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Just off the Boat

A start-up campaign with a strong role-playing slant

The player-characters come from Falesa, a coastal village on a small island of the same name that lies just north-east of Ssamris Island.

Players start by determining status, then choosing a role and (optionally) one or two personality traits. They should then roll their characters according to the standard *TIRIKELU* rules, with the exception that natives of Falesa are generally good looking (roll Comeliness on 2D6+6) and ethical (roll Honour on 2D10+2). This does not apply to the Outsider.

Status

Players roll for status using a six-sided die. A roll of 1 indicates high status, 2-3 is medium, 4-6 is low. This is the character's status in the Falesa community. (As far as mainland Tsoylányi are concerned, they're all equally summy.)

Role

This choice determines the character's initial skills. Players should make their selection based only on the role description, without seeing the skill-level allocations. Note that some roles have a prerequisite status.

The Acolyte has studied under the priest of the village. He/she must be of high or medium status.

The Athlete is the village champion in the annual wrestling and acrobatics contests held against other islands. He/she must be of high status, and will have often got out of humdrum chores so as to train (possibly inducing jealousy in the other characters).

The Black Sheep can be of any status. He/she has had a misspent youth, having run away to Ssamris Isle for several years. He begins with 3 Discredit but has picked up some interesting skills.

The Fisherman, a standard island character, can be of low or middle status. Any number of players can select this role.

The Hunter is another standard character, but this time of middle or high status. As with the Fisherman, more than one player can take this role.

The Outsider is of low status. He or she is not one of the Falesa villagers by birth, but a Nom merchant who arrived penniless and decided to stay.

Personality traits

A player can list up to two personality traits on his or her character sheet. These could be such things as honesty, intolerance, greed, courage, laziness, modesty, deceitfulness—the choice is up to the player. These are qualities of which the character is renowned.

Names

Each character (except the Outsider) must be fitted onto the family trees provided. A player who strenuously objects to being assigned a first name may change it, bearing in mind that these are the characters' formal names and they would have other informal names for use by family and close friends.

Background skills

All characters get the following: Etiquette 8, Historian 1, Mu'ugalavyáni 3 and Tsoylányi 8. In addition:

The Acolyte gets +1 Reasoning and Psychic Ability, plus these skill-levels: Alchemist 8, Calligraphy 1, Divination 9, Literacy 6, Musician 4, Orator 8, Physician 10, Sorcerer 4, Storyteller 7, Swimming 7, Theologian 9 and Warrior 3.

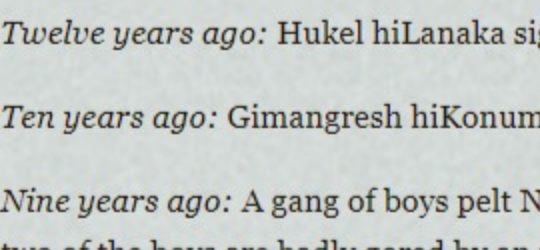
The Black Sheep gets +2 Cleverness and these skill-levels: Carpenter 1D6, City Lore 2D6, Cook 1D6, Kickboxing 1D6+3, Languages 2D6+3, Sailing 8, Survival 2, Swimming 7, Sword 1D6+3, Thief 5, Thrown Weapon 5 and Warrior 3.

The Outsider gets +1 Stamina and Cleverness, along with these skill-levels: Armourer 6, Bow 8, City Lore (Jakállá 7, Pala Jakállá 9, Bey S<129> 10), Literacy 8, Nom Etiquette 12, Physician 3, Poet 8, Salarvyani 11, Shortsword 9, Swimming 5, Tomb Robber 8 and Warrior 1.

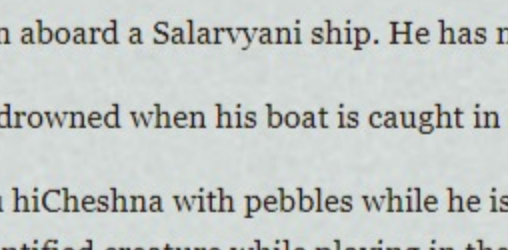
Fisherman character gets +1 on Cleverness, Dexterity and Stamina, plus these skills: Carpenter 1D6, Charge 7, Cook 5, Dagger 3, Fisherman 9, Javelin 6, Netmaker 1D6, Sailing 9, Spear 4, Survival 5, Swimming 12 and Warrior 6.

Any Hunter gets +1 on Strength and +2 on Stamina, along with these skills: Bow 5, Charge 7, Cook 2D6, Dagger 4, Fisherman 3, Hunter 11, Javelin 5, Sailing 4, Spear 3, Swimming 8, Sword 5 and Warrior 5.

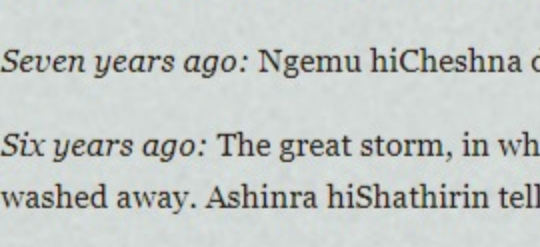
The Athlete gets +1 on Strength, Stamina, Dexterity and Cleverness. He/she should roll 1D6 for performance in last year's all-islands contest: 1-2 = no distinction; 3-5 = performed well; 6 = outright winner. Initial skill-levels are: Acrobat 9, Charge 10, Dagger 3, Dancer 8, Sailing 3, Singing 1D6, Survival 3, Swimming 8, Sword 1 and Warrior 9.



The Wise and Generous Konumra Lineage
[\(click to enlarge\)](#)



The Brave and Honest Lanaka Lineage
[\(click to enlarge\)](#)



The Energetic and Modest Shathirin Lineage
[\(click to enlarge\)](#)

Relationships

In Falesa as in mainland Tsoylányi, your true mother's sisters (and your father's brother's wives) are all your "mothers". Likewise, your true father's brothers (and your mother's sister's husbands) are all your "fathers". Children of these people are your brothers and sisters. Your true mother's brothers (and true father's sister's husbands) are your "uncles", and your father's sisters (and your mother's brother's wives) are your "aunts".

Thus many of the player-characters are related. Shiwan, for example, is the younger brother of Goreng's and Etmesh's mother, making him their uncle. Areli's mother is the sister of Timung's and Tamkade's mother, so the three of them are siblings. And so on...

Some marriages are pending. Shiwan hiKonumra is betrothed to Karisa hiLanaka, Etmesh hiLanaka to Ji'una hiShathirin, and Timung hiShathirin to Darsha hiLanaka. It has not been possible to hold the marriage ceremonies for want of the wealth needed for the appropriate gifts and ceremony.

Money & equipment

Shathirin family members start with 20 Hlash, Lanaka family members with 40 Hlash, and Konumra family members with 60 Hlash. The Outsider is equipped with a spear and light leather armour. Shathirins have light leather and two weapons. Lanakas have medium leather and three weapons. Konumras have medium leather, a small shield, and four weapons. Anyone taking a bow as one of his weapons also has twenty arrows.

History of the island

These are the major events which have provoked gossip, speculation and daydreams over the last quarter century.

Twenty-five years ago: A Tsoylányi priest from Jakállá visits Falesa on his way to Kheiris. He ends up staying a month and blesses the fishing boats before going on his way. At the next catch, the nets fill with fish and there is feasting for a month.

Twenty years ago: Mesmei hiKonumra becomes pregnant but refuses to divulge the father's name. The child is called Ngemu hiCheshna— "the son of the unknown".

Eighteen years ago: A strange creature, said to be a Hluss, is washed up dead on the beach. It is buried under a pile of coral rocks at the mouth of the lagoon.

Sixteen years ago: A Livyáni ship puts in for supplies. Its crew (including a Shén) terrorize the village until Chondrek hiLanaka wrestles with and beats the Shén.

Fifteen years ago: Tsoylányi sailors press-gang Chondrek hiLanaka while he's trading in Ssamris. He is destined to return later after many adventures.

Thirteen years ago: A rock falls from the sky onto the beach and emits a yellow vapour that kills Chondrek hiLanaka's old dog.

Twelve years ago: Hukel hiLanaka signs on aboard a Salarvyani ship. He has not been seen since.

Ten years ago: Gimangresh hiKonumra is drowned when his boat is caught in a squall.

Nine years ago: A gang of boys pelt Ngemu hiCheshna with pebbles while he is walking on the hillside. Later, two of the boys are badly gored by an unidentified creature while playing in the forest.

Eight years ago: Chondrek hiLanaka (now missing a leg) returns from his voyages. He is a drunken hulk of his former self and sits on the beach all day telling wild stories.

Seven years ago: Ngemu hiCheshna disappears.

Six years ago: The great storm, in which the houses lose their roofs and half the island's fishing boats are washed away. Ashinra hiShathirin tells everyone: "It is Bithra, out searching the bay for Ngemu hiCheshna."

Five years ago: A traveller from Tsoylánu is washed ashore after a shipwreck and spends a month recuperating in the village before travelling to Ssamris. There is a plentiful catch after he leaves and the elders are reminded of the priest who stayed with them twenty years before. Later it is discovered that the Black Sheep character has left, presumably having stowed away on the boat that took the Tsoylányi back to Ssamris.

Four years ago: Ashinra hiShathirin sees a chashkeri washing its hair in the lagoon. She never speaks again.

Three years ago: Domandoi hiKonumra wins the all-islands athletics trophy and there is joyous feasting lasting for days. As the feasting ends, the Black Sheep character returns from his wanderings.

Two years ago: The Nom outsider arrives on the island. Penniless, he is given hospitality in return for helping with odd jobs.

Last year: Mu'ugalavyáni sailors put in at the island and take Ssaria hiShathirin to the god Bithra's fane and rape her. They all die of fever a few days later.

It is now 2368 AS. Dich'one has been deposed and the new Dra-worshipping Emperor Neshkiruma II, "the Conciliator", has taken the throne. A Ditlana has been announced for Jakállá. The Empire looks forward to a period of renewal, but the prospect on Falesa is bleak.

Clan and nationality

The following is strictly for the Referee's eyes only!

The player-characters are not recognized as Tsoylányi citizens, nor do they belong to a clan. However, if one or more of them eventually acquire citizenship then by implication it would be possible for the whole island to become known as the Falesa clan.

Another route to acquiring citizenship is by precedent. Back in 2020, there was a period of some fifty years when Falesa island served as a depot for the Red Flower clan. The Shathirin family are in fact direct descendants of the Zanirin lineage of that clan. (The spelling differs because literacy is low on the island.) The others are collateral branches of lineages no longer represented in Red Flower, but known in other clans. If the characters discover this fact (which is not widely known) then they might be able to petition for the clan to recognize them.

Divine intervention

Being only a minor demon, Bithra is very interested in his few worshippers and is relatively likely to render them aid. On the island itself, an unmodified Theology check is needed to obtain intervention. Check at -5 anywhere other than Falesa itself. If successful, the character can then attempt an Honour check to try and impress Bithra, with +1 per significant offering. Critical success means the little god grants intervention—usually something very minor such as some fluke that gives the characters a clue badly needed. Critical failure results in the character getting a rash, a cold, or some other petty ailment, such things being known as "Bithra's chastisements".

Setting forth

The yacht that will take them to Jakállá is a single-masted vessel large enough for ten people. The whole village gathers on the beach and, after a final pep talk from the elders, they are ready to set sail.

The voyage starts well, with a fair south-westerly breeze making for good headway. One course is to steer due north until they reach the mainland, then follow the coast around to Jakállá. More daringly, they could strike out directly east for Point Küne. Assuming the yacht covers 100-150 kilometres a day, landfall will optimally occur after three or four days on the former route, ten days on the latter.

A Sailing check must be made each day by whoever is navigating. This check is at +5 on the first day, +4 on the next, et cetera, until land is again sighted. A failed check puts them off course by up to three compass points in either direction—double that on a critical failure. (Obviously these checks must be made secretly by the referee so that the players don't know how they're doing.) Once within sight of the coast, navigation checks need not be made except in fog or heavy rain.

Each player must also check every day to see if they have had any mishaps. This is a +5 Dexterity/Sailing check, with further modifiers if the weather turns bad. Each failure reduces the distance covered by the yacht that day by 10 kilometres. On a critical failure roll D6:

1-2 Damage to the yacht; reduce speed and resale value by 10%

3-4 Man overboard; Swimming check required to rescue him, with modifier depending on weather

5-6 Accident; character is injured for 0-11 points (2D6-1D6)

The yacht has fresh water and food for two weeks. Once this has run out, an unmodified Survival check allows them to keep on for another couple of days at best. (Only allow one Survival check, by whoever is calling the shots.)

The aim is not to kill off the characters before their adventures even get started. If they get into real trouble there are plenty of alternative fates you can throw at them. They could be wrecked on an uncharted island, picked up by a passing ship, or beached in the mangrove swamps between Penom and Point K<129>ne. If they reach Jakállá without the yacht, they get 2 Discredit (4 in the case of Konumras) and have the task of making do without the money they would have got for selling it.

Seeking their fortune

On arrival in Jakállá, the characters first task is to find themselves accommodation. Staying at a hostel in the Foreigners' Quarter earns them all 1 Discredit (they don't think of themselves as foreigners in Tsoylánu) but is at least cheap—say 20 Hlash a day for the whole group. Alternatively they can find a squat in the Jakállan slums. Either option is dirty, smelly and generally a far cry from life on their tropical island home.

The Konumra family members have the final say on whether or not to sell the yacht. They should be able to get 80 to 150 Kaitars for it. Assuming they are sensible enough to trust the advice of those characters with City Lore. Otherwise they'll probably be tricked with clipped coins or some other ploy and only get half the yacht's true value. (Clipped coins also have to be handed in to the Imperial Mint on pain of execution, and it might then be months before they got back even a fraction of their money.)

Heads held high

The theme of this campaign is the struggle of the characters to achieve wealth and recognition without betraying their principles. They have been raised in a close-knit community that (in common with most of mainland Tsoylánu) sets great store by honourable behaviour. Thrown into the urban jungle of Jakállá's slums, can they maintain their dignity or will they soon resort to crime?

As referee, your task is to present the players with scenarios that will challenge their moral values and present difficulties for them to either triumph over or give in to.

The first adventure

The characters are visited by Mirizhan hiTathlua of the Blazoned Sail Clan, steward of Nokesh hiPayuli of the White Stone Clan. He offers them 5 Hlash a day each to protect Nokesh, with a bonus of 50 Kaitars if they deal with the person who has been threatening him.

Nokesh lives in a villa along the coast, about eight hours' walk from Jakállá. The characters are told to present themselves there the following day. When they show up, Mirizhan passes them on his way out. Has has packed and is leaving, he says, now he's done his duty and arranged for his master to be guarded.

Nokesh is blind. He keeps to a locked room at the back of the house. He opens a panel in the door before unbolting it to admit anyone. He conducts his arrangements entirely with the character's leader (the eldest Konumra family member).

Nokesh's room is a musty book-lined study. Doors open onto the garden patio, but they are shuttered and bolted. As they cross the room to a table where there is a bottle of brandy waiting, Nokesh makes some comment about the player-character's physical attributes—"Ah, you are a strong man," or something like that. How did he know? He chuckles before explaining that the steps dividing the antechamber from the main room creak under a person's weight. He can tell how tall a person is when they speak, so their weight lets him estimate how muscular they are. Nokesh is quite pleased with himself when he manages a little trick like this.

Nokesh is willing enough to tell his story over a goblet of brandy. He was a captain of marines in the Flotilla of Hagarr. Twelve years ago he and his lieutenant, Thojeng hiDresak of the Red Sky Clan, won a hard battle against the escort of a Mu'ugalavyáni ship. They discovered a treasure worth many thousands of Kaitars which they buried off Ngeshtu Head, knowing they could come back for it when their term of service was up.

Nokesh and Thojeng were subsequently captured by the Mu'ugalavyáni and imprisoned. During an escape attempt they got separated. Thojeng was recaptured; Nokesh escaped into the backstreets of Kheiris where he was pressganged by Livyáni pirates along with his steward, Mirizhan. He later became blinded by a Doomkill explosion. Three years ago he and Mirizhan got their freedom and made their way back to Ngeshtu Head, but the treasure was already gone.

Nokesh learned that his family had perished in a Mu'ugalavyani raid on Penom. He retired to the family villa near Jakállá, where he lived in lonely isolation until a few weeks ago, when he received a message from Thojeng demanding a large sum of money.

"Isn't it enough that he took my treasure?" laments Nokesh. "Why does he come to persecute me now?"

The truth

The treasure wasn't taken by Thojeng but by Mirizhan, who was lying when he told his blind master it was gone. Mirizhan has moved his family off up north and has been slowly preparing for the move himself, intending to retire to a life of luxury, but Thojeng's arrival on the scene scuppered that plan.

Thojeng thinks Nokesh has swindled him. After spending six years in the Mu'ugalavyáni prison he was sold into slavery in Ch'ochi, escaped, and ended up leading a band of brigands in the Tlashte Heights for three years. When he finally got to Ngeshtu Head and found the treasure missing, he came gunning for his erstwhile captain.

What happens

Mist begins to roll in off the sea, advancing up the garden like a solid white wall. Towards dusk, an old man with a wooden leg comes hobbling up to the house. His ragged clothes, staff and backpack make him look like a traveller. But he is no pedlar or wandering lay priest. He says his name is Ssúnruel of Tumissa; "Thojeng sent me. I'm here to parley with the master of the house."

He is admitted to the study and spends some time talking with Nokesh. Voices are raised, then Nokesh summons his manservant and has Ssúnruel put in a guest room. "We'll speak again in the morning," says Ssúnruel.

Nokesh snorts: "Why bother?"

The next day Nokesh will not let anybody into his room. By mid-afternoon Ssúnruel decides to leave.

That night, Assuming the characters get suspicious and force an entry, Nokesh is discovered dead. He has obviously been dead for hours. The room appears to have been searched.

Failing to protect Nokesh earns the characters 7 Discredit. If they succeed in an Honour check they must remain and if possible bring the culprit to justice. A failed Honour check allows them to just scam with their money and leave Nokesh's servant and distant clan-cousins to sort things out, but inevitably they will be questioned by the police and there is a strong chance they'll be blamed for Nokesh's murder.

How it happened

Inside Ssúnruel's backpack hid Chikattag, a Tinaliya with a gift for ventriloquism and mimicry. Posing as the characters' leader, he got into Nokesh's room during the night and killed him, but could not find the money. To buy more time to search the room he mimicked Nokesh's voice and told people to keep out.

Clues to look for

Nokesh was murdered beside the creaky steps. (That was when he realised it wasn't a human that had entered the room, but something much lighter.) The wound was a stab upwards into his abdomen. (Hence a very low blow.) There are tiny scratch-marks on the polished floorboards (caused by Chikattag's hard chitinous feet).

Climax

After hearing Ssúnruel's report, Thojeng Assumes the characters are the ones with the missing loot. He comes in force with his men to Issue an ultimatum. They must convince him they don't have the treasure (or agree to a strip-search and then vamoose, for 1 Discredit). Otherwise it's clobbering time.

Various outcomes

The ideal situation would be if the characters guarded Nokesh well enough to prevent him being murdered in the first place. This will be quite hard, because Chikattag is stealthy and cunning.

The characters ought to be given time to get suspicious about "Nokesh" refusing to let anyone into his study the next day. If they listen at the door they could hear boxes being opened and cabinets moved around. They don't have much chance of catching Chikattag even if they decide to break the door in—since the fire has burned out overnight he can escape up the chimney.

Even if the characters have figured out everything when Thojeng shows up and tell him that Mirizhan must have the loot, they still might feel obliged to do something about Nokesh's murder. They can wipe out most of that 7 Discredit by taking revenge on the Tinaliya (who is not a Tsoylányi citizen) or by insisting that Thojeng makes a payment of Shamtla and half the treasure to Nokesh's clan. They'll still be left with 2 Discredit to reflect their failure to do the job they were hired for.

Background

(give each player a copy of these notes after he/she has generated a character)

In former times, life in Falesa was not so hard as now. Historically the island of Ssamris has passed between Tsoylányi and Mu'ugalavyáni hands several times. Your families sided with the Tsoylányi in the dispute of 2020 AS. Now Ssamris is back in Mu'ugalavyáni hands and you are paying the price. Settlers have come to your little island. The Mu'ugalavyáni government favours them in trade and legal matters, leaving you in straitened circumstances.

You have decided to leave and seek your fortune in Tsoylánu. Perhaps you can return with wealth to help your families; perhaps you can pave the way for them all to enjoy a new life on the mainland. Perhaps you will even rise to prominence as admirals in the Tsoylányi navy and come back to displace the Mu'ugalavyáni from your home!

Lineages

The Konumra family (high) are considered wise and generous. The Lanaka family (medium) are noted for their bravery and honesty. The Shathirin family (low) are thought energetic and modest. If you have taken a personal trait that corresponds to one for which your family is renowned, gain 1D3 Honour; you are considered to exemplify your family's virtues.

Religion

Falesa reveres Pavar's gods, most notably principal aspects of Hnalla, Hru'u, Belkhanu and Karakan. Also important is an aboriginal deity called Bithra who has a fane in a stand of bamboo on your island. The Shathirin family are keepers of the fane, and only the older women of this family take offerings to Bithra. However, Bithra is the tutelary deity of all Falesa and it is the custom among all the islanders to call on him first when in trouble. He may only be a minor deity, but he is more likely to help you than those mighty Lords of Heaven!

Assets

You each have some money. Also you have a yacht. This is jointly owned by all of you but technically subject to the disposal of Konumra family members.

The Nom

(give a copy of these notes to the Outsider player)

The Nom are a seafaring race inhabiting a number of city-states spread throughout an archipelago of many islands and coral atolls. The economy is based principally on fishing, with some agriculture on the larger islands, and other commodities traded overseas with Salarva and Haida Pakala. (Property is less important than custom: the right to fish in a certain bay, etc. Property can be lost, but such rights—which descend through the female line—can never be taken away.)

The Nom are:

- Lord Done*, who sends fair winds for ships.
- Lord An Hu*, who gave the gift of fire; he oversees metalworking and the exchange of hard currency; he is invoked when making pacts because he abhors an oathbreaker.
- Lady Jiu*, lady of the sea, who protects children and pregnant mothers.
- Lord Kaa*, who rewards bold men with the courage to fight and win in battle, but punishes cowards with slow death.
- Lord Ne'en*, terrible harbinger of violent storms.
- Lady Peli*, goddess of luck.
- Lady Chl'nh*, spirit of night and mother of the moons, who brings the tides that give fishermen their catches.
- Lord To'u*, who is Death.

The Nom have a shame-based culture (even more so than the Tsoylányi). Simply to refuse to accept a Nom's word on a matter is to shame him. To avoid disgrace a man will choose exile or even death. Nom who have been shamed say "Pei has turned her face away" and become fatalistic until some happy stroke of luck restores their belief in the chance to redress their shame.

Nom society is matrilineal. This does not mean it is a matriarchy, however. Men still rule, but inheritance is through the female line. A man is therefore often closer to his sister's children than to his own; they are the ones who will inherit his family's responsibilities, rights and property.

Several lineages make up a clan. Each city-state has members of all twenty-four Nom clans. Nine of the clans comprise the Sea People and fifteen are the Land People. The names of these two factions indicate their different areas of authority: fishing & overseas trade in the former case and farming, crafts & markets in the latter. The paramount lords of the two factions rule the city on alternate days.

The clans themselves are exogamous. Men marry outside their lineage and clan, and then go to live with their wife's family. Each clan is responsible for certain rituals. For a city-state to declare war, for instance, requires twenty-four rituals to be performed and therefore cannot happen without the consent of all the clans. But a lesser state of aggression can be declared by only nine Sea People rituals, giving those clans considerable sway in matters of minor foreign policy.

There are serfs, but the caste is hereditary and the Nom view the enslavement of free men as a barbarous practice. In general Nom society is very cultured. Oaths made in the name of An Hu are always honoured, but An Hu is only invoked if the pact is a matter of great weight—to mention him in the same breath as a simple promise would be disrespectful.

