



The Game of Kévuk

A Tékumel Netbook

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The World of Tékumel

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KÉVUK

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The peoples of the Five Empires love a good wager. The Hirilákte Arenas, the displays of duelling and wrestling provided at feasts, the skilfully staged puppet shows, in which miniature beasts fight with tiny heroes, gods, demigods, or other creatures, and the lavish gaming tables found at the entertainments of the wealthier nobles, clans, temples, and officials -- all offer opportunities for winning or losing great sums of money, slaves, jewels, and landed property.

Mastery of the various gambling games forms an important part of one's "social graces." The "face" which one presents to one's table companions is as important to one's as the money itself. The Tsolyáni, for example, respect an urbane, sophisticated gamer, who demonstrates courage and verve, who is lavish and generous to a fault, who is not made angry by losing or arrogant by winning. The ideal is the ancient culture-hero, Hrugga, who "won the world, the two moons, and half as much again" from the Goddess Avánthe -- yet who continued to stake everything he had on each play until he had lost it all back to her "because it is not seemly for a mere man to overmaster the immortal Gods."

The Mu'ugalavyáni, on the other hand, gamble with a fierce, cold concentration. The Salarvyáni are reckless, noisy, boisterous --

and quick to insult, often leading to a duel. The Yán Koryáni and the northern peoples prefer wild betting and heroic bravado, while yet maintaining a facade of easy camaraderie. The Livyáni are cool and secretive, much like the image of the "riverboat gambler" of old Terra. The nonhumans are also diverse: The Pé Chói rarely participate, but when they do, they are clever and cautious; the Ahoggyá dislike gambling; the Shén are the reverse: easily addicted, but quickly enraged. The Páchi Léi are taciturn and calm, while the Swamp folk are the opposite. The Tinalíya are excellent at odds and calculations, which causes them to be quietly excluded from human gaming parties.

There are several common games. For two players there is Daquí, a board game something like chequers. Multiple players may choose Dén-dén, which employs a polygonal board and ranked sets of coloured pieces and counters. The commonest of all, however, is Tsahltén, a game developed in Mu'ugalavyá, which is popular throughout the Five Empires. Tsahltén involves the tossing of a number of coloured and marked sticks into the air and calling out a pattern. A judge (/tugrúntokoi/ in Tsolyáni) determines whether the pattern is made, not made, or neither made nor not made. The thrower wins or loses accordingly, as -do

those who bet for or against his “making the pattern.” Patterns are ranked according to complexity, from the “single square” up to the “Dragon.” The thrower chooses how many or how few sticks he will use, thus raising or lowering the odds. The patterns themselves are given odds: the “single square” has about an 80% chance of success, whereas the “Dragon” has perhaps only a 10% chance -- and even less if fewer than eight sticks are used. Intermediate patterns (e. g. the “double square,” the “single peak,” the “double peak,” the “triple peak,” the “High Forest,” etc.) are given chances ranging from 30% through 80%, with further modifiers added or subtracted according to the number of sticks used.

The rules for judging Tsahltén are too complex to be explained here. There are books on the subject in most of the languages of Téकुमел, but much depends upon the experience and subjective judgment of the /tugrúntokoi/. It is rare to find one of these judges being accused of bias or cheating; prestige and power depend upon the appearance of absolute impartiality, and a scandal can damage a clan’s, temple’s, or individual noble’s reputation for years to come. Sponsors may retain a professional /tugrúntokoi/, or they may purchase a slave and have him trained by the Clan of the Balanced Stone, which specialises in the education of body servants, secretaries, major domos, accountants, and judges of sports and games.

The rules for Kévuk, a common dice game, are given below. Tables for this ancient pastime are provided at parties and feasts. Dice games are also popular with the lower classes and with the soldiery.

Kévuk uses two 6-sided dice. These are somewhat larger than most Terran dice, and show different symbols. Tekumeláni dice are made of various substances: precious stones,

metals, bone, Mu’ugalavyáni red glass, pottery, and the wood. Some versions of the game require more than two dice, and there are also 20-sided dice, “long” dice (long oblongs with four or six sides, the short ends not being counted), etc.

Kévuk dice are of the same colour, but bear different symbols: one die displays a blue (/nírín/) “one,” a white (/abásun/) “two,” a silver (/ssímin/) “three,” a yellow (/páravün/) “four,” a black (/mikárun/) “five,” and a symbol for one of the Gods (see below). The other die shows a black “one,” a yellow “two,” a silver “three,” a white “four,” a blue “five,” and the symbol for the “opposing” deity. There is thus an “opposition” between blue/black and between white/yellow, but there is no opposition between silver and any other colour.

Tsolyáni numerals for 1 through 5 are:

 prúkh “1” ;  gayál “2”; 
 bíyal “3”;  mriyál “4”;  tloyál “5”

Each of a pair of Kévuk dice also exhibits a glyph for one of the Gods, as mentioned above. These glyphs are enamelled in the deity’s symbolic colour. Traditional pairs of “opponents” are: Lord Hnálla versus Lord Hrü’ü, Lord Thúmis versus Lord Ksáru, Lady Avánthe versus Lady Dlamélish, and -- interestingly enough -- Lord Vimúhla versus Lord Sáрку. The ten Cohorts of the Tsolyáni gods are occasionally represented on Kévuk dice as well, and the gods of other lands are also found. The glyphs for the Gods differ somewhat from those used in writing. They are:

1. Hnálla and Drá:



2. Thúmis and Keténgku:



3. Avánthe and Dilinála:



4. Karakán and Chegárra:



5. Belkhánu and Qón:



6. Hrü'ü and Wurú:



7. Ksárul and Grugánu:



8. Sárku and Durritlámish:



9. Vimúhla and Chiténg:



10. Dlamélish and Hriháyal:



The game begins with the host (or his representative) offering the dice to the highest ranking player. This “thrower” (/kevúmokoi/) may play or to pass to the next player to his right. He names one of the two deities and also one of the four colours -- excluding the silver three's. Going around the table to the right, then, each player chooses a deity and a colour. At wealthy parties small plaques are provided to each player to identify his chosen deity and colour. These markers serve only to avoid misunderstandings and have no further use in the game.

One is permitted to change deities and/or

colours whenever the dice are passed from one player to another. It is not considered polite to do so as long as one player continues to throw.

opposite, and not silver: e. g. black is a neutral colour to white or yellow.

Each player now places a bet or passes. In some games the amount is standardised: e.g. 100 Káitars per player per throw. In other, more reckless games a player may stake as much or as little as he desires. A servant or judge serves as a croupier.

B one's bet, the amount wagered
N the number on a die
D the difference between the number on one die and that on the other

The thrower then rolls the dice, and the results are determined. So long as two silver three's are not thrown, he may continue to roll. The thrower may also opt to pass the dice to the next player to his right after a throw. A player may drop out of the game at any time, although it is not good manners to leave in the middle of one's turn.

x times, multiplied by ...
K the /kumesukán/ "treasury": a "kitty" into which and from which amounts are paid.

The following abbreviations will help clarify the results.

3 one of the silver three's
L loses
W wins

Symbol Meaning

oG one's own God's symbol

eG the "enemy" or opposing deity

oC one's chosen colour

eC the "enemy" or opposite colour: blue is the opposite of black, and yellow of white. Silver has no opposite; a player cannot choose silver as his/her colour.

nC a "neutral" colour: one that is not one's own colour or its

Results are read as follows:

Dice

Score

Result

oG - eG W 5 x B from K; W all B from other players

oG - oC W 5 x B from each player backing eC

oG - eC W N x B from each player backing an eC

oG - nC W N x B from each player backing that nC

oG - 3 W 3 x B from K

eG - eC	L 5 x B to each player backing an eC	nC	from player(s) backing that
eG - oC	Lose N x B to each player backing an eC	3 - 3	L 3 x B to K; L all bets to other players; dice pass
eG - nC	L N x B to each player backing that nC	5 - 5	W 2 x B from backers of blue and black
eG - 3	L 3 x B to K	4 - 4	W 1 x B from backers of white and yellow
oC - oC	W D x B from K	2 - 2	L 1 x B to backers of white and yellow
oC - eC	High N wins; D x B to or from thrower: e. g. thrower's blue 1 versus eC player's black 5: D is 4; thrower pays each eC player 4 x his (the thrower's) bet. If the thrower has the black 5, and black is his colour, he receives 4 x the B of each eC player.	1 - 1	L 2 x B to backers of blue and black
		nC - nC	nC is neutral to the thrower: e. g. the thrower's colour is black, and he throws a white four and a yellow 2. High N wins: those backing the high nC win D x B from those
Dice Score	Result	Dice Score	Result
oC - nC	High N wins: D x B to or from the thrower		backing the losing nC. Players backing yellow pay 2 x their B to those backing white.
oC - 3	W N x B from K		
eC - eC	L D x B to K		
eC - nC	L D x B to eC or to nC, whichever has the higher score		When all players wish to quit, a final round is called to determine who gets any money remaining in the /kumesukán/ "treasury." The first player to roll his own god symbol receives this sum.
eC - 3	L 3 x B to K		
nC - nC	No effect on the thrower		Side bets are common. One may bet that a certain roll will come up before another one, that a player will roll two three's before rolling some other number, etc. Side bets do not affect the progress of the game itself and are
nC - 3	High N wins: D x B to or		

often made out of bravado. The Salarvyáni are particularly addicted to them, and some Salarvyáni noble houses provide special croupiers to circulate through the crowd and record these wagers in order to reduce strife.

It will be noted that there is a greater difference between black and blue than between white and yellow: the former produce a difference of 4 (5 - 1) versus 2 (4 - 2). Black and blue are termed “heroic colours,” while yellow and white are called “following colours.” Players backing one of the former stand a chance of winning or losing considerably more than those supporting the latter pair.

As Kévuk shows, many games have a religious or mythological aspect to them. Daqú is said to represent the conflict between Stability and Change; Dén-den symbolises the mythological politics of the deities; and there are even epic connotations to the patterns of Tsahltén: e.g. the “triple peak” is one of the obstacles which faced Hruiggá during his quest for the Egg of

the World. Few take the deity symbols on the dice too seriously, however, and it is not uncommon to find a devout priest of Hrü’ü blowing on the dice and calling upon Lord Hnálla to come to his aid! Only rarely do confrontations arise. An example of a serious quarrel is that which occurred in 2,360 A. S., when supporters of the Incandescent Blaze Society of the Temple of Vimúhla got into a brawl with priests of Lord Durritlámish at a party in Sokátis. This incident involved possible cheating: the use of telekinetic magic to influence the dice. This is strictly prohibited and guarded against in every noble household. The case was adjudicated in 2,365, with the Temple of Durritlámish being fined 3,000 Káitars as Shámtla (“blood-money”). Two of the priests of Vimúhla were sentenced to brief terms in prison and were also demoted one priestly Circle. The consensus was that both parties were lucky. As stated above, “noble action” is strictly maintained in gambling, as in other spheres of life.