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An Introductory Adventure for GURPS Tékumel, by Michael Cule.

Overview

The player-characters will arrive in Jakálla as refugees: members of a tribe fleeing their invaded homeland beyond the Gulf of Teriyal, to the south-west of Livyánu. Their spokesman, Pectai, is a young warrior, courageous but inexperienced, who inherited his position after the death of his father during the exodus. He is advised by Bevand, the tribe's old and crippled shaman. Players can take as their characters some of the other thirty or so adults in the tribe. Bear in mind these people are hunter gatherers. They may have many useful skills, but things like Fencing are unlikely to be among them.

The tribesmen are monotheistic, tending to simplify everything as 'good' or 'evil'. Their social structure is also considerably more egalitarian than Tsolyánu's. Pectai's decisions are often subject to debate, though everyone is in awe of the shaman's enigmatic pronouncements. All in all, they will probably take to Jakálla like fish to the desert.

The beginning

Read this to the players: All night you have waited, sleeping only fitfully, as the ship tossed at anchor in mid-stream, waiting for the tide to cover the yellow sand banks enough to allow the approach into the harbour. As dawn rises over the small ship The Joy of Ssamris that has been your home for the past month or

more, you become aware of the excitement that has been building in you and in your fellow tribesmen for the past few days.

You think back over the voyage from Nuroab. For the most part it has been long and tedious, broken only by the daily lessons in the language of the land you are bound for. These lessons are given by the slightly drunken scholar whom the ship's captain retains to act as his translator. Once the tedium was broken by genuine fear as you ran from a huge black ship which the captain said was crewed by inhuman monsters called Hlüss. He told the children that these monsters like to capture humans and keep them alive so as to lay their eggs in them, but most of the adults dismissed such travellers' tales.

You think back to the discussions you had with the scholar and the captain as they described their homeland and your own questions which sometimes caused them to laugh out loud at your naivety.

Questions, questions...

Here break off ask each player in turn: "What question do you most remember asking?" and give them the Tsolyáni's replies, bearing in mind that the captain is a proud sea-rover of low clan who is more tolerant of foreigners than most citizens of the Imperium. The scholar, who was of a middle clan but is now Nakome (clanless), is more knowledgable, but less reliable owing to his addiction to drink and his despair at his situation.

Now however an end is in sight as you approach the final destination. An end to tedium and to the monotony of ship's food and ship's discipline. You have packed your few precious belongings into bundles small enough to be carried and now wait as the dawn light grows over the ship.

For the past two days you have been sailing up a huge river estuary from the sea. As you sailed upstream you could hardly make out both banks at the edge of your

vision on either side of the boat. But gradually the banks drew nearer. On the right hand you could see cultivated lands with many river villages where youngsters would come out to wave and greet the boat. On the left hand far fewer villages or clearance, for there rose on that side the edge of a great plain of low-lying sandy flats reaching as far as the eye can see. Occasionally you hear the sound of some strange animal crying out from the sparse woods or see a huge flock of birds rise up and swoop across the river. At the high noon and in the afternoon of the past two days you have become aware of one certain thing about your new home: It is hot! In the afternoon even the youngest of your tribespeople become listless and tired in the oppressive sweltering heat.

But now, about an hour after dawn, the air is clear and the skies bright blue and a fresh breeze comes up the river, cooling you and bringing a reminder of the odours of the sea as the captain swings his boat round in a huge circle towards the right bank. You strain your eyes as you peer ahead to catch the sight of buildings rising out of the morning mist.

Landfall!

With a dramatic flair the captain strides to the prow of the ship and strikes a pose, saying: "Well, friends, here we are at last. Welcome to my homeland, to the great and powerful, mighty and ever glorious Empire of Tsolyánu, and to the fairest of her cities, the jewelled star of the south: Welcome to Jakállá!"

At first all you can make out are the tops of towers peeping over the mists but then come the sight of the walls of the city which rise higher above the waters than the tallest buildings you have ever seen before. You can make out that the city spreads either side of a central river and that the northern part must be surrounded by water on three sides. Behind the harbour as you approach you can see a huge avenue of huge majestic ziggurats rising with their marbled sides bright in the morning sun. As you approach from a tall tower beside one of them

comes the melodious sound of some form of bell or gong ringing out over the city. *Tung! Tung! Tung!* it goes and then others join in, each with a different tone or beat until the sound fills all the air of the city.

And then it's suddenly, "Here we are, Musa Jakálla Harbour. All ashore!" and the whole tribe is being guided firmly down the gang-plank and up the jetty and onto the quay. The sailors are busy getting their cargo offloaded and have no time to talk. And before you know where you are all sixty of you are standing with your luggage on the quayside with not a familiar face in sight. The women are trying to keep the children from wandering and the hunters and warriors are looking around and keeping the luggage from wandering. Around the palanquin of the legless old shaman are his two apprentices. All of you turn towards your leader, Pectai. What are you going to do now?

First impressions

Lay out the Jakálla map for the players. Describe the dock-side buildings. Mostly these are warehouses and such-like. From somewhere nearby comes the sound of a hammer ringing on an anvil, and outside a building at the end of the row a group of men wearing armour and carrying bows are marching back and forth under the watchful eye of a scarred older man. These are archers of the Legion of Girrikteshmu on morning parade. (Costume descriptions of passers-by will be found in SB\$1.950.)

At this moment Julula comes up and starts to demand to know what Pectai means to do next. She is a stout woman in early middle age and is the chief complainer for the women of the tribe. She is the widow of a bowyer and practices that trade. She thinks all men are incompetent oafs and never grow up. She will demand to know what they are doing about getting a roof over the children's heads. She never liked the idea of coming here and will do her best to

make life a misery for Pectai. If none of the player characters causes trouble at vital moments get her to do it!

The shaman, surrounded by his assistants is getting settled on a wooden platform on which he will be carried through the city.

Forms to fill in

Give them a few moments to make plans. Then comes their first trouble. A person in an ink spattered robe and with a bad temper comes up and fires a series of rapid questions at them. When some of them fail to understand, he will sneer, “Barbarian muck” and explain with insulting slowness that he wants to know who they are and where they’ve come from. He wants to know all their names, ages, where they come from and to whom they give their loyalty—and why they should not be entered on his register of Suspicious Persons Dangerous to the August Realm of the Petal Throne. He also wants to be bribed! (Chief characteristics: Greed, Officiousness and Xenophobia.)

If (or rather when) they get into trouble with this slug, a person dressed in full and rather splendid regalia of Chlén hide plate (mostly blue with white and gold trim) comes up. He is Drichansa hiNaratal, a Kasi (captain) in the Intelligence Branch of the Omnipotent Azure Legion, and is has just come from an all night interrogation at the nearby Tower of Bones. He will stop the party from being unreasonably delayed, explaining to them about the lack of rights of foreigners in the Imperium and the necessity of staying within the Foreigner’s Quarter. (Chief characteristic: Sense of Duty to the Imperium.) He doesn’t object to inducements as such but dislikes greedy fellows who would try to rob a bunch of refugees just off the boat.

Drichansa will get the forms filled in (and a copy sent to his office) and then arrange for two soldiers from the Legion of Girrikteshmu to escort the party to the foreigners’ quarter. They are instructed to take them as far as the House of

the Red Dome. The two soldiers are glad of a chance to get out of the tedious guard duty they had been scheduled for this morning and will gladly answer any questions the tribesmen have. They are firm but reasonably friendly.

See the sights

The following are some of the things they will pass on the way. (References are to the map of Jakálla in EPT.)

They pass between the temples of Hriháyal and Chiténg (23 and 24—for descriptions see Sourcebook §1.421). The party slows down as the young men stop to watch the priestesses on the left enact their morning dances. Have the characters make a language roll to understand precisely what the priestesses are offering! (Those with Lecherousness had better make Will rolls at -4.) Then from the right comes a hideous scream of agony as the Chiténg morning sacrifice begins!

As they pass between the temples of Qøon and Drá (19 and 20) they see the holy ones of the sect of Drá sitting in the sunshine, their blind eyes turned to the sun as they mutter prayers.

As they cross the Bridge of the Splendour of the Gods (62) a cry goes up from ahead: “Way for the mighty Lord! Make way for the Mighty Lord Vrimeshtu hiChaimanor! Make way for the Mighty Lord of the Clan of the Dark Flame!” The guards begin to move the party to the side for a procession, consisting of three guards at the front and three to the rear surrounding a palanquin carried by six hefty slaves on which lolls a very very severely fat man. As the procession passes by, one of the tribe’s infants rushes out in front of the feet of the guards. What are the nearest two characters going to do? Quickly! The guard is drawing back his foot to boot the child out of the way.

Calling to his slaves to halt for a moment, Lord Vrimeshtu will ask the soldiers who these people are. He will be very interested and even toss a bag containing 10 Kaitars if there has been any injury to anyone. He will be all false smiles and rather unctuous. He will then proceed on. (On a Vision roll, a character might notice the shaman and the Fat Lord lock eyes and a series of expressions cross their faces. A Psychology roll indicates that a complex series of psychic probes is flashing between the two. At the end they bow to each other with respect.)

At the far end of the bridge they will pass between two more temples. The guards will tell them to pause, explaining that they are passing the temple of the deity they worship. (They use the term *Hlimeklu*, which the tribesmen think is a sort of angel; the other terms used are *Mitlan* (god) and *Kiriqalu* (daemon?). The guards wish to pay their respects by watching the morning service.

Before that happens however, the party see the sacrifice atop the larger temple to the right (10), where a man is thrown into the flames in some sort of huge stone chalice. If questioned the guards will explain that that is the temple of the *Kiriqalu* of warfare, Vimuhla. Since the tribesmen are monotheists who talk in terms of good and evil, this event should spark an interesting discussion—which will be curtailed when the guards tell the party to hush as the ceremony is starting at the temple of their own god, Chegárra (25).

A tall man dressed only in a loin cloth is striding up the steps of the outside of the temple accompanied by two guards to where a group of priests wait by an altar at the top.

“Yan Koryani”, says one guard to another. “Yes, and one who follows the way of N’chel.” “Lord Serqu has been very generous to us. Having this one here will make all the difference.” “Hush!”

The man climbs to the top and then chants something to the sky in a language the player-characters don’t recognise. He then lies down on the altar and one of

the priests dispatches him with a single blow to the heart with a silver dagger. The two guardsmen sigh happily and wipe away a sentimental tear before moving the party on. If pressed to explain the difference between the two deities they will get uffy and reply that even a barbarian should be able to see that there's all the difference in the world. "Why, we didn't even torture him!"

Then they will lead the party up to the slightly lower but no less impressive internal wall that surrounds the Foreigners' Quarter. Once inside they will be led past the temple of Karakán (6), the Palace of Glorious War (4) and the Hostel of Birruku the Allaqiyaní (33). "You might want to stay there if you get a bit more money to spend", says one of the soldiers. Finally they arrive at the door of the Tower of the Red Dome (34). The guard will then solicit a bribe and, if given a Kaitar or so, will tell of a friend of his who lives nearby who is an agent for letting of buildings and might... just might...

A roof over our heads

The Tower of the Red Dome has: "insects, bad food and human riff-raff" and the women of the tribe refuse point blank to have anything to do with it. The lower middle class hostel is acceptable but will charge half a Kaitar a day per person and is unable to accommodate the sudden arrival of sixty people without doubling up the rooms it has spare...

At this point either they take the advice of the guard or the shaman uses his ESP to read the information from his mind.

A new home

The party are shown by the rental agent (a small, rather greasy Salarvyáni named Chisu) into a two storey building at the end of a long narrow alley. It is surrounded by other taller and newer buildings, but this means that it is nicely cool in the heat of the day. It is located at the centre of a block in the Foreigners'

Quarter some distance from the main streets. The agent says that the previous owners were a family of leather workers. They moved to another location when this place grew too small for them, and too hard for their customers to find. (This is not entirely true but is left for the next adventure to uncover.)

Physically the building is of the same type as most Tsolyáni construction: masonry with mud-brick facing. It has two storeys around a central courtyard which contains a well (dry and clogged with weeds) and a small derelict garden. The lower floor comprises workrooms and storage rooms, with sleeping and living quarters above. Across the square from the only entrance (a set of double doors at the end of the alleyway with a smaller wicket gate set in them) are kitchens, communal washing facilities and latrines opening into a sewer beneath, and a large communal eating/meeting hall which will just take all the tribe if they squeeze in. (Two sittings will be more comfortable.) There is no furniture that has not been broken up for firewood and there are signs that squatters have been using the place recently.

Having been carried round to inspect the place, the shaman sniffs and starts to haggle with the rental agent. The conversation is remarkably rapid considering that neither man is using their native language. The rental agent leaves about half an hour later, wiping his brow and saying that he will return the next day for the first three months' rent.

Loose change

Bevand the shaman calls Pectai to him and says that he must rest after that session. He wants Pectai to organise someone to visit a local jeweller to sell the stones he brought with him for local coinage, then to organise groups of people to buy food and other supplies for the tribe. "Get enough to last until tomorrow at least. We must learn to survive in this city. And don't send people out alone!

Groups of two or three.” If he has an apprentice among the player characters he will send the apprentice with the group going to sell the stones.

Bevand will give them directions to the offices of the Clan of the Golden Lintel. These are small suboffices in the Foreigners’ Quarter, not the main clan house. (Refer to the Tékumel Sourcebook §1.734 for description of markets and streets.)

When they arrive the building is closed up. The lintel above the only entrance has been daubed with gold coloured paint which is now flaking off, and there is a sentence painted above it in the flowing Tsolyáni script. To one side of the door is a hook on which dangles a small enamelled plaque: dull grey-green with two rows of four white ovals on it.

Just as the player-characters are getting impatient, a man bustles down the courtyard followed by a lumbering Shén bodyguard (the tribe have seen Shén before in Nuroab) and a slave (male, naked except for his bronze collar) carrying a heavy chest. The man apologises profusely for not being available and unlocks the door. From a box behind the door he takes a bright emerald-green plaque and changes it for the one on the hook. He bows the party in and insists that they be seated on the mat in front of his counting table. When the chest has been taken through a curtained exit and the guard has taken up position by it, he asks the party to wait one moment and then seats himself before them.

“My apologies. Our daily report to the main clanhouse. Now, your great and powerful name is who..?”

This man, Kuraideng hiHelgessa, has a Merchant skill of 15. The tribe’s gems are worth about 2000 Kaitars, though they have no way of knowing that unless they use psychic magic. Kuraideng will not be aware of any mental probing except on a fumble but will get very irritated at such behaviour if he does notice it. So will his Shén. He will offer a sum about half the stones’ value, and will also offer banking services.

Once the money has been got back safely, they must go about getting food for the tribe. Custom dictates this is women's work. In view of the shaman's advice, however, male player characters might well go along also. Split them into two or three groups, each accompanying one of the women, and play out the following encounters:

Whoa, babe!

The party is emerging from a shop hard by the Lordly Domicile of the Hand of Hrugga (36) carrying armsful of vegetables brought at the instructions of young Chuli (the prettiest unmarried female of the tribe) when a pair of young aristocrats, one Tsolyáni and one Livyáni, emerge from the Domicile and barge into them. "Where are you going you oaf?" changes to "Hello, there!" when the Tsolyáni spots Chuli. He will start to put the moves on her and the player characters must find some way of getting him off her. The trick is to do this without anyone getting hurt (or killed—both aristocrats wear swords and are expert at fencing).

To terminate the encounter a slaver's messenger will arrive to advise, "My Lord Surunsa, I've been looking for you everywhere. My master's compliments and he has some very special merchandise..." The noble will leave smiling, actually putting his arm around the little louse of a slaver as a scheme to kidnap Chuli occurs to him.

You lookin' at me?

The player-characters are waiting outside a shop which Julula has entered (forbidding them to come inside while she haggles) when they spot a weird bristly barrel-shaped nonhuman hanging around outside a nearby building. It is the first time they've seen an Ahoggyá. It is carrying a club and shield and, when it spots the players looking at it, it takes offence. "Hey, what you looking at?

What the matter with you? Never see an Ahoggyá before? What you mean no? You take the piss outta me!”

Then the Ahoggyá’s employer appears from the building. She is a Priestess of Dlamélish who has just visited an old client in the building. She is scantily dressed in diaphanous green veils and wears silver bells on an ankle chain. Her make-up and attire are apt to leave these simple tribesmen stupefied!

The priestess brings the Ahoggyá to heel. At this point Julula will appear from the shop threatening legal action against the shopkeeper. When she sees the scene outside she demands to know what is going on. The Priestess takes Julula for a player character’s mother or wife (whichever is more amusing) and leave with her guard.

Dead? I thought she was Mu’ugalavyáni!

If any of the player-characters actually do any shopping they will find themselves in the store of a spice merchant. He is a serious and honest gentleman and is both polite to the outlanders and considerate of their difficulties with the language. They get a very good deal out of him and as he wraps up their purchases their eyes fall on a small shrine in one corner of the room. There is a small portrait miniature of an attractive young woman on one side and on the other is a hideous carving of a skull-faced creature wrapped in grave clothes, carrying a copper dagger in one hand and a coiled snake in the other.

“Ah I see you have spotted my little shrine. The portrait is quite lovely, is it not? My late wife. It does me good to have her there where I can look at her all the time. The statue? Ah, but you are outlanders. You would not recognise our gods (*Mitlan*). That is Siyenagga the Wanderer of Tombs, one of the Greater Aspects of Lord Sárku, the Lord of Worms. My family has worshipped Lord Sárku ever since we came here from Ghaton many generations ago. We have never had cause to regret it and our faithful service and frequent giving have been well rewarded. As

I said to my wife last week, the reward that Lord Sáрку promises is certain and sure. Oh yes, she's dead. But I still see her once a week at the temple. And I've been aSsured that there's a place reserved for me right by her. Well mind how you go..”

Lord Vrimeshtu hiChaimanor is a Clan Elder of the Clan of the Dark Flame and a respected Lay-Priest of the temple of Wurú. He has not practised as a wizard for many years now but has devoted his psychic gifts to the advancement of his clan. He is incredibly fat and is reported to be incapable of standing unaided but he is also believed to know everything that goes on in Jakállá where he rules the local clanhouse like a spider at the centre of a web.

He called his young nephew Vortumoi hiChusu to dine with him, inviting his opinion on a scroll written in Bednálljan. The scroll (entirely genuine) is a poem that translates thus:

“Time to beauty's cheek brings dust The safest tomb will fall to mould Time to
the warrior's iron brings rust Even Sun-fires in time turn cold! Only the undying
Mind holds sure

The Truth once held, forever pure!”

A literature roll would identify it as the work of Bejordi, a court poet of the period of Utekh Mssa just before the move of the Imperial Capital to Béy Sü. He was a worshipper of Ksárul and his works are mostly lost. He was supposed to have written a history of the life of Queen Nayári and the succession of her son Ssirandar I but it is only known through references in other works.

Vrimeshtu then showed him another scroll written in Classical Tsolyáni: a letter by a member of the Dark Flame clan written in the year 245 AS reporting to his superiors in the Temple of Ksárul that he had found the location of the tomb of Bejordi on the fringes of the ruins of Ngala in the Flats of Tsechelnu. A map is

given and a description of where the tomb lies in the abandoned graveyard. He explains that he has not tried to enter the tomb because he had not discovered how to “placate the Outer Guardian” but that he believes reciting the enclosed poem will do it.

Vrimeshtu went on: “For some reason, perhaps the death of the scholar, the letter was never sent to his superiors in the Temple of Ksárul and has lain undisturbed in the clan archives until I discovered it two months ago. According to the letter the tomb contained not only some magical devices but also a complete edition of his works! I want that edition! Yet not only will the priests of the Doomed Prince want to get their hands on it: Ngala is sacred territory for the Temple of Hriháyal too! They will regard anything found there as rightfully theirs. Fortunately the tomb appears to lie outside the city itself, so there should be no problem there as long as the people entering the tomb are careful. To minimise the risk of people talking I have decided to employ barbarians—in fact, a group I discovered earlier today, who have only just landed in the Empire. They can be trusted to know nothing and understand less. I want you to lead the expedition; you read Bednálljan and are a competent sorcerer. Take your man Karunaz to keep the barbarians in line. Your reward, dear nephew, will be the devices that are mentioned in the manuscript and a third of any jewelry or other valuables recovered. I want the rest and will pay the barbarians. And all the written material comes to me!”

That evening at supper...

...the shaman will announce to the whole assembled tribe that they must do their best to find work and wealth. For as things stand they have enough to pay the rent and feed everyone for three months or less! It is urgent for them to find work and almost everything they earn will have to be added to the tribal reserves (kept by the shaman’s bed-mat).

Give the player-characters a chance to exchange news of the what they have seen that day. Suddenly there is a banging on the gate into the courtyard. If Pectai has remembered to order a guard at the gate, the guard will come in to announce that there is a stranger outside who wishes to see “whoever’s in command here”. Otherwise they’ll have to cross the courtyard and open it to reveal a tall figure whose face and upper body are covered with elaborate tattoos.

This is Karunaz, a Livyáni exile and hired sword who has come to Issue an invitation: “Lord Vrimeshtu hiChaimanor invites your tribal leader and his personal guards to lunch tomorrow at noon. Will you accept? Why? Well, I understand his lordship is thinking of employing you.” Karunaz’s tone implies the gods alone know why. “Now if you’re coming, I hope you’ll have the good sense to get clean and wear your best. Weapons? Nah, you won’t need weapons. Right, be ready tomorrow a kiren before noon and I’ll be coming to fetch you.”

After Karunaz has left, Bevand will call Pectai over and tell him that he will not be going with them. He confirms what they had suspected: the Fat Lord is a powerful telepath. “Beware, your thoughts will be as an open book to him.”

Let’s do lunch

Next day promptly at thirty minutes to noon, Karunaz appears. He inspects the barbarians and grudgingly allows that they have done a good enough job on their appearance. He leads them through the gates of the Foreigners’ Quarter, eastwards across the city to the better part of town. There they enter a large clan house, cross the outer gardens to a hallway and (after leaving shoes at the entrance) walk along a colonnade to the main dining hall. The people in the hall stare down at the barbarians from a series of tiered floors and mutter among themselves. Massive fans up near the ceiling waft cool air downwards while these aristocrats gossip and nibble at delicacies. They then are taken down a passage into a side room. Here waits the Fat Lord, sprawled on fine cushions with his

nephew at his feet cross-legged. The room has a mosaic floor, low table and calligraphy on the left wall. The floor is stepped to form four daises. The Fat Lord smiles in a friendly manner and gestures for his guests to seat themselves on the lowest dais around a cloth spread with breads and dips. He expresses disappointment and surprise that the shaman (“the revered and skilled one”) is not with them; but then, brightening up, he tells Karunaz to summon slaves to serve the meal.

(Refer to the Sourcebook §1.920 for useful guidelines on how to run this part. At CONJUNCTION I actually staged the meal with a paper cloth, plates and cups, wine, and all the strange looking bread, sauces and meats I could afford from the local delicatessen. I couldn’t find any naked slave girls in Cambridge though.)

During the meal, the Fat Lord will allow no discussion of business but enquires in an affable fashion about the history of the tribe and their progress in settling down in the Foreigners’ Quarter. Vortumoi will protest once or twice that his kinsman is allowing these barbarians too much familiarity but his objections are brushed aside. The Fat Lord continues to advise the guests on table manners. (“You like the girl, my friend? A charming thing and very reasonably priced at 2000 Kaitars. Perhaps if you visit again we could arrange for her to warm your bed mat one night. I’m sorry, did something go down the wrong way? Try the hriqa stuffed with minced hma. No, no, no, never with the left hand!”)

After the food has been cleared away and the wine served, he instructs Karunaz to dismiss the slaves. He then conducts a job interview explaining that he wishes to employ half a dozen warriors/scouts to accompany “this learned priest” (*Vortumoi*) on an expedition into the palmetto swamps to the west, there to recover certain artifacts from an ancient tomb: approximately a week’s work for which they will be paid 200 K each. (Tell the players this is enough to keep one person for over a year.) In addition the tribe will get 25% of the monetary value of any gems, jewelry or precious metals the expedition may recover. However, any

magical artefacts, writings or arcane devices recovered will be his. The trip will involve some danger and fighting, though how much is uncertain. They will be under the orders of his young clan cousin Vortumoi hiChusu, a Vth Circle scholar priest of Wurú. (It's obvious Vortumoi is staggered at an offer he considers far too generous.)

In haggling, he will go up to one third of the monetary value of the treasure and may be persuaded to advance up to 50 Kaitars per person. "When do I want you to leave? I think tonight will be best. Be at the landing stage by the Prison of Little Ease (38) tonight at the seventh hour (*tenmre*) and a boat will be waiting to take you across the river. Food supplies and water will be provided. Anything else you think you will require you must provide yourselves."

That night

They are met at the dock by a small fishing boat captained by a rough and inconsiderate Mu'ugalavyáni who orders them all to "get below and stay below". Those who listen and understand the whispered conversation up top can hear the captain telling Vortumoi and Karunaz that he is being paid to avoid the river patrols and therefore they will have to drift for a while with no light showing and no use of oars.

Towards dawn the next day they are dropped off on the western shore beside an old ruined guard tower. The captain says he'll be back here at dawn in four days' time and then again two days after that and two days after that. If they haven't made contact by then, they're on their own.

Lions & tigers & kayi, oh my!

It is a two day walk through the wetlands to the ruined city. The graveyard they want lies on the north of the ruins and they are approaching from the south, so it

may take time to get safely around the city. Remember that the terrain is waterlogged with many intertwined creepers, requiring them to detour often.

The first indication that Vortumoi will be a problem will be when he demands that “the foreigners” assign someone to carry a large black wooden box that he had unloaded from the boat. They will not discover what it is until they have carried it for a day and he opens it at their camp to decide what to wear that evening. His wardrobe.

All through the first day they hear the sounds of birds and other creatures crying out in the woods around them. Occasionally a huge swarm of multicoloured birds swoops up and over them. And at one point they hear a very human giggle from a nearby tree. If anyone is so foolish as to approach, a *kuruku* will reach down from the branches and snatch something from him before running away through the branches.

That first night make a random roll for player characters and nonplayer-characters alike. The one selected should make an observation roll to notice he is sharing his bedroll with a small black snake. If he fails have those sleeping nearby check at -3 to see if they notice. The snake is sleepy and finds the bedroll a nice warm place to sleep. It will bite at sudden movement. Its bite does 1-2 impale and the venom will paralyse within twenty minutes unless a HT roll or a successful Physician roll is made. (Make the HT roll in secret. Allow for Hypochondria!) A paralysis victim will be unable to move for 20-HT hours.

The second night

A host of four *vorodla* come flapping down out of the northern sky to attack the party. This is pure coincidence but should keep them worrying about their presence being known to somebody.

Look upon my works

Early on the third day they come to a rise and can look down on the ruins of Ngala resting in a small valley. They can clearly see the public buildings and temples surrounding the central square and the course of a river, now dry, that passed through the city. There is smoke coming from some of the buildings! On the other side of the valley they can see the ruined graveyard which is their goal.

Sneaking around the city takes the rest of the morning. Shortly after noon they come to the graveyard—the *savalikh hichalyal* or ‘City of the Dead’. It is not as impressive as later constructions, as Vortumoi will no doubt comment. Most of the tombs have been broken open over the centuries, but the one that stands at the far end is otherwise complete as far as the party can see. It is inscribed in Bednálljan: Here rests the Songbird of the Court of Utekh Mssa, Lord of All Men, Bright Emperor of All the Cities. Yea, here is interred Bejordi, whom the aeons shall not forget. Disturb his rest at thy peril, thou of less happy ages to come.

The open top of the tomb (a lid lies shattered to one side) reveals stairs leading down into darkness. The steps are only wide enough for single file. As they descend they hear the sound of movement below. Smoke is coming up the passage.

Ape-men

At the bottom of the steep stairs is a large rectangular chamber. It contains:

1: A small group of *Chnelh*—beetle-browed creatures resembling primitive hominids. They sit around a fire, their glittering eyes turning upwards in shock as the player-characters enter. There are three adult males, an adult female and her infant.

2: A gap in the left-hand wall where it has been undermined by the action of an underground lake. Beyond it, the lake stretches away bounded by a stone wall on the right hand side.

3: In front of the players as they come down the stairs is a huge pair of double doors. On it is a gigantic immobile spider-like creature. This might appear to be carved of stone, but any mages in the party will sense the highly magical nature of this at once.

Chnelh to the slaughter

The adult Chnelh will grab up sticks or burning brands from the fire and stand defend their home. Fighting them isn't actually necessary and hardly worth rolling dice over; they are simple creatures and just want to be left in peace. Karunaz will be in favour of killing them in any event. If the players become violent, play up the fact that they are slaughtering innocent creatures. Have the baby whimper pitifully and the adults look at them with disgust and despair.

The giant spider-thing is a demon in the service of Qu'u, Master of the Forty-Fifth Plane. Touching it will cause the unfortunate intruder to vanish, transporting him to Lord Qu'u's Citadel of the Twelve Pylons of Ta'lar. (Roll 3d6: on a score of 14 the victim reappears after a moment, unharmed but so traumatized by his experiences on the Forty-Fifth Plane that he cannot speak or act for the next 10-60 minutes; on 15+ the victim reappears dead, wrapped in a cocoon of white strands.) However, all this can be avoided by reciting the verse which Lord Vrimeshtu discovered, which will cause the spider to fade and the doors beyond to open.

Within is a simple chamber at the centre of which is a large black wooden coffin. Surrounding it are four *mrur* (zombies) in the armour of the First Empire, one on guard at each corner. The left hand side of the chamber has collapsed and the underground lake can again be seen on the far side of the stone wall which juts out across it from the outer chamber. This wall extends right out across the cavern, being part of the original cavern, and effectively divides the lake entirely in two.

The undead can be *Fast Talked* to a degree, convincing them that the party have noble intentions in taking the grave items away, but Vortumoi is the only one with the language skills to attempt this.

Assuming the player-characters manage to destroy the *mrur*, they can open the coffin to find a corpse (which crumbles to dust at the touch), a gold funeral mask and other jewelry (worth 6000 Kaitars), two Eyes (an Ineluctable Eye of Healing marked in Llyáni with 23 charges and an unmarked Excellent Ruby Eye with 31 charges), and two books which Vortumoi claims for his own. (These last are the complete works of Bejordi.)

At this point, anyone waiting in the outer chamber will get the chance to notice a large swarm of *kayi* (a dozen or more) approaching from the underground lake. The easiest way to escape them is to duck into the tomb and close the doors. However this will cause the spider demon to reappear and the doors to lock shut with our heroes on the wrong side. Anyone who tries to fight the *kayi* is likely to be drained of all HT. One or two characters might be able to flee up the stairs but they will then have the problem of making their way home alone.

Across the lake

Characters who flee into the tomb have only one escape route: across the lake. The water is too deep for wading. The only solution is to use the wooden coffin as a boat. Tipping the mortal remains of the renowned poet onto the floor, Karunaz helps the nervous Vortumoi into the prow and instructs the player-characters to use their shields as paddles to propel the vessel across the sea and into the mist that hangs there.

After a while they are amazed to hear sounds of laughter and music! There is light up ahead. Steering towards it, they find that they have docked at the wharf of a city. Disembarking they find themselves in a place where the inhabitants are in festival mood. Passers-by are dressed in very little, what there is being in

silver, purple and green. The local people will call out cheery greetings in what Vortumoi recognises as perfect Engsvanyáli! They always dodge out of the way when someone tries to touch them, and any questions are just met with a smile and cries of “happy festival!”

Looking onto the astral plane reveals that there are no souls where these people apparently are. Indeed there is only one living thing in the city apart from the party members.

Interlude: history lesson

Millenia ago, this city was a centre of the worship of Hriháyal because it was the place where she held captive a lustful *sharetl* (demon) who was her favourite lover. Then the high priestess Qestenil foolishly released the demon out of motives of pity—an emotion neither demon nor goddess were acquainted with. The goddess destroyed the city except for the underground section of her own shrine. And the player-characters have stumbled on the place where Qestenil is tormented every day for her sin.

The place of punishment

As the party pass through the crowd they should make an IQ roll to notice that they have come to a central square identical in layout to the ruined one they saw earlier. Ahead of them, seated at a fountain, is the one figure that does not fit in with the happy festival crowd. An incredibly old and filthy woman dressed in a few grey rags is weeping and moaning inconsolably. This is Qestenil, still alive after all these millenia, tormented every day by reliving the destruction which her misguided action brought about.

Once she understands that the player-characters are not part of the illusions which torment her, she will beg them (in Bednálljan) to kill her “before they

return. Haven't I suffered enough? Haven't I paid for my mistake every day for all the uncountable years?"")

As soon as it seems dramatic, squadrons of Aerial Ones of Tu'unkelmu (the ophidian flying demons that serve the goddess) will appear from a swirling purple vortex that forms over the city. They will swoop down and begin to wreak destruction on the city and its inhabitants. Doomkills! Lightning Bolts! Ripping inhabitants to pieces and eating them!

If the players stand back and do nothing they will watch as the city and its inhabitants are destroyed and finally Qestenil is torn to pieces by the demons. She'll be back tomorrow at the same time.

If they kill Qestenil as she asks them to, the demons will pause in their destruction, look at the party and make a telepathic declaration that all hear: "The Dancing Maiden will not be pleased by this."

Either way, the city fades into mist and all sign of it vanishes. When the mist clears the characters find themselves in a huge stone chamber. If they killed the priestess a small pile of rags and dust lies at their feet; otherwise it is empty. There is one exit from this place: a set of double doors. These are unfortunately bolted on the other side, and to make matters worse there is a *ru'un* on the far side! However, Vortumoi has a spell which will dissolve a hole through the door. The *ru'un* is programmed to stop people entering the chamber and will be momentarily confused when people run out of it. The only recourse is to run like fury and not stop for any who stumble. About fifty metres ahead the tunnel turns at right angles and the *ru'un* will not pursue after that point.

A score

At the end of that passage, they hear the sound of water ahead and come to a wooden bridge over an underground river. The bridge leads to a dock on the far

side where a small river boat is moored, its poop directly beneath the bridge. A priestess of Hriháyal is overseeing the unloading of a delivery of *zu'ur*. She loads a series of tightly sealed containers onto the back of a slave and leads him away on a leash. It is clear from the way he has to be guided that he is blind. The strange pair go up a ramp into a tunnel and up out of sight. (This tunnel leads up into the Temple of Hriháyal and even more trouble.)

The boat remains behind for a while before leaving. If the players choose to attack the boat they will discover aboard two human river riff-raff and a low-level grey ssú sorcerer. (Suggestion: since this is the first time the players have encountered these creatures, take along a plastic bag filled with cinnamon and have them make a Smell roll. Then give them the bag and say "You smell this!")

Aboard the boat are more sealed containers of Zu'ur hidden inside carpets, some slavers' chains and restraints, and a small bronze key with a triangular shaped head.

If they take the boat or let it go and then follow the underground river, they will come to a small cave where the underground river ends in a lock cunningly concealed to look like a waterfall. The lock can be operated with the bronze key. Beside the 'waterfall' is a bronze disk with a triangular hole in it; fitting the key into this and turning it lowers the lock down to the level of the real river.

If they are on foot they can walk back quite easily to their rendezvous with the boat that brought them here. If they have the river boat they can take it back to Jakálla. (They haven't got papers for it! Do they think to get rid of the *zu'ur*?)

If they slew Qestenil, they look back in the direction they have come and will see that, where the ruined city lies, a purple vortex has appeared in the sky. As happened originally in ancient times, winged figures are swooping down to wreak destruction on Ngala once again. The Temple of Hriháyal will be looking for whoever is responsible for this!

And if they interfered with the *zu'ur* shipment they now have unforgiving enemies in the Society of Emerald Radiance (see *Adventures on Tékumel Part Two, Volume One*).

Back in Jakálla

Vortumoi will insist on the barbarians coming directly back to his clan house to be paid “and receive his lordship’s thanks.”

They are seated in the same room as before and the Fat Lord will bring out the best wine to toast their success. However, anybody with Danger Sense feels very uneasy when they raise the wine to their lips. Poison! But how do they refuse to drink?

If the players need bailing out of this predicament, there is a whooshing sound in the air at the foot of the table and they turn to see Bevand the shaman sitting there looking a little flustered and irritated. The Fat Lord beams with pleasure.

“Ah, revered one. You honour us.” (He uses *tusmisimu*—the ‘You of Wide Journeying’.)

“Yes,” says Bevand wily, “I felt I ought to be here.” Those with Psi Sense can feel the tension between the two as they each probe the other’s mental shields and fail to get through. Finally the Fat Lord sits back and smiles.

‘Karunaz, this wine is not special enough to toast our special guest with. Clear it away and fetch some more. Tell me, reverend sir, do you play den-den?’ His voice trembles and he gestures to Vortumoi to bring forward his board and lay it between the two of them.

“Perhaps you could teach me?” And the young people are dismissed as the two terrible old men settle down to make better acquaintance.

Home again

The party is escorted by Karunaz back to the Foreigners' Quarter (Bevand says he will make his own way). As they trudge wearily into the clan house they are met by Julula:

“And where have you been? Gadding about all over the place! Why aren't you here when you're needed, eh, eh? Chuli's been kidnapped and you lot are off enjoying yourselves! Men! Isn't it typical? Don't you walk away while I'm talking to you...”

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