

The World of the Petal Throne

Some 25,000 Years Ago

From the Tablets of Llyan

Nothing of the world before the Time of Darkness now remains on the surface of Tékumel. The elements have had their way with the fragile cities of men. Some of the great shuttle ships still stand, perdurable towers of never rusting metal, half buried in the debris of millenia; here and there, too, buried beneath the strata of later settlements, one finds the remains of the underpinnings of the cities of the ancients, bits of corroded and unintelligible machines, fragments of plastic. A very few of the devices found in the labyrinths are still operable: some of the little tubeway cars still stand brightly lit at their stations, awaiting the richly clad passengers who come no more. The wonderous items cached in the Latter Times are both awesome and dangerous—men have died from thinking ladies' perfume to be liquor, from travelling in a tubeway car to a destination where the tunnel has collapsed, and from a thousand other simple, silly causes which could have been avoided if only the languages of the ancients were still known. But aeons have passed; the cultures of modern Tékumel no longer have the technical ability or the cultural orientation to understand the manuals even if the grammars and vocabularies were available.

The oldest written records date back only some 25,000 years—and this dating is doubtful at best. The industrious scholars of the Engsvanyáli Empire worked from sources now lost to compile portions of a language now termed Llyáni. The longest and most complete Llyáni text is the *Tablets of Llyáni*, written upon leaves of imperishable gold and now kept in the sanctuary of the temple of the Livyáani deity Qame'él in the city of Tsámra. These speak of a soldier adventurer named Llyán, whose capital was apparently at Tsámra itself. The names of the cities and provinces which he subjugated are now meaningless, lost in the mists of history.

Nothing else much remains of Llyán's 'mighty empire': fragments of walls, a few statuettes depicting unnamed gods, crumbling rings of monoliths set high upon knolls all across Livyánu and southern Mu'ugalavyá, shards of red-glazed pottery—these are all that is left upon the surface. Below in the catacombs which underlie many of the ancient cities, there is more: chambers and halls and sepulchres below Ch'óchi in Mu'ugalavyá, empty shrines beneath Tsámra itself, an intricate circular labyrinth under Khéiris in Mu'ugalavyá, and occasional hoards of curiously thick coins stamped with the image of a naked man bearing what seems to be a wand or a two-handed sword.

By Llyán's time the technology of otherdimensional power had become 'magic' for all intents and purposes; the scholars of this age compiled voluminous compendia of 'spells' and magical instructions detailing the means of utilising energy from the Planes Beyond. The 'skin of reality' was thinner in Tékumel's new 'pocket dimension', and it was therefore easier to open gateways between the Planes. It is unfortunate that so little of this wisdom has been preserved.

Even less is known of the political history of Llyán's empire. There are only hints of wars with the Hlüss and with the other human states, whispers of religious strife and fragments of economic records and temple donations.

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