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Seasoned Creepings

David Chaterjee takes a look at the family side of Sárku worship. You're a sick man, David!

An address given by Jadhák hiChna'él of the Clan of the Ebon Blade, Eleventh Circlescholar priest of the Lord Sárku, in his clanhouse in Tléku, Thaúri Isle, on the occasion of the Festival of the Breaking Open of the Tomb on the 12th Night of Trantór.

Yohoho! Are we all having a lovely time? **[Chorus of screams from the audience.]** Do you know who I am? Don't you recognise my raggedy old Bednálljan güdru robes and the wispy trails of white fungus over my hair and face? That's right! I'm Vergessái the Dispenser of Blessings **[25th Aspect of Lord Sárku]**, who brings the gift of death to all good children everywhere!

Today is a very special day, as we all know: tonight the wonderful Lord Sárku (e-ver-bless-ed-be-His-Name) **[The children chant along]** the wonderful Lord Sárku rises to stalk the face of the world looking to see who's been a faithful little demon and who's been a disobedient rascal bringing shame and dishonour to his clan and making this tired old wanderer very unhappy. Has anyone been naughty this year? **[No!]** Good. Because then I can be busy tonight finding all the tombs of your glorious ancestors and crawling down into them through the dark heavy earth, and blessing them all for being such honourable people and faithful worshippers of Me.

And if any of you has been really noble this year—has anyone? **[looking round dubiously]**—I can do my favourite thing. I can ask my friend the Black Angel of the Putrescent Hand **[one child shouts out, "Lord Durritlámish!"]** to look into His amazing Vessel of the Vision of the World and find out where your tomb will be when you die; and I'll claw My way into it before it's even there and leave you a very special present so that you can come straight to join Me in My splendid Halls for all eternity—wouldn't that be lovely!

[Slaves bring in some mince pies and drónu. Meanwhile a singer in the corner starts crooning "Silent night, holy night" and "Gods rest ye, merry Sárku men" whilst the adults hum along.] Eat up children. I'm afraid you're all too young to eat real minced flesh and drink real blood like you clan-parents will do later on in My shrine. **[Yeurgh! from the audience, gentle smiles from the watching adults. The carols move on to "While shepherds watched their hmá by night."]** This year we're eating Uncle üjütétl who died last month, do you remember? The nice priests saved a little part of him in case he was the last to die before tonight and, luckily for him, he was. Isn't that nice? That will help him go straight to heaven. He'll be the first person I see tonight when I go visiting everybody's graves. Shall I say hello from you all? **[Yesss!]**

Shall we sing some carols or do you want your presents now? **[Presents!! Four adults dressed as corpses enter bearing a sarcophagus, which opens.]** Oh look, here's my magical helper, Zaídza of the Liquescent Mould, who comes to carry you to paradise if you die in your sleep! Say hello to Princess Zaídza, children—but don't get too close! **[The Princess starts offering small gifts to the children, who line up nicely: tiny copper skulls and silver rings to hang as charms; various favourite dried seafood delicacies the children rarely see little toys and gadgets from Jakállá or Chame'él.]**

Come on, come on, I haven't got all night you know! Longest night of the year. There are so many sepulchres to break open and reseal, and especially the ones of the Bereshkordáshmu lineage during the middle Engsvanyáli. They really knew how to make them last, I can tell you. There was one time when I was a third circle stripling **[the audience is slipping away from Jadhák]**—err—does anyone know the story of Ritónmel the Red-Nosed Vorodlá? **[Yes! and Of Course!]** What about the tale of the late wizard Sivusé hiVoroshkótl, clan-ancestor of young Jangáiva and Raimáni here, who was out of his tomb guarding his clan from danger late one cold Trantór night when the monsoon came early and washed him away and he had to try to get back home safely before the vengeful Vergessái—err, me of course—found him missing and cast him into the Halls of Ever-Blazing Flame to dry him out (may the love of the Lord of Worms defend us all from such a fate)?

[The children settle down to listen. Krézhmadz cake is brought in—krézhmadz is a Salarvyáni delicacy extracted from the glands of the górrdzha slug—and the Princess of the Liquescent Mould breaks into the traditional crispy white 'domed tomb' cake with an extended claw, to finger-snapping applause from the adults. Slaves offer the crumbled masonry to the audience revealing the dark, moist flesh beneath, flecked with slivers of fruit and laced with tsuhóridu. The adults each take a piece and file out, singing 'The Twelve Days of Trantór' to ready themselves for the night's rituals in the catacombs. The children sit, enraptured by Jadhák's tale of solstices past.]

We five worms of Sárku are.
Devouring flesh, we burrow afar
Field and fountain,
Moor and mountain,
Following yonder shédra.
O Worm of wonder,
Worm of blight,
Worm with deathly beauty bright.
Downward leading,
Still proceeding,
Guide us to Thy perfect night.