuléng after the Storm" to return to Jakállá. All of the important members of Salarvyáni society will be at the party, to show their respect to Legate Dlekku and to welcome Legate Oludún. There may be a war going on between the two empires, but the forms must be observed, lest we be no better than beasts.

This hasty departure has been a strain on the former Legate, who has been looking haggard and wistful. Perhaps the stress of uprooting his family of Salarvyáni mistresses and children is what's bothering him. Perhaps it is simply the knowledge that these half-breed children, despised by Tsolyani and Salarvyáni alike, will never be accepted in either empire, and have only been barely tolerated here because of the power of their father. Whatever the cause of Dlekku's anxiety, it will be good to leave this place.

**Note to the referee:** The situation is far tenser than the players realize. Dlekku had the habit of selling people into slavery when they especially irritated him. The victim was invited to stay in the purple bedchamber. That unfortunate would be drugged, carried out by a secret door, and sold into slavery, usually to Haida Pakalla or Tsa'avtulgu. Dlekku does indeed bear a grudge against all worshippers of Durritlámish, and those who approached him in the past found his temper much shorter than worshippers of other gods. Oludún hiSayúncha had business with Legate Dlekku long ago and apparently fell victim to Dlekku's short temper. Oludún was sold to Tsa'avtulgu, and was unbelievably fortunate enough to escape with his life—and a new companion, the odious sorcerer Zlengnubb. He spent years waiting for the opportunity to take his revenge, and with the ascension of a Sárku-worshipper emperor, now it is his: the fate of Legate Dlekku rests in his hands. He is going to make sure that Dlekku pays the price for his arrogance. Dlekku is going to depart, yes, but not to Tsolyánu: he's going to the slave-pens of Tsa'avtulgu.

To make his plan work, Oludún is going to abduct Dlekku during the party. Dlekku's loyal guards will be kept disarmed and far away from anywhere they can interfere. Oludún's own guards will be posted around the house to ensure that Dlekku cannot escape. Zlengnubb has made connections with the slavers, and they will pick up Dlekku at dawn, the morning right after the party.

The players are oblivious to all of this when the party begins. The new legate has no interest in them, but he will be wary, nonetheless. If they begin to make trouble, they may go to Tsa'avtulgu themselves.

The outline of the adventure is that the players will gradually become aware of trouble as the party goes on, and one of them will become a witness to Dlekku's capture and harsh treatment at the hands of the new guards. This player should realize he or she is a marked person who cannot be permitted to escape, and draw the other players into the plot. The players have to figure out how to save

their skins without the benefit of combat skills, warriors, or sorcery to aid them. Oh, yes: this being Tékumel, after all, some of the PCs have been engaged in peccadilloes that would disgrace them if they were discovered. Keeping their secrets quiet may make them look more suspicious and untrustworthy to each other.

After reading the introduction, introduce the PCs to each other (most of them have lived together for some time, after all), and let the party begin. Each PC should be run separately, unless they specifically say they are staying together and working as a group. Randomly select events from the list provided, and let PCs attempt to solve these problems. Events marked with an \* are important, and should definitely happen at some point. Players who aren't involved in a party encounter can play the part of the NPCs or simply watch and make comments. Let the PCs have some fun, and let the role-playing get thick. Keep in mind that Salarvyáni are quarrelsome, mercenary, fat, hairy, greasy, over-perfumed, and for the most part physically unappealing to Tsolyani eyes.

The evening is split into early, middle, and late evening events. Smoothly proceed from one period to the next: do not indicate to the players that the tone of the party has changed. Let them figure it out.

## Early Evening Events

The beginning of the party (can be hastily sketched over): the guests arrive, meet with both Dlekku and Oludún, and wander off in search of food. This procedure normally takes most of the evening, but the gluttonous Salarvyáni are more interested in getting to the food and entertainment, and they don't have to show as much etiquette to a country that they're currently beating in a war. During this early phase of the party, use the Early Evening Event list to keep the players busy. Be sure that the asterisked events are used.

1. Fight with weapons between a chancellor of the Salarvyáni court and a member of the royal family.
- R. A slave reports there's somebody snooping in Dlekku's quarters. The party will be unable to catch this person—he slips away like a shadow. (May only be used once.)
3. A conjurer hired to entertain the guests isn't very good, and the Salarvyáni guests are being insulting about it. (Probably should only be used once.)
4. One of the guests is cheating at one of the games. He will deny it vehemently, and his opponents will threaten him. A fight could break out. (Probably should only be used once or twice.)
5. Some guests have a loud squabble over nothing in particular. (False alarm. Repeat often.)
6. The player is complimented on the entertainment. The guest wants details on how the entertainers were found.
7. Guests at a recitation of poetry insist on an obscure piece that the poet doesn't know.
8. Older Salarvyáni gentlemen want to run a race, and they need a referee. (Note: they may hurt themselves. This will probably only happen once.)
9. A Salarvyáni man takes a liking to you: a very intimate liking. (This will probably happen once.)
10. There is a loud debate on an athletic exhibition of the previous day. An argument may erupt.
11. An Ahoggia has wandered into the kitchen and is gobbling down the food. (If the players are sharp, this should only happen once.)

12. A high Salarvyáni guest is very offended (loudly) by the presence of a half-breed son of the Legate.

13. One of the guests wants to tell you a long and pointless story.

14. There is not enough wine at one of the tables. The slave responsible for keeping this table stocked seems a bit drunk, and needs to be supervised. Down in the wine cellar, one of the casks has apparently been left open to drain on the floor. [Note: each time a player has to enter the wine cellar, there will be a barrel draining onto the floor until there is a good number of empty barrels. This could be useful to the players later on.]

15. One of the carter clan members insists on dealing with you to arrange for a pick up of the empty wine casks tomorrow. They will be picked up at dawn, because they need them to ship back tomorrow afternoon. They are very insistent on this point.

## Mid Evening Events

The main part of the party. Both legates have disappeared and are nowhere to be found. Early evening events may also be used here. During this phase of the game, the players should gradually come to realize that Dlekku isn't around, and he should be. When players have figured this out, the mid-evening may be continued to keep the players nervous, or the game can proceed to the late evening.

16. Two guests are squabbling over the sexual favors of a serving slave.

17. The Legate is running low on wine.

18. Drunken guest is convinced you are an old enemy.

19. Drunken VIP guest is going to do something really embarrassing, like slide down the banister.

20. The player is compelled to join in some horrible drunken singing.

21. A drunken provincial noble is insisting on meeting the Legate personally, so that the Legate may have his personal slaves serve him. This is a gross insult to the honor of Tsolyánu (and the Legate is nowhere to be found).

22. A very drunk guest wants to gift you with a steel dagger.

23. Two drunken guests are going to prove their courage with the knife between the fingers game (Mumbly Peg); Zlengnubb is watching from the shadows, with great amusement.

24. A guest wishes to see the Legate personally to congratulate him on his fine party and his retirement, but he's nowhere to be found.

25. A fine Salarvyáni lady has badly ripped her formal wear, and you happen to be walking by. (Note: she may demand that a runner be sent to her home for new clothes, or wailing that the horrible Tsolyani are responsible. The Legate's wives may be able to solve the problem—but they'll ask where Dlekku is, since nobody knows.)

26. You observe another PC involved in one of the more difficult events, with Zlengnubb watching, obviously amused.

27. An Ahoggia is dozing under a table, making a horrible racket and disturbing the epic poetry recitation.

28. Zlengnubb seems to be spying on you.

29. A minor member of the Salarvyáni ruling family, the Chruggileshmu, insists on seeing Dlekku personally to wish him good-bye and give a small gift. The legate is



nowhere to be found.

### **Special events for the end of the mid-evening phase:**

These two events are “specials”: They should absolutely be run, and rather later in the mid-phase of the party. These are clues to the players that something is amiss. If the players have begun to tire of the random events of the party and are looking for a purpose, these events should be sprung to make them suspicious, and the game swings into the late evening phase.

(30). The new guards are obviously searching for something, but won't say what.

(31). Oludún is looking for Dlekku—or merely pretending to.

### **Late Evening**

The plot should now thicken. Players should begin to think something is wrong because Dlekku has disappeared. If they ask, feel free to give them the information from “clues”, below. Once player paranoia has ripened a bit (or, whenever you're ready to spring the trap), run event (32). Once this has happened, the players should be aware that trouble has found them, and the real meat of the adventure begins: figuring out how to save their skins. Continue to run events from all three time blocks until the players get organized and get out of the party environment.

(32). One of the players sends a slave to retrieve a book from his room so that it may be returned to Lord Thollognarr Chruggilleshmu from whom it was borrowed. The slave returns hurriedly, and out of breath: he saw two of the new guards savagely beating Legate Dlekku in an isolated room! If the player looks, he'll see a guard obviously searching for the slave. The guard sees the player talking to the slave. If the player has any brains at all, they'll realize their life isn't worth a copper Qirgál.

33. An empty storeroom has a puddle of fresh blood on the floor. (The legate? A guest? A side of hmélu?)

34. The guards are looking for something or somebody: it could be you.

### **Clues:**

If the players catch on quickly from the absence of Dlekku, they may start asking other questions. These are fairly obvious points that they can discover quickly.

1. All of the visible guards seem to be new, either brought to the legate by Oludún, or you've never seen them before.
2. If inquiry is made, all of the original guards have either been discharged, or are outside, guarding the outer walls (or at least, so you're told.)
3. Zlengnubb is poking around. He may be just a sneak, but he seems pretty ubiquitous.
4. None of the players or regular embassy staff are allowed to leave the building. The guards are polite, but firm: Oludún has given strict orders that none of the occupants of the Legate are to be permitted to leave, lest violence befall them. (Very soon after event 31, if the guards see the player characters, they will ask to escort the players to their quarters "as a safety precaution".)

## **The Great Escape**

The conclusion of the adventure depends heavily on player actions. Once Oludún realizes that the beating of Dlekku has been seen, he will see to it that all of the old staff that were at the party will suffer "accidents", or be sold off to slavery as well. The players must unite to protect themselves. [Note to the referee: although Oludún could capture the unaware players, and it is possible that the player who is involved in event 32 does not share this information with the others, it would be unsporting, and a poor adventure. So, nobody gets caught

until they know what's going on.] Oludún's plan is simply to put each player out of action, and ship all the survivors out to the slavers tomorrow, who will carry them out in chests, the same way Dlekku used to do it. In fact, Zlengnubb contacted the same rogues that Dlekku used to use.

The adventure was written with two deliberate escape hatches, but it's up to the players to find them. The first and most obvious route is via the empty wine casks. The trick is getting everybody to hide inside without being detected. Players simply have to make sure they disappear late enough in the evening that the guards have little time to search for them, and there are enough guests to cover for this activity, so guards can't simply notice everybody is missing. The downside to this ignoble escape is that most valuables would have to be left behind. Too much gold would make the casks noticeably heavy. Those players who have families in the legate will be abandoning them to the tender mercies of Oludún: not a noble act.

A more elegant means to escape is to capture Oludún and turn the tables on him. If he's handed off to the slavers tomorrow morning, they'll happily carry him off to Tsa'avtulgu. (They've been paid in advance to carry their cargo, and they're not picky.) Players will have to disable Zlengnubb and the 20 guards in the house, but it's not impossible, especially if they recruit allies among their guests and perhaps inspire an Ahoggya to wreak some havoc (and disable the guards). Another technique is to use drugs or just food or drink: the newcomers aren't used to Salarvyáni cuisine yet, and the food will give them horrible cases of diarrhea, while the powerful Drónu will affect all but the most seasoned drinkers.

There is also a way out through the underworlds in the basements. Dlekku's son Hachetlám knows how to get into the underworld and out again in the slums of Tsatsayagga. He'll demand quite a payment in exchange for guiding the party, and if they don't treat him especially nicely, he's likely to guide them to a deep pit and disappear. Also, there are other, unsavory denizens of the underworld. This

would be a dangerous trip, and there will be pursuit. Zlengnubb might be able to track them down there.

Combat should not be an option for escape. The players are short on combat skills, and the guards could make chopped meat out of them. Tricking the guards is unlikely to succeed, since there is another batch at the front gate outside who are sober and looking out for tricks. Even a wild Ahoggya battling to escape is likely to hesitate in the face of a dozen guards at the gate.

Notice that Toposh has helped the Legate in his past slaving activities. He may recognize Oludún, but not know why. Start him off with “there’s something about the new Legate that is odd”, and later on, prompt the player that Oludún looks vaguely similar to somebody he used to know, and once things are in a full panic, tell the player that he does remember Oludún, but he doesn’t know from where. Save the full recognition for a moment to maximize panic.

## **Important NPCs**

### **1. Dlekku hiTankolel, of the White Stone clan.**

The Tsolyani Legate to Tsatsayagga. Old, friendly, and smells horrible, both in body odor and breath. Loathes worshippers of Durritlámish, and not too fond of the Dark Trinity. Owns a caravan/shipping business, has been known to sell a few Tsolyani into slavery in Salárvya.

### **2. Oludún hiSayúncha, of the Dark Water clan.**

The new Legate: A worshipper of Durritlámish, he was sold into slavery by Dlekku for his arrogance and obnoxious behavior. In Tsa’avtulgu he survived and made some interesting acquaintances, including a horrid and disreputable sorcerer who has accompanied him ever since. (Few spells, a few devices, mostly a charlatan).

### **3. Zlengnubb, the disreputable sorcerer/hedge-wizard.**

This man is quite short, swarthy, sparse hair and yellowish skin. He is balding, and there is a repulsive odor about him. His mouth is very wide, his arms long, and he is somewhat bandy-legged. This sorcerer is from Tsa'avtulgu, worships Black Qarqa, and may well be planning a major sacrifice to his God/dess here in Tsatsayagga with the Tsolyani as the main course! This could also make trouble for the ruling Chruggilleshmu family, or the man could just be a fanatic. Notice that if he escapes, it's a neat sequel to have the old guy hiding in the underworld near the manor, just raring to make trouble.

## **Player Characters**

### **1. Dritlan Hlókku hiKúrodu, of the High Pinnacle clan.**

Retired from The Legion of Mirkitáni, Hero of Victories, 7th Heavy Infantry (of Venerable status). Worshipper of Karakán. Hlókku is an elderly man. He is somewhat pompous, dismissive of anybody not from the Five Empires, and mainly interested in proper form and creature comforts. He is full of old war stories, most of them from his experience putting down rebellions in the Chákas against the Ito clan and the wild Pé Chói. Hlókku is sinking into his dotage, and is "short a few arrows in his quiver". Hlókku is a hanger-on to the legate, and Legate Dlekku is fond of him, although he holds no official responsibilities. Hlókku has a wife and two children back in Tsolyánu, but he has no permanent family here. He detests Takóyan, and believes he's either a deserter or somebody who spent the war in the rear. (Secret information: Hlókku is exactly as he appears to be. He still thinks he's a capable military leader, but no longer pretends to have much fighting ability left. Still, he may have some hidden resources left.)

**Best skills:** Military tactics and soldiering, war stories.

## 2. Meshshútla Chnéshshu, of the Roaring Black Waters clan.

Salarvyáni. Meshshútla is the Legate's Major Domo, in charge of protocol and keeping the household running smoothly. Short, fat, impeccably pomaded and oiled, the smooth-talking Meshshútla can be guaranteed to know precisely the honors to accord Tsolyani or Salarvyáni visitors of quality. He's snippish and short-tempered to those of the lower classes. He is married, with a wife and two children who live with the clan. (Secret information: He's been embezzling for years, and has stolen a lot of money. If his chambers are searched, a deed to his retirement home can be found, and a pile of gold Nzuggesh is hidden. He will be frightened that a review of the books that a new administration may do could reveal his involvement. He believes his best bet is either to retire quickly and get out of the reach of the Tsolyani, or else to become invaluable to the new administration as smoothly as possible. He will not abandon his money without an argument.)

**Best skills:** Etiquette, calligraphy, orator.

## 3. Pilásh hiSénkolum, of the White Stone clan.

A personal physician to Dlekku, and rather devoted to him. Pilash is a skilled physician who has been caring for Dlekku and his family for many years. Short, chubby, with a smooth and pleasing voice, he is very popular around the household. Pilash comes from a poorer lineage of the clan, and would have grown up to be a bricklayer. Dlekku's father noticed how dexterous his fingers were, and paid for his education as a physician. Pilash has been devoted to the Tankolel lineage ever since. He has few hobbies beside reading turgid popular poetry and collecting small clay figurines. He is a skilled physician, and knows some apothecary skills as well. Pilash is married to a clan-cousin, who stayed behind in Tsolyánu.

**Best skills:** Physician, alchemist, amateur botanist (drugs).

#### 4. Mizhosh hiTankolel, White Stone clan.

Mizhosh is the legate's Second Assistant, the financial advisor and keeper of records. Distantly related to Dlekku, Mizhosh originates from Usenánu, where the Tankolel lineage is not so well off. He is a bureaucrat and administrator, and has seen to it that the Legate runs smoothly. Bottle-shaped (with a thin neck and arms, but a tubby little pot-belly), Mizhosh is a figure of fun to the Salarvyáni for his fussy ways and high-pitched voice, but the Salarvyáni underestimate the keen mind, political instincts, and financial sense of this man. Mizhosh knows that Meshshutla has been embezzling, and has been holding this information for the most profitable moment. Mizhosh and Toposh do not get along well, but Mizhosh is loyal to his clan and other duties. Mizhosh is married, with two full-blooded Tsolyani children here at the legate.

**Best skills:** Administration, mathematics, politics.

#### 5. Logásh hiSurollan, Red Mountain clan.

A merchant from Paya Gupa, he has recently arrived in Tsatsayagga with a wallet of fire opals from the Chákas that he is trying to sell. Logásh is tall and skinny, with a prominent Adam's apple and long, delicate fingers. He wants to make valuable connections with the nobles of Salarvyáni to sell his stones, and learn how to do proper business in Salárvya. He was supposed to speak with Toposh, who has been too busy to spend time with him in the past week (wrapping up Dlekku's business here). He is staying in the Foreigner's Quarter, housing for Tsolyani Vimúhla-worshippers being hard to find these days in Tsatsayagga. Logash is at the party to try to make business connections. He is not acclimated to the diet here yet.

**Best skills:** Merchant, bargaining, gems, gossip

#### 6. Takóyan hiTrélshmu, Weeping Sun clan.

An out and out con man. He claims to have been Kási in the Legion of the Storm of Fire, with experience in fighting in Yán Kór. He's full of stories of sieges and

battles with the Yán Koryáni, where he features prominently as a heroic fighting machine. Sadly, a wound to his sword arm ended his fighting career, for although the general's own sorcerer healed him (so that the scar is very small), he never regained the strength he needed in his hand to really fight again. He even claims to speak Yán Koryáni fluently (but the only phrase he really knows is "More wine, boy!"). Takóyan claims to be of high clan status, but his clan is distant and small, so it is unknown outside of the mountainous northwest of the Empire. In reality, he's a poor wanderer from Jakállá, living by his wits. Takóyan has a follower, Mizhósh hiChulátl of the Reed Mat clan, a young teen who is learning how to be a great warrior like his hero. Mizhosh worships Takoyan, and will do whatever he says and will defend his honor to the death. [Mizhosh is a good enough brawler (but no pro) but would die quickly in a sword fight with any real challenge, since Takoyan's attempts at "training" has hampered his ability. Mizhosh's line: "This man is unworthy of you. Let me dispatch him so your blade won't be dishonored." ] Takoyan and Mizhosh have been living the soft life here for nearly three months, and have become acclimated to the food. Takoyan has found a woman to share his bed, and Mizhosh has no such permanent arrangement.

**Best skills:** Lying, fast-talk, avoiding work.

## 7. Piur hiTankolel, White Stone clan.

The ne'er-do-well. Piur has a carefully cultivated exterior: the bland, useless, chummy fellow. However, he has been running a successful smuggling business under his cousin's nose, because he keeps his ambitions modest, and nobody thinks he has the grey matter to do it. Piur is thought to be a heavy drinker, but many of his forays into the market were to arrange for goods to be moved around without being taxed. Piur's known skills are drinking, eating, gossiping, and spending time with the ladies. His hidden skills include being a shrewd judge of character, an well-oiled ability to lie, a good knowledge of how to get goods in and out of Salárvya, and a practiced hand at forgery. He has a dutiful wife back in Tsolyánu, and two concubines here in the legate.



**Best skills:** Lying, judging character, calligraphy, connections.

## 8. Toposh hiTankolel, White Stone clan.

Toposh is tall, thin, and leathery. The Salarvyáni call him “The hatchet”, or sometimes “The Vringálu” (a poisonous, winged snake-creature). Toposh is Dlekku’s First Assistant. He is cold, efficient, and reliable. He is a shrewd bargainer, and even the mercantile Salarvyáni admire his skill. Toposh has even assisted Dlekku when obnoxious and difficult guests or customers were kidnapped and sold into slavery. Toposh is married, and his wife and two grown sons remain in Tsolyánu. However, he has a slave concubine here at the legate with him. In his free time, Toposh enjoys reading history and composing long narrative poems. He does not like Mizhosh, finding him fussy and over-precise.

**Best skills:** Administration, bargaining.

## Postscript

I don’t remember much about this game, but it worked fairly well. The random events kept the players amused and hopping. When the two elderly Salarvyáni gentlemen wanted to run a race, two of the Tsolyani PCs wanted to set up a betting pool over which would die first from heat exhaustion! They were dissuaded by the ignobility of having guests drop dead at their party. The Ahoggya in the kitchen was distracted by an offer of a mountain of food in the courtyard. When the PCs discovered their peril, one tried to sell out another, and several were captured. In the end, I think they managed to overpower the new Legate and ship him off to become enslaved again, which is the preferred solution. Two roleplaying notes: I was amused when another PC attempted to flatter Mizhosh by telling him that he really should be the one running the place. Mizhosh’s player swallowed it hook, line, and sinker, and was eating out of this other player’s hand for most of the game. And the Flame Gem merchant

distracted the soldiers by throwing his gems down the stairs while the rest of the group fled.

It was a good game. Maybe I'll find a venue to run it again some day.

## Praise for the Underworlds

Most of the Tékumel scenarios I've written or played in take place in the outside world. But dungeon exploring had its place. The old-timers must remember dungeons. D&D3 has returned to dungeons as a good way to introduce new players to the hobby. The original *Empire of the Petal Throne* assumed players would begin their careers exploring the Tsuru'umikh. One of the reasons why I liked EPT over D&D back in the old, old days was that it had a good reason for all these dungeons to be lying around. What role do the tsuru'umikh have for modern Tékumel role playing?

Tsuru'umikh are an important feature of the Five Empires, and should not be edited out by a new rules set. Ditolana ensures that they exist under the cities, and the importance of the shrines and tombs excavated to retain access means that they are regularly used and explored. The Man of Gold showed some of the uses to which the Tsuru'umikh are put.

What are the reasons to use them, aside from nostalgia? They are dandy adventure hooks, as they are the best places to find ancient artifacts, entrances to the Tubeway car network, and possibly secret paths beneath cities. Tsuru'umikh offer opportunities to battle foes from other temples without violating the Concordat, and what better place to "disappear" political opponents? Tomb robbers venture below to obtain wealth, and temples and the tomb police patrol and place guardians to prevent this. One may be able to spy on rivals by finding hidden passages near temple meeting rooms, and enterprising teams may break in and steal valuables, as in the Man of Gold.

Dungeon adventures definitely had their downside. Too often they degenerated into monster hunts, or the bad old days of huge mazes filled with randomly generated monsters and loot with no rhyme or reason. Role playing took second fiddle to mapping. Tékumel deserves better.

But there's no reason to go back to the bad old days of referees obsessively mapping out every feature. Key areas should be mapped out, but large sections can be left vague or only simply described. There are long, featureless corridors; narrow, twisty tunnels; numerous dead ends. We can even gloss over large portions of the underworld as we do the outside world when parties travel long distances. "You arrive at the Chamber of Nessu'mar. Now what?"

I believe some of the old conventions of dungeon exploration should be abandoned. There's little reason to force players to make maps. Upper class Tsolyani would disdain paper maps, and I don't think there are many who can create High Cartography stones, especially while wandering around down there. More likely, explorers would blazon their trail underground, or use a code like the tomb robbers' argot. Directions for traveling underground would be mostly verbal, and the old dungeoneer's game of carefully pacing out and mapping rooms to discover likely secret chambers should be a waste of time: the Tsuru'umikh do not utilize every square foot of space, and square rooms and simple, straight corridors would be rare.

Likewise, the "game" of putting traps in dungeons all over the place has little purpose here. The underworlds were excavated to maintain access to important areas, or to provide for transportation to same. Traps would exist for a reason: either to guard an important area, or placed after the fact to prevent access to an area. Some might set traps to capture explorers: Priests of Ksárul looking to interrogate prisoners, or monsters hoping to make an easy meal. But the paranoid days of tapping everything with a ten-foot pole should be over, too.

As it happens, I have one adventure ready for convention play that has not gone past playtesting, called “For Old Times.” It’s a dungeon crawl, and I tried to keep it up to my highest standards. My playtesters enjoyed it, and it was a real delight to see a serious and skilled group of dungeoneers tackle it.

Besides, if D&D3 is going back to the dungeon setting, maybe it would be helpful to have a few good dungeon games out there to help transition the D&D players into Tékumel--hopefully without having to translate the new game system into d20.

## Outside Threats

Meanwhile, what about outdoor threats? In the old days of EPT, wandering monsters were found everywhere outside of city walls, so that parties crossing the Sákbe roads might have to fight a swarm of Serudla four days outside of Jakállá, and be wiped out. Just how common are wandering monsters, in the old sense, in the Empire?

Ever since reading the sourcebook, I’ve considered dangerous animals like the Serudla to be pushed back to the wilds. The settled areas of Tsolyánu, except for unpatrollable areas like the swamps, are reasonably free of huge predators and wild animals. Consider how difficult it would be to farm if Zrné kept slinking in and carrying off the workers?

But it’s possible I have the wrong image. Instead of a broad settled Empire like ancient Rome or China, the Five Empires might be more like medieval Europe or Russia, where the only places one could be relatively sure of safety from wildlife was the cities. A pack of wolves might pursue a lone sledge in wintertime Russia; a pioneer family in Dakota in the 1880s might be besieged by a mountain lion; the forests of medieval Europe had wild boars and other unpleasant beasts.

Gardasiyal's encounter tables have lowered the probabilities of meeting dangerous creatures, but it's still possible to run into a Feshenga one hex away from Béy Sü. Even more dangerous creatures can be encountered in the mountains and woodlands, regardless of how close one is to civilization, and whether there is a Sákbe road in that hex.

Given the encounter tables, I feel dangerous beasts are more common in the Five Empires than I used to think, but I still believe the settled areas are safe. Organized humans tend to fight off threats, and unlike Medieval Europe, where a local lord might not be able to afford the manpower to organize a hunt for potentially dangerous boars or wolves, the Five Empires have settled these lands for a long, long time. Neither manpower nor weapons nor organization are a problem. Predators might lurk in the dark forests where Sákbe road guards dare not go, but the likelihood of meeting a Feshenga between Béy Sü and Usenánu seems pretty low to me. How could the Empire send lone runners from city to city if they ran the risk of being carried off?

As before, I welcome your thoughts and comments.

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