

THE EYE OF ALL-SEEING WONDER  
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**You're not in Kansas anymore**

*New Players start here, with guidance from Patrick Brady*

*This is based on the players' handout for my Hall of Stone campaign, set in northwest Tsolyánu. Player-characters all begin as clan cousins in The following is the gist of what players need to know at the outset:*

The planet you're on is called Tékumel. It was originally colonised by star-farers, but you don't know that. (It was sixty thousand years ago and th a bit since then; see box below.)

Your country is Tsolyánu, one of five great empires. The social background is not medieval, but closer to that of ancient China or India. The social hierarchy of extended family groups called clans. Politeness and honour are very important.

There are no horses or other riding animals (the colonists didn't bring any). There is a draft animal, the Chlen, which is like a six-legged tricerat

There are no stars in the sky. There are two moons, one green and one red.

There are several intelligent species, of which humanity is one of the most feared. The intelligent species are divided into two blocs. This dates b colonisers/natives split.

Tékumel is lacking in metal deposits. Iron and steel are extremely valuable.

The eco-system comprises a mix of native, imported, artificial and mutated lifeforms. Some of them are very unpleasant.

**Portable Memory Core 5:**

*External reception (audio); universal translator engaged.*

>

"Science Officer, reporting for commander. As the last surviving Alliance Officer, I leave this record in the hope that a humanspace ship will eventually find the c It's been sixty years since the stars went out. We never did find what hit us—my guess is some kind of weapon using a modified warp bubble, although it would than anything we developed.

"The human colonists have pulled together well, perhaps better than our nonhuman allies, but the Ssú and the Hlüss are a growing threat. This was their world i will be again. But I am hopeful: standards of education are difficult to maintain, but the human spirit survives. We have power from the reactor of the grounded metal deposits on Tékumel is going to be a problem in the future. We also lack any draught animals. We hardly thought to bring homes or meat animals to our must find substitutes among the indigenous fauna."

>

'Do you hear me, Memkor? My grandfather showed me the ritual to awaken you as his grandsire showed him. As tradition decrees, I make the report. The harve and we have traded three hma for a chlen to pull our new cart... Er... Oh yes, and some traders came in the spring."

>

"A wizard of the Bednalljan Empire fears not the spirit of the casket. Let it contest with me, and we shall see who is the greater.

"Pah! It does not emerge. This spirit is a craven thing."

>

"...See, the little light comes on. I told you it wasn't dangerous, Hashran. Some device of the ancients, to judge by its markings. The only one like it in the Empir great grandfather from one of his campaigns in the West. Not sorcery exactly, but certainly knowledge, if we could only understand how to operate it properly.' doesn't seem to actually do anything...

"Hashran? What are you fiddling with there? It could be dangerous! Hashran!"

(The sound of an explosion, followed by volcanic hissing.)

**The planet**

Tékumel has only been partially terraformed. It is big but light (lacking in heavy elements), around 0.9 g. The year is 365 days.

Tékumel is generally hot. In southern Tsolyánu it gets so bad that things pretty much close down in summer. As you approach the equator tempe C, forming an effective barrier to human exploration. There is no record of humans ever making it to the southern hemisphere and back.

**The Empire**

Tsolyánu (pronounced soul-YAHN-oo) has been in existence for 2359 years, ruled (with a few hiccups) by the Tlakotani clan. The present God-Ei Tlakotani, now an old man. His sons and daughters must vie to see who will reign after him. (The succession wars are about to start.)

The Tsolyáni are a proud people with an old civilization. Four neighbouring empires exist, but none is as great as ours.

**People**

There are no Caucasians, no Nordic types. Albinos and blue-eyed people are reviled as freaks.

The Tsolyáni are the main ethnic group in the Empire of Tsolyánu. Complexions range from golden tan to coppery brown. Men average 5'7" and slender/medium builds. Women tend to be a few inches shorter and a little lighter in colouring, with rather voluptuous figures. Hair is fine, stra there is little body hair.

The peoples of the northern continent are all fairly similar to the Tsolyáni, with the exception of the N'Iüss barbarians. N'Iüss are about a foot tal Tsolyáni, and considerably more muscular. They are often employed as mercenaries and bodyguards.

### Mythology

The most common creation story is that there was no creation: things just are. The gods are regarded as higher forms rather than prime causes, a Greek idea. Very ancient stories refer to humanity travelling from the home of the gods at a time when the heavens 'Were lit by lamps'. Moderns are on the food chain, not at the top of it, which is why the protection of the gods is so important. The exact nature of the gods is regarded as pointless to know, like wondering what the Emperor really looks like.

There are ten deities, in two opposed factions called the Tlomitlanyal and the Tlokiriqaluyal. Direct religious conflict between the two factions is limited by a peace agreement called the Concordat, which prohibits a 'hot' war. So, several Temples are engaged in a cold war of unparalleled viciousness.

The great majority of the population are illiterate, superstitious and conservative. You take the faith of your family. Most people are not fanatics, but few and they act as they believe the god desires (Vimuhla has berserkers, Ksarul has assassins).

The Temples control education and maintain an oligopoly on arcane knowledge. The kind of "zap-magic" common in role-playing games is the price you will not have encountered it. This allows more conventional nastiness to predominate.

### Currency

The Kaitar, a gold coin weighing 3 grams, is worth some £50 in modern money. Twenty silver Hlash make up a Kaitar. Twenty copper Qirgal make up a Hlash. Inter-clan favours are commonly used instead of coinage, and there is a rigorous code of commercial honour.

### Literacy

Literacy is a specialist ability in Tsolyánu, like computer skills in our society today. About 10% of the population are literate, and most of those are priests. Very few aristocrats or peasants can read and write.

Merchants are rarely literate. They don't need to be. Historically most businessmen have been illiterate; the Tsolyáni maintain this fine tradition. Accounts require notation, tally sticks are used. These are pieces of wood marked with clan symbols and other marks representing goods and quantities. One half stays with the purchaser as an invoice; the other acts as a reminder to the retailer. The two halves are put together when the contract is made. Because the marks are hand-made they are erratic and very difficult to forge. (This was the system used in Britain for a millennium. The increased use of written accounts practical during the 19th century. The fire that destroyed the Houses of Parliament in 1830 resulted from the over-zealous use of tally sticks.)

Another limit on literacy is the cost of the raw materials. The standard format for paper is a scroll 30cm wide and 100cm long (about as big as six sheets of paper). The cost of the equivalent of anything from £4.00 to £20.00. Parchment or vellum costs even more.

Reading and writing are not all; calligraphy is also very important. A hastily scribbled note is considered worthless, even if the information it contains is correct. (It's not just what you say that's important, but the way that you say it.) Tsolyáni writing reflects their social relations. Western 20th century writing is truncated; the Tsolyáni favour more of an Arab approach, where it takes ten minutes to get past enquiries about your family.



*Ssú Attacking*

Baron Ald Tsolyánu has been at war with its northern neighbour, Yan Kor, for several centuries. It was previously a loose hegemony of almost autonomous city-states, but it has been unified under a visionary in the form of Baron Ald, a former mercenary from the north-eastern state of Chlen.

### Mutant spiders ate my Chlen

The ecology is weird. Each colonising species brought its own animals (mankind brought its own). The indigenous flora and fauna are like something from the Jurassic Period. Some life forms are fundamentally different as to be mutually poisonous, or at least indigestible. The Time of the Mutants was uncontrolled competition. Sixty thousand years on, species have had time to adapt. The descendants rule.

There are similar lifeforms which may be the result of convergent evolution. They are anyway. For convenience the old Earth terms can be loosely applied: spiders, worms, snakes, birds. There are very few of what we would call mammals. This is because the spiders, fish and birds either ate them or just killed them without bothering to eat them. (They are, for example, the "insectoid" equivalent of the rat won the niche from our furry cousins. The "bi" operating at the big vermin end of the market, and they eat the small vermin. The "bi" operating at the big vermin end of the market, and they eat the small vermin. The "bi" operating at the big vermin end of the market, and they eat the small vermin.

Competition from gliders and floaters, the true wing being only one way of getting airborne.

Many of the middle-to-large animals have six legs. Sensory arrangements also vary. Several animals have more than two eyes. The three-eyed arachnids, which means they have a very wide arc of binocular vision.

Most people have a very limited knowledge of the natural world. If you live in a place where dinosaur-sized monsters wander the forests, curiosity is not a virtue. Most humans there are only two types of animal: the ones you can hunt, and the ones that hunt you.

### Common animals

**The Chlen:** A "triceratops" with six legs, used for haulage. It can charge reasonably fast for a short distance, but most of the time it lumbers along at an hour. Its hide can be peeled, shaped into armour and weapons, and then hardened by a chemical process to give Chlenshe, a light horny mate to bronze. In the absence of iron, this is what warriors have to make do with. At least it allows lots of fancy armour designs lacquered in snazzy colors.

**The Kuni:** A genetically engineered falcon. It has enhanced intelligence and specialised language comprehension. And it's more than you can afford.

**The Hma:** A llama-like animal used for fur and meat.

**The Hmelu:** A smaller, tastier Hma.

**The Tiuni (cat):** Not a common pet in the south (it can't cope with the local equivalent of the mouse), but found in cooler northern regions, where quite the same armament.

**The Tlekku (dog):** Several breeds exist. Hunting dogs are like big setters.

**The Rennyu:** A little bipedal animal occupying much the same niche as the dog, but more intelligent. Famed for its loyalty: "Man's best friend"—afford one.

#### Gene genies

Tékumel's original colonists were quite capable of building new animals for fun and profit. Some of that equipment survived and was put to practical (unpleasant) use during the Latter Times. There are still bio-weapons from the distant past. Most are under the control of one of the power blocs (societies of the various Temples). Meeting one is usually a terminal experience.

There are many odd beasts on Tékumel, and some of them are people. The N'lüss are one solution to the post-holocaust survival problem. Given time, down books, technical knowledge and culture, the ancestors of the N'lüss opted instead for engineering their genes to give their descendants raw civilization did not survive, but the enhanced genes did.

#### Friendly & neutral species

The sapient species on Tékumel are split into two factions: those associated with humanity and those who are inimical. This split originated in the humanspace expansion. The inimical species lost and were penned into reservations by the victors. The species we can do business with are:

**The Pe Choi:** Elegant forest-dwellers with a chitinous exoskeleton. Weakly telepathic, so they know when harm is done to one of their kind. Pea common sight in the cities of the north-west.

**The Tinaliya:** Small four-legged creatures with extremely logical minds. Few, and far away.

**The Shén:** Saurian bipeds that prefer hot climates. Very belligerent.

**The Ahoggyá:** Four-armed and four-legged; radially symmetrical with eyes on all four faces. Live in swamplands. Hate the Shén.

**The Hláka:** Furry winged biped with whip-like tails. Capricious and inquisitive. Sometimes employed by human armies as scouts.

**The Páchi Léi:** Reclusive jungle-dwellers that make good scouts. Friendly to Tsolyánu but hostile to the western empire of Mu'ugalavyá.

#### Hostile species

These are the enemies of mankind. They would like the planet to have a very different ecology. They are not numerous, but the regions they inhabit to discourage human incursion.

**The Hlüss:** Kind of aquatic scorpions eight feet long. They paralyse victims and lay their eggs in the body. Think of "Alien", only not so tough. (Before the Alien films were released.)

**The Ssú:** Four-legged and two-armed. Smell of cinnamon and speak in high chiming notes. Capable of hypnosis. Well organized.

**The Hlutrgu:** "Swamp frogs." Vicious; attack in hordes. Not overly bright.

**The Shunned Ones:** Weird chlorine-breathing aliens who dwell in sealed cities in the north. Technologically powerful but few in number.

One of the themes of Barker's world is the survival of humanity against the odds. Humans on Tékumel are not the fluffy neo-hobbits of too many people who brought you the Roman Empire, Rourke's Drift and Auschwitz. They breed fast, think fast, and make dangerous enemies. At the end, nonhumans are more dangerous than man, but humans make the best soldiers. To a Hlüss one human is a victim, but eight thousand are a legio.

#### The military

Several of the gods are proponents of warfare, providing strong religious justification for military action. In war the aim is to win glory and capture territory.

In Tsolyánu, soldiering is a profession with status. A captain (Kasi) has status equivalent to a high priest or a district commandant. The Tsolyáni comprises 397,000 soldiers organized into seventy-one legions. In addition there are usually around a dozen legions of nonhuman mercenaries. Like the British Army of the period 1850-1950. The Imperial Army is well disciplined, organized and supported. It is not used to losing. The tradition makes the regimental peculiarities of the British look inconsequential.

Officers are almost always from the upper classes. They may be chinless wonders but they are seldom cowards; they are expected to lead from the front.

#### Death before dishonour

The Tsolyáni military make the samurai look like Belgians. People will exhibit selflessness in combat which may seem extreme to modern eyes, but understand that the needs of the many must outweigh the needs of the few. A person who dies courageously gains great face. Of course, he is dead good personally, but honour is contagious and so his family, lineage and clan also get some fraction of the glory. He bequeaths honour to his line for it. For the typical Tsolyáni, brought up admiring the great deeds of his ancestors, there can be few better rewards.

A person who is a worshipper of one of the war gods also does himself some personal good by falling in battle. Getting off the cycle of rebirth is recruited by a god is the best way to do it. Everyone has to die sometime; for a Karakan worshipper, a glorious death is a career opportunity.

[\[Return to Top\]](#)