

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü

**of the Clan of the Moon of Evening
Priestess, Scholar, Sorcerer**

**Loyal Citizen of the Empire of Tsolyánu
Resident of Lnóris, Isle of Vrá**

**2387AS - In the Reign of Emperor Mirusíya
“The Flame Everlasting”**

-=: Part Two :=-

Mending a Triangular Scaffold

Being the personal musings and recollections of a socially awkward and hitherto cloistered young woman, embarking on an expedition that could change the world of Tékumel forever.

Cast

Game Master David Bailey

Clan of the Moon of Evening

Anka'á hiSarashkü	naïve scholar priestess of Dilinála and diarist	– Alan Ford
Trákonel hiSarashkü	impulsive ex-legionary and group leader	– Dave Morris
Chu'ésa hiSarashkü	vivacious ex-marine, lay-priestess of Avánthe	– Dermot Bolton
Tusilén hiUjjain	miserabilist sea captain and navigator	– Oliver Johnson
Vrishtára hiSayákka	talented musician and bowman	– Robert Dale
Ri'isma hiKálodèl	typical ex-medium infantry	– Richard Ozanne

Other Comrades

Chrása hiChélekem	Amber Bird, plucky militia cpl and tracker	– Sonia Bird
Hokésh hiQolelsural	Shading Leaf, taciturn and short warrior	– Steve Foster
Ri'isma hiKálodèl	typical ex-medium infantry	– Richard Ozanne
Talūvaz Druob Shienaz	Aloof Livyani combat sorcerer & hireling	– Dave Morris

NPC

Ajái hiAmiyála	Healer and Sorceress of the Temple of Belkhánu	
Arjutmé		
T'tket M'jer	enigmatic pé chói scholar & sorcerer	– David Bailey

Written by Alan Ford, 2020

Edited & compiled by Dermot Bolton, 2023

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü Aged 26 ¾

Part the Tenth – A Not so Gentle Amble into the Chákan Highlands

It was with some relief to me that we finally set forth from Butrús on our expedition to the old Temple of Sárku ruins known as the Vu'ul Pesh Kårvm Domes. The prospect of an unsanitary, sweaty and potentially exceeding threatful journey into a jungle seemed much to be favoured over the recent terrors of the clan house! My new bodyguard, Chrása, soon proved her worth with her local knowledge and had the good grace to not disturb my inner reveries with any idle chit chat. We also had the company of a stout squat sort of fellow called Hokésh from one of our now widening coterie of clans who sought to be allies with us. He is a quiet fellow but did claim the dubious distinction of keeping a 'chopper' under his kilt!

Allegedly the ruins lay but some ten Tsán distant from Butrús but would have to be approached by a more circuitous path due to the trappy terrain we would have to cover once we were under the boughs of the Chákan forest. The first stretch by Sakbé road was relatively easy, although we were soon grievously set upon by swarms of pestilential little biting horrors. We were also witness to an unfortunate fatality at one of our rest stops. Another traveller, who had stepped out to the seat of ease, was found dead in the yard outside without a mark on him. Chrása settled upon the culprit as being a ngevék, a little round reptilian beast that lurks in the sandy banks of rivers. It is called locally the shadow shooter and is reputed by the natives of the area to kill by spitting sand on a person's shadow. Blatantly it must be some sort of psychic vampire feeding on unwary and weak passing souls, but ohé! Such is superstition! We even traced it to its lair, but for some unaccountable reason it was then decided not to kill it, leaving it to feast on more unwary souls in the future.

Shortly thereafter we began the climb into the Chákan forest. By now I was utterly beyond hope of ever feeling in the least kempt ever again. It was up and down ridge and through steep gorges; if we had had a chance to stop there may even have been the occasional possibility of indulging a sense of wonderment. Instead it was just all hard, grimy, sweaty, slog; always within the accompanying cloud of pestilential little biting horrors. I found myself almost wishing to be back in the clan house! We did pause briefly when we came across some splendid specimens of the local fungi, brains of delight, that I had only read about and seen illustrated in books. Chrása was pleasingly very knowledgeable about these too and was able to educate my little obsession further. I can see why they are believed to be related somehow to Dlamélish and wonder if the wife of Archer Hmí may have had a part in their being found so abundantly in these parts.

On the journey I had promised to myself that I would try to make amends with Chu'ésa after my shocking showing at her soiree. Luckily, her wish to improve her sorcery gave me the opportunity and in our rests I helped her with some exercises of the mind and meditations. I rather hoped that Tusilén would also show an interest in this tutelage as he will need much the same sort of training for his forthcoming labours with the sphere. It was not to be; for some reason he had taken to entirely and very pointedly ignoring me again and barely had a civil word to say on the few occasions he was forced to communicate.

This could shouldering on his part suddenly came to an abrupt end just as we were beset by a quartet of winged serpents. Vringálu! One bite from one of those can lead to a quick and grisly festering demise! Luckily, they were only four in number and although utterly fearless they chose to attack only from one direction. Chu'ésa immediately clipped one of them in the wing with her crossbow whilst I

hurled the power of my mind at them, crushing one entirely in a welter of gore and wounding two others; Chrása then clipped another of them as it was inbound with her javelin. Two of the remaining trio, only one still unhurt, were quickly despatched by Trákonel and our two stalwart bodyguards. I finished off the sharp encounter by hurling a Missile of Metállja at the lone survivor; bringing it down, to be despatched at our leisure.

For some reason this seemed to annoy Trákonel, no doubt he felt robbed of a good chance to pose in his usual self-aggrandising way as the hero of the kírén. He even had the temerity to suggest to Chrása that she might consider restraining me from such rash acts in the future! As at least one küni bird in the more distant past and more recently several fine decorative porcelains can attest I never miss with my mind! He's lucky that I did not crush him then and there on the spot for his insult to my honour and my profession; not to mention putting Chrása in an uncomfortable spot with regard to the nature of her contract in his offer to pay her more than I in order to keep me under control. He really is letting all this recent success get the best of him and to cause both of his heads to swell! He's lucky that Chrása chose not to take offence at this disgraceful importunement of her honour too; I bid her to be calm as he was clearly being an idiot in the heat of the moment.

I then fell back into wary discourse with Tusilén who had just before that heady encounter managed to elicit a grudging acceptance from me that it was all Trákonel's fault and that his recent behaviours were at the heart of my recent distress. Now, after the encounter, Tusilén suddenly seemed to be all agitated for some inexplicable reason; positively breathless and bright eyed; all this despite the fact that I am quite certain he did not even move a muscle during the entire, albeit I admit, brief combat.

In a state of some agitation myself I admitted to Tusilén my distress at some of the recent emotions that had beset me and how they had discomfited me. I remained, however, adamant that I would master these feelings in my own terms, as I am wont to do without any external agency. To my surprise, Tusilén then became somewhat philosophical on the nature of creation and extinction, ecstasy and agony and how it has coloured him in his devotion to one of the unknown aspects of Avánthe. I must say it left me in a strange sense of wonderment, only to be ruined to some degree by his going on about how pain is everything. Here lies a cipher! I feel. I surmise, from what little he has said of himself that his life has been by no means as easy as mine to this juncture and just like me, he is broken to a very great degree. I think as a result of these travails that he enjoys inflicting pain, and it comes as a terrible shock to me that he might see a kindred spirit in my own attitudes. And yet... there is no denying the thrill that killing has brought to me; the satisfaction and even pleasure that has coursed through me, nay aroused in me, through being allowed to explore my full potential, heretofore harnessed into utter quiescence and flacidity in the quiet cloisters of the temple back on Vrá.

In my inner musings on the subject of Tusilén's peculiarities I considered whether Tusilén may even find some of the solace he seeks in the strange fusion of Ksárul with Avánthe that is so peculiar to the Chakan districts, certainly I am intrigued in the ecumenical sense which of the unknown aspects of Avánthe he alludes to; whether it be the 40th, apparently expurgated from the temple histories or merely one of the localisms or merely lost that are recorded in some records as lying betwixt the 52nd and 58th aspects and the 64th to 93rd aspects. I must divine more from him about this and sense that a trip to blessed Avanthár may then be in order to consult the scrolls of Niukimina.

These thoughts troubling me, we continued uncomfortably across ridges, canyons and gorges to approach our target from the high ground to the west. On the way we skirted (due again to Chrása's diligence and local knowledge) a potentially unpleasant encounter with one of the native types of snake of these parts, known in the local patois as an 'awlmouth' for its lethally sharp fangs.

That night brought an unwanted disturbance when our hired-on priestess of Belkhánu, Ajái, awoke us loudly to indicate that an interloper had triggered the warding that she had set. Ohé! Something had made off with the circlet of comprehension that had been loaned to me from the temple. This thief and brigand transpired to be a 'mótti', some sort of local reptile or amphibolid with a taste for shiny trinkets. I must admit to being somewhat tardy in my own response but was well served by my companions who swiftly tracked it to its burrow. Tusilén was all for investigation, as such a thief was bound to have a worthy cache beyond what I had lately lost. I arrived just in time to prevent the unnecessary labour that Trákonel was insisting on by digging the creature out. Instead, with the use of the sight and some delicate manipulations through telekinesis I was able to first locate the trove in question, and then to remove that which had been stolen from me and from others before me. This included some form of green jade pendant of uncertain power as well as a handful of other treasures. We should perhaps have taken a bit more interest in the possible origin of some of these and what they could tell us considering the bazaar bustle of recent activity we were but shortly to come across.

The next day we continued our strenuous hike through the trappy limestone country of this part of the Chákas, with lofty heights bearing small plateaus dissected by steep gorges and canyons our ever present and sweaty travail. Yet arrive at our destination we did, and I am glad that the more impetuous amongst us, for once saw reason, and abided by my suggestion that as night was falling we await until the 'morrow before addressing ourselves to the task at hand.

It was thus refreshed as much as we could be that we approached our goal in full daylight (I must admit that at this point I was idly wondering about our chief most goal of timber assaying). The ruins did not disappoint. Certainly Bednálljan at the very least, judging by the architecture and epigraphy. Lofty ziggurats thrusting upwards from the canopy of the enveloping forest. The whole architectural ensemble reeked of Sárku and the ancient Íto clan.

I, of course, presently attempted to bring a little more teaching to my companions on the subject of the history of this area. Again, I was met just by blank stares from Trákonel and some sort of extremely hurtful quip on his part at how BORING (nay a nerd!) I was in this regard. Again, surprisingly, it was the (certainly) sociopathic (and now I believe potentially utterly psychopathic) Tusilén who brought a measure of succour to my growing distress at this levititious comment. He whispered to me that he found me not SO boring after all and that Trákonel had really and completely just crossed a line!

Trákonel and I then had yet another difference of opinion. No doubt attempting to brow beat me with his (admittedly) extensive experience of military affairs as a former legionary; Trákonel attempted yet again to prise my, so far utterly faithful, bodyguard Chrása from me. Spouting some form of abject nonsense about how our front line required every strong arm that it could have and citing the most spurious case of a village under attack throwing everything forward (his argument) rather than keeping a reserve in the eventuality of needing to bolster one's own defences, or launching to exploit an enemy's weakness (my argument). I was of course at pains to indicate that although I lacked his (no doubt) extensive military training, I was rather a dab hand at the tactically and strategically nuanced games of daghórr and here'úl; in which uncovering one's rear echelons could be fatal. We are not a legion fighting a formulaic battle on prepared ground such as he is apparently accustomed to, but more of a skirmish line who must be ready to meet a threat from every (and oft times unexpected) quarters. Flank. From below, from above.... even from other dimensions, based just on our recent experiences in Butrús! Surprised at my own sudden onset of temerity I won this particular exchange, and Trákonel acquiesced, that in case of asymmetrical combat, I should have a bodyguard in close attendance at all times in case of any such attack from unexpected quarters.

He then went immediately on to prove my exact point by rushing forth impetuously into the ruins; unheeding of us keeping his rear clear. Without a close guard, myself and others amongst our companions would have been utterly devoid of any form of close defence should we then have been beset!

Having established a guard at some distance with Ajái and T'tket M'jer, Trákonel immediately and overly expeditiously launched himself forward uncaring of our general safety. I have ways and means, with appropriate use of the sight, to fully reconnoitre an open area, but our august leader was having none of it, treating me, one of the most puissant psychomancers of our age, like some gauche child! Instead he again sprinted on, unmindful of what ruins and tracks might have told us, leaving most of his own companions far in his wake, attempting in our own way to catch up.

Chrása stayed steadfastly with me and commented that perhaps her tracking skills could be of help. It was soon apparent that we might not be entirely alone. Here at the summit of the lesser pyramid we came across the very recent remains of a fire in which were the remains of two books, both I believe sorcerous: the first was in the Livyáni tongue, which I am ashamed to say I do not possess; the second was even more esoteric, but had something of the Llyáni about it I believe, which I do have a smattering of. Chu'ésa meanwhile had rooted around some of the lower buildings and reported she had found a mural of a large, colourful and evidently not so ancient sigil upon a wall. The glyph of present defence set to protect a recent camp.

And so we trailed in our leader's wake through wonders and glories of past ages and scaled a second, much grander erection from which no doubt breath taking views of the girding canopy and canyon country around could be had if we had but paused. This most noble of ziggurats did however offer a view of a scene of vast excavation and a field of carnage. There at the end of the forecourt below was a great rent in the earth, vast and near circular where a behemoth had no doubt been directed forth upon its journey to that library in Butrús where it had met its less than fastidious demise. Nearby, under the eaves of the encroaching canopy, were a number of scattered corpses; testament to a rout and massacre of sorts. What riddle could these divine to us?

Beyond the plaza was a large, but lower building with walls of uncertain stability and a large smashed in door. There was some evidence that a flight of sorts may have taken place towards its promised refuge. Trákonel, Chu'ésa and Hokésh with Verússa began to make their way across the plaza only to find it an area of clearly undermined instability with frequent collapses beneath their feet leading to awkward tumbles into collapsing sink holes and other nuisances. Watching all this misfortune from the platform above I decided not to chance the route at ground level, but with Chrása's permission swept us both up into the air, swooping hand in hand low over our struggling companions and thence to the awaiting portal.

Ohé!, but what a sight we came upon. A charnel of uttermost horror. Ten or more corpses scattered about torn asunder their entrails splashed hither and thither. One of the abused corpses looked to be yet another Mihállí clutching a sphere in its dead grasp. Worse still is to be described; for there feeding most hungrily upon those poor unfortunates was a hideous entity, at the moment of our arrival busily slurping the brains out of the eye sockets of one of the fallen. I felt fear immediately clench within me at the sight of this monstrous apparition. A revolting thing; thin and hideous of aspect, knobbled, and wrinkled, charcoal blackened, and with the look of one kept from food until death had seized it. Tall, lanky and vaguely humanoid, but misshapen and brutish with cavernous inset red eyes and misplaced mouth. If this thing had bested a Mihállí in its prime and its companions, then we were clearly about to be in a great deal of trouble!

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü Aged 26 ¾

Part the Eleventh – Rumble in the Jungle

I must profess to not being a particular aficionado of any of the arts and in particular poetry. I will, however, make an exception here as it is cogent to setting the scene for what follows and even to my untutored ear very much of merit to the poet's art. Our noble cousin Vrishtára hiSayákka brought this particular muse into being to celebrate our present survival of the horror that awaited for us in that ruined temple.

*Beyond wary woodsmen's warnings
Marching swiftly, past all caution,
Forest-shrouded, ruptured, ravaged,
The worm-lord's ancient lost domes drew us
Seeking lore and scenting learning.
Cousins of Vrá, Kashi's kinsfolk.*

*In tumbled temple hall unshackled
Gurushá gorged, famine's image.
Valiant Vráyani warriors stood
Blades aloft and magic marshalled.
Fear beset them but none faltered
Cousins of Vrá, Kashi's kinsfolk.*

*Tusilén held Gurushá's gaze,
Demon-defier, battle leader.
Trákonel's steel shed demon's blood
Glittering crystal, mystic jewels.
While singer's spell struck danger dumb.
Cousins of Vrá, Kashi's kinsfolk.*

*Chrása hewed the starveling spirit
Deep she drove, the monster faltered
Yet it still stood, scattering poison
Clawing cruelly, seeking vengeance.
On they battled, damage dealing
Cousins of Vrá, Kashi's kinsfolk.*

*So spoke Anka'á, demon-dealer
"Origób's help, hungry ever:
Grant we bring the traitors you seek,
Gayél's face again arising
For your feasting, Lord of hunger."
Cousins of Vrá, Kashi's kinsfolk.*

*Binding gashes, thus we follow
Tracking thieves, the demon's tribute
Through forest shade to fated meeting
With tattooed spies. A hero's tale
Forever heard at clan house feasting
Cousins of Vrá, Kashi's kinsfolk.*

Vrishtára

In hindsight so much of what follows could so easily have been avoided with a deal more application of circumspection on our parts. Some more so than others. Trákonel had sprinted off with Arjutmé ahead of all and sundry leaving us to catch up as we could and utterly scornful of the fact that between myself and Chrása, aided by Chu'ésa's talent in prescience we could have divined all we needed to allow us to make informed and sensible choices in our developing predicament. Instead: No time to piece together what the documents we had found burnt on the ziggurat could mean, or what could be learnt from the trail signs that were evident to Chrása. No time to draw together the skeins of thought presented to us by these alongside the sigils discovered by Chu'ésa, no time for understanding and planning. No time to read the scrap of paper that Chrása found, trampled by Trákonel in his precipitous and headlong charge to vainglory.

Instead I found myself before that horrid door witness to the thing inside and mindful that someone had gone to a lot of trouble to place this awful demon before us. Hungering as the nameless one herself, so somewhat apposite, given what we had divined to date; we found ourselves in the presence of Gurushá, right mandible to Origób. Fighting the rising panic, I placed myself into my mantra of quietude, which also luckily put aside a sudden strong compulsion to cast a hitherto unknown summoning as I began to ponder whether a favour from Lelmiyáni may be the present way out of our predicament. That realisation, and that unbidden I knew her true name was even more disquieting than what I had just witnessed within!

Trákonel, Arjutmé, Chu'ésa and Hokésh had already blundered unheeding into that unhallowed place and were thus already promised as vittles to slake its ravening. They at least all had the wit to immediately run, rather than meet their fates within its encompassing unhallow. Trákonel, to his credit even had the presence of mind to make his way, somehow airborne, via the dead Mihállí, sequestering the sphere from its dead grip. Gurushá meanwhile was binding its time teleporting deceased body parts into its slaving, misplaced maw.

Outside, I wafted Chrása upwards to plan our next move. The unhallow was an ancient structure, clearly unstable in places and with Chrása's sapper's eye I believed we had an opportunity to drop the roof on the horror within. Inwardly, I was rather cursing having left Tusilén behind; we would likely need his eye of portal opening and he had been in one of his more amicable frames of mind when I had left him. Chrása's assessment proving the affirmative, I wafted us back to explain the plan to Tusilén.

Trákonel, Chu'ésa, Hokésh and Arjutmé had meanwhile come tumbling back out of the ruin and rapidly put as much distance as they could from the inevitability of their demise. Trákonel's disdain towards Tusilén's immediate reasonable suggestion that we needed to consider our next steps more carefully, rather than run hither and thither like drunken rényu, I believe played to my suite and the destruction of the structure was not only agreed, but with skilled reconnaissance and calculation on the part of my companions, duly accomplished with no little degree of success.

But little discommoded; yet even so, more so than all that followed! Our demonic adversary arose from the rubble and expanding effusion of dust. Trákonel was only just then learning the merits of proper aerial reconnaissance to our rear, shouting out things that the rest of us already knew, whilst Vrishtára and Ri'ísma struggled on foot in the unhandy terrain. Vrishtára took the sensible course open to him and levitated himself above the incipient arena of battle. Ri'ísma, just as wisely, secreted himself behind a pillar.

Then our horrid adversary was in the pillared plaza. Translocated in and instant. Also translocated in an instant was Chu'ésa from her pyramid step to the rear to within its grasp. Peculiarly she then proceeded to juggle with something to distract it from immediately slaking its hunger on her soul. Remarkably successfully too, catching its confused assault neatly on her shield.

I had meanwhile decided that Vrishtára, motionless as he was in the air needed to be recovered to safety, flinging a Hands of Krá the Mighty as I did so to try further to distract its attentions from Chu'ésa. My psychomancy barely had any effect but did at least prove that the thing could be hurt. This little fact and Chu'ésa's imminent mortal danger finally concentrated Trákonel on the job at hand and he and Arjutmé finally recovered their courage to face the monstrosity. My gnat's bite also surprisingly seemed to distract the beast from its present enterprise and once more it translocated further into the plaza, leaving a little jewel of itself behind for Chu'ésa to claim as a souvenir of her brush with death.

Battle was now properly joined with Trákonel and Arjutmé charging in from one side, Chu'ésa and Ri'isma from the other. Hokésh was nowhere to be seen, perhaps prescient of his status as sweatmeat in all this. I trailed my three airborne companions to another flank, and this time, before it inevitably got too busy around our adversary sought to see what effect a silver halo could have. Notwithstanding my excellent aim catching it on what passed for a temple, I was nevertheless surprised that the strike actually discommoded it for a number of seconds, allowing my stalwart companions the liberty of laying about it at their leisure. In its discomposure Tusilén and Chrása, up 'til then impatiently being dragged uselessly around by me, agreed to join the fray so I dropped them neatly into the plaza to ply blows most diligently.

Tusilén surprised me somewhat in this, as previously he had not demonstrated such clear courage, and yet here he was in the very heart of the affray. Blows passed back and forth in the melee, as did confusing translocations of my courageous companions. At some point, one of Vrishtára's missiles was unfortunately translocated into Ri'isma shoulder (or so he claims), spinning him out of the fray. Gems were falling all around, testament to the violence of my friends' assaults. Even I, ingenue in martiality, found myself temporarily transfixed by the excellence of Chrása's axe-work and I must also admit that I had not really noted Tusilén's athleticism before this either. Shaking my head out of my reverie; what was to be done?

My companions continued to draw little gems from the Demon; both myself and Vrishtára tickled it, relatively inconsequentially, with another brace of crushing Krá's, although Vrishtára at least managed to give the horror yet more pause in confusion as it all to briefly wondered what to do with a dose of paralysis. Despite of everything; a temple dropped on its head and the blows raining down on it from my companions; the demon was yet only marginally troubled. The death of my friends and comrades seemed imminent. An idea that had struck me towards the beginning of the affray now struck me as the only sensible way to delay and even, hopefully, avoid the inevitable. Even as the thought germinated in my mind, Tusilén fell; his leg translocated and immediately ingested by our terrible foe. I knew that it would not, could not, stop there.

Here we were beset by a slaving horror that hungered for satiation on the souls of four of my closest companions. Perhaps the offer of food would stay its course? and so I took forth one of the scrolls of sustenance that Trákonel had purchased for us and uttered it unto conjuration. And so, I found myself touching the mind of my second demon. Time stopped as we briefly touched psyches; it appreciated my attempt to treat with it and confirmed that four of its promised were hereabout; and it hungered for them so. It had already had its fill of the other meagre corpses we had found; I can't be sure but I sense it prefers the taste of the yet living! It was Trákonel, Chu'ésa, Arjutmé and Hokésh or a greater banquet that it must have.

I could probably have offered it some of our retainers, our loyal and oh so brave torch-bearers; but my sense of honour and loyalty to them could not stand for that! Instead, impulsively, I offered it the Livyáni, who I was now certain were behind all this. It confirmed my suspicions by its assent. Their promises had so far come to as naught; they had failed to an extent in their bargain. We had a passage of Gayél to deliver or it would come back for all of us. Then it was gone.

Our travails were not over. Tusilén's leg needed to be restored and there was a sudden, inexplicable, greed on the part of many of my companions (Tusilén in his delirium) with regard to the scattered, solidified droplets of demonic blood. Not surprisingly a number of these transpired to be false, slaughtering numbers of our but just summoned labourers, bringing me to the very portals of death and severely injuring others of my companions, including Chu'ésa.

I at least could heal myself well enough through my own psychic agency, especially as I had full control of myself; but others needed the various scrolls that we carried. I found myself rather troubled by the limited thought my companions gave to the deceased amongst the summoned labourers? Just exactly how did they think such conjuration worked? Where had they come from? Did they not have lives and families to mourn them? souls that could feed whatever had taken them? They were not like the demon that had affrayed us; effectively immortal. The thoughtlessness and lack of regard was breathtaking! Even more worrying is that I myself had not even considered it up until now! Is the life that I hold so dear really that cheap?

Many, many new questions had been posed and only a few answers apparent.

Finally, we had time for some careful, informed, consideration. I would like to say that, that is exactly what happened. We have just over 25 days. A passage of Gayél. Why does everything come back to Gayél? Of which more in my next journal entry.

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü Aged 26 ¾

Part the Twelfth – Deliberations and Demonology

I hate demonology! I hate demonologists! I hate demons! I have always held that anyone who deals with demons must have taken leave of their senses; to such a degree I have taken strenuous steps to avoid any contact with them or even their study beyond the basic school lessons of my early days in the temple. It's all such horrid, messy, nonsensical idiocy where nothing is at seems and rules have no real meaning!

So, having just concluded my second little conversation with a demon I found myself rightly out of sorts. Four of us, potentially all of us had been set up as a banquet. I had put the dreadful potentiality back for a passage of a moon with some quick thinking and the cost of a simple scroll of refreshment. We had a breathing space and I had also identified and bargained an alternative source of sustenance amenable to our late foe. And all Trákonel could think of saying was that we would all be on short commons before the unlooked-for hike into the jungle that I had now doomed us all to!

I wasn't hungry anyway. In fact, I was really rather nauseous, having just brushed the mind of my second demon. I was also exhausted, elated, filthy, hot, sweaty, blood spattered (mine and others!), insect bitten and itching all over.

For a while I had to sit and calm myself lest I truly slapped him with a Krá like I had that poor küni that soiled one of my toys in the nursery so long ago. Surprisingly, it was a sensible intervention from Tusilén that poured oil on the waters of my seething, almost incandescent anger. I did not expect that; nor did I expect how quickly his statement of irrefutable sense and logic, linked so closely to my own thinking could bring me such quiet solace. I returned to myself.

The first demon was preying on my mind too, after the only too recent unbidden realisation that I somehow knew her real name, the means of bringing her forth and indeed had even started on the ritual before bringing myself into order. Why? Why?

We also still had other conundrums set us, now we finally had the leisure to piece together the fragments of information we had gathered in those cursed ruins.

The corpses, apart from one, appeared to be Íto, local no doubt, a goodly number of them too who had put up little if any fight; suggesting that they were taken utterly unawares, probably by someone they at least knew and maybe even trusted to a degree. The exception was another mihállí (or even possibly the same one previously met and grappled by Chu'ésa in the library). The sphere he had been clutching was another learning sphere, yet another one related to the finding of the Temple of the Black Leaves, but already drained of all but the dregs of what it had once contained. There was enough to know that that place did at least lie beyond our own reality.

Whoever had killed them, numerous in their own right, had left a trail that could be followed, but were likely a good two days gone already. It would appear though that before the massacre it had been the Íto and their mihállí friend who had summoned the aqáà to send forth to trouble the Temple of Keténgku. Breaching architecture, etiquette, several secular laws no doubt, definitely a number of religious taboos, and above all the Concordat. There are no doubt others in their clan who knew of what they were about.

It was also now certain that if this was the same mihállí, then he had indeed been sequestering lies between his truths in his converse with Chu'ésa. Somewhat troubling to me was that if it was indeed the same mihállí; where were his three brethren who had come to collect him in all this?

Even more worrying was the nature of who, or what, had been the agency of the demise of so many powerful Ito and their mihállí ally; on their own turf. Above all though, why did the assailants then summoned Gurushá and leave it to trap the unwary; almost as if there was an expectation that the scene may be discovered and relatively quickly. It was a very great deal of effort and danger to go to in order to hide something that the native vermin and undergrowth would quickly have disguised without the slightest thaumaturgical effort. Perhaps even other Íto were in part responsible for the carnage and needed a quicker cleansing?

A rather too convenient answer to this last puzzle had actually been presented to us by the scrap of paper in Duruob, ancient Livyáni, that Chrása had peeled from out of Trákonel's boot print in the mould. I had divined some of it using my circlet and even sought to confirm some of its veracity in my brief discourse with the Dread Right Mandible of Origób. I had offered it the Livyáni responsible, instead of my four companions (and I hope also just myself), and it had agreed to that! Some more circumstantial evidence was left charred on the first pyramid; one in a script that slipped before the eyes like lamp oil on water and the other again ancient Livyáni. The latter had been a sorcerous tome; the script of the former hinted that it was associated with the Pariah Gods themselves!

The note itself though was just too much like one of the contrived clues one finds in those pointless works of petty fiction I so detest about foolish heroes stumbling as if blindfold through an ever more comedically convoluted and messy plot; usually with some sort of silly romantic angle foisted onto it as well! Whoever was responsible was clearly an author of some sort!

The note was just too clear and even annotated in modern Livyáni to aid the reader. As if an obviously puissant Livyáni sorcerer would need margin notes to translate ancient Llyáni! This is what it said:

"wait until Gayél is not in the sky – do nothing under the gaze of the Boneless God – then summon the worm, send it forth to destroy the "Sealer of Bones, Mender of Scaffolds", leave clues to incriminate the worm lords and blue princelings, leave no trace of your presence nor of the sacrifices, do not attract the attention of the mischievous many breasted dogs that snap and snarl at our goddesses heels, eliminate any of the vermin that are sent by the Lord of Eyes (glyph) who would thwart our plans. Suck out the contents of the Sphere of Instant Apprehension of Ancient Knowledge and dispose of it."

Utterly insane servitors of the nameless hungerer! Confirmed in discourse with Gurushá to be what it at least believed to be Livyáni. And powerful enough to summon a possible avatar. We really were still in very considerable peril.

And Gayél? Why does it always revolve around Gayél (or we around it!). Almost certain home of the Archer Hmí and his wife, herself possibly part of the essence of Dlamélísh. Archer Hmí, also that which is known as the Mender of Scaffolds, watching from his throne above with no weight beside his original scaffold mender. I have a very real and present fear that, that is where we are bound should we survive all this. Gayél! Always Gayél!.....

One impossibility at a time first though. We have a little over 25 days to track our quarry, already two days gone; puissant, numerous and utterly devoid of compunction or mores. Probably without aid except from our own kin and maybe our temples. Likely with foes listening and watching for our return to Butrús; who knows those that we follow may even have sensed that their vasty summonation has gone somewhat awry of what it had been asked and was intended of it.

Luckily, I am not alone. We are family and sometimes even friends and we will do this together.

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü Aged 26 ¾

Part the Thirteenth – Recriminations and Retribution

The aftermath of our close survival of our first encounter with Gurushá spiralled to an embarrassing and acrimonious conclusion notwithstanding Vrishtára's fine panegyric ode.

Trákonel was of a fixed mind that we needed to commence our pursuit of the Livyáni sorcerers immediately. All others appeared to share my own conviction that we needed to take stock of our predicament and marshal whatever local support we could find for the undertaking of our endeavour. Vrishtára and Chrása both have local contacts and knowledge that would prove invaluable alongside the additional arrangement of reconnaissance and communications. I also made it clear that our pé chói companion T'tket M'jer could no doubt be of assistance, as he too had local pé chói connections and they are renowned for their ability to communicate across distances. Tusilén, nursing a new leg thoughtfully, indicated that further unpremeditated action was unwise and that instead we needed local help whilst scouts were sent to track the Livyáni, and that we should also somehow get news to the authorities in Butrús if we could. This last point being rather the more pertinent after I recalled that the Chief of Staff at the Temple of Keténgku had been described as being a "friend" by our opposition in the under-tombs. Clearly he was a traitor with the very levers of the Scaffold under his control; and we had left that precious keeper of reality in his tender care!

I really thought that the clear sense of having a properly thought through approach to our problem would make its way into Trákonel's stubborn mind. But fie no!

He virtually insulted our forest cousins in a presumption of what their families would require in terms of recompense rather than listening to their recommendations. He blithely ignored my suggestion that the pé chói in these environs could be of invaluable aid and still seemed entirely ignorant of the fact that it was him rushing unheeding into that collapsed temple where Gurushá feasted that had triggered the unfortunate events that followed; blaming all on me. He mocked me for desiring pure water in order to undertake the horrid ritual that I would have to complete. He compounded this by intimating I was possibly "shy" of further danger when I suggested that an initial reconnaissance did not necessarily require me, and that in the first instance, I might be better off talking with T'tket M'jer.

I was in distress enough having inflicted a terrible fate on near all my companions in my desperate attempts to forestall our more immediate endings. Knowledge most terrible had forced itself most unwelcoming into my mind and the thought of what might happen if I actually used such a terrible and mysterious benefaction almost made me vomit in terror to the extent that I had to practise my mantra of quiescence to retain control of myself. The conviction that I likely faced the high ride if I practised what I now somehow knew to save both myself and my companions also weighed heavily on me.

Chu'ésa tried to pour ashes on the somnolent inferno between us by suggesting a perfectly reasonable middle course, in accord with Tusilén's initial outline. This was just met with utter contempt on Trákonel's part; importuning Chu'ésa's competence and even referencing the sad nautical incident in which Chu'ésa lost the love of her life as a reason why Chu'ésa might prefer a more cautious path, rather than urgent, reckless and precipitate pursuit that he advocated.

Chu'ésa is obviously a better person than me, as she raised herself above what I'm sure was a shámtla worthy insult. I to my regret, did not, resulting in harsh words and a scene most unbecoming to either

myself, Trákonel or our clan, insults were thrown at sorcerers and legionaries alike. So unruly did we become that Tusilén and Chu'ésa were forced to step in to bring the entire sorry and shaming spectacle to a close before any more division and hurt to our undertaking could be inflicted by our clash. And to think I almost believed myself to have been in love with him! **Ink blot from falling tear** Now I fear we are utterly estranged! **Blot**. What a stupid fool I am! **Blot**

****BLOT****

And so, we then more or less proceeded with the plan that Tusilén had first outlined. A small scouting party would ascertain whether the Livyáni had made for one of the subterranean passages that Chrása was aware passed under the nearby village and all would then meet up at the said village to take counsel with the elders there and try and find T'tket M'jer.

As it transpired myself and Chrása, through the use of aeriality and potentially other magics subtle to intelligence gathering, as well as Chrása's tracking skill were deployed (as I had also suggested ahead of our foray into the temple) allowed us to quickly ascertain that the Livyáni had indeed taken to the caves under the village some two days hence, taking some care to cover their tracks and leaving a few simple, but unpleasant traps to discomfit any would be pursuers; some 20 – 30 in number were they by Chrása's estimate. Chrása and I then flew up to the village above to find it bestirred by activity. Chu'ésa paused a while in the dread ruins to recover the corpse of the mihállí; confirming that it was indeed the one that she had had discourse with, taking what items that had survived the temple being dropped on his corpse and singing a prayer to speed him to whatever eternity awaited him. On being told of the confirmation later on I professed my curiosity as to why his four brethren had brought him to this place and where they might be now, as we had but found one mihállí corpse. The simple answer may be that they were ingested by Gurushá, but nevertheless we may need to be on our guard. Hopefully Chu'ésa's nobility to their dead companion will at least mean something to them should they chose to later intervene in our skeins.

T'tket M'jer was already at the village when Chrása and I arrived, tending to a hláka in legion harness, which had taken a nasty barbed quarrel in one of its wings. The poor thing had been shot by one of the Livyáni whilst it was on a mission to scout out for them. T'tket M'jer and myself quickly spoke with our minds: The news of the Livyáni incursion and the recent presence of Gurushá was, according to T'tket M'jer, already out and causing no little consternation in Butrús! The legions there were already mobilising and the temples in a state of extreme consternation. He himself had sensed the arrival of the demon some days ago although its more recent departure at my clumsy behest had caused an even greater stir. I quickly filled him in on our recent adventures at the temple, which of course only added to his disquietude. During our discussion, somewhat emboldened, I tried to tease the secret of his part in all this; to which his reply was rather gnomically that he had contacts at a very high level, but was nevertheless no thrall of the Imperium.

T'tket M'jer had also been in contact with nearby cousins of his own kind (as I had divined, the pé chóí can hive speak over very considerable distances) and through that contact and the witness of the hláka we could fairly accurately divine how far our prey had passed on the other side of the ridge having exited the caves below. Close enough that if had not been so exhausted I alone may have been able to fly on and overhaul them; although I would have had a long, lonesome and dangerous walk back.

Tusilén, Chu'ésa and Vrishtára presently jogged into the village; Trákonel being heavily burdened with his steel was trailing somewhat behind; probably in a dudgeon. Appraised of the developing sense of alarum in Butrús and the now known path that the Black Hats were taking; we could refine our plan. Tusilén appeared to be particularly agitated, if not excited at the prospect, and rather discommoded

me by discoursing once again on the subject of suffering, whilst sitting astride a log and idly playing with the scar on his upper thigh where his new leg had grown, rather too far beyond his kirtle line to be entirely seemly. I had to avert my eyes in rising embarrassment and shock as once again unlooked for and unsettling sensations coursed through me. Enough of those!

Luckily Chu'ésa disturbed my wandering thoughts by bringing me back to awful reality. Recommending caution, rightly, if somewhat inconsiderately for her. Reminding us all that the secret knowledge I had had forced on me could see me in particular, and probably my companions, taking the Imperial suppository should I use it to circumvent our predicament. We would have to act fast before the authorities arrived in force. Luckily, by coming to the village our way forward was much eased as the local forest clans and the pé chóí were gathering to our support. T'tket M'jer and his brethren were particularly concerned as one of their family had been felt to die by them whilst investigating the village that the Livyáni were last reported to have been at. They could also offer us further succour in the form of one of their concoctions that bestowed speed and stamina; enough to give us an edge in the delayed foot race we would have to run.

It was decided that myself along with Tusilén, Chu'ésa, Chrása and Vrishtára would take the pé chóí brew and be escorted by the local secret byways depart the next day to get ahead of the Livyáni to set our trap. Trákonel, having rather foolishly been barred by myself from accompanying me during our altercation, would take the remainder of our retinue along with T'tket M'jer back to Butrús to make report and to carry various last wills and testaments. I at least summoned up enough courage to place into Trákonel's hands a recommendation to my temple that medical aid was given to Chrása's afflicted sister and medical training given to another of her relations so that proper care could be given in the future in Chrása's absence. It really was the least I could do, given the predicament we were now all in.

And so, somewhat subdued, we departed and made very rapid progress by the secret paths guided by T'tket M'jer's folk. On the way through that oppressive and filthy wilderness Vrishtára attempted to elicit from me the nature of meeting and attachment with Lelmiyáni. I must confess that my usual discomfiture with strangers, alongside the now apparently ever present terror of having to deal with any form of demon(s) in the first place made me somewhat reticent, but I at least recounted the basics of my meeting with the (not so) juvenile flautist in the basement of the hospice. Vrishtára also appeared to be curious as to the whereabouts of the other four Mihállí that had rescued their now dead friend from that same basement. Meanwhile, Tusilén was almost capering in excitement, showing all who would bear witness the scar around his new leg and the neat sandal that Chrása had fashioned for him. I averted my eyes as much as I could although I noticed that Chrása appeared to be enjoying the spectacle. This mildly troubled me for some unaccountable reason!

On our swift journey we were largely untroubled with Chrása being able to spot a number of the local flora and fauna that may have caused us botherment well ahead of them becoming problematic. We also passed the village where the pé chóí scout had met his end and the hláka had been wounded. A terrible thaumaturgical atrocity had been committed on the poor denizens of that place with all poisoned. The sight of this needless massacre affected me deeply, hardening my heart to the horror that I would soon have to unleash on the miserable cowards and murderers who had inflicted such suffering.

Bye and bye, we hit the trail that our quarry was expected to follow to find that we were almost certainly ahead of them. Chrása cast about and quickly located a suitable defile where our ambush could be as well as a place of concealment from where we could spring our trap and watch the results. Chrása through her woods and track cunning, also contrived to hide the dread sigil that I drew upon

the path, so as to prevent its inadvertent notice. And so, we waited; Tusilén apparently excited about the nature of the coming combat; myself silent, thoughtful and full of terror at what I must do. Chu'ésa and Chrása both diligently watchful and Vrishtára trying to raise various of our spirits with idle, but suitably quiet, tittle tattle.

The ambushade when it occurred was a very horrid affair; I fear we won ourselves no honour in the doing of it. I spoke the names I had been given, and there Gurushá was. I needn't have Krá'd three of the Livyáni, satisfying as seeing them implode might have been. Their death at my mind's behest may well have just spared them a worse fate and, on reflection, perhaps we should all have just left the starveling to his feasting; anything being taken from his repast being but a payment we would have to redress later. The Livyáni were patently most puissant in their art and made an attempt to use battlefield magics on their assailer. With about as much, if not less, effect than we had inflicted on the dread thing by dropping a temple on his head and pricking him with swords. Like us, they did not stand a chance, and in the end I had to avert my eyes so as to not witness the unfolding horror below. Two only escaped into the encompassing jungle, where I cannot believe the pé chói will be kind to them. Their scout surrendered to Chrása and Chu'ésa; favouring that above the alternative. As to the rest; they died; in unimaginable agonies and terror, their screams raising the flocks from the surrounding canopy to add to the awful cacophony of their abject demise. If I had not been under my mantra of quiescence, I believe I will surely have vomited and retched until nightfall.

Quickly and in utter finality the fell deed was done, and I stepped forth to perform the banishment by pure water. To my relief Gurushá had accepted my sacrifice and myself and my companions were saved and so he would depart. But, nevertheless, he let me know (as is the wont with demons) that he desireth more and will now trouble me for further offering on the kalends of Dlamélísh. I could have wept! I should have wept! I must admit I didn't weep because I was too perplexed by his reference to a day holy to Dlamélísh; Gurushá is I thought a thing of Wurú! Why the kalends of Dlamélísh? Does he already know where I think we are all bound?

I would not write more at this stage, so exhausting in the mind this recounting having been. However, there is one thing I must mention. During our return to the agitated ants' nest that is now Butrús we espied a wonder borne on the airs above. A great winged serpent with a rider! A dragon! There are dragon riders, potentially even dragon warriors! The sight actually made me laugh, so incomprehensible has my life lately become.

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü Aged 27

Part the Fourteenth – Revels and Revelations

Butrús was alive with activity when we returned from the forest. The grey robes were in constant worried processions back and forth from the Palace of the Realm, a bona fide dragon circled in lazy arcs in the sky above and the temples and bureaucracy a hive of bustling activity. Tusilén made report of our recent travails, understating our part in the detestable demise of the Livyáni posse to try and avoid too many questions being asked of us (unsuccessfully it very soon transpired).

Trákonel had arrived some days hence and had pretty much departed for Vrá when we returned. There were no partings. He had done well for himself and for us in his recent actions securing himself on the path to clan elderhood by negotiating lucrative and diverse mercantile contracts most beneficial. Wealth undreamt of was again ours. In other circumstances I may have even fondly missed him and our sparring, with his constant jibes and barbs; but I had much weightier matters on my mind. Or maybe I should say: in my mind.

For certain, the horrible affair in the forest had earned me at least one new secret name; given to me by whatever power(s) now rule my final fate. I greatly fear that that fate is fast encroaching and I will not see my 28th year. My mind is in utter turmoil, unbidden thoughts and musings that I cannot forget. My surroundings are suddenly shockingly crystal clear in terms of intricacy of detail, intensity of colours and odours and auditory intimacy. Crowds, never my home, have become absolute torture to me and I can hear voices even in my sleep as the clan house bustles around me. Whispers on the edge of hearing, tinged with cries; whether hawkers plying their trade in the bazaars nearby, or the souls of the Livyáni I have damned to an eternity of torment, I know not.

I must admit that I was wont just to cloister myself away in my rooms; calling forth meals as needed (which was ever more frequent!). Now I am by nature exceeding abstemious in all things so the sudden and complete onset of a very hearty appetite by degrees became concerning; not only to me, but also to Chu'ésa and Chrása who were really my only companions in my self-imposed internal exile. Truly, I was always hungry and I had to admit that it could not just be due to the worrying by the black rényu, that has too oft been my curse.

Indeed, in truth I seemed to be the vessel for an internal dialogue; maybe my various names vying for supremacy of my psyche, through which it became increasingly difficult to remember who I really was; although I could clearly remember too much else. Chu'ésa, bless her, tried to provide solace; even agreeing to be habitually thrashed at here'úl and daghórr to keep me from my introspections. By degrees she also, rather annoyingly, sought to limit my access to the canapes, sweetmeats and candies that I had come to crave.

It was Chrása though, who was the first of my companions to guess the awful truth that I was already to keenly aware of. Gurushá is still with me. He is not alone either, as Lelmiyáni is also there in the shadows. Indeed, I almost think they may be entertaining each other on the interstices of my reason, while they wait out the time until the kalends of Dlamélísh or whatever other conjunction will seal my fate. Sometimes I even join in myself; what better way to practice my rather limited grasp of Llyáni and ancient Mihállí after all! I have never had much time for the arts, but of late I have even found myself jauntily whistling when the clouds of my soul part and I think myself alone, except for the little society in my head.

Clearly, I had to place myself under my Temple's orders for my own good, and likely the good of anyone that I came into contact with. First though I had to survive one of those awful soirees that I find so dull and stressful. It was at Portso's new establishment, so the fare was no doubt exquisite although I must admit my ability to actually appreciate such epicurean delights has now left me entire; I just need the sustenance, and it is never enough. So distracted was I with my own internal trialogue(s) that I had completely forgotten that our clan had invited a Livyáni sorcerous consultant to attend upon us with a view to being taken on by them to ensure our own continued longevity in bringing credit, wealth and advancement to our clan.

Rather rudely we thought, the said Talūvaz¹ failed to make his appearance until after the final remove, although I now understand that it is not the Livyáni custom to board together. This was but one of the foreign peculiarities that we would have to get used to with this gentleman. The entire interview was most awkward, with our guest refusing to sit, preferring instead to stand as he was interlocated by us still at dais. He came with exemplary references, knew in the Livyáni way the sorceries of defence, puissance and healing that we might require, and usefully also has knowledge of the realities beyond and their demonic denizens. We could, of course, not put aside entirely from our minds our so recent encounter with thirty or so of his now horribly deceased, country folk; what they had been about and how they had been bested by us. Even so we decided that it was a risk that would be worth taking and bid him to attend upon us the next morning. This strange meeting with a shockingly tattooed fellow with failed attempts at levity on all sides was nevertheless not the most disquieting aspect of the evening.

That singular honour fell to the brief arrival of my and Chu'ésa's old "friend"; the effeteling himself, Dláppa hiSsánmirin. Proof positive that no matter how hard we might try it would appear that the Omnipotent ones were living up to their reputation, despite Trákonel's protestations of their irrelevance and omni-impotence in these parts. Plumping himself literally and figuratively down beside Tusilén, he very broadly and briefly hinted that he knew that we knew that much more was going on than the report that had so far made it to him and that he should know more and we should know better than keeping him out of the know. That particular hive being thrown, he then left; leaving T'tket M'jer in his wake to join us. The latter was clearly rattled to find us in company, albeit briefly, with a Livyáni shadow sorcerer and his mood was no doubt then not improved by my companions' insistence on drawing converse to the great sorrow and lonesome lamentation of his kind. Yet in time, thankfully, the soiree drew to a close and I could sleep; albeit without getting true rest.

This last is something else that has come to weigh on me. I sleep deeply enough, but like my hunger for food, I yet seem to remain unsatisfied. Indeed, of late, I have even taken to the dull expedient of putting on my face each morning, particularly the kohl around my eyes to hide the signs.

The next morning, Tusilén and myself made our way to put Dláppa hiSsánmirin a little bit more in the know. The gentleman in question put aside the Golden Book that he was scribing and listened with interest to Tusilén's recounting of exactly how many Livyáni he did (or indeed did not) now have to keep track of in the forest. Tusilén had reported that we had killed but six, yet he had had reports of some thirty abroad, and was wondering how the accounting could be so much at variance? Tusilén and I finally admitted that the Livyáni's own summoned horror had actually been responsible for the greater degree of their demise.

¹ *Talūvaz Druob Shienaz of the Clan of the Bird of Paradise, originally from the city of Heméktu in northern Livyánu.*

Our, and in particular my part in directing the demonic discommode was left unsaid; although I greatly fear not unguessed at. Indeed, his final parting words were to warn me to take stock of my resultant predicament at my temple, that we were not to be so remiss in any future intelligence, that the Livyáni gentleman was known to him and could be trusted (worrying in its own right) and that we should mind Chu'ésa's possible infatuation with the Preceptor of the Indigo Tower. This last was but one of the little surprises that my cousin would spring on me in the course of the next few days! Everybody had of course entirely forgotten about the appointment with Talūvaz that morning. Hopefully he took it as a deliberate slight on our part in response to his tardiness of the evening previous; rather than just the incompetence on our part that it truly was.

As it transpired, Chu'ésa had indeed been in attendance with the Indigo Preceptor that very morning rather than meeting our new magical consultant. She didn't mention what they may have discoursed (or otherwise!) upon. Finally, having avoided for now the high ride, in the afternoon we (being myself, Chu'ésa and Tusilén) attended upon the Temple of Keténgku to use the spheres and the high cartography gem. And how our minds were opened!

The interstices of three-dimensional space were opened to us. We were imprinted as the three maintainers of the scaffolds with the knowledge to undertake the task and the knowing the requisite guards and wards to allow us to do it without condemning us all to entropic dislocation. Three of the "scaffolds" were indeed on Tékel, I posit connected to the Three States of the Triangle, forming the base of a three sided pyramid at modern day Butrús (as we had discovered), Tsámra in Livyánu (as Trákonel had guessed) and finally Lnóris back at home on Vrá (as I had surmised). The apex of the pyramid was indeed located (as I had surmised) on Gayél and somewhere, betwixt the terrestrial and the lunar, was the final scaffold in a béthorm identified as the Forest of Black Leaves. Not actual leaves it would seem, but some form of black array of panelling that lies at a nexus point where realities come together in conjunction and travellers between those realities can meet.

My mind, despite already being crammed with remembrances, recollections and rowdy house guests unsought for, nevertheless somehow managed to find space to know the path, the language to be used and how the devices were to be maintained. We also ascertained to some amusement that the teeth repairing function of the Calcinator was but a very minor subsidiary function to maintain the functionality of the device's original servitors and operators. The functionality of the scaffolds was presently in question and reality thereby in jeopardy from those who sought to consume it (or rule) it.

In truth, we had already, beyond successfully completed all the tasks that had been set for us for our trip to Butrús and it did briefly cross my mind as to why we had chosen ourselves to this task. Yet so we had appointed ourselves to the great undertaking. Tusilén declared we would all make ready to depart, leaving me but a day to consult on my predicament with my Temple. Our path was to be first to Lnóris (beneath the Duke's palace no less), then Tsámra in distant Livyáni, thence to the Forest of Black Leaves, and then finally even more distant Gayél. All the journeying could be and would be undertaken through thaumaturgical portals.

The next day I duly took myself to my temple and described my condition. It was met not so much with consternation as sadness. Obviously, I needed to immediately ensure that I was cleansed and purified, but that I would also have to make it a weekly ritual. I think both I, and those I spoke to perhaps know the truth of it.

The last recounting before we finally depart on what I believe will be my final and greatest journey is the other surprise Chu'ésa had left to spring on me. I had been wrong in my supposition that the chief

of staff of the Temple of Keténgku was a traitor to his temple and the empire. Indeed we now had to meet him to ask permission to start on our journey. He seemed entirely absent minded on the subject as Tusilén and myself attempted to divulge the nature of the endeavour we had to embark on. Incomprehension, dilly dallying and obfuscation were all deployed by him as we sat before him in his office. Finally, Chu'éša stepped in and suggested that just she and I spoke with him; and so it was.

Although my actual suspicions were unfounded; I was not so wide of the mark, for Chu'éša had identified him for what he truly was. The shock of the revelation was the first time I have smiled for days, almost grinning when we departed from that sanctum, sworn though we were to secrecy as to what we had discerned. So much so that I will not even write of it here. Suffice to say that the gentlemen understood our purpose, did not expect us to succeed, or indeed survive and gave us warning of the troubles that might (or indeed would) beset us, beyond just having to deal with the entropic wards.

And so, we depart for Vrá. Not for home, but to the clutches of the devious Duke of Lnóris, who some while back attempted to forestall our initial setting forth on our "little errand". Recalling this, and if I were not so distracted by the triumvariation in my mind, we should probably have had a better plan than we do.

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü Aged 27

Part the Fifteenth – Internal Dialogues and Trialogues

Following the ridiculous disparagement I had received for “squandering” a scroll of refreshment for the nonsensical prevention of death and worse to friends and companions, I had secured myself an eye of retaining all things to carry some necessary vittles. Into this I placed the necessities that I believed would be required to keep my house guests in order, at least for the next 12 day or so. For the Sweet Singer: caskets of silver and gold desk with pretty gems and jewellery; for the ever hungry one: a chest of fine offcuts and offal, including hearts, brains and livers from a reputable butcher of Butrús, as well as other sundry fruits and sweetmeats which I expect I shall largely get on the outside of myself.

I have now begun to inwardly institute measures and controls to keep my uninvited house guests in some semblance of order. This has allowed me to concentrate better on the tasks at hand whilst also giving me a degree of internal entertainment and improving upon my usual internal dialogues; something I have long been used to encouraging as I am usually the only person I have found worth discoursing with on many of the subjects closest to my heart. I have thus established a degree of compartmentalisation and set about orchestrating my internal trialogues to keep my guest(s) engaged.

The hunger is much more complex than I had first allowed. It is not just a hunger for sustenance by mere vittles. It is a void in everything; a need to fulfil a whole spectrum of visceral needs. This has given me leverage to apply myself to providing a broader curriculum of inputs, beyond mere food, to fulfil the desires that have been washing across me should I leave my guest unheeded. The hunger is for everything: sustenance physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, knowledgeable and experiential. It is a hunger to avoid the void of endless and uncompromising ennui. A hunger for excitement and new experiences by something unfathomable and oh, so, so ancient! I have also come to realise how close minded and utterly cloistered I have been about my own limited experience of life and certain “fears and horrors” that I entertained have begun to fall away. I need excitement; I need release; I need to explore everything that I have previously denied myself. I need fulfilment! It is a terrifying yet utterly thrilling prospect that shakes me to the very core of my being.

This may well explain why my guest so savours the brains and hearts of its victims: the daises of the intellect and the emotions by which it can be sustained (however fleetingly) through the experiences of those that it feeds upon. Does it (or indeed now I) also hunger for genitalia? Maybe it also explains why I seem to remember everything that I experience too. The memory of a mere dew drop collection on a leaf, the unguarded and the disorderly internal monologues leaking from the minds of my companions! To counter this, I have taken to cataloguing my memories with mnemonic cadences to order my experiences for better retrieval by myself and my guest(s), but only when I/we seek to consult that part of the library of my mind, rather than have them thrusting unbidden from chaos.

My guests oft times squabble, struggling for my time like toddlers with parents; a most distracting and often disconcerting state of affairs.

As such, I have taken to setting my guest(s) logic and mathematical puzzles, opened conversations inward on a range of abstruse and not so abstruse subjects and finally, and, most successfully I have started to play games in my mind where formerly I only had my own self to pit my wits against. I have multiple games of here'úl and daghórr on the go now within the confines of my own intellect;

exploring the so far limitless opportunities to feed reason that these offer to myself and my guest(s). These exercises have been most illuminating; not only am I a palanquin touristique for my guests and an occasional battle ground of squabbles, but I am also an enigma to them. I bring them experiences unachievable and to a degree they also see me as an ally; neither have any wish to see the collapse of the fabric that holds our reality together rent into nothingness. For Lelmíyáni it would spoil her fun and bring her joyous wanderlust to an end; for Gurushá it would rob him of anything and everything for him to slake his hungers on.

If this was not bad enough, I have recently begun to receive unheralded and unwanted whisperings from the minds around me. Crowds are now even more anathema to me and the temple chants wholly interrupted by the tittle tattle of private musings on the part of my fellow celebrants. It really is all getting rather annoying to say the least!

To silence these whispers leaking from the minds of those that surround me I have therefore taken to developing mantras to overlay and mask their unbidden and unwanted outputs. Literally I am having to silence the deafening cacophony of others and still the maelstrom through the maintenance of a barrier of my own internal and private discourse; shouting myself into the void to drown out the damnable clamour.

The measures are already bearing fruit; already I can hear myself think again and my sanity is to a very great extent restored. I will, however, never be the same person that I have been again. I need to be so much more! And I am oh too keenly aware that nothing, no experience, will ever truly satisfy me!

How long this condition can be allowed to persist; not wholly just by myself but more particularly by the powers that be, is a matter of the very gravest concern. I have informed the temple of my present infection and I warrant that they will raise the matter to the highest degree imaginable. I can only imagine the ruckus that this will all cause, and I am certain that the most stringent and no doubt final steps will be taken to remove the threat which my house guest(s) pose. Death at this point terrifies me, for it will be utter and complete in its extinguishment and oblivion of my being and my immortal soul. But for the safety of all I must accept that may well have to be by my fate, to save my comrades and the Empire we serve from that which I carry with me.

blots from tear stains

The Diary of Anka'á hiSarashkü Aged 27

Part the Sixteenth – A Panoply of Planes

Our new Livyáni companion, Talūvaz, remained a troubling enigma. In fairness I attempted to explain the path that we were due to follow., feeling honour bound to communicate to him the nature and threat of our presently expected travails. I believe that he understood the intelligence that I sought to impart, but nevertheless decried any raising of his fee. In truth, I have met less honourable Tsolyáni!

And so we passed back into the basement of our friends the Many-Eyed Knowers of Teeth, and there through the manipulations of myself, Chu'ésa and Tusilén we opened a nexus; we believed unto Lnóris. We could not be sure at first if truth be told. Instead, we found ourselves in a circumnavigating and exceedingly finely built tunnel, the ennui of which was at least relieved by our discovery of several niches, protected by invisible barriers, beyond which coruscating power was clearly evident. For once we maintained a resolute and entirely forward path, finally turning right from our circuit towards the centre of the architectural ensemble. Dragon Warriors all of it, again, not that any of my companions really cared!

Entering a cross passage to the centre of this maze, it was poor Hokésh that learned the error of poor recognisance and he was all but completely undone (not to mention severely wounded) as a brace of bolts found their mark in his flesh. Considering how grievously injured he was, he took it quite well all things considering, quickly ducking to one side and waited, patiently bleeding, whilst more peaceable events transpired. Chrása had in the meantime shouldered me into cover whilst Chu'ésa, Tusilén and the rest also moved to covering and flanking positions.

Thereupon Chu'ésa fell to talking with our two assailants, seeking to prevent any potential blood letting between relations. In this she was entirely successful, lubricated by the offerment of a fairly hefty, and more's to the point, immediate inducement in coin. Content, the brace of guards tied and locked themselves up allowing us to go about our business in peace pending the arrival of the already called for reinforcements.

Manipulating the energies betwixt realities was as nerve wracking as one might expect, but also fascinating to a degree I could not have imagined. To have such power coursing beneath my fingertips! Hokésh meanwhile had stumbled upon another important aspect of our current endeavour; murals that were illuminated with swirling sigils and colours at first apparently much devoted to the Red Devastator but through our tender ministrations were finally brought through the spectrum unto the life giving stability and blue of our blessed lady. Instinctively I knew when we had been successful and so we departed at a rapid clip ahead of now rapidly arriving reinforcements. No fatalities, no kin slaying and no undue impropriety!

No return to Butrús for us; instead we set the nexus for far distant Tsámra in Livyánu and in an instant stepped from the corusessence into a rather familiar looking chamber; a twin of that we had seen on Vrá. On this occasion we decided to take a rightward course around the peripheral corridor. This time we barely noticed the clear niches containing swirling energies, so intent were we to avoid plummeting to our doom into the cavernous pits that lay beside and to the outside of our route. Not only disconcerted by the awful chasms but troubled too by what they could contain, the faint breath of which we could just about sense. Aqáà, and such aqáà that they would put to shame the stripling we had bested beneath the dentistry. Talūvaz, showing distinctly Trákonel like haste, hurried ahead

and I am certain that I was not the only one who had a fleeting rising of panic at the thought that he might be about to sell us all out to his kin.

Not so! Instead we came upon him talking with a number of his fellows, who showed remarkable civility and understanding, considering we had strolled so nonchalantly into one of their innermost sanctums. I was too distracted by the rising whisperings and singing in my mind to pay close attention. But I was lucid enough to assent to Chu'ésa's negotiation that the three of us who had to manipulate the energies should swear a blood oath to return to discuss the matter in due course in payment for our trespass. Thus agreed we had blood taken and were handed a strange golden disc that apparently would command a tubecar of the ancients to return us to this place to fulfill the geas. So, for the second occasion without bloodshed, kin slaying or undue impropriety, we succeeded in re-balancing the machine and with polite farewells made our way back whence we had come.

This proved even more terrifying than our first passage, as the aqáà had emerged from their vasty tunnels to sway and serenade us within touching distance of the walkway we followed. Their singing was surprisingly beauteous and in synchrony, with some cadences only discernible to the second mind. Thusly we returned to the nexus and directed it to transport us without dither or delay unto the Temple in the Forest of Black Leaves.

I am overcome with breathlessness at what I must now recount. We emerged from the sizzling, swirling energies onto a low platform surrounded by a flat plain festooned with a myriad of rapidly oscillating black panels. These panels shifted like a threatened swarm upon a tree branch, tracking a speeding bright orb in the blackness above, a miniature sun. A truly dizzying spectacle with the sun making a full passage through its arc in mere heartbeats bringing with it a rapid interchange between dazzling brightness (and warmth) and utter blackness (and bone chilling cold). Having set my mind to the task, my eyes adjusted quickly to the torment and the disquiet in the pit of my being from the dizzying sense of motion was quelled. I paused to drink in this peculiar and surreal sight; my first sojourn to another béthorm; a pocket dimension said to be at the interstices of multiple realities. So encompassing was my drinking in of this fantastical sight that I largely missed what my fellows were about. Instead still reflecting in wonderment, I finally ambled inward to find my fellows in discourse with none other than the mysterious lady of the Ndálu Clan, Lady Ejél Ndálu, that we had met under the facility of dentistry near Butrús. Once more she had her Yéleth in attendance yet seemed content enough to speak with us rather than contest the ground.

As I had predicted the book that we had sold to her had taught her secrets, including the whys, how's and wherefores of coming here to the nexus of the nexi. No doubt a critical part of the divine mechanism for which she seeks the keys. On my arrival my mind and hers briefly touched stunning me for brief seconds and for a merciful period the clamours of my companions in my head were stilled. She for her part seemed somewhat taken aback too, whispering in the intellect direct unto me that those of us who had this oh so precious gift should be faithful to each other. Perplexity does not even begin to describe the feeling that washed over me. What gift? Puzzled, I was so fazed I did not even strike up more than the most miserable of nugatory utterances when it was negotiated that she could watch us manipulate the energies of an engine that could well succour her and her foolish kind in bringing their sleeping lord back to our creation!

The machine itself had become infested by some unwholesome thing of dark energy that Talūvaz casually sent unto its uttermost perdition with a bolt of fire. For the third time, this time being watched hungrily by one who sought to learn, we plied the implements until Hokésh was able to report that we had brought the shifting murals back to the stable azure, befitting of the Lady. Thus, we took our leave of the hub of all ways and set our passage onward to far distant Gayél. At some point I noted

that Hokésh appeared to have also acquired a diminutive ru'ún akin to a metallic Tinalíya given to uttering occasional weebles and squeaks.

Gayél! The Forest of Black Leaves may have turned our minds; Gayél was something else entire! Again we stepped out of the coruscating nexus onto a platform above a lake of purest quicksilver, under a black sky and into an eerie place where there was no diffusion between light and shade. Around each of us was a rapidly diminishing bubble, suggesting that breathing here could soon become impossible. A multi coloured orb of subtle blues, greens, browns and white hung in the sky an immensity away. Closer at hand and seemingly oblivious to our arrival was the most beauteous woman I will likely ever see. Her beauty and presence was such that if I had not been in control of my primal instincts I fear I could easily have lost myself entire to the peculiar stirrings that coursed through and washed over me. We were in the presence of a Goddess! undoubtedly the Green Lady of Lusts. This vision of wonderment was carrying some sort of device comprising of tubes and hand grips whilst tending what appeared to be a huge cardamom tree festooned with peculiar seed pods. We did not pause, all aware that if we stopped we would all be lost in our entirety to that sublime green gaze.

And so we moved on along a path over the quicksilver lake to a sort of doorway. The devices we bore and the learning we had been given gave us access through a short passage framed at each end by a stout door fabricated entire from the metal of the ancients. The innermost could not be opened until the outermost was closed, and even then, there was a passage of time during which air appeared to rush into the chamber before the inner portal could be won.

Inside was a fantastical series of chambers. To one side a room into which a scintillating and subtly moving depiction of creation surrounded us. Here I had to pause, breathless to attempt to understand what I was experiencing. In time I could gather it was a simulacrum in light of our own creation. There was Tékel and there the moons, including Gayél, upon which we now stood. All swirling in a delicate ballet of ellipses and circles. In between the major players there were other peculiar tracteries marking the passage of wonders unguessed. The more delightful of my two house guests was clearly beside herself with glee at the wonderment; the other seemed grudgingly impressed if a little pre-occupied as to which parts were truly edible!

Whilst I was so thoroughly engrossed, my companions had elicited further things of interest. Clearly out of place was an unwholesome wart like excrescence adhering filthily to a wall; as was a web of seemingly organic webbing like the fruiting bodies of some horrid plant that was plastered over a doorway and apparently eating away at it with some form of acidic ichor. Elsewhere were a number of strange devices including a few clearly designed for use in non-human hands; these had the appearance of some sort of bullseye lamp with clusters of lenses and studs. One of them had a detached panel that had allowed a small cylinder to fall out. One of these devices stood on a table next to a pair of soft blue boots that Chu'ésa immediately fell in love with as a quaint fashionable statement. No sooner had my comical friend availed herself of her new accessories than she became the object of intense attention by some sort of floating kerchief of silvered filigree. A peculiar little dance ensued before Chu'ésa was herded back to the plinth where she was encouraged to remove her new boots for them to be immediately enshrouded by the floating net.

Elsewhere we noted another portal, a window through which gave us a view into some form of rock cut chamber containing a gelatinous blue pool into which larvae were being herded by a coterie of tiny ru'ún. Nearby were seed pods, obviously the eggs. With utter shock we realised that these larvae were in fact diminutive aqáà! The whispering in my head started immediately! We decided that leaving these alone was probably politic.

We then fell to playing around with various things. Myself and Vrishtára ascertained that the lamp like things were in fact miniature lightning bringers that could be set from mild scorch to hole in legion punching power. Avoiding causing inopportune injury to our companions we set to burning the sliming horror from the blocked doorway with nothing worse than some ringing ears and singed fringe on my part.

Meanwhilst, Chu'ésa, Ri'ísma and Talūvaz applied themselves to another peculiar podium covered in recesses and banks of lights. Through trial, error and not a little enlightened guess work they managed to ascertain that it was some form of controlling machine by which doors, lights, temperature and various other environmental conditions could be manipulated. To help matters further they began to label up the various powers initiated by each.

Finally, we came upon something that looked not entirely dissimilar to a lady's compact but when the fastener was pressed, instead of revealing powder or salve, it resulted in a peculiar tweebing from under a pile of rubbish. Investigation and some experimentation led me to divine that the compact and its hidden twin were in fact some sort of fabulous communication device.

Curiosity in no part completely sated, we finally decided that returning to the true matter at hand was in order. Tusilén and Ri'ísma were to act as an initial rear-guard to hold the entrance, so as to secure our exit whilst the rest of us were to reconnoitre further. Ri'ísma kept one half of the communication device and myself the other so we could keep each party appraised of what the other was about. The various control buttons were pressed on the podium and the door that had been covered in filth finally persuaded open. Beyond was a chamber containing a vasty unlit pit. Utilising my powers in dark sight and distant discernment I was quickly able to establish its depth and that nothing untoward awaited us at the immediate base. After some chit chat back and forth with Ri'ísma and some playing around with the podium we managed to get the lights on to illuminate our descent; undertaken by some form of levitation provided by the chamber itself.

Once again we found ourselves in the familiar territory and layout that we had become accustomed to on our earlier journeys; making our way quickly around the circuit until we were brought short by the sudden apparition of a ssú! Luckily it appeared to be already seriously injured, but nevertheless the sight of something so inimical came as a terrible surprise. Chu'ésa promptly shot it, on this occasion wisely choosing action over words! Hokésh and Chrása then quickly finished it off with hand strokes. But what had left this dangerous monstrosity so crippled in our path?

The answer lay in the next corridor, the spine leading to the machine that we sought. Devotees of the Pale Bone! Four at least guarding the intersection with a further two wielding potent energies in the central chamber with the machine. My head by this point was full of whispers of alarm. The sweet singer, the devourer and the aqáà creche all in sympathy that whatever was afoot; it needed to be quickly arrested!

There followed an epic battle to win our way towards the hub with Chrása and I focussing on the foes to the right, Tusilén, Vrishtára and Hokésh those to the left; Talūvaz supporting where and when opportune. Somewhere, a poor Livyáni martyr took an absolute pounding in the ensuing melee. The centre ground was briefly closed to us by a roiling vallation of utter horridness; but in relatively short time the foes to either flank were dispatched by a combination of hand strokes and sorcerous energy. Not without severe hurt on our part though, requiring Talūvaz's healing magics to remedy.

By now the central spine had been barricaded by foul conjurations of a puissance one would normally associate with the sorcerous cohort of a legion. The other two ways into the centre had similarly been blocked. We also had problems being reported from upstairs, where the warty excrescence that we

had studiously avoided in its filthitude was apparently ejaculating forth a ssú. We called Tusilén down to be replaced by Talūvaz in support of Rí'isma to battle whatever was being hatched on our escape route. Tusilén brought with him the object that would help secure our victory; his Eye of Advancing Through Portals.

Before effecting the breach I had protected myself, Hokésh and Chrása with my unimpeachable shield, although in truth it had very little effect against the barrage of sorcerous and techno magical ordnance that was hurled our way it was most efficacious at keeping the odd missile away, and in particular during the last peculiarities of the battle.

We all gathered in one of the side chambers with the flickering portals, offered up prayers to our Gods and otherwise prepared. The awful eye of opening was plied to the wall and easily effected a breach, even through metal of the ancients. Within were two further sorcerous devotees of the Pale Bone, each with a brace of conjured warriors in attendance; no hedge wizards these! But well prepared, most excellently equipped and of utmost command of their powers. Behind everything was another pulsating portal to some void, the nature of which we probably did not want to consider too closely.

The nearest sorcerer, unphased by having the wall behind him disappear and a fusillade of thaumaturgy and missiles rain down on and around him, most adroitly shrugged the worst off and blasted our leading cadre with a heinous eye of nullifying ancient artefacts that he had been plying on the machine. Luckily with little effect as our techno magical ordnance was in large part with the rear rank of sorcerous and missile support. I quickly dispatched the two most distant bodyguards with a barrage of pummelings of Krá whilst Chu'ésa bravely charged alone to engage the most distant sorcerer that they had been protecting.

Chrása, Tusilén, Vrishtára and Hokésh all engaged the nearest sorcerer and his guards in violent hand to hand combat. For their part the pariahs landed a blistering magic upon us which robbed all apart from myself of their pedhétl entire. I barely noticed the attack so unyielding are my own magical defences and was therefore also able to avoid the follow up assault that robbed those affected by the first of the power of their minds. Chrása was not so lucky and was felled twitching and bleeding from ears and nose. Tusilén too was also thus accosted, but apparently they could find no active mind to latch onto!

By now I was in the very unusual situation of having for the most part exhausted my psychic reservoir and was forced for a while to attempt some minor prestidigitation to juggle the offending eye from the sorcerer's grasp, without effect, although it did cause him to immediately target me with the fell pulse again. Once more the terrible power washed around me, and again utterly ineffectually against the power of my mind. Things were indeed desperate, for although we had now bested all of the guards, the sorcerers proved to be most effectively shielded. Reckless of the danger I threw myself under the whirling blades to direct our eye of healing upon poor Chrása with some effect in bringing her slowly back to her senses.

As the closest sorcerer was finally felled by the rain of blows from those of my companions that engaged him, I darted to lend succour to Chu'ésa who was alone against the last. I still had a final Hands of Krá in me but having seen how they had previously shrugged these off, I chose in desperation to actually draw my dagger with the intent of closing! Luckily my utterly amateurish dagger work was not required as Chu'ésa despatched him just as I arrived.

We very briefly breathed in relief and having picked up the various hideous eyes that had been plied against us it behoved Tusilén to administer the coup de grace on the sorcerer that he had so diligently aided in bringing low. This did not quite have the effect that he (nor any of us) desired, as the mortal

stroke served only to create a cloud of loathsome black moths which immediately sought our perdition by feeding upon our souls. Here the unimpeachable shield proved its worth, protecting those huddled close to me from the predatory minor demons allowing them to be crushed by my last Krá and another hurled by Vrishtára. Having observed this disquieting eventuality, we decided to leave the other sorcerer be for now whilst we plied ourselves finally to the principal and most task at hand. Mending the ruptures in reality.

Here my dagger actually came in useful as we had to remove some form of concretion from one of the podial orifices that we were required to ply our tools within. No sooner was this task of cleansing complete when something stepped through the purulent portal at the rear of the chamber.

Resignedly I turned with my dagger ready to face whatever was now about to assail and surely devour us. Only to be affably and politely greeted by a particularly tall fellow dressed in a scintillating metallic carapace of the most iridescent blue. His sonorous voice rang in all our heads, thanking us for his present succour from a predicament most awkward and the most singular service that we had done the béthorm of Téकुmel in general.

Here in front of us was the entity known colloquially as Archer Hmí, but more properly the Boneless King and only in very right company: the Boneless God or the One Other¹, husband to (a) Dlamélis and guardian of the looms of creation, the pylons of our universe. The conundrum of a Pariah who has been protecting us all from those ravening without for ageless eons. An outcast with a long association with the Petal Throne and one who has had the ear of Emperors, through, I reason, the aegis of the Omnipotent Azure Legion? An almost impossible to resolve dichotomy between what is sacred and what is sacrilege and blatant heresy.

The baby aqáà exulted at his return from his imprisonment in the béthorm of the Pale Lady into which he had been translocated through the agency of her vile servitors. They also burrowed through to be with us and set about consuming the last of the sorcerers where it lay bleeding to death. And still that wasn't the last surprise that they had in store!

The engine on Gayél was now in a most cruelly parlous state to a degree that I could feel the rents and tears of reality flapping in the breezes of the void. We had arrived with only mere moments to spare! With our strangely avuncular host, we set about resetting the wards and frames bringing the whole teetering edifice of creation back to a semblance of normality; barely. Very, very barely. Oh so barely! Once all was balanced as much as it could be our host took us on a tour of his domain.

The simulacrum of our universe that we had previously witnessed was as nothing compared to the wonders that he showed us from his throne room. Majestic seats with a panoply of windows looking out into the void. Further flickering murals displaying the state of vast engines buried deep within Téकुmel and its brethren planets. Gayél itself was clearly in its entirety some mighty engine of the heavens whilst visions of the innards of Téकुmel revealed a labyrinthine network of engines linked by a skein of communicating routeways. All stuttering at the limit of their lives and potentialities. The realisation would surely have been bowel and bladder loosening for lesser mortals than those protected as I was at that point by my mantra of quietude. And within all of this the aqáà were no less than something akin to earthworms tilling the very alluvium of this existence; every one of them a seed nurtured by the Green Goddess and set on their vasty path through the void to continue their labours, knowing vastly more about what they tend than the children being lied to that their ministrations protect!

¹ On later reflection this particular appellation may not be entirely accurate

By now my guests were literally as beside themselves in excitement as I was myself, I am fairly confident that they had quite literally just invited themselves along as my guests and passengers to experience that which had been lost to them or was even never known. Meanwhile our host continued to ply us with undreamt of, and what would formerly have been impossible revelations. He had survived the inchoate void of the Pale Bone because she was absent, locked in some titanic and seemingly endless struggle within a béthorm connected in some way to Salarvyá. He himself was on relatively regular speaking terms with the Emperor and he greatly desired aid in his endeavours to keep the entire creaking edifice in balance. It would have been oh so easy to stay; perhaps I should have, as I'm not certain after all I now know and have experienced, that there is any true home for me back with my clan. Our time there with that great library of the heavens was instead, alas oh so short, oh too short. Instead we must return to no doubt tedious mundanity.

Chu'ésa tells me that there will be a great party on our return; strangely, that thought no longer absolutely terrifies me to the point of nausea.