

Issue Four | Spring 1995

Joyful Sitting Amongst Friends

Paul Snow: I ran *Internecline!* and the players mostly enjoyed it. The only complaint I got was that I had appointed a leader of the group. This was quite untrue, as a leader just emerged from the roleplaying.

I think that the referee should appoint a leader at the start—the one chosen by Hetepek hiAztlan, in other words. The fact that he might not turn out to be the natural leader of the group is one of the interesting things about the situation, since it throws players right up against the Tsolyáni status thing. (You must have seen The Admirable Crichton.) Some players feel that status, face saving, etc, are just obstacles to an enjoyable game. Scenarios like *Internecline!* hopefully will show them that they are in fact the motors of drama.

Paul Snow: The referee is always there to be blamed if someone doesn't have fun. In fact my players do seem to be developing a Thatcherite streak that might have been best left undisturbed. They think the ref's role is to provide perfect rules and scenarios to them, the critical customers, and any problem must be my fault. I have been trying to convince them that it is a communal affair relying on their input too.

Plenty of articles are written saying how roleplaying should be a group endeavour so that the players and referee together build up a story. All such articles are written by referees. In most cases I've seen, the relationship of referee to players is as parent to children. You have to entertain them when they're bored and sit quietly indulging them when they just want to natter amongst themselves. Remember: to the players you are not a person who spends hours a week preparing the background to an interesting adventure; you are just a janitor who clears up the mess after they've gone.



Paul Snow: It also gives the opportunity to let the facts be wrong or stretched, because it is all from the perspective of the narrator.

Mark Wigoder-Daniels: Certainly not everything stated by Jichka of Jgresh is necessarily "true"! The same approach that Paul is advocating was used very well by Stafford in King of Sartar. If such first-person accounts can be so effective for Glorantha, why not for Tékumel?

It's my belief that if, instead of doing a modern fantasy novel, the Professor were to write "The True History of the War of the Sons of Hirkane" by one or more Tsolyáni commentators, he could have a cult bestseller on his hands.

Michael Cule: How much do you think the Ssú understand of human culture? Do you think we could ever write a history of Tékumel from their point of view, or is it better to leave them as unintelligible menaces?

In my book the Ssú are just too way-out for human understanding. The problems of communication aren't in the vocal cords, they're in the whole way the creatures' brains are wired up. If you start giving them the politically correct "Rights for Ssú" treatment then you're wasting them. (Which, of course, is the best thing you can do with Ssú.)

Mark Wigoder-Daniels: Back to more mundane matters. On the map last Issue, you omitted to name the countries bordering Tsolyánu.

Also I only remembered the Gilraya Forest at the last minute, which is why it's lettered by hand. Tsolyánu's western neighbour is Mu'ugalavýá, to the north lies Milumanaya, due east is Kilalammu and south-east, beyond Hundranu Rise, is Salarvya. The small territory south-east of Fenul is Ssúyal, abode of the Ssú, and south of that is the state of Pechano.

Mark Wigoder-Daniels: People who don't have access to Barker's maps might also like to know that the Pe Choi inhabit the Do Chaka forest lying along the border west of Chene Ho, the Pachi Lei dwell in the forested highlands of Pan Chaka, just north of Ngeshtu Head, and the eyries of the Hlaka are in the Chayengar Mountains just inside the borders of Kilalammu.

Yes. All those species have normal diplomatic relations with the human nations, as it were, but the Hlutrgu (who infest the Layoda Swamps around Msumtel Bay) are invariably hostile. While on the subject, I'd also better give the names of the major rivers. The Chaigavra flows down from Tumissa to Penom. The MiSsúma flows from Avanthar to Pala Jakállá. The Rananga runs past Sokatis and Thraya. The Equ'noyel is the one flowing from Jaikalor to Jakállá.

Mike Havant: What colour do you think you'd get when both moons were up in the sky?

Depends on their albedo, I suppose. The eye responds less to red light at low intensities, so I suppose it would be a yellowish mix when both moons were full. Assuming there's enough light to make out colours at all.

Mark Wigoder-Daniels: As an addendum to the Blue Murder article, the assassins' clans were formed in the Time of No Emperor (816–830 AS) when various candidates vied for power and administration was in the hands of the priests of Change.

I imagine the assassins were granted special powers at that time which they have retained to this day even though the state of emergency that initiated them is lost in the fog of history.

Paul Snow: Servants of the Petal Throne had a good Tékumelani feel in the details and style. I felt I could read a lot between the lines about how the bureaucracy works and what it's like to get involved with. As a side note, there are letter boxes throughout the Doge's palace in Venice where people used to post anonymous letters to the secret police to inform on the behaviour of their neighbours. The same must be true in the Palace of the Realm if you want to contact the Omnipotent Azure Legion, but I think the letter boxes are the mouths of demon masks on the palace walls and in the gardens.

I tried that one on my players and they liked it. And if you can impress the likes of them with an idea then you know it must be good.

Paul Snow: I was interested to see that the Omnipotent Azure Legion investigate diabolism. Shouldn't this fall to the Palace of the Priesthood of the Gods? And what is it? Performing religious ceremonies without a temple licence?

Diabolism is worship of the Pariah Gods. If a priest were guilty of this then it would come under the jurisdiction of both the Imperial and ecclesiastical courts, yes. The ecclesiastical courts do not concern themselves with miscreants not belonging to the priesthood.

Jeff Riley: You listed the various demon races in *TIRIKELU* without specifying that a sorcerer can only summon a demon that worships his own deity.

For the simple reason that I don't play that rule. As far as I'm concerned, a Thúmis sorcerer can summon a Flame Dragon if he wants to. Almost all demons are miffed at being pulled from their own world in any case, and the fact that you and they nominally have the same deity won't help much. Bear in mind that the way that two different species think of and worship a common deity may in practice be drastically different.

Paul Snow: Divine intervention—how common should it be to reflect the nature of life on Tékumel? Are there any examples of DI from primary sources? As you pointed out, temple magic is simply the intellectual property of the priesthoods, so DI is really just about the only manifestation of divine power that is seen on Tékumel. Now, there are two ways DI could work. The first, cited by Michael Cule, is where a devout worshipper calls upon a god whose principles he follows.

The Professor says nothing in *Swords & Glory* about devotion making any difference. I think that's more in keeping with medieval Judo-Co-Christian belief, where you might expect to get DI if you had a higher "Holiness" score or whatever. The gods of Tékumel just aren't like that.

Paul Snow: Well, perhaps it works as a kind of sympathetic magic. Pushed to the limits of desperation, the worshipper is able to draw power from the god without his/her/its active participation. This would be a form of "reaching through", but to a power battery with a name. Now if that seems unlikely, consider the other way DI could work, where it is a deliberate act by a conscious god who is acting as a friendly big brother to his loyal servants. But, as you say, that isn't at all likely given the nature of the Tsolyáni gods. They just don't act like that. So I think DI either doesn't happen or is given accidentally to the devout worshippers according to the first theory.

I have another suggestion. On the walls of temples in Egypt you can see certain formulae. To call them prayers isn't quite right; they are spells that, if performed properly, induce a deity to grant the priests' requests. I think maybe DI on Tékumel is just a transaction like that. But I can't guess why the gods want offerings of gold and gems. The DI system in RuneQuest, where you give the deity some of your own power, is easier to understand.

Mike Havant: You don't need to understand it. You shouldn't understand it, in fact. All that people on Tékumel know is: get the prayer right, offer enough gold and sacrifices, and the god will intercede. I don't suppose the Aztecs sat about trying to think of theories as to why the gods wanted so much blood.

Liz Fletcher: Are there any creatures like mice or rats on Tékumel, as far as you know? There must be something that has evolved to fill that ecological niche.

Unless the priesthood of Avanthé really are so shit-hot with their agricultural spells that they've also exterminated all grain eating pests on the planet! But that level of sorcery implies such a drastic warping of the environment that I can't really buy it.

Mike Havant: I liked the food article, but there was no mention of chocolate.

The Tsolyáni must have the cocoa plant. Surely. I can't believe the human race would spread through the galaxy taking cats and dogs with them but forgetting about a necessity like chocolate!

Aidan Dixon: It's good to remember that Tékumel is a work of literature as well as a role-playing setting. Not everybody role plays Tékumel, but I don't see why SF and fantasy fans shouldn't find the world just as interesting. After all, there were Tolkien fanzines long before ICE published MERP, right?

My only quibble with Michael Cule's articles was his making the Hill People monotheists, especially the "chosen people" bit. Looking at our own world, such an outlook doesn't tend to produce the open-mindedness necessary for the barbarian "wild card" that Michael mentions. I agree that culture clashes make for good role playing, but ultimately at least one of the two viewpoints must be able to accomodate the other or violence will result. Monotheism doesn't rule out such tolerance, but I can't help feeling that animism or polytheism would be more likely to start the characters off with the ability to accept other points of view.

The conviction that "I am right, you are wrong", inherent in many theisms, seems to me the most pernicious of evils. Even when you get a fundamentally decent religion some fanatic old git like St Paul comes along and perverts it. Give me animism any day.

Aidan Dixon: just out of interest, which is the other of the "best two commercially-available rolegames around"?

At the time I was thinking of GURPS and RuneQuest, but that was just for the nuts-&-bolts of the systems. If you're talking about the best rolegames—ie, the books that do the most to create a really inspiring setting it has to be *Ars Magica* and *Bushido...* and *Pendragon*, of course. Also I have a soft spot for *Valley of the Pharaohs*. And some of the GURPS worldbooks are really excellent. I suppose I shouldn't forget *Stormbringer* either (even if Chaosium have), and I prize my copy of Paul Mason's yet-to-be-published *Water Margin...* Oh blow it, I'd better not get shipwrecked on a desert island, that's all!

Nathan Cubitt: Another idea on scarring. Possibly some of the younger Tsolani would want to rebel against their strict upbringing and go into deliberate disfigurement? This is a growing trend these days. You should check out Research 14: Modern Primitives. Full of interesting interviews and pictures, including one of a bloke who had his penis shaft split down the middle, pierced on both sides, with chains running up to his belly button. Now I've been bored, but never that bored.

Thanks for sharing that with us, Nathan...

Jeff Riley: The update on the Professor's own campaign was interesting.

I just get it off the internet. Recently Bob Alberti posted the latest developments. It seems that in the closing weeks of the year 2366 AS, Prince Taksuru left Bey Sü for Avanthar for a meeting with the Emperor Dchich'üne. Surprise, surprise, he hasn't been heard of since. Rather like Squirrel Nutkin popping in to see old Brown if you ask me.

A few days later, on Dohala 23rd, a delegation was sent to carry a challenge to the Emperor from one of the other princes. Upon arriving via tubeway car, several members of the delegation slipped away. These included Baron Ald and Prince Mridobu, both disguised. Their group gained entry to the Golden Tower and Dchich'üne was forced to flee for his life. If life is the right word.

Mridobu was then crowned as the Emperor Hiriiktashte, "Risen to Rule", with Ald as his High General. So it remained for all of two days (meaning that at least a couple of peasants in the fields south of Avanthar must have heard about it) and then hosts of undead emerged from those pesky catacombs beneath Avanthar. General carnage ensued; no one survived.

Subsequently Dchich'üne's forces attacked and overwhelmed Bey Sü, which had been left virtually undefended. So the current situation seems to have Dchich'üne once more back at the top of the heap, having retaken the capital and eliminated half of his rivals.

Paul Snow: I'd run *Keeping the Peace*, but most of my players are stuck with a need to be heroes who save the world.

Save-the-world stuff bores me. How many times can the same bunch of people save the world anyhow? How many Tsolyáni would understand what it meant? Perhaps most important of all, saving the world from total destruction is just not as emotionally engaging as problems on a more personal level: finding your little niece who's gone wandering off into the Foreigners' Quarter, learning the good name of your brother in the legion, or dealing with a conflict between duty and personal desire.

Okay, that's it. So long and thanks for all the tletlakha. And puh-lease send Steve your comments. He can't do the fanzine without them.

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