

A is for Akho

A is for Akho, the great sea leviathans who swallow whole ships. The Akho lives in massive deeps, which are marked on every chart; ships avoid them unless the Gods are unkind.

A is also for **Avanthar**, the tower of living marble, carved from the heart of a river-bend mountain over millennia to become the Golden Tower of the Seal Emperor of Tsolyanu. Once the new Emperor enters the great palace, he never leaves again, but his word is law across the Empire of the Petal Throne.

B is for Bey Su, the “uncrowned capital” of Tsolyanu where the bureaucrats and priests do the work of the empire. Where Avanthar is ornate, quiet and orderly, Bey Su is dirty, noisy and crowded with people rushing on all manner of vital errands. To be a policeman in Avanthar, you must be handsome and polite; in Bey Su, you must be clever and quick.

C is for Clan: The clan is a vast extended family, but also a tribe, a home, a corporation and a fortress in times of sorrow. Your clan will feed, house and protect you from harm, hide you from the police, seek your advancement in your profession, find you a wife or husband, look after your children, listen to your woes and applaud your triumph. And you will never refuse a clan-brother anything, as he would not refuse it to you.

D is for Dhi'chune: the youngest Imperial Prince and the one who knows the most of sorcery, Dhi'chune is a follower of Sarku, God of the Undead, and friendly with the temples of Hru'u and Ksarul as well. Should Dhi'chune succeed his father as Emperor, priests and wizards would be much in favor in Tsolyanu, and soldiers and merchants correspondingly less.

E is for Eselne: the bluff, hearty eldest son of the Emperor, Prince Eselne commands the Army of the Chakas. He is an able leader in battle, a good strategist, and no diplomat. If Eselne becomes Emperor, the Army will prosper and the Temples should tighten their belts. But what Eselne conquers for the Empire, his successors will get to keep, whether with the sword, the pen or the amulet.

F is for Favors: The bureaucracy of Tsolyanu runs on a sweet oil of favors given and favors returned. Money is much less often used to grease the wheels than is the granting of pardons, exceptions, indulgences, and grants to favored persons or those to whom the clerk in question owes other favors.

G is for General Kettukal hiMraktine: the greatest general of the 24th century, Kettukal has won signal victories on the Yan Kor and Milumanaya frontiers for thirty years and is the man the Emperor calls for in every military crisis. A good friend of Prince Eselne, General Kettukal is also the sworn enemy of Baron Ald, whose lover he slew in a siege many years ago.

H is for Hnalla, the king of the Gods of Stability. Hnalla, lord of Light, set the Second Imperium in motion and watches over its eternal solidity from his palace in the Sun. The temple of Hnalla oversees official transitions and announcements of the Seal Empire of Tsolyanu and is “first among equals” in the Tsolyanu pantheon of twenty gods.

H is also for **Hru’u**, king of the Gods of Change, lord of Darkness, who drives the universe constantly in wild veering swings to bring about the Fall of Night, when Order shall be shattered asunder and all manner of mad impossibilities will swoop into and out of being in every sensation-drenched instant.

I is for Eye: the ancients left Eyes of great power in their ruins, and they turn up all over the world. Shaped like a human eye, they produce mighty workings with the touch of a button, from floods of fire or lightning to tunnels through solid rock or instant transportation to impossible worlds of violet thunder and raging crimson ice. The sages can tell one Eye from the others, which can be useful if you want to avoid blowing up half your home province!

J is for Jakalla, brawling, bustling, steaming port city of Tsolyanu. The spicy cuisine of Jakalla burns even the iron palate of a Sarlavyani, the entertainments are saucy enough to pop the eyes of the most jaded Livyani aesthete, and the sprawling bourses regularly change millennial fortunes in a matter of minutes.

K is for Kolumejalim: when the Emperor dies, the temple of Hnalla gathers all his children for a series of contests to determine who will become the new Emperor. The games test strength, speed, memory, cleverness, strategy, luck, and other qualities, and only one contestant emerges from the Kolumejalim alive. Each Prince or Princess can bring up to three champions with him or her to take tests in his or her place. It is possible

for contestants to “renounce the Gold”, of course, and give up their right to compete in the Kolumejalim in exchange for a lifetime of pampered luxury, but this choice must be made before the first test begins!

L is for Livyanu: the nation of tattooed priests and sorcerors of the Shadow Gods, rivals or distorted reflections of Tsolyanu’s own twenty gods. The Shadow Gods’ priesthood controls every aspect of life in Livyanu, although they seem to leave their subjects plenty of leeway to devise intricate poetry, cuisine, sculpture and rites of love. A Livyani is tattooed with glyphs denoting his caste, role, family and other qualities, nor do they ever change in his lifetime. In rare instances when a Livyani has had to step into the shoes of a suddenly deceased superior, witnesses swear they saw their tattoos crawl and change into new forms before their eyes!

M is for Mu’ugalavya: the nation to the northwest of Tsolyanu. The “Red Hats” of Mu’ugalavya have a staccato accent and manners somewhat abrupt-seeming to the refined Tsolyani, but their devotion to the gods is, if anything, even more complete. Vimulha, or as the Mu’ugalavyani call him, Vemelish, is first among equals in their pantheon, with most warriors and many wizards decking themselves in his blazing red and orange. The “Red Hats” have a compound government of four Squares, governing the four quadrants of the nation with different uniforms, symbology, temples, and even seriously differentiated regional dialects.

N is for Ndalul Clan: a secret society within the Temple of Ksarul, the Ndalul are scariest of all to a Tsolyanu because they secretly renounce their birth clan for the allegiance of their own sect. The Ndalul Clan believes in political action by the Temples, and some of its agents are secretly enrolled as priests of Hru’u and Sarku, some at high levels. The sort of fellows who would wear a mask when they were alone in a dark room, and beneath that mask, another ...

O is for Omnipotent Azure Legion: The Blue Eyes see all. The Legion is more than the Empire’s most elite fighting force, though it is that as well. It is also the Emperor’s spy service, recording all that happens under the Petal Throne, for good or ill. The Legion is responsible for hiding the Imperial progeny until the Kolumejalim, and for the loyalty of the Empire’s generals. A special unit, the deaf-mute Servitors of Silence, bodyguards the Emperor himself in his Golden Tower at Avanthar.

P is for Pavar’s Pantheon: Pavar was the Newton, the Galileo of Tekumel, for he was the one who finally discovered which gods were real and which were superstitious

nonsense. The Tables of Pavar list all the many, many aspects of each of twenty gods: five gods of Stability, five of Change, one each for Rulership, War, Death, Love and Learning. Each god also has a Consort, a sort of specialist under the god's broad rubric, such as Hrihayal, Lady of Amusement, the Cohort of the Change Love goddess, Dlamelish.

Q is for Qol: head of a serpent, shoulders of a bull and body of a satyr, these weird monsters live underground and have been known to serve the Temples of Change as indefatigable bloodhounds. Often Qol lead packs of other, lesser underworlders, for their lidless eyes can see in blackest night, and their forked tongues can smell fear.

R is for Road: The Sakbe roads bind the Five Empires together. Remember that there are no horses, no draft animals, on Tekumel, just shank's mare. The Sakbe Roads are like triple-decker Great Walls of China, with the broadest lower trafficway for common folk, the middle for soldiers, and the upper, airy decks for nobles in their palanquins or sedan chairs.

S is for Ssu: The Enemies of Man are as old as we, and the roots of their hatred for mankind and his allies are lost in the mists of time. But by now, it is as instinctual of the hatred of a spider for a wasp, and the Ssu never miss a chance to harm and destroy humankind. They eat strange, toxic plants, called collectively the Food of the Ssu, and their skin is perpetually drying and peeling off, giving them a tattered appearance. The Ssu smell of musty cinnamon, and their voices are like tinkling chimes running up and down the scales. They see best in the deep blue colors and carry dim blue lanterns to light their way at night.

T is for Tsolyanu: the sun center of the age, the Seal Empire of Tsolyanu has lasted 2,365 years in the center of the West. Tsolyani are class-conscious, status-seeking, and prize "noble action" above all else. Nobility, to a Tsolyani, means fulfilling your role to the utmost. If you're a warrior, be Conan. If you're a wizard, be Gandalf – don't settle for Merlin, come back from the dead!

U is for Urunen: the centaur-like inhabitants of the southern continent appear as well developed as our own civilization, though their extent is yet unknown.

V is for Vridi: the proud Vridi clan of the city of Fasiltum trace their lineage to the First Imperium, and make no secret of thinking they, not the Tlakotani, should be the Imperial Clan. Vridi have been involved in several uprisings and plots, and are easy to

enlist in dire schemes at court.

W is for the West: the Five Empires are located in the civilized western half of the great continent of Tekumel. The wild East is home to anarchic tropical Sarlavyani city-states, the barbarians of the central hills, the Mihallu empire which still believes it is part of a vanished superstate, the Plains of Glass (site of an ancient battle) and sundry mysterious islands.

X is for the unknown: mysterious places abound on Tekumel's ancient surface. Devices of ancient times hide immense, unguessable powers. Magic calls forth inexplicable sendings from the Other Planes, and the Gods play their multidimensional games over the span of millennia. But the deepest mysteries lie in the human heart and mind, for no one – no one! – is precisely who he says or seems, and sometimes not even vaguely resembles his outer seeming.

Y is for Yan Kor: The rough and ready country north of Tsolyanu, united under the charismatic Baron Ald only recently. Yan Koryani society has clans much like Tsolyanu, but the women run the clans, and therefore the economy and society, while men are away at the wars. Usually, this meant wars with each other, but under Baron Ald, Yan Kor has put a massive army into the field against Tsolyanu.

Z is for Zu'ur: a deadly drug peddled by the Ssu to undermine mankind. One taste brings instant craven addiction, and the user dies within months. Religious and political differences notwithstanding, the whole human race agrees that the Zu'ur trade is a danger to all and must be ruthlessly crushed.

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