

# Issue One | Autumn 1992

## Joyful Sitting Amongst Friends

This would normally be the letter column. If you write, please don't expect a personal reply—I just don't have the time! *This* is where letters will get answered, if I think they're worth answering.

Letters can be on any subject. Those that deal with real Tékumel will be favoured over game-related comments. To this end, I'm going to devote the column this Issue to a few topics that I'd like to throw open to general discussion.

### The nature of magic

'Real' sorcerers (that is, the kind described in folklore) can't just zap off a Sending of Evil in six seconds. Or even in one minute. The things they can do are much more eerie, and seem to work over a longer range, but take longer to cast. They couldn't just blast you if you were walking up to chop them.

This doesn't mean they're defenceless, though. The typical Tsolyáni would fear to harm or kill a sorcerer in case the guy returned from the dead to get revenge or was avenged by his familiar—or simply in case he puts a curse on his murderer as he's dying. This relies on superstition, of course. The trouble is that players all know exactly what a sorcerer can and cannot do. You can get around that either by not having player characters as sorcerers (sure, people will say that makes magic arbitrary: they should think that—it's equivalent to being superstitious!) or stop player-character sorcerers from telling other players the magic rules.

I've seen various *GURPS* versions of Tékumelani sorcery. They usually suffer from twisting the world to fit the rules. Tékumelani magic is fatiguing to cast, admittedly, but the best sorcerers aren't the fittest ones. That's because the more skilled you are, the less fatiguing you can make the spells. It's more efficient to learn better sorcery than to train up stamina!

Military sorcerers are young fit types because of the rigours of military campaigning. In fact this is an interesting player character career option. Maybe a player-character military mage could get very limited use of magic—such as affecting a foe's morale over a prolonged period. Also they might have other skills like unarmed combat, languages, divination, and so forth. These characters wouldn't be like the 'machine-gunners' that most sorcerers seem to function as, but what real sorcerer would?

### Divine intervention

Let's get something straight. The gods don't care how much of a fanatic you are. Vimuhla is not going to give special favour to any mere mortal—even a lunatic priest who scars his face with fire and drinks boiling blood once a week. ("As Chri-flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport...") The gods simply respond to the quality of the ceremonies you perform—or have performed on your behalf, if you're not a priest. To some extent this will depend on what you can afford.

Some referees give bonuses for characters who have had prayers said and amulets blessed. Don't—give penalties if characters don't get these things done. No Tsolyáni would walk into the Hirilakte without making sure he'd arranged a tutelary ritual at his temple beforehand.

### Leave my slave alone!

Slaves don't have zero status. Lord Rereshqala's wine-cup bearer probably has more status than you do, buddy!

### Clothing (or lack of it)

A Tsolyáni noble would go naked in the inner precincts of his clanhouse. He might feel he looked a bit of a peasant if he wandered into someone else's clanhouse looking like that. He needs some clothing to indicate his status, after all. (The modern equivalent would be to go into the Savoy hotel wearing jeans.)

### Scarring

Being so warlike, the Tsolyáni must often get duelling scars and disfiguring injuries in battle. How do they square this with their horror of ugliness?

### I surrender! (Kill me later)

Okay, just one rules-related point. It strikes me that most systems just amount to 'hack till you drop'. Systems have improved over the years, so the situation's a little better than the old *D&D* days, but not by much. The point is that a Tsolyáni soldier who was thoroughly outclassed would probably not fight on. Being sacrificed to a god is more noble than getting chopped to pieces in a hopeless fight. This is maybe why Tsolyáni morale is fierce but brittle—beaten guys 'fold' fast. (If this wasn't the case, you'd never be able to capture prisoners in a Qadarni.)

The perfect Tékumelani rules system would include this morale factor as a major determinant in any fight—just as important as strength and stamina. No, I've no idea how to go about it!

### Arrivistes

Clans come into being when economic changes cause a social drift between the lineages within a clan. Then, logically, it's time for a new clan to form. (For example: a printers' clan invents a new printing process, so most of the unskilled lineages who formerly did the copying work are then dead weight.)

### Big fish

High office isn't a simple question of salary, but the lifestyle you can afford to maintain. When selecting a new Governor of Jakálla, a major criterion is who has the financial clout to fill the position. (Churchill allegedly was offered the Duchy of London but turned it down because it was beyond his means.) The purpose of acquiring high office is prestige and influence—not hard cash, even allowing for inducements. A brilliant civil servant of only medium clan might have to borrow heavily to fill the position that a bungling but rich Sea Blue member would breeze into.

### The Kolumejalim

Most readers must now be aware of the recent events in Professor Barker's version of Tékumel. Dchich'uné has become Emperor in what was an unorthodox accession by anybody's standards. (The entire Kolumejalim was declared, staged and won in a single afternoon, with other contestants either dead or absent.)

A lot of players have expressed 'off the record' opinions concerning the result of the Kolumejalim. But would most Tsolyáni even consider the possibility of having a view one way or the other? It is the will of the gods how these things turn out, after all, and I cannot envisage a peasant out in the Dná fields muttering darkly about 'that Dchich'uné, I reckon 'e don' deserve to be Emperor!'

If you did disapprove of the Kolumejalim result and went to a banquet where a loyal toast was required, it would hardly be 'noble action' to say the words of the toast with your fingers crossed behind your back. The Lan course of action is clear: boldly announce your opinion, and to hell with the consequences! (Hey, maybe we should have an etiquette column: "Dear Eye, I've been challenged to a duel..." etc? See you here next time.)