*Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium*

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100. INTRODUCTION

*Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* is a campaign supplement for M. A. R. Barker’s famous table-top science-fantasy roleplaying game, *Empire of the Petal Throne*. The setting of this game, first published in 1975, is a combination of Sword-and-Sorcery and Planetary Romance, strongly inspired by the works of Robert E. Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Jack Vance, along with the author’s vast knowledge of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Mughal India, the Aztecs and lastly his lifelong interest in “ancients” genre lead figure wargaming and Hollywood pulp-adventure films.

Thus, a very “Hollywood” but worthwhile way of conceptualising *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* is “Ben Hur-meets-Barsoom!” In other words, an ancient, non-European, fantasy milieu seamlessly melded with “sword-and-planet” style science-fiction ideas and elements.

Like all fictional role-playing settings, *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* establishes a detailed narrative backstory to the game world present.

This backstory begins with the, predominantly human, galactic empire conquering the planet Tékumel and terraforming it, which required ultra-advanced technology to be driven into the planet’s exact centre to regulate its orbit, rotation and gravity. Though Phil Barker never established exactly what this tech was, it fits the genre best if it is a millions-of-years-old relic not entirely understood or controlled by those employing it.

The indigenous life of the planet was six-legged, often venomous, and included sapient species having advanced technology. To this indigenous life was added creatures from the many different worlds of the galactic empire, also the nonhuman intelligent space-faring colleagues of mankind (as well as a few dangerous enemies).

Resources, especially iron and other industrial mainstays, were virtually exhausted by the galactic empire. In the game world present this era is thought of as an Eden-like period and is called “The Time of the Ancients”.

From their hidden strongholds the indigenous species, the Ssú and others, struggled against mankind, and can be assumed to have searched for some means of defeating the invader.

At some point (for reasons that are unknown but not unknowable), Tékumel’s entire star system – it and its sun, moons and sister planets – disappeared from the galaxy and found itself in a pocket dimension, a separate universe completely cut off from the Milky Way. The stars simply went out.

This instant and unexpected shift from one universe to another brought an immediate end to The Time of the Ancients. Natural disasters tore civilization apart, especially earthquakes, volcanism and climate chaos. The indigenous species also attacked and interfered with mankind’s attempts to respond to the event. Famine, plagues, violence and the hostility of the poisonous environment combined to nearly eliminate Man and his allies from the large planet. A civilizational devolution proceeded which took human life from a science-fiction starting point to a kind of “Tech-Lord Barbarism”. Warlords controlling still operating “super-tech” weapons or otherwise important machines were idolised as gods by ordinary, ignorant people (whose ignorance was forced upon them by events and their new masters). The arts of reading, writing and arithmetic vanished from virtually the entire population (which suffered catastrophic declines), and almost the whole legacy of galactic civilisation (everything from its production to its decorative styles) dwindled to nothing.

This period is now called “The Time of Darkness”.

Again, for unknown, but not unknowable, reasons mankind did not completely die out. The planet’s increased heat was an unexpected problem for the Ssú, the Hlýss, and the Chyrstállu. The Shén also seem to have helped drive the planet’s vengeful original species back, and afterward to have assisted their human neighbours so that urban civilisation in what (in the game world present) is called Livyánu could resume. Another unexpected problem for mankind’s enemies was the interplanar geometry within which Tékumel’s universe found itself. Whereas the original human universe seemed to be *closed*, the pocket dimension that Tékumel now found itself suddenly in was somehow *open* to others, and the denizens of those other planes-of-being became aware of the universe containing Tékumel’s star system that – lo and behold! – was in their midst. They then found means of contacting sentient intelligences upon Tékumel, and clearly decided that humanity and its nonhuman allies were worth preserving.

This communication and assistance was naturally slow to develop, given the barriers inherent in occupying separate dimensions. The “Gods”, as they would eventually be known, guided our so-called “Tech-Lord Barbarians”. This guidance added a psychical and interdimensional component to the surviving super-tech, which extended the life of many machines, especially weapons such as energetics and aircars.

The first “post-Time of Darkness” human culture able to organise conquests, and then to administer conquered lands (even reinventing written language to do so), flew into battle in aircars spewing slay beams. As a result, their victims called them the “Dragon Warriors”. These aggressors took over much of the territory that would, in the game world present, become Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium. Eventually, however, as their weapons’ powers finally faltered, the Dragon Warriors suffered defeats. The one thing that outlived their violent reign was the religious worship of Vimúhla – Sun God, God of Fire, God of War and Destruction. Certain of Vimúhla’s fellow deities also penetrated into Tékumel’s dimension. Current wisdom holds that the first of these was Ksárul, the Ancient Lord of Secrets, but the temple masters of Livyánu would laugh at this idea in its entirety. In contemporary Tsolyánu, people are taught to believe that Ksárul was joined by the female goddess Dlamélish, the necromantic Sárku, and finally the chief principle of evil, Hry'ý. Most are socialised to fear these “Tlokiriqáluyal”, these Five Evil Ones, also the Masters of the Shadow and the Old Gods.

The emperors of Tsolyánu originally worshiped Vimúhla, and they have named their empire “The Second Imperium” to reject certain perceived errors made by political and religious leaders in the past and to embrace, again according to their perception in the game world present, a correct path. This correct path was that adopted by the First Imperium, the historically significant concentration of authority and advancement of civilization that immediately followed the Dragon Warriors’ rule. It is significant that the Bednálljans (as the peoples of the First Imperium called themselves) were the first culture since the Time of Darkness able to build a city from scratch, on virgin territory. With the continued guidance of the Tlokiriqáluyal, the followers of the Empress of All, Queen Nayári, painstakingly developed a dozen important pillars of complex civilisation that ground society even today. These pillars include architecture, urban planning, the Hirilákte Arenas, clan and palace operation, military organisation and strategy, civic projects such as harbours, canals and the Sákbe Roads, laws and traditions regulating strife between religious sects, written language, and the absolute control of sorcerous knowledge. By the 1,000 Year Anniversary Celebration of Queen Nayári’s Reign, the First Imperium’s magicians knew a great deal about the art of sorcery. They knew that magic was as much a part of the universe as flesh-and-bone, breath, feelings and ideas, and spirit itself. They knew, also, that its use brought with it great danger and responsibility; and the First Imperium’s temple councils mandated strict secrecy and total control over sorcerous knowledge. This totalitarian insistence on control of magic marks the greatest divide, the difference between the Bednálljans and the Engsvanyáli who were their successors in history.

As material well-being increased across the entire population of the First Imperium, regardless of social class (plebeian, skilled or noble), people felt they had more to lose than previously and began to crave “Stability”. In answer to this craving, a religious revolution occurred that upset traditions people had observed since the advent of the Dragon Warriors. For thousands of years, the gods were understood to represent the four aspects of life – the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, and the spiritual (and a vital fifth aspect: the integration of all four). Thus, Vimúhla represented the physical, Dlamélish the emotional, Ksárul the intellectual, Sárku represented proper preparation for the afterlife, and Hry'ý stood for all the above correctly integrated into one single well-lived life. This was understood to entail both “Stability” and “Change”, which is why the pantheon was often described as “the Rulers of the Shadow”. Life was seen as an interplay of life and death, gain and loss, sunlight and darkness (like the dance of shadow upon a choppy sea).

The priest Pavár it was who answered the people’s need for Stability. He proclaimed that there were not five gods, but twenty; organised into two opposing arrays whose enmity was the defining characteristic of all existence. Opposed to the Tlokiriqáluyal, so said the priest Pavár, were the Tlomítlanyal, the Lords of Glory and Gods of Stability. Their representative governing the physical was Karakán; the emotional, Avánthe; the intellectual, Thúmis; the spiritual, Belkhánu; the chief principle of so-called “Good”, Hnálla. Additionally, each of the ten gods was served by another deity, one especially concerned with mundane affairs. These were the Hlimékluyal, the Cohorts. The words of the priest spread far and wide; and his miracles were impossible to ignore (he was clearly in contact with other-planar powers). It is interesting that his tenets were most quickly and thoroughly embraced by agricultural populations occupying the plains, the coastal flatlands, and the great river valleys. The pastoral populations long established in their defensible hill citadels nearer the mountains and head-waters of the Mssúma, Ranánga and Chaigávra rivers held to “the Old Gods”.

Of course, the Bednálljan imperial core, centred in the northern cities of Béy Sý and Fasíltum, was initially determined to slow the spread of Pavár’s heresy, to arrest its adherents, and to return the people to the worship of the Tlokiriqáluyal. Sectarian strife flared into religious wars that raged, died down, and then exploded into violence again. The Wrath of the Gods era tested the very survival of the First Imperium, but the empire survived. Tsolyánu’s favourite folk-hero, Hrúgga – Warrior of the Gods, lived and quested during this time. His most famous adventure was The Quest to the Centre of Tékumel. The great wizard Nyélmu also lived and cast terrible spells during this period. The Wrath of the Gods lasted many centuries, but finally The Concordat was signed, a treaty which forbids open violence between the Lords of Glory and the Masters of the Shadow. Over time, Tsolyánu’s bi-cultural civilization developed. In the game world present, citizens who worship the Tlomítlanyal live most of their lives in contact with people of their own faith. The same goes for citizens who worship the Tlokiriqáluyal. In Béy Sý the centuries have erased the fact that those who originally built the city worshiped the Tlokiriqáluyal, and that the last Bednálljan Emperor (one Tarishánde XIII) was an adherent of Vimúhla. About two thirds of Béy Sý’s population worship the Gods of Stability, with slightly less than one third worshiping the Gods of Change. These two separate cultures, when forced to do business with one another, behave correctly, circumspectly, with a minimum of interaction. No one breaks The Concordat; to do so would draw an immediate response from the Imperium (i.e., the “High Ride” upon an impalement stake).

Tarishánde XIII was the last Bednálljan Emperor because he gave formal powers over to the Supreme High Priests of Pavár’s Pantheon.

Thus there began what is called The Golden Age.

The Priests Supreme ruled over the Kingdom of the Gods, which governed more beings than any state except that of the Ancients. The empire of the priest-kings eventually included the entire Five Empires region of Tékumel. From the Tláshte Heights in the west to the Sleeping Desert in the east; from the Pentrúrtra Deeps in the north to the Deeps of Chanayága in the south – an area the size of Eurasia fell under the sway of Engsvanyálu. Lest anyone conclude that the rule of the High Priests was some kind of utopia, nothing could be further from the truth: it was a totalitarian state, one that used violence (and sorcery) whenever necessary. Nor did the worship of the Good Gods alter human nature all that much. This is proven by the Plain of Execrations in Milumanayá. The area was once under water, but now is an arid flatland northeast of Khirgár. Littered about the place are thousands of execrations, small clay idols with the name of a target individual (who suffers a curse upon the activation of its spells). In the game world present, scholars have determined that most of these curses were cast into some ancient inland sea, and thereby activated, by worshipers of the Lords of Stability. In other words, folks dedicated to the Tlomítlanyal were just as susceptible to greed, avarice, lust and violence as their supposedly evil counterparts who devoted themselves to the Tlokiriqáluyal. Just as today, so too in the past.

Human nature may not have changed much, but that region in the game world present known as Tsolyánu changed a lot. The Sákbe Road system was completed, and these linked together great cities – Béy Sý, Fasíltum, Jakálla, and Tumíssa (to name only a few). Late in the history of the Priestkings’ Empire, the fortress of Avanthár developed engineering and architecture like nothing before or since. In its heart, Engsvanyálu’s Masters of the Powers and the Ways carved Tirikélu, the Petal Throne. Suddenly, just as this project was completing, a catastrophe of unknown dimension overwhelmed all Engsvanyálu. The Kingdom of the Gods collapsed, and much of its divine wisdom (and sorcerous knowledge) died with it. This incredible disaster was followed by a Dark Age almost as total and terrible as that which had brought low the Ancients. In the game’s current day, theories abound, but no one has convincingly explained why the empire so suddenly perished (except to exclaim, “too much sorcery!”).

No one knows how long the Time of No Kings, as it is called in Tsolyánu, lasted (for calendars and even counting had disappeared). All that can be said is that eventually a leader calling himself the Tlakotáni conquered the home territory of the nation and established himself at Avanthár. From that mountain fastness the Tlakotáni Dynasty has ever since ruled in totally inviolable, stringently ceremonial isolation – its emperors’ only human contact being with deaf mutes called the Servitors of Silence. It must be understood that this ritual separation of all emperors from any observation undergirds the social stability of the Second Imperium. Assassinations are almost impossible. Political disaster never ruins the legitimacy of the imperial government. Personal foibles never spread via the knowing and smirking whispers of the masses. No matter what “person” is seated upon the Petal Throne, to the people he is forever the God-King at Avanthár. This “divine” protector is treated in every respect like a god: there are holidays and celebrations in the emperor’s honour; there are sacrifices and libations made to him; there are breeding-age high clan beauties brought to him for his pleasure; there are great mausoleums driven into the underworld for the housing of his mortal remains after death.

As pervasive as this civic cult of the emperor is, there exists in the game world present an unintentional challenger for this civic worship. General Lord Kéttukal hiMraktiné is the absolute favourite of the common people. They raise commemorative stelae in honour of his military victories. They burn paper cones bought from scribes with his name on them, a form of offering to the Tlomítlanyal war-god, Karakán. The Imperial Party has noticed this, as has the Royalist Party.

The emperor’s will is executed by fearfully competent political strategists, negotiators, torturers, assassins and sorcerers (all backed up by an imperial standing army almost one million in strength). Thus, Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium, also called the Empire of the Petal Throne, has reclaimed the legacy of mankind’s past and has prospered. Its success has lasted a formidable 2354 years. Portents and suggestive signs, however, indicate that this success may be at an end.

200. FOREIGN LANDS

A word about the lands bordering the empire is necessary. Beyond its western boundaries stands Tsolyánu’s greatest rival – Mu'ugalavyá. Across various rivers and ridgelines in the Cháka Forests, the Petal Throne’s blue-clad legionnaires face those of the Four Palaces of the Square in Ssa'átis, whose armour is lacquered a deep red in reverence of the war god Vimúhla. Mu'ugalavyá is governed by clan-councils of so-called “Princes”. There are four of these councils, each ruling a quarter of the empire from its palace within the capital city. Like Tsolyánu, these palaces conduct affairs via cross-clan obligations, but the Legion of the Mourners in Sable (the central powers’ equivalent of the Omnipotent Azure Legion) stands ever-ready to enforce the imperial will. Mu'ugalavyá differs from Tsolyánu in religious terms, not only preferring the Fire God above all others of Pavár’s pantheon, but also introducing an entirely new deity, the god Hŕsh.

Beyond Tsolyánu’s south-eastern frontiers, its soldiers stand on alert in case the feudal realm of Salarvyá attempts to revenge itself for its defeat in the Battle of Rý. The King of Salarvyá constantly juggles the power-plays of the nation’s great noble families, who intrigue throughout the Hall of the Dome in the city of Tsatsayágga and use the loss of their western provinces (Káija and Kerunán) to goad their sovereign into action. Salarvyáni custom establishes that the land’s nobles have the inalienable right to depose any monarch becoming ill or showing signs of weakness, so the threat of hostile action coming from the black-garbed warriors of Salarvyá is a constant from Sokátis to Jaikalór. Fortunately, Salarvyáni temperament and society makes its land armies prone to brittleness; this, however, cannot be said of the nation’s vast naval fleets (who raid far and wide in search of plunder). Salarvyá also differs in religious terms from Tsolyánu in that its people revere Shiringgáyi, a female goddess, above all others of Pavár’s pantheon.

Far to the southwest, across the Deeps of Chanayága, lies an ancient land of mystery and magic – Livyánu. This millennia-old theocratic state interacts only seldom with the other great powers of Tékumel’s northern continent (Tsolyánu, Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, and Yán Kór); instead, it focuses inwardly upon its half-human rituals of evil. The Petal Throne, therefore, knows very little about it. Its theocrats, whose gods aren’t even known by name (except a very few), have never acknowledged the cultural importance of rank, lineage, and clan that all other nations inherit from Engsvanyálu. Apparently, the Livyáni are organised domestically by the totalitarian dictates of secret temple masters; no foreigner is ever invited to know more than this. All that can be observed from what trade and diplomatic intercourse has, in the past, occurred is that as Livyáni advance in society they are tattooed with more and more brightly-coloured designs drawn from the intricacies of their almost alien religion. Livyáni women cannot be observed at all, but Avanthár’s spies have determined that, when they do emerge from seclusion, these females go about costumed as the monsters, demons, and gods of their virtually numberless myths and legends.

Northward, beyond the Desert of Sighs, stands Tsolyánu’s most recent military and political problem – the relatively new nation of Yán Kór. Until recent years, Yán Kór was a collection of independent city-states, but these have joined together under the leadership of a renegade Tsolyáni general named the Baron Áld. The empire has sent about a dozen Qadárni expeditions into Yán Kór, in an attempt to draw the criminal into a trap from which he can be captured, but so far to no avail. Three years ago, one of these expeditions caused an incident (see below) which makes inevitable a major war (Qádardàlikoi) with that northern nation of hardy and forthright men. The Yán Koryáni military cannot match the training, equipment, and experience of the Tsolyáni; for example, their legions muster as many men, women and youths as can be gathered instead of recruiting and maintaining a set number of professionals. This is a product of Yán Kór’s matrilineal culture. In terms of religion, the Yán Koryáni are known to worship all of the Gods of Pavár’s pantheon, plus a host of demigods, demons, and heroes drawn from older traditions.

Between Yán Kór and Tsolyánu lies a desert and mountain no-man’s land called Milumanayá. The western two-thirds of this vast tribal frontier is dominated by the Desert of Sighs, as large and inhospitable as the Sahara Desert of ancient Earth. The eastern third is overshadowed by high, arid mountain ranges. As mentioned above, the Temple of Ksárul, the Ancient Lord of Secrets, lies in ruins somewhere within the mountains of Milumanayá. Hushed rumour holds that, though the enormous blocks of stone making up its surface structure are a scattered jumble, underworld chambers remain in-tact that host dark adepts who manufacture creatures of nightmare such as the Qól, the Vorodlá, and the inescapable Hrá. Other dangers include the fortresses of secret political societies and splinter-cults of the Tlokiriqáluyal. An example of both of these within a single underground fraternity is the Incandescent Blaze Society of the Temple of Vimúhla. Its hidden citadel trains agents of the Vríddi Clan, fanatic flame worshippers and implacable enemies of the Tlakotáni Dynasty.

300. NON-HUMAN SPECIES

A word about Tékumel’s nonhuman allied species, especially those most suitable as a choice in character creation, is equally in order. The Pé Chói live the nearest to Tsolyánu; their lands lie beneath the eaves of the Cháka Forests separating the Tsolyáni Imperium from Mu'ugalavyá. They are mankind’s best friends, taking part in human society most easily and remaining within its lands longer than any other species seems able to do. They also make the easiest nonhuman species to roleplay, speaking human languages well and gesturing with their four “hands” in endearingly man-like fashion. In terms of class, the Pé Chói make fine magicians, since several of their innate abilities are psychic in nature. They can be found throughout the empire, but especially in the cities of Chéne Hó and cosmopolitan Tumíssa. The pugnacious, reptilian Shén live the furthest from the empire; their homelands lie further even than distant and distrusted Livyánu. The Demon Warriors, however, travel far to engage in combat, and they may be encountered throughout Tsolyánu as free-lance mercenaries. This makes them an ideal character species to choose by those who adore “hack and slash” action in their role-playing sessions. The Pygmy Folk, called “Ninínyal” in Tsolyáni, reside about as far from the imperial capital as do the Pé Chói, but their enclave lies on the border of Milumanayá and Yán Kór. These avid cheats and thieves ply the Sákbe Roads between all the cities of the Five Empires, and, therefore, can be found everywhere in Tsolyánu (from Thri'íl to Penóm). They make excellent rogues and break-in artists. The other nonhuman species are more difficult to roleplay and so can be ignored for the time being.

400. THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

Having briefly described the five major nationalities and the three major nonhuman allied intelligent species, from which to perhaps influence character building, it remains only to describe the present political situation within the Empire of the Petal Throne itself. As stated above, the current year is 2354. This is the default date of everything in this book, and no materials published subsequently to this will carry history forward in any way. It was M. A. R. Barker’s wish that what had been “his” Tsolyánu becomes “your” Tsolyánu, and the only way for that to happen is for this author to encourage you to determine what occurs after 2354, because of the events described below, yourself.

Essentially, there are four related but separate threats to the empire. They are: a) a probable succession crisis once the emperor dies; b) the ever-present possibility of religious war between those who worship the Tlokiriqáluyal and the Tlomítlanyal; c) the peril of all-out war with Yán Kór; and d) an intensifying danger posed by the Ssú, the Hlýss, and certain other inimical nonhuman species.

The Second Imperium finds these complications difficult to negotiate because there are four blocs vying for control within Tsolyánu:

THE MILITARY PARTY

This bloc was until recently commanded, informally, by the great general, Lord Kéttukal hiMraktiné, of the otherwise unexceptional Scarlet Flower Clan. The general’s service to the empire cannot be doubted. He defeated the Yán Koryáni three times in the last few years, all along the border between the Atkolél Heights and the nearest deep dunes of the Desert of Sighs. Before that, he overcame the Mu'ugalavyáni near Butrús and the Salarvyáni before the gates of Rý. In spite of his strategic brilliance, Lord Kéttukal has been exiled to the small wood-and-sandstone hill town of Chéne Hó in Dó Cháka. This is because of the machinations of the Royalists. These machinations, only possible after the Sack of Ke'ér (see below), took the form of a series of delicately staged intrigues that gave the Imperium reason to believe that Lord Kéttukal was angry about events in Yán Kór and interested in power of his own – nothing so major as a takeover of the Petal Throne itself, but perhaps a return to the Kerunán Protectorate (where he once ruled for a time) which might then be set upon a path to semi-autonomy or even independence. Kéttukal has been a war proponent, arguing for Qádardàlikoi against one of Tsolyánu’s neighbours; he knows better than anyone the rewards of this. The Royalists despise Kéttukal for his advocacy however. Victors, after all, would be awarded most of the administrative posts of any conquered lands. One weakness of Lord Kéttukal, however, is that his bloc is deeply, structurally, divided. Tsolyánu is a bi-cultural nation: people who worship the Tlokiriqáluyal do not consort with those who worship the Tlomítlanyal; thus, military men raised to revere Vimúhla find it difficult to place their lives in the hands of officers worshiping Karakán. General Lord Kéttukal derives from that sector of Tsolyáni society that harkens back to Éngsvan hla Gánga and that gives fealty to the Lords of Glory. An entire campaign could be devised that involved player-characters in these intrigues and cloak-and-dagger initiatives; the campaign would be less dungeon crawl and more covert ops in nature, but action-filled nevertheless.

THE PRIESTLY PARTY

This bloc, right from the outset, suffers even more strongly from the division noted above. When those who have dedicated the most alert hours of the most active years of their lives either to the Masters of the Shadow or to the Lords of Glory find themselves in an imperial palace chamber together (for purposes of negotiations), hatred hangs in the air like the pall of death. Feuds are never resolved. Glances are never overt. Hisses of detestation surreptitiously rip the air like daggers through distant silk. The divisions are more complex than even society’s incredible Tlokiriqáluyal/ Tlomítlanyal rift: the Old Gods themselves do not actually cohere well. The war god Vimúhla holds in contempt all others. The Dark Trinity vies against the forces of Fiery Destruction and of Undeath. The Temple of Sárku cares for nothing of this world of life and breath. Discord rules! Only the deadly agents of the Omnipotent Azure Legion maintain faces of placid unconcern. They can obliterate anyone seriously threatening the empire’s equilibrium. Priestly rank and social status are also connected with personal ownership of enchanted items or ancient devices; therefore, an entire campaign could be devised that enmeshed player-characters in the religious struggles of temples and pantheons. The scenarios would certainly involve much in the way of dungeon-crawling, as characters seek thirsted-for magico-technological treasures with which to advance their careers. They would also, however, include research, travel to places where rare books are hoarded, deciphering lost languages and codes, and unravelling the mysteries of Tékumel’s past. This is not so straight-forward as it may seem, as any secret adherent of The One Other would admit.

THE ROYALIST PARTY

This bloc is so named because its leaders are descended from Engsvanyáli and Bednálljan royalty. While the former generally worshipped the Five Good Gods and the latter worshipped the Five Evil Ones, these families are by now so interrelated that the religious sectarianism dividing the Military and Priestly parties is far less intense and problem-causing. This means the Royalists get things done: they comprise the main population from which come provincial lords, fief administrators, city governors, palace bureaucrats, scribes, etc. They want to keep things this way, and seek to curb the power of the Military Party (which they see as allowing upstarts into high society based upon “merit” of all things). They don’t mind allying with the Priestly Party, into which many younger sons find careers, but only to use the temples for their own aims. They also profess great loyalty to the Tlakotáni Dynasty, although only so long as the emperor defends their interests. When the imperium falls short in this, certain clans and lineages can be counted on to engage in sedition. The most powerful of these is the Vríddi Clan, the historical rulers of Fasíltum, the City of Chiming Skulls. The Vríddi evince disgust at Tsolyánu’s ruling family because they feel that their claim to the Petal Throne is stronger than the emperor’s. Campaigns centred around aristocratic player-characters focus on politics and social events: hunts, daily visits to the Hirilákte Arena, feasts, gambling sessions, duels-of-honour, battles over position, marriages (forced and otherwise), and gambits of every description. A well-written campaign of this type can be very rewarding, even though dungeon crawling is at a minimum.

THE IMPERIALIST PARTY

This bloc is the least divided, being comprised of the Tlakotáni family, personal friends of the emperor, the male clan-relations of Hirkáne Tlakotáni’s birth-giving consorts, and finally the courtiers, bodyguards, and political agents (who are organised into the Omnipotent Azure Legion) at Avanthár. This grouping, while the smallest in number, has access to superior enchanted steel weapons, artefacts of Engsvanyálu, and even relics of the Ancients. This is perhaps the most obvious sort of campaign to devise, one where veteran agents of the emperor are assigned various clandestine operations: thwarting threats to the lives of imperial heirs, preventing the provocations of religious fanatics that might cast Tsolyánu into wars of religion, deep undercover work to find out what strange powers the Baron Áld has been in contact with, hunting down the source of the drug zu'úr, or a combination of all of these. The Imperial Party seeks to maintain a balance between the military, the temples, and the ancient clans and lineages; it plays one off the other and throws its weight behind any underdog time and time again. Presently it supports the legions and Kéttukal because the priests and aristocrats have him in their sights. It doesn’t want a repeat of what happened with the Baron Áld. Longer term, another issue exists. The nation is called “the Second Imperium” for a reason; its name communicates a desire to avoid the excesses of the Kingdom of the Gods. And yet, in recent centuries, the empire has swallowed up five provinces of neighbouring states (Káija, Kerunán, Chaigári, Dó Cháka and Pán Cháka) and seems bent upon recreating Éngsvan hla Gánga. Certain powers have noted this. Thus we have a deep, underlying thread which might knit an apparently episodic campaign together.

This hidden-but-influential theme (that of the nature of the Petal Throne itself) is ripe with possibilities. At present (2354, please recall), the emperor is sixty-nine years of age. Games referees have the option of devising scenarios involving a succession crisis, and each of the above power blocs has a claimant to the throne (whose victory would affect the direction of the empire). General Lord Kéttukal is a personal mentor to one of these, Eselné Tlakotáni. One of the most powerful, and corrupt, members of the Royalist Party, Lord Chiringgá hiTíshkolun of the Golden Bough Clan, is father-in-law to another imperial heir, Rereshqála Tlakotáni. The High Princeps of the Omnipotent Azure Legion, Lord Qorumá hiRi'inyússa, has overseen the upbringing and training of yet a third imperial claimant, Mridóbu Tlakotáni. A fourth imperial heir, Dhich'uné Tlakotáni, has chosen, of his own volition, to disappear for training into the Kra'á Hills and the temple of the necromantic god Sárku. This causes disquiet even among those who control the Priestly Party. The situation, thus, is more potentially explosive than at any time in the nation’s history.

The situation is explosive because the status quo is untenable: either the Second Imperium remains faithful to its initial concept, or it commits fully to resurrecting the Golden Age. Currently, although Avanthár might disclaim this, both paths are being pursued at the same time. The Military and Priestly parties, comprised as they are of middle-class or “younger son” rank-and-file, prefer to bring back to life the Golden Age. However, the former would centre culture around honour, manliness and the legions; whereas the latter would centre culture firmly upon religious devotion, holiness, and the temples. The Imperialist and Royalist parties, made up as they are of the most high-status men and women of the nation, prefer to leave the Golden Age in the past (after all, it somehow caused a cataclysm nearly as destructive as the Time of Darkness itself). However, the former would homogenize society until there were no regional differences; whereas, the latter would encourage diversity, local power or semi-autonomy, and even fragmentation under various promises of confederation. A very ironic solution might be to negotiate full national independence for the various protectorates (Káija, Kerunán, Chaigári, Dó Cháka and Pán Cháka) and to offer some means of restorative justice to Yán Kór. This would necessarily involve all the four affected empires contributing to the independence and defensive capability of these entities, i.e., to truly locally loyal, national legions able to fend off future aggression by either Mu'ugalavyá, Salarvyá, Yán Kór or Tsolyánu.

But who could imagine such a thing!

You, the game referee. And you, the player. I have had Tékumel with me since I was fifteen years old. I now give this strange and wonderful world over to you. It is your imagination which must now guide the Empire of the Petal Throne through the spring and summer of 2354, through the harvest-laden autumn, and through all the years that follow afterwards. Remember, mankind and his nonhuman allies are essentially invaders; the world (while terraformed) tends toward hostility to human life and is naturally very poisonous. Finally, the Ssú, with their “hive mentality”, are not affected by individual greed and competitiveness and thus plan VERY long term. You must imagine how all that currently afflicts the Five Empires might possibly be a result of operations millennia in the making by the Enemies of Man. Also, there are enemies that even the Ssú fear.

Survival is a battle, and your in-game characters have only medieval technology, magic, and the intervention of the gods to help them.

Good luck.

420. THE PETAL THRONE IN 2354

The current emperor of the Second Imperium, whose ruling dynasty arose from a Vimúhla-worshiping secret society during the dark age following Engsvanyálu’s fall, is Hirkáne Tlakotáni, whose throne name is “The Stone Upon Which the Universe Rests”. This is a rather startling royal epithet, given that the Emperor only ascended the throne seven years ago at the already advanced age of sixty-two. The emperor was born in the late autumn of the year 2,285AS, during the reign of his grandfather, Emperor Arshú'u Tlakotáni. Hirkáne’s father, Hetkoláinen, ruled for over fifty years, and so the emperor “gave up the Gold” in 2345 because he felt that, at sixty, his age was such that younger half-brothers would win the struggle for rule. A brutal kólumejàlim followed, which wiped out the flower of the Tlakotáni lineage and resulted in the chief principal of the gods, Hnálla, choosing a twenty-six-year-old Mirsún Dlekkúminè as emperor. Less than two years later, however, the promising young emperor was dead from an overdose of the deadly zu'úr. Having given up “the Gold” already, Hirkáne Tlakotáni should have been disqualified from entering this second kólumejàlim in as many years, and yet he entered, forced at least one of his close relatives, Nállukan Tlakotáni, to escape with his life, and ended up ascending the throne. Whether Hirkáne had anything to do with Mirsún’s fatal overdose is not known, but the emperor seems to have expected to rule one day, for he began placing heirs in secret foster-families as early as 2324 (or even before). Hirkáne worships Hnálla, so perhaps that has some explanatory power; but there are individuals and clans out in the land that feel a cheat was perpetrated seven years ago.

440. THE INCIDENT OF 2351

Hirkáne Tlakotáni’s reign might indeed have been “rock steady”, had it not been for an unfortunate event during one of Tsolyánu’s recurrent military incursions into Yán Kór. In 2351, after eight attempts to forestall the creation of a fifth empire in the north under the Baron Áld, an especially ambitious campaign plan was adopted. General Kéttukal hiMraktiné drew his former friend and elder mentor’s attention to himself, while his lieutenant, General Qeqélmu hiViridáme, lead a sizeable detachment across the wastes and struck north, eventually finding himself before the walls of the distant citadel Ke'ér. This citadel was held by Áld’s mistress, the lady Yilrána. Qeqélmu ordered his subordinates to assault the fortress while he attempted to assist Kéttukal via a rear attack on Áld’s reserves. Surrender was demanded of the noble and beautiful Yilrána, but – thinking that her worthy consort must certainly be nearby – she refused. The assault went forward, was successful, and Tsolyáni General Bazhán hiSayúncha repaid Yilrána’s temerity by impaling her upon a stake before the shattered gates of the main keep. While there is certainly precedent for treating a recalcitrant defender in this way, to do such a thing to one of the noblest and most accomplished women of the entire north has been called into question in the few years since. General Bazhán paid for his cruelty; he was captured and slowly tortured to death by the Yán Koryáni. General Qeqélmu also died, but as a result of battlefield wounds unrelated to the sack of Ke'ér. The Baron Áld, finding his life’s love horribly held aloft by the impaling pole, vowed then and there to obliterate everything Tsolyáni. In the three years since, the Baron has worked without pause toward this dark goal. He has made secret alliances with no-one knows what strange powers; all that can be said is that his coffers seem bottomless, his troop strength nears that of the Petal Throne, and he is rumoured to be acquiring some horrible, forbidden weapon of the Ancients.

460. THE FIRST LEGION OF EVER-PRESENT GLORY

In *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium*, military legions are almost as important as clans and temples and the civic cult itself. All three of these power-poles place a great deal of importance upon military legions, which essentially have a life and personality all of their own. People never having served in a legion, but connected to that unit by clan or city or simple nationalism, feel high emotion whenever their legion experiences the glory of victory or the agony of defeat. Such is even more the case when a legion has a long history of battlefield excellence. This is what makes the First Legion of Ever-Present Glory the subject of such machinations in Tsolyánu today. Whoever commands this legion has a politically potent tool, a hammer really, with which to smash through to victory. The First Legion is comprised of eight-thousand of the empire’s best warriors and tacticians. Its lowliest infantryman can take on ten ordinary soldiers and win the day. In 2347, during the Battle of Rý, a few cohorts (400 men each) of this legion were ordered to block the escape of the nonhuman, reptilian Shén – roughly equal in number but seven feet tall and berserk. The disciplined soldiers of the First Legion methodically slaughtered hundreds of the Demonic Warriors and forced their leader to “accept the gold” (i.e., to switch sides). Currently the legion is commanded by the exiled General Kéttukal, but the Royalist Party would like to gain control of this political boon by naming their man, Wesséku hiTánkolel, as its Kérdu. Thus, a whole campaign could be devised that centred on the fate of this legion. It might involve actual lead-pushing table-top war games, but might include a dungeon crawl or two as well.

480. THE LIVYÁNI AS PENULTIMATE BAD-GUYS

The two influences that have defined, respectively, Sword-and-Sorcery and Planetary Romance as literary genres are Robert E. Howard’s “Conan” and Edgar Rice Burroughs’ “John Carter of Mars”. In each of these fiction series, a remnant civilisation of decadent sorcerers threatens from afar. In “Conan”, these threats emanate from Archeron and Old Stygia; in “John Carter” they arise from the Mind Masters of Old Lothar. *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium*, therefore, exercises a bit of literary licence by returning this trope to the forefront. This is accomplished by making Livyánu a decadent civilisation of almost inhuman evil bent upon world domination.

Tsámra’s secret temple masters view the Second Imperium as an impediment to their long-term plans. They are convinced that, after five all-powerful rulers bent upon restoring The Kingdom of the Gods, another long-lived and capable Tsolyáni emperor would complete the task. They tried to place Mirsýn Dlekkúminè on the Petal Throne, but this failed when the emperor took a zu'úr overdose. The Masters of Tsámra dare not attempt this again, for their ploy was nearly discovered in 2345. Hirkáne Tlakotáne, the current emperor, is clearly capable of manipulating the kólumèjalim to ensure that his heir has all the personal capabilities of Gyésmu, Gyésmu Dálisan, Heshtú'atl, Arshú'u, Hetkoláinen and himself.

The Livyáni therefore have sent their agent, the Lady Shahtáhmasèb, to pursue a multi-track plan to destroy the Second Imperium. The first track involves increasing the power of Hirkáne’s youngest son Dhich'uné. The Livyáni through their arts have given this fanatic follower of the god Sárku the belief that he is an avatar of his god and is divinely destined for rule. A second track involves supporting the Royalist Party, especially the Vríddi of Fasíltum, in their bid to regain The Petal Throne and to return the nation to its pre-Hejjéka IV political path (more feudal in nature, with autonomy for Fasíltum, Purdimál, Mekú, Sárku and elsewhere). To this end they have compelled the Priests of the City of Sárku to return three Clockwork Automatons of Qiyór to Fasíltum, and the government of Mu'ugalavyá to return yet another one. The Vríddi under Lady Elára’s stewards are emboldened. A final track aims to summon the demon Origób and have it employ its power of Sundering upon The Petal Throne.

The drug zu'úr is just an additional thorn in the Imperium’s side. The Lady Shahtáhmasèb is a capable operative, but her personality is such that she spends too much time hawking zu'úr and not enough time keeping other irons in the fire. In actual fact, the Lady Shahtáhmasèb is not Livyáni at all (more than that, she is not even human). It is up to you, the game referee, to determine what the Lady Shahtáhmasèb is, and for whom she ultimately works.

500. CAMPAIGN LOCATIONS

There are three important locations within which to set *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* campaigns. This is not to say that other settings cannot be chosen, but rather that the particular dangers facing the Empire of the Petal Throne in 2354AS manifest most critically in the following three locales: 1) Béy Sý – Avanthár; 2) The frontier with Yán Kór; and 3) Fasíltum, desert fastness of the Vríddi Clan.

520. BÉY SÝ – AVANTHÁR

The eventual imperial succession, sectarian violence, war plans and preparations, and the timeless hatred of the Ssú – all of these perils to the empire are coming to a boil in Béy Sý (the nation’s administrative capitol). This metropolis is larger than any other in the Five Empires, except for perhaps Tsámra in Livyánu. It occupies the west bank of the Mssúma River, which is a quarter mile wide at this point. The city governor’s palace lies to the furthest north, set within its own protective fortifications, gardens, and parade grounds. To the south of Governor Jijékmu hiSayúncha’s immaculately maintained residence there rises the temple precinct, the Hirilákte Arena (largest in the land), the imperial palaces around their great square, various barracks of illustrious legions, and lastly the Foreigners’ Quarter. Across the brown waters of the Mssúma stand several temples of the Tlokiriqáluyal, the City of the Dead, and the dreaded Tólek Kána Pits (a horrific imperial prison). Beneath Béy Sý lies such legendary sites as the Museum of Utékh Mssá, the Maze of Unreturning, and the Ultimate Labyrinth. Deep below these are the adits of the Ssú, who know full well the importance of Béy Sý in mankind’s overall control of the planet.

Two hundred Tsán upriver from Béy Sý rises the mountain-fortress of Avanthár, with the Petal Throne at its heart.

Between these two most important centres there is constant traffic, some of it on land and much of it via the Mssúma River. One might encounter the empire’s most stellar personalities along the Béy Sý-to-Avanthár axis: Prince Eselné returning to the Legion of the Mighty Prince barracks-complex and palace from a plea to his father for General Kéttukal’s release. Lord Khámiyal hiSayúncha, the governor’s nephew, heading north in an opulent river galley to argue the opposite. Miriggá hiDulumésa, the evil high priest of Hry'ý, meditating over how best to wrest control of Prince Dhich'uné from the undead masters of the City of Sárku. Prince Mridóbu arriving, apparently from nowhere, to confer with the deadly agents of the Omnipotent Azure Legion. The longer a campaign goes on, the closer to these important persons a party of player-characters gets. The closer to Béy Sý’s power centres, the more secrets get revealed. Eventually, the player-characters encounter truly historic threats.

540. THE FRONTIER WITH YÁN KÓR

General Lord Kéttukal, Prince Eselné, Lady Mríssa hiChagotlékka, Sérqu hiChaishyáni, and others hold various courts between Chéne Hó and Khirgár. These officers are the foundation of the Military Party. For the last three years they have been infighting with the Royalist Party, while at the same time fending off provocations by Yán Kór and spying on the Baron Áld. During this time, they have grown more and more concerned. The Baron has taken as his political advisor the mysterious Fú Hsí, a yellow-skinned being of vast sorcerous power. Rumours have it that this hitherto unknown personage has acquired for the Baron a “Weapon Without Answer”, and that this weapon will be on the Tsolyáni frontier in the Spring. Three landscapes characterise this frontier: the Chákan forests; the Atkolél Heights; and the Desert of Sighs. The Weapon Without Answer is reportedly large, and could not be brought through the forests or over the heights. General Kéttukal and his associates, therefore, reinforce the city of Khirgár, and its outer defences and nearby castles. Their efforts, however, are complicated by such men as General Korikáda hiKurúshma, Karín Missúm, and General Kuruktáshmu hiKétkolel. These worshipers of the Fire Gods have set up an alternative command court at Khirgár and at the Fortress of Chalukolumél (also, the nearby temple of the demon Jnekshá'a). Their legions are less tied to the Imperium and more tied to temple and city and clan. They lead Royalist forces, truth be told, and even meet with Prince Rereshqála at Tumíssa. How these men have gotten imperial approval for a “divided” command is completely unknown – some truly deep politics are involved.

Again, the longer a campaign goes on, the more important to the headquarters of the Military Party the player-characters become. Unlike a campaign centred in Béy Sý, it is the player-characters themselves who are likely to uncover secrets and to reveal them to their superiors. These secrets include Baron Áld’s plans, the Weapon Without Answer, the identity and powers of Fú Hsí, and the role of Tékumel’s inimical races in all that transpires.

560. FASÍLTUM, THE CITY OF CHIMING SKULLS

Geographically, Fasíltum is situated in the embrace of three steep connected hills, the River Eyági, and a fourth promontory across the river. The oldest section of the city lies to the north of the river, beneath Cho'ólan, Dzonóte, and Lekkún Kakkán (the latter meaning defensible tumulus). The newer city section lies south of the Eyági beneath Kà'á Kakkán, which is larger and higher than its northern sisters. Beyond the Kakkáns to the east lies the Foreigners’ Quarter, the great Gate of Trákonel I: the Blazing Light, and Seqhán’s Wall. The amazing Shaft of Lord Amúkanàtl pierces the cliff joining the Dzonóte and Lekkún Kakkáns. Driven and carved at the same time as Avanthár, this feat of engineering and architecture is the chief access to Fasíltum.

It is also its chief defence: chambers and murder-holes to all sides make any foes an easy prey to fire, poison gas, and other more esoteric weapons.

The river, Seqhán’s Wall, and Kà'á Kakkán defend the southern, newer, area of the city. There the four palaces of the Imperium, the Clan Council Hall, the Hall of Martial Glory, the Red Sandstone Palace, and various wealthy clanhouses stand, overlooked by the House of Emperor Khánmi'yel Nikúma I (a citadel atop the high prow of Kà'á Kakkán).

North of Kà'á Kakkán but south of the Eyági River lies city’s religious precinct, where temples to deities other than Vimúhla and Chiténg are allowed to operate. Further north, built deep into the crest of Cho'ólan Kakkán, stand the two most visible pieces of monumental architecture in Fasíltum. The first is the Palace of the Might of Vríddi and the second is the Fortress of the Emperor Khánmi'yel Nikúma II. At sunset these glow red, black and white.

Just east of these buildings, Lekkún Kakkán rises to a conical peak. At its apex an ancient altar stands, along with a bottomless Flame Pit that dates all the way back to the founding of the city. This most sacred place is named The Pinnacle of Silence, and the city’s most important sacrifices are offered there.

To the far southwest, a few hundred meters beyond the city and topping the narrow ridge that makes up the stern of Kà'á Kakkán, stands one last fortification: the Citadel of the Twelfth Eye of Flame.

Upon a lower eminence forming the northeast wall of the Foreigners’ Quarter (called Chanésh Hill) stands the castle-like Barracks of the Legion of Searing Flame, 10th Imperial Heavy Infantry. The legion’s Field of War lies downslope just to the north of this castle but still within Seqhán’s Wall.

From the south-westernmost tower of the Citadel of the Twelfth Eye of Flame to the most north-eastern curve of Seqhán’s Wall stretches about 3,900 meters of territory. There are many beautiful and unique features to either side of this dividing line, quite apart from the chiming skulls which give the city its nickname. There are the sharply up-thrust hills, which seem to rise almost vertically from the ground; the eight or more immaculately maintained fortresses, the joined Temple Complex of Chiténg and Vimúhla (the largest in the world), the Eyági River and its three bridges, the walks atop the Dzonóte and Kà'á Kakkáns, the Pinnacle of Silence (whose flame is visible for miles and miles), the Shaft of Lord Amúkanàtl, and finally the Ancient Fane of Lord Vimúhla (though few ever see this).

Life revolves around religious and social observances in Fasíltum. The gargantuan Tunkúl-gong of the Temple of Vimúhla (and its myriad lesser imitators throughout the city) sounds at sunrise, as do the chanting processions that climb to the crest of Dzonóte Kakkán to share the first sliver of molten gold over the far eastern horizon. Then throughout the day further ceremonies are held. These conclude two hours after sunset, when chanting litanies performed seemingly by the entire citizenry reverberate softly off the walls of the four Kakkáns (creating a dreamy atmosphere). The evening meal at sunset is the centre-point of most people’s day, and the cuisine of Fasíltum is scorching hot. Holidays here are celebrated with intensity and passion. The least fanatic lay-member of the Temple of Vimúhla still spends scores of hours in personal preparation for various processions or costumed rituals throughout the year. These parades or rites include worship ceremonies dedicated to heroes, historic dates, the foundation of the city itself, legion victories, and even specific individual combats (as well as many religious holy days). The pageantry, rituals, and sacrifices observed on Chitlásha, the fifth intercalary day, know no equal anywhere in Tsolyánu (even Avanthár or Béy Sý).

Given the above, it should be little wonder that all Vríddi, and also all non-Vríddi, citizens of Fasíltum, appear supremely proud to the point of open arrogance. Besides Béy Sý, there is no more important city in the Second Imperium. The reason is simple: if the Vríddi Clan, which is descended from the royal families of both the Dragon Warriors and the Bednálljans, decides it can no longer abide being ruled by Tlakotáni overlords (who the people of Fasíltum believe were once Vríddi) they can easily tear the empire apart. Thus, all the four power-poles of Tsolyáni society (the Military Party, the Priestly Party, the Royalist Party and the Imperial Party) make constant diplomatic visits to the City of Chiming Skulls. There one sees all the imperial heirs, including the one not mentioned yet: Princess Ma'ín (who is not expected to vie for the throne once Hirkáne Tlakotáni dies).

Unlike the first two campaign locales, a Fasíltum campaign could (but would not have to) base itself upon flame devotees working for the Royalist Party. The longer this variety of campaign went on, the more important would the player-characters become to such movers-and-shakers as the adventurer Husó hiChiréngmai, the warrior Ahanbásrim, and the imprisoned queen, Elára Ferríya hiVríddi. The secrets of the actual origins of Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium would come to light, as would the actual events in 2347 that ended in the present emperor’s ascension. The mystery of the failure of the empire, given the Baron Áld’s threats, to declare Qadárdàlikoi against Yán Kór during the last three years might also be revealed. Should such revelations shake the throne, scope exists for Fasíltum to once again strike out for independence from the Second Imperium.

600. CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

The types of player-characters developed for a *Second Imperium of Tsolyánu* scenario or campaign depends upon the style of game desired. The game began as an ancients/ fantasy wargame as much as a fantasy role-playing game. Should a group desire their game to centre upon the war with Yán Kór, then obviously Officers, Bodyguards and Intelligence Gatherers (i.e., characters overcoming obstacles with “words”, “swords” or “secrecy”) come to the fore. If, on the other hand, a group should desire that the game focus on discovering “secrets of the Ancients”, then clearly Scholars, Sorcerers, and Underworld Experts take centre-stage. Interestingly, the first example is a very “physical” game; the second is “intellectual”. Games could also be centred around the “emotion” of family and clan, or the “soul” of religion and spirituality, or even a mix of all four. Tsolyáni religion is organised thus: with arrays of five gods, representing the Physical, the Emotional, the Intellectual, the Spiritual, and All-of-These combined. In this section, therefore, I will discuss “Karakán” games, “Avánthe” games, “Thúmis” games, “Belkhánu” games, and finally “Hnálla” games and the player-characters that these require.

All characters should have three goals which define their personality: 1) the outer; 2) the inner; 3) the love-interest. Since “conflict” is the essence of story, two of these three goals should conflict with one another. The discussion of game-and-character types will thus start with an exploration of certain beginning conflicts obvious to and appropriate for each of the above five. These will add depth and realism to a *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* game right from its inception. The more one learns about the game setting, the more inherent conflicts will suggest themselves. Love interests are very important. *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* is an offshoot of Planetary Romance. Romance is rooted in medieval tales of warriors pushing themselves beyond their limits to win their life’s love. Don’t neglect this.

700. THE KARAKÁN GAME AND ITS CHARACTERS

The Karakán Game centres on military conflict, initially on the “cold war” between Yán Kór and Tsolyánu, which people fear will turn hot after the rainy season ends. Conflict between those units whose soldiers worship the Tlomítlanyal and those who worship the Tlokiriqáluyal has already been mentioned. There is also conflict between middle-class officers who earned their commission by merit and those aristocratic officers who were given their commissions. And how about the debate between “Kýni” and “Káika”, war-lovers and defenders of their homeland? Take the impending conflict with Yán Kór: if that nation were committing aggression against Tsolyánu, few arguments would arise; but, in fact, it is Tsolyánu that has committed aggression against its far northern neighbour. This has been going on for nearly a century. The present emperor has had a dozen raids enter Yán Kór and Milumanayá in the last seven years. His father was even more bloodthirsty. His grandfather too! These men have not hesitated to damage trade, pressure clans, employ sorcery, even import the drug zu'úr into the north so as to achieve their aims. Then again the Baron Áld has escalated the situation beyond all expectation: he has apparently made dark pacts with inhuman powers whose purpose is the total annihilation of Tsolyánu!

You, as game referee, should try to unleash in-character arguments around the above issues whenever possible.

Characters appropriate to the Karakán scenario/campaign are military men, so, as per the above, design Officers, Bodyguards, and Intelligence Gatherers. Officers use their status, rank, communication skills, and contacts to achieve their mission. An Officer might need the cooperation of a Palace of Ever-Glorious War bureaucrat. Pulling rank might be required to assign a Semétl (a squad of twenty soldiers) to guard someplace important. He might have to argue his point-of-view to field grade officers, or else be assigned to a wrong course of action. Over time, all Officers develop contacts, even among their rivals across the Tlomítlanyal/Tlokiriqáluyal divide. It is up to you, game referee that you are, to write these sorts of social challenges into *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* adventures.

Bodyguards are fighters, characters who specialise in combat. A Bodyguard uses his prowess and weapon skill to keep his comrades alive or gain an objective. Every fan of sword-and-sorcery understands the place of combat challenges in an adventure; it’s what the whole thing is about!

Intelligence Gatherers are scouts and spies. They use their clandestine skills (tracking, covert observation, climbing walls, reading lips, etc.) to assemble an accurate picture of the military reality facing Tsolyánu. Intelligence operatives also have the brains and background to make sense of this reality, and the communication skill to convince the High Command (at Khirgár and Chéne Hó, for example) of the correct course of action to take.

720. THE HIRILÁKTE ARENAS

In M.A.R. Barker’s early writing on *Empire of the Petal Throne* there was a repeated emphasis on gladiatorial combat. *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium*, therefore, resurrects this very “Ben Hur-meets-Barsoom” motif and returns it to its central position in the milieu. Originally, the Five Empires were imagined as constantly sending champions to, and receiving enemy champions from, their international rivals. The people of the civilised world were also said to be as addicted to Hirilákte Arena events as the people of Rome or the Red Martians of Edgar Rice Burroughs’ Helium. The barriers between social classes are relaxed at Hirilákte Arenas, so these coliseums are fantastic places to start scenarios (where talk is freer and doesn’t draw attention).

Gladiatorial arenas have existed in the Five Empires since early in the First Imperium. The initial combatants were often prisoners of war, so some gladiators professionally specialize in the weapons and armor of so-called “barbarians”. Others perform in the equipment of ancient Fasíltum, a city governed by the God of War. Still others fight in mimicry of the non-human race, the Hlýss, or even sport the supposed weapons of the Ancients. Much later, gladiators began to represent the eternal struggle between the Tlomítlanyal and the Tlokiriqáluyal, so some today fight as heavily armored paladins while others fight as vicious dual-wielding reavers.

In 2354, current gladiatorial fashions are as follows:

*Banshees* – Female speed and movement fighters. No armor or light armor. Darts, nets, lassos, bolas, sickle blades for dispatching immobilized foes. Currently outfitted like the female auxiliaries of Yán Kór.

*Primitives* – Speed and movement fighters. No or light armor. Darts, caltrops, bolas, short swords and knives (balanced for throwing) The most recent fad is to equip them like the Lorún or the recently contacted Tané.

*Fanatics* – Semi-speed and movement fighters. Medium armor. The two-handed sword and a targe for closing distance. Often paired against Banshees and/or Primitives (for a satisfying cleave!).

*Phalanxers* – Heavy armor, spears, rectangular shields, currently fashioned to resemble Yán Koryáni troopers.

*Myrmidons* – Hlýss-like armor and jagged lightning swords. Defensive and methodical until close, and then explosively deadly.

*N'lyss Mercenaries* – Primitive tribesmen. No armour, and armed with a greatsword and axe. An arena favorite all across the Five Empires (especially in far off Livyánu).

*Paladins* – Super-heavy armor, shield and sword, often in the style of the First Legion of Ever-Present Glory or another elite unit.

*Reavers* – Medium armor, dual wielding (two axes usually) and dirty tricks.

*Silver Suits* – Specially-licensed silver bodysuits made only by the Temple of Ksárul, using as weapons The Splendid Eye of Krá the Mighty.

Gladiators don't always fight other gladiators; sometimes they fight mobs of criminals or war captives or animals such as Feshénga or Zrné.

A day at the Hirilákte Arena doesn't just involve fighting; there is music, food, popular dramas, and other forms of entertainment as well. Plenty of opportunity exists for rubbing shoulders, getting parties together, or spying on rivals and worse.

Karakán games based in Hirilákte Arenas, of course, have the unique characteristic of involving slaves, since all gladiators are unfree. This requires careful planning on the part of the referee, if variety is to be maintained. A positive aspect of gladiator games is that there is an obvious theme of “belonging”, a quest for freedom and acceptance by Tsolyánu’s very status-conscious society. This makes them a bridge into Avánthe Games, which focus exactly on such emotions as social acceptance.

800. THE AVÁNTHE GAME AND ITS CHARACTERS

The Avánthe Game centers on family, lineage, clan and political party. Conflict over stakes that are emotional rather than physical define this variety of scenario or even campaign. Many players find family and clan politics to be more rewarding as a game experience than a monotonous series of combat die rolls. Endless rewarding scenarios and campaigns can be adapted from William Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, and character-driven films in general. “Romeo and Juliet” is a beautiful example of a clan based series of scenarios, as is “King Lear”; in the former, young characters defy their elders in order to marry; in the latter, an elderly patriarch defies his children in order to recover his integrity. There are no limits!

Characters appropriate to an Avánthe game include The Good Clan Girl, the Rebel, and the Back-Stabber. Good Clan Girls have a protected place in Tsolyáni society; they cannot be sued in court, for example. This does not mean, however, that they are uneducated or submissive. They can be just as complex, capable and entertaining to play as a sorcerer. Additionally, the northernmost frontier of Tsolyánu exhibits the matriarchal clan structure of Yán Kór. In this broad swath of territory, females, while Good Clan Girls, are trained from birth to make decisions and to exert power. Game referees should feel free to design Good Clan Girl characters born and raised in places like Purdimál, Thri'íl, or even Yán Kór City.

The Rebel character charts a life-course against the expectations of his clan. He calls into question clan strategies or even crusades against clan corruption. The Akira Kurosawa film “Sanjuro” relates the story of idealistic young clan members fighting the corruption of their elders. Rebels need passion, persuasiveness and even skill-at-arms to succeed. Scenarios including a Rebel character should involve investigations and dungeon dives.

The Back-Stabber character uses guile and intrigue to rise through the clan hierarchy as rapidly as possible. Again, William Shakespeare specialized in this brand of person in the characters Iago, Edmund and Macbeth. Back Stabbers use falsehoods, forgeries and poisons to achieve their aims. The Back-Stabber Edmund, in Shakespeare’s “King Lear”, has all these abilities in spades, and great battlefield tactics as well.

Generally speaking, conflict in an Avánthe game remains interior to the person, the family, or the clan. Poor individuals, families and clans, however, might come into high conflict with the Imperium. Phil Barker never considered the subject, and perhaps the existence of mind-bars is the reason, but peasant rebellions were constant throughout medieval Europe, the Near East, India and China. Peasants often fled the lands to which they were assigned. In the *Empire of the Petal Throne’s* 1974 manuscript, Phil revealed that peasants are not allowed to cross Sákbe roads without permission. Any who do become nakóme (odd-jobbers, entertainers, smugglers, and bandits). Almost as often, these people band together into small armies and sometimes seize towns or even provinces (Ferinára is an example in 2354). This variety of family drama, clearly, bridges the distance between Avánthe and Karakán games.

900. THE THÚMIS GAME AND ITS CHARACTERS

The Thúmis Game centres upon knowledge and information, and – beyond simply the normal or paranormal knowledge a scholar might seek in furtherance of his career – certain truths about Tsolyánu threaten major civilizational disruption. Hints about the Tlakotáni Dynasty, the Petal Throne, the Pantheon of Pavár, and the plots against Tsolyánu have already been aired. Other forbidden truths exist as well. What are the demons, and how are they related to the gods? What of the gods of other nations? How are the Ssú such fearsome magicians? Ultimately, what forces work to destroy mankind and why? Any time disruption looms because of the release of information, a conflict arises between those who value truth and those who value the status quo. An apostate sorcerer could prove that Pavár’s arrangement of twenty deities, ten “good” and ten “evil”, is a fiction. Even Pavár himself acknowledged the existence of certain other gods. This seeker of forbidden lore, however, might also ask destabilizing questions about Hnálla, Hry'ý, and others integral to the nation’s religious system.

You, as game referee, should try to unleash in-character debates over the above mysteries whenever possible.

The Thúmis Game necessarily involves research into history, geography, archaeology, languages, scripts, codes, and ciphers. Characters appropriate to the Thúmis Game are scholars, so, as per the above, design Specialists, Sorcerers, and Intelligence Gatherers. Specialists use their knowledge, experience, language skills, and mental ability to achieve their goals. A Specialist might organize an archaeological expedition to the Valley of the Fire Kings in the Eyági Desert. Mastering a spell might be required to interrogate a minor demon about arcane lore. He might have to argue his point-of-view to temple masters or rival Specialists. Over time, all Specialists develop insights, even ones that call into question received truths. It is up to you, game referee that you are, to write intriguing mysteries into *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium* adventures.

Sorcerers are spell-casters, characters who specialise in magic. A Sorcerer uses his psychic ability and ritual skill as a boon or a bane to those involved in his adventures. Every fan of sword-and-sorcery fiction understands the place of magic in the genre; like combat, it’s what the whole thing is about!

Intelligence Gatherers are scouts and spies. They use their clandestine skills (tracking, covert observation, climbing walls, reading lips, etc.) to purloin scrolls, books, and text fragments for their Specialist and Sorcerer partners. Intelligence operatives also have the brains and background to navigate underworlds, ruins, and the shrines of secret societies and cults.

1000. THE BELKHÁNU GAME AND ITS CHARACTERS

The Belkhánu Game centres upon spiritual growth and sorcerous mastery (for sorcery is not just artillery; it's a lifepath that develops its practitioner's Balétl, [spirit-soul]). "Harry Potter", the most important fantasy series since Tolkien, is essentially one extended Belkhánu Campaign; a similar "school of sorcery" succession of games could be devised for Tékumel. In my “New Purdánim” campaign, teenage characters at first work to become initiates of inner mysteries. Their instructors send them upon missions to develop their sorcerous abilities. Success leads to invitations to selective tutorials where secret spells and enchantments are taught. Further success causes a few to be appointed senior apprentices, attached to second-tier sorcerers, who in turn learn from the true masters. Out-performing rivals in skills, rituals, knowledge-sets, metaphysics, enchantments, etc., culminates in the eventual creation of magic items, mastery of basic spells and rituals, and – most importantly – demonstrations of loyalty and devotion to the school’s High Adepts. The process continues over years or even decades of time, until the players achieve the status of “Masters of the Powers and the Ways” themselves.

Again taking “Harry Potter” as a template, characters appropriate to a “school of sorcery” campaign include the Fated One, the Precocious, the Psychic, and the Anti-magician. A Fated One character could know zero spells and rituals; luck and destiny simply follow that individual around wherever he or she goes. Alternatively, he or she might be heir to a special bloodline or destiny. This fits well with the genre and well describes how Phil Barker ran his personal campaigns. A Precocious character works hard and learns rituals very quickly, but often causes others to be jealous. A Psychic character perceives a whole world of things hidden even to other magicians. Perhaps she or he is especially attuned to the demon planes! An Anti-magician seems proof against sorcery, but for unknown reasons. If this magic-negating effect radiates out from the character, his or her comrades would have to cope with both magic debility and defensive benefit.

While sorcery on Tékumel differs from traditional medieval spell-casting (in that its inspirations derive partially from science fiction), it nevertheless incorporates almost all that exists in the canon. Thus, characters have plenty of scope to individualize the style of magic they perform. Phil Barker recognised two broad divisions of magical practice (psychical and ritual), but hinted at more. The legendary wizard Metállja, for example, headed a school of mystics called “The Blasphemous Accelerators”. These ascetics used magical symbols and deep meditation to shape reality in an extremely slow but impossible to counter process.

You the game referee can develop systems of discreet spells, improvisations using ancient symbols, ceremonial magic requiring involved rituals, the making of one-use enchantments, negotiating with minor demons – the sky’s the limit!

Like the Thúmis Game, the Belkhánu Game necessarily involves research into hidden and forbidden lore, piecing together clues, and dungeon dives. Remember, however, to keep the overall theme cemented to the idea of spiritual growth.

1100. THE HNÁLLA GAME AND ITS CHARACTERS

The Hnálla Game combines all the above in a seamless whole, and thus is likely the most important campaign style toward which an rpg gaming group might strive. Each character in a Hnálla Game seeks to improve their combat skills, to find true love and acceptance, to learn new truths about the nature of the Second Imperium, to develop spiritually (and maybe master a few useful spells), and finally to achieve success as a person. A powerful campaign plan for *Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium*, as stated previously, is to have characters form an Omnipotent Azure Legion clandestine “mission team” set up in Béy Sý and tasked to tackle threats to the empire. This team could begin with a mission to investigate the Livyáni renegade, Lady Shahtáhmasèb, and then expand outward to include Royalist Party machinations against General Lord Kéttukal, the revenges of Baron Áld, and finally the Ssú themselves.

Clandestine mission teams are composed of five operatives, much like the command staffs of individual military legions. Each team has an overall leader, the only person having a link to the team further up the chain of command, who directs four subalterns of various professional competencies. Agents practice the skills of their cover identity, but also receive intense training in combat, espionage, and communication techniques as needed. Furthermore, the overall leader is a subaltern in the planning team above, and each of his subalterns is leader of their own team of rawer sources, contacts and contract agents below. These higher and lower teams can be called upon, in part or in whole, under special circumstances.

In his early “Reports Submitted to the Petal Throne” articles from *The Strategic Review* and *Dragon Magazine*, Phil Barker suggested possible story arcs. One concerned the Legion of Kétl, the disappearance of a friend of the princess Ma'ín Tlakotáni, the secret abuse of Lady Elára Ferríya hiVríddi, illegal rituals conducted beneath the Tólek Kána Pits, and the emperor’s youngest son. An imperial mission team could be tasked with investigating the disappearance, kidnapping the Lady Elára, replacing her with a sumulacrum, and finally catching young Prince Dhich'uné in the act of abusing noble-class citizens. All of this seems to have occurred just after the near rebellion of Fasíltum in 2349AS. Saving the beautiful fire-worshiper, who is none other than the queen of the City of Chiming Skulls, from an eerie imperial heir is just one possible set of Béy Sý scenarios for a campaign based around imperial mission teams.

1200. IMPORTANT NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Before providing a sample scenario, a word or two about important people likely to impact player characters seems in order. These will be organized around the places, whether a political party or the courts of various imperial heirs, where they are most likely to be met.

To begin with, the city of Béy Sý revolves around two types of events: Hirilákte Arena circuses and nightly feasts of the nobility. Both of these offer scope for characters to rub shoulders, gain information, and begin adventures. Of the emperor’s children, the Princess Ma'ín Krytháin has the most socially active court equally engaged in putting on and attending these two different (but related) sorts of spectacles.

*Princess Ma'ín* – the emperor’s only daughter. The princess is known for her beauty, vibrant personality, and passion for gladiatorial contests, grand feasts, and secret gossip. Her whims provide the game referee with plot twists, as in the case of the disappearance of her friend *Lord Drésu hiNakkolél*.

The following persons currently attend the princess, the above eventually sparking the investigation into high clan young people disappearing into the Tólek Kána Pits. A constantly shifting circle of notables surrounds Ma'ín, and the list below serves merely as an example.

*Lady Shána* *Tlakotáni* – the granddaughter of Nállukan Tlakotáni, Shána functions as Princess Ma'ín’s chief lady-in-waiting. This member of the imperial clan has known the pain of betrayal and loss. She is a much better person than Ma'ín Krytháin, and tries to teach the princess true nobility.

*Lady Sitláya hiHehésha* – this young beautiful contemporary of the princess is notable for her intelligence and her Chákan looks (i.e., lighter eyes, hair and complexion than is usual in Tsolyánu). A priestess, Sitláya knows much about history, religion, sorcery and current politics.

*Lady Chía hiGíridra* – this high clan beauty is known for her charm, intelligence and devious ambition.

*Lord Chegálla vuMakkocháqu* – the successful exploiter of previously Salarvyáni forest products in Káija Province, young Lord Chegálla thinks of himself as the nation’s best jungle explorer. He is currently organizing an expedition in search of the fabled city of Lost Bayársha.

*Lord Drésu hiNakkolél* – this handsome young protégé of the duelling master Nírunel hiQolsúna (the empire’s most illustrious swordsman) has recently disappeared. Before that, he had won imperial gold by officially representing Tsolyánu in a highly publicized Hirilákte arena duel held in the city of Ssa'átis, the capital of Mu'ugalavyá. Drésu vanquished the Mu'ugalavyáni champion in a dramatic bout full of near disasters. His apparent abduction has discomfited the Princess Ma'ín Krytháin, and she has spoken to her father. The emperor has decreed that an investigation be made. Orders have come from High Princeps Qorumá hiRi'inyússa to one Chagúr, his secret lieutenant in Béy Sý.

A player-character mission team would get its orders from Chagúr.

Princess Ma'ín Krytháin’s allegiance is unknown. She appears to be on good terms with soldiers, priests, lords and imperial bureaucrats. Her older sibling Rereshqála Tlakotáni preserves no such balance, however. He is a self-avowed stalwart of the Royalist Party and schemes against all rivals.

*Prince Rereshqála* – the eldest son of the emperor, Prince Rereshqála is the odds-on favourite to win the Petal Throne once Hirkáne Tlakotáni dies. He advocates for the return of the Second Imperium to its original concept; in doing so, he is engaged on several fronts. He was involved in the intrigues leading to General Lord Kéttukal’s exile to Chéne Hó.

*Khámiyal* and *Ta'ána hiSayúncha* – these two fraternal twins are the in-laws and heirs of the governor of Béy Sý (Lord Jijékmu hiSayúncha). The former shares power with his uncle. He and his sister’s sponsorship of arena games, high feasts, hunts and other noble events is second only (in terms of frequency and scale) to the Princess Ma'ín’s.

*Lord Keréktu hiKhánuma* – this person runs Prince Rereshqála’s intelligence network, which is organised similarly to the Omnipotent Azure Legion. Should the prince arise to assume the throne, Lord Keréktu will replace the current High Princeps and a cull of that organisation will occur. Characters working as agents of the imperium will likely then be targets of that bloodletting.

*Lady Kalusý hiViridáme* – this mysterious beauty from Jakálla speaks many languages and has served as a diplomat, even as a teenager, to both Salarvyá and Mu'ugalavyá. She has recently sponsored the renegade Livyáni courtesan, Lady Shahtáhmasèb, in order to gain for her entrance into imperial circles in Béy Sý. In Jakálla, Lady Kalusý has matched Shahtáhmasèb’s fellow renegade Lord Múghniyaz with the Lady Mnélla hiSsánmirin (of the Clan of Sea Blue).

*Lord Beshmúlu hiVríddi* – this member of the powerful Vríddi clan is the prince’s liaison to the flame-worshipping command in Khirgár and to the City of Chiming Skulls. His loathing for the youngest imperial heir, Prince Dhich'uné, is an open secret.

*Prince Dhich'uné* – a wild card among the imperial heirs, this young man is the target of Livyánu’s long-term intrigues. At present, he requires a constant supply of victims to sacrifice while he learns the art of demon summoning.

*The Black Triad* – the Lords Vridékka, Churmegásu and Mirusháste hiTlélsu are three exactly identical triplets who attend Prince Dhich'uné. Hailing from the forbidden city of Sárku, their provenance remains a mystery. In actual fact, they are Livyáni clones, able to swap minds at will, who maintain the young prince’s delusion about being an avatar of his god. Sorcery, combat, and espionage are their respective specialties, but the power to instantly swap around abilities among the three perfectly identical bodies makes them extremely dangerous.

Presently, the Black Triad seeks to reduce the power and influence of the Vríddi, whom Emperor Hirkáne currently placates by preferential treatment for various posts and assignments throughout the government and military.

*Prince Eselné* – this aspirant to the Petal Throne has the largest support base, given that he worships the Tlomítlanyal and is the protégé of General Kéttukal. Having been blessed by the latter, Prince Eselné is expected to overtake his older half-brother and emerge victorious (should the emperor die while Kéttukal’s popularity is still high among the peasantry).

*Lord Kaishónu hiSsáivra* – this older aristocrat is the prince’s personal tutor, a specialist in History, Military Strategy, Politics, and Statecraft. He accompanies Eselné everywhere, and owns a device of the Ancients.

*Lord Ríretlu hiVrázhimy* – called “The Wrestler”, this friend from First Legion headquarters is a loyal companion of the prince. In fact, fanatic Ríretlu has appointed himself chief of the prince’s personal security detail.

*Lord Raimáne hiVorodláyu* – another comrade from First Legion headquarters, this former soldier works within the Palace of Ever-Glorious War in Béy Sý, and often accompanies Prince Eselné to Avanthár.

*Lord Ngáru hiTukkolén* – a third friend from First Legion headquarters, this Drítlan (colonel) of that legion is the nation’s most outspoken warmonger. He openly advocates that Tsolyánu resurrect the Kingdom of the Gods. Secretly, he feels Eselné’s greatest threat comes not from Rereshqála, but from Mridóbu.

*Prince Mridóbu* – this staunch supporter of the Tsolyáni Imperium and the peoples of Tsolyánu has actually wandered the land, getting to know persons of all social classes and regions. He is an officer of the Omnipotent Azure Legion, and disguises himself as the foreigner Chagúr when on a secret mission in Béy Sý.

*Lord Sérqu hiTánkolel* – this imperial officer has sky-rocketed into the position of the Legate of the Palace of the Realm at Béy Sý. His duties are manifold, and he takes his position very seriously, but he also works for Prince Mridóbu as a part of the prince’s clandestine “mission team”.

*General Kaikáma hiMrachiyáku* – this Béy Sý success story is a staunch supporter of the Imperial Party, and of the meritocracy of military promotion. Literate as well as a brilliant military tactician, Lord Kaikáma is much sought after for feasts, recitations, and other high clan soirees.

*Lord Huén* *hiMrachiyáku* – the brother of Kaikáma, Lord Huén is the capital’s current fashionable poet and author. He and his brother are close friends of Prince Mridóbu and they have pledged their lives to the cause of his winning the kólumèjalim, when it should occur.

*Lady Lithéni hiKarélsa* – this agent of the Omnipotent Azure Legion shadows the prince when he disguises himself as Chagúr. While perhaps somewhat plain according to the standards of beauty of her fellow nobles, she has that malleable face that makes for a master of disguise.

*Lady Nélei hiChaishyáni* – this young superstar advisor to the emperor remains close to Prince Mridóbu (even though she disagrees with his ranging the streets and alleys of Béy Sý disguised as Chagúr). She fears that were Mridóbu to ascend the throne, he would break the tradition of imperial seclusion.

*Fíru ba Yekér* – this former Chákan war slave is a scribe, an artist and a sculptor of Classical Tsolyáni glyphs for use in monumental architecture. Many of the friezes on the capital’s buildings have been new-carved in Fíru’s workshop. For some mysterious reason, all the nobility of Béy Sý count this bald old man as their equal and as a man of extreme worth.

*Chiriné ba Kál* – a companion of the famous scribe and sculptor, this adventurer wears many mantles well; he can fight and cast spells with equal mastery. Like Fíru ba Yekér, he is welcomed by all of Tsolyánu’s nobility (but especially the Fire worshippers around the Royalist Party).

1300. THE SEVEN-POINT PLOT

Whether the game style decided upon by all those gathered around the table-top role-playing surface is purely Karakán (i.e. combat-oriented) or Hnálla (i.e. combat, relational, investigative, and sorcerous) in nature, seven basic plot points should be experienced during each major scene, complete scenario and overall campaign. They not only contribute to rising action and the build-up of suspense; they also make table-top role-playing a profoundly satisfying experience.

INITIAL SITUATION

Scenes, scenarios and campaigns should open with at least one character in severe conflict over whether to get involved in the adventure set forth by the game referee. Tsolyánu is a complex civilisation, and soldiers, priests, scribes, and fief and province rulers are expected to perform their duties, not continually disappear on missions of dubious legality. Other conflicts can derive from family, clan, love-interests, promises made, membership in various “societies” or even the character’s own personality and psychological make-up.

Major scenarios and the overall campaign should also begin with the mission team in a state of real division.

Take the Planetary Romance section of the original “Star Wars” movie as an example of the above. The main character, Luke Skywalker, wants nothing more than to be a hero, to leave the backwater planet Tatooine; at the same time, however, he feels a strong sense of obligation to his aunt and uncle (who have adopted him and raised him). When Ben Kenobi asks Luke to accompany him to Alderan, the dutiful (though yearning) farmer-boy says, “No”.

Division and conflict should be tied to conflicting goals. Characters have an external goal, an internal goal, and a love-interest; their conflicted initial situation, therefore, should stem naturally from these.

INCITING EVENT(S)

In order that players truly be convinced of their characters’ involvement in the game sessions put forward by the referee, one or more events must push characters in the direction of total involvement. This is an often-neglected aspect of scenario design; it defaults, of course, to the “Job Offer in a Tavern” with which so many role-players are familiar. The weakness of such a device, however, should be apparent to all: the characters have no believable reason to risk their lives once things get deadly.

Take the opening set-piece of “Star Wars”, once again, as an example. Five or more separate events push Luke Skywalker into joining Ben Kenobi’s mission to Alderan: 1) Princess Leia’s message; 2) his rescue by Ben Kenobi; 3) his hatred of the Empire (a repressive presence, even on Tatooine); 4) Ben’s revelations about Luke’s father being a Jedi Knight and his handing over to Luke his father’s Lightsabre; 5) Ben and Luke’s discovery of the Empire’s murder of Luke’s aunt and uncle. These events are convincing; they add strength to all that follows.

POINT OF NO RETURN

At the terminus of the “Set-up Phase” of important scenes, major scenarios, and the overall campaign, characters should clearly and concretely commit to the adventure set forward by the game referee. It is generally not enough for them to simply agree to pursue a quest objective; they ought to experience a “do or die” moment in their collective lives.

Actually, the Point of No Return in “Star Wars” does not occur when Luke Skywalker says to Ben Kenobi, “I want to come with you to Alderan; there’s nothing for me here now.”

Luke’s Point of No Return occurs when he and Ben Kenobi escape from Tatooine in the company of a wanted smuggler. Imperial agents and Storm Troopers lose their lives. There is afterwards no chance of Luke avoiding imperial retribution; his life is permanently altered – it’s “do or die” for him.

This kind of Point of No Return increases believability and suspense, but mistakes do get made. In “Star Wars”, the Point of No Return happens almost halfway into the film. This is far too late. The Set-up Phase of any narrative should terminate roughly a quarter of the way through the entire story. Thus, if your total campaign entails twelve separate scenarios, the Point of No Return should occur in Scenario Three.

THE MIDPOINT REVEAL

In the exact middle of critical scenes, important scenarios and the overall campaign, the player-characters should confront a choice: either 1) pursue a more “selfish” but “safer” path; or, 2) reveal their true priorities (especially to themselves) and expose themselves to direct risk from the opposition. This choice earns for the characters their victory; game referees applying much thought to this plot point guarantee rich feelings of reward once the storyline winds up.

In “Star Wars”, Luke Skywalker and his mission team (comprised also of Han Solo, Chewbacca, C3PO and R2D2) face a choice at the film’s Midpoint Reveal. Having learned that Princess Leia is aboard the Death Star and is scheduled to be executed, they either may remain safe as ordered by Ben Kenobi, or they may risk themselves to save the rebel leader. The fact that they decide on the latter reveals Han to be more than merely mercenary, and focuses Darth Vader’s attention upon them for the first time.

THE MOMENT OF APPARENT DEFEAT

Roughly three-quarters of the way through an important scenario or the overall campaign, a pivotal character or the entire mission team should face what “appears” to be complete and final defeat. This crisis forces the character or mission team to confront (having nothing left to lose by doing so) uncomfortable truths about its methods and goals, and to make permanent sacrifices. These sacrifices, instead of causing debility and paralysis, free unrecognised strengths that the protagonist(s) then bring into the final climactic battle.

The opposition, blinded by its (perceived) looming victory, fails to enter the climactic battle with adequate preparation.

As a result, the characters win!

Of all the plots points discussed in this subsection, this one is the most difficult to do well. “Star Wars” barely makes an attempt; recall the scene where Luke Skywalker, aboard the Millennium Falcon, grieves for the slain Ben Kenobi. The old man’s death does not threaten total defeat. Luke faces no inner demons. No sacrifice is made. No sensation of strength and freedom comes across. Luke simply mopes a bit, then gets busy exacting a little revenge.

The Moment of Apparent Defeat in the original “Toy Story”, in contrast, is beautifully done. Recall the scene in which Woody exists trapped under a milk crate, waiting for an alarm clock to wake Sid Phillips. His fellow toy Buzz Lightyear sits nearby, offering no help whatsoever (having lost his desire to live). Woody, facing death, realises the truth of the situation: his jealousy has brought Buzz and Woody to this pass. Next he admits to Buzz that Buzz is the better toy, and encourages Buzz to escape, leaving a resigned Woody to his fate. This sacrifice jars Buzz Lightyear out of his depression, and the two, together, defeat Sid Phillips and get back home.

Learn from this!

BATTLE

The Battle should follow swiftly after the Moment of Apparent Defeat. It should be a peak-point in terms of conflict intensity. In other words, all involved in the scenario or campaign should agree that the opposition brought “everything available” to the fight. The original “Star Wars” does this adequately; the opposition confronts those for whom the audience is rooting with the Death Star. The weapon’s destruction is a real blow to the Empire.

RESOLUTION

Important scenes, crucial scenarios and the overall campaign should end with some kind of emotionally satisfying ‘moment’. In the original “Star Wars”, the scene in which Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Chewbacca are awarded medals by Princess Leia and the rebellion is such a moment.

In Tsolyánu, the Second Imperium, there are similar medals awarded to those who well serve the Petal Throne.

1400. SAMPLE SCENARIO

The following scenario could be set in Béy Sý, Khirgár, or Fasíltum, but for tradition’s sake has taken as its location Jakálla. It’s essentially a Belkhánu-style scenario, having a young student of sorcery delving into the city’s underworld and by accident coming upon a dangerous conspiracy.

The Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One

Part I: *Risking it All!*

Jakálla is one of the most ancient cities known to mankind. Lord Chirinngá hiTíshkolun has sought to divert attention away from intrigue and corruption by opening up Jakálla’s hitherto cursed and tabooed necropolis of the Bednállan Dynasty to excavation (for some parts are buried) and exploration. The Year is AS2354. The necropolis lies far east of the city’s high outer walls, and includes mortuary catacombs, surface and subterranean temples, caverns, tombs of nobles, graves of commoners, and sites about which rumours and legends swirl. The necropolis has been cursed for over two thousand years, since the reign of Emperor Trákonel I. Ancient texts suggest that the underground city claws downward toward the centre of the Earth through thirteen separate main levels and half again as many minor ones.

The following four player-characters are in their early twenties, and should be fairly advanced without being heroic in scale (say, D&D5e equivalent of 6th Level).

*Kalusý hiViridáme* is at a critical crossroads in her life. She was brought into the College of the Priesthoods as a child prodigy, but her Royalist Party arrogance has slowed her progress and she now must prove herself in a very dramatic way or be drummed out of her sorcery school. She has decided to explore the Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One (ignored while attention is focused upon the necropolis), believing that its reputation for evil will have protected it from looting.

*Hóru hiFirshéna* has agreed to accompany the Viridáme princess, in return for exclusive rights to export ancient artefacts for various foreign clients.

The foreign-born mercenary *Ahánbasrim* has determined to join Kalusý to learn more about the Ancient Unnamed One, whom he suspects is none other than the Goddess of the Pale Bone.

*Nríga hiViridáme* companions his clan-cousin, protecting her on behalf of their relations in the famous city of Purdimál.

Storytellers, puppeteers, folk-singers and religious men are full of rumours and warnings and other information about the Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One. Some of these are: 1) worship of the Goddess of the Pale Bone has begun anew; 2) worshippers of the pariah gods know forbidden secrets of the Ancients; 3) the Temple of Sárku has recently met disaster deep beneath the Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One; 4) the Livyáni ship that went ashore near Jakálla a few days ago is connected somehow to the opening, for theft and desecration, of the old Bednálljan necropolis. Its manifest listed thirty-six passengers and was crewed normally by seven. None were found on the vessel when it grounded.

Part II: *Exploring the Temple.*

The Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One stands in the east-central area of Jakálla, near clan palaces of those families that trace their descent all the way back to the Llyáni Empire.

The Pyramid of the Ancient Unnamed One is a sizable monument and a crowning architectural achievement of the Bednálljan Dynasty (being exactly 1/4th the size of the Great Pyramid of Girandú, the present capital’s original founder). It stands 70 feet tall and 110 feet wide with an 11-foot-high wall surrounding its base, which extends from the pyramid’s mortuary temple. The mortuary temple stands along the eastern face of the pyramid and extends approximately 20 feet outside the surrounding wall. Folklore declares that the pyramid connects, via a buried causeway, to the Tower of Ruvádis the Wearer of Eyes.

The pyramid is constructed of limestone blocks like other pyramids of its age. The mortuary temple’s entrance is traced in alabaster and inscribed with Bednálljan hieroglyphics inlaid with copper, aquamarine, and turquoise. The glyphs are the following curse: "As for all men who shall enter this tomb, rendering it impure, there will be judgment, an end shall be made of them. The Goddess shall seize the neck of each like a bird. She shall cast fear of herself into all." The carving accompanying the inscription depicts a woman with elongated skull, long neck, arms, legs, fingers and toes, deformed breast, distended belly, and curved spine. She seems alien. She wrings a duck’s neck. Except where descriptions state otherwise, the interior of the pyramid is constructed with megalithic limestone blocks, has 9-foot ceilings, and contains no light sources. Pyramids are dark, cramped, unforgiving places.

The player-characters, while young, are healthy and zealous and have spared no expense on equipment (thanks to the wealth of the Viridámes). Divided among four sturdy canvas backpacks are candles, compasses (4), a crowbar, stonemason chisels, flint and steel, hammers (2), lanterns (2), oil, miner’s picks (2), pitons, rope (4), a small shovel, clothing, a bedroll, and rations, water, enough for four days underground. Each backpack weighs about fifty pounds. The group doesn’t expect to do battle, so Kalusý’s one Terrible Eye of Raging Power comprises the group’s energetics. This device has a mere seven charges remaining in it. The other player-characters also have minor devices appropriate to their level and to their vocations. Ahánbasrim, for example, might own a steel dagger with a slight enchantment upon it. The other two are secret society agents and might have items loaned to them from their organisations.

All other weapons are basically tools (i.e., picks, shovels, and knives). The group is a thieving team; it flees underworld foes.

1. THE APPROACH

The safest approach to the Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One is from the Eqúnoyel River. Player-characters cross the water in a hired craft, landing south of the old citadel. They then enter the city’s river drains and head east under Jakálla’s the oldest neighbourhood, where private patrols abduct interlopers.

Kalusý tells her friends that the Unnamed One is a god, about whom several amazing legends are told, whose worship predates even that of Vimúhla. Legends state: It was once human. It was a pariah god. It was from an alternate universe. Its religious worship was aimed at getting it to that alternate universe. It is a dead god. The god was murdered. The Unnamed One only seemed to die; it has been slowly rebuilding its powers so that it might once again challenge Tsolyánu’s ten gods and their cohorts.

A single random encounter roll must be made, indicating the group has come across one of the neighbourhood’s private security patrols. Three ruffians, abominably clothed and stinking like animals, demand a tax for the party to proceed further.

Halfway through the drain to the 10,000-year-old pyramid, the player-characters encounter another underworld explorer, a low-caste Livyáni, gibbering in fear and absolutely unable to do anything but shake.

2. MORTUARY TEMPLE

The four young trespassers exit the tunnels. The stone portal opening from the Plaza of Gámulu into the mortuary temple is enormously heavy and was once steam operated. A lead seal was, at one time, half-melted over the seam separating its two panels. Close inspection reveals the seal must have once displayed a cartouche, but the soft lead has been pounded smooth. This seal is now severed! Strength and toil are required to open this fortified entrance. Doing so does not, as everyone expects, cause an exhalation of ancient air. Inside, the walls are covered with hieroglyphics, sigils, protective patterns, and hawk-headed figures with palms upraised in admonition and/or warning.

A second portal, also stone and steam-operated, lies open into the dark, enclosed Causeway of the Soul’s Procession. Close inspection of the floor reveals much recent traffic from the plaza into the interior of the pyramid, and a single person opening the portal and then following the other footprints, slide marks, and dolly tracks heading west inside.

3. ANTECHAMBER

The walls are completely covered with the mythos and history of the Unnamed One. Her birth, childhood, the abduction by the Mihálli, her recovery and marriage, the first five years of her reign, then a religious revolution, struggles with sun gods, counter-revolution, imprisonment, death-in-childbirth, entombment. The style harkens back to the early Bednálljan Empire – perspective determined by status, idealised beauty, everyone in profile, etc. There are innumerable hieroglyphics. A Linguistics skill check success reveals that there is a secret code at work, but only time and a critical success will reveal what the code expresses.

4A. SOUTH HALL

The purpose of this long corridor or hall is to lure invaders into a pit trap. Coded hieroglyphics cover the walls and ceiling. They tell the story of the Unnamed One’s religious revolution, at least its outer (public at the time) doctrines. The Unnamed One discovered, through her religious and magical practices, that Tuléng had a twin, an infinite number of twins, in a parallel universe whose energies, beneficial to mankind, could be concentrated without the interference of the barrier pylons, the quadrants, or the Silver Suits. The Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One was to have been a source of this energy, once known to mankind and rediscovered by the Mihálli. The hieroglyphics are designed to capture attention and keep it directed upward, so that the pit trap may spring underfoot with full surprise. Someone making a Perception skill check is alerted in time (thanks to a stack of long sturdy planks lying just beyond) to avoid this.

4B. NORTH HALL

The purpose of this long corridor or hall is to lure invaders into a deadfall trap. Coded hieroglyphics cover its walls, but not ceiling. The glyphs tell the story of the Unnamed One’s religious revolution, this time explaining its personal or psychological energy. Those human beings who, like the Universe (who joins with its twin at the end of its lifecycle) seek the experience of rebirth, must combine Stability and Change in themselves to reach what was the state-of-mind “enunanboté’a”. Importantly, the glyphs direct attention to the floor at the end of the hall, where a permanently inscribed sorcerous ten-pointed star pattern lies etched into the surface, or two five-pointed stars, one directed up, the other down. The connection to the gods of Change and Stability is clear, but very close inspection communicates an aura of forbidden knowledge. It is significant that the deadfall stone is massive, and it fall sends a crack downward through the pyramid’s foundations; this releases “the fusion” (see below).

5. MUMMIFICATION CHAMBER

Proof positive of recent tomb-robber invasion finally appears. There are reed sleeping mats and head rolls for about six people, in Livyáni style. There are also cooking-braziers, bronze lanterns and stacks of balýrikh wood for fuel, yellow citron in small crates padded with wood shavings, a tub of iron filled with distilled water, a ephemerides in hieroglyphics that seems to indicate a conjunction of the sun and some other celestial body, rarest oils, aulléb venom in a small wax-sealed jar, the anaesthetic drug osdru'ób and two steel surgical spoon-like instruments. Careful searching unearths a Letter of Credit from Ksamánduish of Khéiris, of the Clan of the Red Stone, for ritual vestments totalling in value an amazing 60,000 káitars. The most troubling discovery is a locked chest (whose key is nearby) containing thirty-six leaves of the finest tlésa paper that anyone has ever seen. Written on every leaf, in human blood, is the ancient Llyáni pledge: “You, Oh Mighty One, I serve.” The most obvious, but puzzling, discovery is a tall shattered glass urn, a slick and saline fluid still spilled all around it upon the floor, and a single damaged human eye.

Once the shock of the intrusion and the strange equipment allows it, the player-characters investigate the room. Three blue-black granite slabs stand side-by-side like medical stations. The room’s hieroglyphics portray mummy preparation, so these slabs are mortuary rather than medical work-stations. An ancient canopic jar has been used by the recent invaders. It contains soap suds, fírya-fibre pads soiled with human hair, dirt, sweat and filth, and even some blood. Others are saturated with rarest oils.

In the far corner of the chamber, a copper mask of a human face, with Salarvyáni features and ringlet beard, lies in the jumble.

6. UNKNOWN CHAMBER

This chamber is empty, its very air undisturbed for over ten thousand years. There are small recesses high in the outer walls, probably ventilation shafts. In one rests a silver mask of a human face, with Tsolyáni facial features and straight stylised hair.

7. LIVING QUARTERS

Collected in this triangular area are innumerable household effects. All are over ten millennia old. There are tools, grinders, sifters, pots, urns, jars, censers, chests (the largest containing a lateen sail), bedframes with six feet carved to resemble sérudla claws, bier frames (biers were specifically used for sex during the First Imperium), the remains of a loom, baskets of every description, and two 24-inch diameter perfectly round gold disks mounted on sloping wooden bases that ringed a sleeper’s head with an areola that 1) attracted god’s attention; 2) identified the user should death take her in her sleep; and 3) protected him against enemies while unconscious (no magic left in them after ten thousand years). One depicts the strangely configured Unnamed One in various attitudes; the other a similarly odd male companion in a variety of activities.

8. UNKNOWN CHAMBER

This chamber is empty, its very air undisturbed for over ten thousand years. There are small recesses high in the outer walls, probably ventilation shafts. In one rests a gold mask of a human face, with Livyáni facial features and intricate, stylised facial tattoos.

9. GRAND HALL

This chamber replicates a throne room. Its walls, as with others, are filled with hieroglyphics, cartouches, sigils, and also a series of painted scenes depicting the Unnamed One’s inner doctrines: specifically that there is an entity at the heart of the cosmos, in the centre of all things. This being, having brought mankind and his allies to the pocket dimension they currently find themselves in, is in a struggle against strange entities native to the pocket dimension and also against beings native to the star-filled universe from which mankind came, for example Chótl (a divine embodiment of Tuléng).

Player-characters may suffer extreme cognitive dissonance as a result of exposure to the Grand Hall; madness might eventually ensue.

10. FALSE HORDE

This chamber is filled with real riches, but it is meant to serve as a trap for careless grave robbers or temple defilers who find their way into the pyramid. It does, however, contain one critical piece for reaching the Unnamed One’s funerary complex (a lead mask of a human face with Hehechánu features). The meteoric iron lock on this door is still strong after ten thousand years. It can be opened with thief’s tools and a successful skill check, or with a successful strength check at a very difficult level.

The room contains a very well-hidden pressure plate which, when tripped, causes a stone valve to grind swiftly down to block the exit and tiny spherical pellets of high quality iron to pour into the chamber to suffocate everyone. If the trap is triggered the chamber shudders with a heavy cracking sound and dozens of fist-sized stone plugs rain down from the ceiling, immediately followed by cascades of iron pouring through the opened holes. The entire room instantly becomes difficult terrain and characters must roll initiative to establish turn order. Anyone reaching the doorway (remember the entire chamber is difficult terrain) can use an action to catch the falling stone before it seals the opening. No normal object will support the stone, however; it just bends or snaps under the weight. Only a heavy iron peg, bar, or similar item can halt the valve’s fall. Once down, the slab can be chiselled away, creating a crawl way, but only after the stone plugs have been 1) found; 2) fitted; 3) hammered back into the ceiling. The iron is a treasure in itself!

11. CHAMBER OF THE OBELISK

This chamber is remarkable and horrifying. First of all, there are stacked, like firewood, near the wall opposite the secret entryway thirty-six human child-like figures with rubies instead of eyes. Each is perfectly, perfectly life-like; each glistens in the lantern light (as though painted in a semi-gloss enamel); each is perfectly hairless, even eye lashes and eyebrows are nowhere in evidence. These figures are hard as steel, and can’t be scratched or dented or damaged in any way.

Secondly, there are ten murdered individuals inside the room. There are six labourers, men of the mountains who are half-ape, half-man (hailing from the sorcerous vats of the Lost Temple of Ksárul). There are three Livyáni, clean-shaven and having the smell of soap and oils about them. There is, lastly, a strange yellow male of advanced age, whose face registers all the signs of a powerful intellect. All except this last seem to have perished from a mind-blast of some sort, for blood trickles from ears, noses and mouths; also, all eyes are swollen and purple. The yellow power-mind twitches intermittently, but does not bleed (either internally or externally).

The Player-characters must make some sort of morale check, or else accumulate another point of madness, which must not exceed limits set by the referee.

At the centre of this large square chamber is a 15-foot tall white stone obelisk sitting atop a low square pedestal. At each corner of the chamber, looking inward, stands a statue of the Unnamed One’s four children, but each is fanged, clawed, and with a weapon (cudgel, poison, onel [the Bednálljan “Y”], and net).

The ceiling in this chamber is 20 feet high, to accommodate the towering obelisk. Each statue is costumed as one of the major autochthonous human races – the Salarvyáni; the Tsolyáni; the Livyáni; the Hehechánu.

The alabaster obelisk is covered with hieroglyphics traced in gold and turquoise. They seem to hint at a global project, spanning Tékumel, reaching (under the Unnamed One’s direction) beyond the solar system; a character who makes a successful Linguistics (ancient Bednálljan hieroglyphics) check gets the general sense of the symbols, though their precise meaning is lost to time.

Approximately 6 feet above the base of the obelisk on all four sides are human face-like depressions about the size of real human faces. PCs must place the appropriate metal masks from areas 5, 6, 8, 10 into these depressions to gain entry into the funerary complex. The depressions do not give away their matching mask. Instead, there is a single-character signifier of above-mentioned weapons.

The correct combinations are:

Cudgel copper Salarvyáni Unconscious

Poison silver Tsolyáni Sickened

Onel gold Livyáni Frightened

Net lead Hehechánu Exhausted

Nothing happens until each socket contains a mask. At that point, any mask in the wrong socket unleashes its condition upon the creature who misplaced it. When all four stone masks are placed in the proper spots, the obelisk rises on its surgical steel spine a few inches, revealing a hex key-like iron implement that has a cross-section like a ten-pointed star.

A rude forcefully-runed amulet of a serpent lies discarded on the floor, its broken chain still around the yellow-skinned male diabolist’s neck.

*The following timing of events is assumed. The player-characters enter the pyramid several hours after the party lead by the yellow-complexioned foreigner. The player-characters explore the first several chambers, and perhaps get caught in the pellet-trap, while the other party meets failure/death in the Obelisk Room. By the time the player-characters get out of the iron-trap, the Wearer of Eyes has appeared and slaughtered the sallow diabolist and his henchmen. But when Ruvádis opens the gates to area 12, swarms of beetles (sent by the fusion) attack, forcing the ancient sorcerer to flee. In fact, the player-characters hear his roaring yell of panic while fighting their way out of the pellet trap. Thus, by the time player-characters emerge from area 10, they are alone in the pyramid.*

*The player-character then proceed to the Grand Hall. Once any character draws close to the location of the secret door into the Obelisk Room, the device will reveal itself by buzzing beetles (agitated right over the trigger) and will then open just a crack to allow muscle to be applied.*

Part III: *Encountering the Fusion!*

12. FUNERARY FOYER

One very steep, narrow staircase angles up through the pyramid; yet another angles downward into the immense solid blocks that form the pyramid’s foundations.

13. THE UNNAMED ONE’S BIRTHING/ BURIAL CHAMBER

A large single piece of black loadstone, carved with images of the alien-looking Unnamed One, stands in the middle of this chamber. The hieroglyphics on this sarcophagus read, for a player-character making a Linguistics (Bednálljan hieroglyphics) skill check at a very difficult level, “Beautiful are the beauties of [scratched out], preparing the way for the Unity/Nullity to come”. The Unnamed One’s four children, her quadruplets, figure into these carvings, one to each side and all four on the lid of the loadstone coffin.

A pretty picture . . .

Except when the player-characters slide aside the lid of the sarcophagus they are met with a hideous sight, the bones and tissues of the Unnamed One’s corpse make it clear that her offspring exploded outward from her belly, bursting out like larvae from a host.

Player-characters must make some sort of mental strength check or accumulate more levels of madness.

14. JUGGERNAUT CORRIDOR

The narrow stair descending steeply downward from area 12 exits the layer of gigantic blocks that form the base of the Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One and enters solid rock. The bottom step leads onto a short landing, which terminates in an open square aperture in the floor. On the far wall, meteoric iron rungs have been hammered into the stone (thus providing a means of reaching the 1-person sized niche giving onto the corridor beyond). The walls of the staircase are filled with hieroglyphics and scenes of the Ancient Unnamed One and her consort in foreplay with two alternate-universe counterparts, or perhaps the two are simply figures in a more mundane scene (in foreplay with one another, simply near an actual mirror).

Every 10 feet, 1d20 scarabs buzz about, their parent swarm having already been released to pursue the Wearer-of-Eyes. Anyone experiencing bad luck receives a nasty bite.

The corridor into which Kalusý’s party descends is completely blank-walled, having no carvings, inscriptions or scenes of early Bednálljan Dynasty concerns whatsoever. This may have to do with the alternating gypsum and loadstone 1’ bands that run the entire length of the corridor. The curved hallway’s height is nine feet. Its width is four feet. The corridor runs not straight, but rather in a perfect circle the same area as the pyramid above (although this will not be discernible to Kalusý and her friends).

Again, every 30 feet, a few aggressive biting scarabs buzz about.

Any player-character making a difficult perception roll will notice a vibration – the floor and walls are vibrating. Soon a sound will be picked-up by those with good hearing. A fluid stone-on-stone sound comes from behind the group. Eventually, the player-characters see in their lantern light a statue of a crouching human or demonic figure, claws gripping cudgel, poison, onel, net. The solid granite wheel takes up half the statue’s height, but one able to leap up above it to the four-faced granite figure (a composite of the Ancient Unnamed One’s demonic spew) filling the upper half of the corridor’s volume could squeeze through gaps and jump down behind the car’s rear pin/wheel (leaving the juggernaut to make an entire circuit before an acrobatics encore would be required). The acrobatics skill check difficulty class begins at a moderate level, but then rises each pass as the juggernaut speeds up. Anyone failing the vital athletic check gets a single reflex saving throw at the same difficulty (indicating she or he has aborted their leap and landed on their feet in order to sprint ahead of the mammoth device). Anyone failing these throws DIES.

The player-character caught by the juggernaut is crushed feet-to-head. At first their feet go under the heavy granite wheels with barely a scream. By the time the shock allows them to emit a cry, their knees and thighs vanish under the weight. Once the hip-bones and pelvis are crushed, they arch back and vomit blood and other materials from inside the body. This stream of materials ejects several yards along the floor. Anyone seeing this or its result, after the car has passed over its victim(s), makes a morale check/ madness save.

If the ladder niche were thought of as at 12 o’clock, secret doors on the inside walls of the juggernaut circular hall stand at 7 o’clock and 11 o’clock. These doors require the key found inside the obelisk. A fairly challenging perception check is required to find the keyholes, so small in cross-section are they. It is, of course, possible for a group of explorers to retreat into the niche whose ladder leads up.

15. EVOCATION CHAMBER

Passing through one of the secret doors above, the player-characters enter a perfectly circular chamber, eighteen feet high, over one-hundred feet in diameter, with a black, circular bottomless pit in the exact centre. The walls are again covered with protective glyphs, patterns, and innumerable hieroglyphics. The hieroglyphs are, like those up above, coded. Kalusý takes her time, carefully processing everything.

The scenes accompanying the hieroglyphics depict the five stages of effect-working sorcery: 1) preparation; 2) marshalling energy; 3) invocation of entities; 4) binding and dismissal; 5) dissipation of residual energies and effects. The preparation phase depicts fasting, meditation, bathing, pattern-writing, etc. The raising of energies segment involves incantations. The invocation of entities seems to be divided into three phases (bringing forth the Unnamed One’s Child, working through lesser demons, and finally bringing forth the King of All Demons – Origób – who devours thirty-six sacrificial victims). The binding and dismissal crucible clearly involves rare signs and even rarer substances. The dissipation of energies requires sorcerous rarities as well.

The dense granite juggernaut exactly replicates the appearance of the Unnamed One’s Child in the wall scenes.

An inhuman, even alien, fear grows and grows in every one of the four individuals, adjusting for strengths and immunities. At some point, while helping Kalusý systematically commit to memory the information on the walls, someone looks back and sees a figure staring at them from the lip of the bottomless pit. This four-faced and four-armed human figure is hairless, skull-elongated, skeletally thin, clawed, fanged, and wearing only a ten-thousand-year-old linen loin cloth. This is the fusion, the Unnamed One’s quadruplets fused into oneness. This fusion climbs slowly from the bottomless pit’s lip to consider the player-characters. It is especially interested in Kalusý, sensing perhaps her status as a marék. It approaches Kalusý. It speaks in 10,000-year-old pre-Bednálljan and cannot be understood, but Kalusý could memorise its words and decipher its speech later. Seeing living human beings, and young vibrant ones at that, the fusion initially approaches like a stalking predator. Assuming a standard wearing of protective amulets, the fusion will halt once various Glyphs of Present Defence reach it. The fusion will then be interested in trying to find out as much about the present moment (i.e., AS2354 of the Second Imperium) as it is possible to do (using hand-gestures – quite a sight since there are four).

Player-characters must make a morale check each turn to endure the unnatural dread that the fusion inspires. This gets more difficult each turn, rising by 1 so long as the fusion believes the four to be of use, rising by 5 when this proves to be untrue, rising by 2 anytime a character breaks and runs, and rising by 5 should anyone show the fusion the ruby snake amulet.

Eventually, all will flee, not stopping until out of sight of the dreaded Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One.

Nightmares will plague any player-character having accumulated madness levels. These can be eliminated via sorceries, such as Alleviation.

Part IV: *Aftermath*



The yellow-skinned summoner’s amulet, above, is carved out of a deep red ruby and is exquisitely shaped in the semblance of Wurú, the original inchoate ruler of Tékumel’s pocket dimension (who was overthrown) that awaits return to bring destruction to Tuléng, its moons, and its planets. This amulet carries a powerful techno-magical power. The summoner used this devise on the thirty-six sacrifices, and it will be needed by those wanting to complete the ritual. In fact, it is wanted also by the Wearer-of-Eyes, who will use his magic to scry Jakálla for its location.

The mustard yellow intellect is a simulacrum of none other than Fú Hsí. This enemy (and very powerful sorcerer) gained possession of the amulet long ago. His plots have been decades in the making.

The six apelike mutants are not only labourers, but also warriors and chieftains. There will be agitation among the chnélh once word gets back to their troops.

The Livyáni celebrants are not identifiable. They are not from the Foreigner’s Quarter, but rather from Khéiris. Should the player-characters travel to that city, they will eventually connect these sorcerers to a dire network of conspirators emanating ultimately from Tsámra. Note: the sole remaining Livyáni, the one encountered before entering the pyramid, could be taken for questioning if the player-characters return to his location immediately after getting their morale back.

The player-characters will possibly make the logical leap between the thirty-six sacrifices frozen “out-of-phase” and stacked ready to be carried down to the evocation chamber and the news story about the Livyáni ship which ran aground empty but was supposed to have thirty-six passengers. Next steps would be to research the owners of that ship, whose port-of-origin was Tsámra.

If Kalusý has the presence of mind to hand the ruby serpent amulet over to her masters in the Cloak of Azure Gems Clan, then its agents will bring the four player-characters along for a second look at the Pyramid Temple of the Ancient Unnamed One.

The fusion will no longer be there, nor the thirty-six bred-for-purpose sacrifices. The fusion, the Wearer of Eyes and Fú Hsí will all be in play.