

Visitations of Glory

Issue 10





Scarabomancy by Barry Blatt

Lost in the Library by Krista Donnelly

A Forest Wending by Brad Johnson



Scarabomancy

Barry Blatt





Scarabomancy

by
Barry Blatt

Ohé! Let it be known among the wise that the ancient and most perfect art of Scarabomancy has been rediscovered and that lectures in such will commence in Tumíssa on 12 Fésru, at the gong of Awakening in Azure at the Temple of Ksárul.

Herein I shall outline for the curious what this art entails, for in this decadent age few, even among the wisest of the wise the adherents of the Doomed Prince, have even heard of this most marvelous method of divination and interpretation of the knots of Skeins of Destiny.

First you need a scarab beetle, obviously. This attractive little beetle is most sacred to Ksárul, master of the mightiest beetles that roll the planets and moons through the sky, and himself manifest in the great fireproof beast that moves the sun itself. Each scarab is, in a minute and most infinitesimal way, an aspect of Ksárul himself and thus can impart wisdom from beyond this most mundane of planes.

Second you will need chalk and a bit of flat floor, and on it you shall inscribe the Ten-Fold Circle of Fate and the Fifty-Five glyphs of the Tongue of the Scarab (copies available from me after the lecture, price 50 káitars and worth every qirgál). The very best method is to permanently incise the Circle on the floor of a dedicated Shrine of the Scarab, but as the Provost of the Fabric of the Sacred Space has no spare rooms at the moment, I will instruct students in the use of Mríddu's most marvelous chalk.

Thirdly, you will need pen, ink and paper, and fourthly, the most important ingredient, dung. Most dung will do, chlén is ideal, but hmá and hmélu do just as well. Do not be tempted to use human dung!

It is easily available (all too easily given the woeful culinary standards of the Tumíssan temple refectory) but the stench is awful, the consistency poor and it will make your scarab ill, if he can be persuaded to approach the stuff at all.

The procedure is as follows.

Ask the questioner (or yourself (but not out loud or people will think you mad, which I am not)), to state their request of the Mightiest and Wisest of Gods in no more than thirteen words and two symbols of punctuation. Write this question, in any language, scarab beetles are perfectly multilingual like their master, on a piece of paper two chóptse wide by one hoi long and roll it into as tight a cylinder as you can.

Take a lump of dung in the hand, ten mló will do nicely, but a weak or small beetle might only be able to cope with seven or eight, and roll it into a ball. Insert the question into the ball of dung and place it on the Glyph of Questioning in the very centre of the circle.

Take a Dársha leaf, and roll it round a mló of Aíra grass, a mló of Chúmaz, three mló of Hnéqu weed and a pinch (and believe me, only a pinch) of dried Urugál root. Set fire to the rolled herbs and inhale the smoke in Lorúni fashion. When the room has stopped spinning, get your scarab and blow upon it the smoke. When the scarab has stopped waving its legs in the air and coughing place it on the circle at the Glyph of Wisdom (that's the big square one).

Observe closely the path it takes to the question using the left eye, and then observe closely the path by which it rolls the ball of dung out of the circle using the right eye. Do not use both eyes at once! If this process takes more than two kirén you have probably used too much Aíra grass. If you lose consciousness before the end of the process I suggest you use fresher Chúmaz, and if you find yourself distracted by the green translucent Vringálu singing Pijenáni drinking songs you have used too much Urugál root and should seek professional demonological help immediately.

By analyzing the path of the sacred scarab it is possible, with practice, to determine with amazing accuracy the course of the questioner's skein of destiny with respect to his question. So if you are asked 'Ohé, shall I wed the handsome mat weaver or the ugly slave merchant?' and the scarab crosses the Glyph of the Impaled Ahoggyá, the Glyph of the Left-Centre Eye of the Zrné and then abandons its ball of dung on the Glyph of the Missing Finger and bites the questioner, the answer is of course neither you silly person, you are going on a long sea voyage in the course of which you will inevitably drown.

The many relations of Glyphs to knots of fate are detailed in the scroll 'Key to the Skein of the Scarab, or Silly Answers to Stupid Questions' by the mighty seer Arkha'anú the five-legged, who himself was a scarab, so he should know. Copies of this are being produced in the scriptorium of the Plume of White clan for those students willing to take ship on this barge of most excellent wisdom to its ultimate destination, the Sea of Fate itself.

Oh yes, the last stage of the process is wash your hands.

Rusála Yi'íisia hiNáshomai, Friend of the Scarab, Twitcher of the Refulgent Blue Curtain, Kusijáktodàli of the Temple of Azure Ambivalence etc. etc. Teacher of Scarabomancy

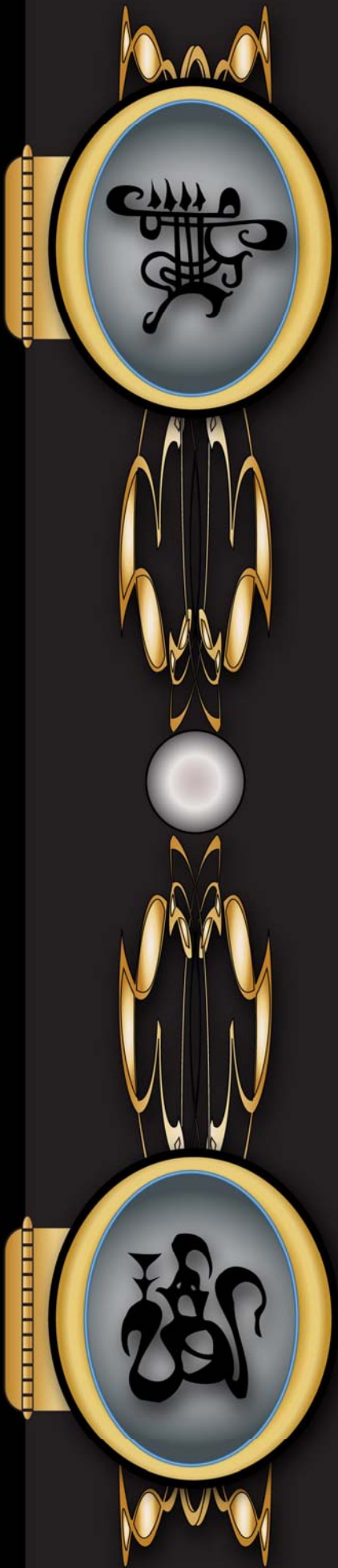
All hail Ksáru!



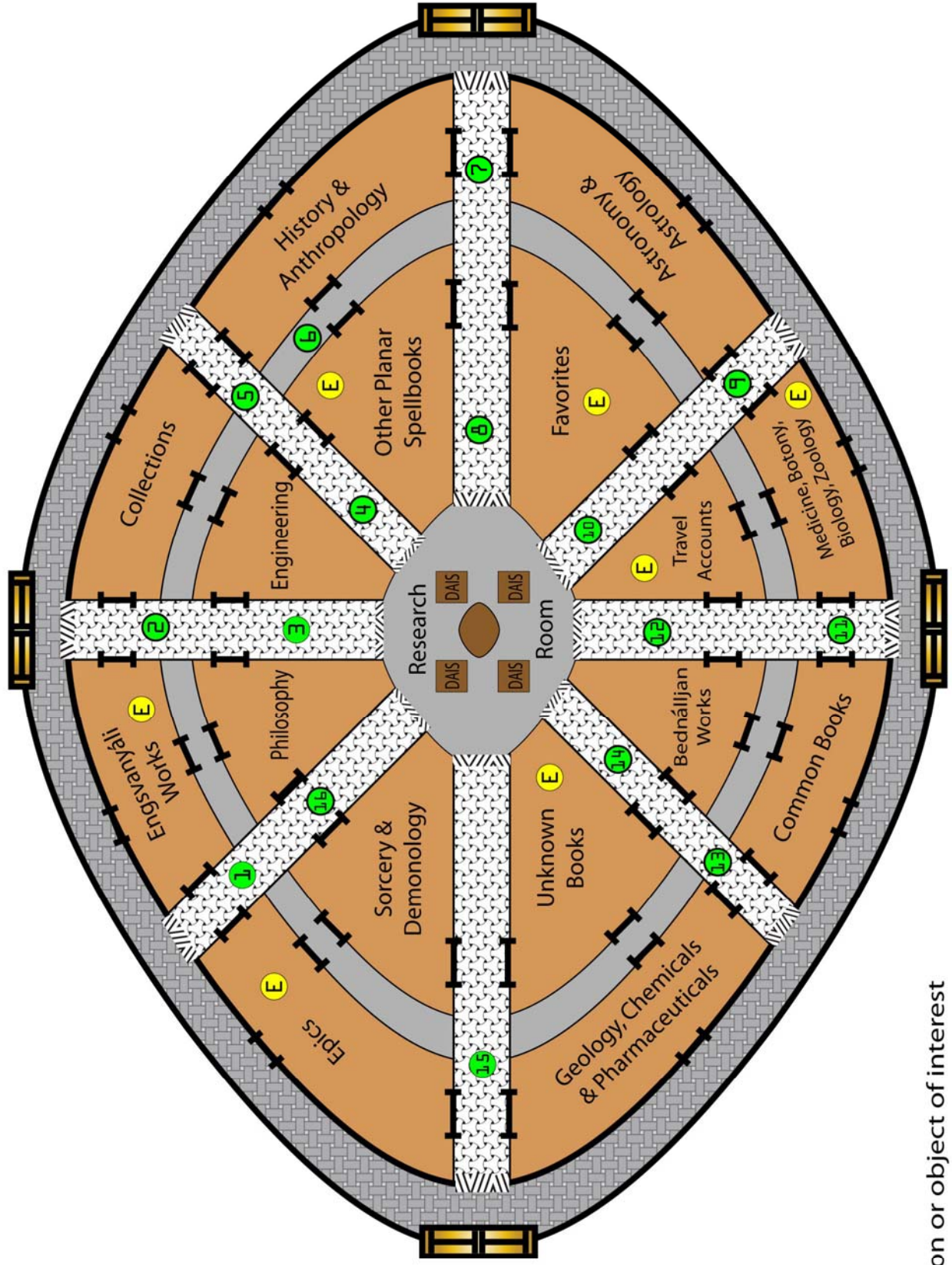
Lost in the Library
By Krista Donnelly



مكتبة



Library Floorplan

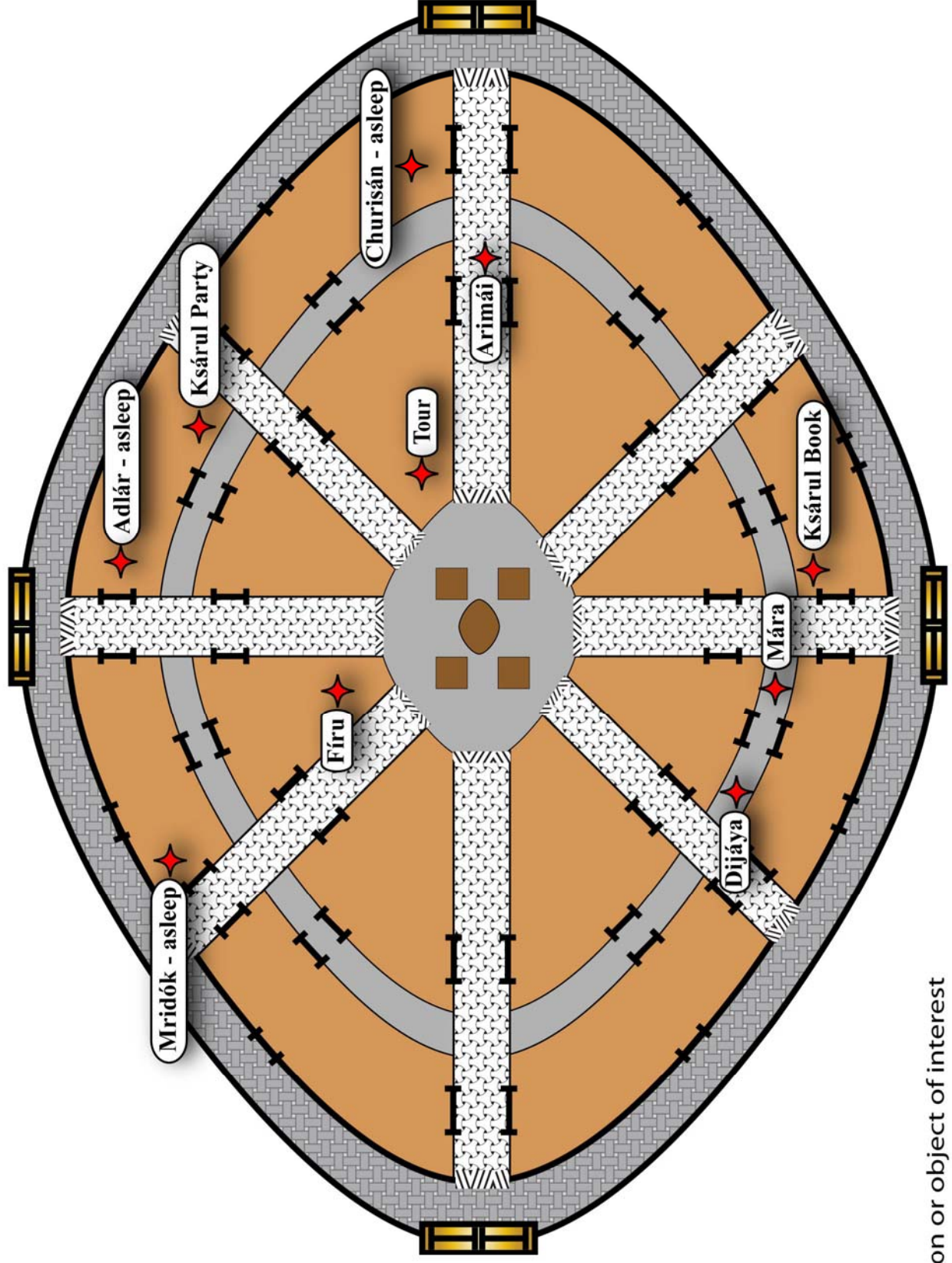


◆ Person or object of interest

● Circles with a number inside = Aspect statues (see appropriate library section)

● Circles with E = Execrated texts

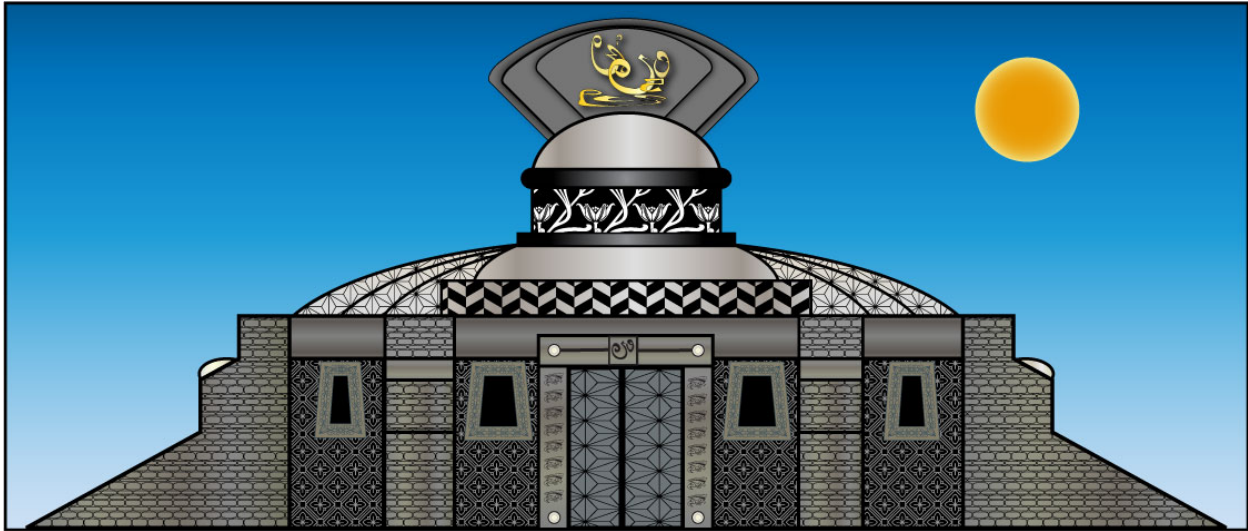
Library Floorplan



★ Person or object of interest

● Circles with a number inside = Aspect statues (see appropriate library section)

● Circles with E = Execrated texts



Lost in the Library

By Krista Donnelly

Author's Introduction

Inspiration for the library and its contents was derived from Mitlányal, Volume 1: The Gods of Stability (by Robert Alberti and M.A.R. Barker). Though I tried for a faithful depiction of such an institution, it's probably still too well-organized.

Game Master's Introduction

Most of the action takes place in the library, with a coda involving application for branch membership to one of the High Priests. The scenario revolves around the interaction of the characters, the Ksárul party, the regular library inhabitants and the library itself. There's a bit of everything: social interactions, magic and combat.

Since the characters have not been here before, they should not be shown a version of the map. Being lost or sketching on the fly will add to the atmosphere.

Many people will be moving around the library during the game. It may be helpful to use some sort of token to depict their locations so you know when someone is going to encounter another person.

If you wish to accommodate more players, Dijája and Mára can be written up as player characters.

Introduction

It's the 25th of Dohála in Sokátis, and that can mean only one thing: The Temple of Thúmis is celebrating The Uncovering of Wisdom! As a holiday which really only interests themselves, they diligently extended invitations to all other temples to come and partake of the rituals and be exposed to the opportunities for learning and scholarship residing within the Temple. The High Ritual Priest, No'ómu hiKarélsa, succeeded in securing the presence of the High Ritual Priest of Keténgku, polite declines from the other Stability temples, rather curt declines from the temples of Hrü'ü and Sárku, stony silence from the temples of Vimúhla and Dlamélish, and the attendance of several young priests from the temple of Ksárul.

While the unwashed masses have little appreciation for The Uncovering of Wisdom, you acolytes have been eagerly anticipating it. This is your day of decision, when you choose a branch of priesthood to follow or decided to leave it altogether for another career path. For the first (and perhaps only) time, you are given entrance into the inner areas of the temple. From the opening ritual in the Inner Shrine with the High Ritual Priest, to an audience with the High Administrative Priest in her office with her ledgers, to a tour of the great library following a lecture from the High Scholar Priest, you are given one last reminder of the delights each branch of priesthood holds. At the end of the day, you will submit your request for admission to your chosen branch to its High Priest.

Currently, you are touring the library. Your guide is Arimái, a crusty old woman who's worked in the library as a scholar priestess for decades. You've been trailing dutifully behind her for a while now, half-listening to lectures on the importance of preserving knowledge for future generations, educating everyone so all can benefit from the repository while keeping it safe with proprietary spells (she winked at you there). Then she hobbles to a stop and glances about her for a moment, as if lost. "Wait here, I'll be right back." She slowly makes her way through a doorway and out of view. You wait for several long minutes and then heard a noise, perhaps it's a sudden intake of breath, in the near distance. Stirring among yourselves, you also notice that Dijáya and Mára, two teenage girls who had been bringing up the rear, are also gone.

The Library

The head of the library, the main curator, is Bálesh hiTáika, High Scholar Priest. He has answering to him a flock of lower level scholar priests, each responsible for a section of the library. Each scholar priest has a page to assist in the grunt work of maintaining their section, and occasionally an apprentice priest slowly learning the contents of that section of the library and the spells and defenses needed to protect and maintain it.

The library is divided by era, by subject, by collection and by type of media (e.g. paper, parchment, wooden plaques, metal plates, clay tablets, etc). All of these sections can overlap each other. Thus, an Engsvanyáli spell-book given to the library 1,000 years ago as part of a larger bequest from a near-by fief-holder could be stored with the Engsvanyáli-era books, with the spell-books, as part of the fief-holder's collection or with other parchment documents. In

essence, finding a book requires the assistance of the scholar priest or the curator who will have memorized its location.

Although it's not of sorcerous origin, the acoustics of the library are such that sound does not travel well at all. The rows of books that crisscross the room render noises from one section virtually inaudible in another section. Even within each section, the sheer mass of items tends to absorb sound.

Books line every wall depicted on the map. Each room within the library is not a wide-open space. Besides the main work tables of the scholar priest in charge of the section, there are shelves, tables and piles of books and manuscripts everywhere.

Work Stations

Each section is the responsibility of a scholar priest. Each priest has his own work table where his work in progress is stored: books requested by researchers, books to be re-shelved, researcher requests (often in form of long, flowery letters praising the priests and outlining the sort of information they're after), little ornate containers where bribes from the researchers are deposited, notes involving the priest's own research or more mundane business matters. Next to each work table is a statue of Tyélu, "Smiling, pleasant young woman with a hand outstretched." Pages leave the bribes and letters in Tyélu's open hand for the scholar priests to collect and examine later.

Each station also comes equipped with a set of méshqu plaques. Since the library is closed to outsiders, these are for the benefit of the other scholar priests and the pages. Most stations display the Signifier of Inaccessibility (Moss-green square with 2 rows of four white ovals each), indicating that the owner is out. Fíru's station, in the philosophy section, displays the Symbol of Inspired Creation (White with 2 concentric blue circles), indicating that the owner is busy with an artistic or literary project. Fíru is working through the holiday, taking advantage of the relative privacy to learn his section better. Churísán's station, in the History section, displays the Indicant of Ebullient Delight (light blue with a central green circle).

Library Sections

Statues of Aspects of Thúmis are scattered throughout the library, vaguely corresponding to the contents of a nearby section. This fact is not widely known outside of the library.

The Center of the Library

At the center of the library is a large circle at the center of which is a pedestal of pearl-grey granite decorated with carven eyes of all shapes and sizes. Lying on top of the pedestal is a single sheet of yellowed paper, weighted down on each corner by a carven eye. It is reputed to be from the original Scrolls of Pavár, inscribed by Pavár himself. This is the crown jewel of their collection and is protected by a Muniments of Excellence spell. If it's approached without Thúmis' version of Disenchant being cast, an impervious cylinder of deep pearl grey will spring up around the pedestal, extending to the ceiling of the room. Nothing physical or magical can

enter it (though anyone within it can walk out). Anyone within the cylinder would be in utter darkness and silence, as no air or light can pass through the barrier.

1. Engsvanyáli Works

The statue is of Ferésh, “A serenely beautiful woman, seated on a high throne, eyes closed and hands lying relaxed and empty on her lap.” It’s near Engsvanyáli era since it represented the height of culture in poetry, literature, music, sculpture and all arts. The work station here has an Execrated tract on it, keyed to Thúmis worshippers: will explode for 15 points of damage.

Hidden in this section is one of Bálesh’s letters.

Mridók, the 50ish guide for the Ksárul party, is asleep in this section.

2. Collections

The statue is of Kakán, “Beast-headed, armored man with a staff”

Adlár is asleep in this section. The Ksárul party starts the scenario in this section.

3. Philosophy

The statue is of Muór, the Sage of Sages, “An aged man standing in a long robe and black skullcap, holding a rolled scroll in one hand and a carven staff in another.”

The méshqu plaque on display here is the Symbol of Inspired Creation (white with 2 concentric blue circles), indicating that the owner is busy with an artistic or literary project. Fíru is working through the holiday, taking advantage of the relative privacy to learn his section better. (See Fíru in the NPC section below.)

4. Engineering

The statue is of Thekkúsa the Artificer, “A barrel-shaped, middle-aged figure with long white hair tied in a knot at the back of his head.”

5. History and Anthropology

The statue is of Chokóth, the Messenger, the Far-Wanderer, “A tall, wiry, athletic, 30-year-old man wearing leather leggings, a short leather kilt and a hood-like headdress.”

The méshqu plaque on display at the work station is light blue with a central green circle: the Indicant of Ebullient Delight. Lying on the floor, asleep, is Chúrisan, the handsome scholar priest who works in this section.

6. *Other Planar works and Spell-books*

The statue is of Ne'élti, "Thin-faced middle-aged man." The work station here has an Execrated tract on it, keyed to Thúmis worshippers: will explode for 10 points of damage.

The spell-books are jealously guarded. If one of them is touched by someone other than a scholar priest who works in the library, it will trigger a variant of the Guarding spell. All the exits from the library will glow a pearly-grey and will be impenetrable from the inside until a Disenchant is cast from the outside.

Hidden in this section is one of Bálesh's letters.

7. *Astronomy and Astrology*

The statue is of KànuKolúm, "Haloed manlike figure with hands like rays of light": near astrology, astronomy and more geology works.

8. *Favorites of past High Scholar Priests*

The statue is of Nrásh, "Single eye from which rays stream forth." The work station here has an Execrated tract on it, keyed to Thúmis worshippers: will explode for 5 points of damage.

Arimái abandoned the tour in this section.

9. *Medicine, Botany, Biology, Zoology*

The statue is of Meshmúr, the Molder of Flesh, the Healer of Entrails, "A great, curled snake with a large head sporting a single, great eye." The work station here has an Execrated tract on it, keyed to Thúmis worshippers: will explode for 5 points of damage.

Hidden in this section is one of Bálesh's letters.

The blue book that the Ksárul party is searching for is on the work table in this section. The scholar priest here is a favorite of Bálesh's, and asked to examine it.

10. *Travel Accounts, Books from Distant Lands*

The statue here is of Pohán, Sage of Lost Cities, "A man attired in rags, wearing a leather tunic, scuffed traveler's boots, and a flat cap." The work station here has an Execrated tract on it, keyed to Thúmis worshippers: will explode for 20 points of damage.

Hidden in this section is one of Bálesh's letters.

11. Common books, often used in classes

The statue is of Feshmu'ún, "Thin, elderly man with long, grey locks bound in a single coil behind his head and one hand upraised as if lecturing."

Hidden in this section is one of Bálesh's letters.

12. Bednálljan works

The statue is of Khálesh, the Decider, "A handsome, portly man of middle age, seated upon a simple stool with a tablet on his lap." It's near the Bednálljan section as it represents the foundations of the current governmental structure.

Hidden in this section is one of Bálesh's letters.

13. Geology, Chemicals, Pharmaceuticals

The statue is of A'akán, Alchemist of the Gods, "An old man with four hands, in which he holds a crucible, an alembic, a flask and a scroll."

14. Books with unknown contents

The statue is of So'ónkum, Victorious of the Far-Flung Ones, "A grey bearded scholar, unarmed but conveying power": near books with unknown contents. The work station here has an Execrated tract on it, keyed to Thúmis worshippers: will explode for 10 points of damage.

15. Epics

The statue is of Armésh, the Jeweled Serpent, "Gigantic coiling serpent." The work station here has an Execrated tract on it, keyed to Thúmis worshippers: will explode for 5 points of damage.

Hidden in this section is one of Bálesh's letters.

16. Sorcery and Demonology

The statue is of Chuharém the Diviner, "Stern man, seated with a walking-staff across his knees."

The books on demonology and sorcery are guarded even more closely than the spellbooks because of the potential for harm if they fell into the wrong hands. If a visitor should venture too close to them without first casting the peculiar version of Disenchant needed here, she will trigger a Vallation spell. It appears as a grey mist drifting along the rows between the stacks at a rate of 2 metres per second, to a maximum distance of 60 metres at which point it dissipates. For each person struck by Vallation, roll a die and multiply by 4 (the Margin of Success when the spell was cast) to determine how much damage is inflicted. Successfully resisting the spell halves the damage [the caster's Magic skill level is 6].

Library Defenses

The library itself is protected under a permanent Guarding spell. No spells may enter or leave the area of effect, although they can operate within it. This protects it from magical espionage and nexus point travelers.

About a quarter of the books have an alarm spell cast on them (the most valuable quarter). If they are not Disenchanted first, they will emit a piercing scream if carried out of the doors of the library.

The books themselves often have some level of the Preserver of Wisdom cast on them – though it's mostly the less powerful versions, to combat mold and mildew.

For the more powerful defenses of specific volumes, see the above sections on Spell books, Sorcery & Demonology, and the Center of the Library.

The Ksárul Party

As mentioned in the introduction, the Temple of Ksárul sent a small group of priests in response to the invitation from No'ómu. Or rather, No'ómu assumed the group is an official delegation. The truth of the matter is that the invitation was set aside, waiting for an administrative priest to craft a refusal. One of the scholar priests, Jesékh hiTukkolén, noticed it and asked if he could attend. The invitation was given to him.

Jesékh is no longer young, but not yet middle-aged (30 years old). He's served in the temple long enough to realize that he's not going to be invited into the true power structure of the priesthood. If any of the cleaning staff are in truth patriarchs of the temple, he doesn't know it. This frustrates him since as a child of privilege in a Very High status clan, Cloak of Azure Gems, he always anticipated golden threads for his Skein of Destiny. Then Jesékh learned of a rumor that opened up another set of possibilities for him.

His brother Sánjesh had been sent out to the hinterland to oversee the reclamation of a fief long abandoned to an encroaching swamp. As it turned out, it was unfortunate that Sánjesh was not the most diligent of overseers. The peasants doing most of the work belonged to Sinking Land and tended towards Stability worship, particularly Belkhánu. After only a few times of Sánjesh waving off news of this or that person's death in work accidents, they stopped coming to him with messages. So it was that when they found the book in the mud and water, they didn't even mention it. When Sánjesh finally heard, it was too late. They'd already given the book to the local priest of Thúmis who'd passed it along to the Temple in Sokátis. He brought the peasant who'd found it to Jesékh, who commanded him to think of the book and then cast Ascertainment. Peering into the man's mind, Jesékh saw him reaching into the foul swamp water and lifting out a book, undamaged by the water. No mildew, no mold, pages still crisp. It had obviously been protected by the Preserver of Wisdom. The cover was of finely tooled vringálu-leather, dyed a deep indigo blue. But what took Jesékh's breath away was when he'd opened the cover and flipped through several pages. It was a sorcerer's manual, the type written by a tutor when the pupil was going to be away for an extended period, allowing the pupil to continue learning the

spells. Looking at the writing hurt the peasant's eyes so he'd closed it quickly. But Jesékh had seen enough to know that the spell he was looking at was a generic spell belonging to the Ksárul temple. Jesékh decided then that he would retrieve the book from the Thúmis temple, learn the spells himself and drop out of Temple life to become a lay priest. With that kind of knowledge, he can live well as a "bazaar sorcerer."

Jesékh's Plan

Jesékh first needed to find where the book was located within the library. This stumped him for a while because only the scholar priests who worked in the library knew where anything was, and he couldn't find a way to corrupt one of them. Then he realized that the pages, the assistants to the scholar priests, also had access. He befriended Yapán, a rather slow-witted man who enjoyed visiting and feasting at all the temples' celebrations. After describing the book, he asked Yapán to look for it, hoping that its recent arrival would mean it hadn't been hidden away in a cubbyhole yet. Over a number of weeks, Yapán brought him sighting after sighting. In all, Jesékh has six potential locations for the book.

Getting into the library was taken care of by the invitation to The Unveiling of Wisdom. He plans to attend with his brother Sánjesh (who wants his own cut of the proceeds) and his cousin Visán. The library should be virtually deserted because of the holiday. When they're alone, they'll dispose of their guide through the judicious casting of Sophoriferousness. If the spell should fail, Visán, a talented but bloodthirsty duelist, will run the guide through. The spell or Visán will take care of anyone else they should meet.

It's common knowledge that the Temple of Thúmis has spells in place to protect their books from theft. For instance, one is known to produce a great shriek or other noise if the book on which it is cast is removed from the premises. Jesékh plans to avoid these defenses by not touching any book except the one he's after. He assumes (correctly) that the scholar priests will be unable to enchant this book because it is attuned to those who worship Ksárul.

Having secured the book, he will place it in his satchel and simply walk out of the library.

Bálesh's Plan

Bálesh is the head of the local branch of the secret society, the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom (see Tákodai's character sheet for an accurate description of its belief, see Mízhotl's for the conservatives' distortion of its beliefs). He is a fervent advocate of the superiority of Stability worship, particularly of Thúmis, and he is aggressively recruiting those young priests and priestesses who agree with his stance. He believes that a recruit into the Brotherhood can be radicalized further once he or she is a part of the actual work. He's using the opportunity of the tour to see if any of acolytes are of the right stuff to join the Brotherhood.

The guide for the acolytes is a member of the Brotherhood. She will lead them to a pre-selected spot within the library (the Favorites section) and then disappear. At the spot will be a piece of paper, folded over and sealed. It will be labeled, "To a True Lover of Lord Thúmis." Inside it will read:

“A True Lover of Lord Thúmis is not content with only a single scrap of wisdom. He pursues knowledge, searching it out wherever it may be found. An Epic search, it winds through the Bednálljan era to Engsvanyáli times. He may travel to distant lands or Other Planes or find it while serving his fellow man through medical care or teaching. Worthy is he of Thúmis who gathers from all these sources!”

At each of the mentioned sections (Epics, Bednálljan, Engsvanyáli, Travel Accounts, Spell-books and Other Planar, Medicine, Common books) there will be a discreet grey folded piece of paper somewhere in the section – not immediately obvious, but not well-hidden either. Each one reads, “You have done well, Thúmis would be pleased with you.” Anyone who can show these slips to Bálesh at the end will be able to enter the scholar branch if they so desire. Multiples will bring an offer into the Brotherhood in the near future (or immediately, if the character brings it up).

NPC Listing

High Priests

No'ómu hiKarélsa High Ritual Priest, currently running the temple. Highly suspicious of Bálesh hiTáika, the High Scholarly Priest. Suspects him of belonging to the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom. No'ómu is aligned with the conservatives.

Bálesh hiTáika High Scholarly Priest, currently recruiting heavily for the Scholarly Branch, particularly if the priests are likely to share his activist philosophy. He leads the secret society, the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom.

Sáyi hiChánkolel High Administrative Priestess. Rather elderly time-server. She couldn't care less about internal Temple politics. She's only interested in the smooth functioning of the Temple and her own imminent retirement. She'll prefer competent priests for her branch, but she's a realist and rarely turns anyone away.

Scholar Priests

Adlár Works in the library, pre-dating Bálesh, knows the personal collections section. He resents the new concentration of Brotherhood adherents. He's decided to play a mean-spirited practical joke for the holiday: leaving tracts against the Brotherhood on the work tables of Brotherhood. The tracts have Execration on them, keyed to Thúmis worshippers.

Adlár's Execration has the following defects: Erratic Preparation, Involving, Linguistic Requirement (Cost 6). His Magic skill level is 3. He has 46 Energy Points and cast Execration 7 times, leaving him with 4 energy points.

Arimái Crusty old woman who's guiding the acolytes through the library. She belongs to the Brotherhood and is completely loyal to Bálesh. She's responsible for the travel accounts and books from distant lands.

Chúrisan Handsome scholar priest who works with the local history books. He likes making assignments in the library and has arranged to meet the two girls, Dijáya and Mára.

Fíru New scholar priest in charge of the philosophy section. He's been here 6 years, but didn't pay close attention to his predecessor, assuming he had years to learn everything. But recently his predecessor died unexpectedly, and he's in charge. He's trying to cover up his ignorance and learn the contents of his section as quickly as possible. He's working even during the holiday.

Mridók Guide for the Ksárul party. A trusting older man (around 50) who enjoys telling stories. He failed his Magic Resistance roll and fell asleep. Works in the Engsvanyáli section.

Pages

Yapán Slow-witted page who's been befriended by Jesékh hiTukkolén, the Ksárul priest. He also works mainly in the Engsvanyáli section.

Wivárin Quiet, non-social man. He likes to run through the stacks retrieving materials. He saw Adlár casting Execration on the tracts. He'll try and avoid contact with people.

Gathám Resentful. He'll never progress beyond the 3rd Circle. He works around the Engsvanyáli section, but doesn't know it well. He's sneaking around the library, checking for any coins left at the work tables (bribes from researchers to the scholar priests).

Fellow Acolytes

Dijáya and Mára hiVáika 16 and 17 year old girls. Dijáya is from Moon of Evening; Mára is from Scroll of Wisdom. They met as acolytes in the temple. They have a crush on Chúrisan and agreed to meet him in the library tonight, sneaking away from the party for that purpose.

Ksáru Party

They are trying to travel to 6 different work stations, looking for their book: spell-books, engineering, chemicals/geology, sorcery/demonology, travel accounts and medicine/biology.

Jesékh hi Tukkolén Tall, thin and gangly with a prominent adam's apple, particularly noticeable when he swallows. He wears the symbols of the Cloak of Azure Gems and Ksáru. He has a leather satchel slung across his shoulder (was hidden under his overshirt when he arrived). He fiddles with things, needing to keep his fingers constantly busy.

Str 2, Dex 3, Int 6, Psyche 7, Char 3, Will 5

Initiative 8, Combat 3, Health Points 35, Shock 7, Chase 4

Magic Resistance 6, Energy Pool 37 [13 left at start of the scenario]

Ritual Magic skill 3, relevant stat = 5; Psychic Magic skill 1, relevant stat = 6

- Spells:
1. Soporiferousness (Ritual, Cost 6, Range 20 metres, 1 target, Duration 1 hour, takes 5 minutes to wake, -2 to cast due to level and cost)
 2. Ascertainment (Psychic, Cost 4, Range 5 metres radius, Duration 5 minutes, -2 to cast due to level and cost)
 3. Healing (Ritual, Cost 18, Range: Touch, 1 target, Duration: instantaneous, restores health points equal to margin of success x 5)

He has cast Soporiferousness 4 times: Mridók, Chúrisan, Adlár, and Arimái (failed on her).

Sánjesh hiTukkolén More handsome version of Jesékh: tall, slender, dark-haired with an easy smile. He also wears the symbols of Cloak of Azure Gems and Ksáru. He has a small leather pouch hanging from his belt which contains 50 káitars wrapped in güdrü cloth to keep them from jangling. If he needs to, he'll use them for bribes. He's here to make sure his brother Jesékh doesn't lose his nerve.

Str 5, Dex 6, Int 3, Psyche 3, Char 6, Will 4

Initiative 10, Combat 6, Health Points 45, Shock 9, Magic Resistance 4, Chase 5

Bribery (Gov) 2, Charm (Social) 3, Intimidation (Social) 3, Intoxicants (Powders) 3

Visán hiTukkolén Thin, wiry man with an expressionless face. Sánjesh recruited him as a back-up for Jesékh. Visán agreed because he's slightly psychotic: he enjoys killing people. He has a bad reputation for starting unfair duels, and Cloak of Azure Gems has had to pay shámtla on his behalf in the past. Once he's tasted blood, he'll grow increasingly harder for Sánjesh to control. He barely listens to Jesékh.

Str 7, Dex 7, Int 3, Psyche 1, Char 2, Will 6

Initiative 13, Combat 7, Health Points 75, Shock 15, Magic Resistance 3, Chase 7

Intimidation (Street) 4, Sword (rapier) 3 [damage x 3]

Timeline of Events

- Adlár skipped dinner to come to library and cast Execration on his anti-Brotherhood tracts. He cast it seven times and left the tracts at the following work-stations: travel accounts; Engsvanyáli era; medicine and biology; books with unknown contents; epics; favorites of past High Scholar Priests, spell-books and accounts regarding the Other Planes. He then retired to his section, Personal Collections, to rest up. His plan is to wait until something's triggered and then join in when everyone comes into the library once they've heard the news.
- Wivárin, the non-social page, saw Adlár cast some of the spells. He was in the library and was drawn by the loud talking in another language.
- Jesékh cast Sophoriferousness on Mridók while Sánjesh distracted him with questions. Previous to that, Sánjesh charmed out of Mridók the clue to basic navigation in the library – the statues indicate the sections. Unfortunately, none of them are very conversant with the lesser known aspects of Thúmis, and they will have trouble navigating the library. They are trying to travel to 6 different work stations, looking for their book: spell-books, engineering, chemicals/geology, sorcery/demonology, travel accounts and medicine/biology. The book is in the Medicine and Biology section.
- Jesékh, Sánjesh and Visán checked out the spell-book section first since they'd asked Mrídok to take them there. Jesékh picked up the book in blue leather, triggering the Guard spell which now blocks all the exits (glow a pearly-grey). Everyone is locked in the library now until the end of the scenario when the High Priests will Disenchant it (with a complement of the Temple Guard). He dropped the book on the floor in disgust. Visán noticed the tract, read it and pocketed it. Since he's not a Thúmis worshipper, the Execration was dispelled.
- Dijáya and Mára sneak away from tour. They're 16 and 17 year old girls and good friends. Earlier this week they arranged to meet a cute scholar priest, Chúrisan. He likes to have assignations in the library and told them to sneak away from the tour and meet him at his station (méshqu plaque: Indicant of Ebullient Delight).
- The tour is in the Favorites section when Arimái stepped away from them, intending to leave them here. She went out to the hallway between Favorites and Spell-books. Bálesh will judge the acolytes' fitness for his branch based on how they react to his note: the longer they spend wandering around the library looking for further notes, the better. However, Arimái surprised the Ksárul party in the corridor. Jesékh's spell failed, and Visán ran her through.
- **THE SCENARIO STARTS HERE.** From this point on, events occur in any order, depending on where the characters go and what they do.
 - Note that if Chárgesh wants to find a weapon, he will be able to. There are many artifacts as well as books stored here.

- Similarly, items appropriate to the subject of the section can be found in each section, either on the shelves, intermixed with the books or at the work stations of the scholar priests.
- Dijáya and Mára got turned around when they left the group and instead of turning left and heading towards Anthropology, etc., they turned right. They can be met anywhere on the opposite of the library from where they want to be. They are carrying vials of the powder Chümaz (bluish-white, heightens perception and acts as an aphrodisiac).
- If the characters find Arimái, she's lying on her back on the floor, blood soaking her clothes and pooling on the tiled floor. She'll gasp, "I, I don't know why they did it. So sudden . . ." If they attempt to question her, she'll murmur pleas for help and lose consciousness. [She has 40 Health Points, Visán inflicted 21 points of damage. Unless she is stabilized by a Medical check, she will bleed to death in 6 hours.]
- The Ksárul party fled into the Collections sections after Visán ran through Arimái. Jesékh is shaken by the violence, but manages to drop Adlár with his spell. They will spend some time here debating among themselves on what to do. They hadn't expected another tour since they knew all the other Temples had turned down the offer (except Keténgku, but they wouldn't need a tour). Jesékh is losing his nerve, but Sánjesh and Visán push him to continue the search. Roll randomly to determine which door they choose at each opportunity. If it doesn't lead to a section they're interested in, don't have them linger there for any significant game time.
- Visán is out for blood after wounding Arimái. If the characters start trying to find them immediately, he will separate from Jesékh and Sánjesh and start stalking them. He'll try to separate one of the characters from the others (or will follow someone who separates) and challenge him to a duel. He'll pull out the tract, read it aloud and proclaim it as his reason (it is accusing Thúmis priests of breaking the Concordat after all) for the duel.
 - The tract reads: "This Temple is an abomination, infested with adherents of the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom. You act in reckless disregard of the Concordat and endanger relations with the God-Emperor and the other temples by aggressively proselytizing for Lord Thúmis. You wish to start a holy war! Curses be upon your head!"
 - Rules for a chase: Have them make opposed Stat checks using the average of Strength, Dexterity and Willpower. Keep track of the Margins of Success. Whoever reaches 10 successes first, succeeds (in getting away or in catching up, whichever he was trying to do). A critical success means immediately succeeding in your goal; a critical failure means immediately failing in your goal. Both characters getting critical successes or failures means they cancel each other out and only the normal successes are counted.
 - In combat, if Visán is facing an unarmed or obviously inexperienced opponent, he will only fight to first blood. He is skilled enough that this should severely wound the

character (exceed the Shock Value) and will prevent them from following or harassing him. The character should be allowed to crawl dramatically for help. Don't have him lose consciousness, but enforce that he can't move much, is in pain, etc. Thúmis help him if he bleeds on the books!

- If Visán faces Chárgesh in combat, he will fight until he himself is wounded. At that point, he will attempt to flee.
- The first sleeping body that the characters find will have Yapán, the slow-witted page, leaning over it. He'll be concerned, gently shaking a shoulder. [It takes 5 minutes of persistent effort to wake someone up early. The spell wears off in an hour.] He'll deny knowing anything. If asked why he's in the library, he will explain patiently that he *works* here. If they specify wanting to know why he's here *now*, he'll explain that he was hoping to find his friends. Questioning along this line will reveal that his friends are the Ksárul party and that he's been giving them information about a specific book ("It's blue!").
- At some point, if the characters don't enter the Sorcery & Demonology section and set off the Vallation spell, the Ksárul party will set it off during their search for the book.
- Wivárin is steadily working, pack on his back, re-shelving books; he doesn't care for holidays. Wivárin is so dedicated that he works in many of the sections. At some point, the characters will hear him as the sound of running feet one row away. He should lead them on a chase before anyone catches up with him. When they catch sight of him, he'll stop and look and then keep going. He won't respond to any calls. He'll be sullen if he's forced to interact and will give monosyllabic answers. He's seen Adlár casting Execration and will relate it if asked.
- If they enter the philosophy section, Fíru is hard at work learning the contents of his section. He's absorbed enough that he won't notice them. They'll see him with a scroll in hand, examining books – taking them off the shelf, opening and glancing through them – and marking something on his scroll. If they attract his attention, he will start visibly, roll up the scroll and tuck it away. He will try to avoid explaining what he was doing. He can be persuaded to act as a guide, but he doesn't know the library well. He'll stride about in an authoritative fashion, leading them on wild káika chases, in order to conceal his ignorance. In addition, he'll warn them against inappropriate behavior: "Don't climb on the shelves! Don't touch that book!" in an effort to bolster his credibility.
- If the characters enter a section that Jesékh has searched, there will always be a book bound in blue leather on the floor.
- If anyone enters the central circle and approaches within 10 feet of the pedestal, the Muniments of Excellence spell will be triggered.
- Gathám is sneaking around trying to steal coins from the work stations. He's a prime candidate for getting run-through by Visán.

- Once Jesékh and Sánjesh have found the book (note that Sánjesh will not willingly leave Jesékh), they will head for the nearest exit. When they find that the exit is blocked, they will try all the other ones as well.
- When the characters meet up with Jesékh and Sánjesh, Sánjesh will do the talking. He will deny harming Arimái and (in an unknown stroke of providential fortune) will assert that their guide simply abandoned them. They are merely poor visitors looking for the exit.
- If the characters have proof of their perfidy (Yapán and his statement, Arimái revived with Medical checks, Adlár or Mridók roused from sleep [Chúrisan will provide no proof since he didn't see them]), they will change their story. They will assert their ownership of the book and threaten to bring a lawsuit against the Temple. They will accuse the original peasant donor of stealing it from Sánjesh and imply that the Temple knew this, but ignored it in their lust to gain access to spells from the Ksárul temple.
- If the characters bring up the woundings or deaths caused by Visán, they will disown him. "He acts on his own. We have no control over him."
- If the characters point out the ignobility of Jesékh using his Sophoriferousness spell, he will speak up and state that he felt threatened by the Temple after they were abandoned. If Mridók is there to challenge their story, they will attack his integrity.
- SCENARIO END. The Temple guard enters, makes a complete sweep of the library and rounds everyone up in the center. Everyone will be searched, and everyone will have a chance to speak their piece. The High Priests will go ahead and conduct the branch admissions at this time. If anyone wishes to speak to their chosen Branch chief privately, it will be granted.

Chárgesh hiVessúma

37 years old, Standing Stone

Description: Imposing man, with grave mien and military bearing

Character Stats	Combat Values	Magic & Other
Strength: 6	Initiative: 11	Pedhétl: 1
Dexterity: 5	Combat: 6	Magic Resistance: 3
Intelligence: 4	Health Points: 60	Energy Pool: 8
Psyche: 2	Shock Value: 12	Respect: 0
Charisma: 6		
Willpower: 3		

Skills	Attributes	Defects
Language (Tsolyáni Spoken & Written) 2	Older	Shadow Scars (Waking Echo)
Knowledge (Páya Gupá) 2	Highly Skilled	Bad Day
Etiquette (High Clan) 1	Veteran	Low Pedhétl
Etiquette (Military) 1		Lame (25% of normal movement)
Tactics (Small Group) 1		Vow (Help the Helpless)
Teamwork (Combat) 2		
Language (Mu'ugalavyáni) 2		
Subculture (Military) 1		
Subculture (Temple) 1		
Theology (Outer Doctrines) 2		

Weapon	Skill	Initiative	Damage	Range	Notes
Long Pike	2	11	x 4		Two-handed
Long Sword	4	4	x 4		
Short Bow	2		x 3	60 metres	Two-handed
Dagger	4	2	x 2		

Notes: On a Bad Day, any 10 is an automatic critical failure and all critical successes are treated as normal 1s. You check for a Bad Day the first time you need to make a Skill check. A roll of 6 or higher means it's a Bad Day.

You are defying many of your society's norms, but you just don't care any more. You've served in the Legion of the Lord of Wisdom, the 22nd Heavy Infantry, fighting in the civil war and then against the Mu'ugalavyáni invasion. When you retired, you'd reached the rank of Molkár and commanded half a legion, about 4,000 soldiers. You left because your soul, your báletl, felt empty. You've seen too many people die, fear secretly that your mistakes may have cost some of them their lives, and you wonder if there will be any of your báletl left to journey onto the Isles of Teretané when you die. So you turned away from the expected career paths. You have no desire to tutor callow Standing Stone youth in the ways of wielding a weapon so they can more easily join a legion. You don't want to take charge of security for one of the clan houses. You don't even want to lounge around the clan house, serving as a charming and prestigious host

for important guests. Instead you announced that you were joining the Thúmis priesthood. You want to spend your days cloistered away from the hustle and bustle of the clan, reading philosophy and reflecting on life. You did accede to your clan elders' request and join a Temple on the other side of the Empire, where Standing Stone has little presence anyway and less status to lose.

When you look at people these days, you see puzzlement on their faces as they try to place you and figure out their status relative to yours. Once these sorts of things concerned you very much, but now you simply find it mildly amusing.

Goal: Live a peaceful life; don't watch anyone else die.

Goal: Find a way to steep yourself in philosophy.

Your Fellow Acolytes (in status order)

You outrank all your fellow acolytes.

Mízhotl hiKarélsa, Staff of Beneficence Nephew of the High Ritual priest, ambitious and talented.

Tákodai hiChársha, Grey Cloak Earnest, a strong believer in Thúmis' principles.

Omél hiVáika, Moon of Evening Bright young scholar, but you feel a kinship with him. He's got some sorrow he's not sharing.

Aliná hiNakkodái, Scroll of Wisdom A talented sorceress, the type of person who gets others killed.

Ekuné hiKarélsa, Scroll of Wisdom Handsome, able young man, likely to do well wherever he's placed. Too bad he's not from a better clan.

Mízhotl hiKarélsa

16 years old, Staff of Beneficence

Description: Tall, thin and confident

Character Stats	Combat Values	Magic & Other
Strength: 3	Initiative: 8	Pedhétl: 4
Dexterity: 3	Combat: 3	Magic Resistance: 5
Intelligence: 5	Health Points: 40	Energy Pool: 23
Psyche: 4	Shock Value: 8	Respect: 0
Charisma: 5		
Willpower: 5		

Skills	Attributes	Defects
Language (Tsolyáni Spoken & Written) 2	High Lineage	Arrogant – you believe your intelligence is 7
Knowledge (Sokátis) 2	Highly Skilled	Debt of Honour (No'ómu)
Etiquette (High Clan) 2	Friends in High Places 3	
Etiquette (Temple) 2	Attractive (Hawk-like)	
Administration (Temple) 2		
Calligraphy (Tsolyáni) 2		
Language (Engsvanyáli) 2		
Charm (Professional) 2		
Politics (Thúmis Temple) 2		

Notes: +2 to Charm checks

This past year as an acolyte has been a valuable apprenticeship in the fine art of Temple politics. You entered the Temple as a known quantity since your uncle No'ómu is the High Ritual Priest of the Temple. With him as a patron, you knew your path would be smoothed before you. No'ómu instructed you to keep your head and observe and learn, “When you inherit friends, you also inherit their enemies. Discern your enemies well and prepare yourself.” You followed his advice and half-way through the year he showed his pleasure by casting Sagacious Acquisition upon you. With the aid of this powerful Temple spell over the last 6 months, whatever you set yourself to learn, you learned twice as quickly as normal. Your time in the lower Circles of the priesthood will be short indeed.

But you also now know why No'ómu is grooming you so carefully. The Temple of Thúmis may appear to be a placid place, home to humble scholars, but beneath the surface, it's positively roiling with politics. It turns out that the temple in Sokátis is infested with members of the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom. The Brotherhood recklessly endangers the Concordat and relations with other temples and the government by aggressively proselytizing for Lord Thúmis. Not only do they wish to build more schools for the common rabble and extend them greater medical services, they strive for the highest posts possible and favor only their fellow adherents. When they speak of eradicating the worship of the Change gods, it's clear they're only one step away from advocating a holy war. The head of the Brotherhood in Sokátis must be Bálesh hiTáika, the High Scholar Priest who's curator of the library. Last year he founded a new school

for the lowest of the clans, and he's upped recruitment for membership in the Scholarly Branch. Rumor has it that to be accepted in the Scholarly Branch now, you must be willing to work a stint in the school. He's also opened up the resources of the library to any who wish to research there, using the excuse of a greater workload to justify bloating the numbers of the Scholarly Branch.

After discussing matters with your uncle, he told you to join the Administrative Branch. He has such a firm control of the Ritual Branch that he doesn't need your help there. The Scholarly Branch would be too hostile an environment for one so closely associated with him. But the Administrative Branch is wide open. Sáyi hiChánkolel, the High Priest, is a clueless time-server. Your natural talents will allow you to rise, and in time you can consolidate the branch under your control and align it with No'ómu. In the meantime, he's given you two assignments to perform during The Unveiling of Wisdom. First, after you have infiltrated Bálesh's domain (i.e. while you're touring the library), you are to slip messages to each of the scholar priests who work there. They will probably be absent attending the holiday rituals, but you can leave the messages at their work stations. Each message is contained in a folded slip of heavy paper, sealed with plain grey wax. You're carrying them in a leather satchel. Second, you are to encourage Ekuné to apply to the Ritual Branch. He's the finest potential ritual priest the temple's seen in years. It's just a happy coincidence that he belongs to your own Karélsa lineage. Between these two factors, it would be an embarrassment if he entered any other Branch.

Goal: Deliver your messages discretely.

Goal: Recruit Ekuné to the Ritual Branch. At the very least, make sure he doesn't join the Scholarly Branch.

Your Fellow Acolytes (in status order)

Chárgesh hiVessúma, Standing Stone A high clan eccentric who's tolerated. He's old (37), with a distinguished career already in the military. Now he wants to be a priest and joined the acolytes along with the callow teenagers. He walks with a limp, and you avoid him.

You rank here.

Tákodai hiChársha, Grey Cloak He's always kept his distance from you. He's made no secret of his desire to join the Scholarly Branch, though he seems more of the Admin type to you.

Omél hiVáika, Moon of Evening A natural-born scholar with a gift for languages.

Aliná hiNakkodái, Scroll of Wisdom A quiet, dreamy girl who's uninvolved in politics

Ekuné hiKarélsa, Scroll of Wisdom Handsome, graceful, smart, with lots of stamina.
Keeps to himself a lot.

Tákodai hiChársha

17 years old, Grey Cloak

Description: Chubby young man with a slight scowl

Character Stats	Combat Values	Magic & Other
Strength: 5	Initiative: 10	Pedhétl: 4
Dexterity: 4	Combat: 5	Magic Resistance: 6
Intelligence: 6	Health Points: 55	Energy Pool: 23
Psyche: 6	Shock Value: 11	Respect: 0
Charisma: 2		
Willpower: 6		

Skills		Attributes
Language (Tsolyáni Spoken & Written) 2	Calligraphy (Tsolyáni) 1	Aptitude (Medical)
Knowledge (Sokátis) 2	Classical Tsolyáni 1	Highly Skilled
Etiquette (High Clan) 1	Observation 2	
Etiquette (Temple) 2	Theology (Outer Doctrine) 1	Defects
Medical 2	Politics (Temple) 1	Ugly

You descend from a long line of Thúmis priests. It's a proud tradition since the Temple of Thúmis is by far the most beneficial temple. You educate the young and heal the sick, without regard for station or status. You preserve the history and knowledge of the ancients and bestow it upon anyone who should ask. Only the Temple of Avánthe comes close in service to society. What's nearly inconceivable is that the common folk should be duped into worshipping the worthless Change gods. How has Hrü'ü helped anyone? Sárku? Why, every time a Worm-worshiper has sat upon the throne it's meant trouble for the nation. The Dlamélish priestesses are notorious for weaseling the hard-earned cash out of poor folks' hands. And the resources that are wasted in the fires of Vimúhla! Someone needs to do something.

That someone is the Brotherhood of Supernal Wisdom. Contrary to conservative propaganda (spread by types such as the High Ritual Priest No'ómu hiKarélsa), the Brotherhood is not so crass or foolish as to advocate a holy war. Stability worship, Thúmis worship in particular, will prevail because it's clearly superior, and the people will gravitate to it. The Brotherhood will expand Thúmis worship through the proliferation of schools and expansion of medical services to the poor. Naturally, they also aid those within the Temple who agree with their aims, and support the rise of Thúmis worshippers in all aspects of society (government, military). Sokátis is said to be a stronghold for the Brotherhood, and you believe its leader is the High Scholar Priest Bálesh hiTáika. He started a new school last year, and is recruiting priests into the Scholarly Branch, emphasizing those who wish to be teachers or physicians. You want to join in his work. You're not much of a scholar, but you have the makings of an excellent physician. You've heard that he uses the library tour to find those worthy of the Brotherhood, but you don't know how he does this. In case you don't figure it out, you've brought along a Bednálljan-era book from your family's library to present to him at your audience. It's The Addendum to the Universal Bibliography by Minháris of Purdánim. Your Bednálljan is non-existent, but you've

been told it lists arcane books stored in small monasteries and temples that were overlooked in the Universal Bibliography. You're carrying it with you in a leather satchel.

Goal: Show yourself worthy of the Brotherhood.

Goal: Endear yourself to the Brotherhood by undercutting the haughty Mízhotl, the nephew of the conservative deadweight of a High Ritual Priest No'ómu hiKarélsa

Your Fellow Acolytes (in status order)

Chárgesh hiVessúma, Standing Stone A high clan eccentric. He served in the civil war and fought the Mu'ugalavyáni invasion. Retired as a distinguished officer and now he's entering the priesthood as an acolyte! You're not sure what to make of him.

Mízhotl hiKarélsa, Staff of Beneficence Haughty pet of his uncle No'ómu. He's a man on the make and can't be trusted. Very likely aligned with the conservatives within the Temple.

You rank here.

Omél hiVáika, Moon of Evening Very studious but there's an underlying sadness to him.

Aliná hiNakkodái, Scroll of Wisdom Talented sorceress. Sometimes you wonder if she's completely sane.

Ekuné hiKarélsa, Scroll of Wisdom A perfect fit for the Ritual Branch – handsome, graceful and patient. He's hard to read, though, and keeps to himself a lot.

Omél hiVáika

16 years old, Moon of Evening

Description: Attractive young man with an intense gaze

Character Stats	Combat Values	Magic & Other
Strength: 3	Initiative: 9	Pedhétl: 4
Dexterity: 3	Combat: 3	Magic Resistance: 5
Intelligence: 7	Health Points: 25	Energy Pool: 23
Psyche: 3	Shock Value: 9	Respect: 0
Charisma: 4		
Willpower: 6		

Skills		Attributes
Language (Tsolyáni Spoken & Written) 2	Analysis (Scholarly) 1	Aptitude (Languages)
Theology (Outer Doctrines) 2	Planning (Temple) 1	Attractive (Voice)
Language (Engsvanyáli) 1	Subculture (Temple) 1	Emotional Control
Language (Classical Tsolyáni) 1	Calligraphy (Tsolyáni) 1	Highly Skilled
Language (Bednálljan) 1	Knowledge (Sokátis) 2	
Language (Bednálljan Salarvyáni) 1	Etiquette (Medium Clan) 1	Defects
Language (Classical Mu'ugalavyáni) 1	Etiquette (Temple) 2	Poor
Language (Llyáni) 1		Secret
		Fragile

Notes: +1 to Charm, Etiquette, Negotiation checks. -4 to endurance, disease, poison rolls.

You came to the Temple of Thúmis with an ulterior motive. Moon of Evening is a solid medium status clan, but your particular lineage fell on hard times generations ago, and you've always been the poor relation. Some aspects of this are merely frustrating and slightly degrading – seeing your relatives work as servants with the clan-house, wearing the hand-me-down clothes and always sitting on a single, thread-bare mat. Other aspects are nearly unforgivable. Two years ago your mother fell ill. There's nothing outwardly wrong, she just became pale and tired until she could hardly stir from the sleeping mat. When she first fell ill, the clan brought in a physician but he couldn't find what was wrong with her. Later, she was sent several times by palanquin to the Keténgku priests, but they also proved to be ineffective. After that, the clan elders refused to authorize any further treatment. You argued, convinced that they gave up too soon. Clearly, she needs a more skilled physician or a sorcerer well-versed in the Healing spells. But your arguments fell on deaf ears. You stared in envy, hopeless, when a highly skilled physician, Osumétlu hiKarélsa, from the Temple of Thúmis paid a house call to cure one of the elders. You ran after him when he departed, begging him to see your mother. He took one glance at your clothes and smiled condescendingly at you, not even deigning to answer.

That left you only one option. You resolved to join the Temple yourself and become a physician. During your year as an acolyte, you've found to your misery that you don't have an aptitude for medicine. Your gift is languages, and your teachers have driven you hard to exploit this. Over and over you've examined your circumstances and resources, trying to figure out how

you can leverage them to get help for your mother. You've ranged from desperate thoughts about finding the medical tomes in the library and stealing them to give to a lay Ksárul priest in exchange for his healing your mother to using your language and research skills to ingratiate yourself with a sorcerer who might then help you. You're really not sure what to do.

Goal: Locate some medical tomes in the library

Goal: Start trying to make some contacts within the Temple

Your Fellow Acolytes (in status order)

Chárgesh hiVessúma, Standing Stone A retired military officer. He's been severely wounded sometime in the past as his limp attests. It's very odd that he's entering the priesthood instead of returning to his clan, but high status folk can do as they please.

Mízhotl hiKarélsa, Staff of Beneficence Nephew of the High Ritual priest. The physician who scorned you was a relative of his. You can see the resemblance in his bearing.

Tákodai hiChársha, Grey Cloak Another high status acolyte, undoubtedly with a bright future.

You rank here.

Aliná hiNakkodái, Scroll of Wisdom She's a sorcerer, and you hear she's good. But she doesn't strike you as the type who knows Healing magic. You haven't asked though.

Ekuné hiKarélsa, Scroll of Wisdom If you looked like he did, you'd have a third option for getting help for your mother. You don't know anything about him really.

Aliná hiNakkodái

17 years old, Scroll of Wisdom

Description: Quietly dreamy young woman

Character Stats	Combat Values	Magic & Other
Strength: 3	Initiative: 5	Pedhétl: 10
Dexterity: 4	Combat: 4	Magic Resistance: 7
Intelligence: 5	Health Points: 30	Energy Pool: 54
Psyche: 6	Shock Value: 6	Respect: 0
Charisma: 2		
Willpower: 3		

Skills	Attributes	Defects
Language (Tsolyáni Spoken & Written) 2	Magical Ability (Psychic)	Addicted (Magic)
Knowledge (Sokátis) 2	High Pedhétl	Clumsy
Etiquette (Medium Clan) 1	Highly Skilled	Indecisive
Etiquette (Temple) 1		
Magic, Psychic 2		

Spell	Cost	Range	Area	Duration	Notes
Comprehension	8	N/A	Caster	10 minutes	Understand, speak & write any one modern language
Terrorization	9	20 metres	1 Target	5 minutes	Flee in utter panic

Notes: If you have an opportunity to use Magic, make a Willpower check to resist. You have difficulty making routine decisions. Make a Willpower check to decide something immediately. When making your magic skill checks, both spells get a -2 difficulty modifier due to spell level and spell cost.

A world exists that's beyond the ken of most people. It's not a safe place, and it's not a nice place. You've always known it was there. You feel the rush and pull of the eddies of raw power flowing around you. You sense, vaguely, the presence of Other beings and Other intelligences throughout the planes of existence. Watching the ceremonies in the Temple is almost painful as you itch with an almost uncontrollable urge to *correct* their movements and their words so that they will have results, will draw in and channel the energy surrounding them. To see others so oblivious, blundering along through life, expending so much effort on such insignificant adjustments to their position in this phenomenal life is both deeply amusing and deeply disturbing to you. When you were a child, you used to try and enlighten others about the full reality of what existed around them. No one appreciated your efforts. It didn't take long before you were sent off to Temple school where you stayed in the student dormitory. There you met teachers who helped you to access the other planar energy that you feel so keenly. But their instruction is uneven and very plodding. You sense that they're only mouthing words handed down to them from far more perceptive predecessors, that they don't fully share the awareness of which you are possessed. You can learn so much more and so much faster than what they are prepared to teach.

Obviously, you need a position within the Temple where you can devote yourself to magic and not be bothered with mundane minutiae. Having complete access to the library is preferable since then you can search it for tomes of magic that will enable you to expand your grasp of the intricacies of the manipulation of other planar energy.

Goal: Obtain a post within the library so you can study magic to your heart's content. Take advantage of any time you have in the library to further your pursuit of sorcerous knowledge.

Goal: Engage in as much magic as you can.

Your Fellow Acolytes (in status order)

Chárgesh hiVessúma, Standing Stone An old man (37 years old), probably used to be a soldier.

Mízhotl hiKarélsa, Staff of Beneficence His uncle's a priest here. He thinks he's important.

Tákodai hiChársha, Grey Cloak He should lose some weight.

Omél hiVáika, Moon of Evening He knows many languages, could be useful in pointing out which books would be good to read while you're under the effects of Comprehension.

You and Ekuné are the same status.

Ekuné hiKarélsa, Scroll of Wisdom He's handsome. You don't know him.

Ekuné hiKarélsa

18 years old, Scroll of Wisdom

Description: Handsome and graceful, the very image of an upright priest of Thúmis

Character Stats	Combat Values	Magic & Other
Strength: 7	Initiative: 8	Pedhétl: 4
Dexterity: 6	Combat: 7	Magic Resistance: 5
Intelligence: 6	Health Points: 50	Energy Pool: 21
Psyche: 3	Shock Value: 10	Respect: 0
Charisma: 5		
Willpower: 2		

Skills	Attributes	Defects
Language (Tsolyáni Spoken & Written) 2	Attractive (Sculpted Face)	Nemesis
Knowledge (Sokátis) 2	Resolute	Xenophobe (Salarvyáni)
Etiquette (Medium Clan) 1	Tough	Secret
Etiquette (Temple) 2	Stamina	
Ritual (Public, Thúmis) 2		
Calligraphy (Tsolyáni) 2		
Language (Engsvanyáli) 1		

Note: +2 to rolls resisting starvation or interrogation. +1 to Ritual skill checks. +2 to Stat or skill checks relating to endurance. +1 to resist poisons.

You've come to the Temple to escape. On the outside you've attracted the attention of Réshma Suzhán, the most hideous Salarvyáni woman you've ever seen. She's short and stout, with dark wiry hair and a distinct mustache. She smells heavily of some disgusting Salarvyáni spice, and her Tsolyáni is barely understandable through her thick accent. She is also, unfortunately, the wife of the Salarvyáni ambassador to Sokátis. It's been your worst nightmare. What's even worse is that your family and the elder of your lineage think this is a great opportunity for the clan and want you to exploit it to the fullest. In horror, you fled to the Temple and joined up as an acolyte, hoping you'd be hidden away from the public. On only one level has it worked so far: your family has had far fewer chances to talk to you and pressure you.

But the Temple has not been quite the refuge you were hoping for. With your good looks, they immediately began trying you out in the public rituals. Fearful of angering your superiors, you have done your best. It turns out that you are very good at performing the rituals. You easily memorize all the chants and movements, you move gracefully, you don't tire easily, and you look good. But the rituals are for the public. Several months after you joined, you noticed Réshma in the audience. She had tracked you down. She's been attending on an almost weekly basis, staring at you the whole time and undoubtedly donating lots of money to the Temple, given the way the priests fawn over her. Even though you'd clearly do best in the Ritual Branch, you can't stand the situation. You have to join either the Administrative or the Scholarly Branch.

Goal: Find a position that keeps you away from Réshma Suzhán.

Goal: Having people fall in love with you is not the golden Skein everyone assumes it is. If you could find something that would dampen unwanted suitors' attention, your life would be much easier.

Your Fellow Acolytes (in status order)

Chárgesh hiVessúma, Standing Stone A retired soldier who's starting over again in the priesthood. It's very odd, but who are you to judge? He does demonstrate one (unacceptable) way out of your dilemma: lose your looks by getting wounded in battle. He's got a limp.

Mízhotl hiKarélsa, Staff of Beneficence He's going to be a powerful person in the temple. His uncle is the High Ritual Priest.

Tákodai hiChársha, Grey Cloak He's intense and eats too much. That's another way you could go, but you refuse to do it. You don't want to lessen yourself in any way.

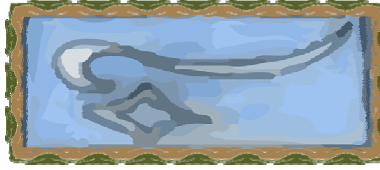
Omél hiVáika, Moon of Evening He's so smart, he's a lock for the Scholarly Branch.

Aliná hiNakkodái, Scroll of Wisdom She's from your clan, but you hardly know her because she started studying at the Temple school at such an early age. She's always been spooky. Rumor has it that she talks with demons.

You and Aliná are the same status.



A FOREST WENDING



A Forest Wending

Part I

It was just after noon when she set out to find the mad priestess of Dilinála. All morning had been spent saying goodbyes to her clan folk. The most tearful farewells were with her sisters who both feared her leaving and envied her the journey.

Turquoise-colored gúdrú cloth decorated the entire Blue Shadow clanhouse in her honor. Even the neighboring Sapphire Bird clan had come out and lined the path as she left the small village. The aftereffects of the previous night's celebration could still be seen in their eyes, but they nonetheless loudly praised her departure with the playing of their wonderful music.

She reached the forest's edge just before nightfall. There, she set up camp near the moss covered Shrine of Makórsa. The small ligneous structure had been built within the intertwining roots of the gapúl tree that stood tall overhead and had since become fused into the living tissue of the plant. She opened her pack and took out the wooden offering and placed it into the shrine as her dlántukoi had instructed. After she spoke the prayers she had learned from the clan elders she studied the detailed carving of the dlél fruit gift. During her short lifetime, several foolhardy Salarvyáni merchants had risked crossing the border to come to her village to buy these realistic art pieces. She wondered if they also used the figures as sacrifices.

As she unrolled her bed she tried to remember that the local hunters had cleared this section of the Kerúnan Forest of the most dangerous beasts. Still, she felt spooked every time that an unfamiliar noise reached her from the darkness. She calmed herself by concentrating on her reasons for being here. The last several years had been rough on her. No one openly blamed her for the poor crops and the well drying up, but they had noticed that all of these occurrences were somehow connected to the girl with the straw brown hair. Her birth had preceded a long drought. Her naming ceremony had been halted when the boy that she had been promised to died in a freak accident. Even this declaration of aridáni status at the small temple of Dilinála had been postponed due to an ill-timed early menstrual flow. Perhaps this ceremony would provide more insight into why her clan was so afflicted.

She had resisted the call for many years. Even when the visiting Avánthe priest from Jaikalór had read her dire future, she still resisted. He had written her name on the holy pavestones beside the small village temple and as the water slowly evaporated he had seen a mighty power coming to claim her. He became quite apoplectic and began screaming about heretical acts and a cleansing of the land. His attendants had to restrain him and take him back to the city in a chlén cart.

Looking back at that incident, she was suddenly bemused. His outburst had started her thinking that there was a force outside of her control that was leading her somewhere. She just needed to find a way through the darkness to find the answer.

As the day began to cool the insects came out to attack her and enjoy a rare feast of human blood. Glancing around at the ground she notice a line of the purple drí ants found in this area. She reached down and gathered a handful of them, crushed their plump bodies and smeared the juices on her body. A daily application would be enough to repel most of these parasites. No one had taught her this when she was young; she simply knew what to do in such instances. This strangeness kept many people away from her, even in her own clan. That meant that she spent most of her time alone to learn such little secrets for herself. Initially she had tried to explain such discoveries to her elders, but because their fear they had ignored her as they would a bothersome hmá.

She was tired when she finally reached the remote shrine on the borders of the cleared pasture. Beyond the crude stone structure were the great woods. She took off her pack and began to settle in for the night. During her final devotionals, as Tuléng was setting, she noticed a pool of dark blue shade that seemed to flow from the growing shadows under one tree to the next. It constantly moved just outside of her direct vision, never coming into focus and always staying beyond the shrine's boundaries.

"Surely, this was not one of the Handmaiden's servants." she thought. Suddenly she felt a great fear building up within her bowels. She reached down to grasp the small bronze dagger at her side. Then just as quickly the shade disappeared. And with it the daytime sounds of the forest ceased, and those of the darkness began.

There was nothing more that she could do. Fires were forbidden at the shrine, so she prepared herself for a restless sleep and prayed to the power of this place to protect her. Still, she held onto the knife for comfort.

Dawn was heralded by impatient birds high up in the trees. Their raucous noise served to warn the night dwellers to retreat to their hiding places. The creatures of the day began to awaken and to begin their routine of finding their morning repast. A small troop of dark furred kité snuffled around the shrine trying to decide if the sleeping figure would make an easy meal for their young back in the warren. After a few moments they sensed a wrongness about the place and set off sinuously on their six short legs deeper into the woods.

She woke as the diffuse light reached down through the branches to where she lay. She sat up and began to rub the sleep from her eyes and as the dreams swept from her mind she surveyed her resting place in the morning glow. Surprisingly, her sleep had been quite restful.

Rising to her feet she noticed a subtle change in the forest noises around her. The animals had changed from their constant territorial challenges and mating calls to something less strident, perhaps even welcoming. She looked out into the lessening gloom of the forest and reflecting from the sun behind her back she saw a figure coming towards her. The fearful visage of the approaching snake headed woman was enough to cause panic. Just before the fainting culminated into darkness the ophidian creature reached out towards her falling body.

Her second awaking of the day found her in a clearing deeper into the woods. Nothing looked familiar from her prone position. The logical part of her mind connected the relationship between the grey-haired woman squatting in front of her and the reptilian mask lying on the ground. The terror began to subside and she slowly looked up into the eyes of the crone.

"Get up, child. You waste precious time for training just lying there." The old one said.

A surge of inner strength brought her to a kneeling position. She now recognized this elder as wearing the raiment of a priestess of Dilinála that served the Aspect of Eshátl “The Champion” who represents the woman as defender and champion. A rarely noticed Aspect in the temple friezes she was nonetheless there depicted as a nude woman with the head of a snake. A fearsome and cruel Aspect she was not much worshipped in the peaceful village of farmers.

“Mistress, how may I serve you of the seeking of the spirit?” She reverently inquired.

“Identify this tree behind me.” She ordered.

“That is an ngósh,”

“And its importance?” she continued.

“All I know is that it is associated with the temples of Ksárul and Thúmis.”

“And what do you know of Lord Ksárul?”

“That he is one of the Tlokíriqaluyal and a great enemy to our Lady Avánthe.”

“Tlá,” the old woman reprimanded, “All is not as simple as what those half-witted visiting priestesses from the city would have you believe.” She came closer and took the girl’s hand, held it palm up and began to examine its lines. “Have you seen anything, unusual in the forest?”

She remembered back to the scare she had last night. “Yes, just before sunset I saw a blue shadow that seemed to move on its own as if it was avoiding me.”

Unfazed, the old woman was now tracing a form on the girl’s palm. “You are perceptive. Have you seen this mark on your hand before?”

“I see nothing, learned one.”

“Perhaps this will help.” The crone reached into a pouch that hung off of her belt and pulled out a small bag. She poured some of the dusty contents onto the girl’s hand and asked, “Do you see the mark now?”

The girl brought her hand closer to her face to see if there was any change. She peered closely and saw only the layer of powder. Suddenly, the priestess exhaled and blew the dust into the girl’s eyes. She doubled over, fell to the ground and began to choke and rub her stinging eyes. The pain soon passed and she looked up at her tormentor expecting even more punishment. Instead she was asked, “What do you see now?”

Where the powder had been she could clearly see the shape of an animal. “What sort of creature is this?” she pleaded.

“It is a vúr, a large leather-winged night flyer. Anything less and I would have to send you back to village with only a few scraps of herbal lore for your clan. But, it appears that you are worthy of more tests.”

The girl continued to stare at this frightening beast that now seemed all too visible. The old woman held up her hand and asked, “What do see in my palm?”

She now realized that she had a new sight that allowed her to perceive a many-limbed, segmented serpent in the priestess’ wrinkled skin of her outstretched hand. She recognized the animal. One of her cousins had been bitten by one some years ago while they were in the forest gathering berries. His death had been swift and painful. “It is a chnáu.” She replied.

“Yes, fierce beasts to mark those with fierce destinies.” The priestess noted to the confused girl at her feet.

“Get up! You have much more to see before this day is through.”

Throughout the morning they walked deeper into the forest. For all of her age the priestess was graceful amongst the threatening briars and branches. Not one touched her bronzed, naked body. The same could not be said for her young follower. Soon her clothes had been shredded by the undergrowth and before long had to be abandoned except for a small purse of keepsakes. Surprisingly, the lack of clothes produced fewer scratches as she quickly learned to avoid the plants.

Soon the pair came upon a great tree in a clearing. It had a hideous trunk the color and texture of dead flesh and its purple, meaty looking leaves only added to its menacing presence. No trees existed around it in a wide circle as if they had been warned of sudden demise if they grew too near. Even the ground beneath the tree's canopy was barren and had the appearance of the freshly turned earth of graves. Its roots were putrid tentacles burrowing into the earth and when the wind shifted the distinct aroma of decay was overpowering.

With a curt "Follow in my footsteps", the priestess walked across the dark soil without a care and placed her hand upon the cadaverous bole. Too tired and shocked to question the demand, the young girl placed her feet in the exact indentations that the priestess had made in the loamy dirt. Halfway across, she noticed that the ground was animated with the movements of small, moist blood-red flatworms boring in and out of the muck. As terror and nausea were about to completely take hold of her senses she reached the side of the priestess and suddenly they were no longer under the arboreal horror, but inside a stone room with sunlight glimmering through the broken mortar joints. Bits and pieces of a broken frieze on a nearby collapsed wall depicted a parade of brown and purple cloaked priests with skulls as heads.

"Don't look so frightened, child" she said with little compassion, "you have been taught that the paths of Avánthe and Durrilámish often cross paths during the annual cycle of growth and decay of the fields. It is the same in the forest. Only out here, growth and decay are much more demanding forces and you must learn to understand and respect both."

After passing through the web-covered entrance of the ancient building it became clear to the girl that the forest surrounding them was not the same that they were in just moments before. She did not know how far that they had traveled, but the different types of trees in the area were evidence that it had been quite some distance. Her questioning glances to the old woman were ignored and they set out again.

Gradually the trees thinned, the land grew bare, and they climbed onto a hillock to a small temple. Blue-walled and solitary, the haven stood like a sentry at the summit, looking out over the vast Layódu Swamp. Below, they could see countless monumental statues of fantastic creatures rising from the moss-covered mounds as if trying to escape their marshy prison. Their cruel, frozen toad-like visages peered out at them with sightless stone eyes. The weight of the silent, gathered army was overwhelming, like visitations from the ancient demons themselves.





The Glyph of Present Defense
[From a manuscript of the reign of
Emperor Nriḡa Gaqchiké, nicknamed "The Spider."]