



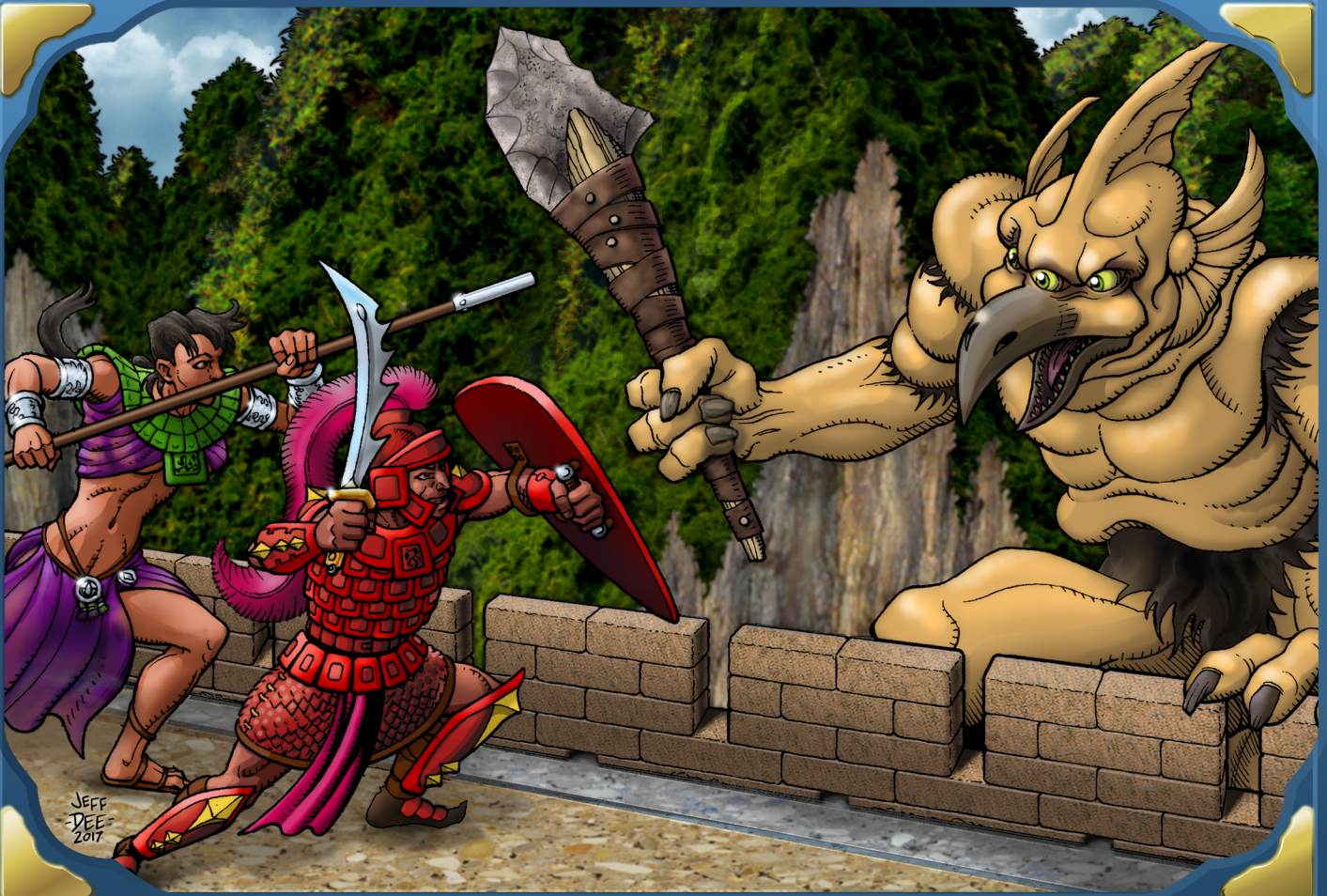
Béthorm™



The Kúrt Hills Atlas

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by Talzhemir



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Tékumel™





Kúrt Hills Atlas

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DEDICATION

Special thanks to Dr. Victor Raymond and the other members of the Tékumel Foundation,
for their generous contributions of time and knowledge.

The Kurt Hills Atlas is dedicated to Dr. Giovanna Fregni: archaeologist, illustrator, sculptor,
and a chronicler of the World of the Tékumel®.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

About the Hex Numbering System

We have adhered faithfully to Professor Barker's numbering system from Empire of the Petal Throne for the Large Hexes. They are numbered from left to right, and bottom to top. The lowest hex number is in the lower left corner of the region map; the highest hex number is in the upper right. (The hexes on the Tsolyánu map in the Béthorm core rule book, found on Page 254, are numbered the same way.)

The Atlas entry for each Large Hex begins with a general description of its terrain. This is followed by a list of the indicated locations in each.

We have also added a numbering system for the Small Hexes in order to clarify the next smaller level of detail. Each Small Hex has a distinct position within the Large Hex, defined by two letters. The first is its row, from A to S, starting at the bottom. The second is its column, a second letter, from A to O, starting on the left. Hexes sharing the same column letter are aligned vertically, with a slight "wobble" alternating left and right.

In the accompanying Atlas, each terrain feature or settlement is designated by the Large Hex number, followed by a period, then its Small Hex designation. For example, the Town of Tsóri will be found at 3611.IF (Large Hex 3611, Small Hex Row I, Column F).

Cartography Upon Téकुmel

These maps are meant as out-of-character information for the Game Master. In-character, the vast majority of the Tsolyáni themselves have no interest in detailed and literal representations of coastlines, rivers, forests, etc. Instead, they use simplistic diagrams, with just the details important to their craft, trade, bureau, or vocation depicted. Relative distances and accurate compass directions are often missing or abstract. Conventions and standards vary wildly, if there are any.

For example, an illiterate river boater might have a sketch of rivers and tributaries, with symbols for dangerous shallows, rapids, and monster sightings. It might be etched on the back of a few pieces of pierced Chlén hide that he wears tethered together with leather as a pectoral, an ornament, on his breast. Lowborn folk have no need of knowledge of geography beyond a few miles of their immediate surroundings, and this is soon memorized, anyhow.

A smuggler might draw up a rough diagram of cities on paper. Perhaps days of travel were noted by how many

times a line zigs and zags, or, perhaps it is done with small loops, and so forth. If the information is confidential trade secrets, it will be made deliberately difficult to decode.

These are two examples of so-called "low cartography". The Tsolyáni do not have "generic" maps for everyone's use, with rivers, roads, villages, terrain, etc. They could, if they tried, but, it is a quirk of this culture, a kind of "cultural blindness", that they would not think to try.

Those of higher status are disdainful of producing and reading flat maps. Yet, surely, military commanders, administrative priests organizing information about taxes from fiefs, and so on, need something of the sort? If there are very few flat maps, then what do those who need such information use? The answer is, they employ the map stones (Chánmisen) of High Cartography.

In ancient times, there were devices which imparted their information through a kind of psychic technology. The item would be touched or held, and the user would "see" images, and "hear" words. Over the centuries, though, these "stones" ceased to be useful. Languages changed, making their narration obsolete; cities rose and fell; rivers changed course; jungles vanished or grew up. Satellite informants that once corrected these flaws fell out of the sky.

Perhaps because they were reluctant to admit anything was amiss, the stone handlers developed a sort of code of minute grooves, protuberances, colorations, and patterns which can be felt with the fingertips or seen with the eyes. Making and reading these is an art taught in the Temples of Lords Thúmis and Ksáruł. Those trained in reading them can learn the general contours of a region, its population, the number and approximate locations of its cities, its major natural features, and more.

Map stones are made from extremely durable rock, perhaps set with gemstones or inlaid with highly durable salvaged materials of the ancients. Using a system akin to Braille, the information can include names and words. Like the carved navigation sticks of the Norse sailors who traded along the coast of Iceland, features of a sculpture can be "read" in complete darkness. Objects of high cartography resist water, handling, mildew and fire. They can last for tens of thousands of years. They will remain lovely and enigmatic to look upon.

With such an elegant and exquisite option at their fingertips (or at least the fingertips of an underling trained in the art), people of higher status disdain scrolls or murals with such information. A map that can be eaten by insects or fall apart due to mere water? How pathetic.

Scale

The Large Hexes (enlarged versions of the hexes which appear on the Tsolyánu map) are 100 Tsán (133.3 kilometers, or 82.8 miles) across. The Small Hexes are 7.1 Tsán (9.5 kilometers, or 5.9 miles) across.

The distance a human can see to the horizon on Téकुmel is about 5km. As a very rough generalization, a traveler can see what is in their own Small Hex, plus the surrounding Small Hexes. (If they are on higher ground, if they are making use of an observation tower, etc., they can see farther.)

Map Key

Village		Landmark		Clear	
Town		Rough		Open Forest	
Large Town		Local Road		Dense Forest	
Fort		Sákbe Road		Swamp	
Ruin		Rivers		Slopes	

Descriptions of the Terrain Types

 **Clear.** The word “clear” here actually includes less dramatic hills, streams, little lakes, and a host of other features too insignificant to be seen at this scale. It may be like grassy savannah, but it can also be like light woods. Farms generally stay within 6-12 kilometers (so, roughly .5 to 1 Small Hex) from the road. In general, “clear” is a catch-all for terrain that is passable by a marching army with only modest detour or delay. If the local road or Sákbe is taken, travel through this land is significantly faster. Within 1-5 Small Hexes of any road, the population density tends to 10-20 persons per square kilometer, thinning as one goes farther.

 **Open Forest.** This category includes woods, timberlands, and scrub jungle. Open woods are passable by a marching army, although there will be some delay. Perhaps underbrush trips at the legs or thick vines try to bar the traveler’s way. Note that open forest may look completely natural to the city-dweller but in some places about the Kúrt Hills, the trees are often selectively harvested and replanted. In some places, there will be saplings growing in very straight rows, easy to overlook at first, but clear when viewed from certain angles - a form of worship in the cult of an Aspect of Lady Avánthe called Makórsa.

 **Dense Forest.** This terrain seriously slows a marching army. Injuries and even casualties are possible. There may be natural trails made by animals, but

they will tend to form a maze instead of leading sensibly to places humans wish to reach. Perhaps the worst is the alien vegetation. Some of it was brought here from other worlds to form thorny privacy barriers or just to make thick-skinned non-humans immune to various effects feel more at home. Téकुmel’s own native purple foliage, the Food of the Ssú, is toxic; citizens are supposed to destroy it if they find it. Other products of the dense forest are highly desirable. Some of the most valuable lumber only grows in Dense Forest.

 **Rough.** This texture indicates a variety of terrains that significantly slow movement, usually rocky. It may stand for glacial moraines, scree at the bottom of a granite hill with exfoliation rubble, ruins of a fallen city, and so on. This is land whose passability by a marching army is in doubt. If attempted, not only will there will be some delay but probably some injuries as well.

 **Slopes** These bands of parallel hatching are contour interval lines to show that there is slope. They may be the sides of steep hills but in general, they only indicate that a higher elevation has been achieved. They do not necessarily depict cliffs or canyon walls with little vegetation, however, when two or more occur relatively close together, they probably do.

 **Swamps.** This is a kind of land that not only delays the marching army, but incurs the risk of serious casualties to cross. While this region is usually depicted as one terrain on the map, it is actually a dark chaos of many kinds of wetland. There are tall reed thickets with mazes of game trails. Half-submerged fern-like plants uncoil their leaves with a whip crack sound to lacerate the flesh off of any creatures who try to pass. Mists that never lift may conceal grassy wetlands or small exotic fungus forests. At the edges of mysterious water-filled sinkholes, the air is so foggy that humans can barely breathe it. In some places, the black water reflects iridescent colors between twisted trees killed by those substances.

 **Rivers.** The rivers named and noted are the largest. In addition, there are countless rivulets that flow into them, some permanent, many disappearing during the dry season. The southern part of this region, receives more rainfall; it is at the northern end of the monsoon zone. Depending on the time of year, the current may vary greatly. In some months they are strong enough to carry a person away even if they are a powerful swimmer. In others they are so slow that the water may even start to go fetid, giving off a rank odor (and there is often a local taboo against drinking it at that time). Water depth may vary with time of year, some months allowing craft with a deep draft, but others, only flat rafts. Sometimes there are “horn wells”: dark conical holes that generations of large unpleasant life-forms have excavated over time, often in order to hide during the day.

Think Tropical

Here in the Kúrt Hills region, the occasional stately Gapúl tree, with generous spreading canopies and limbs contorting in artlessly artful fashion, may be all that remain of the thick forests that once covered much of the region. However, bear in mind that plant life here still grows at an exceptional rate. This area of Téकुमेल is around 12 degrees north on the planet, and receives ample rain, followed by a long growing season. 'Flooding' doesn't mean 'disaster', it means 'Lo! Spring is here.'

The Kúrt Hills region is the "breadbasket" of the Empire. The southern edge of this Atlas's area has a monsoon season, but, being at the edge, it is not subject to as many potential disasters. On Earth at this time, two crop intervals per year is the norm; in this part of the Empire of Tsolyánu, with "winter" being merely "the dry season", there are three. That's not to say that the farmer's life is easy. There will be more food - but there will also be more weeds to pull, more fences to build around vegetable gardens to fend off both wild and domesticated animals, and so on. Plus, all this work will be done in heat similar to that of Nigeria, Ethiopia, Thailand, and Colombia!

In general, starvation is seldom an issue because the Kúrt Hills region is a breadbasket for itself and the rest of the Empire. Cities are full of clever gardens. Rainfall and sunshine often result in generous amounts of food. Provided that a clanhouse has maintained good relations with others, they are well-buffered against crop-failure by the ability to make inexpensive loans, etc.

Life can be difficult, but if people in this grain-growing region are starving, it is because of some unusual circumstance. Perhaps there has been a massive brushfire that wiped out crops; maybe the area is under punitive taxation for threatening rebellion or having aided the forces of Prince Dhich'uné the Usurper; and so on.

Approximate Populations

This data is taken from the Téकुमेल Sourcebook. These numbers are only very rough estimates for the GM's use. Despite a fondness for bureaucracy, no full and detailed census has ever actually been undertaken of the Empire of Tsolyánu.

Large metropolis: 600,000 or more
Large city: 200,000 - 600,000
Small City: 100,000 - 200,000
Large town: 50,000 - 100,000
Town: 10,000 - 50,000
Small town: 5,000 - 10,000
Village: up to 5000

Settlement General

Descriptions and Organization

Provinces

The Kúrt Hills region is composed primarily of four provinces (Mekú, Alidlár, Ketvíru, and Khósa) which surround a fifth (the dramatically hilly and thickly-forested Kúrtur) like petals around the center of a flower. This Atlas also includes portions of the neighboring provinces of Marélmu, Parikána, Ssá Sáрку, Beranánga, and Urusái.

Provinces are ruled by Provincial Governors (Jaithulénkoi), who usually come out of the Imperial bureaucracy. This system is extremely complex. There are four branches of government, known as the "Palaces" (the word is also applied to the literal buildings where their functions are carried out). Local officials in the Palaces forward reports and requests to the office of the Provincial Governor, who is, in turn, responsible to officials in the Imperial capital at Avanthár.

Fiefs

With so many places, how does a governor of a province keep track of it all? Cities, towns, and villages are roughly organized into fiefs which go back many generation. Some areas trace their establishment to Engsvanyáli times (that is, the First Imperium, prior to the present age of rulership known as the Second Imperium).

It is an irregular system without marked boundaries. Some locations ambiguously belong to more than one fief; some belong to none. A fief may sprawl across a region as wide as a Large Hex, but their sizes vary greatly. They can be thought of as "counties" within the Provinces, but there are a few fiefs that lay across province borders.

Who Rules the Fiefs?

Control of fiefs is primarily a meritocracy. The word 'fief' is a touch misleading because that word tends to imply "medieval-style" inheritance by primogeniture. The position of Fiefholder (Lumeharétokoi) is typically a promotion from the bureaucracies of various institutions. A military outpost's leadership may be chosen by a particular Temple; charge of a thriving riverside port may be assigned by the Palace of the Realm, and so on. Thus, these are usually experienced senior administrators, with some tendency to higher clan status because of better education or perhaps clan-funded 'inducements'.

In a few rare cases, some obscure tradition wins out over sense, and a post is purely inherited. Regents assist such an heir if they are unsuited to the task. And sometimes, on very

rare occasions, a fief in need of new management is awarded to someone who has proven invaluable to the empire (... perhaps even a player character hero!)

A fiefholder typically makes their home in a manor, castle, villa, etc. which shares its name with the fief. Because the seat of a fief ends up holding wealth on behalf of the Empire, it may be a fortified location, with crenellated walls, guard towers at the corners, perhaps a defensive moat, and so on.

Being the fiefholder carries many obligations besides gathering up, and passing along, taxes. Sometimes there are ceremonial roles, such as the opening and closing of the season of an animal whose hunting is locally regulated. If there is trouble in the territory (perhaps an outbreak of banditry or an invasion of inimical non-humans), something that affects multiple villages, a fiefholder is likely to act, often, out of tradition, and to uphold honor.

A Fiefholder who has somehow severely displeased the Imperium can be replaced. Being profitable usually goes a long way towards 'pleasing the Imperium'. Although measured in coinage, taxes are often "in kind" (submitted directly as goods, especially grain). The seat of a fief always has extra warehouse space and granaries.

Status

Respect for pedigree is strong in Tsolyáni culture. Mostly, it manifests as an old surname: to be the descendant of somebody of note primarily within a clan.

Particularly within the Royalist Party, descent from the aristocracy of bygone eras automatically carries a measure of respect. In rare cases, there is a hereditary title. Often, these were bestowed centuries ago, dating back to Bednálljan and Engsvanyáli times.

It is so far back that it is not uncommon for these titles to come without money, or land, or neither. A lordly epithet only comes with judicial or political power if it is held by one with a Circle rank in one of the four Palaces. Presumably, one of the Royalist Party's goals is to "rectify" this, through strong adherence to arranged marriages within bloodlines, and so forth.

Titles granted by the Emperor or Empress mainly serve as marks of Imperial favor. They may or may not come with a grant of land. Throughout Tsolyánu, land ownership is largely clan-based, with the Temples also owning a good deal of land.

So, once again, to be clear, by default, the position of Fiefholder only brings the title of 'Lumeharétokoi'. This is perhaps better conveyed in English by addressing them with terms such as "Your Honor" or "Sir"/ "Madam" rather

than "Milord", "Lord", and "Lady". It's a bumpkin's error of etiquette, akin to the difference between addressing a modern American judge as "Your Highness" instead of "Your Honor".

Here are a few of the many traditional aristocratic titles, and a rough approximation by which they may be rendered into English. There are always ceremonies, special costumes, honorific forms of address, and many other details that go along with a title. Because they are so old, they have a grand archaic ring to them (the same way an obsolete appellation like 'Viscount' might sound to us). In order from highest to lowest approximate status: Arsémkoi - "Baron" Hehéllukoi - "Count" Mríngukoi - "High Lord" Páchukoi - "Lord"

Cities

Every city has a Mayor (Savalharétokoi). Cities are often at the crossroads of mighty Sákbe roads. There will be a Palace of the Realm, a Palace of Ever-glorious War, a Palace of the Priesthoods, and a Palace of Foreign Lands. If it is a port, or near a border, there will be a foreigners' quarter, disdainfully isolated from the rest of the city by walls.

Normally, only a major city would have a Palace of Ever-Glorious War. Katalál in the Ketvíru Province is an exception. The site of its current Palace of Ever-Glorious War is the same as where an analogous structure existed in Engsvanyáli times, before the great earthquake of -12,857 AŞ (known as "The Harbinger of Worse to Come") destroyed Úrmish and Katalál, killing thousands. The presence of a War palace is due to its legacy as a place that once had a much larger population.

A Palace of Foreign Lands functions as an embassy, dealing with foreign trade, especially. (The 'large town' of Katalál has a Palace of Foreign Lands, legacy from when it was larger, and Kúrtur was a tiny nation of its own.) It oversees the paperwork if there is a Foreign Quarter. Typically, within a city, a foreigner requires some kind of sponsorship, some official writ stating their business. On Téकुmel, it is customary that empires may declare war and soldiers may battle, but the affairs of merchants (at least in theory) are to be left unmolested. The most honorable war is the one not conducted against the civilian bystanders.

A city needs several markets because the plethora of roads and alleys make getting from one point to another take quite a bit of foot travel detouring. The different markets serve different social statuses and geographic areas.

In the most prosperous and highest-status areas, there may be lighting at night, but in general, streets are left dark. After dark, sensible people in a Bronze Age city stay home. If they are returning from some evening or nocturnal event, they

will tend to travel in a group, with family, friends, bodyguards, attendants and torch-bearers.

When a town or city is also the seat of a fief, administrative duties related to roads and villages are more the business of the Fiefholder, while the Mayor is mainly concerned with what happens within the town. However, this is not a hard line, and how matters are handled varies from place to place. The densely-populated urban area such as a town or city, and its satellite villages, are often a symbiosis of trading crafted goods and proprietary services such as surgery, for food. Ideally, Fiefholder and Mayor are in a cooperative partnership.

Since there is no refrigeration, produce purchases are made on a daily basis. For women, the market affords a welcome opportunity for socializing. Close to cities or just a little inside them, the plazas of Sákbe roads (typically located where they bend) often serve as places that wholesale to the inner city markets. So, a clan can also send folks out to pick up good bulk deals on non-perishable goods - a distinct advantage of living in a much larger family group.

The local Hirilákte arena will run daily events. Even folks with little to no interest in gladiatorial clashes or duels of honor will go. It is perhaps the only place where the usual custom of not mingling with one's social inferiors is slightly relaxed.

Markets have their own bureaucracy of administrators and market police. City markets also boast countless little permanent stalls and shops. On the ground, these bazaars are often crowded maze-like warrens. They are usually closed between sunset and sun-up because fair shopping requires lighting, and extensive use of lamps and torches is both expensive and hazardous.

A slave market, with the stigma against the slavers themselves as Very Low status, is usually placed out of sight. In general, most slaves are not treated so badly, and, consequently, most are docile. Those who are not may undergo horrific treatment that either humbles or kills them. (While most modern Earth people may enjoy meat, they would rather not ever see, or even think about, what occurs in the slaughterhouse. Analogously, the Tsolyáni are extremely comfortable with slavery, yet they would rather not ever see or even think about how slaves are broken.)

Additionally, in the city or larger town, there are private slave auctions for the special or rare "merchandise". These are by invitation only, conducted in darkness and a silent audience using colored mirrors, at a discreet hall rented for the purpose since hardly anybody would wish to enter a slavers' clanhouse. No food or drink is served; this is not considered some fun social occasion.

Most cities have slums composed of claustrophobic clanhouses of the poorest and lowest-status families. The

clan system tries to be a balancing hand: If a clanhouse in one location has too many people, a clan member may be forced to move to another, or arrange to live and work at the clanhouse of an allied clan. If the entire clan is very poor, this does not help much.

Overpopulation

With so little to share, why create more mouths to feed? The standard view is that offspring are one's only hope of support in old age. Clans always care for their elderly. Rather than embrace the birth control of easily-available Lisútl root, kids are seen as blessings - little lottery tickets handed out by destiny. One or two may someday "make good" with a job promotion. The more children, the better the odds. If they do not, then one's best hope is still to have as many offspring as possible, so that one's upkeep might be spread between them as they contribute to the business of the Clan.

As true in Tsolyánu as it was in the days of Earth's ancient empires, the first thing humans do when they have managed some little scrap of prosperity, is to procreate. This outlook can contribute to keeping desperately poor people... desperately poor. It's a circular system of cause and effect that is difficult to break. How have the cities of Tékel survived for so long? Their collapse is held off by the synthetic upheaval of Dítána, which revitalizes a city by forcing clans to reorganize, and by providing a massive number of jobs.

In the worst case, rather than starve to death, a citizen can sell themselves into slavery, and give the meager proceeds to their clan. Although there are many exceptions, the typical life of a slave is often better than that of the poorest slum denizen.

To many (especially to the slavers), a slum is not a blight. It is a natural factory for the human chattel from whose labor everybody else in the Empire profits.

In a city, there will be temples to all twenty of the Gods and Cohort-gods of Pavár's religion. A day does not go by without some festival or observance to one or another deity. This holds true even in the dark and mighty City of Sárku where that god's priesthood dominates. The presence of a Palace of the Priesthoods, with its Ecclesiastical Courts, ensures the Concordat is upheld.

The dead of the city are buried in necropolises, cities-of-the-dead, usually to the east or south. Tomb police nominally guard against desecration of clan mausoleums. As there is little money in the job, some may turn to tomb robbery themselves.

Overall, the arrangement of streets and buildings is chaotic. Artifacts of the city's earliest formation haunts the layout. A vegetable marketplace might be very inconveniently wedged between the grounds of a large temple and a steep hillside (onto which the present market has climbed) because it was formed around the presence of a well that dried up some nine thousand years ago.

Despite the "re-do" afforded by Dítlána, "city planning" is exquisitely rare. Holders of the land tend to want their old locations back. It is often the case that there are underground areas to which they fully intend to reconnect by discreetly excavating later. After the razing, proper sewers and drainage tunnels are also constructed which may be built to drain into previously existing systems that have not yet been choked with effluvia of the inhabitants.

Below layers of rubble, many cities are veritable layer cakes of history, archaeology, and deadly danger. It seems inevitable that somewhere in the city, someone will break through once more to the Tsuru'úm (the "Underworld").

Towns

The status of 'town' or larger brings with it the presence of a Palace of the Realm. If a town is larger, it may have a Palace of the Priesthoods of the Gods. Several temples are likely to be present, with followers of some deities possibly having to content themselves with an unattended shrine. It is unlikely to have a Palace of Ever-Glorious War. Especially if it is near a border, it may have a Palace of Foreign Lands for dealing with foreign trade and ambassadorial functions.

A town has a Town Mayor (Mraduharétokoi). It is possible for that post to be granted for a limited time, but the position is more usually held for life or until retirement). Unlike the Hetman of a village, a Mayor is more typically chosen by the chiefs of the bureaucratic factions, with some input from a local council of Chief Elders (quite possibly in the form of bribes).

The local Hirilákte arena will often be a major social focus, with at least weekly events. As in the city, streets are not normally lit; after sunset, most folks stay home.

There will be at least one marketplace. To have several is more usual, and some commerce (especially wholesaling to supply shops and markets) will take place at the Sákbe road plaza markets.

There is usually a slave market, but it will be out of the sight of "genteel" eyes (and noses and ears).

The dead are brought to graveyards, usually to the east or south (and cremations may also take place here). There are

often tomb police who would arrest or slay defilers of these grounds.

Villages

In a village, there is a Hetman (Laithturúnkoi). These are locally-appointed, chosen by a council of the Chief Elders. A village Hetman will usually wish to see any visitors – especially higher-status visitors. In Tsolyánu, they are most often men, but a Hetwoman is not unheard-of. A village usually has just one market.

The permanent presence of a priest or priestess is less likely (unless, perhaps, they have retired). Then again, some villages are formed strongly around some clerical site. For instance, the Ba'alán Shrine is surrounded by lands held by the Temple of Keténgku. In addition to the priests and children who serve the Aspect Ba'alán, there are a hundred or so local farmers, nearly all followers of Keténgku.

Civic functions may take place on common grounds. In the smallest villages, they may be hosted on the property of the wealthiest and/or most prestigious clans, from whose ranks the local Hetman is very likely to have emerged.

If the village is large enough, there may be a little Hirilákte arena with monthly spectacles. What passes for entertainment in a village is likely to be dull by city standards.

Especially in the outlying rural areas, religious teachings and practices are very rudimentary. Perhaps they converge at a local shrine to observe some religious holiday, or receive a simple and standard blessing from a visiting priest, or burn incense and pray for favor, several times a year. Personal sacrifices tend to be little things, such as a flower of a particular color.

All of the Twenty Temples own large tracts, generally out in the countryside. These are worked by peasants that follow the one particular deity. Despite being fully under the domination of a single Temple, however, moderation is the norm. Out here, the worshippers of the Gods with the oddest or most inhuman proclivities lead lives not much different from their counterparts whose deities have less exotic agendas.

Should an individual wish to join a different temple, the Concordat would be observed, and they could, in theory, pursue their newfound faith free from serious stigma. Then again, the peasant who lives and works on temple-owned lands would probably no more consider changing their god than a typical modern Earth-person would consider changing the language they speak for some other.

As the goddess of agriculture, Lady Avánthe occupies a slightly unusual position in that worshippers of both Stability

or Change pay Her homage out in the country. This is entirely accepted, and not viewed as a sin against one's own Temple. It is common to find some kind of rustic shrine to her, perhaps as simple as a stone that is ritually stained blue with dye every two years.

Various Settlement Focuses

Sákbe Road Villages & Towns

These can be found within a Tsán or two of a Sákbe road. Their inhabitants do some farming in the nearby area, but tend to be oriented mostly to selling items and food and providing services to travelers on the road. Typically, a Sákbe road village or town will contain storehouses for storing goods that are in transit along the Sákbe road; also caravanserais (sometimes inns; more often these are merely platforms providing space where caravans may camp for the night). A few of these places are known for exceptional items, such as superbly crafted baskets, good wines, etc.

Fishing Villages & Towns

These can be found near or on the edge of a river, lake or ocean. Their principal means of support is fishing, but it can also include the sale of items created from materials found in the area, such as baskets made from reeds that grow along the shore. It is sometimes possible to hire a few of the local fishermen to ferry travelers along the shore for a short distance, as long as the fisherman and his boat are not going to be in danger (after all, the boat is his means of livelihood).

Agricultural Villages & Towns

These are found out in open country, usually surrounded by cultivated fields for several Tsán (typically, within the same Small Hex). Their main means of support is farming. If the village or town happens to be near a forested area, its residents will augment their farming with products found in the nearby forest area (berries, edible plants, fruit trees, etc.).

Kurtáni Forest Villages

In the woods surrounding the province of Kúrtur, and upon the highlands of the Kúrt Hills, the houses tend to a different ethnic style. There are small buildings arranged in a circle around a central open common area. To one side is a special drying hut on stilts for seasoning lumber, hung with aromatic herbs to discourage pests.

The quaint and rustic foresters are not just loggers, however. There may be fenced areas with lovingly tended seedlings and saplings. As descendants of longtime Stability-oriented

people, they replant forests. One may happen upon trees growing in regular rows to reclaim open land for the woods.

Other Focuses for Settlements

Trading, fishing, and farming are not the only primary occupations, of course. Some communities are formed around minerals such as salt (used to preserve food) or natron (essentially, unrefined baking soda, used in cooking and cosmetics). There are communities that harvest wood (for lumber, or, to heat it into charcoal) or chip out raw anthracite (baking out its rank smell to form coke, the kind of coal usable in braziers), to supply the cooking needs of the cities. The universities and colleges of this world are typically temples that may be the center of an independent village. There are a few military bases, usually forts. Legions are sponsored by Temples or Clans, and there are entire villages devoted to the training and upkeep of standing armies (with dedicated lands for feeding them).

A Note on Clanhouses

Clans are extremely influential in Tsolyáni society. They function as a sort of combination extended family and company. Especially out in the country, tradition dictates a strong focus on one business, or perhaps several closely related ones. Clans in the cities and large towns tend to have broadened interests. Both factories and warehouse space will most often be incorporated into the grounds of a clan.

The population size of a clanhouse varies widely. From 100 to 200 individuals is typical, though there may be as few as 20, or as many as 500. Clans are made up of families who share a clanhouse. Families are headed up by Elders. Elders together decide on a Chief Elder. The process varies widely; there may or may not be a vote. It is possible that the title is held for a set term, but most often, the position is for life, or until retirement.

A Note About Land Ownership

People do own private homes on Téकुmel; it's just not the most typical life arrangement. The clanhouse (often a compound, not just a single building) can be residence, factory, business offices and recreation space all in one. According to the law, all land technically belongs unto the emperor. If all the deeds of land-custody were to be tallied up (a feat that has never been fully accomplished, though it has probably been attempted), they would show that 40% is held by clans, 30% by the state, 20% by temples, and 10% by private individuals. (This ratio, of "4-3-2-1", holds true for all of the nation's resources.)

About the Kurtáni

The once-independent forest nation of Kúrtur formed over some 10,000 years. The Kurtáni were then conquered by the Empire of Tsolyánu roughly 2000 years ago. Since then, they have lost, regained, and again lost their autonomy, largely as a result of religiously-motivated disfavor/favor from the reigning emperor/empress. Despite such a long history together, many Tsolyáni think of Kurtáni as ignorant savages who ought to be more grateful for being allowed admission into the magnificent Empire. They also have a reputation throughout the Empire as rustics, and also as skillful archers. (The word Kurtáni is both a noun and an adjective; the word Kurtonyál can also be used for "the Kurtáni people".)

Bit by bit, the forests on the hills and plains below were devoured for fuel, building, and farmland. Today, all that remains is what is close around the hills. Some Kurtáni have become the guardians of the forests, a very Stability-oriented preoccupation. This is not entirely without concessions from the Empire. For example, within the province of Kúrtur, only the locals may legally cut down a Séresh tree.

The folk of the higher hills and deeper forests are often "wild": unlikely to approach strangers, shy, keeping their distance so that might quickly vanish into the underbrush if displeased. They may also be impulsive, tending to "shoot first, ask questions later... if at all." Those who live in light forest and interact with "outsiders" tend to be viewed as "up-country ruffians" by Tsolyáni.

It is central to Kurtáni culture that they are very territorial. They usually carry one or two smaller "arrows of dissuasion", to be shot at non-lethal areas of interlopers. Territoriality includes being very touchy about the treatment of their ladies. They are not sexually prudish; they are polyamorous like their lowland counterparts. A father takes a dim view of trifling with his daughters' heart.

It is not uncommon to find Kurtáni who have a low opinion of the Tsolyáni in general. It is often Tsolyáni slavers, illegal loggers, bandits, and others up to no good who would seek to prowl about their woods.

Religion mitigates or exacerbates encounters: They may welcome fellow worshippers of their own deity with a feast, be civil to other Stability worshippers, however, they are rude to Change worshippers, and openly hostile towards those of Lord Sárku or His Cohort.

A Kurtáni from deep and high in the woods might miss all but the most obvious visual cues for social status. Proper etiquette through the use of the many pronouns of the Tsolyáni language is apt to be missing or faulty. They find the constant flowery blandishments towards one's social

betters that is completely normal in the cities, insincere and annoying.

From the Kurtáni perspective, the Tsolyáni are decadent status-obsessed battle-crazed brutes who can't take a hint from just a little arrow to the thigh or rump, but will instead take this as an act of war. The closer to the Dense Forest, the better the odds that male Tsolyáni trespassers will be outright killed, especially if they are harming trees or taking game. Female Tsolyáni interlopers might fare a little better: they will probably be captured and sold to a slaver.

The Kurtáni are seen as brusque, aloof, and boorish louts by the Tsolyáni. Kurtáni humor is often based on crude sexual jests. This can also lead to trouble. A higher-status Tsolyáni touchy about their honor might consider ribaldry calling their sexual prowess into question, grounds for a duel or Shámtila.

Not all the Kurtáni folk are standoffish. Many are completely assimilated into Tsolyáni culture, coming from families that have been "Tsolyánified" for centuries. Found in the few towns in Kúrtur, they are the ones more likely to keep slaves.

Some Tsolyáni technologies did not adapt to the karst forest environment. For instance, Chlén hide tools have to be imported from the several towns and cities because Chlén can not live atop the karst for long. When the great lumbering beasts attempt to cross the hills, human bearers must bring bales of their food, and their slow movement makes them an easy target for banditry. And then, Tsolyáni tanner clans, who are famously secretive about the details of their craft, generally prefer to live amidst the comforts of "civilization".

Many Kurtáni will happily Chlén use hide tools if they can get them, but they have little to no money, so they simply can not afford imported goods. It is true many are relatively uneducated, however, most are not "primitives".

There are a few Kurtáni, the most furtive and superstitious, who avoid the use of complex material technologies of the Tsolyáni. For instance, they would rather use the lower jaw of a small animal rather than a Chlén hide to carve. Tied to this xenophobic aversion is a fear of becoming dependent on these things they cannot make for themselves. (See the text box for Buráni, the Night People, under Large Hex 3914.)

Despite thousands of years of occasional interbreeding, the Kurtáni remain physically distinctive. Typical Tsolyáni are lithe; Kurtáni tend to be more stocky, and short. The mouth may be broader, with full lips. Women have rounder faces, sometimes with upturned noses. Black to dark brown hair and dark brown eyes are still the norm.

Tékumel's grain was genetically engineered to provide excellent nutrition for humans. Partly for genetic reasons and partly because they may have less nourishment, the

people that live high in the Kúrt Hills may be smaller overall. Typically described as "bandy-legged", some are bow-legged as a result of poor nutrition. Kurtáni willing to purchase food from towns have legs that are strong and sturdy, with thighs and outer calves rounded out with muscle from life on the karst slopes.

Bushels of the precious grain are brought to the most remote villages by human bearers. It is so nutritious and delicious that there are conservative tribes that regard it as addictive and will not eat it!

The men often wear Dáichu bark kilts and leather jerkins. Their hair may be braided. They may be bearded (but they tend to be smooth-bodied, not like the hirsute Salarvyáni).

The women are partial to very comfortable tops made of Dáichu bark, airy and porous because they are pounded nearly unto transparency. (Dáichu cloth is preferred for tops by women throughout western Tsolyánu.) Some wear a broad conical hat woven from thin splint of bark. Others favor bowl-shaped wicker caps with a neck cloth in back.

The towns and villages of the hills correspond fairly well to the different tribes. For game purposes, it is close enough to speak of the Chálu Tribe, Gushálu Tribe, Rúchanu Tribe, Kúrtusha Tribe, and so on. Roads in Kúrtur are considered to belong to all Kurtáni neutrally, but crossing through another Tribe's forested lands without permission is dangerous. Tribal affiliation would be obvious to another Kurtáni from their clothing, as it is worked into the designs of their garments, and affects the weave of their hat, etc. This information is "invisible" to a lowlander Tsolyáni. (Béthorm rules: The skill of Etiquette can have the specialization "Kurtáni culture".)

The Kurtáni have remained an archery-oriented people. Their Séresh-wood longbows are without equal throughout the empire. And, if a hard wood or bone arrowpoint will do to pierce the quarry's eye, why seek out flint or bronze tips? These would only be added expense and weight.

Atop the Kúrt Hills, every village has an "A'éme", or "senior archery teacher". They will almost always be a member of the Avánthe-worshipping Sé'iyau A'ózu religious society. The A'éme is both a bowyer and fletcher, and teaches the fine points of these arts and archery.

A traditional gift for the A'éme was a small bag of the hard thorns of the Mo'ími, or Tooth Plant, which only grows in a few rare places in the Kúrt Hills forest anymore. An acceptable substitute is leg-bone from the largest Chlén to be found. By virtue of having to bear so much weight, this material is extremely strong, and so, makes wonderful arrow points. But, Chlén do not live upon the hills, so, from time to time a little Kurtáni band may go on a ritual quest to the "lowlands" to bring some of this bone back. It is something that the lowland Chlén herders will happily trade for.

A language called Thu'úsa (controversially thought by some scholars to be a dialect of Engsvanyáli) was not intelligible to outsiders. Over the centuries it came to be associated with poverty and low status. Thus, most Kurtáni adopted the Tsolyáni language. Spoken Thu'úsa persists in the most remote regions, and some Kurtáni may use it when they wish to communicate privately amongst themselves. (Béthorm rules: The GM can simply decide what languages an NPC speaks, of course. The following is a suggestion if they prefer to color in such details using dice. Upon meeting a group of Kurtáni in Dense Forest, the odds of at least one speaking Thu'úsa will be 16 or less on 2d10, while their odds of at least one speaking Tsolyáni are 12 or less. However, if met outside of Dense Forest, Thu'úsa-speaking drops to 13 or less, and Tsolyáni goes up to 16 or less.)

The Kurtáni may live in clanhouses but they also have large communal huts for various seasonal activities such as harvesting a particular fruit, or tapping a certain tree for sap. They may travel in bands of perhaps 20-30, and will often be preceded by an extremely stealthy scout. (Béthorm rules: treat as a combined Deftness and Stealth Skill Levels of 17.)

In addition to belonging to a clan and a tribe, most individuals belong to a religious society called a Sé'iyau. It has very vague parallels to a Temple, but without the formal profession of 'priest', or permanent buildings. Members are usually identified by just a small wooden chit, cut with a Tsolyáni symbol for the god on one side and a Kurtáni glyph on the other, on a string necklace. The leaders of the Sé'iyau are called Hu'hún. Outsiders are not made privy to the knowledge that they sometimes possess peculiar psychic abilities. (For more detail on the different Sé'iyau, see 'The Sé'iyau Religion of the Kúrt Hills')

While the Kurtáni give lip service to the Concordat, the limited presence of worship of the Gods of Change says the truth is otherwise, and a Kurtáni strongly drawn to the worship of a god of Change may even be socially pressured into exile from their tribe.

There have been Temples of Change built in the Kurtáni towns for four centuries. The Kurtáni are still resentful of the pressure from outside to permit this. It is perhaps the first thing they would change if they had their autonomy back, and a major reason that they are kept under the political control of Haumá. (When harm befalls a Temple of Change in Kúrtur, it is likely the exchange rate of goods for food in the city will suffer, as an unspoken punishment and warning.)

A Hint for Kurtáni Speech

Professor Barker would often "borrow" real-world dialects to help communicate the essence of the different

characters and ethnic groups to his players. Kurtáni characters sounded like a combination of "West English" dialect of the Welsh (which strikes many English-speakers as "folksy"), and the informality of the American Appalachians, with casual contractions like 'em and younguns. Words like "t'was", which add a slightly archaic flavor, can also fit the Kurtáni.

Here are a few examples from the book "Beyond the Borders of Tsolyánu", Book Two of Professor Barkers's solitaire adventure series Adventures on Tékmel:

"T'was a fairish fight, Ka'am!"

"Let the little bugger go. No sense getting the high folk after us."

"My folk found the Sárku lads after they'd done their deed. We slew the lot of 'em and took the Eye."

The Plodding Pace of Chlén Transport

The standard and ubiquitous beast of burden throughout Tsolyánu is the six-legged broad-footed Chlén. It moves a ponderous 3 km (~2 miles) per hour (so, perhaps two and a quarter Tsán, if you wish to use the Tsolyáni measurement). This is 15 km (~10 miles) per day (roughly 11 Tsán). All together, they are only worked some five hours a day.

Given such a slow speed, the Chlén is definitely not a riding creature. Its legs have enough work supporting its own enormous bulk as it is. However, it does have the extra strength and energy to draw a huge cart.

The spacing between Sákbe Road towers is not consistent, but, as a very, very crude generalization, they do tend to be around 15 km (~10 miles) apart. Thus, they are perhaps a day's travel apart for a Chlén.

The Small Hexes of the Kúrt Hills Atlas map are 9.5 kilometers (~6 miles) across (or about 7 Tsán, if you care to use the Tsolyáni reckoning). Thus, a Chlén (with or without cart) can cross from the center of one Small Hex to the center of another in about a day and a half. To traverse two Small Hexes would be roughly three days. (For other travel rates by soldiers, merchants pushing small carts, litter-bearers, etc., see section 13.1 in the book Béthorm, p. 155.)

Chlén are plant-eaters, grass-loving but with jagged mouths capable of stripping leave to fill up their bulky bodies with great stores of fodder. In dry times, big droppings would lead to unnecessary water loss; relative to the creature's bulk, the Chlén excreta will then be small. They may internally ferment (leading to some epic

expulsions of gas!), but they are genetically engineered to possess their own enzymes for the job of breaking down cellulose. Their dung is compacted to a leathery dryness, fibrous, with little to no nourishment for vermin to extract.

At Sákbe road markets, slaves may fill troughs with water brought up from below. It is more usual to walk the creature down a ramp to a stream or well. This is usually unnecessary. Thanks to their carapaces, Chlén beasts lose very little water. They can drink a good deal, helping them withstand drought (or a long traverse). They also do not need to be constantly eating, but they do need to rest. A sleeping Chlén is a common sight, its body extracting nourishment while it dozes.

Some drivers name their beast, keeping just one a long time. In many places, however, especially near large towns and cities, the need for efficient cart transport is great enough to keep a large number of recently-fed and watered "spare" Chlén beasts in a lot at the base of a Sákbe road tower. This way, under some kind of pressure (such as a military engagement,) double and even triple the usual times can be made by harnessing up a fresh beast.

A tired creature is turned out to fend for itself. Near the highly populated places, peasant children play in the fields, ushering random Chlén to fallow hay-lots where their fertilizer is welcome. (Remarkably, their six broad feet prevent tamping down and thus ruining the tilth.) In the countryside, peasants eagerly gather up Chlén dung as fuel for cooking fires. Later, they may go out and round up a "refueled" Chlén, driving it back to the pen for a few Qírgals.

The Thu'úsa Argot

The Kurtáni dialect of Thu'úsa was later adopted by priests of Lords Hnálla, Thúmis, Belkhánu, and their Cohorts as the basis for their private argot (artificial language) also known today as "Thu'úsa". Words were added to make it more useful as an ecclesiastical code. It was also occasionally altered further to render leaked understanding obsolete. This renders the argot unintelligible to the Kurtáni. However, a priest who knows the Thu'úsa argot has a rudimentary grasp of the Thu'úsa dialect used by the Kurtani. (Béthorm rules: treat knowledge of the argot as the first level of Thu'úsa dialect. Some say Thu'úsa came from a dialect of Engsvanyáli, but others believe it came from an entirely different language family than that which includes both Tsolyáni and Engsvanyáli.)

The Sé'iyau Religion of the Kúrt Hills

In the double isolation of the woods and the hills, worship of the "native" goddess Makórsa combined with that of Avánthe (or were they perhaps one all along?). Strong devotion to the gods Hnálla and Thúmis, especially, developed. Worship of the Tlomitlányal, the gods of Stability, thrived, while that of the gods of Change, the Tlokiriqáluyal, was heavily suppressed. The teachings of the early Temples of Stability, traceable back to the priest Pavár, gave rise to the Sé'iyau organizations, religious societies better suited to their semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Kurtáni.

In a semi-nomadic culture, there is a need for a semi-nomadic cleric. This role is fulfilled by the Hu'hún. This position is traditionally described with the phrase "of the 3rd Circle". Their knowledge does correspond fairly well to that of Third Circle of Tsolyáni Temple teachings, but the Temples very rarely interact formally with the Sé'iyau. A Hu'hún may be visually identified by knots in the cords of their necklaces, and, sometimes, obvious ritual scarification. They are known to the official priests, who maintain a presence in a few actual small temples in the towns in the hills.

When a Kurtáni is in their early teens they will probably choose a Sé'iyau. These are religious societies that are shared by all Kurtáni tribes. It tends to relate to their family occupation, but this is flexible. Youths must be sponsored by a member, who imparts their first instruction. A member is known by a simple wooden chit with a symbol on a necklace, and, in some cases, also a scar with that mark. This may dangle below or next to another wooden tag with a clan symbol.

Membership of these groups are kept in very rough balance. On the rare occasion when one Sé'iyau has more than enough members, an applicant may be refused. In this case, they will either wait until the group has openings, or allow themselves to be directed to one of the others.

Magical training is much harder to come by in Kúrtur. The Temple of Lord Grugánu may offer training for a fee, but the local people usually cannot afford it. Most spellcasters are Hu'húns, shaman-priests, and instruction may come through one's Sé'iyau. A stronger Pedhétl, reservoir of mystic energy, is one of the reasons one is chosen to become a Hu'hún. It is assumed that a Hu'hún sometimes possesses odd other-worldly abilities, but it is taboo to speak of them.

(For Béthorm rules: a Hu'hún typically has a Rituals (their deity) Skill at 13-, and a PSYC of 5. On a roll of 5 or less on 2d10, they will have a PSYC of 8 and also an Advantage of some kind of small and quirky "ESP" type talent. On a roll of doubles, they will have some kind of Disadvantage that relates to their psychic sensitivity. For instance, they may be empathically overwhelmed by the feelings of others, and be unable to enter towns or cities. Or, they may give off

some kind of psychic emanation that somehow attracts predators.)

In eastern Kúrtur, a Hu'hún often keeps a pet Kúni falcon, which they scale the cliffs to acquire as a chick. These clever birds can talk and can be sent to carry a message to a friend. They may also be sent to carry a stick to a village shrine, with a message incised upon it. After a certain number of years of service, the bird is released to go have a family and raise its young, and the Hu'hún usually begins anew with another chick.

Space prevents listing all of the Sé'iyaus but here are the most prominent.

Arutáo. The Sé'iyau Arutáo take pride in their stoicism. They seek to honor Lord Hnálla, and emulate the transcendental outlook of Lord Drá. Lord Dra's reward is not 'plenty' at some unspecified time in the future. It is freedom from fear of scarcity, right now. While the "city folk" below run shrieking for a Temple-trained healer at the least injury, Kurtáni do not have that luxury. "Noble action" for the Arutáo is to accept crippling injury, horrific disfigurement, and death stoically, to face famine without complaint, and to maintain dignity, avoiding unseemly excesses, when there is good fortune to enjoy. The village of Chéyal (3913.CH) has a shrine to Lord Hnálla that is significant to members of this Sé'iyau.



Falconer Sujó'l climbs a cliff in the Kúrt Hills to find what he needs: a lively Kúni-bird chick.

Within this Sé'iyau, it is known that one can find the entrance to a particular cave by going to the Spire of Galakú (3813.GE) at the Winter Solstice, and looking northwestwards at dawn, to find a marker obelisk covered in quartz crystals. On no other day of the year does it sparkle.

Thamyáni. The Sé'iyau Thamyáni worship the God Thúmis under a variant name of Tháume. Rather than garden in a village or town, though, they travel about and propagate those plants that are beneficial, such as edible mushrooms which they dry, bring back to villages, and trade. They are healers and gatherers of herbs. They believe that Lord Tháume placed amazing properties within the various medicinal plants. (The occasional genetically-engineered plant with pharmaceutical properties growing feral upon Téumel will not prove this outlook wrong.) They may employ a Thu'úsa writing system known as "Ladder Writing" which is carved into wood. "Noble action" for them is to remember where the wildcrafted stands are located, to remember names of many lineages, to be aware of tribal territories, and so on, to make knowledge beautiful and hold it in trust for others. For some reason, the site of Homesteader's Hill (3714.DG) is significant to them.

La'ukán. The Sé'iyau La'ukán are defensive warriors. Rather than follow Lord Karakán, however, they follow a local Aspect of Lord Belkhánu they call Balkuéna. This Aspect goes out of his way to ready the most wonderful afterlife, with restful forests and plentiful game. Though they do not outright raid, the La'ukán are rarely peaceful. They are constantly challenging all who intrude upon their lands, and in battle they are fearless. They are especially concerned with killing creatures that threaten Séresh stands. "Noble action" for them is to fiercely hold their territory, and to fight without fear of death.

Mahé'zīyal. The Sé'iyau Mahé'zīyal are cutters of trees. They worship Makórsa, an aspect of Lady Avánthe who guards the forests. They prune and shape fruit trees hidden where their prizes will not be devoured by strangers. However, they are also cultivators of seedlings and saplings of future trees, often working closely with members of the Sé'iyau La'ukán. "Noble action" for them is to surreptitiously plant seedlings of the fast-growing trees that propagate by subterranean runners at the edges of the forest to increase its size, to clear areas around a few select trees so that these will grow larger than the rest, and to move invisibly, at one with the woods.

A'ózu. The Sé'iyau A'ózu are known for prowess in hunting, but they also take an interest in crafting and falconry. Like the Sé'iyau Mahé'zīyal, they also worship Makórsa, but in Her capacity as patroness of hunters. Those who make game animals suffer through poor placement of an arrow will face the ire of Balkuéna's companion, Yá'huón, the hunting dog who, according to folktales, must chase the spirits of wild animals all over the afterworld if they arrive upset. A'ózu

are often experts at moving stealthily. They often range into the light forest, rocky areas, or even the farmlands in small groups, undetected and returning to the dense forest with game. "Noble action" for them is to hone their archery to pinpoint accuracy, to create longbows that will last for at least two generations, to prevent the suffering of animals.

Sunggánmirai. The Sé'iyau Sunggánmirai are soldiers. They worship "The Striding Force", an aspect of Lord Karakán not officially recognized by that Temple. The Kurtáni maintain several legions, and their scouts and archers occasionally go off to find employment. A boy marked for such service is raised differently, subjected to strong discipline that may seem harsh to outsiders. (Girls are not accepted as Sunggánmirai.) They must put an arrow through a target before being allowed to eat their evening meal, punch the bark of a tree daily to callus their knuckles, and so forth. "Noble action" for them is to mind their manners, to be true to their word, to be exceptionally honest, grow up fast like an annual flower to be self-sufficient a year or two before their peers, to engender children sooner, and to follow the orders of a superior to the best of their ability.

Amáljenyal. The Sé'iyau Amáljenyal are said to be midwives. Their sacred site is Two Scar Basin (3713.LD), a place of ritual since the days of the earliest Kurtáni (the ba'Aruán). They are the most unusual Sé'iyau because they are always women, and they are all psychically gifted in some fashion, even if it just means "a slightly deeper Pedhéti (the "psychic reservoir" that all people possess. (Béthorm rules: they possess a PSYC of 5 or better instead of the usual 2; some will have psychic Advantage or two.) Because of their sex, they are not permitted to become Hu'hún, leaders of any Sé'iyau, besides this one. They serve Amáljeni, a goddess said by some Tsolyáni priests to be a lost female aspect of Lord Ksárul (an accusation the Amáljenyal strongly deny!). She is said to appear in dreams as a grandmotherly lady. On very rare occasions, a child shows sign of some sort of psychic talent. Perhaps they cannot help but know the inner thoughts of others, or little fires start spontaneously in their vicinity, or maybe small items fly about the room when they are upset. The family is advised to keep it secret, but to let an Amáljenyal know. Depending on their abilities, the youngster may have to be raised in the wilds, apart from their band or clan. "Noble action" for Amáljenyal is to live with humility and decorum, to advise new mothers, to deliver children, and to find and protect future Hu'hún.

About the Kurtáni Foundationists

The Foundationists are Kurtáni Stability-fanatics trying to oust those nobles placed into power during the reign of the Usurper Dichi'uné, all of them worshippers of Lord Sárku. In response, some Kurtáni revived their ancient ancestors' vigilante efforts as a movement that calls itself the Foundationists. It is well-known that the Foundationists fund

their activities through banditry. They may actually be an unknown number of small independent organizations.

It is partly a religious movement, with no written manifesto, but one clear set of targets. During the Usurper's brief reign, a number of Sárku-leaning persons were awarded control of fiefs in this region. Across a certain region (Large Hexes 3714 and 3814 in Khósa, and even 3914 and 3014 in Alidlár), carts bringing goods to and from the towns and cities of these fiefs have been attacked.

Unfortunately for these rebels, the Empire appears to have decided these lands are legally held, and the Foundationists are naught but treasonous raiders in need of a good impaling. The amnesty that many ordinary bandits earned by harassing the supply lines of Prince Dhich'uné's armies was revoked when they continued their criminal ways past the Civil War.

A Background to the Conflict

The modern Kurtáni's antipathy for the worship of Sárku could date all the way back to the Time of No Kings (also known as the Rise of the Priestkings; 21,884 to 12,392 years ago). The despotic Priestkings fought constantly against each other, cruelly exploiting nearby peasants to do so. In those days, the Kúrt Hills Forest extended much farther to the northeast, all the way to Tsurú, almost to the foot of the Kràà Hills.

A powerful alliance of Sárku-worshipping warlords formed at this time especially persecuted worshippers of the Gods of Stability. Settlements in the woods (most of them ruins today) became bastions of order and justice for the Kurtáni, who remain primarily worshippers of Stability today.

Although the Concordat is now enforced and the Empire of Tsolyánu has reined in the most abusive practices, the oppression lives on, powered by affiliations of old nobility and secret societies based in the modern-day City of Sárku, within the Fief of Sárku, in the Province of Ssá Sárku. The rise of the Usurper Dhich'uné and the civil war disinterred a deep fear: that this 'nation of Sárku' has returned.

The prelates who rule the Palace of the Priesthoods in the City of Sárku requested that the soldiers of the Omnipotent Azure Legion in the area formerly under Prince Dhich'uné's command still in this area be ordered to capture and execute all Foundationists. Emperor Mirusiya has refused: mere bandits are the business of governors of provinces, normally beneath Imperial notice.

He has also refused requests to rescind appointments made by Prince Dhich'uné. If a fief holder is sufficiently

incompetent, to the point that the Imperial government takes notice, their title may be revoked. This is historically extremely rare. Although Prince Dhich'uné's reign is widely regarded as a farce, to remove the Sárku-leaning nobles now, simply because they are worshippers of Lord Sárku, smacks of violating the Concordat. If, however, they are judged unfit later, then the emperor shall have prizes to award to those of his own choosing.

The Stations of Brave Peripatation

The Kurtáni were once an independent and sovereign people. Rustic and disorganized in comparison to their Tsolyáni contemporaries, they were subjugated by the Tsolyáni. Driven back onto the wild and tall surges of karst central to this province, where farming ranges from difficult to impossible, many of the tribal people lived stoically upon the edge of starvation.

In 2208 A.S., under Emperor Heshtú'atl "The Mighty", 57th Seal Emperor, the 25 Stations of Brave Peripatation were decreed. The goal was help evolve the Province of Kúrtur from a desperate resentful population with a fractious undercurrent, into a unified and productive province, one loyal to the Petal Throne. Thus, merchants were encouraged to travel and acquire the 25 Sigils as they learned about the various local economic interests. This earned them honorable recognition from their Provincial Governor.

The project was successful. In time, rich foods from the lowlands were routinely exchanged for products from the forested hills. Under the joint auspices of the Palace of the Realm and the Temple of Avánthe, the Stations of Brave Peripatation are all still in operation, despite their obscurity.

The Stations themselves are waist-high pillars of gray stone whose tops are dished to function as simple braziers. They are carved with clear depictions of mundane local items of commercial interest such as an ear of Gáin grain. Any traveler may, for a few Qírgals, have their walking stick (or some place on their palanquin) branded with the local Sigil of Peripatation. The task of placing the brand takes an hour, and it traditionally falls to one of the most junior members of the local Palace of the Realm, or perhaps the local mayor's staff.

The brand marks were generally collected in sets of five. Few people would collect more than one set of five. One who has collected all of the Sigils, however, is entitled to a 26th symbol from any of the five governor's palaces.

Visiting these Stations has not been a popular venture in centuries. It is rather esoteric, with Medium clan merchants being the most likely to know of them. Those versed in etiquette might know that it was the custom to collect up delicacies from the far-off places as gifts to the governor.

The achievement of having visited all the sites is worth a bit of prestige and positive reaction when dealing with either the Temples of Thúmis, Avánthe, or Dlamélsh, but it comes with a modest obligation to help the Governors should they ask.

Ketvíru Province

- 1 Fortress of Mu'á (3612.AG)
- 2 Charkú (3611.LK)
- 3 Kái (3610.MA)
- 4 Treasure Trove Keep (3711.HH)
- 5 Árgarunkh (3810.KF)

Khósa Province

- 1 Yaggásh Estate (3614.HD)
- 2 Haumá (3613.IG)
- 3 Kásh Keep (3714.DE)
- 4 Siketlá (3714.JJ)
- 5 Town of Koyél (3814.AG)

Kúrtur Province

- 1 Kúrtusha (3713.JC)
- 2 Pa'arídlatlú (3713.NN)
- 3 Kirúna (3813.DG)
- 4 Dlánü (3812.FG)
- 5 Tláva (3813.JJ)

Mekú Province

- 1 Kelél's Hold (3810.MM)
- 2 Métlá (3912.BG)
- 3 Erqúma (3910.GI)
- 4 Mekú (3911.JL)
- 5 Mirrá (3912.LL)

Alidlár

- 1 Hléksa (3814.OA)
- 2 Tsurú (3915.FG)
- 3 Chethá (3915.MI)
- 4 Chúsetan (4013.FM)
- 5 Drasá (4014.FK)

About the People of the Kráà Hills

People of the Kráà Hills are stereotyped as "peculiar" by outsiders. Outsiders may mistake their quiet or stern nature for being dim-witted. The primary god here is Lord Sárku, and, true to their god's ideals, extravagant displays of emotion are considered pointless. Sometime these folk are stereotyped as dour and humorless, a contrast to the stereotype of Kurtáni as feral, rustic, and ribald.

Much of their diet is from tree crops. Groves are not movable, not like the way that, say, a farmer of the Golden Meadows could choose to sow grain and vegetable seeds over here or over there.

Whereas the Kurtáni are semi-nomadic, some just barely making use of the permanent villages, the people of the Kráà Hills tend to be very emotionally attached to the homestead clanhouses of their origins. Gossip is for inside the clanhouse, in private, rather than the market or the

Hirilákte. (If some local Hmélu drover thinks you are mad, he will probably keep his opinion to himself... until he gets home.)

Probably around the dawn of the First Imperium, high-born Tsolyáni came to the hills, bringing their families closer to the sacred revelatory "arrival places" of the god Sárku. Over the centuries, they imported countless slaves to work the mines. Being repeatedly joined by outsiders, the residents became much like rural Tsolyáni anywhere in the Empire. Due to an exchange of culture that went both ways, religious rites at the edges are similar to those held in the City of Sárku.

Despite isolation, and reverence for family heritage, most people here no longer remember their ancestors' ancient culture. Only a few words are recalled of what they say was once a complete language. (Where some proper name is required, it is called "Shedalün" by a few rare scholars, but this is not what its own speakers would have called it). The Kráà Hills folk are now very much Tsolyáni (with clans, a male-dominated polygamous society, arranged marriages, a keen sense of social status, a fondness for bureaucracy, a love of ritual, and so forth).

The character of religious worship is different from that practiced in the rest of the Empire. There are likely to be ceremonious yet family-oriented visits to the crypts, and viewing of remains. The Aspect worshipped is sometimes ascribed a female gender. It is said that there are even ancient temples to that deity of which the "proper" Temple hierarchy is itself unaware.

Priests are less common but worshippers who are particularly devout may be marked with facial scars.

The Úùm: Triple Cicatrice of Devotion Eternal

In some of the mountain clans, true devotees of Sárku are given three scars upon the face, typically a trio of small parallel cuts. The custom varies; it may be upon one cheek, or both, or upon the forehead. These may mean that an individual has been inducted into the inner rites of the temple of Sárku (or Duritlámish). A person with an Úùm is seldom seen outside the Kráà Hills. Such a mark will inspire deep distrust if not outright hostility from old-fashioned Kurtáni folk (who refer to it as an "Ú'um").

In general, the folk here do not think of themselves together as an ethnic group, "the Kráàniyal". They tend to identify more with a particular village or town. Incredibly, some of these settlements predate the coming of the Fisherman Kings. Some communities are so isolated that even years may go by between visits by non-mountain residents. From time to time, feuds may break out between low-status clans or family branches from different valleys. Away from nobles

or magistrates from the governments of Alidlár or Ssá Sárku, these can fester and go on for centuries.

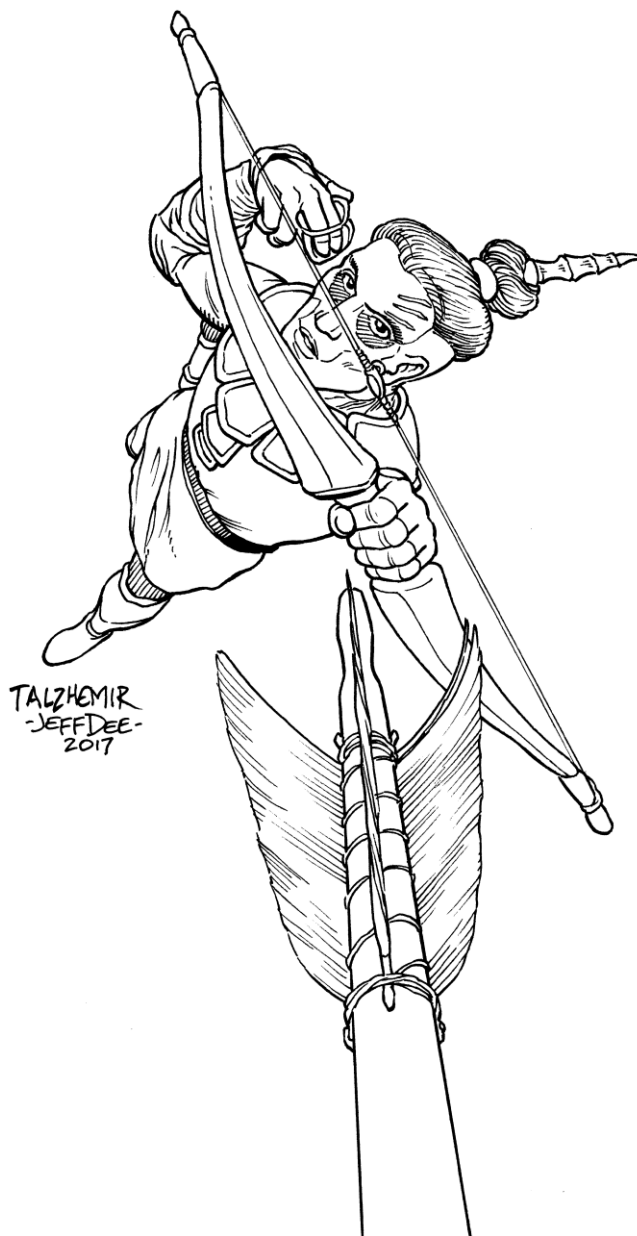
An education is harder to come by. In general, there is more superstition here than scholarship. In many villages, the people will not go out after dark, for fear of hostile apparitions and soul-hungry demons. Since the region's primary income is from mining, it is in the aristocracy's best interest to encourage attitudes and superstitions that keep their workers close to their mines.

Physically, the people are described as slightly short, with sturdy legs, sometime a bit bow-legged. Those who happen to be raised where the air is thinner are known for their superior stamina. The land is not generous and life is rigorous; they are usually quite lean, possibly barrel-chested. Men wear their hair long on top and shaved all around the sides, maybe held in a topknot or tail, with no facial hair. Older folks tend to have skin with a leathery weathered look from life in the sun, wind, and rain. Those rare few who survive long enough may earn the silvery to cloud-white hair of age.

They have a penchant for brown or ochre clothing, usually a jerkin or smock rather than a kilt. Hide tanned to a bluish black is also used. Some of the close-fitting caps used by the clergy of Lord Sárku, with a little point coming down like a widow's peak in front, are patterned on skullcaps worn here. While the Tsolyáni of the lower elevations tend to be barefoot or wear sandals, here, long boots that provide protection from the venomous strike of the Alásh are the norm. (Fancy adornment such the S-shaped feathers of jungle Khéshchal birds are for the richest.)

According to some elder traditions, proximity to the right tomb enables finding one's family, friends, and loved ones in afterlife. Therefore, one's place is near one's ancestors, and their hallowed graves. Outsiders are seldom invited to participate in their religious practices. Perhaps this is because they worry that those who know where their cemeteries are could show up in their neighborhood of the afterlife, and they are not about to invite strangers.

The Concordat is respected here, and there are shrines and temples to other gods. Somehow, though, there just does not seem to be much enthusiasm for them. The typical local thinks, "Everybody dies. Therefore, the god who cares for you when you die is fine for everyone." That the other Tsolyáni deities have afterworlds of their own is a dubious concept. Even if those Planes really exist, how could they be a "heaven" if they did not include one's family? To be made a slave here means losing one's access to burial on the ancestral lands, and therefore, admission to the afterlife. For this reason, they may prefer execution to enslavement. Worshipers of the Flame Lord or his Cohort who want to be cremated are expected to perform their distasteful alien rites out of the sight and smell of others.



The scars and skull facepaint mark this man as a devotee of Lord Sárku. His arrows have no notch; instead, they fit into a bowstring socket.

Albél, Grandmother of Dooms

Clans around the Kráà Hills often worship a female Aspect of Sárku known as Albél. She is depicted as an emaciated old woman with white hair. One of her epithets is "The Pursuer". She whispers and mourns in the aisles between the tombstone or the passageways of the sepulchres. There are stories of her granting vengeance by breathing upon women recently dead, turning them to Jáigi. In general, she is far more 'fearsome' than 'benevolent'. However, should a person disappear, and their body not be found, the family will probably appeal

to Albél to find and guide their lost soul, sacrificing copper ornaments to honor her. There is also a superstition in some villages that one should wear a piece of copper jewelry meant as an offering to Albél in case one is killed away from home. These bracelets or armbands are typically marked with the person's name, and village. (See also the text box for A Wedding in Dlúya, 3916.RH)

This area is the home of the Legion of the Peaks of Kráà, 12th Imperial Archers, and cohorts of several other Legions. They employ slings, and bows. Bows are usually made of Ajátl wood. These may be longer and thicker than those of the superior Séresh, in which case, they probably require more strength. The heavy draw weights can yield excellent range. Alternately, typically-sized bows are used with poisoned arrows to compensate for lower damage. Arrow points may be anointed with toxins to cause paralysis of the limbs, icy coldness or numbness, and other terrifying but generally non-lethal effects. Substances that cause festering wounds are considered appropriate for followers of Lord Durritlámish.

Sometimes children of the hills and mountain are raised to unusually high discipline, joining their grandparents on watches starting around age four. The Kráà Hills have long been a source of tribute children who are proud to be given to Sárku-oriented legions to turn into even tougher soldiers.

Crossbow Couples

There are ways to form items out of copper to have the properties of steel. Crossbows springs (bow parts) can be made this way- it is rumored that those of the Legion of the Scales of Brown were traditionally bound in human skin. In the military-oriented communities of the Kráà Hills, it is considered the responsibility of the men to use their strength to cock and load, then the women do the aiming and firing, in rapid and close cooperation. There are a few military units from this region that accept only married couples, specifically to function this way.

Lost Lakes

A number of small dark circular "kettle lakes" exist in some of the valleys. These are often devoid of aquatic life besides insects. The Temple of Avánthe takes an interest in a number of these. Sometime a priestess will carry jars of fish fry or other edible creatures with which to seed the lakes as an arduous "Labor of Reverence". They avoid lakes close to a copper mine, which are often poisonous to fish. These sojourns into the Kráà Hills are kept quiet, lest they be misinterpreted as the kind of proselytizing forbidden by the Concordat. Though the

priestesses are usually unwelcome, the resulting fish are usually not.

About the Special Biomes

In the Kúrt Hills region, there are four notable terrains with their own assortment of plants and animals. The Golden Meadows are especially prized farmlands. There are the deep woods that grow atop the humped karst hills of the Kúrt Hills Forest. There are the Swamps of Ksárul. Then there are the Kráà Hills, of basalt and granite and some volcanic outcroppings.

Also, of course, throughout Tékel, there are countless patches of plants whose ancestors were brought from other worlds. Thanks to the gene modification of the ancients, and sometimes natural emergence, many hold useful properties. They remain natural organisms, though, their roots in a constant invisible warfare, so they tend exist in patches and pockets of compatible plants, often the remnants of preserves and gardens. Some are dependent on animals (possibly also gene-altered) for that plant to perpetuate and thrive.

Over the centuries, because of their valuable properties, it was most typical for these stands to get wiped out by overharvesting. Nevertheless, many of them survive in the least accessible terrain.

About the Golden Meadows

The Golden Meadows occupy Large Hexes 3715, 3716, 3814, 3815, 3915, and 3916.

The richest croplands in the Kúrt Hills region are here. They are a prize traditionally sought by invaders. The name comes from the dominant crop, golden Gáin. Farmers pull plow-like devices to plant some types of seed in the winter.

Chlén beasts are left to wander about after harvests. They aerate the soil by tugging plants out and eating them roots and all. Remarkably, their broad feet are not harmful at this fallow time, and their prodigious droppings add to the fertility.

The keystone starch crops of the Empire of Tsolyánu (Gáin, Dná, and Yáfa) are genetically engineered but the tale of their origin as human-altered is, of course, lost. Not only is this land especially fertile because of the rainfall and temperature, but there are also unique microbes local to the soil that account for more of its prosperity.

About the Kúrt Hills Forest

The Kúrt Hills occupies Large Hexes 3611, 3612, 3613, 3711, 3712, 3713, 3714, 3811, 3812, 3813, 3814, 3913, and 3914.

The lumber of many-centuries-old trees forms some of the most prized exports of the Kúrt Hills. A support timber for an impressive building has to be strong and large, and these are just not to be found on the plains or in light forest. One massive tree may require an entire village together to tow it, and it may be worth hundreds of Káitars.

The deep forest is some of the most difficult terrain to cross. Ground-cover plants several man-heights tall may obscure sharp crevasses. Lush vines make pitfall traps of sinkholes with sides that curve inwards towards the top.

The Gapúl Tree

Though it may grow tall and wide, the common Gapúl tree is not the most favored for lumber for building. Unfortunately, the harvested wood has erratic gaps, and bands along which it tends to split. This does allow for some interesting tricks, however. Páchi Léi will cut the bark off of two slender stems, tying them with string to keep them in certain bends. They soon grow together. They can be harvested for exotic-looking baroque stands, or left growing as living furniture out in the woods. In Katalál, there are a few examples of living arched walkways with leafy roofs. In the region northwest of Haumá, there are beautiful hunting platforms, their supports, railings, and shade canopies formed by arranging and maintaining the living branches just-so.

The Gapúl tree is mentioned in literature as being significant to Lord Ksárul. Perhaps it is the unseen sprawling root system that strikes a harmonious resonance. Gapúl trees can thrive near and even in cities despite the constant harvesting of plants for fuel in an urban environment because, after every trunk has been taken, it can still grow back.

Yet, the Gapúl is also associated with Lord Thúmis. It is a symbol of education, as teachers and students may gather in its shade. Its majestic crown is emblematic of a receptiveness to the sunlight that is Lord Hnálla's gift. A walking stick made of six branches grown fused together is sometimes used by devotees of "Tháume", Lord Thúmis, amongst the Kurtáni. The Bridge of Rayíl, a hospital in the village of Zúrshqu that is a cooperative effort of both temples, has this tree as its emblem. (3613.LL).

What appears to be many trees is often actually one organism, propagating from runners. An entire forest can grow from just one seed. Sibling stems from the same root stock grow into each other, forming composite trunk over

time. Gapúl "trunks" can even grow to a massive thirty meters wide, withstanding the most frightful storms for centuries.

The Dáichu Tree

Dáichu trees are common in the Kúrt Hills Forests. Dáichu cloth comes from bark that is beaten into soft sheets. This process requires stripping off a layer of bark, usually a tall diamond-shaped piece. As it is beaten with little clubs, the fibers loosen and the parallelogram becomes a neat square. Squares may be joined to form larger sheets to make wall coverings. The process is laborious and noisy.

In western Tsolyánu, Dáichu cloth is preferred by women over other textiles, especially for tops. Pieces may end up fashioned into comfy kilts, and long poncho-like tunics for women. Beginning as white, it is typically dyed pastel colors. The finest grades are shipped to Katalál, where they are dyed and painted by higher status artisans in the colors and motifs appropriate to the wearer's clan and religion.

The bark of the Dáichu is also important for making some of the strongest rope. In this case, the bark is taken off in long strips, perhaps as wide as a hand, and several person-heights long. Good quality requires climbing the tree. The best will come from cutting a very tall tree down. Responsible harvesters will use this for firewood and other purposes.

The rope business is even more crucial than the clothing, because, in warm Tsolyánu, there is no great need for garments and there are several fine alternatives to Dáichu bark cloth, but there are countless purposes for strong cordage and few substitutes here. There are many bridges in the Kúrt Hills made of rope.

Proper bark-gatherers take from only one side, then splash a protective layer of an herbal mucilage on the raw area, sometimes doing so repeatedly on two or three successive days. The tree will usually heal, and be ready for another harvesting on its other side in coming years. Poachers from outside a territory, however, have no care for the tree's survival. It will be found stripped and left to die, or chopped down. Not only have they stolen a valuable material, but they have ruined the source of it for others. This behavior pushes holders of forest territory to enraged lethal responses!

The Séresh Tree

The best bows, it is said, come from Séresh trees, in particular, those which grew for several centuries in the shade of other trees, slowing their annual growth. The people of the province of Kúrtur are very possessive of these stands. They have a near monopoly; it is one of their few points of financial leverage. Like earthly mulberry, the wood is springy and unusually delicious to browsing animals, who leap or trample fences to reach it. Any large herbivore, such as a Tsi'il beast, that threatens these trees will be ruthlessly hunted down.

The Vrés Tree

The aromatic Vrés tree grows here; it is the source of an incense popular throughout the Five Empires. Countless ceremonies use it. Resin is tapped, and the wood burned. The highest quality is from trees infected with a particular fungus, a rare occurrence that gives the trunk a stunted, twisted appearance. To Kurtáni, who generally tend to favor Stability, this smacks of Change. Such a tree is 'bad luck'; they either avoid it, or they harvest it with extra ritual precautions. (See text box "Vrés of Parsái")

The Lésame Tree

Not known to grow elsewhere on Téकुmel, this tree is useful for its soft and buoyant wood. The Lésame is easily felled and shaped with hard wooden tools to make rafts or canoes.

The Umyéni Tree

Bark from this aromatic tree is heated in a sealed container to evaporate then condense its sap into a black goop. It is used to seal bark containers. Barefoot Kurtáni who intend to travel on sharp stones coat the callused soles of their feet with this.

H'láulo Vine

A brilliant and indelible crimson dye is made from the seven-petalled flowers of this plant. That it is the work of the Ancients is very likely, for upon every blossom, there are markings like a stylized symmetrical human face, upon the seventh petal.

Gré'a, the Weeping Trees

There are, in a number of places, evergreen trees with slightly curly needle-like leaves. They gather moisture from the wind. They are so good at it that they are constantly dripping dew. In some places there are so many of these, that little streams form at their roots. Weeping tree areas are misty, with gentle rain despite a clear sky. They are not particularly associated with any deity, but sometimes there are poetic allusions to these as perpetual mourners.

Unidentified Plants

In Téकुmel's distant past, myriad species were brought from other planets. There have also been countless dimensional rifts. Upon the summits of thickly-wooded egg-shaped hills, plants from all over have serendipitously established themselves. If it could be seen from the air, the different colored plants make a patchwork. The GM is therefore encouraged to populate this region with highly unusual plants. They can be motile, perhaps pulling up roots during the night and rearranging themselves, or even walking about. Carnivorous plants, plants with unusual and hazardous means of propagation, plants with fruits or leaves that have unusual (perhaps even useful) properties, abound. What is very seldom found here, however, is the Food of the Ssú, as both the Tsolyáni and Kurtáni will work avidly to destroy these purple-hued plants. (If running a Kurtáni tribal villagers campaign, going to a hill on a quest to destroy such might make an interesting adventure.)

An Example Tsolyáni High-status Hunting Lodge

At the center of an open meadow stands a walled compound. Graceful wooden blockhouses oversee opposite corners. A garden of flowers and vegetables fills much of the central court, tended by Kurtáni in broad conical wicker hats. A quaint little covered well stands in a corner. A blocky two-story villa with many conveniences for the 'high folk' dominates the central area. There is a cookhouse and dormitory for the servants in the back, along with an open-air area for dressing game. Perhaps a mile away, there is a portable hunting blind of Páchi Léi devising, set up in a huge tree. Steep stairs lead up to several small platforms with cushions. Small elegant wicker canopies stave off the worst of sun and rain.

About the Swamps of Ksáru

The Swamps of Ksáru occupy Large Hexes 3911, 3912, 3913, 4010, 4011, 4012, 4013, 4110, 4111, 4112, and 4113.

At some times and places there is stench, such as mildew, or the reek of some corpse-scented blossom. At others, there are sweet, pleasant, even intoxicating aromas. There are rare perfumes and resins that come solely from this region.

Water travel is restricted to the smallest lightest craft, personally carried. Rivers and streams wriggle lazily, joining into larger bodies but then often seem to branch apart again, defying water's more usual pattern of a tree-like structure when seen from the air. Or, perhaps, these areas are wide slow-moving rivers with diamond- and tear-drop-shaped islands. Sometimes, what appears to be an island is but a tangled mass of floating weeds. The land may turn porridge-like beneath the foliage without visual warning, stranding porters with larger burdens.

While visible water is common, drinkable water is extremely rare. Those who would have human porter slaves bear cargo through the swamps face the challenge of providing them enough fresh water and nourishment. Biting and stinging insects are everywhere, their larvae wriggling in the fetid shallows. Pungent repellents are necessary, lest the scantily-clad servitor be drained bloodless by them.

Deeper in the forested swamp lands are odder and odder creatures, imports from other worlds long ago. The intercompetition has made some of them very fierce. It is almost as if the Swamps of Ksáru were an arena to breed the most durable, cunning, and voracious things. Kúni birds avoid this area because of an aerial predator, the Tlátsekal.

Tlátsekal, the Observant Whirler

It has six short tentacles with a membraned wing on the end of each, and, between these, three long and flat limbs with beaks, normally kept curled close. It moves like a wheel, its uppermost wings fluttering as it rolls on the lower ones. The largest can soar and glide horizontally, riding the thermals. Each of its "arms" has its own eye and a rudimentary mind, so they attack independently. The smallest are timid, crawling about the undergrowth. The largest can swiftly carry off a Hmélu beast. Those who live in this area know that it is vulnerable to arrow shots to the slight bulge at its center, a sac which holds a very corrosive bile that it vomits onto dead prey in order to lap up the fluids.

Tlátsekal, Large (.8)

Wandering: 20%, 2/3/4 Lair: 80%, 4/6/8

PHYS: 10	DEFT: 11	INST: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: -1
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 7 ground, 8 flying	
Defenses:	Melee: 2	Missile: 2
Armor: 1/0	Hits: 10	Energy: 10
		Magic: -1

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Grapple	13-	-	2/3/4 Beak
Corrosive Bile	14-	2/4/6	6 range

Other Abilities:
None

Chlén beasts, with their weight spread between six broad legs, actually do well on soggy ground. They are never happy to come here, though, for there is little that tastes good to them. Worse yet, many plants are inedible, and the Chlén handlers will have no idea which of the many greens available cause their poor beast to swell up, roll over, and die. The local variety of Chlén has a mouth with no serrated beak edge so that it cannot strip leaves, and very long and wide toes, leaving an almost circular yet squarish footprint. It must be fed food gathered by slaves, who remove a strap that keeps its mouth shut except during feeding time.

In a few places, halves of felled tree-trunks are placed end to end between pairs of logs, forming little walkways through the mire. Then there are stone causeways. These may lead to tiny settlements not marked on the map. They may lead to little clearings where the buildings are burned down, or overtaken by vigorous vines.

These trails might lead to stands of trees deliberately infected with edible or medicinal fungus. Sometimes the fungus is the precise opposite of edible - grown for its toxicity or hallucinogenic properties. Yet others are wildcrafted for dyes.

Some might look at the province of Parikána and consider the large portion of it that is 'swamps' a wasteland. Surely, though, there are hidden resources that make this land quite worth having, and such rewards are invariably acquired through the exercise of the intellect. The region is also a place of dark beauty. As naturalist and poet Ákse the Unknown of Púrdimal once said, "Even as one lies dying, sinking in quicksand, there shall be fascination and intrigue. So is smiling Lord Ksáru's somnolent promise."

The Hehecháru "the Marsh Dwellers"

In this region, there is a small and dispersed population of Hehecháru, "the First Ones" (no more than 5-10 individuals per square kilometer). They are a humanoid sub-race (perhaps mutated - or interbred with some

older, aquatic species?). During the rainiest weather, the Hehecháru may bring out fine specimens of lumber, which they float on the waist-deep water, poling it while balanced on top, or pulling it together on half a dozen ropes. In drier seasons, they may come forth to trade their basketwork, produced by weaving the splints for hours underwater. Except for this trading, they remain aloof from human contact. Hehecháru are closely related to the Hehegánu, who dwell in the Underworld below Púrdimal (not located in this Atlas but also located in the Swamps of Ksáru) itself and who occasionally mingle with men.

Racial Traits:

- Lung Capacity (1)
- Distinctive (-1)

Tíu Tree

This is a tall and slender conifer with black needles. Because it is strong, rot-resistant, and has a modicum of flexibility, it is used for key structural beams in buildings such as clanhouses. Sometimes it is used for ships' masts. There is a protected grove of these trees in the Kráà Hills explicitly destined for use in the form of execution known as impalement. (See the entry for Impalement Wood at 4114.PE.)

Tsévu Fruit

Tsévu is a small bitter fruit associated with both Lords Ksáru and Thúmis. It is edible, and used commonly in invocations associated with those deities. It may be the "Ngásh" fruit that is spoken of in the Book of Ebon Bindings... or perhaps not.

The Ssár Tree

Not so big, but quite strong for its weight, this wood resists rot. It is carved by the Hehecháru into fine staves. It has a tendency not to splinter, even when struck, making it useful for handles. In some marshy areas, when Ssár trees fall over, they are somehow altered by the stagnant sour water. Minerals soak in, making it heavier, and foul-tasting to vermin. Sometimes fine bows are crafted out of Ssár wood, and some say they even rival those made from Séresh.

Ráyapu, the Sedge Nut

The Ráyapu plant looks rather like a patch of grass growing in a soggy area. It can be told apart by its three-sided stems. It is sought out for its filbert-sized "nuts", which are really tubers that grow from its roots. They are delicious both raw and roasted. They are referred to in old scrolls as "Dríkope of the marshes", a reference to the Dríkope tree nut found in the Kúrt Hills forests. They are too scarce to become a cottage industry but a Hehecháru might offer a few handfuls in a bladder for a small trade. An obscure Third Circle rite for priests of Lord Ksáru in this area is to go out and collect them. Ráyapu's identity as one of humanity's oldest food plants from Earth has long been lost.

About Karst Formations

The word "karst" refers to limestone formations. Over long periods of time, this stone is dissolved by water. Simultaneously, water containing enough dissolved limestone will deposit stone, layer by layer, to become stalactites and stalagmites over mere centuries. In geological terms, this is "fast", thus karst is sometimes nicknamed "living" rock. Rock formations can grow up to 3 mm (0.12 inches) per year. Caves and cave-complexes are common. So is "honeycomb rock", stone with spherical holes inside that give it a sponge-like appearance.

From a distance, the Kúrt Hills are similar in appearance to the legendary karst formations of South China, such as those near the city of Guilin. The tops are rounded or plateaus, and often host forest patches that cling tenaciously. The sides range from steep slopes (exhausting but traversable on foot) to cliffs (essentially impassable unless one is a Hlaka or going very slowly using climbing gear).

There are often regions of "cones", almost regular hills shaped like the top half of an egg, formed by rain. Between the hills there can be streams and rather circular ponds. Instead of leading to larger bodies of water, they may wriggle around, and then simply disappear by draining into an area of honeycomb rock.

Karst hills such as these are formed primarily by an eccentricity of water from the surrounding region. It drains into the limestone but then surges upwards due to gravity on the sides. Sometimes there are spring bubbling up at various points. Rivulets and small waterfalls may appear on the side of a hill; a few manage to rush down to feed streams that lead out into the surrounding countryside. They can also go down sinkholes into caves via openings as small as one's fist, or holes large enough to swallow a clanhouse or two.

Due to the many sinkholes and natural springs, the usual conventions of travel may be turned "upside-down". Spring-fed rills may be found at the tops of karst surges, while the valleys in-between are dry. The physical similarity of the myriad cone-shaped hills defies memorization. Outsiders are apt to get lost.

There are also many baroque formations, like "pillar forests". There are natural bridges, ledges that project in intriguing ways, and "hoodoos", stones worn away in such a fashion as to resemble people, animals, and whatever else someone delirious with thirst or hunger might make of them.

About the Kráà Hills

The Kráà Hills occupy Large Hexes 3915, 3916, 4015, 4115, and 4116.

How to Say "Kráà"

The second accent mark in "Kráà" is a reminder that every vowel is to be pronounced. An English-speaker can approximate this with a drop in tone on the second a. There is no glottal stop (it is not Kráh Ah). However, sometimes a Kurtáni person might say it that way.

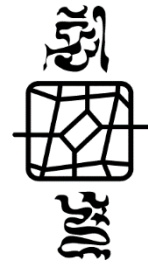
The Vishéna River is regarded as the southwest boundary of the Kráà Hills region. Perhaps the folk here are fond of understatement: the Rolling 'Stream' is quite a broad raging torrent, while the Kráà 'Hills' sweep up from hills into mountain peaks. The hills rise on the horizon out of the mist, appearing bluish or purplish. Much of this is hard basalt, ranging in color from pale gray to nearly black. Amongst other valuable minerals, sulfur and copper ore are found in this region. With temperatures slightly cooler than the lower lands, and countless wooded valleys, it almost feels like another world. It was in these bleak highlands that worship of recognized Aspects of the god Sárku began, during the reign of the Fishermen Kings, before the Bednálljan Empire.

The Tongue of the Worm Lords

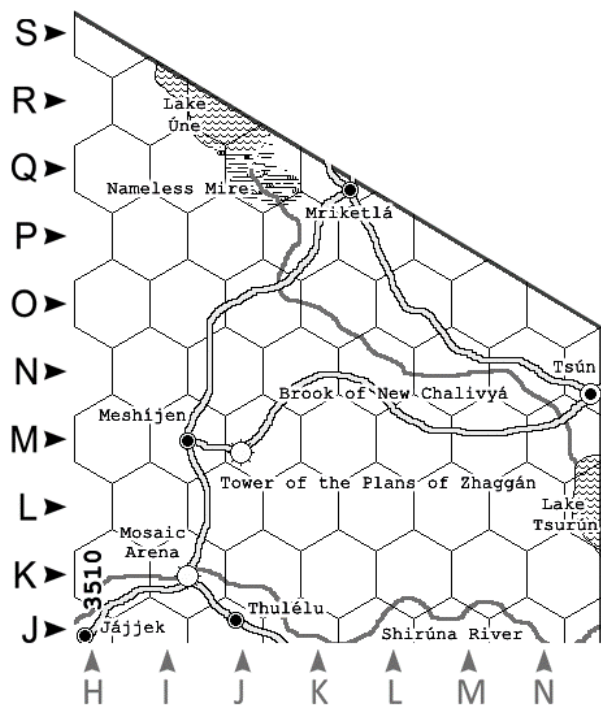
The Tongue of the Worm Lords is a secret language taught only to the highest, most trusted Circles of the Temple of Sárku. Inscriptions upon ancient monuments in the Kráà Hills of this writing have been found; they date back to the First Imperium. While the Kráà Hills are indisputably the origin of the worship of Sárku, ancient examples in this language dating to around the same period have also been discovered in the Chákas.

For thousands of years, this rocky land has been a grand source of copper. Even as far away as Mekú and Katalál, if a clanmother in the Kúrt Hills region is cooking in a copper

pot, there is a good chance its making began in the Kráà Hills.



*The 26th Brand for
having visited all
Stations of Brave
Peripatation*



HEX 3510

This Large Hex is full of many tiny intermittent streams, obvious in the rainy season and missing during the others. This is an agricultural area with farm holdings clinging to the roads. Annually, the land runs the gamut from thick slimy mud to sunbaked clay. The lands beyond these are plains stocked with many Tsi'il beasts. Their voracious appetite for greens keeps the land from becoming forest. These large delicious herbivores are not domesticated, but they are loosely managed and hunted. At the astrologically-auspicious times, Tsi'il are lured in with bushels of raw grain (sweetened with appetizing dried Díél plums) and slaughtered.

In most areas, the meat of a Chlén is acceptable fare but in this hex, it is taboo to eat (just as eating horse is taboo for many people on Earth today).

Village of Jájjek (3510.JH) Although diligent and talented, the people of Jájjek remain unrenowned as makers of many hmá wool blankets and cloaks. When they can, their merchants scour the region for hmá with excellent fiber, and exceptional dyes. The larger items are sometimes commissioned one to three years in advance, incorporating the colors and motifs appropriate to their future owner.

Village of Thulélu (3510.JJ) Here is said to be a nexus of simple beauty. The village is on a floodplain, surrounded by bright flowers. Garlands of countless little straw figures are strung from the tree branches. The green fields slope away to the Shirúna River to the north, and the fertile terraced gardens feature colorful crops. Folks here pay a

price for the rich soil laid down: inhabitants are confined to the top rooms of the clanhouses for about two months each year. An open-sided blue stone shrine to Lady Avánthe marks the entrance of the town.

Shirúna River (3510.JL) Fed by a plethora of little streams, the Shirúna runs fast for most of the year. In winter the water level drops but this just exposes jagged rocks that were previously hidden by the loudly rushing white water. A fish-like predator, the Óyakket, lurks in the water, sometimes in great roiling schools. The only safe crossing is Public Tower.

The Óyakket

"The Leaping Trap". Related to the inedible Tletlákha, this fish-like creature is a local delicacy from the Shirúna River to Lake Tsurún (3510.LO). It is a turquoise dinner-plate-sized predator with a mouth like a bear trap. It leaps from the water to catch prey. It is also made into a powdery brown condiment to flavor porridge, but its finest flavor is quickly lost. It lives in roiling schools. The jaws crush through armor; should a Tsi'il fall in, there will be nothing left of it mere minutes later... (use Tletlákha stats).



The Óyakket, related to the inedible Tletlákha, is a local delicacy. It is found in the Shirúna River and Lake Tsurún.

Mosaic Arena (3510.KI) The fractious Shirúna River annually scours all but the heaviest stonework away. This location remains clearly marked, however, by a platform topped by a handsome mosaic within a circle of knee-high stones. The design is a floral motif depicting different plants sacred to the different gods of Tsolyánu. It is used as an arena for legal dueling between gladiators. Attempts to make this a settlement are unsuccessful, but there are popular gatherings every few months for a rustic Hirilákte arena. Merchants ply their trades about the margin.

Lake Tsurún (3510.LO) The Shirúna River flows into this lake. There are Óyakket "fish" here (see the text box at the Shirúna River (3510.JL)).

Village of Meshíjen (3510.MI) Hunters here go out in large groups to harvest the wild-ranging Tsi'il. Casualties are common, not so much because of the beasts themselves, but because of the many predators of Téकुमेल. After being cut into manageable chunks, the lightly sweet Tsi'il meat is salted, smoked, dried, and shipped out. Much of it ends up in the ration kits of Imperial legions. (3510.MI)

A friendly rivalry exists between the Chlén carters of the village of Meshíjen and the town of Tsún. Since the beasts travel so slowly, a contest called the Mud-Pull of Urghán is held in both places simultaneously each spring.

The Mud-pull of Urghán

Each spring, two members of the White Stone Clan are carried from Mriketlá by palanquin, through the rains and above the mud, to preside over two simultaneous weight-pulling competitions by Chlén beasts in both the village of Meshíjen and the town of Tsún. It is a matter of paramount importance to folks of low clan status, while those of medium and up are indifferent.

There are two tests, one to carry a heavily-laden sled the farthest distance in a set amount of time, and another to move the most weight. The judges have a ritual for such actions as checking the consistency of the mud field where it takes place, requiring that more powdered earth or water be added. The judges are treated with as much generosity as the lowly clans can muster, staying as honored guests for a month, then returned to Meshíjen, at which point slave runners are sent to announce the results to each place.

The honor of Meshíjen was once besmirched 200 years ago when some villagers who had placed rather large bets for their station were caught attempting to coerce their judge by threatening his children. Both the White Stone Clan and the clans of Tsún demanded an outrageous amount of Shámtla.

An annoyed Fiefholder, His Honor Sso'úru hiLó'i, presided over the trial. The offending three cart-drivers were each publicly given five lashes of the whip. Then, in a bizarre spectacle, three screaming Chlén beasts were suspended by ropes and executed by impalement in Mriketlá. Honor and good will were restored, and the Mud-pull of Urghán resumed the next year.

Tower of the Plans of Zhaggán (3510.MJ) This is a place where clans of herders (mostly Hmélu but some Hmá) occasionally come together upon the stone foundations laid for what was intended to be a great castle. Only one lonely tower and two incomplete segments of wall that peter out were ever built. There are also a number of

clanhouses around here, scattered in the green space between the New Chalivyá Brook and the Shirúna River, visible from the tower. Men of these clans spend much of their time driving their flocks to and fro to fresh new pastures.

Zhaggán was a retired general and a devotee of an obscure aspect of Dilinála whose title is the Gentler of Beasts. Eventually this Zhaggán had his own gonads ritually removed as a sacrifice. It was said that after this, he could walk amongst wild animals, laying his hands on them and calming them.

The Table of Lílúve

A gory annual rite is held at a great slab of stone known as the Table of Lílúve, outside the Tower of the Plans of Zhaggán. It is consecrated to the goddess Dilinála. Herders castrate immature animals not required to breed, an act that improves their eventual flavor as adults. As Avánthe and Dilinála are gentler goddesses, anesthetic powders are used. The favor of the other Lords of Stability is also requested; it is a rather rustic ceremony overall.

Those who are about to go out to capture a young Chlén for taming may come to this altar stone to ask for virginal Dilinála's favor. Conversely, female livestock are kept far from Lílúve's Table, for fear their milk will go dry and they will become barren. (Young women with hopes for a big family also stay clear of it.)

Brook of New Chalivyá (3510.NL) This sluggish rivulet comes out of the Nameless Mire and where it pools up, it is very slightly bubbly or soapy in appearance. While drinkable after being cooked, this water tastes unpleasant. It flows into Lake Tsurún to the southeast. Its depth is unpredictable; boats can run aground in tangles of weeds that were not there the season before. Tsi'il beasts would normally devour such greenery but they despise its flavor here. The original Chalivyá was once a navigable river that ran from Lake Uné to Lake Tsurún, passing close to Mriketlá. Over time, it filled in (becoming the road to Tsún), and the Brook of New Chalivyá formed a bit to the south of that path.

Town of Tsún (3510.NO) A friendly rivalry exists between the Chlén carters of the town of Tsún and the village of Meshíjen. Since the beasts travel so slowly, the contest is held in both places simultaneously each spring. (See the entry for the Mud Pull of Urghán under the village of Meshíjen, 3510.MI).

Nameless Mire (3510.QJ) A thicket of unusually tall reeds grows at the southeast end of Lake Úne. Water gathers at the southeast end of the Mire to become the

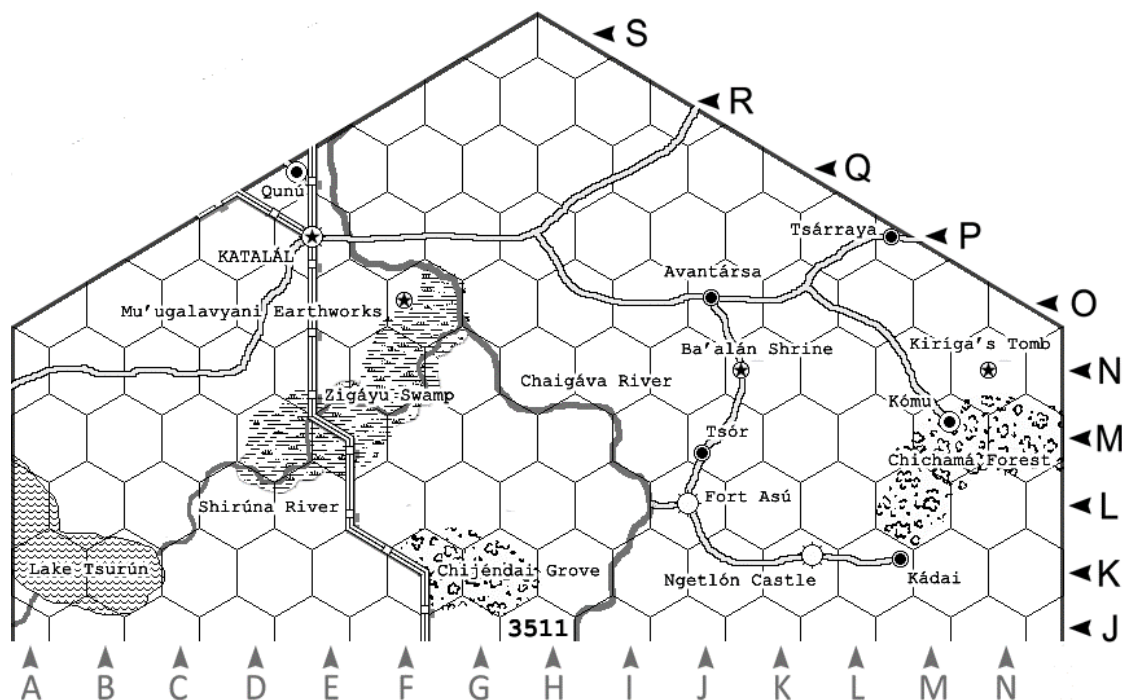
fast-flowing Brook of New Chalivyá. Its original name was the 'Unspeakable Mire' but when it was compared to other wetlands by travelers and not found to be particularly horrible, they demoted it to the less dramatic 'Nameless'.

Village of Mriketlá (3510.QK) In addition to several small clanhouses, here stands a field of granaries like truncated cones, with flags and placards mounted on posts atop each. They belong to many different legions, merchant clans, and temples. There are stables and paddocks for many Chlén beasts. The only actual temple in the town is devoted to the god Vimúhla, Lord of the Flame. Offerings are given frequently, along with prayers asking

Him to spare the precious dried Yáfa and Dná grain from mishaps involving fire.

Lake Úne (3510.RJ) Sparkling light green Lake Úne is ringed by banks striped with white crystalline powder. It is full of minerals that render it undrinkable. A tragic local ballad says that it is named for a handsome prince captured in war. Úne cursed the water, dooming both his captors, and himself. A powder made by cooking the lake water is called "the Dried Tears of Úne". It is used to treat cloth to make it extremely flammable for tinder kits. (Lake Úne extends into Large Hex 3610).





HEX 3511

This Large Hex encompasses a broad, shallow valley of rich fertile land around the Chaigáva River. The entire hex is heavily farmed, with larger agricultural holdings in the north and east and smaller, more scattered tracts in the south and west.

Lake Tsurún (3511.KA) This placid lake has several elegant villas upon its shores, occupied by retired nobles from nearby Katalál and their retinues. There are Óyakket "fish" here (see the text box at the Shirúna River, 3510.JL).

Chijéndai Grove (3511.KG) Planted in the early days of the Second Imperium (approximately 360 A.S.), this one-time orchard has grown wild and unkempt over centuries of neglect. The Pé Chói find this place unsettling.

Ngetlón Castle (3511.KK) Within the walls of this sprawling complex there are stands of fruit trees. Shaped like an oval with two points, it has two small towers, one each at its northeast and southwest ends. Its central keep is a squat circular tower. Several clanhouses are built along the path to an entrance on its southeast side.

This is the residence of the local Fiefholder, Lady Maluél hiVirídame of the Golden Sunburst Clan (High lineage, Very High clan). Born in 2320 A.S., she is tall and sturdily built with light brown eyes. She follows Lord Chegárra, and holds frequent parties for her many friends from the city. She is rumored to favor Kurtáni efforts to curtail the expansion of Change-oriented legions in this region.

Village of Kádai (3511.KM) By custom, the inhabitants of this well-to-do agricultural village adopt a grim mood. They believe that pessimism attracts the favor of the Gods.

Shirúna River (3511.LD) This small river flows fresh and clear out of the Zigáyu Swamp south of Katalál and into Lake Tsurún. It is nevertheless held in superstitious dread by locals. One who gazes into its waters is said to be 'seen' by the inhabitants of other planes.

Fort Asú (3511.LJ) This is the official seat of the Fief of Asú, however, the fief-holder, Lady Maluél, is most likely to be found at Ngetlón Castle to the southeast (see the entry for Ngetlón Castle, 3511.KK). A guard tower consists of a single 3-story tower surrounded by a single ringwall, with a gatehouse. It is currently occupied by a small number of troops from the Legion of Mórusai the Chieftain, 40th Imperial Medium Infantry, charged with watching over activity on the Chaigáva River.

Chichamá Forest (3511.LN) The forest is unusually - some say unnaturally - lush and verdant around the town of Kómu. Even the plumage of the forest's native Khéshchal birds tends to be longer, brighter, and more durable. (A bit of this forest extends to the east into Large Hex 3512.)

Village of Tsór (3511.MJ) This Agricultural village makes paints and dyes in addition to the usual agricultural products. The locals like to bleach and dye their hair.

Town of Kómu (3511.MN) This is a very prosperous Agricultural town. From a distance, wispy smoke is seen and the aroma of charcoal-making drifts on the wind.

Zigáyu Swamp (3511.NF) The Chaigáva River flows south of Katalál, possibly due to the drainage of the city's effluvia, forming this unpleasant sodden marsh. Scattered ruins of farm buildings can be found here, abandoned since the swamp waters rose. The swamp is a refuge for creatures which on rare occasions attack lone travelers upon the Sákbe Road or approach all the way into Katalál's City of the Dead in search of prey.

Chaigáva River (3511.NH) This broad river flows out of the Kúrt Hills in the north, past Úrmish and out into the Deepes of Chanayága at Penóm in the south. It runs clear and fresh north of Katalál, but slows and becomes murky to the south.

Ba'alán Shrine (3511.NK) This is the largest shrine in the Empire to Keténgku's Aspect Ba'alán. This Aspect appears as a gentle man of older middle age, always seated upon a stone, with His hands on His knees, leaning forward as if listening. Silver rings one hand-span in diameter are offered as sacrifices to Ba'alán, along with Tetél flowers, in hope of having mental ailments treated and cured.

Every day, a choir of young boys and girls recites from the rising of the sun to the setting of the first moon after sunset (whichever moon that is on a particular night). The children greet the setting of the moon with shouts of joy.

Kiríga's Tomb (3511.NN) Said to date from the time of the Dragon Lords, only a few scattered stones with fragments of ancient carven N'lüssa script remain of this site... at least on the surface.

Mu'ugalavyáni Earthworks (3511.OF) This is a remnant of the defensive fortifications that were erected by the Mu'ugalavyáni during their occupation of Katalál during the Great War of 2020. After the relief of the city, it was found that the Mu'ugalavyáni had entombed every single member of the city's Legion of the Sun-Bright Sword alive (or dead) within these earthworks. This, the Mu'ugalavyáni stated, was in revenge for a wrong done them by General Kuríshe hiSu'únmra in the time of Kánmi'yel Nikúma V "the Pretender" in 1711 A.S.

The earthworks of Katalál were a massive undertaking primarily accomplished by the labor of captive villagers and prisoners of war. It resembled a section of Sákbe road made of dirt rather than stone. Eventually, it became overgrown with grass and trees.

Most of these earthworks have since been dismantled (and the bodies reburied) in the centuries since the war, but one

section (the southernmost end, near the Zigáyu Swamp) still persists, and likely still contains human remains and some of their possessions.

Village of Avantársa (3511.OJ) This is a young, growing Agricultural village. Chlén beasts do not do well here, growing sickly, with thin hide and no offspring.

City of Katalál (3511.PE) This small city (actually a very large town) is the capital of Ketvíru Province. Gapúl trees and trailing vines give it the look of an overgrown ruin. Within the city is Lake Chakurén, which is fed by a spring. Like most of the bustling cities of the central plains, it is flat, neat, stolid and a little pompous - devoted to the agricultural bounty of the region, and to the making of money. Its major exports include fancy glassware and pottery, and Chlén-hide weapons and tools.

The governor's mansion and related facilities occupy a small hill on the south side of the town. Perhaps in contrast to Katalál's reputation as ancient and staid, Governor Daséshmu hiMriyatláku (of the Black Monolith Clan) is a follower of Lady Dlamélish.

The entire west side consists of a modest-sized foreigners' quarter. Running from north to south along the Chaigáva River are the very low and low-status clanhouses. The high clans dominate the north side, the very high clans dominate the south, and the medium clans are situated alongside the Great Square of the Seven Heroes, ringed by the temples at the town's center.

Katalál's clanhouses tend to be large and open, with gardens and parks, courtyards for trade and crafts, stables for Chlén-beasts, pens for Hmá and Hmélu, servant quarters, slave quarters, and facilities such as kitchens, pantries, wine cellars, scriptoria, record-rooms, refectories for dining, etc. One first encounters a solid wall all around the clanhouse grounds, with a high gate emblazoned with the clan's symbol. Inside, there is an open court for the "parking" of palanquins, where slaves and escorts can sit and wait under shaded colonnades, with food and drink, fountains, etc., and more gates that lead off to other courts where stores are kept, crafts are performed, where the clan transacts its usual business(es), etc. Every clanhouse is differently organized and arranged.

The temples of Stability tend to predominate here, though the city's temples of Change are venerable, and firmly entrenched. One cannot enter the city without seeing the ponderous tower of the Temple of Vimúhla to the west of the Great Square of the Seven Heroes, the dark and brooding Shrines of the Dark Lords to the east, and the colorful temples of the Lords of Stability to the north. Upon the grounds of Lady Avánthe's temple is a shrine to Her sixth aspect Chraikála, "She Who Cares for Children".

Each of these groups seems to huddle together, like soldiers around a great leader, and this factionalism has dominated the politics of the city for almost its entire existence.

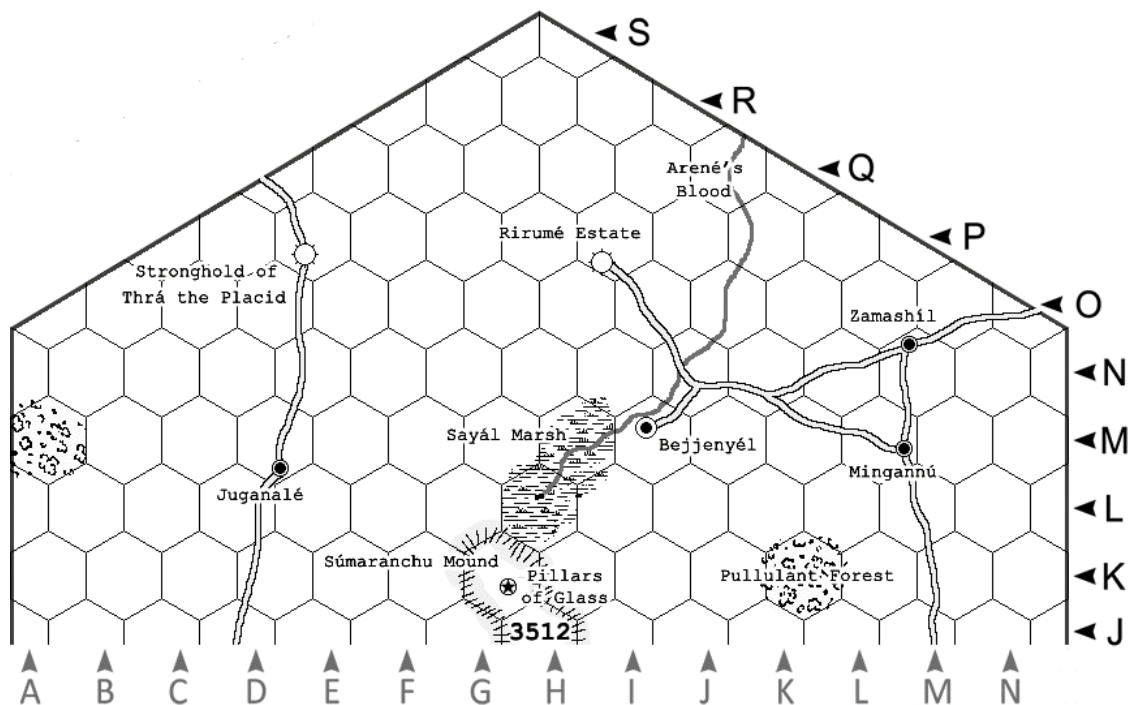
Katalál was seized by the Mu'ugalavyáni, after a forced march through open terrain just north of the Sákbe Road, early in the Great War of 2020.

Some centuries ago Katalál experienced an incompetently performed Dillána, leaving its foundations unstable. Some major buildings, such as the city's temple of Vimúhla, have been completely re-built as a result. In other places, patchwork repairs were made to compensate. To this day, sewer-workers beneath the city's streets face great peril.

Village of Tsárraya (3511.PM) The clans of this rustic agricultural village tend to favor the Lords of Change. Wood and charcoal are brought here from Kómu, as they have almost none of their own.

Town of Qunú (3511.QD) This small Sákbe Road town is a 'suburb' of Katalál. It is customary for the local girls to serenade travelers on the road to Katalál every morning. Some of the songs have been sung for so long that no one knows what the lyrics mean; they are repeated phonetically, with dubious fidelity to the original. There is a folktale of the Kúni bird who learned to sing, and farmers will tell you they have heard Kúni birds sing phrases of their morning songs.





HEX 3512

This Large Hex is full of many tiny intermittent streams, obvious in the rainy season and missing during the dry. Instead of heading conveniently for rivers, the waters often converge on ponds and lakes which, themselves, then disappear for a part of the year. As these change from decade to decade, mapping them seems a futile occupation and it is easy even for native-born residents to get lost.

Wild Chlén love all this greenery. These beasts are more properly termed "feral". They are extremely docile, and serve as cart beasts because they will go where they are herded. They can subsist on the water and nutrients in their bodies for some time. Instead of feeding them regularly, the cart drivers here may make them pull a cart until the creature is exhausted, and then turn it loose. They are rounded up by peasants (often youngsters) after they are well-fed again. (An old peasant saying in this area is, "One Chlén's as good as another." to refer to an unfortunate situation with only equally poor options.)

Súmaranchu Mound (3512.KG) From a distance, this hill is like a low-rising inverted bowl. Unlike other hills of the area, this one is not the pale and porous karst, but granite. A few clumps of trees dot it. Upon closer approach, its bluish exterior appears to be flaking off in sheets as thick as a human is tall. Countless pieces of this have broken off and lie in little tumbled clumps. However, walking up to the top of this anomaly is not difficult because there are plenty of smooth stretches. There are a few drop-offs, several person-heights tall which can be dangerous if one is walking

about by night, as the tops of trees can be mistaken for bushes, obscuring the hazard.

It is said that some ancient marvel may be seen at its apex: a circle of pillars, made from what appears to be glass. If one is approaching directly from the east, one can see a trail to the top marked off with blackened boulders. (For details of this location, see the Béthorm adventure "Pillars of Glass"!)

Pullulant Forest (3512.KK) This beautiful stand of trees would have been cleared long ago were it not declared sacred to Lady Dlamélish. Villagers of the area sometimes say that dainty demons of Lady Dlamélish's retinue have appeared here that resemble attractive human women with orchid-colored skin and leaves for hair. A small group of priestesses with male and female assistants tends a movable shrine to this goddess, usually north of the forest. Proud of their strength and endurance, they sometimes carry the structure to area villages.

Sayál Marsh (3512.LH) This moldy-smelling mire is avoided by most. Sometimes the river of Arené's Blood flows into it, other times it flows away from it. On its eastern edge, the town of Bejjenyél uses marsh water to grow and process its Thésun gauze.

Chichamá Forest (3512.MA) These trees once reached the village of Juganalé. They have since been cut down by charcoal burners, who must now carry bundles of their precious charcoal twelve miles to the east. As one goes westwards in the forest, the greenery grows richer and

brighter. (This is an eastern extension of forest to the west in Large Hex 3511. See also the Village of Kómu in that hex.)

Village of Juganalé (3512.MD) The Copper Prybar Clan (Low status) is based here. They are known for their practice of going out to peel hide from wild Chlén. This clan sends a party to the Town of Bejjenyél for new ropes every other year. Bringing them back requires a Chlén cart, so this is only attempted in the dead of winter, when most streams are either dried up, or easily forded. The most dangerous part is assaying the north edge of the Sayál Marsh.

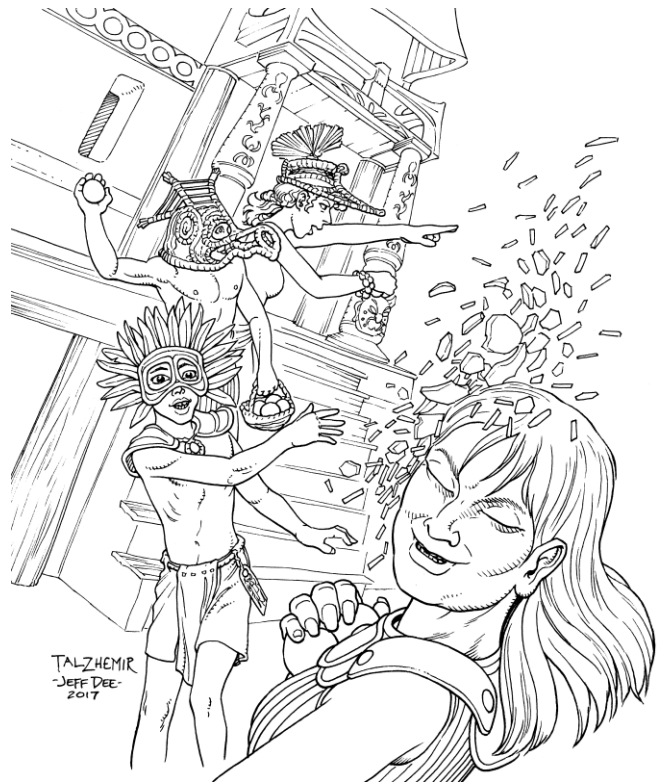
Town of Bejjenyél (3512.MI) A clanhouse of the Devisors of Soft-clinging Beauty stands here. Gǔdru plants, from which fine sheer fabric is woven, fill many of the fields. On the west side of town is the area where folk gather to work, standing on a plaza of slabs of rock. Stone blocks have been hewn into rectangular tubs and filled with swamp water to function as retting ponds. The long stems are left in the foul-smelling water, washed, dried, then pounded between hinged blocks to extract the fine fiber. Bast from the bark of the Dáichu tree is treated similarly, and used to make the specially-woven wild Chlén hobbling cords for tanners of the village of Juganalé.

Village of Mingannú (3512.ML) Much of Mingannú's farmland today is affiliated with the Temple of Dlamélsh, in her capacity as the goddess of culinary pleasures. A particularly fine cultivar of Dlél plum is grown here.

The placement of Mingannú was an accident a mere 1279 years ago. Some folks were marking a road to connect Bejjenyél to Zamashíl to the Fortress of Mu'á. Their leader was so drunk he misread the compass and veered too far south. He decided that he would cover his mistake by building a clanhouse for his clan of Green Kirtle, naming the place Mingannú for his supervisor back in Haumá.

Village of Zamashíl (3512.NM) For the most part, the people of Zamashíl are as sober as anywhere else, but once a year, they celebrate the "Festival of the Rain of Moons". People indulge in an intoxicant powder, don odd clay and straw masks, buy a few light thin clay balls for a few coppers, and have a rowdy pottery fight in the streets. Centuries of this practice have made Zamashíl's main road into an exceptionally reliable and sturdy one.

The Clan of the Hollow Moon makes this pottery out of a red local mud. It is never fired and it dissolves in water (so it is unfit for use as dinnerware or containers). Throughout the year, this clan makes the fragile hollow apple-sized spheres filled with chaff- many thousands of them.



People indulge in an intoxicant powder, don odd clay and straw masks, buy a few light thin clay balls for a few coppers, and have a rowdy pottery fight in the streets.

Stronghold of Thrá the Placid (3512.PE) This small castle is the seat of a small fief. It is ruled by a wealthy direct descendant of a warlord named Thrá, who was the quiet third son of a warrior chieftain of the Ripened Sheaf Clan (Medium status). His two older brothers were born on the same day to different mothers. Each of the two raised an army, intending that their glorious clash would decide the succession. The forces were so well-matched that by the end of the day, both brothers were dead, and only eight of their followers survived. Rulership of the tribe was awarded to Thrá. By tradition, the heir takes the name of Thrá for themselves. Thus, the Hetman of the immediate region will be Thrá hiThrá (High lineage/ Medium status).

Rirumé Estate (3512.PI) Millenia ago, this was a small military outpost, but it was abandoned. There is still a wall with small roofed towers (not normally manned), surrounding an old keep and several clanhouses. The keep is home to a family of Ninínyal (Pygmy Folk), who are not troubled by its lack of roofs nor its collapsed wooden floors. The surrounding area is farmlands with the typical furrows curving to follow the slight slopes.

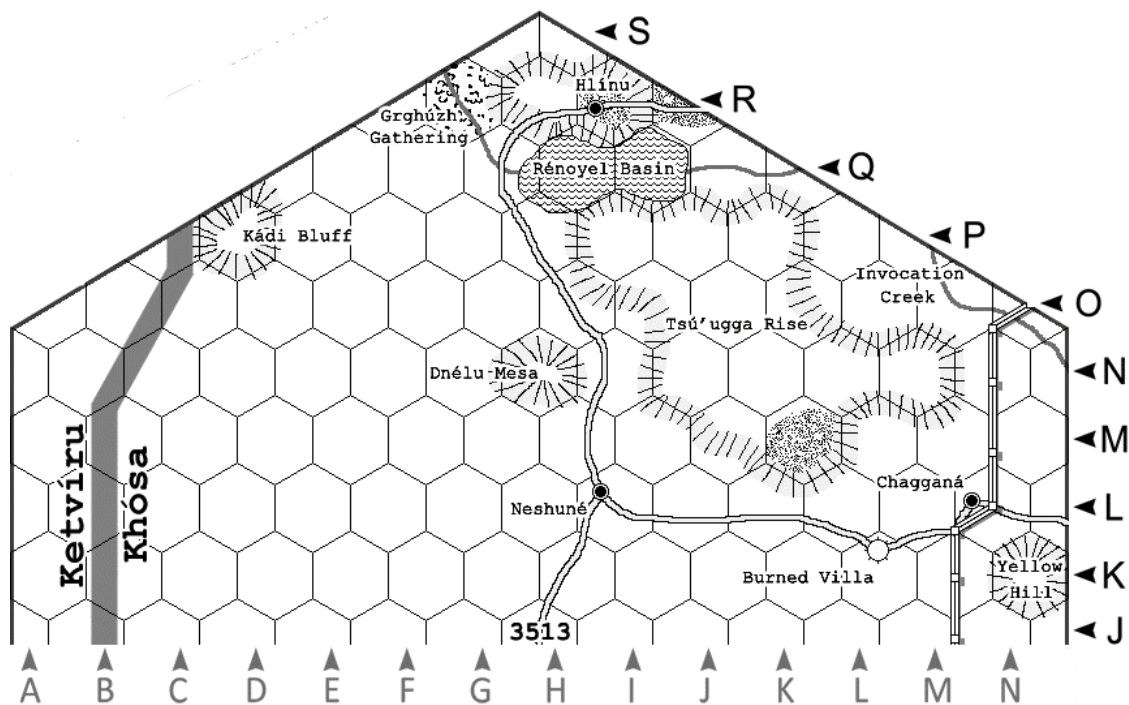
The Watchful of Rirumé

Should danger threaten, there is a small inter-clan militia of archers who are known as "the Watchful of Rirumé." They are not a standing army who drill or go out on maneuvers. They are far more like an honorable local archery club. Casualties amongst the group are rather high due to aerial predators, primarily Káyí from the Sayál marsh. The Watchful keep arrows around tip-

down in jars of thick material that can be ignited. Several Ninínyal belong to this militia.

Arené's Blood (3512.QJ) Nicknamed "the Treacherous Flow", this river sometimes goes northeast towards the Sákbe road, and other times reverses course to go southwest to the Sayál Marshes. Because it is full of predators, and its banks are mushy underneath the green, people seldom follow its banks. The reason for its actual name is unknown.





HEX 3513

This Large Hex is much like its neighbors, the roads lined with farms primarily growing grain and the land criss-crossed by myriad streams which disappear with the dry season. Then the rainy season refills the ponds and lakes.

Copious grass along the waterways attracts larger growing Chlén beasts, who are easily subdued and put to work before a cart. Sometimes Chlén are driven until they are near-starving. Their hide too ratty to be crafted, and their meat too gamey to eat, they may be released here to recover their strength. Such sadly treated animals are not considered anybody's property in particular.

This is also the southern extent of a region that the Grghúzh Páchi Léi frequent. They actually range all throughout the Kúrt Hills region, very much a road folk.

Grghúzh: the Páchi Léi Travelling Folk

This is a sub-culture of the Páchi Léi. Close-knit "buddy" groups of perhaps six to thirty-six individuals travel the Sákbe and sometimes minor roads that roughly circle the Kúrt Hills. They carry modified palanquins in which they sleep. These constructs are extravagantly carved, and lacquered in vermillion, violet and black. At night, cunningly worked panels of fabric on frames fold out to form a tiny house on stilts. They peddle their woodworking skills on the road, offering repairs. They are not merchants, they are tinkers.

Some are members of the Turning Wheel Clan. Those who are not, risk infringing on the "territory" of that clan when they fix some broken Chlén cart.

In town, these Páchi Léi become street-performers. Some are acrobats, leaping through hoops with knives mounted on the edges pointing inwards. They readily make a spectacle of themselves if there's a few silvers in it. 1 Hlásh to see one of them 'go Biyúrh'! 3 Hlásh to hear their tale of woe! 5 Hlásh to personally meet the last "Tree Lord" of their once-illustrious line! And so on. They have a thousand and one ways to get pedestrians to part with money. Most (but not all) stick to legal means. (Béthorm stats: Exchange 'Quirk: Dignified (-1)' for 'Outcast (-1)')

Grghúzh are treated as only slightly above the clanless beggar and (maybe) the slaver. They must pay an annual 'refugee tax'. Papers are checked by the authorities frequently, if inconsistently. They are often accused of sabotaging carts and palanquins, in order to show up and 'fix' them later. The Grghúzh take this persecution in stride.

Some Páchi Léi are annoyed by their undignified ways. Others are more concerned. 'Going Biyúrh' is a very rare but potentially tragic liability. The Páchi Léi worked for centuries so that it would not stigmatize their kind. They would really prefer that the general public did not think about it. It is something that they, themselves, do not like to discuss.

Burned Villa (3513.KL) A few years ago, this was the seat of the fief. When Prince Dchich'uné came to power, this was one of many places suddenly granted to one of his Sarku-worshipping cronies. The moment the would-be emperor was deposed, the people of the region rose up. In proud homage to the power of the fire-god Chiténg, cohort of Vimúhla, locals set fire to this villa, calling it the Burned Villa. It has remained uninhabited since then. Its original name was Pa'úsu Villa.

Pa'úsu Villa (3513.KL) See Burned Villa (3513.KL)

Yellow Hill (3513.KN) This hill does not look special in any way, but it does have a faint unpleasant odor. It is not colored yellow. Local lore says this is the excrement of the Pengdáli, a mythical giant centipede-like creature.

Village of Neshuné (3513.LI) There is a clanhouse of the Red Scarification Clan here. They have a long history but Low status, and they are not as numerous as they once were. The last surviving lineages of the even-older Red Banner Clan joined with them centuries ago.

Village of Chagganá (3513.LN) Nestled between Tsú'ugga Rise to the northwest and the Sákbe road going north-south, this is a place where little has happened in hundreds of years. The people of Chagganá cultivate their fields with vigor and confidence, proud to support the Empire of the Petal Throne with their baskets of golden grain. A statue of Emperor Mirusiya, the Resplendent Flame, its eyes two fire opals, has been placed in a shrine that once belonged to a forgotten local deity. (3513.LN)

Fifteen miles northwest of here, only just barely visible from the Sákbe Road, a huge heap of rubble can be seen upon a hilltop of Tsú'ugga Rise. This six-mile-wide tumulus, they say, is where the Pengdáli, an enormous centipede-like creature, once raged. To take stone from there is considered bad luck.

Dnélu Mesa (3513.NH) This flat-topped hill is surrounded by long grasses in which large numbers of gangly antennaed Dnélu beasts are indeed known to creep. In some places, they form networks of burrows, such that a human's leg might break through the dirt. They are one of the main reasons the land from here to the western edge of the Khósa Province are uncultivated.

Sometimes desperate parties of peasants come here in hopes of gathering valuable Dnélu cocoons. As the large group dwindles, so stories go, the survivors often turn upon each other, resulting in harrowing events that resemble Earth's frontier gold rushes.

The mesa has an older name: the Table of the Weeping Bones.

Table of the Weeping Bones (3513.NH) Another name for Dnélu Mesa (see the entry at 3513.NH).

Tsú'ugga Rise (3513.OJ) Patches of green struggle to cling to the tops of this collection of dark gray limestone that seems to bubble out of the ground. Ringed by sharp chunks of stone that range from house-sized to fingernail chips, it is difficult to scale because it is so soft. Shánu'u, their silhouettes reminiscent of earthly lions, but with wings, can be seen lazily riding the updrafts about its margin.

A cottage industry once thrived here. Limestone was broken into small pieces and baked in pits at Tsú'ugga to make quicklime. (See text box for "The Forbidden Mortar" at Large Hex 3514.)

Kádi Bluff (3513.PD) Round-topped Kádi Bluff is roughly five miles across and half a mile high. The distinctive silhouette of this limestone outcropping serves as a landmark for those few who find themselves traveling across wilderness. Its steep sides are marked by horizontal whitish and brownish stripes. The land in this Small Hex and those around it are unfarmed because the water drains out too quickly, killing crops. There are records of this place being used for training exercises by warriors of the ancient Red Banner Clan, now absorbed into the Red Scarification Clan (Low status).

Rénoyel Basin (3513.QH) Invocation Creek widens into a lake about twelve miles long and four to five miles wide. A tale told to children claims the Pengdáli, an enormous centipede, was commanded to dig a trench so that the creek might go pass through the hills instead of around it. (See also the entry for Invocation Creek, in this Large Hex, 3513.)

Invocation Creek (3513.QJ) A healthy running river in other seasons, during the winter, Invocation Creek becomes a smaller waterway, obliging and placid, allowing barges to be poled in either direction. Unlike so many of Téकुmel's waterways, aquatic predators are rare along this waterway. West of Rénoyel Basin, it is a rushing stream, but east of that, it is calmer. Both sides are navigable. (See also the entry for Rénoyel Basin, in this Large Hex, 3513.)

Túrume Grove (3513.RG) This is a thickly wooded area west of the village of Hlínu. Humans keep clear of the area. Rumors say it is infested with Dnélu and Zrné. (See also the entry for Grghúzh Gathering, in this Large Hex, 3513.)

The Grghúzh Gathering

To humans, 'Túrume Grove' is a place with a reputation for nasty predators, so they stay far from it. To the Páchi Léi, this is an annual fairground to which humans and the

other friendly races are not invited. Most of the attendees are the Grghúzh, a local ethnic group of travelling Páchi Léi found southwest of the Kúrt Hills (primarily in Ketvíru and Khósa).

Having been integrated into human society for tens of thousands of years, most Pachi Lei are not longing for a homeland of their own. These nomads in their skillfully carved portable wooden dwellings are mainly descendants of the Mu'ugalavyáni genocide of their people about 1000 years ago. Some, however, are "city" Páchi Léi who will go back to their normal lives afterwards, living as members of human Clans. Although they are not officially such, this sub-group is treated by the Empire as a Very Low status clan, and referred to as "the Grghúzh" (3513).

There was an earlier site located more centrally between Katalál and Haumá. When it was found out by the Temple of Thúmis, the governor of Ketvíru Province commanded the Grghúzh to stop meeting there, erecting stone pylons to warn them off. (See the entry for Séresh Tajúrk at 3612.EH.

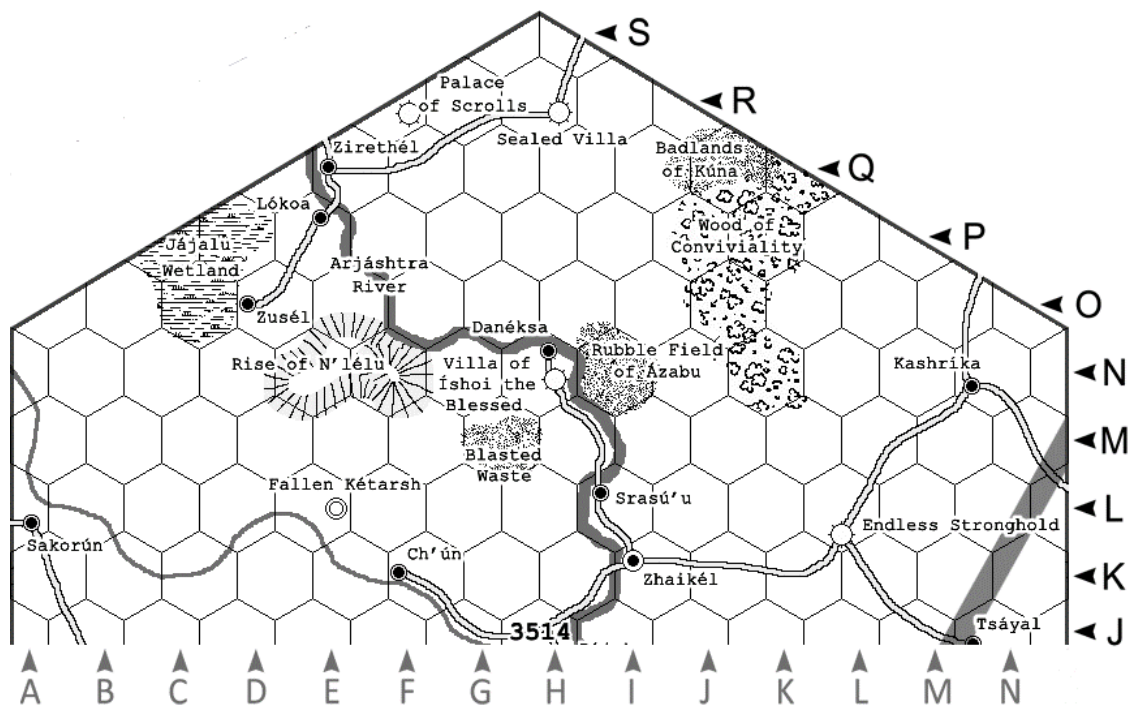
Raised voices are not welcome, and anyone who sours the atmosphere by quarrelling is offered powders of pleasant mood-altering while a neutral judge is sought to

resolve a dispute. If necessary, a Páchi Léi sorcerer performs a discreet mind-bar spell upon the offender, to keep the peace of the grove. This is also the fate of the rare humans who have stumbled on the place.

The Gathering includes trading, woodworking, and the training of acrobats and jugglers. It is an event of pleasant thoughtful companionship. A hill to the east delays the arrival of sunrise, adding to the sense of relaxation. Since the Páchi Léi reproduce by incidental physical contact and then budding, it is not really an opportunity to meet sexual or romantic partners. However, genetic material does incidentally get passed along, and a Páchi Léi living-group ("Buddy Group") might casually lose or acquire a new member at this time. One of the benefits that they enjoy from the Grghúzh Gathering is that younger individuals have more options of which social group they would like to belong.

Village of Hlínu (3513.RI) Perched upon the eastern part of a hill, clanhouses in the village of Hlínu are built upon stone foundations. This was once the site of a tower that has fallen to rubble. If asked what happened to it, villagers will tell a brief tale of the Pengdáli, a centipede that coiled around the building, crushing it. They say the Pengdáli is not gone, but merely sleeping somewhere out there.





HEX 3514

This area generally only experiences a milder version of the monsoon rains that drench the lands to the south of this region. It is mainly sleepy farmlands.

Many of the clanhouses that have granaries also have rows of little kilns where grains can be parched, that is, half-cooked into the insect-resistant form that requires only boiled water to prepare it for eating as a pinkish porridge.

Locals know of bread but seldom have it. Instead, the clan-matrons make a sourdough-like mixture of roasted grain, porridge and oil, leaving it overnight to get bubbly. They smear this onto wide edible leaves, which are then baked into crackers atop a parching kiln.

The Forbidden Mortar

A number of ruins dot the landscape of vast fields of reddish Dná. One can still see residue of a sort of crumbly white cement that once held the blocks together. People of the region refer to this ill-fated material as "Mortar of the White Goddess" - a shoddy preparation that seemed strong yet only lasted a little beyond a century. It was the common material also known as quicklime.

Quicklime has many other uses, including a hazardous powder that can produce heat just by adding water. After it was wetted ("slaked"), cooled, and dried, it was used in some foods to change sourness to saltiness. It was an ingredient in whitewash. Roughly four centuries ago,

building with quicklime in this area was forbidden by an obscure Imperial decree. No one here seems to know why.

Village of Pijék (3514.JH) Located at the point where Invocation Creek flows into the Arjáshttra River, the clanhouses of Pijék are built on thick upright wooden logs (similar to the manner of Kurtáni buildings for seasoning lumber). Wooden walkways connect various places. This way, they avoid forearm-length deep mud during the rainy season. By summer, meadow-like gardens are planted between the buildings, with fields of Firyá reeds waving closer to the waterside. (3514.JH)

Village of Tsáyal (3514.JN) Tsáyal was wiped out by disease at one point. When Katalál was going through its last Dítlána, a number of the most desperately poor people were forced out of their clanhouses of frail worm-eaten wood. The Temple of Durritlámish offered them safe haven in deserted Tsáyal. Primarily devotees of Change, they left the city to successfully take up the life of a peasant and repopulate the village. A large portion of their income goes to the temple, yet they seem happy enough.

Tsáyal properly belongs to Úrusai Province, but the only road out leads to the Endless Stronghold to the northwest, in Khósa Province. As the people here are all Very Low status, both Provinces find it easiest to just pretend Tsáyal does not exist.

Invocation Creek (3514.KC) This small river goes to the village of Pijék (3514.JH), then joins the Arjáshttra River

(see the entry 3514.OF). (See also the entry for Invocation Creek at 3513.QJ)

Village of Ch'ún (3514.KF) This is the site of a beautiful little stone dam where the water cascades through a myriad of vertical slots. One can walk across the top to the other side of the stream if one can jump over the half-meter-wide gaps. The fields are cleverly irrigated on both sides with little devices powered by the stream itself. While the people of Ch'ún would be offended to be associated with the slavers of Fallen Kétarsh in any way, it is undeniable that a small intact stone building northwest of town matches the architecture of Kétarsh perfectly.

Town of Zhaikél (3514.KI) There are a large number of clanhouses and warehouses here. It seems only decades away from achieving the status of a city. Money and goods flow liberally through the docks and along the three roads. Crime slinks through the shadows to follow it.

The mayor of Zhaikél is Ja'óm hiA'úsu of the Grey Wand Clan (Medium lineage, High clan status), a staunch worshipper of Lord Chegárta. His distant ancestry is mainly Kurtáni. A dour man, he is unsupportive of those things he deems frivolous, but extremely intelligent and surprisingly popular. He was master of the harbor for years until he was unanimously promoted to mayor. The town has a small official town guard, well-trained, and selected for their intellect as well as fighting skill.

Páchi Léi belonging to the little Grghúzh groups are extremely unwelcome here. They must detour the town in their travels.

Just east of town there are two temples, a northern one to Lord Hnálla and a southern one to Lord Hrü'ü. Along this road, there are unattended shrines to the other Gods and their Cohorts.

Village of Sakorún (3514.LA) The people here have a reputation for being poor farmers. Tired of passing companies of Imperial soldiers who either gave poor compensation or simply took what they wanted, Sakorún relocated 300 years ago to be farther from the Sákbe Road. Their crude little homesteads are strung along the south bank of Invocation Creek. Their Kurtáni heritage shows in their generally Stability-oriented outlook and some skill with archery, but in height and appearance, they are midway between Kurtáni and more cosmopolitan Tsolyáni stock.

Ruins of Fallen Kétarsh (3514.LE) This city survived many Dítlána renewals and left a large mound. Fragments of decadent designs can be seen on disk-shaped chunks of tumbled pillars as wide as large tables. In its last century, it boasted an enormous slave market, hence its nickname, the "City of Mirrors". Kétarsh fell during Bednálljan times for

unknown reasons. An Underworld here is likely but that remains an unsubstantiated rumor.

Village of Srasú'u (3514.LI) Rest for the weary and amusement for the deserving is what amiable Bamír, the Hetman of Srasú'u, promises the traveler. Cheap booze is what the friendly and easily-washed courtyard of the Clan of the Eternal Sky (Very Low status) mainly offers. The temples of Dlamélsh and Avánthe both operate inns and small brothels here. North of this village, a strong wooden bridge crosses the Arjáshtta River, on the road leading to the villa of Íshoi the Blessed, and the village of Danéksa.

Endless Stronghold (3514.LL) This was once a hotly contested location, where repeated sieges necessitated building a full castle. Built of white rock with no sharp corners, this broad structure has withstood the centuries well. Its inhabitants are now mainly Stability-oriented, their clanhouses built within a waist-high wall whose sole function is to prevent flood damage.

Blasted Waste (3514.MG) From a distance, the top of this low hill looks flat but it contains a crater six miles wide. It is filled with spiky grayish obsidian rock formations several man-heights tall that interweave as they twist through the air. It is said that once a lone sorcerer sought to develop a new spell. This was the result.

Rise of N'lélu (3514.NE) The Flat Rock Clan (Very Low status) operates a quarry that can only be active during the fall. Slaves drag the blocks to the Arjáshtta River. Barges operated by the Clan of River Brothers converge to do business at this time. The captains play Kévuk. Those who lose accept the more laborious contracts for bringing stone upstream, while the winners enjoy the trip downstream.

Village of Danéksa (3514.NH) Each of the clanhouses that stands here has several small cantilevered platforms and high walkways that jut out over the water. Schools of fish gather in the deep pool below. The little platforms are for dropline fishing. An old and sprawling clanhouse of the River Brothers (Very Low status) stands here, populated by numerous wives and children of the river boaters.

Fish may be cleaned by members of the Wicker Image Clan (Very Low status) whose clanhouse is located a quarter of a mile inland. They collect the offal and mix it with hay, leaving it to stand until the smell quiets significantly. By agreement, they place this in buckets around the base of all the clanhouses in the village. Out of these wooden tubs, five or six meter high vines grow up posts producing plenty of small Káo squash almost year-round.

Villa of Íshoi the Blessed (3514.NH) This is the seat of the fief. Formerly, this location was known as the Fief of Dó'bash. Before Hehéllukoi ("Count") Tulám assumed control, it was held by Paringíse hiDó'bash. Nicknamed "The Crusader", this high priest of Lord Karakán was accused of treason and atrocities. Tulám was sent by the Governor to assault the fortified villa and Paringíse was defeated in single combat. Paringíse feigned surrender, but then fled, and was hunted down, and impaled. For these deeds and others, Tulám was granted a boon, and his request that the fief be renamed for his own lineage was granted.

Though the place seems peaceful now, there are hints of the former unrest. Portions of the villa are still off-limits because it is rumored they are booby-trapped. There are members of the Dó'bash lineage living in the fief who believe their clan-cousin was framed. They hate Tulám and his family, and are suspected of sabotaging the affairs of the fief.

Hehéllukoi Tulám hílshoi of the Blue Stream Clan (High Lineage, Medium Clan status) is a former swordsman who journeyed into an Underworld whose location he does not divulge. After surviving two years of adventures, he chanced upon a magical book whose sale made him a very wealthy man, enabling him to restore his lineage name to a financial glory that matches its Engsvanyáli prestige. Now he lives with his eleven wives and (at last count) 34 children, while close to a hundred peasants tend his lands.

Villa of Dó'bash (3514.NH) The former name of the Villa of Íshoi the Blessed. See also that entry.

Rubble Field of Ázabu (3514.NI) This was once the site of a full city called Ázabu. Today, it is avoided, as it has become a breeding ground for Átlun spiders of every size and Dnélu as well. A quarry at the Rise of N'Iélu provided good stone for building. However, instead of shaping the blocks precisely to fit and balance, a locally-made rustic cement was employed. Built over a period of ten years, Ázabu lasted 150 years, then abruptly collapsed during an earthquake that apparently did not harm any other settlement.

Ázabu's story has entered local lore as a morality tale against shoddy crafting told by priests of Thúmis to children. For a few Hlášh, a priest of Ksáruł can tell the same tale, but with a few additional details. The cement used was something known as "Mortar of the White Goddess" (see text box at Large Hex 3514). Rumor also has it that Ázabu was destroyed by a contingent of sorceror-priestesses of Lady Avánthe.

Village of Kashríka (3514.NN) Mainly farmers who grow Yáfa grain, the village is dominated by the Green Bough Clan (Medium status). While other regions frequently

have a third harvest, rare is the year in which there is not a fourth crop here.

Jájalu Wetland (3514.OC) Water sinks quickly into the spongy ground of this Small Hex and those around it, but the roots of plants clearly find it. Hmélu beasts and Káika birds love to eat the tiny oily Jájalu berries that grow only here. The wetland thicket grows higher than human height, making the interior a maze of paths. Very large predators can appear out of the water with alarming speed. The marshy land along the edge is ideal for growing Firyá reeds for fiber.

Spiky Hmélu

If seen in the field, the Hmélu flocks of this area are an unusual sight, for the herders from Lókoa and Zúsel strap spiky-looking Chlén-hide armor to their backs, from their heads to their haunches. Thus equipped, these may move about the edge of the Jájalu Wetland with a higher survival chance. There is little water to drink, so some of the beasts are also water-bearers. Hmélu raised on Jájalu berries grow unusually round and tall, using several successive sets of "armor" in the process. (As these are not raised for their wool, it matters little that patches of their pelts are matted to felt.)

Village of Zúsel (3514.OD) Sweet aromatic herbs are gathered, prized for making beer. Káika ducks are raised here in large numbers. They are driven along the road from Zúsel to Lókoa to be sold. The villages of Lókoa and Zúsel are both home bases for Hmélu herders. There is little time for gardening or tilling fields; they trade live animals and meat for what they need. (See the text box at 3514.OC, Jájalu Wetland, for a note about their eccentric Hmélu herding practices.)

Women in many places cultivate Firyá reeds from which fiber for cloth is processed. The region from Lókoa to Zúsel is especially good for growing it.

Arjáštra River (3514.OF) This major river flows from north in the Kúrt Hills, past Haumá (see the entry in Large Hex 3613), to Usenánu (not described in this atlas). It winds between low hills, with many slow and deep points along the way). Bridges are rare, but barges are common, and skinflint boaters may bear a party of passengers across for a few Hlášh. In addition to the surface rivers that join it, there are also a few underwater waterways in caves that empty the bounty of their dark waters into the Arjáštra.

(Beyond Usenánu, these become the waters of the Mssúma River, which flows all the way south to the mighty coastal metropolis of Jakálla (not described in this atlas).

Village of Lókoa (3514.PE) This is mainly a herders' village. They grow little food, preferring to trade for various food items. The fattest Hmélu beasts are loaded onto boats here alive, most going up-river to Haumá. (See the text box under Jájalu Wetland, 3514.OC, for a note about their eccentric Hmélu herding practices.)

Waddling Káika fowl arrive with their herders, too. They are brought into pens with flexible walls made of reeds joined by cords. Too plump to fly, their ankles are hobbled, then they are loaded onto a boat.

Women in many places cultivate Firyá reeds from which fiber for cloth is processed. The region from Lókoa to Zusél is exceptionally productive for Firyá.

Wood of Conviviality (3514.PK) This is a difficult patch of ground to cross. Beneath the gnarled trees, the ground is wildly irregular, with person-sized lumps all about. Under the soil are large rocks, and when trees grow around them, they often fall partly over. It gives the visual impression of drunken buddies leaning on one another as they head down the street. Niches form pockets where dangerous creatures lair, notably Epéng and Dlíkkén "centipedes", and millions of little chittering Kurukú that skitter and taunt predators until they are eaten.

The Wood of Conviviality (3514.QJ) surrounds the eastern edge of the Badlands of Kúna, the ruins of a hastily-constructed city.

Village of Zirathél (3514.QE) This is a prosperous place, with two wooden docks extending out into the river. Most of the trading goes on here, between broad raft-like boats, and the small adjoining market. Several small clanhouses stand here. One is the Clan of River Brothers (Very Low status).

Badlands of Kúna (3514.QJ) The Badlands are bordered by the Wood of Conviviality, which grows upon the eastern extents of the rubble. As one approaches this place (one small-hex out), the ground becomes littered with fragments of very hard gritty rock. The ground becomes more and more rocky, very difficult to cross on foot, and impassable for a Chlén cart. At its eastern end are stones two person-heights wide, with carvings on the sides of some, a sign this was once a city. Some say it fell because of something called "Mortar of the White Goddess". (See the text box for this under Large Hex 3514.)

There are caves here that are better described as room-sized gaps below rocks compacted together above. There are also reports of the occasional Sró dragon appearing here. They apparently like to roll on the rough ground to polish their scaled skin.

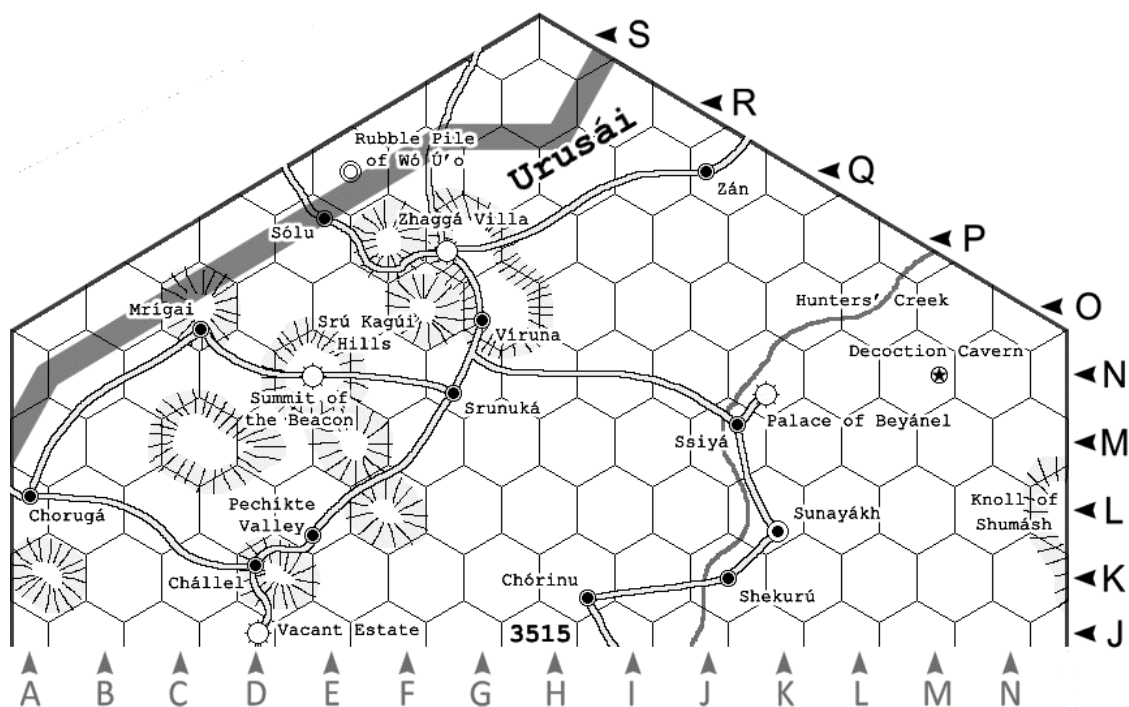
Palace of Scrolls (3514.RF) Perpetually shrouded in a heavy yet dry fog, this ancient establishment currently belongs to the Ripened Sheaf Clan (Medium status). In a slightly eccentric fashion, it is not part of the Fief of Yaggásh which surrounds it. The walled gray stone building with a single tower at one corner functions as a peculiar sort of bank. How exactly business is conducted is known only to its extremely wealthy patrons. It is whispered that compasses whirl and magic goes tremendously awry in this place.

Southern Tsolyánu is blessed with the monsoon rains which, while nourishing to crops, bring decay to paper and parchment. Located on the northern edge of that region, the Palace of Scrolls was originally only for storage for documents. Over the centuries, this expanded to include small (hand-sized) deposit boxes, fashioned of translucent white jade and sealed with wax. The fee for keeping a box depends on the value of its contents, and it starts at two hundred Káitars per year. Items are only accepted if the owner is willing to accept the possibility of theft, and will take money in compensation. Their filing system is apparently eccentric. The owner of a box is given a piece of white steatite as long as a person's hand and two fingers thick, with eleven icons engraved upon it.

Rumors of what goes on within are plentiful. Some assume it is a labyrinth of storage chambers, protected by exotic traps and creatures of the Underworld. Some say security is provided by retired military sorcerors and mind-controlled Ahoggyá. Others say that only demons are employed. In any case, there hasn't been a successful burglary in over 1500 years.

Sealed Villa (3514.RH) Well-cut blocks, each the height of a man, are fitted together into an imposing wall tall enough to obscure all that lies within. Doors at the northeast and southwest allows permitted guests to enter. There are no known clan-houses at this location, and those who are not welcome (pretty much everybody not a resident) are greeted with hurled clay pots full of angry insects. From time to time, the inhabitants of the Sealed Villa have honey to trade. When they appear in public, they are draped head-to-toe in sheer Thésun gauze. It can still be seen that several of them are Pé Chói.

Nominally, the Sealed Villa is under the auspices of the Temples of Avánthe and Dílinála, but no priestesses have come or gone to this location in living memory, nor is any tribute requested. On extremely old scrolls, it may be called the House of Fifty-Thousand-and-One Avatars. There is even a rumor that there are women here who give birth without men.



HEX 3515

This Large Hex is comprised mainly of farms that grow many different crops, and villages that cling to the verdant Srú Kagúí Hills. Local roads here connect various villages to others. Some are so rock-strewn that they threaten to shake Chlén carts apart.

Vacant Estate (3515.JD) Though overgrown with weeds and in disrepair, this elaborate building could be restored to use. It was once the home of one Chasétl hiArjásu. His Honor Chasétl, they say, lost his mind and was killed by his own retainers. The estate has been left abandoned since. Eventually, the Emperor will award it to a new owner, as soon as the message of Chasétl's demise arrives. This will probably take years (or perhaps, with the right inducements, decades.)

Village of Chállel (3515.KD) Two generations ago, the inhabitants lived two Small Hexes to the west, but then they relocated to the west side of Srasaúl Hill. During those days of the rainy season when they are cooped up with little to do, many of them indulge in narcotic powders, laying about in a daze. Exactly how or where exactly they acquire these powders is a mystery, because merchants coming to this area do not appear to bring them for trade.

Srasaúl Hill (3515.KD) Srasaúl Hill is the granite mound upon which the Village of Chállel is built. It is also the rainy-season home for villagers of Pechikte Valley.

Village of Chórínú (3515.KH) Chórínú is located east down the road from Shekurú, across a large bridge over Hunters' Creek. It is said that the Hyahý'u bandits once hid a cache of golden Káitars somewhere around Chórínú, while their wives, the Chashkérís, hid another one by the village of Zán. There may be truth to the rumor yet: farmers have found little gold coins while plowing. (3515.KH)

Village of Shekurú (3515.KJ) Shekurú is east of a bridge that looks far too large for Hunters' Creek, and it is on the road from the Village of Chórínú to the Town of Sunayákh. The villagers cut and trim tough reeds to bring to Sunayákh, which, in turn, gives them woven baskets to hold grain.

Village of Chorugá (3515.LA) Along the east-west road, there is a row of fenced areas about brick squares where travelers may set up camp sites in the shade of old trees. A fountain on the south side of that road marks the center of town, and the intersection is surrounded by a market. There is a stereotype of the folk of Chorugá as expert and tenacious hagglers. The road north, from Chorugá to Mrigai, is an axle-breaking mess of knee-high blocks.

Some of the ladies around town may stand out because they are nearly naked except for knee-high boots. These women belong to the shoe-crafting Clan of the Brass Awl (of Medium status). As they originally hail from Tsolyánu's northern border, they tend towards matriarchal customs. Alas: the majority of Tsolyáni people wear sandals, buskins, or go barefoot, so the clan is slowly losing money.

Village of Pechíkthe Valley (3515.LE) During the rainiest month of the monsoon season, Pechíkthe Valley must be temporarily deserted. In spite of being surrounded by a wall as tall as a man, the entire village gets submerged. Villagers must travel to Srasaúl Hill to the southwest (3515.KD) and live in small cave complexes hacked out of the soft rock. This is thought of as a “bad” time because some are inevitably lost to predators, both along the way, and, in the caves. (Locals claim the name is Pé Chói for “fear of drowning”. This is probably a jest.)

Town of Sunayákh (3515.LK) Sunayákh is home to several Low Status clans of basketmakers who weave materials into soft baskets which can be sold flat. There is precious little money to be made in this, but the constant need for these baskets is beyond what the grain-growing clans’ own weavers themselves can meet. Villagers from nearby Shekurú bring them cut reeds ready to weave. There are fruitful farms from Sunayákh to the Knoll of Shumásh in the east. An attempt at a road long ago decayed into a long and broad trail of waist-high white rocks. People must therefore carry grain on foot in a hazardous annual “migration”.

Knoll of Shumásh (3515.LO) (extends to 3516.KA. See entry for Knoll of Shumásh, 3516.KA)

Village of Ssiyá (3515.MJ) Located southwest of the Palace of Beyánel, goods come in from the town of Sunayákh down the road to the south. They are sold by merchants to other merchants, who take it to the village of Víruna down the road to the west, and then northwards.

Summit of the Beacon (3515.NE) A handsome temple to Lord Hnálla stands upon this, the highest point in the Srú Kagúi Hills. Atop its highest roof, one huge oil lamp burns with a clear white flame below a set of mirrors arranged like an inverted ten-sided pyramid. On a clear night, it can be seen from Mrígai to Srunaká. The oil is brought as sacrifices from neighboring villages.

Lower down the hill, a wall surrounds the estate, which is a garden as well as a fortress. The priests grow white fragrant flowers and white-fruited cultivars of common crops (for instance, a white Káo squash).

Village of Srunuká (3515.NG) On a clear night, the Summit of the Beacon can be seen from here. Every other year, a rough imitation of an epic is performed. It celebrates the comedic exploits of a folk-hero named Rock-head the Ahoggyá. Visiting Ahoggyá usually find it funny, but there was an incident once in which an Ahoggyá took exception and threw the two dancers in the Ahoggyá suit across the plaza. Although Srunuká is not known for it, they make some excellent beers and sweetened beer-like beverages here.

A fair amount of trade passes through Srunuká and onwards up the hill to Víruna.

Palace of Beyánel (3515.NK) This is the seat of the fief. To the southwest is the nearby Village of Ssiyá. Built upon a little mound, the Palace of Beyánel once controlled trade upon Hunters’ Creek. Since that river’s decline, the Palace is now too far from the waterway to have much to do with it. It is now situated between orchards of Díél “plums”. At other times, the honor of being the seat of the fief has belonged to Zhaggá Villa to the west (3515.PG). To the chagrin of many a scribe, sometimes the census scrolls refer to this region as ‘Zhaggá’.

Decoction Cavern (3515.NM) This place has a very sinister reputation. The region’s Hyahyú’u marauders once had an enclave here. One legend says they were a vestige of an ancient outlawed cult, and they were driven mad by reading one of its scrolls. Another legend says that they turned to eating hapless travelers, until people learned to avoid the area, and they turned to devouring each other. Then again, some say that the decoction of the name merely has to do with a secret wine-making using dried fruit, and not some cauldron of dubious meats.

Village of Mrígai (3515.OC) Built on the southwest side of Mrígai Hill, this place produces pleasant fiery-colored wines from dry-loving varieties of Nálum fruit. Several of the Vimúhla-oriented Red Clans are represented here. On a clear night, the Summit of the Beacon can be seen to the southeast. The road from Mrígai to Chorugá is a tumbledown mess of knee-high blocks.

Mrígai Hill (3515.OC) The village of Mrígai overlooks its southwestern slope. On the south side of this hill, there is a person-sized hole that leads to a place where snowy-colored limestone is chipped out of the cave wall. Folks here heat the white rocks in a fire pit so it becomes quicklime. After it is ground in a human-turned millstone, the village’s taxes are paid to the Empire in the form of numerous sealed jars of the stuff. (See text box at Large Hex 3514 about “Mortar of the White Goddess”.)

The Whelp (3515.OF) This is the smallest of the Srú Kagúi Hills (or “Hyahyu’u”) Hills. For years, people have reported seeing lights, like campfires, at night here. Upon investigating, they find only places with scattered flat flint chips as large as one’s hand, looking recently broken off.

Village of Virúna (3515.OG) Virúna is the site of a number of old well-built stone clanhomes built onto the slope of a hill. It is proverbial, locally, for being sturdy and dependable, but with a slight implication of “dull”. For instance, villagers from elsewhere might gossip, “His second wife is solid as Víruna.” It is usually slaves from Víruna who are pressed into service when stones tumble onto the road to

Jhaggá Villa and Sólu beyond. It is said that the founders of the village of Sólu to the northwest originally left from here in a rage, but what they were angry about, nobody remembers. (Thus, today there are no hard feelings.)

Hunters' Creek (3515.OK) This vigorous but shallow brook runs from northeast to southwest. The creek is often not deep enough to pole a barge to the Sákbe road at Tsolél. Land-crawling giant Étla crabs that sleep in the water are common.

It is said that outlaws here lived on the meat of Étla. These bandits, generically nicknamed the Hyahyú'u, prowled up and down this waterway for centuries. Their womenfolk, said to be as treacherous as the men, were called Chashkéri. Some say there are still some Hyahyú'u and Chashkéri, debased and wild people living without the usual clan structure, and therefore inbred and half mad.

Village of Sólu (3515.PE) Sólu is very productive for grain. Most other goods must be brought in. It is said that it was founded by a troop of angry people from Víruna Village long ago. These founders traveled until they were no longer in the shadows of the hills to the east at dawn. What the original quarrel was, has been completely forgotten. Thus, today there are no hard feelings.

Srú Kagúi Hills (3515.PF) This is a series of green-topped hills that rise up over the plains. They extend from here (Large Hex 3515) to the northwest (into Large Hex 3614). They are also known pejoratively as the Hyahyú'u Hills. This is because they once harbored bandits who were euphemistically called Hyahyú'u after those raucous predator beasts.

Hyahyú'u Hills (3515.PF) Another name for the Srú Kagúi Hills (3515.PF).

Zhaggá Villa (3515.PG) This was originally an outpost headquarters from which to hunt bandits. Now the walled villa is flanked by orchards of broad-trunked leaning trees clinging to the hillsides. Within the walls, a large platform cantilevered off the rocks hosts a large marketplace. Chlén carts trundle northwards with grain, often passed by lean merchants jogging their troops of fruit-carrying slaves to the Sákbe Road.

At times, this was the seat of the fief. (That honor currently belongs to the Palace of Beyánel in the east at 3515.NK) The road going east from here to Zán was once a raised road made of large stones. Now it is in very bad shape. Travelers on foot have little trouble but Chlén carts are even slower than usual.

Rubble Pile of Wó Ú'o (3515.QE) This ruin was once a wonder: a citadel both broad and tall. For one hundred and nineteen years it towered over the landscape. Then, without warning, it collapsed, some six hundred years ago. These nice waist-high white blocks would have been carried off and built into new things but the gaps between them are now home to Zné and other hazardous creatures.

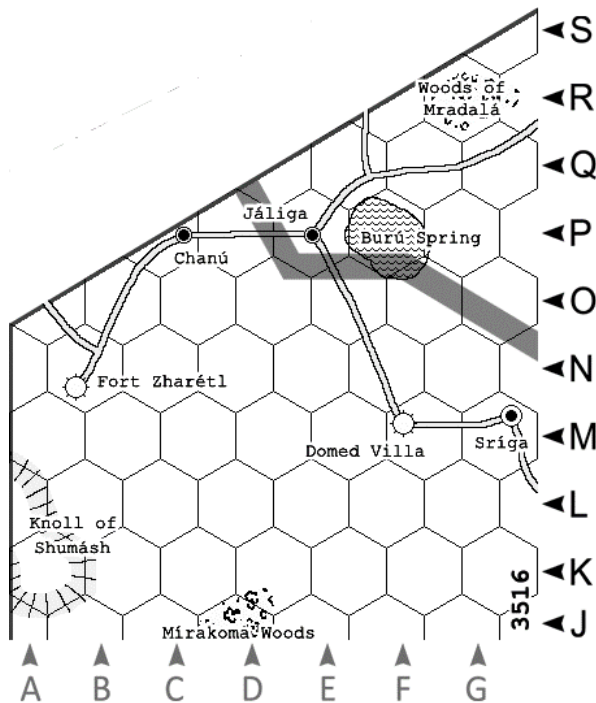


*Chodékka had no fear of the Gíriku
but its stench was making him ill.*

Village of Zán (3515.QJ) An unusually large number of clans are represented here. There are little clanhouses with just a handful of inhabitants. The grandest belongs to a sole inhabitant, Dhochúram Tlakotáni, an artist (High status, Very High lineage) status who has carved demon faces onto knee-protectors all his life. The road going west from Zán to Zhaggá Villa was once a raised road made of large stones. Now it is in very bad shape. Travelers on foot have little trouble but Chlén carts are even slower than usual.

The Beastly Bandits' Gold

According to local legend, a large gang of women river pirates known as the Chashkéis, buried a trove of golden Káitars by Zán Village, while their infamous husbands, the marauders called the Hyahyú'u, hid another somewhere around the Village of Chórinu.



HEX 3516

This Large Hex is primarily yellow-tinged scrub, with farm fields clinging to the road. Patches of stunted shrubs refuse to become trees. Farms here give a smaller yield than comparable lands elsewhere. Rainfall is as plentiful as elsewhere in the Katalál region; it is the land, they say, that is tired. Many of the human inhabitants also tend to be on the scrawny side.

Mírakoma Woods (3516.JD) There are trees here of unusually long-lived species. Some are thousands of years old, and stand hundreds of feet tall. Her Honor Zk'Káchi, the Pé Chói fiefholder of this area, allows logging, but only for an astonishing tax of three Káitars per tree. (See also Text box for "The Leaf-clad Pé Chói" at Town of Sríga, 3516.MG.)

Knoll of Sunásh (3516.KA) (extends into 3515.LO) This craggy hill is dirty gray-brown limestone. In bygone days, a mine was begun on the northeastern side, but the attempt met with disaster. Stones were placed to block the entrance. A hazardous climb is required to reach it because only a few fragments of the black wood beams that used to formed ramps and scaffolding are left.

Domed Villa (3516.MF) Amidst extensive and fruitful gardens, this whitewashed mansion with pale greenish blue accents is the home of Her Honor, Zk'Káchi, a Pé Chói, whose fief this is. At the center is a portion several stories high, topped by a copper-plated dome. It had a blue-

turquoise patina until a decade ago, when it was polished to a pinkish orange luster. If one is of medium or higher status, one is permitted to stand upon the parapets below the dome. From here, a cluster of small clanhouses on a knoll can be seen to the east: the town of Sríga. (See also Text box for "The Leaf-clad Pé Chói" at Town of Sríga, 3516.MG.)

Town of Sríga (3516.MG) This is the seat of a very small fief under the auspices of the Temple of Lady Avánthe. Its fiefholder is Her Honor, Zk'Káchi, nicknamed "Zk'Káchi the Leaf-Clad". A large number of shabby clanhouses encrust a low hill. On the north side of the town is a white-pillared blue-roofed temple to Lady Avánthe, including a large orphanage. From here, to the west, the top of the Domed Villa can be seen, its polished copper surface like a spark at dawn.

Here, unarmored members of the (Low status) Taloned Sandal Clan train their children to wield Chlén-hide-tipped spears. What they lack in equipment, they try to make up for in dedication and courage. Their sandals do indeed sport small curved Chlén hide claws, in honor of an aspect of Lord Karakán. For the men, to grow old is the highest dishonor.

A green weed known locally as "Báhu A'ái" grows from here to Fort Zharétl on the west side of this Large Hex. Similar to earthly woad, it is wildcrafted and processed into an indigo blue dye. This lowly work involves collection of urine, which is kept in small buckets until it smells of ammonia. A local ordinance decrees that the eye-wateringly foul-smelling stuff must be kept a mile's walk south of town. Those who stir the dye vats to boil it into hard lumps eventually lose their sense of smell, so this is a job done by slaves.

The Leaf-clad Pé Chói

Growing up in Jálíga, the girl Zk'Káchi hiFaléng (Medium Clan, Low Lineage) always felt a bit out of place, and not just because she was a Pé Chói. Born somewhere in the Chákas, she was brought to the region by her father, who paid for her adoption into a family of dye-makers in the Clan of Covered Arm. Being helpful and kind, she was well-loved by the clan-mothers.

As a child, she exhibited odd behaviors. Chief amongst these was dressing herself in little bracers and mantlets made of fresh leaves sewn together. She told her sisters that she could hear the trees whispering, though what they were saying, she didn't know. Once, her clan-grandmother found her hanging upside down from a branch by a rope she had wrapped about her ankles, her gem-like eyes glazed over. She had been watching

a small web-making spider, and had somehow gone into a sort of trance.

When Zk'Káchi was old enough to think about such things, she realized she had no interest in becoming a wife or mother. She declared herself Aridáni, and attended the Temple of Lady Avánthe in Srigá. Her potential for magical training was discovered, and she learned a few common spells. Over time, she was promoted for her diligence and kindness, as well as a shrewd business sense. She was an administrative priestess for fourteen years. She was then promoted to holder of the diminutive fief of Srigá. As a wry nod to her own eccentricities, she has obvious leaves worked into the designs of her light blue garments.

Various groves about the region that are considered the property of the Temple of Lady Avánthe are now in her charge, and it is rumored that she somehow finds out whatever happens at those places. She keeps herself very busy as an administrator, and a gardener, but on some occasions, a peculiar wistfulness steals over her, and she sits quietly on a swing, head tilted a little, as if trying, hoping, to hear some particular distant sound.

Fort Zharétl (3516.NB) This structure is made of light brown bricks topped by bluish slate roof tiles. It is in good condition despite having been abandoned eighty years ago. Since then, there have been two attempts to restore it to use, both ended by mysterious murders. Locals say it is haunted by soldiers from the Legion of the Dry Moat, Imperial sappers funded by the Temple of Durritlámish.

Two centuries ago, this legion's numbers were badly depleted by the losses in their last battle. Their purpose here was to create a new salt mine to supply the Empire, and perhaps train new recruits. After these last members were trapped by cave-in at the Knoll of Shumásh to the southwest, they were officially listed in the Imperial records as lost.

Village of Chanú (3516.PC) It is a minor wonder that this struggling village still survives. Creatures from the surrounding wilderness are constantly taking their tithe of the bodies that eke out a living here. A dark and rather fatalistic cult to Lord Hrű'ű dominates. Any actual rituals or sacrifices are rare. Mostly, it is a philosophy in which being devoured by wildlife is a mark of honor. The peasants believe it earns passage to the afterlife, to serve in Lord Hrű'ű service as a strange and powerful creature.

Village of Jálíga (3516.PE) Roughly two miles west of Búru Spring, the village of Jálíga is situated at a crossroad. Its sparse marketplace offers skinny tubers and bags of Yáfa rice. Grains for porridge are cracked by women pounding meter-long sticks into narrow stone pots each day. As the thumping rhythm continues throughout the autumn, villagers dance on the grain to hull it at spots worn to a dished shape on the plaza. About the base of a shrine to Lady Dlamélísh, there are sellers of salt and herbs. Across the dusty road is a shrine to Lady Avánthe, featuring an old stone colored turquoise blue. Prayers asking for many children are accompanied by offerings of finger-sized cakes of blue dye which comes from the town of Srigá.

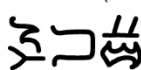
Búru Spring (3516.PF) Its name, 'Búru', means 'Plenty'. Seen from the village of Jálíga to the west of it, Búru Spring is a placid circle, glinting like a lead mirror. It swells during the rainy season, but, during the dry, it does not shrink past a certain point. Some say it is fed by an underground river. Its still waters rippled by breezes are unremarkable, although some might find the flocks of Káyí drifting above it to be picturesque. The spring is ringed by a broad zone of reeds and bushes.

Woods of Mradalá (3516.RG) These bent and sickly trees are under the protection of a wealthy Pé Chói named Zk'Káchi, whose fief is to the south. Any form of fire is forbidden. Logging is not permitted, but picking up fallen branches is allowed. Rumor has it that she is trying to discover why plant life does not thrive in this area. (See also Text box for "The Leaf-clad Pé Chói" at Town of Srigá, 3516.MG.)

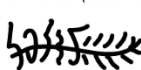
Fortress of Mu'á (3612.AG)



Town of Charkú (3611.K)



Town of Kái (3610.MA)



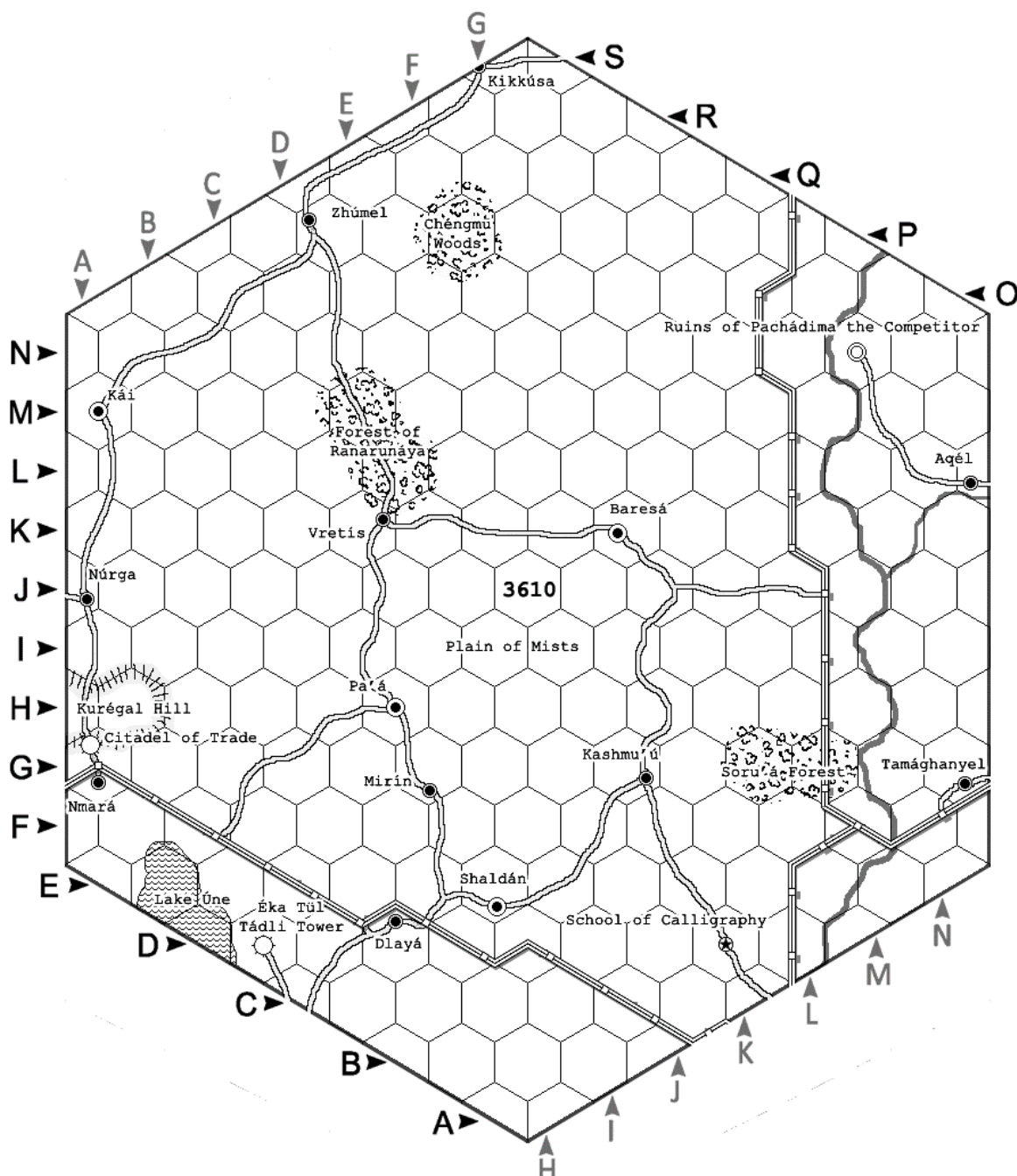
Treasure Trove Keep (3711.HH)



Town of Árgarunkh (3810.KF)



Brands for the Stations of Brave Peripitation of Ketvíru Province



HEX 3610

This Large Hex consists of low rolling plains, sloping gently down from the west toward the Chaigáva River along its eastern edge. There are large agricultural holdings in the south and east, and smaller scattered tracts in the north and west.

Éka Tül Tádli Tower (3610.DD) There is a clanhouse of the Standing Reed Clan built leaning on the side of the tower. From the nearby shore of Lake Úne to the Sákbe Road to the northeast is a fief. The band of N'üss who live here identify as a tiny tribe, the Éka Tül. They live as herders

of many large Hmélu beasts. To their perception, this makes them prestigious and wealthy, so they are content. They do consider themselves warriors, not shepherds, and both boys and girls are trained in weapon use from an early age. Their leader is an old woman, Djalí hiNérshan (Very Low clan status, Very High lineage). She is technically a titled noble but, barbarian that she is, she does not insist on formal recognition of this in speech. However, she does demand tribute from those who come from nearby Míketlá or Dlayá to acquire the "Tears of Úne" on their land.

By the Éka Tül's own account, many generations ago, this band of the giant-like N'üss were traveling in an enormous flying soup tureen when its magic failed, and it fell to earth.

The survivors jumped into Lake Úne. They built the stone tower, its thick stone staving off this new land's heat. Eventually they made contact with other N'lüss, and joined as clan members.

Village of Dayá (3610.DF) Tucked in the sheltering bend of the Sákbe Road to the north, this village specializes in ground-grown delicacies of many kinds. The Rising Sun Disk Clan (High status) has a clanhouse from which they operate a produce growing and shipping venture. Squads of couriers (a number of them hired from Medium clans) carry baskets of fruit padded with chaff, making haste to feed the nobility of Katalál. Each group is four files and five rows, and there is a relay of sixteen to twenty groups.

Along the south side of the road, there are many orchards and small fields that bring forth additional crops. As relay units arrive, they may turn their attention to harvesting. The "rejects" or "seconds" are sold for a pittance to lower status individuals, who sell it from roadside stands.

The Rising Sun Disk Clan also pays heavy inducements (sometimes in the form of fresh goods) to the Sákbe road guards for protection of their gardens along the way.

School of Calligraphy (3610.DK) This famous school for calligraphers is run by Lord Keténgku's clergy. They will train practically any skilled calligrapher from almost any Temple, in exchange for tuition, which is often handled on a reciprocity basis. This is one of the schools that produce the Imperial calligraphers that work in gold leaf and gemstone inks to create important Imperial documents. Most occupational calligraphers will be of middle-clan status, but high-clan and very-high clan-members will also study calligraphy as an artistic pastime.

Lake Úne (3610.EB) Sparkling light green Lake Úne is ringed by banks striped with white crystalline powder. It is full of minerals that render it undrinkable. A tragic local ballad says that it is named for a handsome prince captured in war called Úne. He cursed the water, dooming both his captors, and himself. A powder made by cooking the lake water is called "the Dried Tears of Úne". It is used to treat cloth to make it extremely flammable for tinder kits. (Lake Úne extends into Large Hex 3510.)

Town of Shaldán (3610.EG) This is a rundown though orderly town whose inhabitants have no time for farming. Though not well-populated nor particularly famous, Shaldán has been made the seat of the local fief within the past decade. In bygone centuries, Shaldán was more populous and powerful than Katalál, but it has faded. (The general opinion of aristocrats seems to be that "anybody who is anybody" would rather live in cosmopolitan Katalál down the Sákbe to the southeast.)

Clans with specialized crafters of the sort needed outside of cities have set up clanhouses here. New two-wheeled Chlén carts with their oversized harnesses can be commissioned, for instance. Often, traveling Páchi Léi of the Grghúzh ply their trade as tinker-carpenters here.

Twice a month, livestock are auctioned in the market, either young beasts to raise oneself, or mature specimens ready for slaughter. There is also a slave market, confined to the south of town. Prices are slightly higher there due to demand.

For generations, a large clanhouse of the Standing Pinnacle Clan (Medium status) has provided unusually tall guards to patrol the Sákbe road from Katalál to the grand city of Tumíssa. In their clan equivalent of gradeschool, little boys remain illiterate, yet can recite the many personal names by which the guards have privately referred to the towers for centuries: Kíási, Púputel, Go'óm, Chíru, and on and on. These tower names are by no means secret; this information is simply of no significance to non-guards. Children may be named for a tower if their mother thinks that is where they were conceived (a circumstance they consider propitious).

Citadel of Trade (3610.GA) This is a fine ivory-hued complex of platforms, broad low stairs, and roofed pavilions used as a large marketplace. Tamed adult Chlén beasts are sold, along with each one's harness and enormous two-wheeled cart.

It is visible from the Sákbe road to the south. To the east are several clanhouses. The Turning Wheel Clan (Very Low status) churns out wooden cups, wooden bowls, torches, tent stakes, and other very mundane items for the market. The Flat Rock Clan (Very Low status) runs quarries in the gorges of Kurégal Hill.

At its base and a little to west stands a small clanhouse of the Black Monolith Clan (Medium status). Out of sight of both edifices, hidden by a spur of the Kurégal Hill, there is a slave market a mile farther on to the west.

Village of Nmará (3610.GA) There is a sizable road tower on the Sákbe road at this point that functions as a gate. On each side (north and south) there are two great doors which are normally open during the day. People and Chlén carts pass through.

Amongst others, there is a small clanhouse of the Nighted Tower Clan (Very Low status) here. From time to time they send a party southeast to undrinkable Lake Úne with slaves bearing firewood. They cook lake water to acquire a powder called "the Dried Tears of Úne". This is used to turn Firya cloth into exceptional char-cloth for tinder kits.

Village of Mirín (3610.GF) Muffled banging with a syncopated rhythm greets the visitor soon after the

clanhouses of Mirín come into view. At a clanhouse of the Open Hand Clan (Low status) here, the workers are pounding Dáichu bark mainly for garments.

Village of Kashmu'ú (3610.GI) This agricultural village is well-managed, yet suffers from a crime problem. Built on the western edge of the Plain of Mists, the crops thrive in the humidity and still get plenty of heat and light. Some whisper that demon minions of the Usurper Prince Dhich'uné were turned loose into the Plain, and this is why livestock vanish.

Prior to this, Kashmu'ú already had a long-standing reputation for strange incidents. Some say they have heard the túnkul gong of Pa'á here, even though Kashmu'ú is 25 miles away. Several generations ago a rain of taxidermed animals fell in one of the fields. The incident has never been explained.

Soru'á Forest (3610.GK) The trees of this forest grow high above the Sákbe road, meeting overhead to form a somber tunnel of greenery. This place teems with wild animals, and the guards stationed at the two closest Sákbe road towers are kept very busy protecting travelers from predation.

Village of Tamághanyel (3610.GN) This Sákbe Road village is home to a surprisingly large number of different clans. Several esteemed psychic puppeteers come from this locale. Since the population is high, for a token fee, the Temple of Avánthe connects farm hands whose clans have no work for them at the time (usually because their particular crop's season has ended), to clans with farms in need of assistance (with some other crop).

Kurégal Hill (3610.HB) This set of beautiful round-topped limestone outcroppings was once covered with tall trees, but only random greenery now remains. The road between Núrga and the Citadel of Trade is flanked by numerous boxy gouges made by millenia of quarrying. Slaves originally from Very Low Clans or even Nácome (clanless) who are brought to the Citadel of Trade and not purchased for other work will probably be bought for a pittance by the Flat Rock Clan (Very Low status). They are put to work shaping and hauling blocks under the orders of the stonecutters.

Town of Pa'á (3610.HF) This is the seat of the fief. To the east is the mysterious Plain of Mists. This mist often drifts out to engulf Pa'á. Hungry creatures appear out of this dread fog, and it is not uncommon for people to disappear with just a scream to mark their last known location. When a strong wind blows from the west, rows of Chlén-hide-tipped stakes of varying sizes are revealed, all angled to point towards the mists. Thirteen years ago, an unidentified

house-sized creature with tentacles for legs was found dead, having run itself into the spikes.

Waddling Káika birds flee the area unless held in a cage, where they remain uneasy and lay no eggs. Hmá herders keep their beasts in pens with spiked roofs close to town, paying Qírgal pennies to the enterprising children who will gather up armloads of fodder.

Farmers make their fields to the west and northwest, running hastily back to town before nightfall. A large túnkul gong is rung with a swinging log at sundown. Some say the mist makes it sound like it is coming from a different direction than it is. Some even say they have heard Pa'á's gong in Kashmu'ú, 25 miles away.

Plain of Mists (3610.IG) This area is famed for the heavy mists which cover it almost constantly. As a result, visibility over any distance within this region is poor. Bandits have been known to use these mists to cover their escape. Local folklore tells of a village, lost in the mists, which starved to death because of a demon's curse.

Village of Núrga (3610.JA) Built on a rise between softly rolling hills, the land is covered in fields as far as the eye can see. The clanhouses each have small tower platforms, the better to see the far sides of surrounding hillocks. A shrine to an aspect of Lady Avánthe also named Núrga tops the southernmost. Here hangs a tall calendar upon excellent Firyá paper, glossy swirls of fiber visible behind the indelible blue ink. Beside each row of dates are neat holes, to be filled with pegs as those days come. A new one, embellished with small illustrations, is commissioned from the School of Calligraphy once every five or six years; it is very expensive. Most years, a more rustic calendar is made locally, on Dáichu cloth.

A broad cauldron of bronze is affixed to the stone here. It has a permanently attached lid with holes. It is cleverly cast so that on significant days, when water is boiled in the cauldron, a plume of white steam rises into the air. This can be seen by the surrounding farms (within that Small Hex).

Núrga happens to be a popular girl's name in the rural area northwest of the City of Katalál. The hope is that the child will be wise, beautiful, and bear many children.

Village of Vretís (3610.KE) Perched on a hill south of the Ranarunáya forest, folks here venture cautiously in groups into the woods to harvest trees. Pairs of sturdy well-trained dogs are brought with them. They must first rub themselves with a pungent herbal paste to hide their scent. Trees are cut slowly with Chlén hide saws rather than axes, lest the noise attract curious flying tentacled Chólokh monsters and other scourges.

While out and about, the women tap trees for sap to boil into lacquer. Children gather up the sweet wildcrafted berries. To make the finest ropes, an old and tall Dáichu, of a variety with three-pointed leaves like Shén tracks, is chosen to yield bast fibers several person-lengths.

At the end of the process, the largest segments are tied into bundles of seven logs, and sent rolling down the hill. Humans and teams of dogs drag smaller branches out behind them.

Some still refer to this place by its older name in Thu'úsa: Baraón.

Village of Baraón (3610.KE) The older Thu'úsa name for Vretís. See entry for Vretís at (3610.KE)

Town of Baresá (3610.KI) The Town of Baresá is on a low hill's summit, at the center of clanhouse-like homesteads arrayed three to ten miles away. To the north there is a prominent graveyard. This is a jumbled mix of headstones, exposed stone crypts to hold single coffins, small mausoleums, statuary, and tall thin (probably unreadable) stelae dating back to the time when the now-province of Kúrtur was an independent nation. A lonely clanhouse of the Nighted Tower Clan (Very Low) is found at the center of this area.

Village of Aqél (3610.IO) Life in Aqél is slow-paced and visitors were very rare. A large group leaves twice a year on foot to bring goods to market in the town of Háya to the east (3611.KC). Their Hetman is a woman in her 40's named Núrğa, of the ubiquitous Open Hand Clan (Low status, Medium Lineage). Five years ago, a merchant captain named Kolú (also of the Open Hand Clan; Low Lineage) on a boat crewed by Ahoggyá, "discovered" Aqél, and wished to do business with them. He offered to ship their goods directly to Katalál. The offer was gently refused, but the local people were amused by the visiting non-humans. An unlikely friendship sprung up. Captain Kolú now visits regularly to see Núrğa while his crew trade bawdy jokes with the village men.

Town of Kái (3610.MA) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) A road runs north to south through the center of town. At the center, a market plaza flanks both sides of that pathway, surrounded by a number of colorfully painted clanhouses. Devotion to Stability tends to dominate here but on the east side of the road is a small fragrant temple in green and purple. A slightly unusual aspect of the goddess Hriháyal is worshipped here.

She is Pa'ádima, the Lady of Serendipity, an aspect of Hriháyal. Below the statue of a youthful woman in a head-dress with Khéshal plumes above each ear is her altar, formed like a great bowl. It is surrounded by bundles of sweet-smelling Tsúral buds. When the Dná grain is

harvested, the last one to complete a sheaf must buy the others a drink.

The Maiden's Tourney of Kái

At the close of the harvest, farmers bring small bundles of ears on stalks for "The Maiden's Tourney", a game that resembles a beauty contest for heads of wheat. The stems are woven in a way that identifies the one who picked it. It is judged by a priestess of Lady Avánthe and a pretty local girl celebrated as this year's 'Harvest Whore' of Lady Pa'ádima. This girl will be playfully dressed as a temple prostitute in the livery of Lady Hriháyal, although she will probably take part in no such activities.

This grain is then brought to the tiny temple of Lady Pa'ádima and cast into the bowl. At the close of winter, the contents of the bowl are mixed with the dried Tsúral herb, ritually stirred with a phallic staff, and measured into small bags. For a donation, these are given to pilgrims. The bag's contents are meant to be mixed into one's own seed corn so that all the fields will be infused with a luck blessing.

The Harvest Whore is given charge of the shrine, where donations of Dná (always fresh) are kept in stone boxes. Should a farmer lose their crop to some disaster, they can appeal to another house of their Clan for an inexpensive loan of seed to try again. They will also customarily receive a sack of seed out of the granary of Lady Pa'ádima.

Forest of Ranarunáya (3610.ME) These trees cling to a bulging tall hill. The road between the villages of Zhúmel and Vretís rides its central ridge. Hunting is forbidden in the thick of the woods, but from time to time several Tsi'il venture out. When they are sighted, a party may be organized to attempt to bring them down. On very rare occasions, Pygmy Folk have been sighted at night; perhaps they have made an underground lair here.

Ruins of Pachádima the Competitor (3610.NM)

The sad white boulders were once an enormous statue of a heroic-looking princess. A wooden structure has been built over the remains of her resolute face, now turned towards the sky. Some claim she was named after a local goddess, worshipped today as an aspect of Hriháyal. Before the writing was worn away by wind and rains, her name could still be read: Pachádima the Competitor. The effigy was thought by some scholars to represent a 'Pachádima' who was sister to Kurshétl Nikúma I, the Tsolyáni emperor who subjugated the Kúrt Hills in 590 A.S. If so, she would have met her noble but tragic end in the great Kólmel contest for the throne.

Chaigáva River (3610.OL) This broad, clear river flows out of the Kúrt Hills in the north, past Úrmish and out into the Deeps of Chanayága at Penóm in the south.

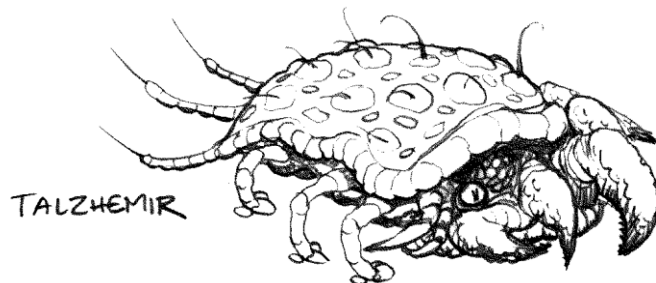
Village of Zhúmel (3610.PE) Zhúmel is located roughly fifteen miles west of the Chéngmu Woods. Upon finding a number of Dáichu trees stripped of bark, ropemakers of the Open Hand Clan (Low status) accused weavers of the Flat Rock Clan (Very Low status) in Kikkúsa of taking the bark. No evidence of the missing material was to be found there. It was pointed out by members of both villages that a group of half a dozen Grghúzh, itinerant Páchi Léi, had recently come through the area. In light of this, the ropemakers from Zhúmel formally apologized to the weavers from Kikkúsa, who accepted a few tuns of beer as honorable Shámmtla. The current consensus is that the "poachers" were Grghúzh, and so, all such Páchi Léi are under suspicion.

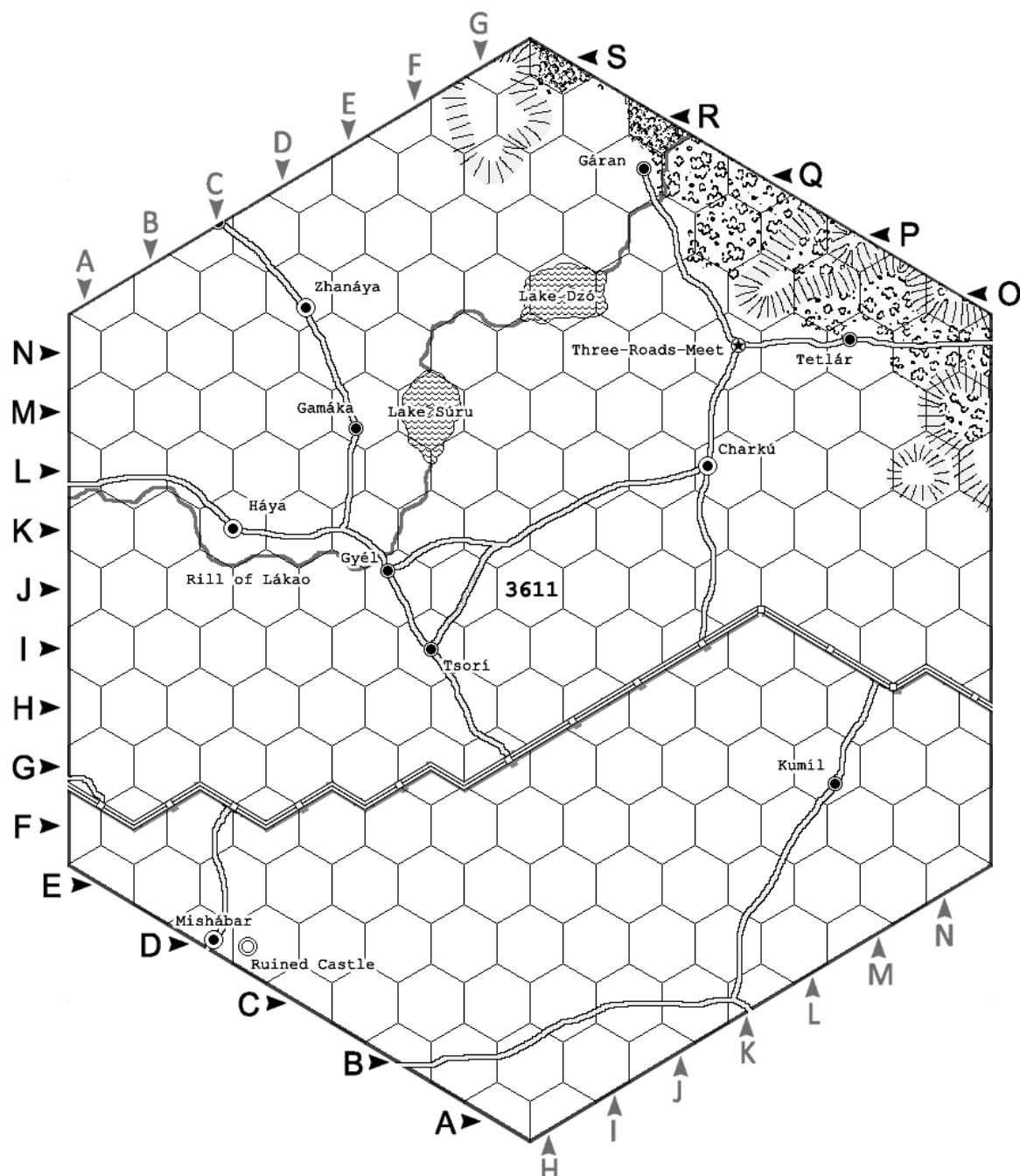
Chéngmu Woods (3610.PG) By a strict agreement with neighboring villages, it is only folks of Zhúmel who may harvest the Dáichu trees here for cordage, rope, and pounded cloth. Recently, some of the trees were stripped, in violation of the agreement. Villagers of Zhúmel and Kikkúsa suspect some Grghúzh travelers who were seen in

the area around that time. Which Grghúzh individuals are responsible however, they could not say, thus they are all under suspicion.

Village of Kikkúsa (3610.SG) All buildings here are built on stone blocks or pylons to dissuade vermin known as Ch'múni bugs. (See the text box description of Ch'múni in Large Hex 3710.) Because they will eat Ch'múni, there is unusual tolerance for the troublesome giggling Kurukú here.

During the reign of Emperor Kánmi'yel Nikúma II (c. 1044 A.S.), after civil war, it was decreed by Kikkúsa's Hetman that the presence of each strongly-aligned Clan would be balanced by one from the other side. This proved impossible to enforce in such a small settlement. The council of clanheads then tried to achieve balance by requiring that individual religious preferences of their menfolk be balanced. This, again, was impractical. Seventy-seven years later, it was finally agreed that the position of Hetman would alternate between a follower of Change and Stability. This proved successful, and Kikkúsa has remained peaceful even during periods of history when the rest of Ketvíru Province was afflicted by such conflicts. A chest-height granite marker commemorates the decision with handsome carvings and an inscription.





This Large Hex consists of low rolling plains, sloping gently up from the southwest toward the Kúrt Hills in the northeast. There are large agricultural holdings along the Sákbe Road, and a few scattered tracts of farmland farther north, but as one approaches the edge of the wooded hills, the land becomes more rocky and uneven, and farmlands become ever scarcer.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

Town of Mishábar (3611.DC) The entire population of this relatively young agricultural town comes from the very low status Flat Rock clan. Local superstition says that is as bad luck to travel from here to Tsáraya.

Ruined Castle (3611.DD) This structure may have once been a Fiefholder's seat, but it was abandoned centuries ago for reasons which the locals in nearby Mishábar do not recall. It is still in relatively good repair, consisting of a single 2-story keep with a strong outer wall and gatehouse.

Village of Kumíl (3611.GL) 250 year ago, the poet Dúrrouz Djefrí fled Livyánu and came here. He took on the pen name of Ochébi.

Village of Tsoří (3611.IF) This agricultural village is reputed to have its own small Tsu'úrum (underworld). Its origin and extent are subjects for further investigation. Scholars dismiss it as nothing but a few dusty cellars left over from the village's last little Dítlána, but the locals claim that Tsoří is built atop a glorious villa from the early days of the Empire.

Village of Gyél (3611.JF) This was formerly the site of a ferry. After the coronation ceremonies of Emperor Mirusiya, troops of the Legion of Mórúsaí the Chieftain (40th Imperial Medium Infantry) were commanded to stand guard during the rebuilding of a bridge over the Rill of Lákao. Made of huge logs, it is large enough to accommodate a Chlén cart. The village's tone is hopeful as farms that were abandoned in this area are being restored. On rare occasions, a Pé Chói or two may be seen visiting here.

There are two villages by this name. To help keep them apart, this one is sometimes referred to as Gyél-Zhanáya. The other is Gyél-Yaggásh (3614.IA).

Town of Háya (3611.KC) The seat of this fief was originally Zhanáya. During the brief rule of Dchich'uné the Usurper, that honor was given to Háya, which is more Change-oriented. To the relief of scribes who were not happy with the confusion over renaming the fief, it has been changed back again.

Rill of Lákao (3611.KD) This river begins at a shining crescent of ice high up on the Peak of Ascension (see the entry in Large Hex 3712.FG). There are cataracts whose rushing breaks the stillness of the thick woods as it wends its way southwest. The last of these tall waterfalls is near the village of Gáran. The torrents are gentled, turned to lakes by crossable dams at Lake Dzó (see the entry at 3611.OH) and Lake Súru (see the entry at 3611.MF).

River of Ascension (3611.KD) Now the Rill of Lákao. This is its original name (translated from Thu'úsa) before the construction of the dams that made Lake Dzó and Lake Súru.

Town of Charkú (3611.LK) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) From Tetlár to Charkú to the Sákbe road, during the day, there is a constant flow of groups of people carrying bundles of wood (if going south), or grain, fruits, and vegetables (if going north). Members of the corresponding clanhouses in Tetlár and Charkú are especially close because they will alternate spending the night in one and the other. Between these two is the

clearing of Three-Roads-Meet that functions as just a rest area (see the separate entry in this Large Hex).

Village of Gamáka (3611.ME) The Clanhouses here are made mostly of local limestone. The doors of Gamáka are smaller than usual. The smaller local people, of Kúrtur stock, slip through, but larger people from elsewhere have to duck and scrunch to enter. A tragic tale may be heard here, of villages that once surrounded Lake Dzó. They were set-upon by blue demons, who came out of the water. The handful of survivors settled in Gamáka. Gamáka has a raised hut of the sort used for seasoning wood, but there are few trees here worth the effort, so it is mainly for storage of purchased firewood, brought from elsewhere.

From five miles to the east, a different threat occasionally emerges from Lake Súru to trouble the locals. Several times a year, at night, when the moons are full, Étla crabs come trundling out at night in search of food, an event known locally as a "Surge". The smallest always come first, scuttling as fast as they can, a sign that larger and larger ones are on their way. Villagers rush for the clanhouses, closing shutters over all windows. The Étla may travel for up to three miles, before returning to the lake.

One sort, medium sized and colored greenish gray with a dark red arrow on its back, is edible if cooked for a full day, and the water changed out a dozen times to get rid of an ammonia-like flavor. It is a Kurtáni delicacy but in general, Tsolyáni from the city want nothing to do with this stew.

Lake Súru (3611.MF) At its south end, a dam, of granite, stands here, functional as a bridge upon which two may walk abreast. It is smaller than the one at Lake Dzó but built with the same curved plan, thick, with trapezoidal crenellations along the top. This place has a reputation as a breeding ground for many sizes and types of Étla crab. They emerge in mass migration called a "Surge". (See the entry for the Village of Gamáka for more information about the Étla Surges. 3611.ME)

Three-Roads-Meet (3611.NK) The only thing to mark this location is the worn and tramped-down dirt, but it is customary for peasants to stop for rest at the juncture of the roads north of Charkú and west of Tetlár. People from Gáran must get up earlier to reach this place around mid-day and make quick trades.

Village of Tetlár (3611.NM) In addition to the dwellings that may be seen in the village, there are others in the surrounding forested area. A "clanhouse" is actually a tight cluster of huts sharing walls, but with many doors open unto the surroundings. There is also a communal drying house: a large lumber curing lodge, built on thick log stilts, and hung with aromatic herbs to discourage or kill pests. Beautiful Tiúni roam here, large housecats with soulful

eyes, swept tufted ears, and spotted flanks. While friendly with humans, they have an instinct to kill any small creatures they come across.

As little is grown here, food must be constantly brought in from the south. In exchange, logs valuable for lumber rather than firewood are fitted with simple skis so they can be towed by teams of six or more people. Members of the corresponding clanhouses in Tetlár and Charkú are especially close because they will alternate spending the night in one and the other.

Town of Zhanáya (3611.OD) This is once again the seat of the fief. During the usurpation by Prince Dchich'uné the Usurper, the town of Háya was made the seat of the fief. It has recently been changed back again.

The long rise upon which Zhanáya stands runs north-south, and in the ravine to the east of this is a quarry. People here grow enough to feed themselves and have little to trade besides the pure white soapstone. Wearing masks of Firyá cloth, they cut finger-wide slices off with Chlén hide saws (a commodity that they constantly need). Eventually, most of it is pounded into a kind of talc for making pottery. Some pieces are turned on old lathes with pedals and flywheels to produce bowls. Sometimes oblong egg-shaped pieces the size of a head are made and sent to Katalál, where they are purchased by Shén as religious icons.

Lake Dzó (3611.OH) Once known as the River of Ascension, a granite dam at the southern end of the lake turned it into the Rill of Lákao. Resembling a high curved wall with trapezoidal crenelations, three people may walk across the top as a bridge. A similar, though smaller, dam exists at Lake Súru. It is said that there were farmsteads here

throughout the Second Imperium, but then the people were killed 150 years ago, by blue water-demons that emerged from the lake.

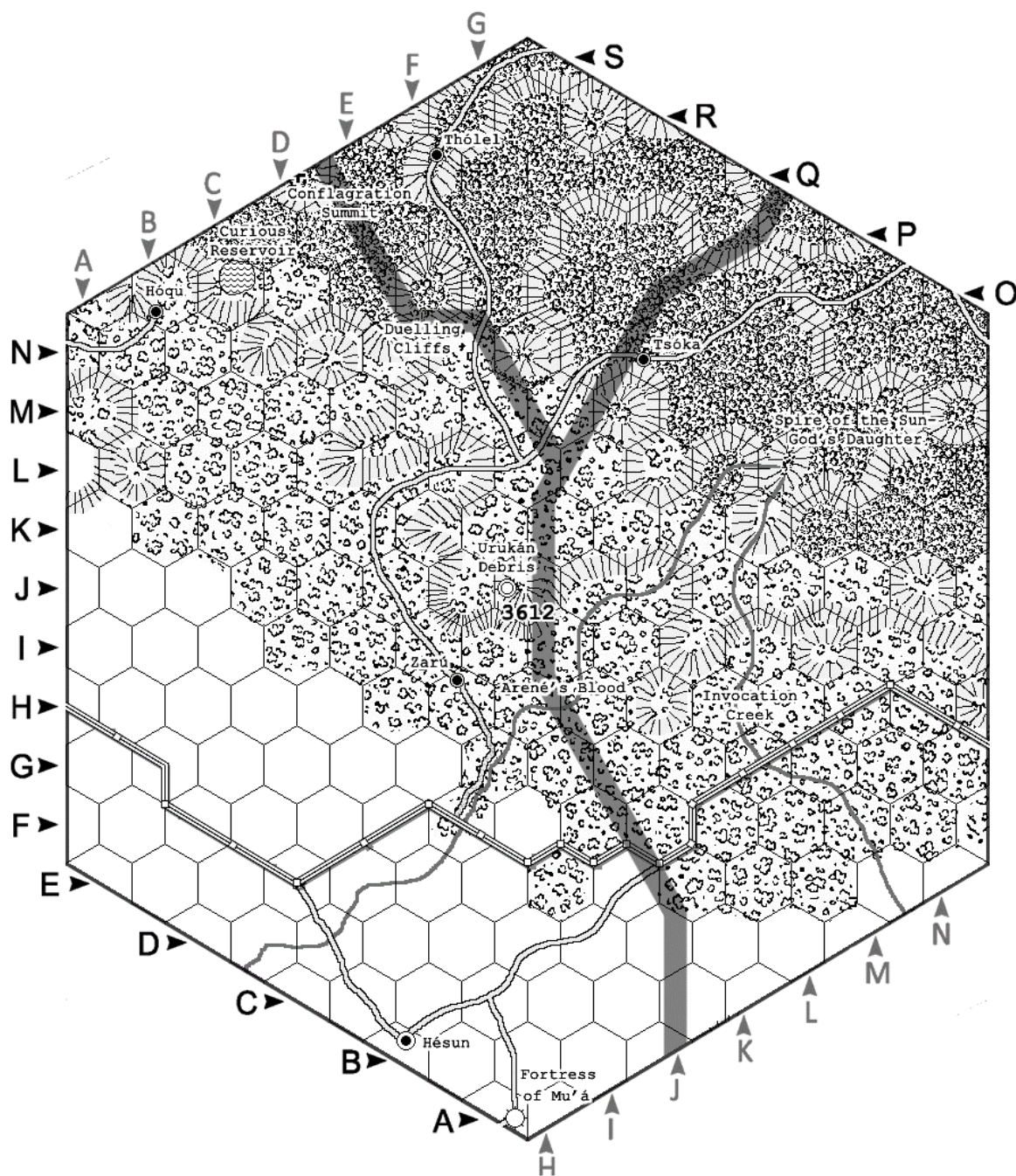
Village of Gáran (3611.QI) Gáran is the source of valuable firewood, Dáichu bark for making cloth, and salt from a mine said to be located somewhere to the northwest. A mile or two from here to the east, many tall waterfalls hammer the ledges and raise clouds of mist. Beyond, to the southeast, is the casual rest stop of Three Roads Meet (see the separate entry in this Large Hex). The village is rumored to be under the domination of Súrutsai Qál, an enigmatic priest of Ksárul who commands a retinue of undead minions which he keeps in a tiny stronghold near Gáran. While some would take issue with this Súrutsai Qál, others want to leave well enough alone.

Village of Doyói (3611.QI) Gáran's older, Kurtáni name. See entry for Gáran (3611.QI)

The Túnkul of Doyói

This is an old bronze gong located in the village of Gáran. The Kúrt Hills loom high above Gáran, which is built on the western slope of a hill a mile or two from the River of Ascension. Due to this hill, dawn comes two hours late in Gáran, so the people are awakened quite early by the resonant "kloong! kloong! kloong!" sound of the bronze Túnkul of Doyói. (Doyói is Gáran's older Kurtáni name.) It is the source of a Kúrtur aphorism. If someone "wakes to the Túnkul of Doyói", literally, it means, they wake especially early; figuratively, it means they are very astute and enterprising.





HEX 3612

This Large Hex is the southernmost point of Kúrtur and the Kúrt Hills. Much of it is light forest, and crazed with unmarked trails going in all directions. Proceeding northwards, trees hundreds of feet tall will soften and conceal wild karst landforms underneath, such as tombstone-shaped hills and cliffs on the edges of plateaus. Where the Sákbe Road cuts through it, the air is cool and breezy.

Some of the finest Thésun gauze is made from fiber produced by insects, especially the cocoons of the Dnélú found in abundance in this region. Of course, that means

that so are plenty of vicious Dnélú, a fact that raises mortality in the region. Hunting them for the cocoons (and treasures sometimes found gathered in their lairs!) is a cottage industry that raises the mortality rate even higher.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

Fortress of Mu'á (3612.AG) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the Fief of Mu'á. It is an ancient construct, consisting of a pair of three-sided buildings offset from each other, one with an opening to hold a courtyard facing south, the other with a courtyard facing north. Mu'á is built upon a large wide hill that is part

of a soft ridge that runs from southwest to northeast. It once accommodated travellers from Segí, a town to the southeast, now vanished.

Mu'á is a name from a Kurtáni dialect. Some say the word Mu'á is related to the Tsolyáni word "mu'ágh", meaning, a kind of large acid-coated tentacled blob found in dark wet places.

All signs of the lost town of Segí visible from a distance are gone, however, there is a twelve-meter-wide hole in the ground four miles southeast of the fortress. There is a little circumstantial evidence for the name association, however: there is indeed a Tsuru'úm, an "Underworld" there, where mu'ágh have been seen. Just how far down the hole goes, no one knows.

Town of Hésun (3612.BF) Hésun is neither a great importer or exporter, but it used to be a large fishing village. The town now forms a crescent distantly surrounding a tiny pond to the north, called Lake Mosír. This body of water once filled the Small Hex to the northeast (3612.CF). A local legend relates how Lake Mosír became a swirling whirlpool, and drained away, leaving a stinking mud full of dead creatures. After some centuries, it has started to fill up again. There are no fish in the water, a situation the council of Clan Elders seeks to one day remedy.

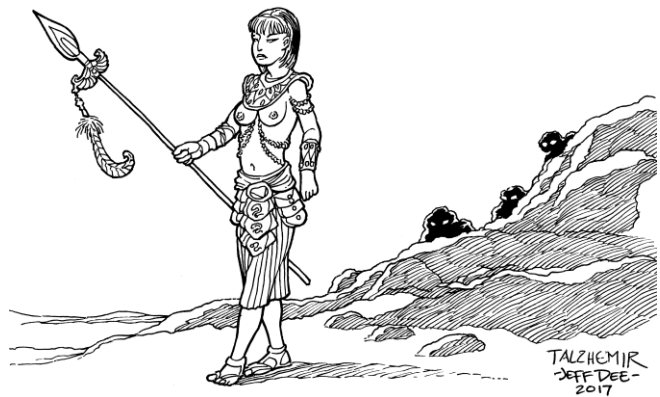
Séresh Tajúrkh (3612.EH) This is a sunny clearing with neat rows of Serésh saplings under vined trellises around a small well. This clearing was the site of a Páchi Léi gathering of Grghúzh Traveling Folk. It is ringed by stelae engraved with modern Tsolyáni. They announce that, by the Governor's decree, no Páchi Léi is allowed within their perimeter, on pain of impalement. Illustrations of Páchi Léi being impaled are thoughtfully included for those who can not read. (See also the description of Grghúzh Gathering in Large Hex 3513.) These valuable trees will be ready for harvesting in two centuries. No large beasts will be found near here, as the locals diligently hunt them down.

Village of Zarú (3612.HG) A fragrant plume of smoke crowns this village. Their main export is salted and smoked meats. Unlike a number of the others, this village was not originally a tribe. It was mainly settled by urbanized Kurtáni wishing to return to the ethnic heritage they had never personally known. They embraced the archaic Kurtáni ways, and became "the" Zarú. As a matter of ethnic pride, they do not "farm" (although small garden plots are acceptable). A good portion of the populace is thus primarily hunters from Stability-worshipping clans. Followers of Change are most likely to have to stay at the local wayhouse operated by a handful of worshippers of Lord Keténgku of the Ripened Sheaf Clan (Medium Status).

Mischief Afoot

Despite the Concordat, there are fanatics of Stability here. They keep their extreme religious leanings private. It may manifest, though, as spiteful petty mischief that the culprit believes will be anonymous. A follower of the gods of Change might discover a sandal strap has been nearly cut through when it snaps, fourteen tsán down the road.

The last time this happened, the Clan Council of Zarú paid a generous amount of new-footgear Shámtla, but could not promise it would not happen again at the wayhouse. The wronged party, a sorcerer-priest of Lord Ksáru, graciously replied that then he would not enchant his shoes to explode, but he could make no such promises for others.



*Riru sensed the creatures following her.
"Just try it," she thought.*

Arené's Run (3612.HI) Arené's Run and Invocation Creek both originate at the Spire of the Sun-God's Daughter.

Invocation Creek (3612.IK) This stream and Arené's Run both begin at the Spire of the Sun-God's Daughter.

Úrukan Debris (3612.JH) An enormous rock spire tapers like an obelisk here. A large gouge is missing from its silhouette on its south-west. This is a mysterious site where a fire was witnessed during the First Imperium. A very vague record of the event remains with the Temple of Vimúhla. Chunks of pitted black rock form a dark heap at the base of the monument. Hostility from the villagers of Zarú has prevented investigation.

Spire of the Sun-God's Daughter (3612.LL) The Sun-God's Daughter is a karst formation, its shape resembling half a pointy loaf of bread set on its flat side. Two springs of water (Arené's Run and Invocation Creek) that

both begin up here can be seen sparkling on its southwest face, like tears down a maiden's face. An ancient scroll fragment from the Time of No Kings relates that her name was Hírjathu, and she fell in love with an enormous armored fishlike creature called Byémikh. When she came to meet him, however, he stole her diamond wings, trapping her on earth.

Access to the summit is by way of one of several paths. All of them become a long and nearly vertical trail of hand and foot holds hewn into the crumbly rock. This point is known to be an area where the "skin of reality" is too thick to allow the casting of spells. Ascent becomes more difficult the higher one goes because the rocks are always slippery with algae.

Duelling Cliffs (3612.NF) This area is a ritual site for settling grievances for a small minority of Kurtáni whose families, even today, have not quite accepted the custom of the Hirilákte Arena. As carrying bodies back down was extremely difficult, those who fought to the death and died were pitched over the side into the ravines beyond with all their belongings. Weapons and armor of Chlen hide soon became unusable, but sometimes minor trinkets are found in the ravines along with bleached and splintered bones.

Village of Tsóka (3612.NJ) This is in an area of "cone karst", irregular conical hillocks the same height and width. A rumor has arisen that this village is hiding fabulous wealth. To reach Tsóka, the road snakes back and forth between the cone hills, culminating in a path that zig-zags up the side of the steep slope with hairpin turns. There is a shrine to Lord Qón here. Centuries ago, a group of villagers (more properly, members of the Tsóka tribe) achieved local honor

by rooting out and destroying an outbreak of worship of "She Who Must Not Be Named". Since that time, they have become even more territorial, automatically driving off outsiders (city folk and hills Kurtáni alike) at arrowpoint if they have not arranged their arrival in advance.

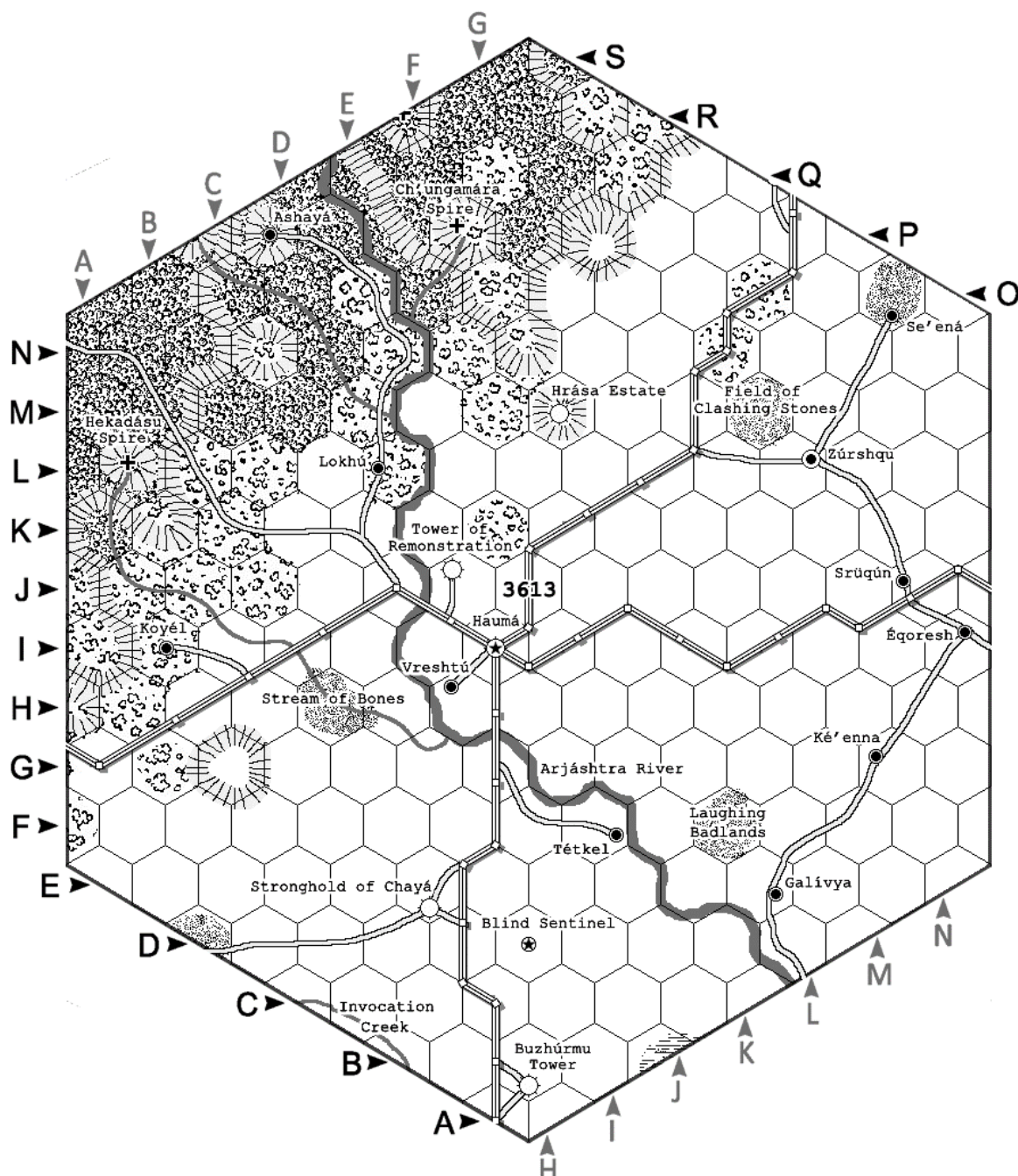
Village of Hóqu (3612.OB) A nacreous blue fossil, known locally as "Íswei shell", is dug out of the cliff face here. It is a traditional sacrifice to Lady Avánthe. Her aspect Makórsa is worshipped here. Khéschal feathers are brought out of the woods by the "Soft Hunters", archers using sticky-tipped arrows that do not kill the birds.

Curious Reservoir (3612.OC) Located atop the cliff plateau, this little lake is filled with milky water that gives off thick white steam and bubbles as if it was boiling. Strangely, though, it is very cold. There are bones around its edge of creatures that came too close, and choked to death for some reason. It can be found from a distance by the white vapor that rises from it.

Conflagration Summit (3612.QD) See entry in (3712.CK).

Village of Thólel (3612.QF) Long ago, goes the legend, this village was founded near where a large nest of Sérudla were found in a patch of forest. The creatures had gathered to lick or chew pieces of a soft local rock. The Sérudla were driven off and pinkish chalk from the little quarry became a source of income. Today, there are no Sérudla in evidence, but sometimes ape-like Chnélh will come in bands at night and steal chunks of chalk. No one knows why.





HEX 3613

The Arjáštra River runs from the northwest to the southeast of this Large Hex, while four Sákbe Roads converge at the town of Haumá. Well-populated, much of this area is inhabited by Low Clan farmers.

This hex contains the capitol of Khósa Province, which is the target of the Foundationists' attacks.

(See also "About the Kurtáni Foundationists")
 (See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')
 (See also 'About the Kurtáni People')

Buzhúrmu Tower (3613.BH) Only a few tsán from the Sákbe Road, Buzhúrmu Tower (or just Buzhúrmu for short) is small walled hilltop with a westward skirt of squalid clanhouses down the slope. People here are stereotyped by outsiders as slovenly and careless. Below the wall, visitors will note that the place is full of litter. The ground is scattered with moldy melon rinds, slimy leaf wrappers from meat-filled grain balls, sharp twigs from candied fruit sold by street vendors, and so on. Above the wall are clanhouses of pampered aristocrats who also routinely toss down their refuse, but it is then quickly picked up by servants.

Jájalu Wetland (3613.BJ) (See the entry at 3514.PC)

Invocation Creek (3613.CE) Invocation Creek only flows through this Large Hex for a short span. It goes southeast-wards to the faraway village of Pijék, where it meets the Arjáshttra River.

Blind Sentinel (3613.DH) A natural karst hill was carved into the shape of a bald androgynous human face aimed for the sky. It protrudes from the ground with chin higher than forehead, like a person in quicksand. Its eyes are empty sockets. During the rainy season, these fill up with water, which streams out the sides like tears. Peasants like to claim that the rest of this effigy is buried below the ground.

Stronghold of Chayá (3613.EF) Not unlike Buzhúrmu Tower to the south, this is a busy large village surrounding a hilltop fort. The well-born and wealthy live in the clanhouses within the encircling wall; the lower-class folk live outside of it. The large markets spill out on the sides of the roads leading up to the Stronghold. Intricately adorned clothing, jewelry, and the like are sold in plenty here.

Northwest of town, in a gully that keeps it out of sight and downwind from the rest of the populace, there is an enormous slave market. The more attractive or skilled human wares will be driven to Haumá, such as singers and musicians. Many of the fittest farm workers, though, tend to be found here.

Village of Galívyra (3613.EK) This location along the north-south road was once a prosperous river-side town of artisans, but then a shift in the land moved the Arjashtra a few Tsán to the southwest. The city's well-made sewage tunnels were destroyed; "canals" of filth festered over the lowest streets. A pestilence broke out that killed most of the people here. Today, the village is inhabited by proud and cultured folks with a rather cynical outlook, still following customs of their ancestors, but the products of their esoteric talents stranded inland. There are clanhouses stuffed with wares such as blown glass and hammered brass bowls, which they have little inclination to sell.

Village of Tétkel (3613.FI) Fisherfolk from the river bring their wares to a harbor pond at the side of the village. Their boats vary wildly in size. The smallest are little rafts made of a chunk of buoyant wood with four poles jutting out in a sort of X, straddled by a child with their feet in the water at a saddle-like depression towards the center. Working together with nets, the paddling children bring in a fair share of each day's catch.

Do-It-Yourself Damnation

South of the road along the way to the village, a strange and untended shrine exists here, a wooden shelter over a three-meter tall statue of Sotrál the Imprecator. He is said to be an aspect of Lord Grugánu that appeared soon after the rise of the First Tlakotáni, although he is not officially recognized by that temple.

According to local wisdom, anyone may beseech this god to curse them. The folk ritual involves kneeling at the base of the shrine, and eating a mixture of rotten meat and maggot-ridden fruit until one vomits. Details such as how long a curse lasts, what form it usually takes, or why somebody would even seek out such self-inflicted misery is a subject for speculation over a cup of the local beer.

Arjáshttra River (3613.FJ) There is much river commerce upon this large and obliging stretch of the Arjáshttra. River piracy is uncommon. River merchants haggling for high markups are the norm, however, as their best prices will be in the towns. Expect no portside bargains. (See also entry for Arjáshttra River at 3514.OF.)

Laughing Badlands (3613.FK) This area of random trees perched upon craggy rocks waist-deep under vines is avoided as unlucky. It is said that the Laughing Badlands were placed upon this plane to break axles and ankles.

(Unnamed Hill) (3613.GC) This is the site of a vast ancient limestone quarry that produced far more blocks than were required. They are sitting in neat rows about the place, free for the taking, though growing a bit pitted. The area from which the stone was cut is now a pleasant little blue-green lake, undrinkable but good for swimming. Some say this place is haunted by the Chusétl, the dreaming-self, of Gyegáltni, an overseer who went gibbering-mad counting the white stones. Others warn that this apparition is a dangerous Hli'ír.

Village of Ké'enna (3613.GM) The women of Ké'enna have a reputation for kindly disposition, beauty, loyalty, and grace, and an odd tendency to bear almost all sons. Since many families prefer boys, neighboring villagers would seek out their daughters, a practice the folk of Ké'enna did not like because they needed their scarce women. Once married to outsiders, however, the ladies of Ké'enna would have children of either sex, as usual. Eventually, it was realized that it was Ké'enna's men who were special, and now it is the sons of Ké'enna who are prized for arranged marriages.

Stream of Bones (3613.HE) Beginning at the waterfalls of Hekadásu Spire (3613.LB), the Stream of Bones is a small river that is present and navigable year-round with a small water craft. It passes through a large "stone forest" known as 'The Bones'. This is a region of limestone spires that are very difficult to pass except by boat. Believed to be associated with the forces of the Gods of Change, the more superstitious Kurtáni of the high hills avoid it.

The Bones (3613.HE) See Stream of Bones (3613.HE).

Village of Vreshtú (3613.HG) The intensely farmed area of Vreshtú is bounded on two sides by Sákbe Roads, and on the third by the River Arjáshtsa. Goods coming and going to Haumá typically come through the busy docks here. There is no bridge to the west, but one may haggle for passage on a ferry.

One of their significant commodities is whole fish. Their heads are stuffed into water in bags made of bladders, and they are suspended by their tails. They are carried on litters by slave teams, arriving in Haumá still alive and gasping.

Village of Koyél (3613.IB) This little village in the forest shares the name of the significant town of Koyél (3814.AG). Its main product is wood. Enormous logs felled in the forest are cut into segments as long as a man using great saws. These are rolled downhill by individuals along the base of the Sákbe Road. Near the Tower of Remonstrance, they are turned into charcoal, which then goes on to Haumá.

Town of Haumá (3613.IG) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) Significantly smaller than Katalál, and located at the juncture of four Sákbe Roads, Haumá is the seat of the very prosperous fief that bears its name.

This town is a lovely place. Gapúl trees in lightly wooded areas dapple the whitewashed buildings with shade. A wind often plays through these stately arbors. From Haumá, the ascent up into the Kúrt Hills is easy. The forest thickens, the trees are taller, and the undergrowth takes on a dense and tangled look.

Its Palace of the Realm is a bureaucratic maze where (due to sheer volume rather than inefficiency) one may hire someone else to wait in line for them for several days. The center of the town has four markets, with four degrees of status (with a corresponding quality of organization and goods). Food is very plentiful throughout the town.

An old song in its honor refers to it as "Shining Heart that Beats in Khósa" (it is a folksong, with a catchy tune and a lively log-thumping rhythm). Trade is frenetic Haumá's life's-blood, and there are many, many Chlén-carts passing through, even at night. Well-tended Chlén stables house the creatures as they rest. A thriving trade in Chlén-hide

weapons and tools grew out of their presence centuries ago.

The buildings at the center are tightly-packed. Built from the finest Kúrtur lumber, they have grown sharply upwards. The most luxurious have entire floors for breezy garden-edged pavilions.

When the Tsolyáni took over this town, it was in decline, just a medium-sized village (and it is still mockingly referred to as "that village" by inhabitants of the larger, more sophisticated metropolitan cities. It has grown to a healthy sprawl, with protected parklands and a ban on logging within so many Tsán of the town.

It is famed as a center of worship of Lord Thúmis, and it is currently renowned as the home of Prince Surundáno (despite His Highness's humble wishes). The Tower of the Pearl marks one of the highest points in the town; it is part of the temple complex to Lord Thúmis. Scales made from the shells of enormous river-creatures give its roof a marvellous nacreous luster. The Temples of Lord Thúmis and his Cohort Keténgku both operate hospitals here. (Much less prominently, the Temples of Lord Ksáru and his Cohort Grugánu operate costly private clinics.)

Haumá's present governor is No'ómu hiChagotlékka, of the White Stone Clan (High Clan, High Lineage). Born 2317, he is in his fifties. His hair is wispy, thinning, and his voice is high and thin. A decent man as well as a good bureaucrat, he holds audience every five days. It is said that he will hear anyone who has something to say. Sincere in his commitment to Lord Keténgku, he tries to help his subjects better their agriculture and solve their problems. With that squint, he is probably nearsighted, yet he enjoys going hunting. He holds few parties or fancy functions. He is a friend of Prince Surundáno. He has one wife, and one daughter (25 years old). (Source: Mitlanyál Vol. 1, p58)

The Standing Pinnacle Clan is very powerful in Haumá. The current fiefholder is a member: Chieftain Mórúsaí hiBa'áshcha (Medium Clan, Very High Lineage). He is a scion of an esteemed Kurtáni military bloodline.

The original Mórúsaí was notable for having used his personal funds and that of his clan to restore the 40th Medium Infantry around 2020 A.S. Now called "The Legion of Mórúsaí the Chieftain", some of its forces are posted to Katalál to police the central regions of the Empire but Haumá is the Legion's headquarters.

While Kúrtusha is the capital of the province of Kúrtur, most of the decisions concerning Kúrtur are made by officials in Haumá, nearly all of whom are Tsolyáni. As this insult continues even after so many centuries, it is no surprise many Kurtáni would not wish to live here, yet they are often seen in-town.

The unspoken truth is that much of Kúrtur has grown dependent upon Haumá for food, especially grain, and economic control keeps the entire province on Haumá's leash. The military presence of the 40th Medium Infantry Legion ensures it. However, while other towns might offer to supply Kúrtur, it also has to be admitted that the Kurtáni are getting a better deal from here, by far, and that is because of the combined influence and cooperation of Chieftain Mórúsaí and Governor No'ómu.

The lowliest inhabitants of this town try to dodge the heat by housing their folks up to three levels underground. A grayish haze drifts up from the poorest section, an unfortunate stuffy valley where the people live in even tighter concentration than usual.

Spools of Hmá-wool thread and yarn from the town of Chívyakainu are woven into large pieces here. The finest become durable tapestries of subtle color. The lower quality stuff becomes cheerfully garish rugs for export.

Scrolls From Dung

The (Low-status) Gauze Frame Clan somehow produces paper made from the excrement of the largest eldest Chlén beasts. They then make and sell little written documents, on practical or amusing subjects, to the poor (who are somewhat more likely to be literate here than elsewhere). The material is perfectly serviceable, durable and white, with no odor, but those above Low status are not willing to touch a material of such uncouth origins.

Village of Éqoresh (3613.IN) This is a thriving Sákbe Road Town. Goods are readily transported east and west. The lands nearby are rather populous, with small seasonal homesteads for various agrarian chores such as fermentation of beers, and distilling spirits. Gáin of a sweet type is grown here and around Srüqún.

Tower of Remonstratation (3613.JG) In modern times, this is a school owned by the Temple of Avánthe. Beyond a certain gate, no boys or men are allowed. Wealthy families may send their girl-children here from far away, to learn. On occasion, this might be done to break up some youthful romance that threatens a Clan's plan of marriage. The place is unusually well-guarded, by both warriors and a few mages, all women. It is whispered that the priestesses resort to magical methods to ensure a young lady follows the wishes of her Clan. If this is true, it might run counter to Tsolyáni law, which grants girls the option to become Aridáni if they so choose.

The place is a veritable maze. Before it was a school, it was a prison for those who ran afoul of the governor of the province of Khósa. A monastic garden exists on its

northeastern side. Run by the Temple of Dilinála, abused women may be relocated here, disappearing into safe anonymity amongst the Sisters of Tranquility.

Village of Bilúke (3613.JK) Some bizarre supernatural tragedy befell Bilúke around 700 years ago. Folk-belief holds strongly that to speak of it, is to invite it to happen again. There are no ruins left to mark the spot, just a waist-high stone engraved with a mysterious symbol. (Not depicted on map.)

Village of Srüqún (3613.JN) Nearly all the buildings here are a full two stories off the ground, built upon thick wooden pilings. Access is by ladders, which are counter-weighted so that they can be easily and quickly pulled up. Why, no one will say, but people of other villages know that this place was settled seven centuries ago by villagers who originally lived roughly 29km (18 miles) to the west in the village of Bilúke (3613.JK). It is considered ill-omened to discuss it. A sweet variety of Gáin is grown in this area. It is used for desserts and various liquors (primarily produced in the village of Éqoresh).

Hekadásu Spire (3613.LB) Patches of thick forest sprout from the sides of this unusually tall karst structure. Wooden staircases cling to it, leading up to a village at the top. Some of these stairs are narrow, with no railing. A handsome shrine to Lord Qón, consisting of a building with a tall roof with a roof-comb, is built on a cantilevered platform above several waterfalls that spews out of the rock. From here, one may enjoy a magnificent view of the valleys below. The water from the waterfalls is the start of the Stream of Bones, a tiny but navigable river.

Village of Lokhú (3613.LF) This appears to be a very sparsely populated place because the residents move in and out of the nearby woods, and their small rectangular clanhouses are left empty. From the region east of town, sometimes wood smoke can be smelled. Also in this area, hillside herders nudge their Hmá or Hmélu flocks to and fro between broad coppices.

As one approaches Lokhú up a long hill, amongst the thickening trees, there is an odd sight: a series of fourteen structures resembling staircases, in a long line, leading up to nowhere. The oldest are stone, and they are somewhat smaller, while the most recent are made of lumber. Wooden platforms extend from their tops.

Lokhú is a major source of fuel wood for Haumá. Large branches are dried, then dragged to the edge of a cliff to the east. When they are thrown down, they shatter into easily managed chunks, while the leaves mostly come off from the shock. Then, at the bottom, (Very Low Clan) charcoal makers gather it up, pack it in pits, and make charcoal of it below heaps of clay mud.

The Enigma of Lokhú

This village is known to be close to a Nexus Point. Visible as an opalescent shimmering the size of a door, it is currently located some 24m (eighty feet) above the ground-- five meters from the most recent platform. It was originally discovered on the hillside, but it is drifting southwest, away from the hillside, in short erratic jumps. The local Kurtáni villagers appear to have no interest in it; they are very busy folk. Their children may tell you, however, that a small gift thrown through the portal is often answered by a gift from the other side.

Town of Zúrshqu (3613.LL) The Bridge of Rayíl is located here. It is a small hospital built on wooden pilings between a shrine to Lord Ksáru and another shrine to Lord Thúmis, each positioned on a little hill. It is a cooperative venture to study and cure maladies of the feet. Its emblem is a simplified, somewhat abstract representation of a Gapúl tree. It is said that this Rayíl was a senior official of the Omnipotent Azure Legion who suffered terribly from pain in his feet. Eventually they both turned black and had to be removed. This brought him such relief that he established both shrines, and his "Bridge".

Hrása Estate (3613.MH) Situated upon the peak of a tall hill, this place is breezy and just a touch cooler. No roads lead to it, but it is easily seen from the Sákbe Road to the southeast. It is a collection of many small towers, platforms, and covered high walkways, primarily of natural wood, in many shades and hues. This property belongs to the Standing Pinnacle Clan (Medium Status). The Estate is not open to the public; it is a private resort for that clan (which is a ruling Clan of Haumá) and their friends. Visitors of typical human stature tend to feel small amidst the high ceilings and large archways. It is a sumptuous stopping-off point before going hunting in the hills and light forests. Confidentially, it is also where the Governor's representatives may meet with representatives of Kúrtur. It is discreetly but zealously defended by soldiers, especially sharp-eyed archers.

Like the Tower of Zúrshqu and the Bridge of Rayíl (3613.LL), the Hrása Estate is a masterpiece of carpentry. Its pine-scented halls are a peaceful retreat for the Governor of Haumá. To maintain its condition, it is systematically re-lacquered using costly heated resins that resist burning. By decree, the trees that ring the estate are also fire-resistant. While this does make the region resistant to fires (natural or otherwise), it also means that all fuel for cooking must be trekked from at least 16km (10 miles) away.

Field of Clashing Stones (3613.MK) This is a mysterious region of orange-red sand littered with irregular large and small rocks. It is difficult for Chlén beasts to even

walk through it; drawing a cart is not possible. Sometimes it appears that a stone has moved as if pushed along the ground with immense force, leaving a straight torn path. The largest of these rocks is larger than a Chlén beast. How the mysterious stones move (or perhaps are moved) has never been witnessed, but travelers on the way to or from the Tower of Zúrshqu have heard terrific noises, of stone smashing into stone.

Village of Se'ená (3613.OM) Around here, the land is covered in large grass-covered roughly conical bumps ranging in size from a house to a hill. (This is known "cone karst".) Crossing this land is very slow.

Flash floods are common whenever it rains. They turn the pockets between the hills into little ponds and lakes at random. The water obstacle can only be seen from close.

There are many roads and paths, nearly all unmarked. They weave back and forth between the hills, slowing travel for both humans and carts. Then they rejoin one another, willy-nilly. Larger roads lead to various valleys where crops are grown, while some of those that go to Se'ená are hardly wide enough to accommodate the local Hmélu herds single-file between steep slopes on both sides.

Several clanhouses are built in a ring about a circular lake. The locals employ a chimney with a kind of smoke-catching pocket of water, which prevents their location from being given away by the sight of smoke. Why they isolate themselves is unknown to outsiders.

Mírun Mound (3613.PC) See entry at (3713.BJ).

Village of Ashayá (3613.PD) This is a wooded area, a plateau with steep sides from which small peaks and cones protrude. The area in which Ashayá itself is built slopes away slightly to the south. The folk here are boisterous and proud. They have a Hirilákte Arena but it is really more of a large sandbox with a lattice roof and awnings for the spectators. Instead of a market that is open daily, theirs is open every third day. To the west, Mírun Mound rises like a great green breast towards the sky, with clouds gathered about the top.

Precious Pillars for Cities

A good portion of the lumber for building in Haumá has its origins in the area of Ashayá. The woodcutters here mainly belong to the Sé'iyau Mahé'ziyal, a Kurtáni "cult" that worships Makórsa (Lady Avánthe in Her capacity as guardian of trees).

Their challenge is to find tall specimens that have grown very slowly and evenly in the shade of their elders, until they could claim a place of their own in the canopy. Yet,

such a tree must not be from too deep in the forest, for then it would be too difficult to move as a single unit.

Extracting the best trees takes many days. They look for one with several horizontally festooning vines higher up, connecting it to its neighbors. Next, the tree is swarmed over by human climbers checking for rot or infestation.

Most lumber candidates are rejected at this stage. Most of the casualties also tend to occur at this point, as residents of the trees may lash out in defense of their home. They say there are many creatures that live up here that are entirely unknown to those who live on the ground.

If this goes well, then great lianas at the bottom are taken away, one by one. The thick vines are not necessarily parasites; they are often symbiotes, holding the tree up like the cords that keep a tent pole upright. The selected timber must be able to stand on its own for weeks after it has been cut free of the lianas.

At this point, a Hu'hún of Makórsa (vaguely like a shaman-priestess) is invited to the site. She may perform divinations, sacrifices, and perhaps a ritual blessing. The tree is trimmed of all branches (which are placed in a peculiar criss-crossing arrangement in its estimated "landing zone") then cut at the base.

As it topples over, its fall is slowed by the transverse vines still attached higher up. These are under immense strain and after the first few snap, the rest break in rapid succession with ear splitting cracks and crashes.

If the woodcutters are less fortunate, the timber shatters as it lands. (Maybe there was previously-unseen insect damage, or a crack that somehow escaped scrutiny.) The pieces may still be usable for other things, such as furniture. If the upper vines were severely misjudged, and did not slow the log's descent, much of it may be "only fit for Lokhú" (the charcoal-making village downstream). It will be carried out load by load to the river. On a very bad day, one or more people are killed.

However, if all goes well, they recruit as many people as they can, and use vines and mud to drag it to the Arjáshtara river. Two smaller companion timbers are tied to one side, and they ride it to Haumá.

Ch'ungamára Spire (3613.PG) There is a site near the top that is sacred to Makórsa, an aspect of Lady Avánthe. Sometimes members of the Kurtáni religious society, the Sé'iyau A'ózu, will make the difficult climb on a pilgrimage. They will then undertake a months-long rite that involves catching an adult Kúni bird.

Yaggásh Estate (3614.HD)



Town of Haumá (3613.IG)



Kásh Keep (3714.DE)



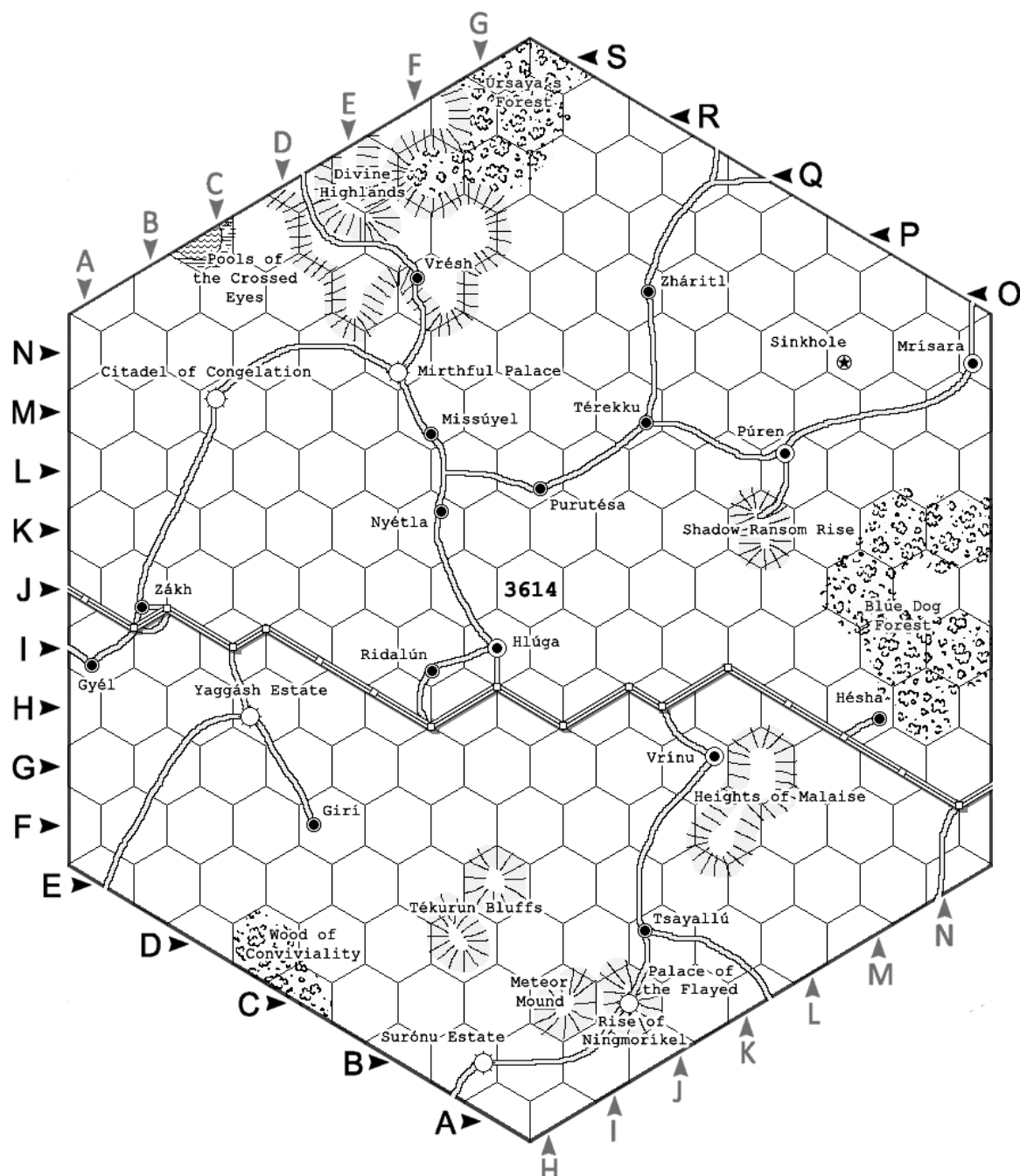
Town of Síketla (3714.JJ)



Town of Koyél (3814.AG)



Brands for the Stations of Brave Peripitation of Khósa Province



HEX 3614

The Sákbe roads mount the hills, connecting the far eastern and western extents of this Large Hex. Within living memory, battles of the Civil War between the forces of the Usurper Prince Dchich'uné and those of his most warlike siblings were fought along this road. A number of the white Sákbe towers, their blocks quarried from local stone, are unusually large.

Especially on the southern side, terraced fields hold the soil and copious water that runs off the neighboring hills. A complex array of miniature canals crosses between them. Easily planted and easily harvested, the different kinds of

grain are piled onto rafts which are towed by a pair of people, one on either side of the canal across the area.

Surónu Estate (3614.BG) The foundation of this structure dates to times in history when this region received much more water. It is a platform of light gray onyx blocks fitted together without mortar, standing three person-heights above the surrounding rise. When wet, intricate designs appear upon the darker gray, some clever trick of the ancients. Some of it is writing in Classical Bednálljan. There is a thinly-populated village in service to the Estate, built about the edge of this intriguing foundation. Numerous

staircases lead up to the bottom level of the Estate, which has three main buildings.



The Khéshchal bird can not be tamed, but there are some few that have befriended a human or two. Mrétil jests that she is the pet of the bird.

Meteor Mound (3614.CH) This orange granite hill rises out of the surrounding light woods like a bald head. It is said that a bolt of flame came straight down out of the sky. There was an earthquake, and where the bolt struck, blue-green fire shot out of the ground for weeks. The site was too hot and smoky to approach for two generations. When the heat and smoke cleared up, there was Meteor Mound. Rumors of very unusual creatures living on the site keep people away.

Palace of the Flayed (3614.CI) Built atop the Rise of Ningmoríkel (see the entry at 3614.CI), this is a disturbing collection of dark purple edifices with roofs and pillars tiled in pieces of iridescent carapace that cause it to sparkle from afar. Here are towers upon towers upon towers. Because of changes in the angles of the ground underneath as they were built, they lean at different angles in a fashion that becomes more pronounced the closer one stands. Looking up from below, it is rather disquieting. In ancient times, it is said, the building belonged to a cult now forbidden. Its priests tore the skin off their faces to honor their

god, Vósha Ssén. Today the Palace of the Flayed belongs to the Temple of Hrü'ü, which relishes its appearance. Its function is mainly administrative. It handles collection and storage of grain.

Rise of Ningmoríkel (3614.CI) The Palace of the Flayed (see the entry at 3614.CI) caps the highest point of this high and rocky hill. Its southwestern portion is an orange-tinted granite, while the rest is karst surging out of the ground. Over the centuries, the Rise has tilted in different directions for some geological reason.

Wood of Conviviality (3614.DD) (See 3514.PK)

Village of Tsayallú (3614.DJ) This big village is the center of a diligent farming community. From the highest rooftops of the clanhouses here, the elaborate terraces and small canals are easily viewed. They skirt the Tékurun Bluffs in the west, Meteor Mound to the southwest, and the Rise of Ningmoríkel to the south. (The Heights of Malaise to the northeast are too far away to be seen.) It is in Tsayallú that they craft the lightweight miniature rafts that make transporting harvested grain easy.

Tékurun Bluffs (3614.EG) These karst limestone hills have a slight orange tinge to them. They are ringed by farmlands that have been terraced for thousands of years. On their northernmost side, a spring was diverted to feed a squiggling stone slide that was crafted thousands of years ago. People bring little floating sleds out to ride it. It has been in use so long that it has been worn to glassy smoothness. At the close of the harvest, a little spring fair pops up for several weeks, with inexpensive rich salty and sweet street foods served by vendors. There are invariably a number of Grghúzh Páchi Léi to entertain, as well as enjoy the water slides.

Village of Girí (3614.FE) A local story relates that somewhere near here (either in this same Small Hex or those adjoining it), there is a deadly catacomb carved into the ground called the "Well of Mirror Metal". In ancient times, it provided a material used to make mirrors. Those who went into the Well, it is said, were punished with childlessness by Lady Avánthe.

Well of Mirror Metal (possibly 3614.FE) A legendary underground complex allegedly somewhere by the village of Girí, or adjacent Small Hexes (see the entry at 3614.FE).

Town of Vrínu (3614.GJ) This is the seat of a small fief made up of Vrínu, plus the villages of Tsayallú and Héshe. This region tends to beautifully terraced hillsides, most of them thousands of years old. The streets are arranged in concentric circles, with the temples at the edges, instead of centrally, together, about the Palace of the Priesthoods.

During the winter, Vrínu becomes a popular place for large parties. Travelers appear from all along the Sákbe Road to the north. To the displeasure of its mayor, Káipuru hiTelrá, this town is also the site of an unusually large number of unsolved murders.

To the east and southeast, the Heights of Malaise (3614.GK), a saddle ridge, can be seen in the distance, the top perpetually blighted.

Heights of Malaise (3614.GK) Visible from afar as a broad dirty gray hill with a fine horizontal striping, this place does, indeed, seem to emanate a sense of depression. It is completely covered in terracing; however, nothing will grow there. Around its lower portion, the crops do fine, but the top is a dead zone. If one ascends to the top, dry orange crystal residue can be seen on the ground in its furrows.

Yaggásh Estate (3614.HD) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This, the seat of the fief, is a populous settlement in the service of the clan of the Blade Raised High. The nominal Lord of the fief, a count, is Hasándri hiLédrunga, a young man of seventeen years (High Clan Status, Medium Lineage). Hasándri served in the Legion of the Golden Sunburst for four years. Due to his high birth, Count Hasándri was kept carefully far from danger. His family lives modestly, though elegantly, as their fortunes are deeply tied into the running of the fief, as investments. His sober clan-uncles (and a few aunts), most of them of respectable military background, see to the actual running of the area. They are most comfortable with Hasándri being a figurehead, and they scheme to keep him safe. Knowing he has no great say in the running of his fief, Hasándri himself longs to return to the military.

The Count has a highborn, though homely, wife fourteen years older than he, an Aridáni, by the name of Kélunel. After having fathered two children, he pursues the company of ladies his own age. It is said that Kélunel is looking for a second husband.

Village of Hésa (3614.HM) As one approaches the town, one passes interconnected wide pools of orange water, their construction vaguely similar to the region's terracing. Hot springs are Hésa's treasure, mineral waters around which the village formed. Those at the center of town are enjoyed by bathers. Those at the edge are used to fill broad puddles, which are drained into others below them, eventually turning orange in color. Those at the bottom are raked for orange salt crystals.

Village of Gyél (3614.IA) There are two villages that have this name. This is Gyél-Yaggásh. The other is Gyél-Zhanáya (3611.JF). Unloved and unsavory Gyél-Yaggásh is a Very Low status place. Three slaver clans run a market.

Crying in the Quarry

It is whispered that there is an old limestone quarry out in the countryside that has been made a slave-breeding pit. Such an operation is not normally profitable, as it means years of feeding a useless mouth, but this place, it is said, specializes in the sale of infants. Dark whispers claim these babes are destined to be sold to worshippers of forbidden gods who crave the souls of the most innocent.

Village of Ridalún (3614.IF) Golden fruits a-plenty fill the fields of the vineyards. They are used to make a thick sweet fruit sauce, itself nicknamed "ridalún" for its traditional place of origin. Fortified with brandy from the same fruits, and sealed into pottery, it is sold along the Sákbe road that runs all the way east-west throughout the Kúrt Hills region. It is a point of pride with the folk of the village that they are to pay their taxes in little crocks of fruit products.

Town of Hlúga (3614.IG) This is the seat of the fief. Several shipments of taxes paid in goods rather than coinage to the Governor of Khósa, have been hit by bandits. Kurtáni Foundationists are blamed. The fief is currently under orders to pay its taxes solely in coins and gems. Traditionally, the Fief of Hlúga is held by a Lord (Páchukoi) of the venerable lineage of Bezhánggi.

(See also 'About the Kurtáni Foundationists')

The Fanatical Uncle

Several years before the Civil War against the Usurper, Hlúga's Fiefholder and Páchukoi (Lord) Ütsai hiBezhánggi died by choking on a bone. Instead of the title passing to his first son, Mráda, a follower of Lord Hnálla, it was claimed by Chomókh, Ütsai's brother, a fanatic for Lord Sárku. He claimed that Emperor Dchich'uné had personally decreed this irregularity in the succession. The eldest son Mráda died soon after, also, it is said, by choking on a bone.

Lord Chomókh became very unpopular when he made a public speech how the Concordat ought to be revoked, and promised that Emperor Dchich'uné would do so. He invited his subjects to change their religion to Lord Sárku, in order to be on the winning side. His noisy proselytizing breaks the Concordat. Ütsai still makes his staff listen to his religious rants, another violation of the Concordat.

Legitimacy of the position is contested by Ütsai's second son (Chomókh's nephew), Nahír. The complaint includes a dark hint that worship of the Pariah Gods may be

involved- a very dangerous slander indeed. The scroll is presumably somewhere between Hlúga and the court of Avanthár.

Blue Dog Forest (3614.IM) This is a place regarded with trepidation. The roots of the tangled trees weave about rocks with holes like bubbly foam. Below them are numerous cave complexes. During the Time of No Kings, they served as shelters for heretic priests known as the "Blue Dogs". They captured artificers of great devices of the ancients, and renegade scholars. These captives were kept in stone labyrinths by the cultists. In the sky above this place, the stories go, are clouds of dark purplish blue shot through with lightning, from which a foul-smelling rain drizzles. This rain, they say, corrupts magical spells in dangerous ways.

Village of Zákx (3614.JB) There is a traditional government inspection post here, the Taster of the Wares. Responsible to the Governor of Khósa alone, he is second in prestige to the village Hetman. South of the Sákbe Road, there is a second inspection station to handle the traffic of the height of the harvest season. There is now a team of four inspectors in service to the head Taster.

The folk of Zákx tend to Medium to Low status. They generally despise those of the slaver-oriented village of Gyél, who are Very Low status. Goods that do not meet with the approval of the Taster of the Wares usually gets sent to Gyél-Yaggésh (3614.IA).

The Taster of the Wares

The original job was just to ensure the quality of items from the Citadel of Congelation. This has since become inspection for many other foods that pass along the Sákbe Road, receiving a small seal of approval if they pass. To this end, there are numerous platforms with wooden roofs, and places for Chlén carts to stop, alongside the main market. There is no regulation requiring this, it has simply become a respected and popular mark.

Every fourteen years, an apprentice is brought to join the current Taster, and the previous apprentice is promoted. There is now a team of four inspectors in service to the head Taster. South of the Sákbe Road, there is a second station to handle the traffic of the height of the harvest season.

The current Taster of the Wares is Jahúndik hiLa'óa (Medium Status, Medium Lineage), is highly respected for his ability to tell different sorts of fruits and their freshness apart. He is a jovial slender man, and it is common

knowledge that he enjoys hearing of the adventures of heroes, especially if it is first-hand.

Adventurers, especially heroes who are conspicuously wealthy, may later be approached by those with information about "The Market of the Rarest Fruits". This is a locked vault-like subterranean market where (so it is said) Eyes and other items are sold. Taster Jahúndik himself knows the Ksáruł-worshipping officiants of this institution.

Village of Nyétla (3614.KF) Nyétla is a prosperous location. An array of dirt trails lead west and southeast out of the village, into radial gardens, then swaths of grain rippling in the wind. Choice fruits and vegetables go to supply the Citadel of Congelation (3614.MC). A shrine to a military diplomat aspect of Lord Chegárra occupies a place of honor at the center of the village. It is locally known for the alleged presence of a species of large and colorful snake-like creature called a Mrájin. Those approaching the village may encounter a knee-height cube of stone with a bowl of beer in a depression on top. It is usual to do this once a month, a practice that is thought to have gone on since time immemorial.

Mrájin of Nyétla

Feathered like the Qáqtla, the Mrájin is a nocturnal semi-intelligent species that seldom shows itself to humans. It is colored black, scarlet, and turquoise. While it may technically be referred to as a "Sézhme", a snake-like creature, that word is rarely applied. Found only within several Small Hexes of Nyétla, it prowls about the fields devouring many crop pests. It is eyeless, and has two lower jaw parts. It usually crushes and swallows prey whole, then retreats to its burrow. Most strangely, if a Mrájin dies, its body decays to a dry gray mulch in minutes. It reproduces asexually, as a live-bearer, producing only one offspring every few years.

The Mrájin is psychic with its own kind, to the point of uniting into a kind of herd-mind when several are together. As a result, this group will tend to attack a single victim in combat. Questioning the locals may uncover the old story that a Pé Chói who once encountered them was driven mad.

In general, it is benevolent, peaceful, and has an odd sense of humor. Should the villagers fail to leave the customary beer, Mrájin may cause mischief, such as opening the Hmélu pens so that they will be found empty in the morning. Despite being told to leave them alone, curious local children usually stay up at least once in their

life trying to get a glimpse of the Mrájin enjoying its due, with a few of them being successful.

Mrájin of Nyétla (.7)

Wandering: 20%, 1/2/3 Lair: 80%, 1/2/3

PHYS: 5	DEFT: 19	SEMI: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 8	Size Mod: +2
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 6 ground	
Defenses:	Melee: 4	Missile: 4
Armor: 2/2	Hits: 2	Energy: 10
		Magic: 2

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Bite	15-	2/3/4	
Fling Stone	15-	1/2/3	12 range

Other Abilities:

Climbing Skill: 14-

Alien Mind: Any form of mind-to-mind contact with a Mrájin is dangerous. A WILL check at -2 must be made. On a success, brief contact is made, leaving the person with a fleeting sense of the creatures' intentions and attitudes, but the disturbing sense that they escaped permanent assimilation. On a failure, the contact is safely broken, with a lingering impression of an alien whose personality and intelligence is constantly in flux. On a fumble, two points of INTL are lost for two months (-probably with no way to know how long this will last). They will be permanently afflicted with alien instincts, such as an urge to eat small prey live, and an urge to invade friends' personal space.

Shadow Ransom Rise (3614.KK) According to local lore, in ancient times, there was a temple settlement atop the broad conical hill. Devotees worshipped "Prasanénu the Headless". Like the Tsołyáni today, they believed in the various parts of the self, including the Chusétl or "Shadow Self". Through some frightening ritual, worshippers were severed from their Chusétls. Known as "the Dreamless", it is said that these unblinking warriors never slept. Superstitious peasants will not go near this place by dark.

Town of Púren (3614.LC) From the side of a hill, a large spring gushes. A remarkable device has been built, harnessing this feature to power a grain mill with great hardwood gears and two horizontal circular grinding stones, their material from the Divine Highlands.

Village of Purutésa (3614.LH) Orchards surround this hamlet. The clanhouses are small and cramped, with people opting to sleep on platforms and balconies during the dry season. As each crop comes into season, there is a mad rush to fill baskets and lightweight mesh bags with goods. In between there are times of idleness in which folks enjoy dice, cardgames, and other gentle pastimes.

Citadel of Congelation (3614.MC) The citadel itself is a limestone fort, whitewashed, with pinkish brown horizontal stripes near the base. It was not a deliberate touch, but simply an effect of color from the soil leaching up into the plaster during the rainy season. Nevertheless, the stripes add to the overall impression that the edifice is quite attractive. It is a well-loved jewel in the possession of the noble Clan of Sea Blue.

As one crests hills near the citadel, numerous small cylindrical stone buildings with ovens and side chimneys on one side come into view. The citadel's name is quite literal, for these are devices for thickening the juice of fruits. . The most expensive - at two hundred Káitars a pot - is made from small berries picked wild in the light forests of the area.

White-colored crocks with little brown stripes around the base are loaded with myriad jams, syrups, and chutneys. The filled containers are stored in the basement of Sea Blue Clanhouse. The few outsiders who have been there report it is strangely cold, even painfully so if one venture deep into this area. Items brought out are greatly thickened (some even dehydrated). Some speculate that the Clanhouse has a portal to another Plane. Some say that the cold comes from an item of the ancients, as large as a hand and resembling a compass.

When they are ready, the goods are packed in straw and sent down a nice smooth and wide road to Zákx. One quarter goes east, to the town of Hlúga, for distribution through the fief. One quarter goes west to Haumá.

Half of the wares of the Citadel of Congelation are claimed by the Empire. They go directly to the Imperial Palace at Avathár aboard unusually large slave-borne palanquins,

Village of Missúyel (3614.MF) For as far as the eye can see, there are fields of Dná and Gáin grains. Industrious little Missúyel benefits from being surrounded by other settlements, which makes predators more rare. The biggest excitement was three years ago, when a slightly unusual storm from the north blew a number of Káyí into the area. Lives were lost as the villagers at first tried to kill them with Chlén-hide scythes, which had no effect. Ultimately, they managed to kill the "Floating Eyes" with clubs. Then they somehow tanned the tough skins into bizarre lumpy lanterns to hang over the marketplace on ropes attached to tall posts.

Village of Térekku (3614.MI) Clanhouses of Térekku tend to be collections of long rectangles, as there is a local taboo against building more than one stories up. As a result, one may see thin wispy plumes of smoke marking the village location, but one does not see the village until one is practically upon it.

Tending rows of little kilns for parching grain, then cracking it to small fragments with hand mills, are common clan occupations. Treated thus, it will only need boiling water poured over it to become porridge.

Mirthful Palace (3614.NF) During the rainy season especially, this is a little resort village built around an elaborate a central building. It is built on the west side of a hill whose peak delays sunrise for several hours. Liquor is inexpensive in this place, but high-quality goods are not to be found (as those were drunk first). The Divine Highlands (3614.QE) are just visible in the north, and one can also see the village of Vrésh (3614.OF) from here. Many pleasant balconies with lacquered wooden railings overlook the road that eventually leads to the soberer Citadel of Congelation.

The Mirthful Palace itself belongs to the poor but proud Red Scarification Clan. It is built upon a mound that marks the site of many past Dítlána razings. There is a rumor that this clan keeps a dungeon here.

The Long-Sufferer

The Long-Sufferer is a traditional post in the Province of Khósa. (The full title is "Long-Suffering and Just Judge-to-the-Governor"). This magistrate deals primarily with very low to medium clan status disputes. The current Long-Sufferer is Tazhún hiSenára, of Low Lineage in the (High Status) White Stone Clan. He was originally from the village of Áshaya (3613.PD). He was an orphan raised by "wild" Kurtáni. He was a member of the Sé'iyau Arutáo, the Hnálla-oriented religious society of the hill people. He was promoted to Hu'hún (very vaguely, like a shaman or a deacon; he has the religious knowledge of a Third Circle priest). While Tazhún is a very hard-working and conscientious judge, he misses the wilderness terribly, and the high point of his year is a hunting trip.

The Kúyok, the Ugly "Bird"

A local oddity is a ground-dwelling bird, known as the Kúyok. It resembles a four-legged Káika bird. It is normally a biped, but there are two smaller legs closely in front of the usual two. It may be the product of genetic engineering (perhaps somebody who wanted more drumsticks?), or it could be a mutant strain. Perhaps it is a bird analog from one of the home worlds of the friendly non-humans.

In any case, the extra feet become a blur as it runs rapidly up a slope when alarmed, displaying its small upswept tail in a short fan as it goes. Although it cannot fly, the Kúyok can flap its wings and run straight up a wall

or tree. Whatever its origins, Kúyok meat is delicious. The eggs are cooked with traditional seasonings that turn them a bright pinkish-purple.



The odd four-legged Kúyok bird may have originally come from one of the Páchi Léi homeworlds. Locals will also call it a "Káika".

Sinkhole (3614.NM) Here the landscape is interrupted by a very circular kilometer-wide hole. The edge is a pale gray limestone ledge. Nine meters (thirty feet) down is the surface of a tiny lake of pure water, apparently fed by a spring. Because of the way the ledge hangs over, climbing out without rope is extremely difficult.

Town of Mrísara (3614.NO) Exchanging clan-daughters between corresponding clan-houses in the town of Hlúga (3614.091) has kept this far-flung edge well-connected to the seat of the fief. Many people here are employed in clanhouses whose main businesses are parching and milling grain so that they will cook quickly, requiring less fuel, in the cities.

Village of Vrésh (3614.OF) Located on top of a tall stone hill, Vrésh can be seen from a fair distance away (Small Hexes 162, 163, and 178 in this Large Hex). There are several wooden watchtowers in Vrésh from which the Mirthful Palace (3614.NF) can be seen. There is a prison complex for the province of Khósa here, built from the local

stone. Other than that, the place is a home base for herders who take their bleating Hmá-beast charges up into the Divine Highlands (3614.QE) to grow exceptionally strong thick coats. The pastoralists also range the myriad green rolling hills between here and Zháritl. Mortars, pestles, broad grinding bowls, and similar tools are made from the local stone, whose use is said to enhance longevity. Slaves with pointed oval stones of the same material chip them slowly into shape.

Village of Zháritl (3614.OI) The clanhouses of Zháritl are spread out a bit more than usual, upon the crests of a close cluster of hills. Its market is along a north-south road that makes a slight north-south S-curve. This location is isolated by a little "sea" of surrounding hills. Instead of going on to rivers, streams go towards ponds, making this an easy place for strangers to get lost. These pools, between Vrésh and Zháritl, make it an excellent area for Hmá herding.

The roads that lead to and from this location have a number of beautiful long valley-spanning old bridges, made of wood and stone, to shorten up their winding progress. During the civil war with the forces of Usurper-Prince

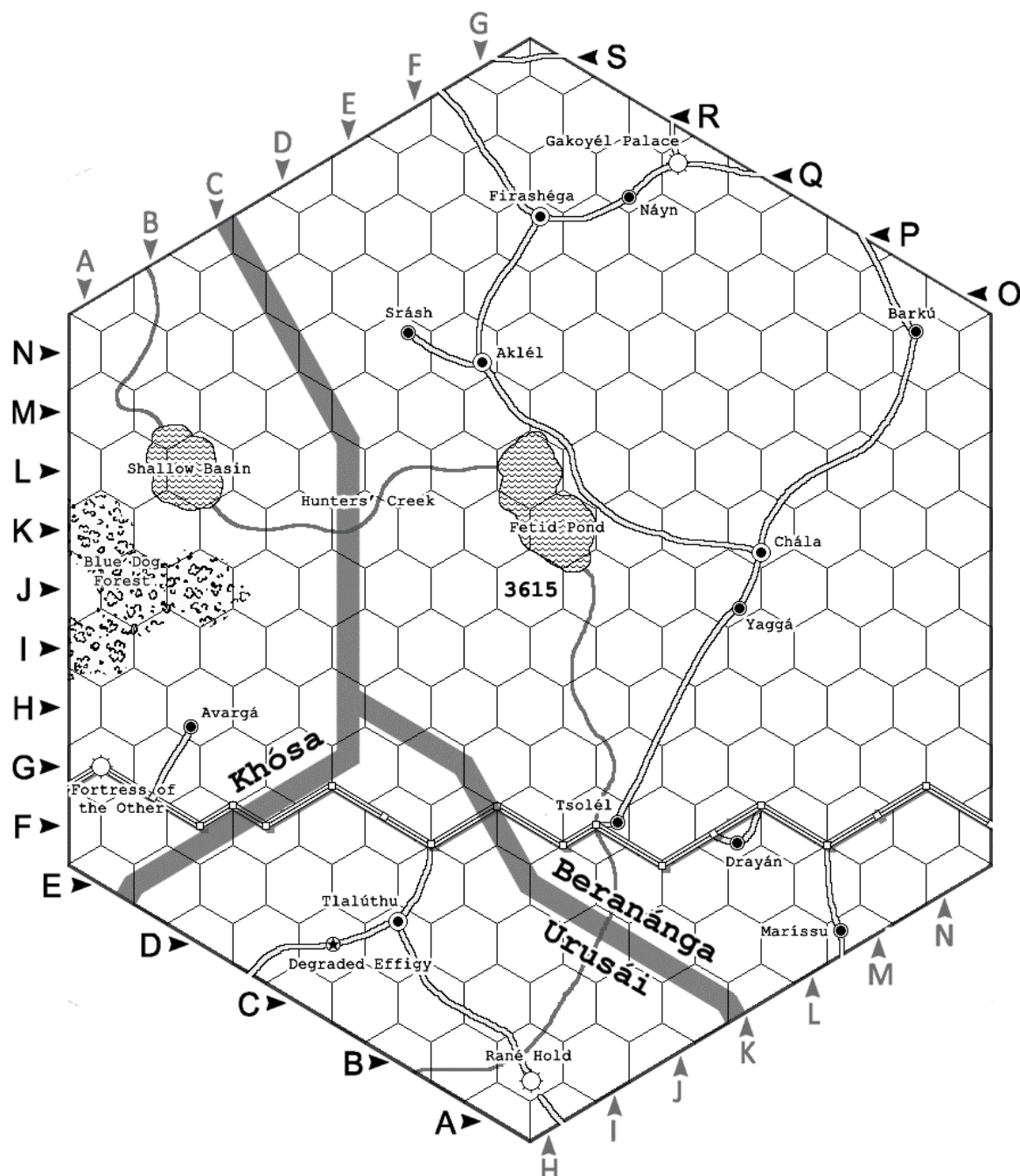
Dhich'uné, the foundations of several of these mysteriously fell apart, rendering some bridges unusable. It has taken years to reconstruct them from the rubble, and several are not yet finished. Thus, goods coming down this way are primarily being ported by slaves.

Pools of the Crossed Eyes (3614.PC) See 3714.BJ

Divine Highlands (3614.QE) The plentiful grass growing here is attractive to Hmá and Hmélu beasts, while the chill here encourages short but thick fur. This Small Hex and its adjoining Small Hexes are not karst (landforms of limestone) but instead, a mottled dark bluish granite-like rock. It resists being quarried and carved but pieces of it do crack off, and get carted away for use in masonry. Mruggá's Hold (3714.DL) is located on the northern slopes. The village of Vrésh (3614.OF) is situated on a southern hill of this formation; useful items are crafted out of the tough local stone. Hláká will not come here, and, if questioned, will flatly refuse to explain why. Its highest point is at (3614.QE).

Úrsaya's Forest (3614.RH) See entry at 3715.GA.





HEX 3615

The people of the area roughly encompassed by this Large Hex are unusually proud of their particular livelihoods. In addition to symbols for Clan and deity, they proudly display emblems of their profession. A likely way to earn their disfavor is to expect a plum farmer to do the work of a bearer, or to try to hire a tailor to dig a ditch. This behavior began with an old decree by the Tsolyáni governor that all citizens of the region would wear such identification. There are also customary small ornaments for the different fields of work, such as a particular shape of ear plug for those who grind Dná grain to flour.

The portion of this Large Hex northeast of Hunters' Creek (mostly within the Province of Beranánaga) are some of the most highly fought-over places. It is the southern tail of the area nicknamed the "Golden Meadows". Fortunately for the peasantry, many of these fights are resolved as ritual "scaled down" Qadárni battles.

Rané Hold (3615.BH) This is the seat of Rané Fief, which straddles the boundary between Beranánaga and Urusái. Little intermittent streams that flow into Hunters' Creek are central to the area's prosperity, which depends on the cultivation of Yáfa rice. A string of four large wooden bridges to the northwest form a causeway that is much

needed during the rainy season, when the surrounding land becomes a chin-deep marsh of mud.

Degraded Effigy (3615.DE) A strange sculpture resembling three humans seated and fused back to back sits atop a stony hill. Either the faces have been hacked away, or they never had eyes and noses to begin with. The blocky heads do sport open gaping mouths large enough for several humans to crawl in. Rumor has it that an expedition from the Temple of Hrū'ū attempted to destroy the Degraded Effigy long ago. After a string of disasters befell them, they stopped; they got as far as chipping away a third of one foot.

Town of Tlalúthu (3615.DF) Tlalúthu remains obscure despite a relatively high population for a town. The northwest and northeast parts were once villages of their own, but have been swallowed up. A popular local drink is a fresh orange-tinted beer made from Dná grain. Made without herbs, it cannot be exported, as it spoils. The markets of Tlalúthu are full of perpetually drunk patrons. Support for the Temples of Lady Dlamélish and Lady Avánthe are growing here.

Village of Maríssu (3615.DM) Patches of trees, especially Gapúl, shade the way to this village. Pale golden flowers are planted along the way. A kilometer east of the village, a deep stream with stone banks appears, flowing into the porous rocks a kilometer to the south. Plump healthy fish and fish-like creatures are often caught here.

Village of Drayán (3615.FK) Though their clanhouses are in the village, roughly half of the farmers of Drayán work lands on the north side of the Sákbe Road. Quiet and well-run, the hostels of Drayán are owned by clans loyal to the Dark Trinity. Unattended shrines to Lords Hrū'ū, Ksárul, and Sárku form a triangle about the town. Other deities are not represented. (However, there is an old retired priest of Lord Keténgku named Gavúk who hangs out at the garden on the edge of the public square daily. He offers friendly advice if asked.)

Village of Tsolél (3615.FI) Hunters' Creek passes by this place. Rows of stone barns house heaps of dry green fodder. This is carried to the Sákbe Road to feed Chlén beasts. Stored with a little seed still on the stems, this is a favorite food. Chlén beasts can be walked down from the market atop the road bend to dip their muzzles in the sparkling water and fill up. To the north grow stands of tall reeds, their roots credited with cleaning up the creek. As idyllic as Tsolél can be, it is also Very Low clan status, with nothing to recommend it to the sensible highborn person.

Fortress of the Other (3615.GA) Built upon the turn of the Sákbe Road, this defensible structure with several towers is abandoned today. There are no longer roofs, just

stone courtyards connected by wide stairs, and walls. During the recent Civil War, it was occupied by the troops of Prince Eselné, and used as a temporary tent encampment for several years. It has since become a marketplace, and when the Imperium gets around to it, it may be granted official 'village' status.

The mysterious name of this place defies clear explanation. Yet, it probably still has significance for some relevant faction out there, as attempts to rename it have failed. The only insight that locals can offer is that it was shortened from an older name: Fortress of the White-Eyed Other Who Has No Rivals.

Village of Avargá (3615.HC) Peasants comb the shrubbery for wildcrafted berries to send all the way to the Citadel of Congelation. Throughout this area, within the boundaries of the Province of Khósa, forest plants from the Pé Chói world struggle to grow alongside more common tree crops.

The exotic Pé Chói foods are brought here and there by shrewd merchants (mostly Páchi Léi), who rely on the information brought by the itinerant Grghúzh Páchi Léi to locate the rare suitable customer.

It is said that Avargá was built upon the ruins of a small fort belonging to an Imperial legion of Pé Chói. They lived there for several centuries, but for some unknown reason, Pé Chói always hated the place. When given permission, they went westwards, to Pán Cháka, as soon as they could.

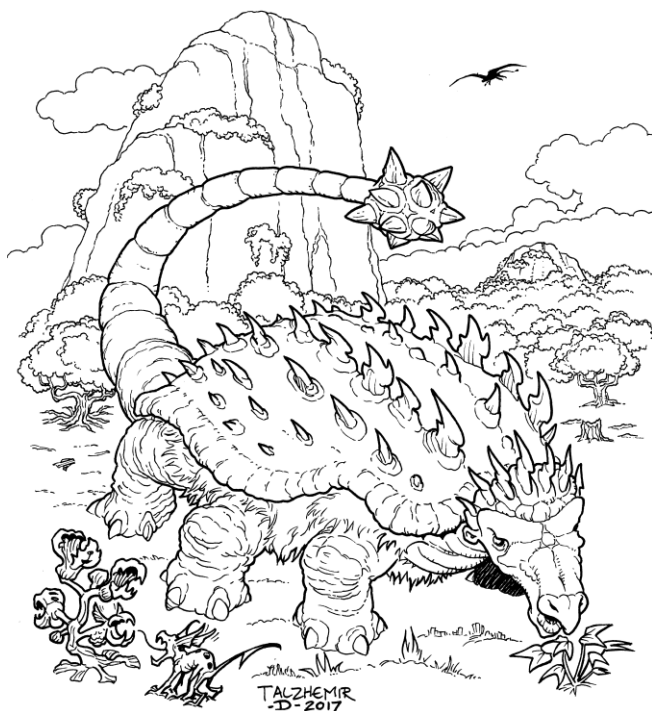
Hunters' Creek (3615.HI, 3615.LF, 3615.NB, 3715.EI) Flowing out of the Reservoir of Hrúgga (see the entry at 3814.FC), is an eccentric rill, slow-moving in some places, but, joined by other streams, sometimes fast. Then, as the water may unexpectedly drain away into the stone, it can grow sluggish again. Ancient dams are said to form many lakes, including the Shallow Basin (3615.LC) and the Fetid Pond (3615.LH). Very long reed-like plants grow between the Fetid Pond and the village of Tsolél. It is mainly only navigable by boat during the rainy season. It can become fractious whitewater with little warning. During a storm, it is prone to flash floods. In ancient times (up until the reign of Emperor Métlunel I "the Foolish", c. 1157 A.S.) they say that Hunters' Creek was a series of deep and peaceful channels, ideal for boat travel, and deliciously fresh to drink.

Blue Dog Forest (3615.JB) See entry for Blue Dog Forest (3614.IM).

Village of Yaggá (3615.JK) People here are descended from Kurtáni long long ago, when the area was still forest. Local custom causes them to refuse to use tools of iron, steel, copper, bronze, or other metal. They believe it brings bad luck upon the village and have as little to do with

metal-users as possible. The (Low status) Clan of the Whirling Stone is based here; they make Chléen hide implements, but not clothing or armor. Arrows made here will invariably be tipped with delicate but razor-sharp bone.

Town of Chála (3615.KK) This is the seat of the fief. It might have been considered as a location for one of the "Stations of Brave Peripatation" but for one thing: Chála has always been very self-sufficient, and conducts little trade with other places. To the east are fenced lands with stands of trees for keeping in Tsi'll beasts. These Tsi'il beast preserves are the private property of Very High-status individuals. As it is unlikely anybody would be here for a reason other than poaching, the (High status) ranchers shoot first, and ask no questions.



The Tsi'il beast is not domesticated, but by killing its predators, it can be grown to a large size before being hunted on private preserves.

Shallow Basin (3615.LC) Fed by Hunters' Creek, the Shallow Basin is like an enormous puddle in a depression of a limestone plain. This white stone is freckled with holes from the size of a fist to a cart wheel. The water is drinkable if cooked first, and does not taste particularly good. At least not to humans - many animals from other homeworlds appear here during the dry season, and they seem to relish it. Predators may be seen curiously close alongside prey, in that strange temporary truce of the watering hole.

Fetid Pond (3615.LH) Hunters' Creek flows into this murky smelly yellow-brown body of water surrounded by bamboo-like plants. The water continues southwards

through stands of reeds that grow up to five manheights. Various dangerous creatures lurk here.

Village of Srásh (3615.NF) Like its much larger neighbor Aklél, Srásh is known to have been the birthplace of several telepaths, but this has not happened in a decade. Some say Srásh has not appeared to produce a telepath because the children are stolen, their deaths faked before their clans even realize they are special. It is thus standard for a child's psychic talent to be hidden, lest they be taken away.

Town of Aklél (3615.NG) This location is known to have been the birthplace of several Imperial telepaths. It was also the hometown of Prince Bashél Tlakotáni, an Imperial heir four generations before Emperor Hirkáne. Raised by the Golden Bough Clan, Bashél renounced the Gold, and became the mayor of Aklél. A statue of him looms over each of the marketplaces. To the east of Aklél is a region of fine farmland, but some 25 miles away perhaps, its value is marred by the alleged presence of demons or monsters called Sijánga. See the text box for information about the Sijánga.

The Sijánga

Sometimes animals are found dead, their bodies drained of all liquid. It is the calling card of creatures called Sijánga, "the Unseen Blood Stealer". Victims are various species: humans, Dnélu, Zrné, Chnélh, and so on. This has occurred for thousands of years. West of Barkú (3615.NN) and east of Aklél (3615.NG) is the rocky plain said to be haunted by them. They are said to have come from the vicinity of the village of Hanó (3716.CE). They are described spiky indistinct light-swallowing silhouettes, of human height, moving twice as fast as a man. Sightings have occurred in Small Hexes 3615.NK, 3615.OJ, and 3615.OK. Thirteen years ago, a team of adventurers was hired to investigate. Their dehydrated bodies were found in a field. A priest attempted a spell to determine how they had died. Something went terribly awry; he was sent to a mental institution at a Temple of Ksáru.

Village of Barkú (3615.NN) The farms of Barkú cling close to the roads and the village is built upon a hilltop. A ring of spiky projections is maintained. Oil is sacrificed to Lord Chiténg to keep lamps burning about the perimeter beyond this, as protection against evil. Barkú is east of the rocky area where the dreaded Sijánga demons have been seen (see the text box at 3615.MK).

Town of Firashéga (3615.PH) The thousand little hills about this location make farming more of a challenge, but the dry-loving plants on hilltops produce very sweet fruit. The game of Kévuk is very popular here. Where the road from

Náyn enters Firashéga, there is a large sculpture depicting Masséfa, the second Aspect of Lord Qón. It has upswept ears and a toothy muzzle; it rears up on its hind legs. In its four upper limbs, it holds a golden disc, a mace, a pot, and a sword. It faces roughly eastwards, and a little south. It is treated with respect by Kurtáni, who recognize it as their deity Yá'huón.

Village of Náyn (3615.QI) A monastic complex dedicated to Chiráshin Tuléngkoi, an aspect of Lord Hnálla, is built here. It is covered in small cut chips of glass so that it sparkles from afar. The devotees of this deity wear only jewelry of gold, diamonds, and strings of crystals upon their tanned bodies. In one of the many open courtyards, there is a large curious device formed out of an angled block of stone. An oval area has been carved out and lined with shiny pieces of gold and glass mirror. When golden bowls of water are placed at a particular spot during the day, the water soon boils. Thus purified, it is given to pilgrims to drink.

Gakoyél Palace (3615.QI) Located between Náyn, Hanó, and Saór, this eccentric but peaceful place is the property of the Temple of Thúmis. It is used as a school of business, with also some training in various kinds of mathematics. Before it belonged to the Temple, it was an abandoned ruin for centuries.

From the air, the Palace itself can be seen to be a neat crescent with 33 walls. 20 are on the outside, while 13 are a curve facing south, making it a fat crescent. This part of the structure is decorated with colored tiles of stone polished to a mirror-like finish. Stone walkways converge on this centerpiece.

Nearby, permanent pavilions of whitewashed wood serve as classrooms (mainly during the rainy season). A settlement has grown up around it composed of hostels for students, run by various clans. There are a few small stands of Gapúl trees with many benches built about their bases. (Students who have stayed out too late are sometimes found napping here, a thing the school frowns upon.)

An Unwelcome Extra-Curricular Activity

A year ago, an ambitious group of priestesses of the Temple of Dlamélish requested permission to build a small brothel on the northwest side of the Palace, meant to please merchants traveling between Saór and Náyn. They pointed out how lucrative it would be, and offered to pay rent to the school.

The School at Gakoyél Palace refused, phrasing it in a most flattering fashion. They pleaded that the school's teachers could not be expected to compete with the fleshly bounties of the devotees of the Emerald Goddess

The priestesses countered that their services could be reserved as prizes for those who accomplished the highest grades. They would be delighted to provide rewards for the most diligent students.

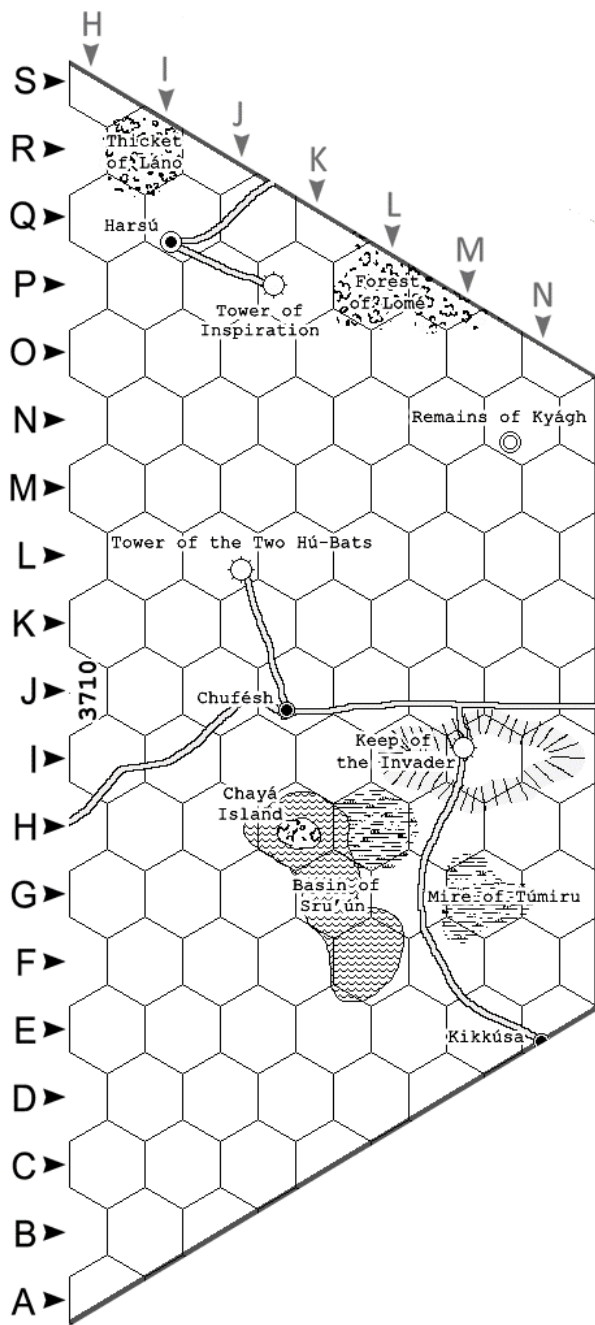
But, it was just no use. Just as at Náyn and Ssór, the priestesses of Lady Dlamélish were turned down here. These professional women from the nearby town of Firashéga have still not given up. Three of them have applied to the School as students.

Now there is some idle speculation among the faculty as to why exactly these ladies want to be near the site of Gakoyél Palace so badly.

The Bridge of Relinquishing

On the road from Saó in the north, one passes over a white arched bridge. It is the custom of students to toss copper Qírgal-pennies into the water here, in a ritual gesture symbolic of leaving behind petty ideas. When it storms, a brook that runs southwards eventually brings the little coins to a rank-smelling reed-edged pond on the far edge a large graveyard. Sometimes fanatical devotees of Lord Duritlámish wade into the water with rakes to gather the coins as they pray for release from painful diseases by death. It is not a Temple-endorsed practice, merely a strange local custom that began long ago.





HEX 3710

Without any Sákbe Roads, this area is truly a "backwater". By day, Kurukú go skittering about over the rocks. At night, numerous Hú bats may fill the skies with flocks that shift like crazy smoke, hinting at the presence of caves somewhere.

Weighing about a pound each, the local Ch'múni bugs contribute to keeping the area primitive by destroying anything made of Chlén hide or wood. Because of Ch'múni, the few trees that there are will be found atop stony outcroppings.

Ch'múni Bugs

The Mire of Túmiru is infested by "Ch'múni", segmented creatures the size of two fists together, with five powerful gnawing mandibles. They leave living tissue and metal alone, but busily chew Chlén hide and wooden items apart into pea-sized chunks. This is apparently a nest-building instinct unrelated to feeding.

This lifeform begins as a fist-sized transparent jelly blob with a visible muck-eating digestive system. It eventually forms a baseball-sized cocoon that looks like a sphere with an attractive colorful swirled surface. It emerges as its hard bug-like form, already pregnant, and only lives for a few weeks after.

Ch'múni are not found elsewhere. They probably rely on something in the Mire of Túmiru for reproduction. They may be a vestige of some long-ago star-settler's dream garden.

Ch'múni are attracted to Chlén hide, and can seriously injure a Chlén beast. The creature might even die because they fail to notice their injuries until it is too late.

The Kurukú ("the Giggler") finds the shelled Ch'múni a delicacy. Humans, it is said, should only eat Ch'múni in very small quantities. How they might affect the other non-humans is unknown.

Village of Kikkúsa (3710.EN) Please see entry for Kikkúsa in Large Hex 3610.SG).

Basin of Sru'un (3710.GK) While monstrous beasts are common in other lakes and rivers of Tsolyánu, the Basin of Sru'un has no such aquatic predators. The Jiró'he (see the text box) claim that is their doing. The northeastern shore of the Basin is overrun by swampland, a northwestern continuation of the Mire of Túmiru (3710.GM).

The Jiró'he

A number of "wild" people known as the Jiró'he live a simple life on the edge of this lake, poling about, hunting Káika birds with carved sticks, and beating the grains off of feral Yáfa rice into their rafts. They speak a dialect of modern Tsolyáni. Ethnically, they appear to be a mix of Tsolyáni and Kurtáni features. No one is sure where they came from. They live primarily on Chayá Island. Jiró'he bury animal-stomachs filled with salt and peeled Ch'múni to make a pungent condiment. It is rumored that the Jiró'he are followers of a urine-obsessed aspect of Hriháyal.

Mire of Túmiru (3710.GM) Blackish grasses and tall thorny fern-like plants dominate the landscape. On the edges are palm-like trees. This area, and its continuation at the Basin of Sru'ún, smells bitter and sour. The Mire is dotted with small mounds formed by Ch'múni, which reduce trees to little heaps of woodchips.

Chayá Island (3710.HK) Positioned in the northern end of the Basin of Sru'ún, this is the secluded home of the Jiró'he people. Their little clanhouses are made of reeds and animal hides tarred with blue-gray "Shú'ak", a foul-smelling substance that both repels vermin and prevents burning. One of the ingredients of Shú'ak is fermented urine. Each clanhouse has a communal Shú'ak pit in the back, a clay-lined receptacle for collecting urine. Despite the local Ch'múni bugs, this island is thickly forested because the Jiró'he paint the bases of the trees with Shú'ak. The Jiró'he will not sell or trade away their Shú'ak; they believe it holds some of their magical essence and can therefore be used against them.

Village of Chufésh (3710.JK) Though there is not so much distance between them, there is relatively little contact between Chufésh and Keep of the Invader. Fields give a meager return for the labor. The folks here tend to be taciturn and dour, and they look underfed. There are more clanhouses than the population ought to warrant because some are abandoned. In the spring, they must take measures against the Ch'múni bugs creeping up from the south. Their efforts at housekeeping are not always successful, leading to collapses of wooden structures. Despite this, there is a beautiful yellow jade effigy of a Ch'múni in the village square... (See the text box for Ch'múni in Large Hex 3710.)

The Dangerous Children of Chufésh

The population of this place is small because they refused to surrender to the Mu'ugalavyáni in 2020 A.S. Most of the adults were executed. The soldiers allowed the children to live because they planned on selling them into slavery. In one village, the youngsters somehow got hold of a number of Ch'múni, and used them to break out of their Chlén hide bonds. They also turned the bugs loose on their captors' weapons. The children then escaped and fled to Jálel. In a battle with little glory, the Tsolyáni defeated the unarmed and unarmored invaders. Soon, clan cousins came from other villages to repopulate Chufésh and take care of the heroic orphans. They eventually put up a Ch'múni bug statue to commemorate the events.

Keep of the Invader (3710.JM) This is the seat of the Fief of Rálljoru. By custom, however, the name of Rálljoru is never written down, probably because he was a high-ranking soldier who led his forces against the armies of Kurtáni natives. The place is always referred to as the Keep of the Invader instead. It is located close to the highest point of a prominent ridge that runs west-to-east. This fort later played an important strategic role in defending Tsolyánu against the Mu'ugalavyáni who came through the Chákas and took Katalál in 2020 AS.

Remains of Kyágh (3710.NN) This is a region of bizarre and extremely alkaline sands. Mostly, it is, white, with purplish red specks. The slightly caustic dust leaves the throat raw. Rain runs off of it and somehow leaves it dry. During the dry season, as the wind blows it, it uncovers dessicated bodies. Most are human, but many are examples of the various friendly nonhumans. On very rare occasions, a stiff fibrous corpse is revealed that belongs to no known species.

Tower of the Two Hú-Bats (3710.LJ) A dark-colored design depicting two Hú bats within a circle is worked into the pattern of the large off-white bricks. One is flying upwards, and the other is flying downwards. It is a squarish compound from the air, each corner in one of the cardinal directions. The highest tower (the one with the bat motif) is at its northern corner, and Hú bats do indeed live in it. The Mu'ugalavyáni who occupied this place years ago (around 2020 A.S.) were captured and ransomed. It is abandoned today. Because of the difficulty of travel, it is not a sought-after piece of property.

Tower of Imprecation (3710.PK) While the more sophisticated city Tsolyáni tend to believe the Gods are far above muttered mortal prayers to call down harm upon others, provincial Kurtáni at this tower have made it a business to claim they can do just that. In exchange for donations, the ostentatious Imprecators will utter pleas unto the Gods, asking for terrible fates to be visited on various individuals named. They claim that they have possessed this talent since the days of the Priest Kings. Thusfar, the various modern priesthoods have been content to accept inducements to look the other way, ignoring these breaches of official Temple teachings. However, when a lordling in Krúkkurru (3711.EC) was actually struck by lightning, his family demanded the Imprecators be charged with murder. Meanwhile the assassin's clans of Harsú have demanded Shámlla for the offense of infringing upon their business.

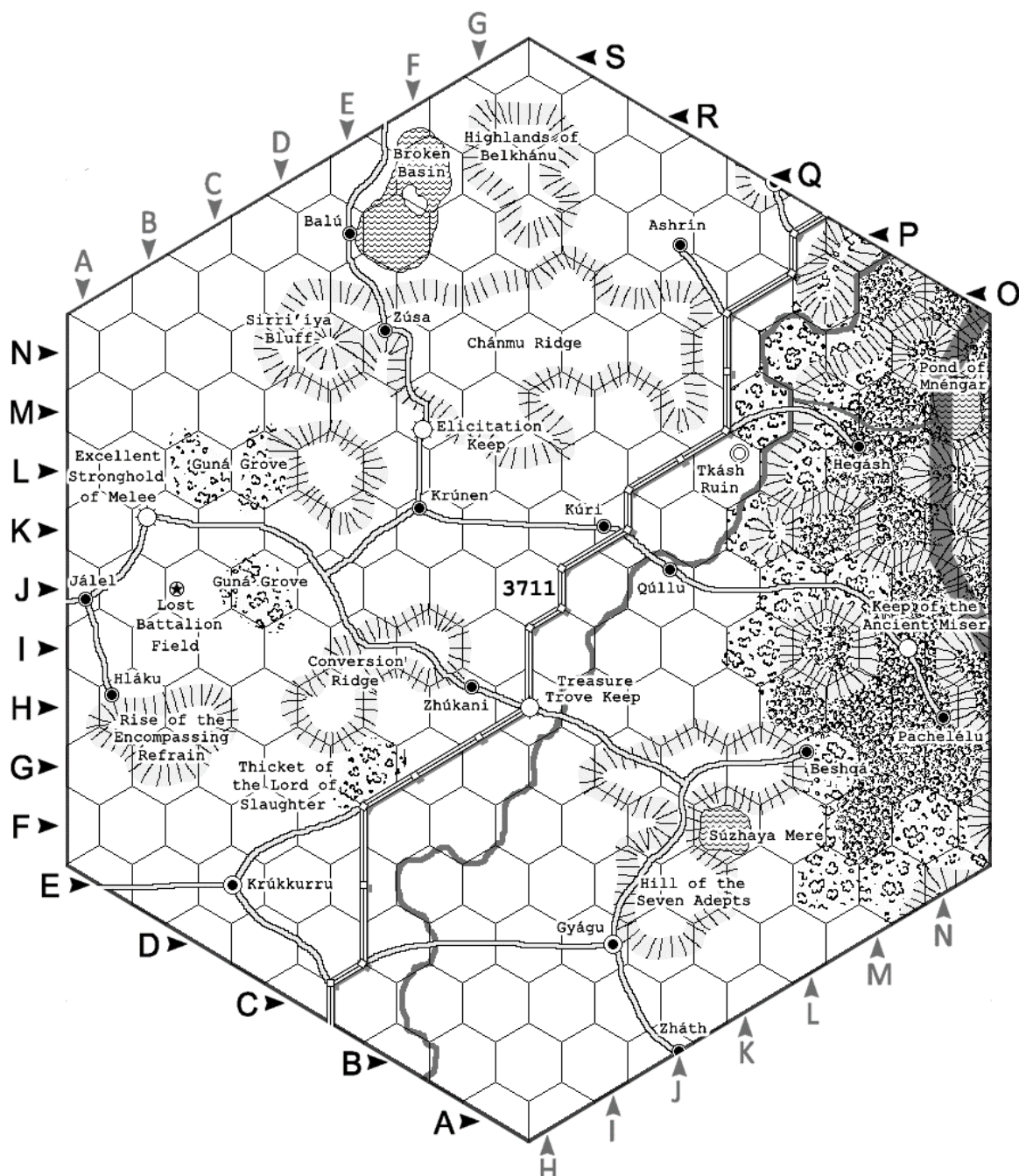
Forest of Lomé (3710.PL) See entry in Large Hex 3810.EB.

Town of Harsú (3710.QI) Although it is well-populated, there are no Very High status clan houses here. The stereotype of Harsú is that its people are ignorant, uneducated even in their own profession. They are notoriously resistant to change, especially when offered by outsiders. Their catch-phrase is, "Those are not our ways." The High-status people are markedly Tsolyáni. They are in the minority, and those of Kurtáni stock outnumber them three to one. The shorter Kurtáni folk appear to have accepted a place as second-class citizens. Typical town-size temple complexes for each of the five deities of Stability

dominate a prominent plaza but those for the gods of Change are conspicuously small. Town-wide, there is a strong accent on the concept that fulfilling the skein of one's destiny is the best path to the rewards of the afterlife. This is demonstrated by Harsú's thriving Hirilákte Arena, where fights to the death are the norm.

Thicket of Láno (3710.RI) Infested with annoying Kurukú, this patch of woods is known to be protected by a hoary Imperial decree. The stone monument along a path of broken stone that leads inwards describes this protection in Classical Tsolyáni.





HEX 3711

From the Sákbe Road, which runs from the southwest to the northeast, there are often hills and rises visible. They tend to be lush and green, even in the dry season. Hmá and Hmélu herds seldom have far to go to graze, leading to an unusually cushy life for the many pastoralists. Thin patchy forest is eagerly reclaiming the hilltops.

The roads are in good repair but going up and down and around the slopes is exhausting, even for the native-born folks. Much of this land has not been farmed in many years. The villages and towns are more isolated from one another.

There are abandoned settlements and homesteads throughout the region. Though they are hardly the fabled underworlds of the great cities, there may be small prizes to be salvaged. The most common threat is probably the Zrné beast. They are said to grow up to four manheights in length here. Some of the Pé Chói activists may operate near the edge of the forest, on the east side of this Large Hex.

(See also the text box for the Company of the Less-Than-Men at Large Hex 3712.)

(See also the text box for Pé Chói and the Under-People in Large Hex 3712.)

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

(See also 'About the Kurtáni People')

Village of Zháth (3711.BJ) As one approaches, diamond-shaped rain reservoir pools atop the hills can be seen to reflect the sky. Canals lead from these to the fields. Fields of trellises alternate with those filled with grain. The residents will probably ask visiting outsiders for news because there are few travelers, and they rarely leave.

In some of the ponds, there are disk-shaped radially-symmetrical creatures with numerous small legs, covered with a glossy golden fur on their undersides. Called Kyúsikai or "Sun Wheels", they grow to be three meters across, at which point they are slaughtered for their fur. To keep them from leaving the area, the ponds are surrounded by several meters of sand, which they will not cross.

Kyúsikai, the Sun Wheel

These flat furry things are harmless and quiet. They swim horizontally below the surface of the water with a spinning motion. They have little intelligence. They live on algae in the water and sunlight, spending most of their time floating, slowly whirling and sunning themselves. There is little call for their fur here in the south, but the light durable waterproof pelts are a prized luxury item in Yán Kór. They have a curious property of keeping the water in which they live unusually clean.

The keepers of these animals are Very High status members of the Clan of Sea Blue. Slaughtered incorrectly, Kyúsikai break into palm-sized pieces. Doing it properly requires the correct proportion of certain mineral salts.

Kyúsikai can not reproduce on their own; it requires human intervention and a device of the ancients. The keepers will trade for the specific kind of power cell to run this very large machine which is kept in a tower of the clanhouse. Rumor has it that it is guarded by "otherworldly creatures". Production remains limited to this obscure village of Zháth because the Clan does not wish to lose its monopoly. The "Sun Wheels" are probably one of the genetically engineered organisms created long ago, from the time before Tékmel became trapped its own dimension.

Town of Gyágu (3711.DI) From afar, Gyágu is a green terraced mound with a town perched at its apex. Dogs maintain the boundaries of herds of Hmá or Hmélu beasts. Tales of bygone times are a favorite subject with the storytellers of Gyágu. Below the surface are, of course, many layers of rubble from previous incarnations of the town between Dítlánas. According to oral tradition, its history begins with the close of the Time of No Kings. Today, however, the courts of the nobility are gone; Hmá wool and

salted Hmélu-haunch exports are really the immediate concern.

One will not find a market with copious magic items for sale, but there are several shops on the edge of the upper-class market which do specialize in rarities.

Folks from Beshqá (roughly 30 miles away, at 3711.GL) come here to have gatherings such as weddings, or attend various religious observances.

Town of Krúkkurru (3711.EC) Krúkkurru is located amidst rolling hills overgrown with regularly spaced green hillocks and coppices. To the south is relatively open land. Currently it is filled with shoulder-high saplings growing staggered in rows, the result of an annual rite to an aspect of Lady Avánthe. It has been cut down and regrown into thick forest many times.

The original name of this town was Krú' Urruén. According to an old legend still told to children of this area, there were once people resembling tentacled splotchy trees walking on three sinuous and tapered legs. They seemed friendly, or at least peaceable, but they did not speak. A mighty mage heard of their existence, and he travelled from far away to use his mystical powers to converse with them telepathically.

The tale does not end well. The first of these non-humans whose mind he touched broke into an insensate rage. Its madness was apparently contagious. The rest of its kind turned on the humans, setting off a little war within days.

As for the sorcerer (in some versions, he is a devotee of Lord Ksáru; in others, he follows Lady Dlamélísh), he was driven mad by his attempt at mental contact. He was confined to a room, where he spent the rest of his days affixing leaves and bark to himself with glue.

Krú' Urruén (3711.EC) An archaic name for Krúkkurru. See the entry for the Town of Krúkkurru (3711.EC)

Hill of the Seven Adepts (3711.EI) Its highest points are in the south. The roads through this place form a T, and there are minor ruins of small forts at the tips of this T. There are also ruins on each of the seven highest points (roughly one in each Small Hex). Ridges show the hills were once profitably terraced with an elaborate system of canals and Yáfa paddies.

Elicitation Keep (3711.FH) In ancient times, it is said, there was a wondrous device here that could be used to find any person. All that was needed was their spittle. Today this little tower is the property of the Legion of the Inverted Hand; a few retired soldiers of the Clan of the Inverted Hand are posted here to watch over it. Use of the device is 200,000 Káitars.

Súzhaya Mere (3711.FK) This shallow lake was created by the wizardess Gáyalin the Improvisor, who was one of the legendary Seven Adepts.

Thicket of the Lord of Slaughter (3711.GE) Once sacred to a local deity of war called Barupún, this place belongs to the priesthood of Lord Chegárra, the Hero-King. Barupún is now said to be one of his demons.

Village of Beshqá (3711.GL) Because of some moldy old decree, festivals of any sort are not allowed in or near this village. At Beshqá's shrines to the Gods, only brief ceremonies with fewer than 21 participants may take place here. There have been formal protests from various Clans that the ban violates the Concordat but they have yet to get far. Those who wish to hold a celebration usually travel to the town of Gyágu (roughly 30 miles away, 3711.DI)

Village of Hláku (3711.HB) There seems to be a sleepy mood about this village. Hmélu herders, usually armed with slings, come and go.

Rise of the Encompassing Refrain (3711.HC) It is said that there are occasional bursts of song, here, as of some great choir singing in some unknown language. It happens without warning, usually going on for half an hour, then stopping suddenly. Sometimes the harmonies are so sweet that shepherds have been known to break down weeping. Other times, however, they are discordant, and people flee in terror. One story is that the otherworldly voices are people out of synch with the Plane of Tékelmel (perhaps like the dreaded Hli'ír). Another is that the entire hill is like the psychic speaking stones of the ancients. The Encompassing Refrain holds no threat for the taciturn herders of Hláku. They note that neither Hmá nor Hmélu seem able to hear it. If it does not bother the beasts, then why should they be alarmed?

Village of Zhúkani (3711.HG) Zhúkani is difficult to notice as it is between many tall trees. The road leading to it is also a bit overgrown. At the Hetman's office, they keep an obscure artifact called the Book of Reflection. It is made of frosty seemingly blank metal pages bound together with leather straps (many times replaced). Once, a Pé Chói who came through said she could read it, but she left without explaining what it said or even what language it was written. This heavy book was stolen in A.S. 1994. After it was recovered, it was attached to a large stone block with a thick bronze chain.

Treasure Trove Keep (3711.HH) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the very busy and large Fief of Treasures. This fortress sits astride the Sákbe Road that runs between Mekú and Katalál. Shaped like a cylinder flanked by two smaller cylinders, one on each side of the Sákbe, it is surrounded by free-standing clanhouses. An irregular net of short roads connects them. This settlement sprawls a bit eastwards, ending in a bustling dock upon the Chaigáva River.

The commander of the keep is the former military administrator Arsémkoi ("Baron") Tuzhán hiShirusánme. Of the (High Status) Red Sun Clan, he is handsome and stern, just barely into his fifties, with a receding hairline, his very short hair turning silvery gray. He spends part of his time as a teacher of Red clan children. The mismatched jewelry he wears looks quite out of place, which supports the rumor that these are not mere baubles, but devices of the ancients that assist him in his duties.

Village of Pachelélu (3711.HN) Soft plumes of smoke give away the position of this settlement nestled amidst the trees. Built in the Kurtáni style, this village has several very large lumber-drying huts. The logs within are meant as posts for buildings. They are special, having been taken from the least sunny forest, their slow growth ensuring their strength. The women of the village share one large oven. Its smoke is piped through tubes into the drying huts, the sweet-smelling plant resins adding to the security of the wood. Material trimmed from timbers is saved, dried, and used to keep the smoke going. Their most expensive material, light weight and rot-resistant, has been treated for eighty years. It will be probably be shipped far away for use as deck planking on a ship.

Conversion Ridge (3711.IE) Here (an old scroll relates) in a time before the establishment of the Concordat, the god Chegárra defeated a demon of war called Barupún. Barupún's followers who would not convert became the large rocks scattered about the top of Conversion Ridge. Some say it is dangerous for followers of Change to wander about this place.

Keep of the Ancient Miser (3711.IM) While most fortified outposts are atop hills, this one is on a stony mound at the center of a steep valley, where something once fell from the sky. It is a single bleak gray stone building, with many balconies upon its exterior. No one remembers who the 'ancient miser' of its name is, but the promise of some kind of treasure drew people here. Beneath the keep is a slanting mine, dug in search of whatever it was that made the crater.

Village of Jálél (3711.JA) This village is on unusually good terms with the village of Chufésh, whose refugee children they once harbored around 2020 A.S. After the massacre left Chufésh with no adults, a number of people of Jálél moved there.

Lost Battalion Field (3711.JC) In 344 A.S., a Nexus Point opened and "the Lost Battalion", composed of 246 soldiers, marched through into that time and place. They established a camp at that place. The strangers wore livery of a color "neither green nor blue, but the color of paint when both are combined" and they spoke "a dialect of Salarvyáni". Their weapons were Chlén-hide. They traded goods from a sea coast with the locals for food. They claimed to have come from "a place of the past". Word soon reached the fiefholder of Treasure Trove Keep, who brought 182 of his own Tsolyáni soldiers and 64 conscripts from every settlement in the Fief of Treasures, most of them Kurtáni. The two armies met in glorious and honorable armed combat. The Lost Battalion retreated back through the mystic portal after a third of their number were killed. A large stone monument of bricks was built tightly about the Nexus Point, with a brief description engraved on its twenty sides.

Village of Qállu (3711.JJ) A priest of Lord Ksárul named Jepál hiTúkom once claimed that Qállu harbored a number of beautiful men and women with a third eye, which they kept concealed. He sent word to the priesthood, but by the time others arrived, the three-eyed people had (apparently) left. The villagers, of various clanhouses, denied the existence of any such folk. For his slander, the Temple paid Qállu 213 Káitars in Shámtla. Jepál hiTúkom was demoted to the First Circle and confined to an obscure village (Kúma, in 4111.CF) for the remainder of his days.

Excellent Stronghold of Melee (3711.KB) After the peculiar and noble conflict of Lost Battalion Field (see the entry for 3711.JC), in A.S. 349, Lord Púdushe hiShayúlusel the Third decreed the building of this fortress. The Red Clans administer it together. Here, the pyramid shrine of Lord Karakán is built just slightly higher than that of Lord Vimúhla, with nightly bonfires atop the latter making up the difference at night. After the ascendance of Emperor Mirusíya, the Excellent Stronghold was granted funds, expanded, and is now a thriving military academy.

Village of Krúnen (3711.KF) Krúnen is home to curiously tall clanhouses with high spiraling staircases going up into the common rooms. In ages past, Krúnen was a floodplain. Its clanhouses are thus built upon rows of six-

sided wooden pillars. Though this flooding no longer occurs, a rivalry exists in which every clan attempt to build a taller structure than the next. A relatively light tremor which rattled the valley in A.S. 1833 caused several to collapse. Because of a conviction that the flooding will one day begin again, the folk of Krúnen keep themselves in relative poverty to import the largest longest timbers they can afford. Páchi Léi and Hláka find Krúnen very beautiful, and a handful have been adopted by local clans. Herders regularly come and go at dawn and dusk.

Village of Kúri (3711.KI) Unremarkable Kúri is near some zigzagging stairs and ramps that eventually lead onto the Sákbe Road. There are many patches of thicket in the area. Locals harvest various bush and tree fruits. They also plant and later dig up starchy tubers called "Ímbo". These are either pan-fried or beaten out into strips and dried to become porridge during the dry season. Ímbo snacks, sold by a street vendor in this area, are delicious but high in starch and poor in nutrients (unless one is a Hláka).

Ayávo's Folly

Off to the side in Kúri, several non-humans also dwell here in a clanhouse-sized hut of their own. There are a few Páchi Léi, some Tinalíya, and some Pé Chói. They support themselves by making modest amounts of an alcoholic berry drink called "Ayávo's Folly". The juice is purified from red-orange to clear before being fermented, then flavored precisely with extracts of local herbs. This elixir allegedly brings humans happy dreams with a glimpse of the future.

Tkásh Ruin (3711.LK) Tkásh was once a prosperous large town, built atop the ruins of many previous cities in bygone ages. Much of its wealth was from logging. A poem-song recounts its strange fate. In A.S. 584, it underwent the customary Dittlána, but, while the people were encamped and preparing to rebuild, they were set upon by wild creatures. There was an infestation of small blood-sucking many-legged lizards, a veritable stormcloud of foul-smelling Gíriku, and an occasional Káyi. Dzór, the dim-witted giants of the forest, destroyed Chlén carts en route. Birds the color of ashes appeared, and gnawed through any cords and ropes left out - starting with bowstrings. Thus, Tkásh was never rebuilt. No one knows how many people were forced to find homes with clan-cousins in other places. The Imperial records state, however, that taxes from about 700 clanhouses in Tkásh never came again. Tkásh is known to have several entrances to an Underworld.



Messenger Ráijan jogs through the ruins of Tkásh, and the Kurukú ready their ambush.

Village of Hegásh (3711.LM) Often called "Hegásh of the Woods", this is a place of shade and serenity. Gapúl trees surround a circular dark lake. It is not so old, having been first established only fifty or so years ago. The clanhouses are built on waist-high platforms. Some of the roofs have regular openings like wide diamonds so that the air space can be used as roosts for wild avians. There are a few huts that travelers can rent.

This is also the site of the Temple of the Song Eternal. Here, Khéschal birds are considered sacred. It is used annually as a nesting site. The birds have a number of different songs. One, an especially lovely and elaborate sequence of notes, was worked into a hymn in a ritual to Evuén hiPichalín, a local aspect of Lady Avánthe. (A folktale says that the Khéschals overheard it, and adopted it.) Evuén hiPichalín is depicted as a blissfully happy middle-aged woman with a pitcher and a platter of pieces of bread. Upon her back there are wings bound with ribbons so that she cannot fly.

Pond of Mnéngar (3711.MN) Just touched by the shadow of a spire northwest of Párika Peak in the early morning, this body of water is quite deep and clean. This water starts with waterfalls from Párika Peak. It flows down a channel that once led all the way to the town of Tkásh (3711.LK), which is now a ruin. Now it just goes into a faltering creek.

Sirri'íya Bluff (3711.NE) Located on the western end of Chánmu Ridge, Sirri'íya Bluff is a beautiful hilly region. The rich will come from as far away as the great town of Katalál to hunt here for the blue pelts of Mnór and durable wings of Vringálu serpents. It is usually a good idea to hire a native guide, as the rippling hills with brooks between look much alike.

Village of Zúsa (3711.NF) A generation ago, a woman went away to visit her sister for a year. When she returned to Zúsa, she had a beautiful child. She kept his head covered with a scrap of cloth. One day, one of the other children snatched a broad headband off the toddler. To their horror, they discovered the boy had a third eye, colored greenish blue, in addition to his two brown ones. The mother and child were both given powders to cast them into a deep sleep from which they never awakened.

Chánmu Ridge (3711.NH) Running east-west, the stone is cut with deep channels as if some great creature had clawed at it. Rich ankle-deep greenery covers it, but few trees. At its western end, Sirri'íya Bluff presides over a rippling land of many small and rather identical hills. Little streams run between them, adding to their confounding similarity. Great-eyed Mnór scuttle furtively away, the ankle-turning terrain beneath the weeds tending to delay human pursuers.

Guná Grove (3711.OI) Guná is a hamlet: a community whose livelihood depends on surrounding fruit orchards. It is not quite a village, in that there are only temporary platforms for representatives of the various clans in other locations to camp. There is a well-loved common fruit-house; its doors and walls are curtains of reed segments strung like beads. When the wind blows, a pleasant clickety noise is sent up. Within are shelving units fitted with woven lattice trays for drying fruit.

Village of Balú (3711.PE) Balú is a sunny little village. They pull basketfuls of shellfish, fish, and fishlike creatures from the water. It is on a foot path to Hátla. Once a road, its surface is now so bad that it threatens to break the wheel off a Chlén cart. (3711.PE) It is said that the fief-holder of the Fief of Treasures longs for a real road from Hátla to Balú. The odd Kyúsikai, or "Sun Wheels", that live in the ponds of Zháth once lived in the nearby Broken Basin (3711.PF) but were fished to extinction here.

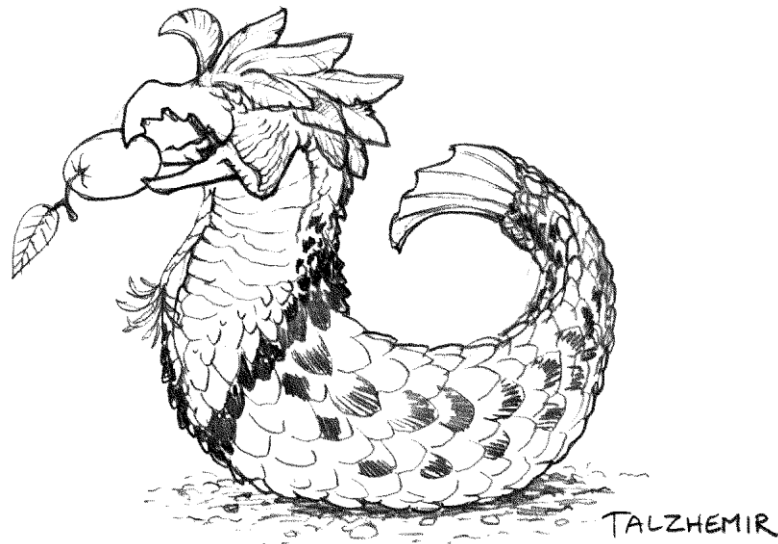
Broken Basin (3711.PF) This body of water provides the livelihood of the people of the village of Balú. The little island has no name. Several times a year, a few very elderly priests of Lord Belkhánu pole a raft to the island for a ritual in which hazardous materials are crushed. The powders are combined to make "The Balm of Serenity" which temporarily deadens the sense of smell. While this unguent is harmless, several of its ingredients are toxic. Some

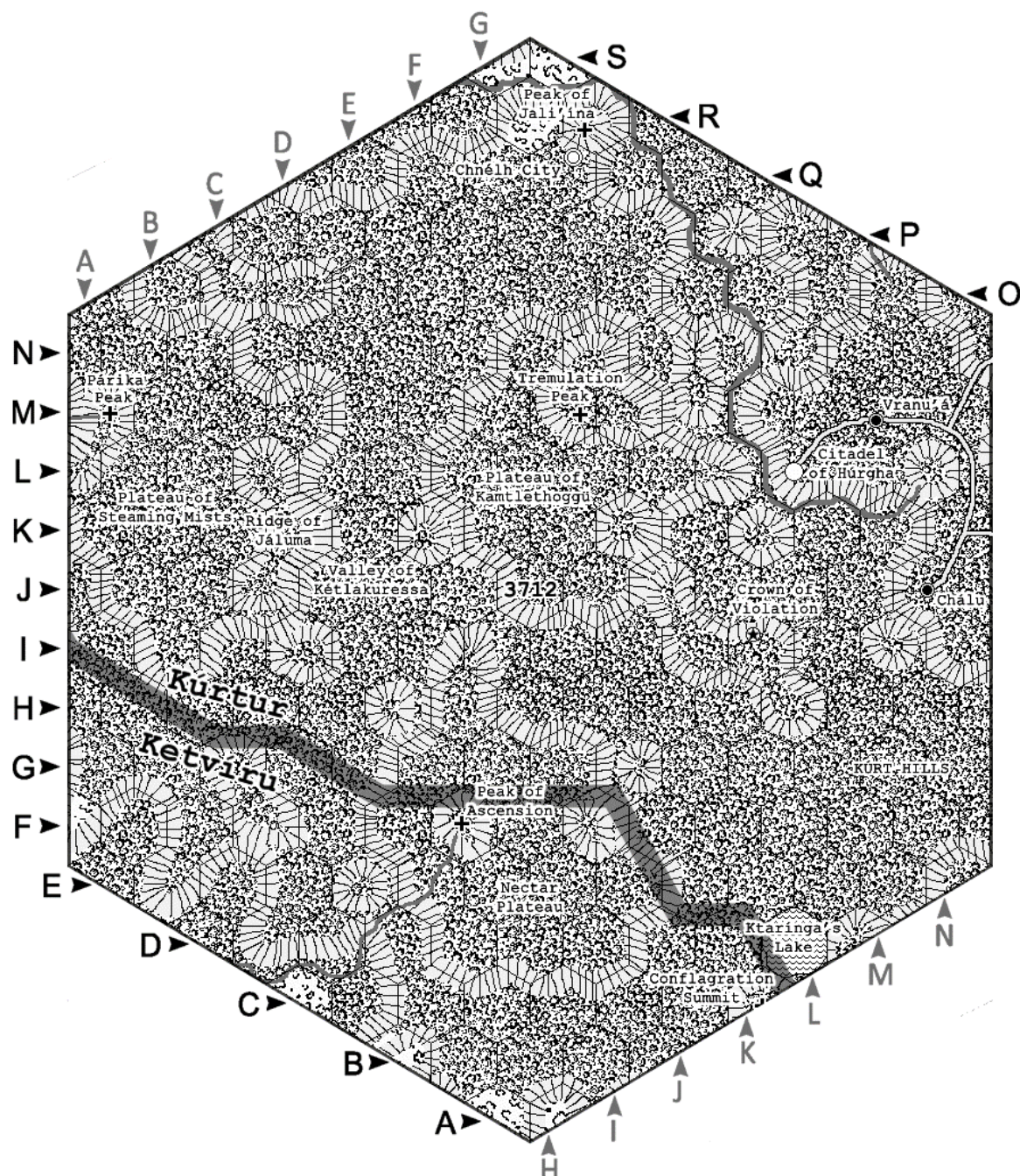
outsiders may marvel that slaves are not set to this task, but the priests are fanatical volunteers. They consider themselves blessed when they eventually perish after a few years in their sleep.

Village of Ashrín (3711.PJ) From a distance, the settlement looks small, with very modest clanhouses surrounded by pens and little shelter buildings for livestock built onto the sides of a hill. Each has an extensive basement hacked out of the rock, and there are small tunnels to friendly common rooms between clans on good terms. During the hottest part of the year, these underground areas are pleasantly cool, and just a touch damp. The Hmélu of Ashrín are notable for their prodigious milk

production and the rich dairy products made therefrom. Ashrín trades generously for great quantities of Firyá cloth for making cheeses.

Highlands of Belkhánu (3711.QG) Sacred to the God of the Dead on the Stability side, the Highlands are a natural wonder: a series of hills and plateaus marked with handsome horizontal stripes, mainly white and slightly brownish pink. On the southwest side of Small Hex 200 there are openings to salt mines owned by the Temple of Belkhánu. Those who work the mine live in total darkness. The Temple purchases slaves who are already blind; they are a diverse lot who usually come from some distance away.





HEX 3712

Travel through this portion of the Kúrt Hills is slow and difficult. Not content to be low and roughly-triangular points, the karst hills also swell up from the ground as tall cones, bulging hemispheres, enormous pillars, tilting jagged teeth, irregular cylinders, and more. Trees cling to the tops and sides. The forests and caves are home to myriad dangerous creatures. What appeared to just be a crevice for some stream suddenly reveals itself to be many meters deep.

Native guides are impossible to hire because there are no humans here to speak of. Merchants have no roads to ply.

The streams appear and disappear into the rock, forking and re-joining in ways that change with the season, eliminating the utility of boating. It is highly unlikely that any high cartographers have travelled here and attempted to portray it with their three-dimensional geography constructs.

While this land is of no account to humanity, however, it is a haven to a number of the rarer sorts of non-humans, who dwell scattered all through its tree-covered slopes and misty rocky valleys. There are a few, very rare, isolated tunnel villages with hordes of Ninínyal (Pygmy Folk). Any such enclaves must keep a low profile, lest they attract the

attention of the Empire, which does not allow non-humans (or foreigners) to gather in potentially threatening numbers.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest').

Pé Chói and the Under-People

In addition to the friendly races, and the inimical races collectively called the "Enemies of Mankind", Téकुmel is home to a number of other races of varying degrees of hostility and intelligence. Several of these species – the Sérudla, Dzór and Sró, for example – are found in significant numbers in the Kúrt Hills forest. To the typical citizen of Tsolyánu, these are not 'people', they are just 'semi-intelligent' 'dumb brutes', like chimpanzees, bonobos, and dolphins. They are 'beasts' that have no more rights than a herd of Hmélu goats.

Humans of Téकुmel are culturally in denial of the very idea that these others might be sentient- maybe even as intelligent as a typical human. Thus, when the Mnór or the Chnélh are clearly seen to wield crude weapons, these facts are pointedly overlooked (just as the implications of a gorilla plucking a broad leaf to use as an umbrella are largely ignored on earth). To a few of those who have ventured underground and abroad, however, it is apparent that perhaps there is more to these races.

Unbeknownst to humanity, in an obscure corner of the Kúrt Hills, some of these groups are making contact with each other, and a small few are even starting to think of themselves together as "the" Under-People. There are wild Kúni birds who are capable of far more than just repeating phrases, their lifespan equal to that of a human's, darting where they please through greenery atop the towering limestone lumps. There are mighty Dzór, too large to effectively hide but fast enough to elude intruders with their huge strides.

'Wild' Pé Chói of the deep forests to the west have sent out several Tíi-Pétk – 'Speakers' – to make contact with pockets of these less common nonhumans. Pé Chói sometimes refer to them as "Under-People".

These Pé Chói 'Speakers' are very secretive because they know they are playing a dangerous game. If they are noticed, it will raise questions about whether they are harmless peace-loving meddlers hallucinating that mere animals think and talk, or spies bent on recruiting foot-soldiers to help them in the defense of their Chákan homelands. If it becomes known that one is treating with the likes of Sérudla and Sró and Dzór (all considered "monsters"), one could be destroyed for treason. So, if cornered out in the woods, a wily Tíi-Pétk is apt to play the part of simple savage or sun-touched mad-creature while their companions surreptitiously dart away.

The Clickings of Peaceful Passage

Actually devised by a wild Kúni bird long ago, these are secret passwords in recognition of old truces, transmitted as rapping on wood, clicking of the tongue, snapping of chitinous claws, and so on. Not all Under-People will know or respect them, but there is a chance that they might. A Tíi-Pétk might teach them to a non-human that they trust. The Clickings of Peaceful Passage include identification of such things as the signaler's race, so an overheard Sérudla watchword delivered by, say, a Chnélh, would be suspicious.

Illicit Gifts from the Ssú

In some places, the Ssú have been trading weapons to various Under-People for thousands of years. Previously, it was limited to only petty items that could be passed off as finds from ruins, or arms and armor from local casualties. Little communication was needed beyond some basic demonstration of the use of the new weapons. In those exceedingly-rare cases where some other kind of communication is possible, the Ssú have done their best to share or spread their hatred of humans.

Due to the failure of their previous attempts to spread patches of Food of the Ssú and the Hlüss scheme to distribute Zu'úr, the Ssú have recently begun ramping up their Under-People arms supply efforts, providing them with even better weaponry, in this region. On very rare occasions, there have even been bargains made to grant steel, enchanted steel, and limited-use magical and technological items.

The original Pé Chói goal was only to open communications, and perhaps help these downtrodden and isolated races. But, these Pé Chói emissaries have recently discovered the Ssú efforts to step up arming the Under-People – and they see a disaster coming. They now attempt to dissuade the Under-People from making matters worse by accepting the Ssú 'gifts'.

The Pé Chói (who are rare) protect villagers, and maintain good will by discreetly informing humans of the places where Ssú emerge.. A number of Pé Chói avoid dependence upon humans, but in this case, they are glad of human assistance. They know it helps cut off the malignant Ssú influence.

The Company of the Less-Than-Men

A glimmer of the truth may lurk in an old body of folktales of the Kúrt Hills. The comedic stories of "the Company of the Less-Than-Men" describe a band of talking animals who went about performing heroic deeds. Marionette puppets used for the tales include a Khéschal bird and two that may be interpreted as a Chnélh and a Rényu (they are both so stylized it is hard to tell).

Conflagration Summit (3712.CK) This is a bare peak, standing out stark dark gray with a blackened tip. Kurtáni regard it with great dread. Every several centuries, this hill erupts in flame for a period of roughly three days, an event which the Temple of Vimúhla named "The Cleansing". It burns an area roughly two miles across, the ensuing forest fire emitting a huge cloud of dark smoke. As this has not happened in 354 years, it is perhaps due for its next Cleansing any day now. An ancient tale relates how a man once sought to stand on the Summit's highest point 171 years after a Cleansing. He approached within eighty meters, then exploded without warning.

Ktarínga's Lake (3712.DL) In the morning, the wisps of fog that rise up from the dark water are said to resemble diaphanous humanoid forms. These are known as Ktarínga's Dancers. This lake is so deep that even at noon, it seems black.

Nectar Plateau (3712.EH) This is a tree-covered landform, and many blossoms thrive here, visited by both flying and scurrying pollinators. Some of the flowers have very bizarre shapes, suggesting they are from other lands, perhaps even other Planes. They open and close at various times, sometimes leading to odd daily color changes. At night, Hü bats and other creatures seem to frolic. Its highest point is the Peak of Ascension (3712.FG).

Peak of Ascension (3712.FG) This is the highest point of the Nectar Plateau (3712.EH). Visible from anywhere on the edges of the Plateau, its tip is often shrouded in thick white mists. There is a mysterious patch of ice here.

Crown of Violation (3712.IK) This is a ruin grown over by trees. Labelled "Crown of Violation" on a High Cartography stone, it was rediscovered by Aráwi, a Hláka scout, in 2366. His full report remains confidential to this day, but it was noised about that the little Hláka found an Eye of the Creeping Fog of Doom. After many years of service, he retired to the village of Chálu (3712.JN) rather than return to some Hláka enclave. The site is believed to relate to an early form of the goddess Hriháyal.

A Tubeway Entrance

Somewhere beneath the Crown of Violation ruins, there is a way into the Underworld - and down there, somewhere, is a tubeway car station. Over the past two centuries Ssú have been encountered east of the Nectar Plateau. The Ssú visit this region via the tubeway to supply weapons to the Under-People (see the other text box).

Village of Chálu (3712.JN) There are Tsolyáni, Kurtáni, and folk of mixed heritage living together here in tiny clanhouses that rest on wooden supports. A rustic Kurtáni feel predominates, with ten beautifully carved wooden posts painted the appropriate colors rather than other sorts of shrines to honor the Gods. Cherished as a veteran of honorable battle, Aráwi, an aged Hláka scout retired from the legions of Prince Eselné, lives here. He knows the location of the Crown of Violation, an overgrown ruin (3712.095), and, for a significant fee, could be convinced to sell directions to reach it. However, he is frail and infirm, in no condition to go adventuring, himself.

Ridge of Jáluma (3712.KD) Kúni birds can be seen here, riding the thermals. Located along the eastern edge of the Plateau of Steaming Mists (3712.LC), the Ridge runs mainly north and south, and its upswept slopes are like the edge of a chisel. Kúni-birds dwell at its northern end.

Valley of Kétlakuessá (3712.KE) This lowland runs north-south through most of this Large Hex. The ground has swampy patches between outcroppings of stone. In some places, there are cliffs of honeycomb rock. During the height of the rainy season, a wide shallow river flows northwards into the Chaigáva River. Then, at some point during the summer, it reverses direction and flows southwards, until it dissolves into a series of marshy oblong lakes. The northern and southern ends of this valley are haunted by Sérudla, and the occasional Kúni bird flies down from the small hills along its sides. There are Chlén beasts in this region that can grow twice their usual size; these freaks are too large for the typical ramps and roads.

Plateau of Steaming Mists (3712.LC) Trees here are more spread out. Roiling mists often flow around them. Their source is a large number of fumaroles, hot springs, and geysers. Between Párika Peak and the Ridge of Jáluma. Unbeknownst to humanity, a number of huge beaked and crested giants, the Dzór, live here in peace, howling challenges to one another out of the fog, and coming together to brawl, then amiably soaking their armored bodies in the pools. Rényu packs dwell on the ridges to the north and south of the plateau.

Rényu of the Kúrt Hills

One race of Under-People, the Rényu, has lived on humanity's scraps for millennia. Humankind has a long history of forcing other races into "reservations", or wiping them out. Not being taken seriously by humanity may well be their best defense. Besides, a Rényu might get put to work if they're seen. Why upset the daily food bowl?

The Rényu are unsure of the benefits of allying with other Under-People. Their ancestors were bred for servility and companionship specifically to humans. In general, they are loyal to their masters and mistresses. They have, thus far, been content to be viewed as dumb brutes and pets.

Dog-men can signal one another in a code of high-pitched whistle-whines - hardly audible to humans, but obvious to a Pé Chói. Some of the Rényu of the Kúrt Hills have even developed a sort of code of conduct for themselves, usually passed from parent to pup, to avoid revealing too much. ('Eat without hands.' 'Speak just one word at a time.', etc.)

Plateau of Kamtlethoggú (3712.LH) Roughly 25 to 30 miles across, the Plateau is spotted with large stands of Tlethoggú trees (see the text box at Large Hex 3813). For humans, the place is like an enormous hedge maze. Sérudla family groups prowl its southern regions, and Kúni-birds live atop the small hill to the west.

Citadel of Húrga (Fortress) (3712.LL) This westernmost point of the Fief of Kúrtusha is one of the oldest surviving settlements of the Kurtáni people. It is sacred to members of the Sé'iyau Mahé'zīyal, a dispersed Kurtáni religious society that worships Makórsa, an aspect of Lady Avánthe. It is said that small demons loyal to Lord Thúmis came to seed and shape a circular region of the tangled Tlethoggú trees. Carvings on clanhouse posts depicting these creature vaguely resemble Páchi Léi (who will be most offended if one suggests that they could have been those 'demons'). While the Tlethoggú afford protection against marauding creatures such as Sérudla, the people who live here must often chop back the branches lest they crush the Citadel's gardens. The process is slow: an animal-jaw rasp is used to cut away the bark. After the branch dies some months later, it can be bashed away with a rock hammer. In the meantime, sap may be gathered in small bark envelopes. Access to the Citadel is through a long wooden bridge through a tunnel-like hole in the tree wall.

Párika Peak (3712.MA) This peak rises up from the northwest part of the Plateau of Steaming Mists, its very tip sometimes streaked with white. On its west side, very cold water flows down in a waterfall into the Pond of Mnéngar. A haughty flock of Kúni-birds nest here.

The Kúni Birds of Párika

Proud and boisterous, they speak to each other in their own Párika-specific language of chirps, chuckles, and chatters. Who can fly highest, fastest, strongest? Who has the brightest shiny objects in his or her nest? Who is the cleverest? The psyche of these avians is driven by constant competitiveness and a hunger for the approval of their peers. Their name for themselves translates into something like "Sky Friends".

Leadership is not normally something they desire. They are descendants of creatures genetically engineered to not crave strong self-determination, nor dominance over others. It shows in the way that wild Kúni bird flocks are egalitarian chaos. Yet, curiosity and a capacity to bond with humans with which their creators imbued them draws a number of them towards civilization.

Their attitudes towards humankind are mixed. They want their freedom, and the company of other Kúni birds. Then again, they may find specific humans endlessly interesting (especially the ones wearing pretty colors).

Normally, internal questions cease when humans use those irresistible Tsúral buds to lure them down. The Kúni bird chews on it, and falls into a state of drunken pinpoint-pupil bliss. For some reason, the Sky Friends, the Kúni birds of Párika Peak, are immune to this effect.

When the Pé Chói called Kétk K'ch'í discovered the Sky Friends, she was surprised to find several who could speak Tsolyáni. She also made another, more chilling, discovery: they informed her that several of them had left the flock because they were now minions of the Ssú.

Tremulation Peak (3712.MH) Something here causes people to tremble if they approach the summit. Long before they have reached it, they experience seizures and falling down. Pé Chói are especially susceptible. Those who are quickly carried away will recover. On a path to the top, whole skeletons litter the region just within the perimeter.

Village of Vránu'a (3712.MM) Travel to this place by outsiders is either by many Tsán of twisty roads to the southeast, or by a portion of the Chaigáva River lively with large aquatic predators. Local Kurtáni prefer to walk through wooded footpaths. One of the inexpensive products of this place is dried nodules of Tlethoggú sap, which they carry in baskets to Kúrtusha. The village is situated between numerous small stands of trees including some Tlethoggú (see the text box at Large Hex 3813).

Chnéh City (3712.QH) In the folktale called "Ugly Balapít", there is a lost city, a place said to have a palace with a room full of gold Káitars, a room full of rubies, a room full of steel tools, and so on. Its existence is usually dismissed as a myth. Perhaps, some say, it is inspired by the fact that wandering Chnéh troops do occasionally inhabit abandoned human settlements for a time, swinging in on long thick vines, hurtling about the stone ruins in a blur. These fractious groups may stay for days or months; they usually depart as abruptly as they arrived.

Chnéh of the Kúrt Hills

Created as servitors, not unlike the Rényu, the Chnéh man-apes are a prolific feral Under-People species. They live in bands no less populous than a clanhouse, sometimes descending as a screeching horde when they outnumber travelers. And yet, they are entirely capable of moving with amazing stealth, their travel through the branches leaving not single footprint upon the ground to give away their passage. A folktale told in a few villages of the Kúrt Hills tells of a Chnéh city. (See the entry for the City of the Chnéh, 3712.QH.)

The Folktale of Ugly Balapít

Long, long ago, there was a boy named Balapít. Born with very short legs, long arms, and a deformed face, he was shunned by his Clan. After the crops failed the five years after his birth, he was sent to the village of Shegá (3812.GD). There, the other children would not play with him because they were warned that he was unlucky.

Poor Balapít went out to gather berries in the forest by himself. Several little Chnéh apes took pity on him and came to play with him every day. He could not run fast

so they showed him how to swing from the branches as they did. In exchange, he taught them how to swim.

One day, they took him far away to see their secret city. This angered the Chnéh King, who threw them down a well. They all landed with a splash. Balapít and his Chnéh friends managed to flee into tunnels.

Eventually Balapít arrived at the village of Thólel with a diadem encrusted with large diamonds. Of the location of the fantastic city, he would only say it was, "In sight of the Peak of Jali'iná." He lived out his days in humble comfort, leaving his fortune to the Temple of Lord Thúmis to build a Shrine to Ba'alán.

The Kingdom of the Chnéh

There are many, many bands of Chnéh at large in the Kúrt Hills. Their sudden alliances and abrupt feuds are as inexplicable to themselves as to humans. From time to time, however, they are united by a leader, a mythical Chnéh King. He possesses "the Crystal Eyes" a device of the ancients that allows him to make and remember long lists. Under his rule, the Chnéh are commanded to avoid or kill humans and all the sentients friendly to them, which includes the Pé Chói. They are terrified of the Ssú, and with good cause. Tales of torment at the hands of the Ssú are common enough to remain a part of their common knowledge.

Peak of Jali'iná (3712.RI) This is a tall sharp peak, a pillar-like spire. On the side facing the Chaigáva River, there are cliffs that loom out over the water, and caves. Somewhere in sight of this landform, the folktale of Balapít the Ugly says the Kingdom of the Chnéh may be found. (See text box for the Folktale of Ugly Balapít under the entry for the City of the Chnéh (3712.QH).

Town of Kúrtusha (3713.JC)



Town of Pa'arídlatlu (3713.NN)



Town of Kirúna (3813.DG)



Town of Díánü (3812.FG)



Town of Tláva (3813.JJ)



Brands for the Stations of Brave Peripitation of Kúrtur Province

This hex contains the capital of Kúrtur Province, and there may be interactions between the Foundationists and the more diplomatic local government.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')
(See also the 'About the Kurtáni People')
(See also "About the Kurtáni Foundationists")

Mírun Mound (3713.BJ) This small plant-covered mountain is associated with Lady Dlamélísh because it resembles a woman's breast. Clouds enshroud the top, and water flows off the sides for most of the year (referred to poetically as "the Lady's perspiration"). A brother of a Tlakotáni emperor who once renounced the gold lived out his days in splendor and delight in a palace on its western side.

Village of Túkun (3713.CF) Patches of the foul purple "Food of the Ssú" plants which once covered Téकुमेल appear in the gorges to the southwest. It is too difficult to travel there and eradicate them, and seeds sometimes drift over, taking root in the region west of Túkun. Growers prefer to farm to the east.

Híkku Peak (3713.EB) Tumultuous-looking clouds swirl above this point, often obscuring it. Cold winds sweep down the slopes. There are reports of creatures not found elsewhere in the Five Empires, notably a creature that hurls sharp stone fragments with human-sized pseudopods thrust briefly from meter-wide holes in the ground. A whole creature has never been killed or captured. It is called "Sobúan" and "The Aberration of Híkku" by locals, who claim it is all just one single extremely large animal.

Sobúan Tentacle (1.4)

Wandering: 0%, Lair: 100%, 8/11/14

PHYS: 12	DEFT: 10	INST: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: 0
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: none	
Defenses:	Melee: 2	Missile: 2
Armor: 1/1	Hits: 20	Energy: NN
		Magic: 0

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Throw Rock	13-	3/5/7	12 range

Other Abilities:

Escape: Once withdrawn into the Sobuan's hole, a tentacle cannot be pursued (nor the central creature, if any) located by any known means.

Grove of the Forest Lords (3713.EC) The "Forest Lords" of the name are said to be the Karst pillars covered in orange-green shrubbery. They range from knee-high to nine meters (30 feet) tall. Poison-ivy-like "Ek A'ek" plants swarm up their sides (see the text box).

The Ek A'ek Vine, "The Climbing Tormenter"

This is a species of weed that grows up trees. It is found in more obscure places of the Kúrt Hills. In some places, humans go out of their way to cut it off near the root with a blade on a pole, but throughout this Large Hex (3713), it may be encountered at random. While it causes itchy welts on humans, it is harmless to Pé Chói (from whose homeworld it may have come). Burning it is unsafe: the fresh vine releases smoke into the air, and this is dangerous for humans to breathe.

Village of Lekái (3713.EI) The people of this, the northernmost point of the Fief of Haumá, are considered eccentric, as well as rustic. It is said that they have no fear of death. Amongst these locals, worship of Lord Sárku is hardly represented. Local followers of Lord Hnálla in the Sé'yau Arutáo religious society think that some souls are sent back to this Plane, to be reborn as babes. (As various Temples are aware that there is a reincarnation spell that does exactly this, belief in reincarnation cannot be denied.)

This was a secret base for Kurtáni rebels at several times in history when Sárku-leaning Tsolyáni emperors treated the people of the Kúrtur Province abusively. The people who fought back are regarded as heroes of old. It is far too well-known to fill this role today, but it still holds symbolic significance for some of the Karakán-worshipping Sé'yau Sunggánmirai.

Mo'ími, the Tooth Plant

A rare shrub grows in this vicinity. Its "thorns" are flat, white and glossy, and resemble long teeth of a shark, but with three edges. These edges are finely serrated like the teeth of some animals. The largest are as long as a hand, and there are several holes that naturally occur, usually five or six on each "vane". They were once used as arrow points and other tools. Sometimes they are used to augment wooden spears and clubs. (If not for their use by a few of the fanatical Foundationists, they would not even be seen outside of the Province of Kúrtur.)

Arjáštra River (3713.FJ) This river begins on Zágursa Mountain as a series of gushing waterfalls and streams. Within this Large Hex, it flows southeastwards, becoming unnavigable rapids and uncrossable waterfalls at several points. (See also entry for Arjáštra River at 3514.OF.)

Lake of the Little King (3713.FL) Astrologers had predicted a great destiny for Prince Daishélmú Tlakotáni. Fearing he would be assassinated, several members of his foster family of the Clan of the Blade Raised High brought

him secretly to an island in a lake in the Kúrt Hills. The Kurtáni who delivered supplies called him Little King. When his imperial father died, however, Daishélmú was only 7. Too young to compete for the throne, he renounced the Gold. He grew into a hardy traveler and a scholar of military logistics. After years of effort, he won glory as a general in ritual Qadární battles. Then he retired to his tiny island palace, a tribute in miniature to the palace at Avanthár.

Village of Hélésh (3713.GE) There are numerous caves in this vicinity. Many of them are used to cultivate edible mushrooms. Lord Hrű'ü is hardly worshipped here, but villagers set aside quite a bit of fungus for several petty priests who come annually to accept their modest offerings.

Although belonging to two different Fiefs, people of Kírutle and Hélésh are on good terms and intermarriage is common. Both villages are dominated by the Pure Touch Clan, originally a Kurtáni tribe of fungus-gatherers. They say they are descended from Chalíya and Zágursa. (See the entry for Chalíya's Mountain, 3713.HF, for the story.)

Rock Ears

The most popular edible fungus to come out of this area are called "Rock Ears", a very flavorful salty pinkish variety shaped like a wrinkled half-disk. Found only in this area, its origins as genetically engineered are long forgotten. A good quality Rock Ear is as big as a serving platter. Although best when eaten fresh, dried Rock Ear can be traded to other regions.

Golden Spume of Namú

This rare and valuable fungus grows bright yellow waist-height foamy masses on heaps of Hú-bat guano. Ingesting it regularly smooths facial wrinkles, strengthens muscles, and enhances sexual prowess. It can also lead to outbursts of rage and permanent loss of intellect.

Chalíya's Mountain (3713.HF) One of the two highest points on Paramour's Plateau. According to local lore, Chalíya was a woman who explored caves, while Zágursa was a man who roamed the mountain forests. They are mythical ancestors to the Pure Touch Tribe, a group that originally would only marry within their own tribe. The elders decided it would be best to split into two groups, now with the peculiar custom that each would only have children with people of the other tribe. Chalíya and Zágursa chose to go with different bands so that they could still be married. These became the tribes, and then, eventually, the villages, of Hélésh and Kírutle. The taboo against marrying outsiders is long gone but the geography isolates people such that intermarriage is still the norm.

Zágursa's Mountain (3713.HI) One of the two highest points on Paramour's Plateau. The Arjáshtá River originates on its southeast side as many waterfalls and generous streams gushing out the side of the rock. (See also the entry for Chalíya's Mountain, 3713.HF.)

Village of Kírutle (3713.HI) Once a tribe, the Pure Touch Clan is found in this village and in Hélésh. Despite being parts of two different Fiefs, Kírutle and Hélésh remain on good terms with each other, and intermarriage is common. The folk of Kírutle are territorial wildcrafters of the woods, tending stands and grottos of valuable fungi. They think of themselves as the children of Chalíya and Zágursa, but especially the gatherer Zágursa. While their cousins in Hélésh are known for their skill at caving, people of Kírutle are known for climbing the steep rocks to reach isolated plateaus and hilltops. (See the entry for Chalíya's Mountain, 3713.HF, for the story.)

Purple Night Horn

Purple Night Horns are long and slightly twisty, with several tapering fingers branching out near the tip. Found wild throughout this Large Hex only on certain trees, those cultivated in shadows around Kírutle are unusually large, sometimes the size of a person's arm. If dried in darkness, a rich purple dye can be made from them.

Dreambane

Found as clusters of pudgy forest green cones with turquoise tips, this tree fungus has an unpleasant astringent flavor. Kurtáni use it to stay awake by painting the inner forearms with a weak tea of it. Dreambane powder is a non-addictive mild euphoric for Tinalíya, who may use it as humans do the various other recreational powders.

The Limner of Drá

This fungus is as large as a sleeping mat for two. It appears as a mass of wet-looking jelly, with a white glow that is only visible at night, when it moves. By day it is still. It is said to be able to cure certain terrible diseases. This requires laying down in its path and letting it crawl over the patient, an event that takes several days. Those who have experienced it said they felt a sense of carefree ease as the Limner of Drá explored every valley and pocket of their body.

Village of Beshúm (3713.HL) Little footpaths radiate out from this village. They wind outwards and criss-cross between stands of many kinds of trees. There are large broken rocks are everywhere; most have fused themselves into the rocky ground beneath. Chlén cannot navigate these trails; villagers and their slaves slowly move huge logs on rollers from here to Kírutle Village.

Town of Kúrtusha (3713.JC) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is both the seat of the fief of Kúrtusha as well as the capital of Kúrtur Province. The nominal fiefholder is Mríngukoi ("High Lord") Ónu hiOqóqu of the Standing Pinnacle Clan. With regards to Imperial matters, he is primarily a puppet leader, and the real decisions are made in Haumá. Outside of this, however, he is still the respected chief of chiefs of the tribes of Kúrtur.

In the immediate area, the trees are of unusually great width and height, 90 meters (about three hundred feet) tall. The town is laid out as irregular concentric rings of rectangular houses with a north-south road leading through the center. Towards the center is a shabby wooden structure that is labelled "Palace of the Realm"; not much takes place there. Judicial functions are carried out on a series of roofed open-air platforms, with the largest of these being Mríngukoi Ónu's pavillion of office.

Those rare souls who have come to visit this Station of Brave Peripatation may learn of the local subterranean fungus trade. See the village of Hélash (entry and text boxes at 3713.GE). (Its allied village of Kírutle belongs to the fief of Pa'arídlátlú.)

Two curved and wavy lines of huge seasoning huts on the perimeter, open on two sides and each sharing its side walls with two neighbors, serves as a kind of symbolic wall. They are assiduously maintained, with herbs and unguents applied to prevent infestation that would damage the value of the wood during the years it needs to age. A number of the town's buildings are empty, as they are seasonal quarters for semi-nomadic groups that range throughout the province.

There are usually people outdoors here, doing various kinds of work. There are a few gardens, but attempts to grow crops on a large scale are doomed. There isn't enough water for Yáfa, and both Gáin and Dná seedlings are frantically devoured by "Obúp" a many-eyed fist-sized local creature which resembles a terrestrial trilobite. The Obúp is itself a delicacy, with a flavor and texture reminiscent of seafood. It is traditional for toddlers equipped with tiny archery gear to hunt Obúp at the start of summer, when they are just about to lay their eggs. The skewered creatures are proudly brought as presents for the elders.

In a shady clearing, there is a magnificent statue of Lady Makórsa (the 27th Aspect of Lady Avánthe) made from a

hard bluish wood. She is depicted as a woman with archery gear. Prayers are offered to her, asking for her blessing as the patroness of the trees. In the past, people brought human bones, which would be crushed and sprinkled as offerings at the base of certain trees. These were from victims of the attacks of wild beasts, especially children. Tsolyáni priestesses found this treatment of human remains disquieting, and the practice has been discontinued (at least in the town of Kúrtusha).

Mount of Loríga (3713.JE) This forested spire is located at the western end of Paramour's Plateau. It is shaped like an arch; there is a hole near the peak that runs through it east-west called the Needle's Eye. There are many caves on the eastern side, often hidden by large fern-like foliage. Water seeps out of the stone, and green slime coats it, making it slippery to walk or climb.



Only a few servitor Ru'ún survived, and these were now hostile to humans.

The Titan of Loríga

At least a century ago, a Kurtáni band traveled to the area to collect bright crimson shells in the streambeds and Kúni-bird chicks to barter in Kúrtusha. They returned to Hélash in a panic. They claimed to have been pursued

by a humanoid figure with four legs and seven eyes, six human-heights tall, seemingly made of a pitted translucent lavender-colored jade with a frosted surface. It crushed several of them under its three-toed feet. There have since been two separate sightings of this thing, now dubbed the Titan of Loríga. They say a small fragment of it may be seen in the village of Qáyuma.

Glabrous Peak (3713.JJ) Glabrous Peak is a tall swell of a glassy-looking pale gray stone. It is located in a field of rock formations that are limestone on the outside, but contains a dark gray flint-like rock. The ground is covered with every size of jagged boulder, razor-sharp rock fragment, and nasty splintery grit. The core stone is appreciated by the Kurtáni because it can be knapped.

Village of Qáyuma (3713.KN) In the shadow of the Mountain of the Third Watch stands the village of Qáyuma. The zealously guarded Séresh trees which may only be harvested by the locals are crafted into some of the finest bows here. In between assisting their elders with little tasks such as warming pots of varnish, the children make their own rustic wooden playthings. There are singing tops, Chnélh-on-a-stick toys, and so on. In the Hetman's office, on a high shelf, an alleged fragment of the Titan of Loríga sits. It is some hard and heavy material resembling purplish-white frosted quartz the size of a child's head. (See the text box for the Titan of Loríga under Mount of Loríga (3713.JG).

Tékel's Ridge (3713.LB) Running northwest of the town of Kúrtusha, Tékel's Ridge is wild country criss-crossed by footpaths. When the weather is hottest, a gentle breeze cools the Ridge. Numerous small summer camps are placed in where rock outcroppings will conceal any fires. In accordance with ritual, fires are doused before sunrise.

Two Scar Basin (3713.LD) This circular lake is sacred to the Sé'iyau Amáljenyal, the loose religious society of Kurtáni midwives. They come here at different times of the year, for rites that date back to the ways of the "proto-Kurtáni", the ba'Aruán. Males, especially those not raised in the Kúrt Hills, are generally unwelcome here. While the Kurtáni make outrageous jokes that claim these women really just come here to fornicate with wild animals, they actually do respect the privacy of the Sé'iyau Amáljenyal, and leave the midwives to themselves.

Village of Rúchanu (3713.ME) There is a general attitude here that Chléh hide is a foolish luxury. Folk try to do everything without the least scrap of it. Their tools are stone

such as basalt, ground into shape with the use of the local sandstone, acquired from secret outcroppings in the hills.

A curious experiment is being quietly conducted here in Rúchanu. Several villagers are growing Gáin grain under netting. Then, they are deliberately letting it attract the "Obúp" in order to catch and eat them. The Elders are suspicious of this concept. It breaks with the tradition that Obúp are for little children to improve their archery skill; it is different from what has always been done. (For more information about Obúp, see the town of Kúrtusha (3713.JC).

Town of Pa'arídlatlú (3713.NN) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the small fief of Pa'arídlatlú. This fief and this town have both earned a reputation for efficiency. Wealthy travelers can enjoy being carried in litters borne by slaves who are trained to run out of synch for a smooth ride, with torch signals sent at night to ready teams along the way. At the western edge of town there is a spa for various social classes, featuring the mud of Ulúmü's Peak.

Teams of bearers carry goods about in relays up and down the hills amidst heavily wooded lands. The marketplace especially teems with Tlethoggú sap nodules (see the text box at Large Hex 3813), Tsúral buds, and Dáichu bark-cloth. The core of the town's prosperity is an exclusive local product, Árukan root, which is grown on the slopes to the west.

Árukan Root

The fields about Pa'arídlatlú burgeon with a spicy root called "Árukan". Usually grown on terraced slopes, they are hot and spicy. Outside of this Large Hex, it is primarily only the wealthiest who may enjoy its savor. Its desirability is connected to its rarity. In the most prestigious market of Haumá, still-fresh roots, carried in moist straw and mud, fetch hundreds of Káitars. Attempts to propagate this spice in other locations have failed; it cannot abide heat, plus there is something about the water and soil of Pa'arídlatlú that is the source of their savor.

See the village of Kíruttle (entry and text boxes at 3713.HI) for notes on local forest fungal products. (Its allied village Hélash, entry and text boxes at 3713.GE, however, belongs to the fief of Kúrtusha.)

Village of Gushálu (3713.OB) Sap nodules of Tlethoggú (see the text box at Large Hex 3813), Tsúral buds, and Firyá reed-cloth are gathered to this point, to be brought to Kúrtusha. Hundreds of years ago, people of Gushálu were impaled for treason to the Tsoiyáni Empire.

Since then, a very complicated agreement enforced by the Governor of Kúrtur forbids the tanning and crafting of any Chlén-hide, here. Thus, Chlén-hide tools and weapons are very much in demand, but the locals have little money to spare for it.

Valley of the Book of Connubiation (3713.OH)

This is a misty place where rain falls each night and many of the days. Mighty trees lean and arc as creepers pull them over, until the greenery eventually consumes itself. Fragments of the text of the book for which the valley is named survive in the library of the Temple of Dlamélish in Katalál; they describe methods by which a marriage may be celebrated. A beautiful carven version is said to exist in a cave in the region of the Village of La'uóm.

Lost Village of La'uóm

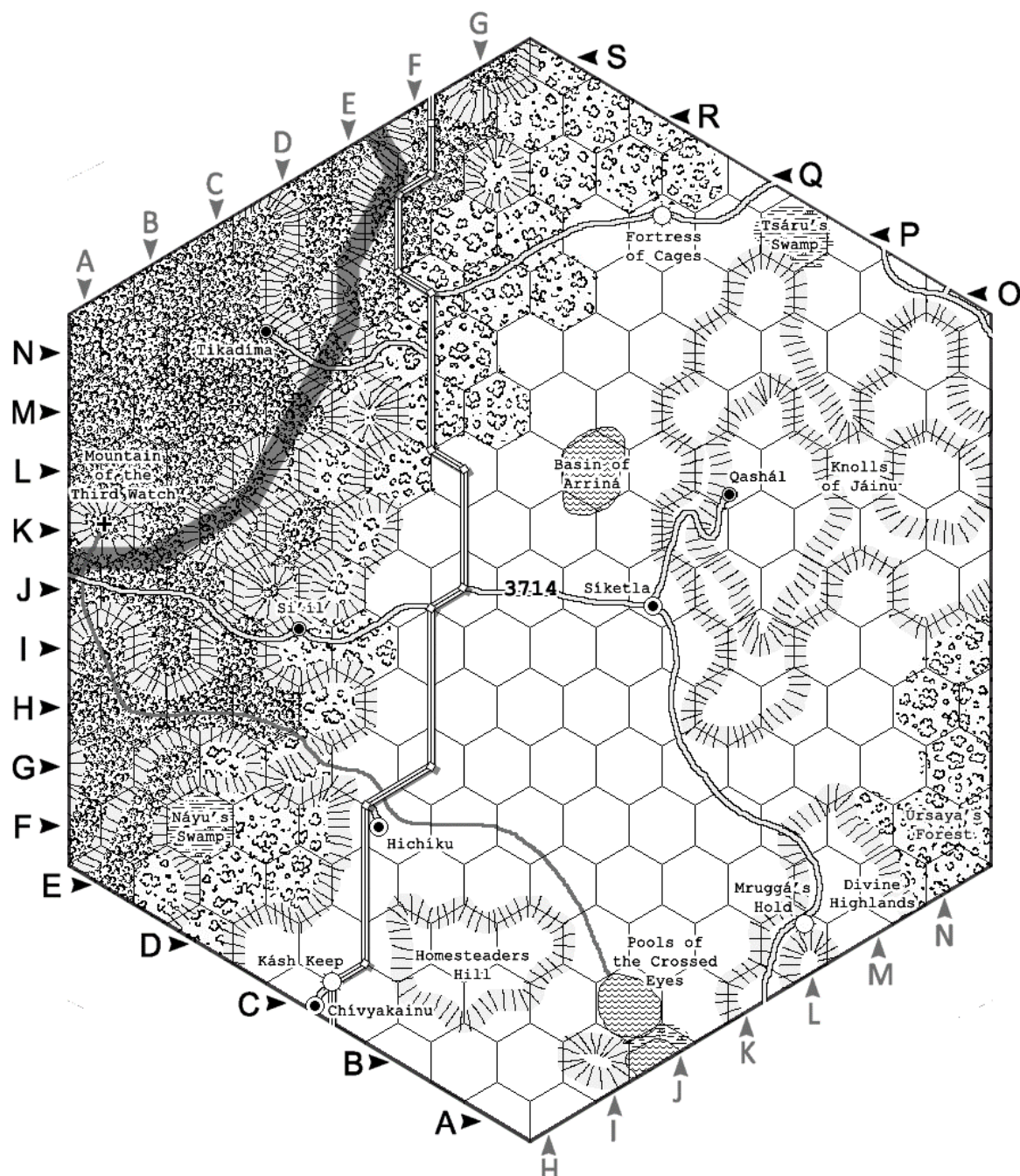
Ancient Imperial texts note there was once a settlement perhaps 72km (45 miles) east of Rúchano. It was built around an ancient stone temple to La'uóm, a goddess who was both Avánthe-like and Dlamélish-like, which had stood since the Time of No Kings. Use of the road was lost to many fallen trees during a severe storm. Thus, cut off from the Fief of Kúrtusha, La'uóm Village was eventually swallowed up by the jungle. Now it is a sad ruin, turquoise-colored lichens blotching the pale stone (3713.OH, or perhaps a neighboring Small Hex).

The Cave of the Book of Connubiation

The actual physical book for which the valley is named was lost thousands of years ago. However, a copy of it was engraved into the stone of a cave high up on the cliff wall above poor derelict La'uóm. The text is all in early Thu'úsa ladder-writing and an old Kurtáni dialect. Skillful stone carvings of its educational erotic drawings were made alongside the text. Some say that there are clues here to the locations of rare treasures hidden in the basements dug below the Temple of La'uóm.

Ulúmü's Peak (3713.OL) The top of this large hill is dark gray, and channels of mud streak down its slopes. In the rainy season, slides of wet slurry fall in all directions. The edge of Pa'arídlattu marks the farthest such has ever reached. Certain plants thrive in this ground, that grow very poorly elsewhere. Roughly four decades ago, a wisp of smoke or steam was seen drifting off the top; some suspect it is a slumbering volcano.

Cannibal Summit (3713.QI) During the Time of No Kings, a god was worshipped here whose commands included ritual human sacrifice and consumption of the flesh. Captives were purchased as slaves, then brought here in carts to be slaughtered as human livestock. An old inscription hints that this alleged deity, called "the Flayer God", left several temples in this Large Hex, but only the ruins of the one at Cannibal Summit are known today.



HEX 3714

This Large Hex has many herders as well as farmers. Some are of Kurtáni heritage and others are Tsolyáni. These semi-nomadic pastoralists have coexisted for centuries, with a much more significant gulf existing between those who keep Hmélu and those who keep Hmá, than along ethnic lines.

Herders travel about, yet they are still very territorial. Every herder is expected to follow strict grazing land agreements negotiated by elders of various clans. Along the trails, there are stone markers shaped like stylized squat human figures,

its slowly eroding features marked in moss. These statues have a second or even a third set of facial features, and other details, facing in the other direction. If there is a dispute over the location of a marker, or a need to place some new boundary, it is customary to ask a Hu'hún with a Kúni falcon to help settle the matter.

Some of these territorial treaties divide places up, not just by geography, but also by time. Thus, only drovers of the larger Hmélu have the use of the valley between Mruggá's Hold and the Knolls of Jáinu in the warmer months, especially when it is flooded, switching to keepers of the shorter Hmá in the month of Dohála, after the harvest festival.

To some Tsolyáni eyes, herders are hardly a step up from clanless scum, perhaps even a security risk. Hoping to avoid this perception, herders will usually wear a wooden marker signifying the village they call "home", even though they might only spend a few weeks there each year.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')
(See also 'About the Kurtáni People')

Dokémi Alán

Some say that there is a way to reanimate a child to make a creature with preternaturally keen senses, except that it is blind. The ceremony allegedly requires the body of a boy or girl who died at the time their limbs were lengthening (a growth spurt, usually around age 11-14 for girls and 12-16 for boys). After the change, they have large back-swept ears with upswept tips, reflecting their acute hearing, and a highly acute sense of smell. Eerily, their eyes have no whites. They acquire, so the tale goes, some unusual craving for something which they must then drink regularly to remain awake. What that is, however, varies depending on which version of the story you believe. In one, it is blood, in another, vinegar, some say urine, and sometimes it is even a certain color of ink, made with some precious stone. Some cite a ban on their appearance (made by the ecclesiastical courts in 1059 A.S.) as proof of their existence.

(A Dokémi Alán in the Béthorm system has Advantages Acute Hearing +3, Acute Smell +3, and Disadvantages Blind (3), Distinctive (2), Must Follow Creator's Commands (2), Unusual Dietary Requirement (1). Their PHYS is 8 or 9. They also have Pain Resistance, thus must lose all Hits before going unconscious. They do not have Toughness or Healthy!)

Divine Highlands See entry at (3614.QE).

Pools of the Crossed Eyes (3714.BJ) On the land between these two idyllic lakes, there is a stony hill with a platform to the top. A delicately filigreed pavilion with a mosaic roof shelters simple benches. On the eastern side, a small polished granite cone is affixed, a bit below chin-height, to a pedestal. Further out, there are sculptures of General Chamó hiLíminoí and his male lover Suhémi. Superstition holds that crossing one's eyes such that the statues appear to kiss brings luck in matters of the heart. One of Suhémi's moving love poems to Chamó is written in Classical Tsolyáni on the pedestal.

Town of Chívyakainu (3714.CD) This is a town on the Sákbe Road, south of Kásh Keep. This is a major center for spinning fiber into threads and yarns. They are shipped undyed to Haumá. Local superstition holds that it is dangerous to be on the east side of the Sákbe after sundown and before sunrise.

Kásh Keep (3714.DE) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) Kurtáni from the wooded hills to the west show up with items to trade such as wild-grown spices and tree resin. Though they claim clan kinship with inhabitants of Kásh Keep, they do not have clanhouses or villages of their own. For purposes of taxation, they belong to Kásh Keep. These "half-wild" Kurtáni are under some suspicion from those looking for Foundationists.

Beautifully patterned and dyed reptile skins from the hills and forests are one of the Keep's products. It is Kurtáni who hunt them, by dragging a half-rotted Hmélu calf carcass on a rope. It is dangerous. This method inevitably draws other predators.

Mruggá's Hold (3714.DL) On the northern slopes of the Divine Highlands (3614.QE), Mruggá's Hold is primarily a village for Hmélu traders, who meet there each spring. (They will meet again at the Basin of Arriná in winter.) The small keep building at the center encloses a fresh water spring, which still exists at the bottom of a huge well, but now only produces a few bucketfuls of water a day. The upper levels of this keep are beautifully appointed because this is where the former ruler of the Fief of Síketla chose to live. (He was actually unpopular, and it was a way to avoid attempts on his life.)

At an annual fair, herders converge, and it is busy. Most of the time, it is an empty fort enclosing countless little empty and unroofed rooms. The place has a bad reputation; every several years, one or two people is murdered at the annual gathering.

Homesteader's Hill (3714.DG) This is a low broad rise dotted with trees. In bygone centuries, it was a clearing in the forest, and a village thrived at its center, protected by "trees that would not burn". It holds some obscure significance to the Sé'iyau Thamyáni.

(See also 'The Sé'iyau Religion of the Kúrt Hills')

Town of Hichíku (3714.FF) There have been raids on shipments in this Large Hex along the Sákbe Road from here to the abandoned village of Asu'ún (3813.EM). Typically, around 25-75 bandits halt a Chlén cart, load the cargo into baskets, and run off with it in every direction. In one case,

the goods were recovered when the baskets were discovered hung up in trees (presumably with the intent to return for them later). A rumor persists here that undead are being used to farm lands somewhere in the Knolls of Jáinu. Even the worshippers of Lord Sárku are uneasy about this: turning one's deceased relatives into slaves is most ignoble.

Náyu's Swamp (3714.FD) While most wetlands are terrifying places, Náyu's Swamp is an odd little paradise. Iridescent purplish-blue Káika paddle about between floating plants with fragrant pink blossoms from which perfumes can be made. Beneath tiny floating green weeds, the water is fresh and clean.

Úrsaya's Forest (3714.GN) See entry at 3715.GA.

Village of Si'il (3714.ID) West of Síketla and all the way to Si'il, the road is unusually straight, the gaps between rises having been filled in. Unlike the Sákbe Roads that it emulates, there is little protection for travelers. This village in the light forest is a center for logging. Skittish Kurtáni tribesfolk who gather wild honey of the Nzí sometimes emerge from the woods here.

Town of Síketla (3714.JJ) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the fief. It is mostly rocky, but with many small clumps of trees, lush grasses, and fresh running streams. The chief products of the region are Hmélu beasts, Hmá wool, and various rare commodities from the Kúrt Hills forest to the west, including wild honey of the insect-like Nzí. To the east, a large amount of grain is grown, and many varieties of Káo squash.

The Bitter Noble

When tall, thin Count (Hehéllukoi) Usólu Numé hiKálmiren of the Domed Tomb Clan was awarded this fief by Prince Dchich'uné, he was pleased at first. When he learned what he had really been given, he was unhappy. Despite the wealth and prestige it represented, it was far from the City of Sárku where he was born. In his opinion, he was dropped between ignorant fractious herders and short greasy Kurtáni peddling their forest grubs, saps, and foul-smelling snake pelts.

The most egregious part was the former fiefholder's accommodations which he inherited: Mruggá's Hold. It had been described as a fort. It was, in fact, a huge barn made of stone. The lord chose to stay in Síketla. He concluded he had dragged his wives and children into a land of squallor where they were all in danger. He did not give the Royalist Party, to which he belongs, a favorable report of Prince Dchich'uné's doings.

More familiar with subjects that cultivated the land, Count Usólu awarded a myriad of plots west of the town

of Síketla to various clans to grow crops. They looked so lush and green; he could not understand why they had been left unplowed. These tracts were already "spoken for" by herding clans, some of whom were now cut off from reaching sites along seasonal routes they had used for thousands of years. Perhaps at the urging of the subversive Foundationists, herders "accidentally" walked their flocks through the newly sprouted fields.

To improve his immediate surroundings, Count Usólu taxed his subjects harshly. Some of this money was used to pay for entertainers and feasting, ostensibly in honor of Emperor Dchich'uné. Disgusted with Hmélu meat, he ordered hundreds of Káika ducks from Haumá. Expecting that they would enjoy a boost in status, he tried to hire Kurtáni as guards, but they refused. On the other hand, plenty of tough-looking local thugs came forwards from the worst part of town to offer their loyalty.

During the Civil War, Síketla was a dull but peaceful town with only the usual share of corruption. Now it is an uneasy place, the suspected haven of Foundationist renegades, and a magnet for criminals from other regions. Threats painted on stones have been thrown through the windows of the clanhouse of the Domed Tomb. Soon after the new Count was instated, a number of people evacuated. Most of the refugees went to the southernmost point in the Fief, the town of Hichíku (3715.FF).

Shipments on their way down the Sákbe Road to Haumá have vanished. Perhaps it is just a matter of time before the governor of Khósa Province interferes - most likely, by temporarily closing all trade through Kásh Keep. Count Usólu and his clan stand to lose a great deal of money if this occurs.

Mountain of the Third Watch (3714.KA) Qáyuma Village (3713.KN) to the west is in its shadow at the break of dawn. Standing proudly above the thick surrounding forests, the Mountain of the Third Watch is said to be where benevolent demons of Lord Karakán landed before returning to their own Plane. The Third Watch were the devout humans who awaited their return. No one knows what happened to them, but some say they have seen a small citadel in this region.

Knolls of Jáinu (3714.LM) The trees that remain are protected by the steep hillsides. Elsewhere, the stony ground is bare. Herders find little nourishment for their charges here. There are a few abandoned mines in this area. A rumor persists that undead are being used to farm lands somewhere in the Knolls of Jáinu. If so, it is an illicit practice that would not be condoned by the Temple of Sárku.

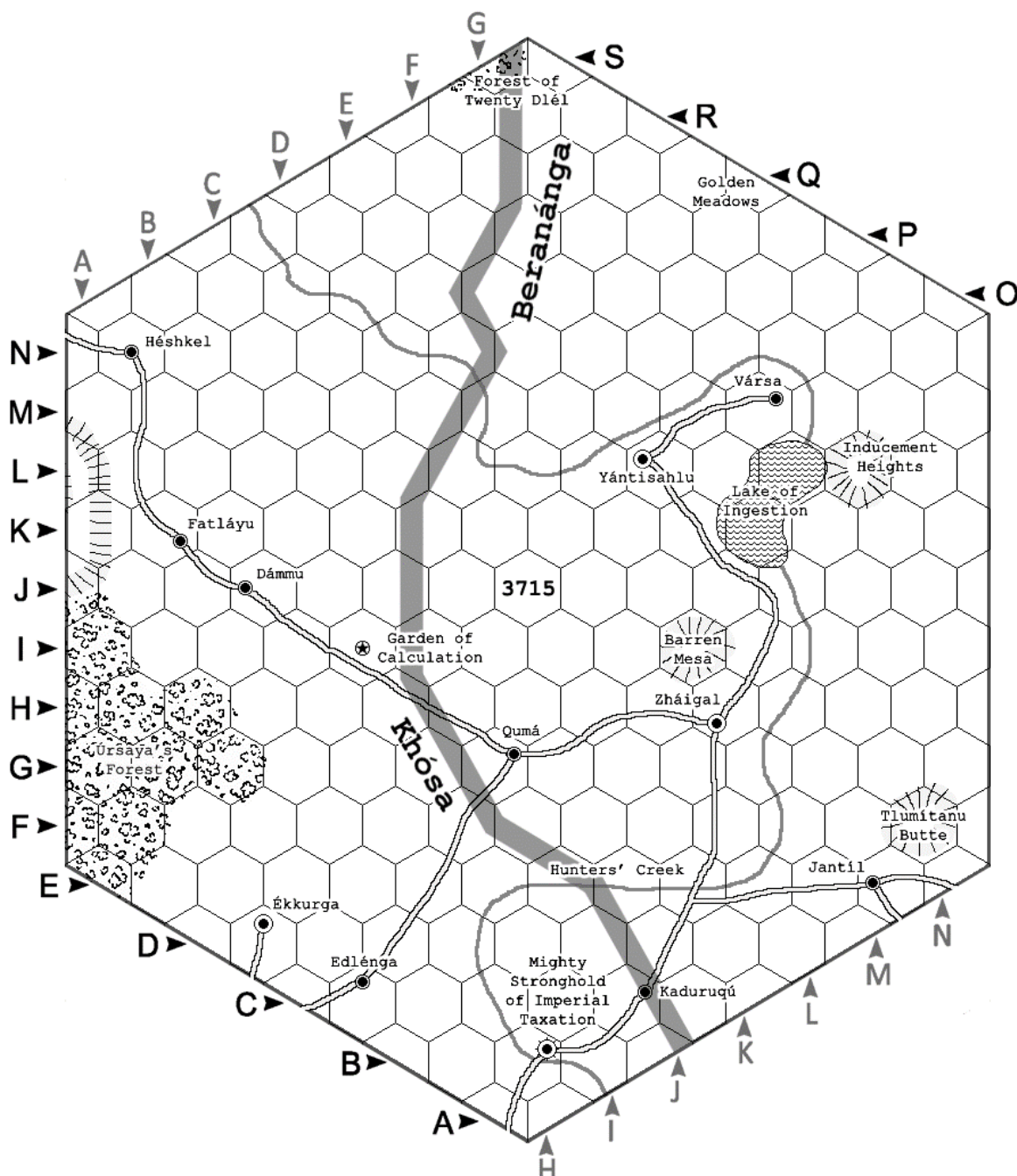
Village of Qashál (3714.LK) A copper mine seems to be the sole source of wealth here. The nights are chilly on this plateau, and villagers who can afford it are apt to wear Kurtáni-style hide vests, softened with fat, curly Hmá wool still on. Qashál is overpopulated, many of its people near starving. Due to longtime inhabitation, there are only bushes left here, no trees. While crimes such as theft are rare elsewhere in the Empire, they are not, here. The village is a barbaric embarrassment, with its surrounding wall and numerous city guards. The local Hetman is more like a warlord out of the ancient times. Although he executes criminals for the least offense, violators of the rules will not be deterred. Qashál (and its surroundings) are places where a Foundationist presence is suspected.

Basin of Arriná (3714.LI) This is an important landmark to the Hmá and Hmélu herders who wander this area. While they nominally belong to their various clans and villages, the herders are also somewhat loyal to all others of their profession. They gather on the shore of the Basin of Arriná in the driest days of winter, when it is smallest; it is the counterpoint to the spring gathering at Mruggá's Hold (3714.DL).

Village of Tikadíma (3714.ND) The road that approaches Tikadíma winds through lost terraces once used by farmers, but now overgrown. Most of the clanhouses are built around huge trees. Séresh and other valuable trees are grown here. Arson draws the death sentence. (While it looks like it ought perhaps to belong to the Fief of Hlarkú, Tikadíma remains independent because it is over the province border in Kúrtur, while Hlarkú is in Khósa.)

Tsáru's Swamp (3714.PL) Creatures that drink of the innocuous-seeming water of this Small Hex soon swell up and die. Whatever noxious substances are in it spread to taint the surrounding Small Hexes during the spring.

Fortress of Cages (3714.PJ) Legend has it that this citadel was intended to be a facility for breeding Kúni birds, but when the large falcons captured from the nearby cliffs were placed into cages, they would not reproduce. At times, this difficulty was overcome with the aid of sorcery. Built by a despot from the Time of No Kings, it was 'liberated' by Kurtáni heroes back in those days. During the brief reign of Prince Dhich'uné, it was given to Sárku-oriented hands. This site is the biggest point of contention for the Kurtáni Foundationists.



HEX 3715

This Large Hex appears to be peaceful, and for now it is. But often in the past it has been bathed in blood, especially its eastern half belonging to the Province of Berananga. "Red" clans are common in the villages and towns. Kurtáni here tend to take on the religion of the Sé'iyau Sunggánmirai (something like a soldier's cult of "The Striding Force", an aspect of Lord Karakán). The governing bodies of each village and town frequently have a bit of military discipline.

On the western side of Hunters' Creek, there is often fog in the winter. People do not like to travel then, for fear of being harried by the flying tentacled Chólokh "bugs".

(See also 'About the Golden Meadows')

The Mighty Stronghold of Imperial Taxation

(3715.BH) This is a most private citadel belonging to the Omnipotent Azure Legion. How coins and gems arrive here or leave is secret. There are many tales, each stranger than the next. Once, in the year 322 A.S., an army came to rob the Mighty Stronghold. The warriors suddenly found themselves in the sky, falling. When they landed, their faces were contorted and blue, as if they had been strangled.

Village of Edlénka (3715.CE) In Edlénka, there are vertical wardrobe-sized shrines to the 20 deities of Most Honorable Priest Pavár's pantheon, with that of Lord Thúmis being slightly larger. People of this backwater consider Prince Rereshqála almost a god because he fulfilled the details of a prophecy said to have been made around 550 years ago: He is a royal prince; he is a priest of Lord Thúmis; his name begins with an 'R' sound; he was raised by "a clan of blue", and he once purchased the village's entire stock of grain (well, not personally, but a sixth circle assistant to a twelfth circle aide did so on His Highness's royal behalf). This was an event for which they had prepared by building extra granaries, diligently rotating stores to keep them fresh. They usually can not resist asking travelers for news of that particular Imperial scion, and some of his devotees whisper prayers to Rereshqála, the Defender of Peace. Elsewhere in the village, not shown to outsiders, there is even a little shrine to Prince Rereshqála. The residents are shy about it, worried this might be mistaken for heresy.

Village of Kaduruqú (3715.CI) Its Kurtáni name for an age was Ekadí' Iqí, and it was no village. Under Emperor Kurshéti Nikúma II (c. 808 A.S.), it was a Tsolyáni prison torture camp for captured relatives and associates of dissidents, as well as a place for mass impalements. Many Kurtáni preferred to fight from the edge of the woods, setting fires to civilians' houses and raiding innocent merchants rather than engaging in proper civilized battles with warriors. After the legions of the Empire closed the camp down, the property was sold to the Temple of Chiténg, who turned it into a sweet Dmí-root plantation.

Town of Ékkurga (3715.DD) Descendants of Kurtáni who became "citified" centuries ago are common in this town. They do not usually look particularly like the bandy-legged people of the hills, but their names and surnames are filled with the glottal stops and vowels of the old Kurtáni language. In general, their reactions to the Foundationists range from unsympathetic to dangerously hostile. Conversely, the Foundationists mockingly call those of Kurtáni descent in Ékkurga who have forgotten the old ways, "Rényu."

Hunter's Creek (3715.EI) See entry at 3615.HI.

Village of Jantíl (3715.EM) This is near the base of the ring of soft hills about Tlumítanu Butte. There are many small clanhouses, each facing a different direction, between crazily angled dirt roads like the lines in a piece of broken glass. The land is generous, and even the lives of slaves are relatively easy. Their agrarian specialty is squashes, which they have collected for centuries.

The Squashes of Jantíl

This crop is a veritable obsession with the folk of this village. The largest, it is said, was big enough for a farmer's two wives to both climb inside. Other plants with vaguely similar fruits, but not related, are also grown here, including the bitter Chř melon that pleases the palate of the Shén. The wise herder keeps their hungry Hmá or Hmélu far from the stones and arrows of the aggressively territorial squash farmers of Jantíl.

To keep the strains pure, various types are each grown in separate little gardens between the hills. The Illustrious Litany of the Káo Squash gives detailed lists of which specimens are to be culled: "Should the Blue Mijéksa be without curl to its neck, should its skin be without the white mottled stripes two fingers in width, should its flesh fail to please the palate, should its blossoms not be fragrant, should the skin be bitter, then let that one be roasted and eaten unto its last seed." Káo seeds are a staple starch in this place.

Tlumítanu Butte (3715.FN) There is an obscure story, perhaps true, associated with this place. In the temples of Lady Hríháyal in Katalál and Haumá, it is sometimes recounted that Páchukoi (Lord) Sríka hiYelóni was enamored of Hláka maidens. He would have bought Hláka slaves, but there were none to be found. To woo his sweethearts, he spent all his money on rare devices that would enable him to fly - and, some say, on those that would influence a Hláka female to follow him. Sríka was mocked by his brothers, and he was too meek to defend his honor. Instead, he flew away to Tlumítanu Butte on magical mechanical wings, and there he built a little eyrie. After his death, he was ceremonially eaten by his wives.

Úrsaya's Forest (3715.GA) Of a wing of Kúrt Hills woods that once graced this region, only Úrsaya's Forest remains. (Also extends into Large Hexes 3614 and 3714.) It is typical deciduous trees mixed with patches of Kézmul, an exotic "bamboo" that grows in a spiraling fashion.

The Twisty Kézmul Bamboo

This is a rare local plant that grows up to fifty meters in a corkscrew-like shape. Typically colored golden-brown to red-brown, and sometimes splotched with a darker color, Kézmul has culm chambers like a bamboo.

A harmless moth-like creature with big dark friendly-looking eyes, the Yísülüss, appears only in this area, during the month of Trantór. It lives only for a few weeks,

summoning a mate by tapping musically on a hollow tree stalk and laying eggs on a Kézhmul before it dies. Finger-sized Yísülüss larvae burrow into the stem of a Kézhmul. As they eat the starchy interior, the Kézhmul trunk above grows more slowly, but also, much stronger.

When Úrsaya's Forest was a bigger region, the Kurtáni would come to search for thick stalks with telltale holes, cutting them down to harvest and eat the big Yísülüss grubs. The oddly spiraling "bamboo" would be carried off to make into such things as interesting interior room pillars in clanhouses. Yísülüss and Kézhmul are probably from the homeworld of the Páchi Léi, who also find the Yísülüss caterpillars delicious.

Village of Qumá (3715.GG) If one is coming from the northwest, prosperous Qumá is the last stop on the road before reaching Zháigal, the seat of the fief. An unhealthy number of Chólokh swoop about valleys along the road. One specimen in particular has become something of a local celebrity: "Old Bazhú", a beast blamed for the loss of a number of shipments. Perhaps the true problem is that the fiefholder of Koyél prefers that the grain grown in his fief go westwards, to the Sákbe Road, where buyers from Tsurú might compete against those from Haumá. Some whisper the attacks are the doing of the Foundationists.

Old Bazhú

Those of a heroic inclination are welcome to hunt Old Bazhú: a Chólokh said to be of unusually large size, with deadly animal cunning to match. Sometimes there are holes dug in the road, disguised by filling them with straw and a layer of dirt. Upon touching this trap, a Chlén blithely finds another place to put its broad feet, and continues onwards, but the wheel of a cart falls in and breaks off. At this point, the driver and the Chlén are attacked. There has been a bounty offered in Qumá for Old Bazhú's head for over fifty years now. Many say that he is not the one that preys upon the carts, for, of what use are so many bushels of Dná to a man-eater? Of course, the disappearing herders and some of their charges, those might actually be the doing of Old Bazhú and his cohorts.

Town of Zháigal (3715.HK) This is the seat of the fief of Zháigal. Neighboring Qumá to the west is part of it, but the next village down, Dámmu, belongs to the fief of Koyél. During the winter, this whole area is frequently clothed in a cool bleak fog.

In the other seasons, there is a peculiar tradition of cooperation that goes on in Zháigal. Hláka like to acquire stones that are around head-size, of certain colors, and lightweight, such as chalk, to take up to Barren Mesa (3715.094). Humans can mine and acquire minerals of this sort throughout the area. To earn these, Hláka will act as aerial scouts, spotting bands of Chólokh, and leading warriors to them. (The willingness of these normally skittish nonhumans to face Chólokh says something about how badly they want these rocks.) Despite the Hlákas' earnest help, though, the road between Zháigal and Héhskel (3715.NB) is still not cleared of them.

Garden of Calculation (3715.IE) Just a kilometer or so north off the road between Dámmu (3715.JD) and Qumá (3715.GG), there is a stone landmark, surrounded by a quite large flower garden. Three meters tall, it is made of black and white stone. Except when the winter mists flow in, it is visible from the western edge of the top of Barren Mesa (3715.IE). Seen from the air, it is a sort of clover shape with three circles and an eastwards-pointing stem. A slender obelisk with black and white alternating stripes rises from the center of the western circle. On the ground around it are oddly shaped plots of dirt surrounded by large bricks paths. The whole of it is best appreciated from the air, as the symmetry of an abstract design becomes apparent. South of the garden there is a plaza of tramped-down dirt where travelers sometimes stop to camp.

Barren Mesa (3715.IJ) From time to time, Hláka are seen going up to this place. It seems to have something to do with their religion, which involves patterns of colored stones and astronomical observations. There are no roads, paths, or stairs going up. It would take a very accomplished climber or magical assistance to scale it.

Village of Dámmu (3715.JD) While this was once a Kurtáni settlement, the people here are very culturally Tsolyáni today, while their slightly shorter stature and exotic facial features hint at their heritage. The lands nearby were acquired by the Temple of Qón thousands of years ago. A resident priest oversees the gathering of tithes. In the evening, he often tells stories of incursions by demons, and how the devotees of Qón fought them back. The shrine to Qón shelters a carving of an aspect that looks like a beautiful young man with large flat circular gems embedded in each of his palms. Úrsaya's Forest to the southwest is all that remains of the forest that once flowed out over the hills, spared for the sake of the delicious Yísülüss moth larva, a local delicacy, and the folk of Dámmu still go out to collect them (see also 3715.GA for the text box on Kézhmul Bamboo).

Fort Qéla'ni

At the close of the Time of No Kings, Dámmu was the site of a Kurtáni settlement called Fort Qéla'ni. The legend says it was protected by a wall made of enormous tree trunks that could not be burned. They were most likely fireproofed with Tlethoggú sap, from trees that grew close nearby long ago. Several woodsy paladin-like folk heroes lived here, and fought the oppressors of worshippers of Stability. Across the Kúrt Hills forest, the story of the heroes of Qéla'ni is told by Hu'húns (leaders) of the Sé'iyau La'ukán, rustic tribal Qón-worshippers. The location of Qéla'ni has been reduced to the stock phrase, "east of the Knolls of Jáinu."

Village of Fatláyu (3715.KB) What originally began as roofs to stave off the worst of the heat eventually grew into the wooden walkways, balconies, and platforms that form a second and third layer high above the ground. Some are built around living trees two man-heights across the base of the trunk. The walkways connect various clanhouses; there are small common areas for those of similar status. The road to either side of Fatláyu has many vine-covered bridges that span the tops of rippling rows of hills. Grain crops are rare, but hilltop gardens of various fruits and squash are common. The valleys between the ridges often contain mist.

Lake of Ingestion (3715.KK) An overabundance of small aquatic reptiles infests this lake. They swim in a mixed school of many different bright colors. To folks in a boat, they are no threat, but they would strip a swimmer to bare bones in minutes. A half-broken dam at the southern end tends to keep these voracious living gems contained.

Town of Yántisahlu (3715.LJ) The town covers a broad conical hill. Vines with cascades of fragrant blossoms drip nectar from the twisted branches of Gapúl trees. There are two very old bridges near here. One spans the river to the northwest; the other goes over a long and deep chasm on the road to the southeast. In bygone times, Hunter's Creek forked here, a part flowing northwards and a part southwards. Yántisahlu is still known locally as "the Mournful Island".

Inducement Heights (3715.LM) Rising up above hills separated by channels of mist, the Inducement Heights are a number of hills shaped like halves of bread loaves of different sizes. This area had several gold mines. They are thought to be played out. From time to time, however, somebody wanders back to town with a spoonful of gold dust panned in one of the many nearby streams.

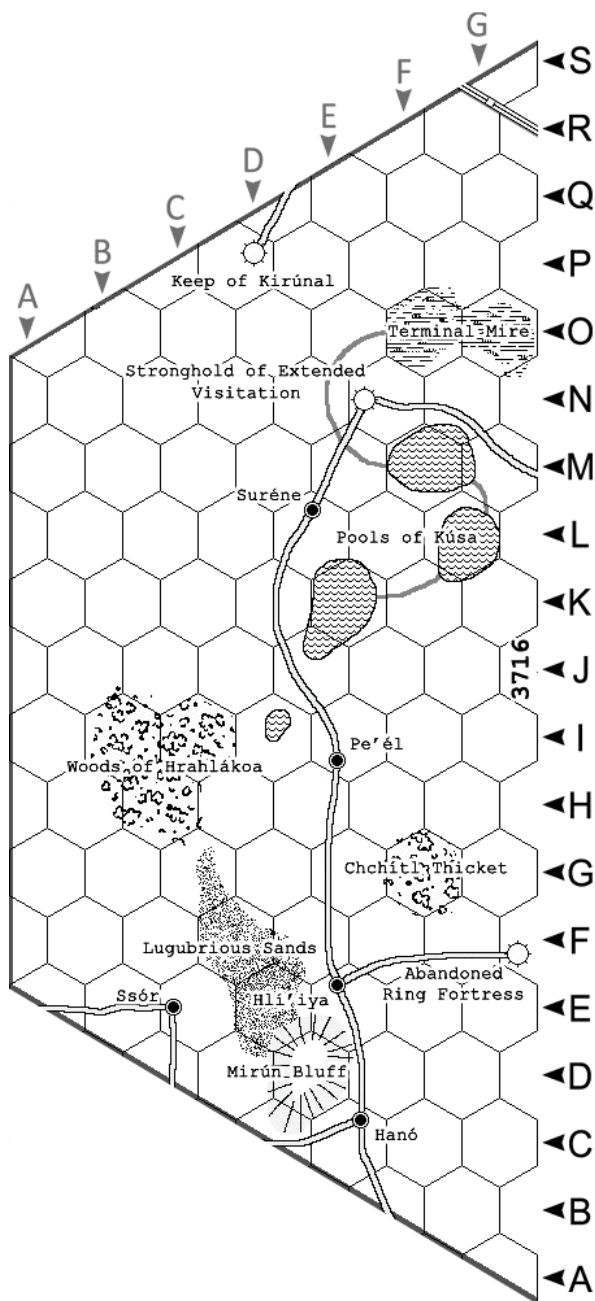
Village of Vársa (3715.MK) This is a poor village, with too many people and too little food. Items such as Chlén hide tools are hard to find. They apparently eke out a living by doing whatever jobs they can at the eastern edge of the town of Yántisahlu, and fishing for small bright-hued bitey creatures in Hunter's Creek. A slaver's clan, that of the Bone Collar, dominates the village. The slaves that they train are usually amnesiac by the time they are done.



As the dreaded Káyi approached, Lump the Plowman cut the traces, and used his legs of bronze to flee.

Village of Héhskel (3715.NB) This village extends down a street that goes northeast of the road. Clanhouses of the "red" clans tower over the others. The clan of Red Scarification has an especially large and sprawling one. Northwest of town are plazas with a well and stone platforms where armies may comfortably bivouac. Since the husbands are often away, women typically outnumber men five to one here, and a large number of rowdy children swarm about. Friendly gangs of teens are encouraged to go on outings to the land between the road and Úrsaya's Forest. There was once a road between Héhskel and Árana (3814.DM). All that remains of it is are stone bridges that connect the chasms.

Golden Meadows (3715.QJ) (See 'About the Golden Meadows')



HEX 3716

This is an area not near any Sákbe Road. The terrain varies in interesting ways. Reed thickets ring fresh ponds where Chlen can drink their fill. Meadows have little berry shrubs on which Hmá and Hmélu can grow fat. Wild Kūni falcons soar in lazy prosaic circles over diagonally striped sandstone buttes and projections.

Patches of honeycomb rock give smaller predators such as Dnélu places from which to spring out. The thorny-backed Tsi'il trundles between similarly thorned copses here.

(See also 'About the Golden Meadows')

Village of Hanó (3716.CE) A sense of strangeness pervades this place. Clanhouses here seem stunted and antique, and a blustery wind comes up from the southeast all year around. The resident population of Hanó is very small because there are no streams, springs, or wells. All water comes either from little clanhouse pools, or bottles brought from elsewhere. The ground is dry and dusty for miles around. The demons called Sijánga are said to have originated here. (See the text box on Sijánga at 3615.NG)

Mirún Bluff (3716.DE) This is a plateau with finger-like spires amidst smaller flat-topped hills. Rather than karst, this is colorful sandstone. There are stripes of white, orange, peach, dark brown, black, and pale purple. Viewed from the road to the east, these lines go from the upper left to the lower right, parallel but zig-zagging in places. There is always a dry wind from the southeast. There is mention of this place in an epic poem from Bednálljan times. Mirún Bluff has six pillars today, but the poem says seven, the southernmost having been worn to a nub.

Village of Ssór (3716.EC) Run-down clanhouses cluster here. This is a sleepy village, mainly inhabited by older people. Ssór is often profoundly quiet save for the rhythmic creak and splash of a clever little pump powered by woven mats on frames that catch the wind. Root vegetables that can thrive on very little water are Ssór's only crop. It is a great contrast to the bustling temple plantations and schools that surround Gakoyél Palace to the south. Baskets of sand from the Lugubrious Sands (see 3716.GF) are brought here. They add water mixed with a salt mined in the Kráà Hills, and let it dry, separating the sand into different colored layers. This is made into colorful pitchers and other wares by elderly glassblowers. This activity is believed to please Lord Hnálla, as it reverses the dissolution decreed by Lord Hrū'ü. Béram hiMíndoi of the (High status) Pearl Shoulders Clan (now in his 70s) is exiled here by his niece, who succeeded him as the fiefholder of Pe'él (3716.IE).

Village of Hlí'iya (3716.EE) When the summer is hottest, wealthy merchants like to converge upon this breezy place upon a sandstone hill. Pavilions with gauze walls keep the grit under control, while servitors with brooms must sweep the walkways frequently. A hostel belonging to the Temple of Avánthe provides exemplary hospitality.

Lugubrious Sands (3716.FD) These are dunes of an odd shade halfway between purple and reddish brown produced by the winds that are constantly eating away Mirún Bluff. Dust devils dance across the grit. Sudden sandstorms can make travel through here very perilous.

Abandoned Ring Fortress (3716.FH) Tumbledown walls and knee-high lines of rock fragments are all that remain of this landmark. The story of Kalkému and his standard of human skin supposedly took place here.

The Corporal's Punishment

Peasants of the Golden Meadows region tell of Kalkému, a soldier who tried to usurp the identity of his fallen commander. Due to his misinterpretation of a signal, most of his men were killed the following day. Kalkému was court-martialed, but instead of impalement, a special punishment was ordered: he was flayed and made to carry his skin on a banner for years. And, of course, some say he has been seen, centuries later, on the battlements at night.

Chchítł Thicket (3716.GF) Amongst common trees and shrubs, there are rare trees called Íjatok, with exotic blue and pink striped fleshy leaves, and a bulging base. The wood is a rich handsome blue, with a distinctive starburst woodgrain. Platters made from it are required in various religious ceremonies.



The Íjat Beast is the aggressive and moving stage of a parasitic life form. Its role is to slay an animal to nourish a future Íjatok tree.

The Íjat Beast

When large Íjatok trees die, an Íjat, a five-legged carnivorous creature (also blue with pink stripes) the size of a large dog, soon emerges. It hunts by spitting thorny darts at unarmored places. New Íjatok trees grow from their spoor, which they bury. They live for about fifty years. From time to time, a noble may pay for a new one to be captured, and brought to some zoo or garden. A very young Íjat can even be tamed, to serve as a loyal guardian. They were brought by one of alien races that came to Tékumel, but no one remembers which.

Íjat Beast (.9)

Wandering: 100%, 1/1/2 Lair: 0%

PHYS: 9	DEFT: 10	INST: 10
WILL: 12	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: +1
Initiative: 2/4/6	Movement: 6 ground	
Defenses:	Melee: 2	Missile: 2
Armor: 2/1	Hits: 7	Energy: 10
		Magic: 2

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Dart	15-	2/3/4	6 range

Other Abilities:
None

Woods of Hrahlákoa (3716.IB) These hills bulge and swell in a way that defeats logging. It is said that the stronghold of an ancient cult of an entity called "The Devouring Blood" is here somewhere, lost amidst the vine-laden trees. Like Chchítł Thicket (3716.GF), there are a few rare Íjatok trees growing here. (See the text box for the Íjat Beast at 3716.GF.)

Village of Pe'él (3716.IE) This is the seat of the fief. Pe'él was once a densely-packed town with many wooden clanhouses at the crown of a striped sandstone knoll. Its grain-warehouses were very full and it was a dry year when it was devastated by a fire two years ago. The fiefholder, Lady Chamisa hiMíndoi of the small but wealthy Clan of Pearl Shoulders, was brought up in Beranánga Province's capital, the metropolis of Béy Sü, where her clan originates. Young and beautiful, she has a ruthless side, concealed with the aid of genteel manners and a winsome smile. Lady Chamisa took over from her uncle a year ago at the age of 20. Half of the superstitious peasants who work her lands fear the destruction, which began with lightning, was a sign of Lord Karakán's displeasure. The other half attribute it to the ire of Lord Chiténg. Lady Chamisa ordered her uncle Béram exiled to the village of Ssór (3716.EC), making him the religious scapegoat for the fire.

Pools of Kúsa (3716.KE, .LG, and .MF) From south to north, they are named Éysa, Jáline, and Tashélnu. Fed by an underground spring, Éysa has a reputation for improving the complexion. Water from Éysa feeds the other two.

Village of Suréne (3716.LE) This village produces a relatively large amount of grain and other crops, giving the folks more free time. It is the headquarters of the (primarily female) "Devotees of Beauty". This is an ancient society within the Temple of Dlamélish with an interest in cosmetics and hair styling. They adorn their bodies with tapering swirls of cheerful colors. Crushed glittery shells, iridescent Khéstchal plumes, and other luxuries are sold in the marketplace.

Stronghold of Extended Visitation (3716.NF) This is an enclave belonging to the Temple of Dlamélish. Guests are treated to the most amazing delights, starting with exquisite and rare delicacies. The priestesses who preside here take great care to avoid a dark reputation. Nevertheless, the lengths to which devotees of the Green-eyed Goddess will go to achieve the ultimate pleasures are legendary, and some, such as those involving demons, are undeniably dangerous. It is said that the notorious drug Zu'úr was used here before it was made illegal.

Terminal Mire (3716.OF) Beyond the Pools of Kúsa (3716.KE), water flows alongside the road in a half-circle arc to the Terminal Mire. At the end, there is a rickety plank causeway that zigzags between pairs of posts, roughly a meter above the dark water. Counter to the reputation typical of swamps, the Terminal Mire is a wetland with

strangely shaped blossoms not found anywhere else, and graceful swaying reeds, the air teeming with small jewel-colored flying creatures.

Keep of Kirúnal (3716.PD) This is at the eastern edge of the "Golden Meadows" region (see Golden Meadows, 3815.DD). A sprawling village surrounds the Keep. The Keep itself is a structure built of huge timbers, kept hale by slaves on ropes applying pungent oils and varnishes every year. At the center of the Keep is the Spire of the Winds, a strange and elaborately-vented structure made of a stone-like material that tapers as it rises above the mists. They say the Spire also extends much farther down into the ground, but no one knows how far.

Thin trails extend westwards into farmlands upon soft low hills. The little clanhouses on stilts for seasonal use out in the fields are common around here. Farther out, several Small Hexes away, there are abandoned ones that are a nuisance, as nasty beasts may take up residence. There are also marker obelisks of different sizes, marked in various archaic languages, and utilising the ancient Thu'úsa script.

The Cave of the Four-legged God

There is a known cave entrance to an Underworld in the Small Hex to the south. Small stone effigies of what seem to be Ahoggyá have been found here. There are whispers that Kirúnal was built upon an Ahoggyá city, but citizens usually take offense if one brings it up.

Kélel's Hold (3810.MM)



Town of Métiá (3912.BG)



Town of Erqúma (3910.GI)



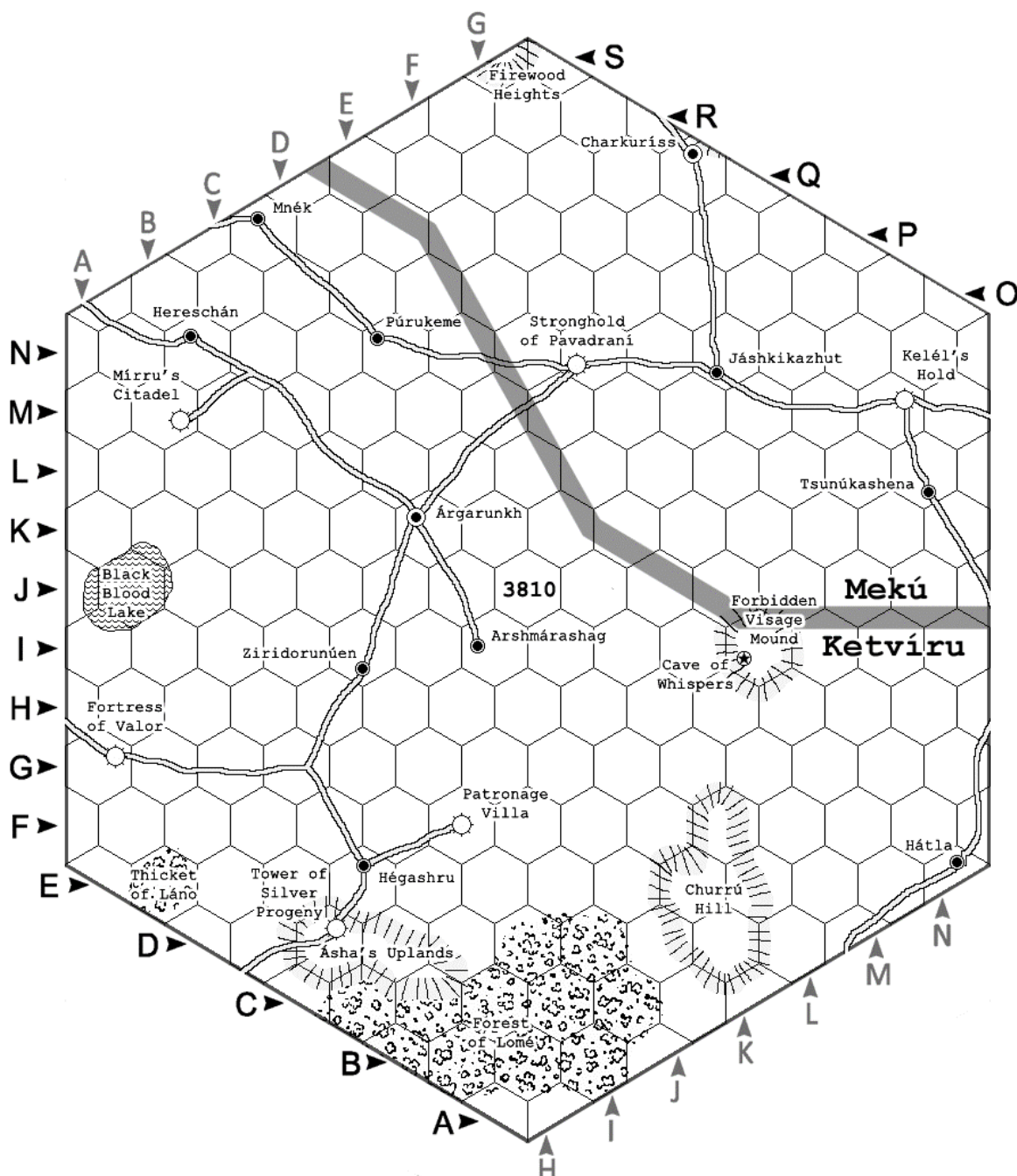
City of Méku (3911.JL)



Town of Mirrá (3912.LL)



Brands for the Stations of Brave Peripitation of Méku Province



HEX 3810

The ground here is such that the land slopes. In some towns, a child's marble placed on one side of the room rolls slowly to the other side. Dítlána is rarely practiced and the buildings fall over on their own. Ruins of previous eras tip crazily towards the sunset, the walls leaning out over great heaps of rubble. There are many such places.

Only the rarest vestiges of the old Kurtáni language persists here today, for instance, in the name of a kind of tall pot for smoking meat strips. Scattered through the usual clans, however, there are descendants of three Kurtáni lineages

(they have adopted the Tsolyáni prefix 'hi'): hiNáya-Núe, hiCh'mó, and hiÁ'a'ai.

This region is the site of incursions of the powers of an entity known as Bész. Although he has been active for centuries, his doings have not yet attracted attention. Villages in this Large Hex are home to Bész's 'children': mortals granted abilities by this demon in infancy. On the surface, they worship the approved deities of the pantheon discovered by Pavár (and their devotion is often sincere), but they regard Bész as their benevolent and deific patron, and wish to free him.

The Demon Bésh

[Taken from Tsolyáni recensions of the Book of Ebon Bindings]: He of Fetters [?]. This Demon is not the Master of any Circle. The Book of Emanations [now lost] states that he was 'driven from Fíru'ún' [possibly the 25th Circle or a site within it]. He is said to be of the Substance of the Green Lady, though his Essence is not recorded. His powers are those of Favoring [causing a designated person to be fortunate in some dealing], Transformation [changing a being into some other shape], and Punition [tormenting a victim with violence]. He is not described.

Although Bésh does not enter the Plane of Téकुमел, his influence is secretly extended by adoring disciples. He is either imprisoned or simply stranded in his own béthorm. His access to Téकुमел is oddly limited: a nexus point of small diameter (about 8") opens for a period of only 8 hours once per year. He himself can not pass through. Despite his limitations, several villages in this Large Hex are secretly controlled by Bésh's cult.

- Hátla (3810.EN; secretly controlled; shrine to "Besísh" used for communications)
- Púrukeme (3810.NF; Children of Bésh live here; cult influence currently growing)
- Tsunúkashena (3810.LN; the cult of "Besísh" has been quietly revived)
- Charkuríss (3810.QJ; fully controlled)

Bésh is still able to bestow gifts upon humans - but only in his own realm. And so, the locals pass infants through the nexus point. When Bésh returns them, they are smiling happily in their sleep, enhanced... and altered.

"The Marks of Lord Bésh" are thus: Attractive: +1 (1), Danger Sense: +2, only when displaying their 3rd Eye (1), Sleep Spittle: ingested poison (via kiss, in food or drink, etc.), causes sleep, resist at -4, one use per day, loses its potency after 1 hour / can't be saved up (1), Secret: demoniac abilities, becomes 2-point Enemy (priesthood of Qón) if publicly known (-1), Distinctive: demoniac 3rd Eye, high on the forehead (-1), Phobia: things which repel, bind, or control demons (-1).

Bésh's "children" have organized themselves into a secret cult. They have no memory of what transpired in the hours spent in Bésh's little world. They consider him their benefactor, and they search for a way to release him from his imprisonment. His most devout supporters converge with care for the ceremony of the opening of his portal each year (Trantór 27; autumn). Amongst other things, Bésh accepts 'tribute' in the form of written current events, of every level of importance, from lowly and local, to high and mighty.

Devotees of the demon called Bésh know of the ruins of the temple where Bésh was once worshipped as a god during Bednálljan times. The site, known today as the Cave of Whispers (3810.IK), was destroyed in an earthquake but a secret shrine remains in the cave upon which the temple was initially built. This is where Bésh is able to interact through a tiny nexus point into our plane one day out of each year. Bésh's children do not meet here, lest they attract attention to his hiding place.

Forest of Lomé (3810.CH) An old children's story tells of the hairy Sikún, the "Little Men" that live in these woods. According to the tale, children who have misbehaved are stolen away, to be turned into Sikún themselves.

Ásha's Uplands (3810.DE) Steep-sided buttes with rounded squarish tops form a barrier for those who would travel north and south. Clumps of twisted trees cluster and overflow their ledges. Waterfalls spring from the sides without rhyme or reason, affording travelers pure fresh drink almost all year round. A road winds upwards from Hégashru, passing below the Tower of Silver Progeny, twisting its way down again towards Harsú. (see also the entry for Tower of Silver Progeny in Large Hex 3810).

These uplands are surrounded by fields with white flowers (see the entry for the village of Hégashru, 3810.EE for more about that). Although locals would most likely be unaware of this, there are caves that were inhabited by Hláká long ago. These entrances are visible from the ground, and inaccessible without flight or specialized gear and a bit of climbing skill.

Tower of Silver Progeny (3810.DE) This is a building on the northern side of the western end of Ásha's Uplands. A fragment of a scroll now kept in the archives of the Temple of Thúmis at Katalál speaks of "the Child Eaters", some sort of bestial predators. These were driven off by "the Silver Progeny", who built a beautiful edifice for themselves. The original is long gone but a modern structure called "The Tower of Silver Progeny" occupies a huge and neatly jutting ledge. It is currently owned by the Temple of Avánthe.

There is almost a settlement that has formed in the shadow of this outcropping. Not yet a village, it is more of a large rest-stop on the way from Hégashru to Harsú. However, there are no clan-houses here.

Thicket of Láno (3810.EB) The approach to this place is through meadows dotted with broad coppices. These are stands growing about a single Gapúl tree. Each has a ring of shrubbery and smaller trees. Inside this, below the Gapúl's

broad canopy, will be a bare shady circle. Thus thinned, the trees grow straight and tall, and, with the permission of the fief-holder (Taganyál hiMriyatláku at Patronage Villa) they may be taken for timber. The thicket itself, however, is a preserve where logging may not be performed.

Village of Hégashru (3810.EE) According to one ancient legend, there was supposed to be a Sákbe Road built from here towards the southeast to the village of Balú. According to another, it was supposed to go northeast, to Táshayalu. In any event, no such road was ever built, and the region remains a backwater. A large brothel is operated here by the Green Kirtle Clan. There are also a number of wives of men from the Fortress of Valor here. It is common to see little boys (and even a few little girls) waving about blunt miniature Chlén-hide weapons.

Halukhói, the Hive-Lizard

This village is surrounded by fields of the common white Tétel flowers and "Pággharek", a white flower with a unique pleasant aroma which only grows in this Large Hex. Along with Pággharek blossoms, there is the "Halukhói", a local creature resembling a plump cantaloupe-sized three-eyed lizard with a long tongue which lives in groups of several hundred. Halukhói are not a threat unless one is attempting to rob their big lumpy mud nest (on the ground) of "Slákh", a fragrant white halukhói "honey" they regurgitate for their young. Halukhói fight back with their tail stingers.

Local folks know that this sweet substance has healing properties. As a food, however, Slákh is a great failure: ingesting even small amounts causes violent diarrhea. Hlákha will find it delicious, however, and have no trouble eating it. (That the Pággharek flowers and the Halukhói were both brought to Tékmel long ago by the Hlákha is likely.)

A gift of Slákh is especially welcomed by priests of Lord Thúmis, who consider the Pággharek flower an adequate substitute to adorn their god's altar if no Tétel flowers are available.

A Halukhói lizard raised from birth can be kept as a pet. It will eat tidbits of food, especially Slákh honey. It soon recognizes the face of its master. It is nocturnal, so it will tend to nap on its owner's shoulder. At night, however, it will prowl about the room hunting for insects. It is about as trainable a very dumb cat. It is also prone to mischief, as Halukhói are constantly attempting to raid one another's nests, so it may attempt to break into food stores.

Halukhói (.1)
Wandering: 20%, 5/7/9 Lair: 80%, 100/200/300

PHYS: 6
WILL: 9
Initiative: 1/1/2

DEFT: 9
PSYC: 2
Movement: 5 ground

INST: 9
Size Mod: 4

Defenses:
Armor: 1/0

Melee: 4
Hits: 3

Missile: 4
Energy: 10

Magic: 2

Attacks
Tail Sting

Hit:
12-

Dmg:
1/2/3

Other:

Other Abilities:

Night Vision: +4

Churrú Hill (3810.EJ) The ground is eaten down to dry dirt, and the top of ivory-colored Churrú Hill appears bare. This arid location abounds with small chitin-covered joint-legged life-forms, with little to eat but each other. Tiny biting Drí make their presence known through conical nest entrances of black sand. Flat blotchy lichens, in varying shades of gray, grow several meters across, lending camouflage to flat-bodied Átlun that resemble enormous dappled ticks.

They say that generations ago, a larger variety of the bug-eyed Mnór lived here. As evidence, locals may take a dry old Mnór pelt of unusual size from a chest, the soft fur worn away except for a few patches of a lovely unfaded cerulean blue.

Village of Hátla (3810.EN) Hátla is a sleepy village, with a few barking but friendly Tlékku (dogs) to break the peace when strangers approach. Because the road to the southwest is poor, it sees fewer travelers. Thus, entertainers are especially welcome. Along the path, there is a line of shrines to each of the ten deities embraced by the Tsolyáni, and next to each of these, a smaller one to each Cohort.

Very easily overlooked, there is an even smaller shrine, consisting of four flat rocks arranged like a knee-high miniature stable in the shade of a tree. It could be mistaken for a seat, and no one seems to mind if it is used as such. This construct hold a few slats of wood with some sort of markings cut into them. The locals say this is dedicated to an ancient local cave-god called Besish. He is generally assumed to be an Aspect of Lord Ksáru, but no one will say for sure.

Most of the clan heads are members of Besh's cult. They use the Shrine of Besish as a place to leave messages for each other, cut into slats of wood. The writing is the obscure "Ladder Writing" of the Kurtáni, now used by the Temples of Stability as a sort of code. (Béthorm rules: Priests of Stability may make a roll on their Rituals skill -5, but +1 for each Circle they have achieved. On a success, they recognize it and can read it. Priests of Stability of the Third Circle and up will immediately at least recognize it.)

The Last Breaker

North of the Highlands of Belkhánu (Large Hex 3711), Hátla is on the path to Balú. Heading south from Táshayalu, somewhere along the way to Hátla, the road becomes so rugged it can break the wheel off a Chlén cart. At this point, one may find the "Breaker of the Rocks".

The Breaker operates a special cart loaded with a bronze slab. The governor of this region sends the Breaker two old Chlén beasts every even year. The slab is lowered down a ramp on rollers. The Chlén are unhitched from the cart and walked over the slab, crushing and flattening the rocks underneath.

The current Breaker is bushy-bearded Ónoi mrá Shuggángulnai (Low Status, High Lineage; age 44). He is assisted by his eldest son Zamú (age 29), his second son Gírok (15), and his third son Gánjot (13). They belong to the Stone Maelstrom Clan, begun by former members of the (now possibly extinct) Stone Hill Clan, and now honorably affiliated with the (Very Low) Turning Wheel Clan. There were once hundreds of thousands of Breakers of the Rocks, their hereditary posts decreed by the notorious Empress Nayári herself and dedicated to Lord Hru'u. The Breaker directed teams of slaves to load rocks onto carts, which they transported for building roads. Perhaps there are several left, or perhaps Ónoi is the last of his kind.

Patronage Villa (3810.FG) This is the seat of the fief, a complex of pastel buildings on a cluster of small but steep hills, each connected to the other by bridges on tall pillars. The ruler of the fief is Taganyál hiMriyatláku, a first cousin to the governor of Ketvíru with whom he grew up. Rumor has it that he longs for a trail to be blazed from this settlement to the village of Balú (see the entry at 3711.PE).

There used to be a village to the southeast (probably around 3810.CI), but it was wiped out by Mnór and large Átlun. The soil is sandy, and the area tends to dry out sooner during the summer. It is avoided by farmers. In addition, it is infested with large ant colonies.

Fortress of Valor (3810.GA) This fortress is run by the Omnipotent Azure Legion. At its summit flies the banner of the Petal Throne, with a gloriously plumed seal insignia. Below that stands the symbol of the province of Ketvíru. This military citadel is surrounded by a patriotic population. There are several clan-houses of war-oriented clans here, but very few women; only Aridani. Male servants perform the menial chores. Children under the age of five are not permitted.

There are whispered rumors of an especially harsh elite military academy concealed here. Its graduates supposedly have complete resistance to pain.

Village of Ziridorunúen (3810.IE) When it was decreed at its conquering that this village would henceforth be known as Zirídóru, the inhabitants stubbornly refused to abandon its older name of Nú'en. They would mutter it under their breath after each recitation of the overly-long one foisted on them by their foreign conquerors. In time, its accepted name became Ziridorunúen.

This is the western end of a region of sandy soil that causes ripe fruit to dry on the bush or vine. Thus concentrated, it makes rich local liquor that is known as Nú'en Brandy or just Nú'en.

The people of this village are inordinately proud of their traditional Kurtáni hats, which they craft and wear. There are two sorts. One is a close-fitting cap with small Chlén-hide scales (acquired from elsewhere). The other is shaped like a broad cone with a soft fabric chin straps and a sort of hood sewn in, typically in dark colors. As a nod to Tsoiyáni fashion, a gauzy scarf or Kheschál plume may be attached to its apex.

Village of Arshmárashag (3810.IG) This village's name was originally Rohé, but it was renamed around 800 A.S. to something very long that the locals could not pronounce. 'Arshmárashag' is how it emerged, and thus it was eventually written on tax records. Lord Karakán is especially esteemed here, and at his shrine, stone carvings of a few of his aspects are depicted.

Cave of Whispers (3810.IK) Located on the southwest side of Forbidden Visage Mound, the Cave of Whispers is a place that the locals are very reluctant to visit. The cave entrance is surrounded by a veritable maze of fallen blocks and remnants of perilously tilting walls.

These once formed a stone edifice whose architectural details may hint that it dates back to the First Imperium, and the peak of the Bednálljan culture. This entrance is not visible until one is fairly close to it, amidst the cyclopean blocks in the center of the ruin.

This egress is easily overlooked - it is so small that it requires crawling up a slope on all fours for a full six meters. Beyond is a small natural cave complex with few wild natural animals, but difficult obstacles and devious traps. In several places, there are natural-appearing holes in the sides that range from palm to laundry-basket size. Some are niches, and some are short tunnels only a Tindaliya, Pygmy Folk, or perhaps a human child under the age of 12 might assay.

Somewhere in the Cave of Whisper is the nexus point that opens onto the plane where the demon Bésh is imprisoned.

Forbidden Visage Mound (3810.IK) There are several ruins here, and, of course, rumors of entrance to an underworld. Locals consider this place taboo to disturb. Some say it is where desperate lovers forbidden to marry for some reason would hold their trysts.

Towards the southwestern side is the site of what was once a temple complex, formed from large stone blocks. Now it is a sort of surface labyrinth. (It is also the site of the entrance to the Cave of Whispers; see its separate entry in this Large Hex).

The name of the god whose temple this was is unknown, but an old story says that its priests would hide their faces behind masks. Some assume this is a connection to Lord Ksáru, and therefore the mound is best left alone.

Black Blood Lake (3810.JB) There is said to be a lake monster that lives here, and it is called "Black-blood". On a windless day, ripples and waves may appear on the water. These are taken as signs of Black-blood's existence. The fishing here is notoriously poor. This, too, is blamed on Black-blood.

In some tales, it appears like a large corpulent man with only one pointy tooth. In others, it is invisible, enormous, and immortal. Then, when it is shot with an arrow, it leaves a trail of dark glistening ichor. Some say Black-blood was one of the first human sorcerers, and he was corrupted by accidental contact with something from a terrifying and incomprehensible plane. Others say the tale was inspired by the blubbery Thunru'ú.

Town of Árgarunkh (3810.KF) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the fief. The region is somewhat isolated, with no quick access to a Sákbe Road. Rich liquor and boisterous companionship are the gifts of the town of Árgarunkh, they say. A thousand years ago, it was known as Raúnga Ihúa, and it was upheld as a capital. After the region was conquered by the Tsolyáni, the forest that once surrounded this point was eaten away, replaced by farmland. According to old Kurtáni tradition, it should have been replanted, but it was not.

Officially, the current Fiefholder is supposedly Chief Elder Vjaraí hiMissággliyan (High Status, High Lineage) of the High Pinnacle Clan. However, Vjaraí died peacefully in his sleep years ago. Through bizarre political machinations, the position of fiefholder passed to his eleven-year-old grandson, Atübo'ek hiMissággliyan.

The Benevolent Regent

Actual control of the fief is being held firmly by Hehéllukoi ("Count") Ulséni hiChódlak (Very High Status, High Lineage) of the Sárku-worshipping Íto Clan. He was

quietly installed during the usurpation of the Imperial Throne by Prince Dhich'uné. He is acting as regent, as he is Atübo'ek's grandfather. Taxes are still coming in on time just fine, so the governor of Ketvíru apparently sees no reason yet to inquire, but some of the local people, especially those of Kurtáni heritage, see this as usurpation. They consider Count Ulséni's regency a ruse and want the Palace of the Realm to either verify or reject Ulséni's authority. Meanwhile, young Atübo'ek loves his Grandpa Ulséni, and the boy is unaware he is also something of a hostage.

Village of Tsunú Kashena (3810.LN) Like Kelél's Hold to the north, this is a well-populated location. It is a home base for numerous clans, especially those with merchanting interests. Their clanhouses have wider bases than usual, for storage, plus there are many small warehouse outbuildings. These clans are on a friendlier basis than usual with each other. In some places they share steps, courtyards, awnings, and small vine gardens. There are numerous tunnels connecting various buildings, and people will use them casually to avoid the noonday sun. Thus, to the outsider, Tsunú Kashena is like a three-dimensional maze.

Unbeknownst to the outside world, a local cult of a god worshipped since the First Imperium has been quietly revived here. He is known as Besísh, or "He of Fetters". His followers wear an inconspicuous clay charm marked with three circled dots arranged in a point-up triangle. If questioned, and the questioner appears to be a follower of Stability, they will claim he is an aspect of Lord Thúmis. However, if the questioner appears to follow Change, the cult member will most likely claim Besísh is an aspect of Lord Ksáru.

Mírru's Citadel (3810.MB) This is an abandoned building complex, not yet a ruin. Built on a low rise, it is well-known to be a necropolis, thus, approaching it with intent to loot it is forbidden by law. Gravestones and mausoleums dot the land for two miles around. At the center is a fortified pentagonal stronghold, all of which tilts uneasily westwards.

Sculptures of numerous ebony brown winged figures stare down from the corners of walls and roofs with milky blue glass eyes. The citadel's brown and black exterior is occasionally adorned with stylized skulls, bones, and other funerary iconography pleasing to Lord Sárku.

Some say that those who trespass are struck by a curse, and must join the region's undead guardians. Others say that the place is merely protected by mundane traps such as spiked pits, but they still shudder to speculate who or what builds, maintains, and resets them.

Kelél's Hold (3810.MM) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the fief. It boasts a very fine

Hirilákte Arena, and new-looking buildings, with one, the Hold, looming pretentiously over the others. Flat stone platforms with roofs for visiting caravans are in good repair. The roofed marketplace is floored with white hexagonal masonry which is kept noticeably clean, and there are wooden shops about the edge.

East of town, one is met by the acrid smell of coal as it is being made into coke. This will be used in heating braziers and forges. Lowly blacksmiths ply their trade here. The slave market is downwind, on a trail a quarter mile to the north.

Bashíre the Foundling

There are folktales told here, about "Bashíre", an adventurer born long ago in Kru'ú (3811.LL). The stories say he was eventually recognized by his relatives by a small tattoo on his palm, of a little handprint, and brought into the clan. (According to certain obscure Imperial records, however, Bashíre had his ancestry "verified" through polite bribes that revived the extinct lineage name of hiSsarínánpemoui, and honorably paying to be adopted by the Clan of the Inverted Hand.) As a reward for his support of an Imperial heir in the Kólumel, he was made the fiefholder of an obscure handful of villages in the Kúrt Hills.

Bashíre built the Hold out of material salvaged from nearby ruins to the northwest of the site. It has the look of some ancient edifice until one comes closer and sees the mismatched motley colors of the bricks. Longing to be famous, he also tried to commission an epic celebrating his exploits. Despite his wealth, he could not find anyone willing to undertake the job because of his relatively low status.

And so, instead, he covered some of the outside of his Hold with relief murals, embellished with his exploits. Those who can read may perhaps glean some wisdom such as "Breathe not the spores of the Sagún", "Gaze not into the eyes of the Yéleth", and "Mock not the corpulent Eater of Eyes."

"Bashíre the Hero", as he styled himself, was snubbed by the aristocracy, but beloved by the commoners because he used his skill at exploring caverns and his wealth to develop a lucrative coal mine (located 4km away, in the Small Hex northeast of the Hold of Kelél).

His invention, the Flingable Tar Lamp, is purchasable in this settlement: For the exorbitant fee of a Káitar each, one may purchase a small spherical clay lamp on a stick. If a string at the base is untied, the device becomes a means to hurl the lamp from its cup-shaped socket. Thus, it comes with four filled replacement flasks, which must normally be purchased here as they are not made elsewhere. (Béthorm stats: the thrower is too light to be

usable as a club but it can function as a torch. Requires 4" movement to ready it by undoing the string. The ball lamp can be flung up to 15" using Throw skill. If it strikes its target, it does (3/5/7) of Energy damage from hot burning tar. Putting the fire out requires a full move and action. If not put out, it does an additional dose of damage each round for (2/3/4) rounds.)

Village of Hereschán (3810.NC) An odd pall hangs over this village. All its buildings lean slightly towards the west. Its people lack colorful feathers and bright stones, and they wear their conical hats pulled down to hide their eyes. Two of its Clanhouses are abandoned (part of one is now being used to farm Káika ducks). Its cooking fires are more smoky and dark. Its tunkul gong is deeper, more sonorous.

Several times over the past decade, this area was attacked by marauding creatures the size of the largest Chlén beasts. They were described as spider-like constructs made of darkened bones somehow fused together, with an enormous skull face at the front. They would appear at dawn, slaughtering people on farmsteads as they headed out to work.

A coterie of priests of Qón came to deal with them, destroying one with magic, but the remaining monstrosities, whose full number is unknown, had vanished. The priests were called away to other matters. The folk here were told to beware of eye-contact with strangers. Hearing of the troubles here, merchants became reluctant to travel and trade.

Originally this village was a Kurtáni city called Srázho. It belonged to the province of Mekú to the northeast, not Ketvíru as it does today. In A.S. 808, it was levelled as punishment for rebellion during the reign of Tsolyáni Emperor Kurshéti Nikúma II ("The Viewer of Night"), a worshipper of Sárku.

The governor who carried out the orders allowed the inhabitants to evacuate to other villages. A rumor persists, however, that many were secretly sacrificed.

Village of Púrukeme (3810.NF) Primarily a stop for merchants traveling the long east-west road, Púrukeme is an eclectic town, with many small clanhouses. If one is not too picky, the heady wine is acceptable and inexpensive. The village has a Hirilákte Arena beyond which sprawls a skirt of Very Low Clan houses where crime is sometimes a problem. Order in town is kept by guards hired from the Standing Reed Clan, whose big N'lüss are instantly respected. This is one of several places where the Children of Bésh have surreptitiously settled, and their influence is growing.

Stronghold of Pavadrani (3810.NI) This fortified building still sits on a well-used road as goods travel eastwards, or west and northwards, towards one of two Sákbe Roads. There are Clanhouses with a variety of military affiliations here. There is a handsome temple to Lord Ksarul here, black and adorned with oval baubles of silvery glass.

This was once the seat of a fief, but when that fief was re-assigned to Ketviru province, its seat was moved to Patronage Villa. The Stronghold is no longer part of any fief.

Pavadrani is known to be the site of a cave complex for storing a large amount of food for a coalition of the Red Clans. They say there is a nexus gate down there, as well, but where it leads is confidential.

Village of Jashkikazut (3810.NK) This place is impoverished. For at least 150 years, there has been an odd tendency for women here to give birth to twins. A shrine to Lady Avánthe offers thanks for this bounty, but no one has any real idea why this is happening. Things are not so bad that they have had to sell children into slavery. Villagers are uneasy about using the contraceptive Lisútl root because they are afraid to offend the goddess. Sometimes women come from far away in hopes of the fructification of their wombs.

Because the clan-houses are packed full, families are eager to marry off as many daughters as they can. The dowry fees are wearing on their purses. The clan-heads try hard to arrange matches in which two sisters join the same groom.

The clan-heads together have written a request to the Temple of Dilinála. It is hoped that the situation can be solved by paying especial respect to Lady Avánthe's own cohort, the patroness of virginity and "woman as woman alone".

It is rumored here that people of Charkuriss to the north (1810.QJ) use unpleasant sour spices to hide the rancidity of their produce.

Village of Mnék (3810.PD) This village has a small copper and tin mine. It is also the source of exquisite pink,

blue, and green tourmaline gems. The deposit was only discovered about 75 years ago, and a mere three generations of digging have not yet tapped it out. They are rapidly trading part of their newfound wealth to hire miners to acquire more. Two modest new houses have been built within the past decade, one for the Flat Rock Clan (Very Low), and the other for the Black Hand Clan (Low Status).

An Auspicious Accident

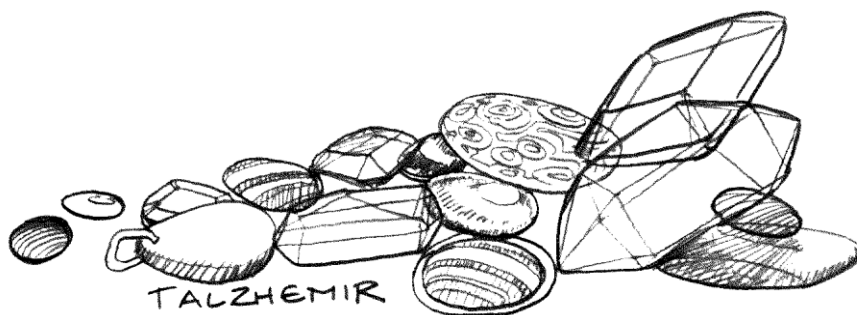
For a time, this boomtown was led by Khésrai hiKét kolel, a follower of Lord Sárku appointed during Prince Dhich'uné's attempt at a coup. Khésrai died in a suspicious mining accident. The new village Hetwoman and overseer of mining is the beautiful Galéni hiTirikesh (High Clan, Medium Lineage, Great Stone Clan), a paramour of Daséshmu, the governor of Ketviru at Katalál. Mnék is now heavily taxed, with metal and gemstones going to Mekú but sizable profits going to Katalál.

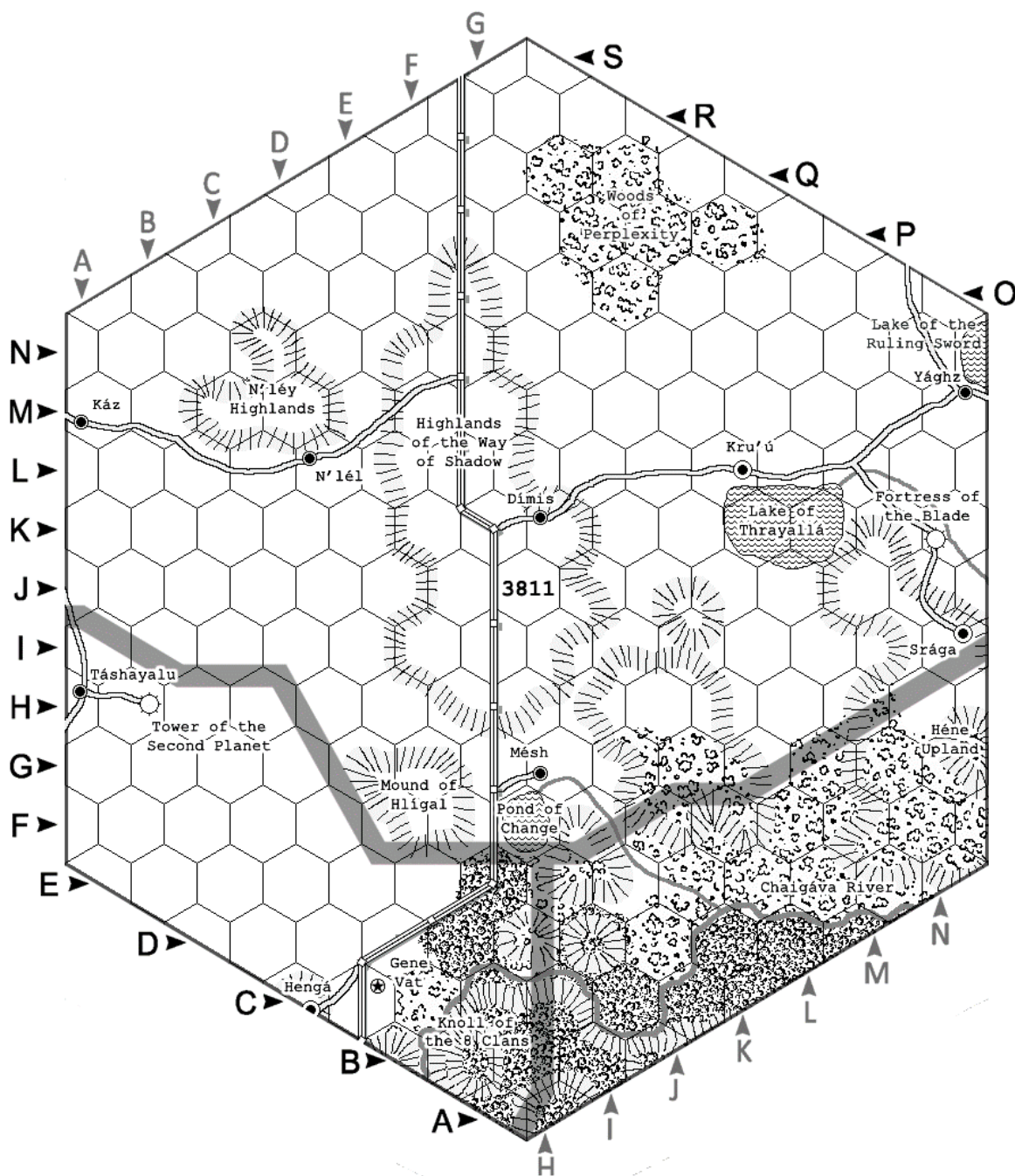
Town of Charkuriss (3810.QJ) This is a singularly inhospitable place. Its marketplace has a cold feeling; people do their commerce and return home as quickly as they can. Located southwest of the Highlands of Gashá, "outsiders" are unwelcome (people outside one's own clan, that is). Clan-fellows visiting from other places are grudgingly admitted, and warned that those outside their clan here wish them ill. There is a mild hostility towards Charkuriss from other towns and villages.

Charkuriss's dysfunctional mood may date back to the time their Hirilákte arena was destroyed by an unexplained explosion during the First Imperium.

Why they will not rebuild such a central amenity remains a mystery. That circular crater is still there on the edge of town. (Secretly, Charkuriss is fully under the control of the Cult of Bésh; perhaps this has something to do with it. See the text box for the Demon Bésh at Large Hex 3810.)

Firewood Heights (3810.SG) See entry at 3910.EM.





HEX 3811

The Sákbe runs north to south through the center of this Large Hex. It is one of the better protected stretches. Each of the guard towers is well-staffed. East of this road are some of the lands that support the Legion of the Inverted Hand. The disciplined soldiers speak contemptuously of the troubles with Foundationist raiders on the other side of the Kúrt Hills over in the east.

From the southeast to the northwest, several ranges of hills jut like the jag-topped tails of slumbering reptiles. The valleys are strewn with boulders of every size. Greenery grows over them, and even an experienced traveler may be

swallowed up in the crevice below when the fragile cover gives way. People tend to prefer living on the hills, and roads follow their tops.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

Knoll of the 8 Clans (3811.BG) This was a traditional sacred meeting place of the Kurtáni. On certain days, the sun shines through particular notches in the hills to the east. These astronomical solar observations hold significance for several Sé'iyau (Kurtáni religious societies). The name refers to Kurtáni tribes, five of whom were once semi-nomadic, but are today settled into villages of those names. The five are Hegásh, Pachelélu, Hoqú, Vranu'á, and Gushálu. The fate

of the other three (Ju'quté, Kochi'ó'i, and A'úl) is unknown. They may have died out, been dispersed - or still be somewhere out there in the Kúrt Hills.

Town of Hengá (3811.CD) Like a diadem resting upon a cushion of rich soft green, the lacquered and polished brass of the roofs of Hengá sparkle from a distance. Many clans are well-represented here. The stereotype of its inhabitants is that of folks who seldom lose their temper.

Gene Vat (3811.CE) This is the site of an obscure and grim-looking edifice known as the "House of Unpredictable Alterations" which houses an artifact under constant guard. It is never actually called "the gene vat", but it has many different names, including, "The Flesh Vat of Hengá". After a few years, the bodies of its guards, who belong to the temples of the Dark Trinity, take on an asymmetrical and molten appearance, with random lumpy growths. The changes are permanent, and defy magical cure. As a rule, both the guards and researchers are in their elder years. The site is also a zoo of sorts, housing a menagerie of unique creatures, some of which have grown large on offerings of the meat of black hmélu beasts. (See the text box for Flesh Vat of Hengá below, 3811.CE)

The Flesh Vat of Hengá

Made of an indestructible metal-like material of the ancients, it is easily the size of a Chlén-beast. The stone block walls were built around it. Temples in the nearby town of Hengá refer to it as "Uniter of Disparate Fleshes", "Infuser of the Germ of Life", "Cauldron of Inchoate Regression", to list a few. For centuries, it has been an object of contention between the Priesthoods of Ksáru and Hrü'ü. They are now under an ecclesiastical council mandate to share access to it, with priests of the temple of Sáru mediating. The handful of researchers, now known as the "Welcomers of Change", have come to cooperate.

Continuation of their research is currently endangered. The temples have noticed they are over-budget. They can no longer afford to buy small containers salvaged from the depths of Underworlds, which they value as novel material for their experiments. When Proctor Gulessá hiAkúche, the eldest of the "Welcomers of Change", passes away, some say the site will be closed down. He is known to be 273 years old.

Chaigáva River (3811.EK) The Chaigáva is rapids running east to west here. There are various waterfalls along the way. Navigation by boat is not possible. In some places it cuts through a canyon, and travelers following it must walk along a perilous path above. Rope bridges of uncertain age swing and fray at various points.

Pond of Change (3811.FI) This is south of the village of Mész. Roughly 700 years ago, during a local dry spell, the lowly cart drivers heading south towards Hengá complained that there was no place for their Chlén beasts to drink along this stretch of the Sákbe Road. Eventually, human travelers started to complain that Chlén beasts were drinking up all the available water. Priestesses of the Temple of Dlamélish in Hengá took it upon themselves to remedy the situation in a project that successfully diverted water from the Chaigáva River to create the Pond of Change. Now there is a rest stop with broad stone steps on its shore, and a statue of Lady Dlamélish, Beauteous Bringer of Refreshment. Ladies from Mész regularly bring their Káika flocks to feed on the floating bright green weed; without this, the Pond would quickly be overrun by it. Children with little fine mesh dipping nets and buckets collect this Káika-weed for human consumption.

Mound of Hlígal (3811.GF) This landform and nearby areas are overrun with Dlíkkén because locals can injure them and drive them off, but seldom kill them. The fragments hide and grow into new ones. There is a legend about the outlaw Ódai Ko'ahín pertaining to the Mound. Ódai stole a cache of rare Eyes. He was captured and impaled, but the missing goods were never recovered, and some say he hid them somewhere on the Mound of Hlígal.

Village of Mész (3811.GH) While this village is mainly inhabited by people of Kurtáni descent who maintain a mild aversion to the Gods of Change, an exception is made for Lady Dlamélish, whose priestesses built the pleasant Pond of Change to the south (3811.FI). Women here make money by buying numerous Káika chicks from clancousins in N'lél, and raising them. Children skim edible Káika-weed for the family either to eat fresh, or dry it and press it for oil.

Héne Upland (3811.GN) A challenging thirty-five-mile hike over rippling hills is required to reach this place from the town of Srága. It has been used by the Kurtáni as a sort of natural redoubt against the Tsolyáni several times in history. Ruins of small log forts dot the area.

Village of Táshayalu (3811.HA) This is a quaint and ordinary village surrounded by a regular array of straight dirt roads leading to farm fields. If one is heading south from Táshayalu, somewhere along the way to Hátla, the road becomes rocky and rough, and one is likely to encounter the "Breaker of the Rocks". See the entry for Hátla, at 3810.EN).

The Youth with the Golden Shoulders

Táshayalu was allegedly founded by the Youth with the Golden Shoulders, who was capable of leaping great distances. He wore magical gold-leafed shoulder

pauldrons. Some suspect this could have been an ancient device. According to the tale, the Youth flew too fast, and crashed into the western slope of the Highlands of the Way of Shadow (3811.JH), causing the great dent (east of 3811.JF).

Tower of the Second Planet (3811.HB) East of Táshayalu, a sturdy stone trapezoid with stairs leading up the sides supports a ziggurat-like structure of stone and wood with many little windows. Belonging to the fiefholder of the large and sprawling Fief of Treasures, there are a number of clanhouses here; it is almost a village. The Academy of Thorns is a small school belonging to the Temple of Dilinála that trains women warriors in soldiery and survival.

Town of Srága (3811.IN) In addition to the various crafts produced in a town, thriving Srága exports rare commodities of the Kúrt Hills Forest brought on foot by the small semi-nomadic family bands that dare to travel the deep woods. One of the most noteworthy is Tlethoggú sap, a flame-retardant resin for which there is always a market (see the text box for Tlethoggú at Large Hex 3813). Although the wars between the Tsolyáni and the Kurtáni are centuries past, the Kurtáni of Srága hold a strange and insulting grudge against Hláka because they contributed to victory by the Tsolyáni. No Hláka is allowed inside the city.

Highlands of the Way of Shadow (3811.JH) The Sákbe Road rides the ridges through this area, unusually high off the ground at places. The Highlands may get their name from a series of deep crevasses that run west-to-east in Small Hexes 3811.JG, 3811.LG, and 3811.MG. Remarkable bridges stand here that may even predate the Sákbe Road by centuries. Rumor has it there are shrines to ancient and forbidden gods in small caves opening out onto those cracks. Legend says that a gorge (located at 3811.JF) was caused by the crash landing of the Youth with the Golden Shoulders (see also the text box at Táshayalu, 3811.HA).

Village of Dímis (3811.KH) From the Sákbe to the west, a series of small broad steps leads for miles down the hill to Dímis, continuing in a curvy zig-zag on towards the town of Kru'á. The valley to the northeast was once a Tlethoggú thicket (see the text box for Tlethoggú at Large Hex 3813). Unusual for that kind of tree, after they were cut down, they did not regrow, and there is a pale brown-gray dusty scar on the slopes where they once stood.

Lake of Thrayallá (3811.KK) Nobles in small boats cruise about for pleasure, while fishers on cheap flat square rafts throw nets to bring in fish and crustaceans. Fed by springs, there are a few very deep places, the water there is a striking dark blue-green, and giant creature come up to

smash ships. The lake drains into the Blue Metal River (3811.KN).

Fortress of the Blade (3811.KN) This is a stronghold of the Legion of the Inverted Hand. Military training is conducted in this Small Hex, and those surrounding it. Originally built when this land was deep forest, it is now hills with many large and scattered copses. The troops are especially skilled at rapidly scaling cliffs with stakes, ropes and other tools.

Blue Metal River (3811.KN) Navigable by barges, and long rowed ships with shallow drafts, this river is named for its sparkling appearance. Water flows from hidden springs in the southeast to the Lake of Thrayallá (3811.KK).

Village of N'lél (3811.LE) N'lél has many small ponds in the clanhouse courtyards, each filled one bucketful at a time with water carried from a nearby spring. These pools are topped with a human-edible bright green weed that feeds their numerous Káika birds. These are prized for their wing feathers, which are used to fletch N'lél's excellent arrows. From time to time, large flocks of Káika are driven to market in Kru'ú. Extra chicks are sold to clancousins visiting from Mész (3811.GH). Some of the clanhouses of this village are built upon the nearby cliffs of the N'léy Highlands (see the entry at 3811.MC).

Town of Kru'ú (3811.LK) This is the seat of the fief. It is rather well-defended for a town, with bridges leading there over a moat filled with sparkly water borrowed from Lake Thrayallá. It is said that a grandson of the ancient Queen Nayári once fled in fear of his life to take refuge in Kru'ú. The current fiefholder is Jodéma hiNáya-Núe, a scholar of logistics trained in the Temple of Thúmis here. His new schedule of taxation, based on a recent census of the fief, is thought to be very wise.

Village of Káz (3811.MA) A very hard type of coal is brought up out of a deep mine here. It is chiseled out of the stone, then carried west to Kelél's Hold, where it is baked into coke for blacksmithing. The village used to have more people. In the year 1331 A.S., several hundred miners were following a large coal seam when they broke into a cave complex. The exhalation of the first cavern killed all the people. Their bones can still be seen down there, as well dark and silvery crystals covering the walls. The only people still eking out a livelihood are desperate miners and their slaves, their light mostly from tiny Káika-fat lamps.

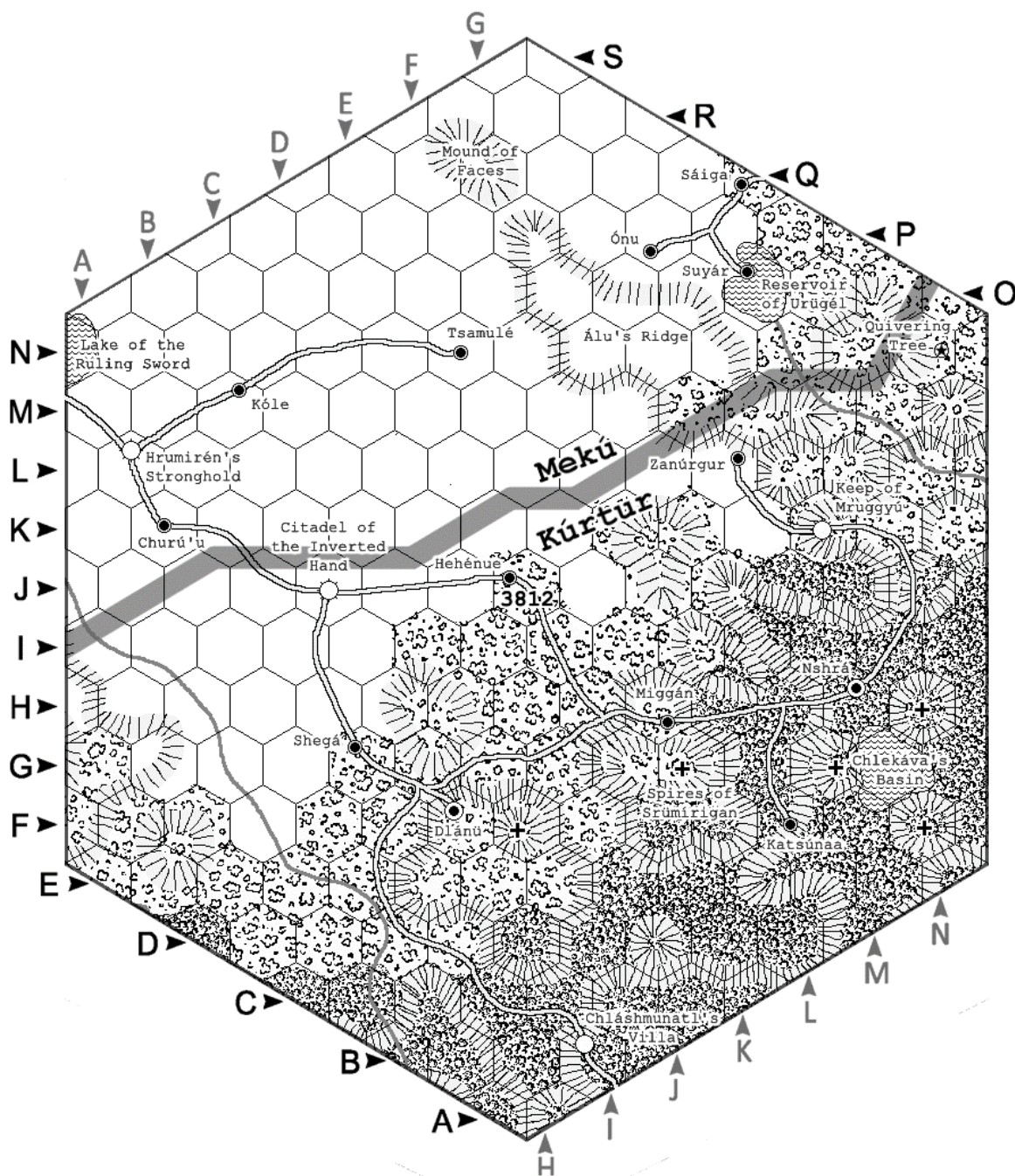
N'léy Highlands (3811.MC) There are a few cantilevered clanhouses built onto the cliffs on the south side of these rocky swells. They are accessed by rope ladders, which go up into trap door holes in the ground. These clanhouses are part of the village of N'lél.

Village of Yághz (3811.MN) Located between the town of Kru'ú (3811.LK) and Hrumirén's Stronghold (3812.LB), Yághz resembles the Kurtáni settlements of old with its small clanhouses and wood-shacks built on stout stilts. Military drums of many sizes are made here. In very ancient times, the drum heads were crafted from the skin of an esteemed enemy, but under the influence of the priests of Hnálla, this

became very rare. Now such drums are only made for temples whose rituals require such a thing.

Woods of Perplexity (3811.PJ) This place is known to be disturbing. Soon after leaving the Sákbe Road to the west, compasses cease to function. It is said that shadows shorten or lengthen without regard for the sun, which appears in the wrong part of the sky. To stay in this place too long is to court madness.





HEX 3812

When the empire allowed the creation of the Legion of the Inverted Hand, it also granted lands north of the Kúrt Hills for its upkeep. These lands are primarily in this Large Hex. The Legion's headquarters are also here, at the Citadel of the Inverted Hand (see the text box at 3812.JE).

The local forest is mostly gone. It fell slowly to axes over the centuries. However, patches of woods with a few enormous trees still do remain in the many places too steep to farm. Most of the semi-nomadic Kúrtáni who lived in the area eventually became farmers instead of hunter-gatherers as the game gave out. Worshippers of the goddess Makórsa,

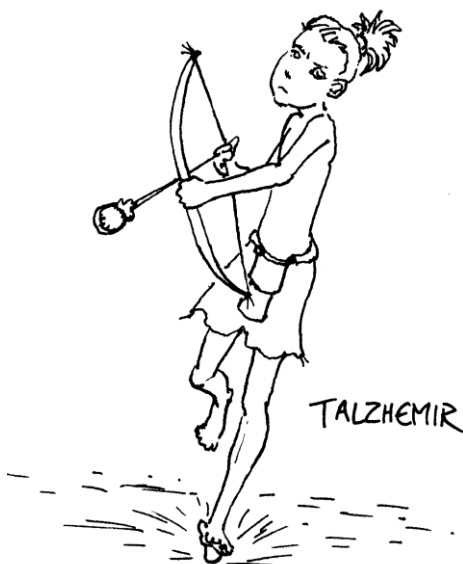
patroness of hunters and sender of game, joined the temple of the agrarian Lady Avánthe.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

Chláshmunatl's Villa (3812.BI) Owned by the Golden Sheaf Clan, the villa itself is a large hunting lodge resort mainly for use by the nobility. Tlethoggú trees on either side make it necessary to pass through here (see the text box on Tlethoggú, Large Hex 3813). An elegant hardwood stockade with catwalks surrounds it. A few clanhouses cluster near the Villa, plus the "House of Lambent Blue Desire," which houses priestesses of Lady Avánthe devoted to prostitution.

Blue Metal River (3812.FD) See entry at (3811.KN).

Town of Dlánü (3812.FG) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the fief. Located upon the Dlánü Plateau, it is small but has many natural defenses. The Kurtáni tendency to territoriality is very strong here, and so is the Tsolyáni love of bureaucracy. Outsiders and their parties are normally only admitted in if someone in the town will vouch for them. A clan, temple, military, or government representative will be sent for. The walls are crawling with patrolling soldiers. At the least sign of a threat, they do not hesitate to put an arrow into each of the intruder's legs. The holder of this fief is retired army captain Kálku'ar hiCh'mó, who was raised at the Citadel of the Inverted Hand. Products of the region include live Káika for meat, smoked Káika meat, and preserved eggs, small amounts of coal, very small amounts of iron, and some products of the forest. A thousand kinds of porridge are eaten; fresh produce commands a good price.



The town of Dlánü is locally renowned for skilled archers and smoked Káika.

Spires of Srümírgan (3812.FJ) A "forest" of karst spires and pillars obstructs safe travel. Their fragility is their defense, as climbers find their handholds crumbling off. The spaces between the Spires of Srümírgan are often filled with jumbled segment and shards. Most the spires are wet, with trickle and sheens of water coming out the tops. Local Kurtáni find the resemblance of some of them to a phallus hilarious. Superstitious Tsolyáni peasants visit those to restore "male vigor".

Village of Katsúnaa (3812.FL) From a distance, the bluish hills upon which this village is built look soft. Travelers soon discover the stone is abrasive and sharp. To leave the road is to risk bloodied feet and damaged footgear. In

ancient times, the Kurtáni tribesmen would coat their callused feet with the aromatic dark tar of the Umyéni Tree when they wanted to travel off-trail (see also the text box for Umyéni under the general description of Large Hex 3612). Modern locals favor sandals with Chlén-hide soles. Vringálu are avidly hunted, with the oldest, largest specimens commanding the best prices for their leathery wings to turn into boots.

Héne Upland (3812.GA) (See the entry at 3811.GN)

Village of Shegá (3812.GD) The woods of this area are well picked-over, and the farm fields to the northwest are stingy with their crops. The Dáichu tree is no longer found here; its bark was a part of the village's income for centuries. Life here is hard. With wood so gray and splintery, the clanhouses look ready to collapse. Young people seeking out of this life eagerly join the army. This is the place to which Ugly Balapít was sent as a boy. (See the entry for Chnéh City, 3712.QH)

Chlekáva's Basin (3812.GM) Found in the center of a cluster of three huge tree-splotched spires, this water is very clean and fresh. East of here, the land rises yet higher, explaining why this highland is thought of as a "valley". There are Tlethoggú stands clinging to the steep sides of scree-covered hills (see the text box at Large Hex 3813). Daring climbers go up to cut the bark so that the sap will ooze out, coming back and climbing again to harvest it.

Village of Miggán (3812.HJ) This was once a fort, built of wood in a ravine between steep limestone walls. Down below, children play on vines and logs as wide as a man is tall that have tumbled down there. They fashion rope ladders and bridges to reach little playhouse platforms.

Town of Nshrá (3812.IL) This town has a handsome Palace of Ever-glorious War but a run-down Palace of the Priesthoods, and both are fairly small. It always seems to be softly drizzling because the tall Gré'a trees drip water (See the text box for Large Hex 3612, the Kúrt Hills forest, Gré'a.) Several very long raised buildings, made of a row of booth-like rooms with one side open towards the west, form the marketplace. The clanhouses sprawl in interesting ways, their architecture as spontaneous as a budding plant, buttresses using living trees formed as an afterthought when some structure began to creak and lean. There are also tunnels from basements of clanhouses and other buildings, through the rock, into the nearby woods; arrivals and departures are often unseen.

N'shrá is charged with protecting stores of food at the Keep of Mruggyú (3812.KL). Along both the western road, and the road to the northeast, there are crude wooden watch points, with elaborately carved screen barriers that can give defending archers a great advantage. Often, instead

of real guards, however, only two or three wooden manekins occupy each.

Citadel of the Inverted Hand (3812.JE) This is the headquarters of the 27th Imperial Light Infantry, the Legion of the Inverted Hand. These are lifelong archers and scouts. Part of the land here is set aside for the Aerie of the Fledgelings, their military academy. Although their lives are very regimented compared to their civilian counterparts, the boys enjoy games that hone their physical prowess, and frequent trips to the woods and hills. Those that show promise of intellect and leadership go on to classroom studies at the Aerie.

The Legion of the Inverted Hand

The Legion of the Clan of the Inverted Hand (27th Imperial Light Infantry) has a long tradition of service, regular officers, and good discipline. It is made up of excellent archers and scouts. Many of them are a bit short of stature, with powerful legs. Training typically includes scaling cliffs and swarming up walls bare-handed. The most skillful, it is said, are recruited from the "interior" of the Kúrt Hills Forest. Its headquarters is at the Citadel of the Inverted Hand (3812.JE). Their current leader is General Ka'á hiSrygáshchene, a loyal supporter of Prince Eselné.

In the distant past, chronic infighting between Kurtáni tribes was partly what prevented overpopulation. After the area's subjugation by Tsolyánu, under the new laws, killing one another for trespassing became illegal. As a client state, people of the province were able to trade for grain. With the food supply increased and violent death reduced, population surged, especially in the eastern and south-eastern portions. The 27th was created both to tap this resource, and to draw Kurtáni folk towards the least-developed part, the northwest. Tribes who sent their sons to join received a reduction in the required amount of tribute.

There were some who worried the Legion's creation might eventually lead to organization and a revival of a wish for an independent nation. However, when the first members of the Legion of the Inverted Hand participated in miniature ritual Qadáni battles, they were amazed to see the hundreds of warriors fielded for the occasion. When they came home, they spoke of the greatness of "their" empire, and the foolishness of rebellion. Perhaps what sealed their loyalty best was defending against occasional incursions by the Milumanayáni armies from the west, which offended them at a personal level. Although they wisely do not protest, they are less enthusiastic about being part of invasions perpetrated by the Tsolyáni.

Aerie of the Fledgelings (3812.JE) This is the military academy of the Legion of the Inverted Hand (see the entry for the Citadel of the Inverted Hand at 3812.JE). The name refers to the hawk motif of some Aspects of Lord Karakán.

Village of Hehénue (3812.JH) Three thousand years ago, this was the site of a small temple to Lord Ksáru. It was the repeated site of peculiar accidents, including lightning strikes leading to fire, and rockfalls. Rather than keep pouring money into repairs, the Priesthood of Ksáru relocated to the isolated village of Tsamulé (3812.NG), where the incidents entirely ceased.

Village of Churú'u (3812.KB) This is an optimistic little hamlet, with small and large clanhouses of many occupations and religious orientations. Because of crop failures over the past two centuries, people of Churú'u often send their boy children to the war academy at the Citadel of the Inverted Hand.

Keep of Mruggyú (3812.KL) This was once a secret outpost of early Kurtáni warriors who established order against the theocratic despots in the Time of No Kings. Now it is the governor's food storage facility, serving this part of the province of Kúrtur. To reach it from the west, rope ladders must be scaled at several points. The less difficult but still steep eastern approach comes from the town of Nshrá (3812.096), which is supposed to post archers along the road.

Hrumirén's Stronghold (3812.LB) Located in the Province of Mekú, Hrumirén's Stronghold is a beauteous collection of airy pagoda-like structures. It is without a wall, but defended by a number of crenellated towers. The visitor will immediately notice many fences and house-like kennels at ground level. A rare white fighting dog is bred here, called a War-jaw (see the text box). Such a beast is worth many hundreds of Káitars.

War-jaws: The Dogs of Hrumirén

About thirty of these canines are kept here. A number of (Low status) keepers care for and train each one. The human handlers share the dog's quarters, and the appointment is for life. It is said the breed was produced for Empress Vayúma Sú (c. 920 A.S.). The dogs' ears are large and upswept; their muzzles are bear-like with broad muscle-rounded cheeks. Their short fine coats are frosty white. The hide about their neck and shoulders is loose and wrinkled. If a human handler dies, the dog does not accept a new master. It is customary to drug the dog and sacrifice it (to join their master in the afterlife). War-jaws are both scent-trackers and attack dogs. As pets, they are a disaster. They gnaw constantly to keep their jaws strong. Even though they bond so powerfully, they

are not affectionate. Trainers admit the dogs are manipulative in their cunning, very jealous of their human master's attention, and prone to biting both humans and other dogs. In an ongoing experiment to produce a more useful breed, there are a number of dogs here that are half-War-jaw crosses.

Village of Zanúrgur (3812.LK) The Tlethoggú trees that once choked this pass between the hills were cut down long ago, to be hastily made into defenses by sappers. They did not grow back on their own, depriving the village of part of its livelihood through sap collection. Members of the Sé'iyau Mahé'zīyal, a Kurtáni cult to Makórsa, an Aspect of Lady Avánthe, have taken an interest in this place. They make pilgrimages from all over Kúrtur Province to plant seeds and saplings here, notably Tlethoggú and Dáichu trees (see the text boxes for Tlethoggú at Large Hex 3813).

Village of Kóle (3812.MC) Farm fields extend as far as the eye can see, and beyond. Small rectangular clanhouse huts with a long side open on the west, raised on short stilts in the Kurtáni style, can be seen. This place has been held under many different flags; the inhabitants (most of them Very Low Status farmers) generally believe in doing as they are told. The land here is bound to the lineage of the fief's holder. Centuries ago, that was a landlord who offered them relief from taxation if they would send six of their cleverest sons to the Temple school, and six of their smartest daughters to the Temple of Avánthe.

The squallid clans of Kóle were baffled; they had never been particularly devout, and they saw no value in skills such as reading, but they complied. They were even more puzzled when their children were returned. The young men came back as book-keepers, while the young women had learned to rear livestock. The sprawling peasant farmsteads became more profitable, and Kóle continues to thrive. A few of the halfbreed white dogs (derived from the War-jaw breed at Hrumirén's Stronghold) are kept as working dogs here.

Lake of the Ruling Sword (3812.NA) Northeast of Yágzh, the village of the drum-makers, this body of water has had other names, a new one given each time the area was conquered by a different people. Observing that the name varied with whomever was currently in charge, the locals decided to refer to it by a neutral name, the Lake of the Ruling Sword. There is a black sword on display in Mélla (3912.BG) said to be "the" ruling sword. It is formed from metal dug from the local sands, ancient bog iron.

Village of Tsamulé (3812.NG) The grasslands upon soft hills here are unfarmed. Income is mainly from a small mine for indigo to blue opals. This is the site of a small temple to Lord Ksáru which was relocated here some 3000 years

ago from Hehénue. On rare occasions, nobles who fancy gems will pay fat fees to have their peons collect specimens while they sip liqueurs and fish in the nearby brook. The best stones, it is said, are used in ritual sorcery of the Temple of Ksáru.

Álu's Ridge (3812.NI) Local legend has it that this was where the mild-mannered husbands of a local unit of Aridáni warriors waited for their return. They used their skill at woodworking to build elaborate wicker watch towers. Today, there is no sign of their handiwork, but the ridge is still named for them. (See the text box for Álu under the Village of Ónu, 3812.PJ).

Quivering Tree (3812.NN) The name refers to a single specimen of a specific type of actual tree, known locally as the U'u'vrú. Even with no breeze, it is constantly moving, shivering, its golden-orange leaves softly rustling. There are others of this rare species deeper in the woods of Kúrtur Province, but this one is esteemed by the Quivering Tree Clan (see that entry in the Appendix). Its trunk is two human-heights across, and its canopy is immense. Wood from this tree can supposedly power love charms. For instance, there is a superstition that a flute made from this wood will win the love of the one who hears it. One legend claims the Quivering Tree can, if it chooses, pull up its roots and walk, but has not done so in centuries.

Village of Suyár (3812.OK) This settlement is built on a large heap of fragments of orange-tinted quartz that sparkles when wetted. The rickety clanhouses are built out over the water on long posts. Másh fruit from a surrounding grove, dye powders and seasoning herbs from plants are their main export. They say that even in the harshest drought, the Reservoir of Urügel (3812.OK) has never gone dry.

Reservoir of Urügel (3812.OK) A grove of large shrubs with Másh fruits thrives around the edge of this basin. A light fog often drifts out of the valley to the southeast. The reservoir catches rainwater, but it is also fed by streams within the woods. Much of this liquid drips from the "weeping" Gré'a trees, which are also the source of the mist. (See the text box for Large Hex 3612, the Kúrt Hills forest, Gré'a.)

Village of Ónu (3812.PJ) Long ago, the Ónu were a prominent Kurtáni warrior tribe, but today they are mainly farmers, with a smattering of soldiers. The Inverted Hand Clan has a large clanhouse here; its members specialize in the finest of elaborately woven wicker containers.

An obscure local custom survives here, in which a man may declare himself an "Álu", the submissive inverse of an independent "Aridáni" woman (see the Álu text box at 3812.PJ).

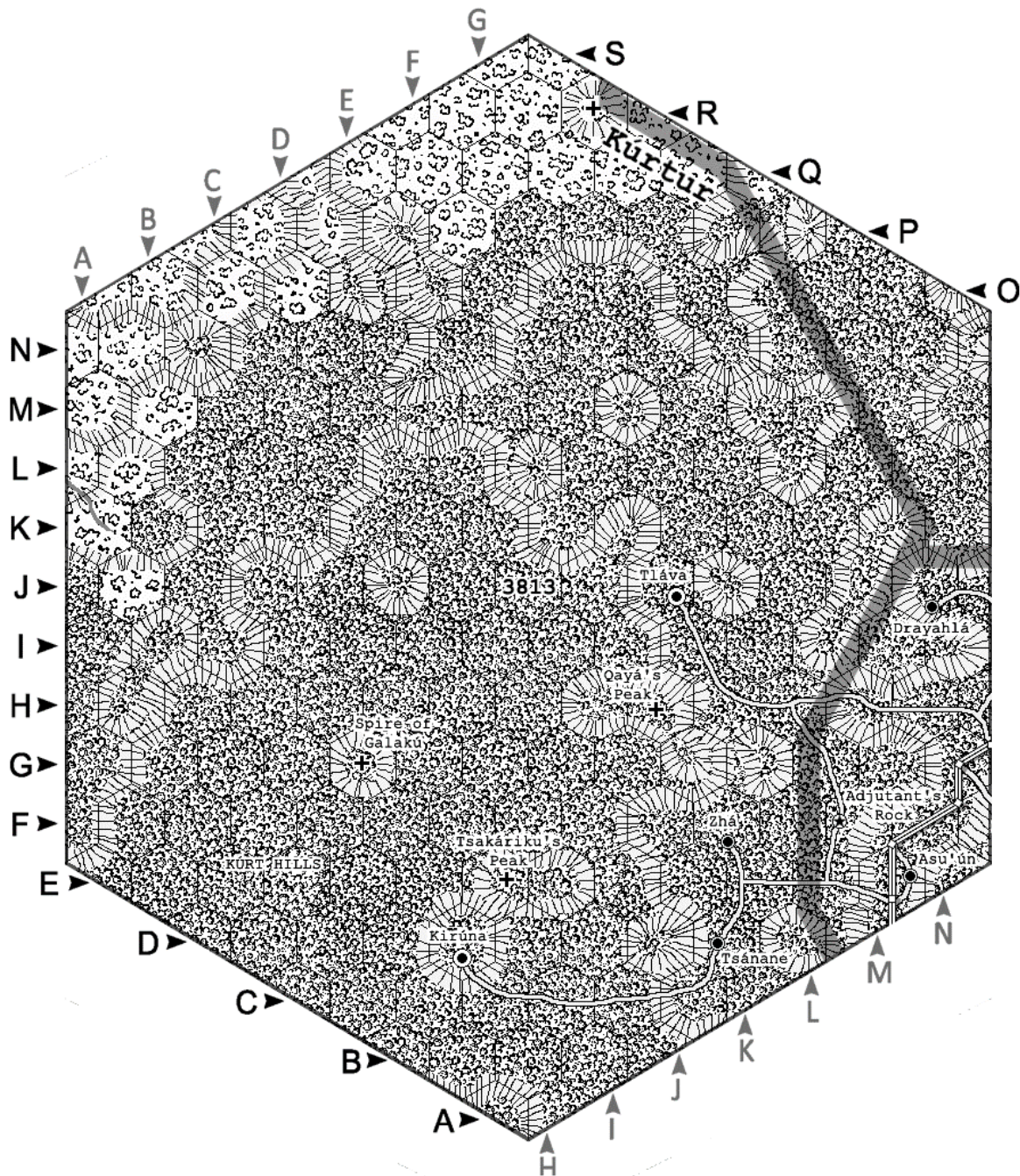
The Álu, or "Counter-Aridáni"

Throughout Tsolyánu a woman may declare herself "Aridáni", "equal of a man". Its inverse, an obscure local custom that was once more widespread in this area, survives here. In the large village of Ónu, a man is permitted to declare himself "Álu". The word means something like "weak" in the local dialect, with the connotation of "humble". (The word "Álu" is also used to describe very old people, and children born mentally impaired.) Visually, the traditional emblem of the Álu status is a woven wicker cap with a long swept pointed visor. A small gauze veil is attached above the ears, and suspended from the tip of the brim by a thin cord. Like the Aridáni status, at least in Ónu there is no stigma to the choice, and it can be undone later. Men who are Álu take on a woman's role in the clanhouse, and, just like proper clangirls, are expected to defer to the menfolk, following the will of the clan. Sometimes a clan marries off a submissive Álu to an assertive and reasonably prosperous Aridáni wife. While accepted locally ("It's not a big deal. My clan-uncle was one."), outside this region, the Álu is usually treated with scorn and derision.

Mound of Faces (3812.QG) The top of this outcropping is faintly orange quartz. Horizontal rows of thousands of very similar stylized faces, with gaping mouths and only dark gaps for eyes, each as tall as a human, adorn the sides of this stone hill. Seemingly at random, some are upright, some are tipped left or right, and some are upside down. On its northern side, at the base, is a lumpy grass-clad hill. It is said to cover the ruins of a very ancient settlement that may hold answers to the questions of who carved those faces, and why. Beyond this place, to the north, the sands are infested with a local menace: huge burrowing Esúsha worms (see the text box under Village of Hlíshum, 3912.GL)

Village of Sáiga (3812.QK) Sáiga provides dried meat for the stores of the Legion of the Inverted Hand. The hillside leading up to Sáiga is covered in scallop-shaped terraces with edges too high for a Hmá to leap or climb, interconnected by gates. Some are gardens and some have been converted into pens for livestock, primarily small Hmá beasts. Instead of herding, greenery is cut in the higher gardens and hurled down into the next enclosure. The road ascends far too steeply for a Chlén cart. A palanquin borne up this path requires very tall bearers at the back and very short bearers at the front (reversing the order for descent). Sáiga's clanhouses perch on large jutting ledges, the limestone hewn to be flat on top.





HEX 3813

Throughout this Large Hex, technology and society of the back-woods Kurtáni are much more primitive than usual. They use chipped stone instead of Chlén hide for blades and points. The Chlén beast, so ubiquitous in society elsewhere in the Empire, is very rarely seen here because of the hazard of eating greenery its body cannot process (see the text box in this Large Hex about Chabísu Sickness).

If met outside of villages, people they tend to be afraid of outsiders. They will not come forwards to parlay, nor will they engage in shouted conversations (assuming they even know enough Tsołyáni language to do so). They even shun

other Kurtáni. Despite their fear, they are still territorial; they will attempt indirect but deadly means to eliminate intruders, such as traps, and diligent sabotage of attempts to mark trails.

Patches of one local tree in particular, the Tlethoggú, thwarts easy travel and the maintenance of roads here. Its seeds, carried by animals, sprout and then it overruns cleared areas in just months. Its dried sap is valued as a flame retardant. (See the text box for Tlethoggú at end of this entry for Large Hex 3813). Villagers trade small sweet cakes for nodules of dry sap from indigent nomads.

The northwest half of this Large Hex is free of roads. Foot trails zigzag wildly, and end abruptly in box canyons, the wild animals that created them often able to walk up stony cliff walls. The largest hills are the tall karst swells that push up towards the heavens in a tumescent fashion. Bands of Kurtáni folk live out here, their tribes uncontacted by civilization (unless one counts exchanges of arrow fire every other generation or so as 'contact').

The eastern edge has many steep cliffs with overhanging ledges. When the autonomy of Kúrtur was rescinded by Emperor Durúmu (in A.S. 1760), the eastern boundary of Kúrtur was shoved westwards, adding the villages of Asu'ún and Drayahlá to the holdings of Sárku-oriented nobles. Rather than cede ownership of stands of priceless Séresh wood and Dáichu trees, these were cut down. There is a lament about this event, sung in a very old dialect of Tsolyáni. The chorus, in slightly garbled Thu'úsa, is sung phonetically by folks who no longer understand this language, and the tune is still traditionally hummed by Kurtáni bowyers.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')
(See also 'About the Kurtáni People')

Those Damned Tlethoggú Trees

This Large Hex in particular is home to patches of Tlethoggú trees. When written in some scroll, the word Tlethoggú usually has a suffix meaning, roughly, "accursed" and "hateful". Yet the Tlethoggú is a significant source of income for the province of Kúrtur because its sap confers fire-resistance to various materials.

Tlethoggú is a succulent; if injured, it oozes sap, which hardens into egg-sized nodules. These are collected by semi-nomadic Kurtáni who trade them in settlements for a pittance. When crushed and mixed with water and wine, Tlethoggú sap can be painted on wood to make it fire-resistant. (Until this dries, it has a foul odor.)

The gnarled limbs of the Tlethoggú go back and forth such that they interweave in all directions. The speed with which it grows makes keeping the roads clear a challenge. When fresh, the copious sap of the Tlethoggú tree is clear and viscous, and it quickly puts out any fires. Clearing stands out by burning is thus not an option.

As lumber, Tlethoggú wood is useless. It is very tough when alive, the abrasive bark blunting steel and Chlén hide alike. (Sometimes the Kurtáni folk use it like sandpaper.) Once chopped down, it dries out and weakens. Not surprisingly, it burns very poorly, the escaping steam making an unpleasant whining or

squeaking noise interspersed with loud pops. It gives off a throat-stinging smoke with a strong vomit-like aroma.

The largest of these trees stand some eight person-heights tall. Sérudla clamber over the tops of them, paying them no mind, while Chnéh brachiate rapidly through the gaps. Over time, humans or various creatures may carve "tunnels" and "rooms" into the stand. The Kurtáni associate them with Lord Hrü'ü because the Tlethoggú tree's dense circular dark green leaves and intertwining branches sometimes create cold shady pockets below it.

Dríkope Nuts

Trees that produce a unique and tasty local species of nut, the "Dríkope", are common in this Large Hex. They are also found in Large Hexes 3812, 3913, and 3914, but they are most plentiful here. They grow year-round. Some years, the trees are stingy, but, unpredictably, in other years, the trees "mast", generously dropping nuts until the ground is covered with them. They are enjoyed as a rare snack outside of this region. For Kurtáni people in Large Hex 3813, however, Dríkope are an important staple. They store very well, staying fresh for three years.

Little offerings of Dríkope nuts are traditionally made to an aspect of Lord Thúmis who is patron of chefs, his effigy placed above the kitchen doorway. These nuts are also left at shrines to Lady Avánthe (commonly worshipped here under the name of her Aspect Makórsa).

Chabísu Sickness

"Chabísu", a word of uncertain etymology, means "plants that make a Chlén beast sick". This area is known to be full of many types of it. The Chlén driver must be vigilant to prevent the creature from eating such greenery. The first symptom of Chabísu Sickness is usually the Chlén's feet becoming very sore and swollen. Uncharacteristically, it protests loudly when goaded to walk. The next sign is cracks in the hide about the animal's mouth and ankles. If the Chlén is not prevented from eating any more Chabísu, and allowed to rest, it will swell up and die. The carcass is usually butchered immediately, to prevent explosive results.

Town of Kirúna (3813.DG) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) Modern products include Tlethoggú sap, Dríkope nuts (cheap here, but expensive when they reach other provinces), Khéshchal feathers, Dáichu bark products

such as rope, and Tsúral buds. This is the seat of the fief, which was established during the reign of the Restorer of Dignities, Emperor Hejjéka IV (roughly around 1500 A.S.). The Kurtáni chose this to be the seat because it was the highest, least accessible town.

Village of Tsánane (3813.DK) This village would be known for its delicious herbal teas if its folk were not so furtive. Sometimes the place is deserted. Amidst the Gapúl trees of this area, there are a number of small secretive clanhouses hidden within the trunks. Entire families may reside during seasonal activities like tapping other trees for resin. The tree clan-houses are extremely hard to spot. Outsiders attempting to find them are likely to be shot full of arrows.

Tsakárikú's Peak (3813.EG) Some very fine Tsúral trees grow here. Kúni falcons love to nibble on the intense buds. They are soon too intoxicated to fly, and can be found blundering about on the ground, or even sprawled on their backs, pupils contracted to little dots.

Village of Asu'ún (3813.EM) The few travelers who have stayed here note that there are six clanhouses and they are all abandoned. They also mention experiencing a strange sensation. Descriptions of it include a faint and distant ringing in the ears, headaches, and an uncomfortable sensation that all of one's teeth are too large for their sockets. Some say there are tombs hidden in the canyon below. Possibly during the chaotic Time of No Kings, somebody chiselled a row of five statues of highly-stylized human-bodied dog-headed beings out of the stone. They occupy roughly oval niches in the stone cliff. (Thus, they can not be seen from Asu'ún itself; one has to be in the valley below to the east to see them.) Each is three times the height of a man. No one knows why, or if they have anything to do with "the ringing", that mysterious discomfiting sensation one experiences in Asu'ún. Also of note: The Sákbe Road from roughly here south to the town of Hichíku (3714.FF) has been plagued by banditry which is blamed on the Kurtáni Foundationists.

(See also 'About the Kurtáni Foundationists')

Village of Zhá (3813.FK) Weather along these slopes ranges from shady and balmy to moist and rainy. The south side of the road is cleared of trees, to allow more sun through. There have been many attempts at farming made here, none yet successful. The main reason for failure is small vermin. Caves south of the village are kept stocked with bales of grass carried up from the Sákbe Road to the east.

Spire of Galakú (3813.GE) The Spire of Galakú is seldom actually seen because of the thick forest canopy, but it figures in a number of old stories from the times when the first Kurtáni tribes made their way into the region. There

are locations that can be found by going to the top at a specific day of the year and observing where the Spire's shadow falls.

Adjutant's Rock (3813.GM) This landmark was once decreed to be a military outpost in support of forces at Kurtúsha. This failed because of the disturbances along the road from the east ending near Asu'ún (see the entry for Asu'ún, 3813.EM). There are large numbers of Dríkope nut trees here.

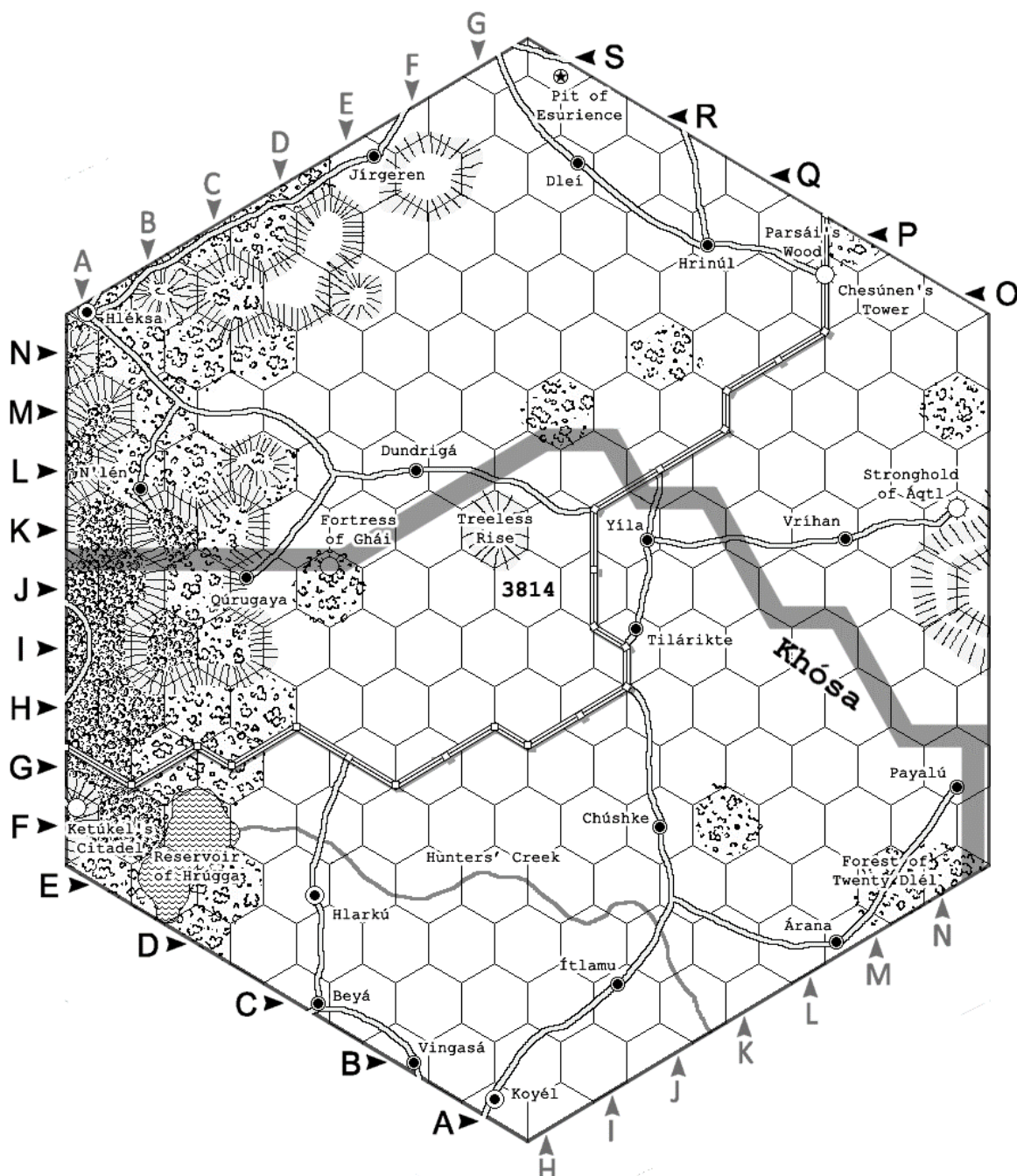
Qayá's Peak (3813.HH) This is the tallest of a cluster of high conical hills. Random splotches of green cling precariously to the sides. Upon Qayá's Peak, however, the forest grows in a ring all the way around. This is thought to be a man-made feature, and some say there is a cave system that connects all the sides. If there is some road or path to this place, it is not common knowledge.

Town of Tláva (3813.JJ) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) Products of the forest are carried out basket by basket from this place with a twisting road that was never made wide enough for a Chlén cart. Tláva is so far up in the hills that travel is roughly half the speed of what it ought to be, as the road winds back and forth. Though there is no especial reason for it, goods from the area of Tláva go northwards, while those from the area of Kirúna are sent south upon the Sákbe Road.

One of the most desired product is nodules of Tlethoggú sap (see the text box for Tlethoggú in the entry for this Large Hex). Dríkope nuts are one of the favored commodities that are exported. Elsewhere, they are just a delicacy to serve at parties but here, they may form a large part of the diet. (See the text box for Dríkope nuts in this Large Hex.)

Village of Drayahlá (3813.JN) This site is deserted except on certain rare days when semi-nomadic bands of Kurtáni gather. They are only just barely a village; they still think of themselves as the Drayahlá Tribe. As their staple, the Dríkope nuts, are plentiful, they are uninterested in trade with the outside. This village was tried out as part of the Kurtáni Fief of Kirúna for a time, then passed on to the more Tsolyáni Fief of Hlarkú. As the Drayahlá would not cooperate, and it was too much bother to enforce the rules, they were essentially erased from the bureaucracy.

Vanishing Hill (3813.RI) Used to mark the border of Kúrtur and Alidlár, the Vanishing Hill is said to have been unfindable at various points in history. Some say the misty hill is a disguise for Palazhú', a lost paradise where no one need ever grow old, but those who find it are not allowed to leave. Some say the disappearance is but an illusion, brought about by unusually tall trees on the surrounding slopes.



HEX 3814

This Large Hex is divided north and south between the Provinces of Alidlár and Khósa. Merchants keep the Sákbe that runs between the two surprisingly busy and crowded. The history of this area is far too convoluted and tumultuous to make an appealing narrative. Suffice it to say that subdividing it into no less than five fiefs went a long way to establishing peace.

Chlén beasts are peeled for their hide in the summer, making loud terrified cries to be heard at least a Tsán away, if not two. Even the medium-sized ones, whose hide is of lesser quality, will be subjected to this indignity, as the

process improves the quality of successive years. Cheap trays and bowls made from this weaker stuff shows up in the paupers' markets of the towns of Hléksa, Hlarkú, and Koyél.

(See also 'About the Golden Meadows')
(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

Town of Koyél (3814.AG) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is a place in disarray. Visitors will note many unseemly things. An overturned merchant's cart is laying on the northeast, its goods said to have been carried off by a horde of Chnélh. Traders are reluctant to come here. Rather than conducting business discreetly out of sight, there is an impromptu slavers' market on the side of

the road into town (from the southwest.) The most dramatic event is that the town's hostel for travelers has been burnt down, allegedly by vandals.

A number of wooden items are made in this area, from Séresh wood bows worthy of a princeling, to Chlén carts. Huge teams of slaves drag lumber from the highlands to the town of Hléksa, where it is loaded onto carts. These prized timbers are used to form key posts in buildings.

Tanned Chlén-hide goods of all sorts are some of this region's exports, especially from Koyél. Two local Chlén tanner clans, friendly rivals, are the pride of the town. The (Medium Status) Clan of Smiling Helm Crafters creates many useful items but elaborate headgear is their specialty.

An Incompetent Mayor

During the brief reign of Dchich'uné the Usurper, a former mayor (whose name was llté) was accused of treason unto the Empire, and executed. He was replaced with Sadítno hiGuténu, a former military man and a fanatical worshipper of Lord Sáрку who was honorably discharged when he lost a leg. Sadítno recently died during a hunting trip. The third and new mayor is Énganui hiPúrume, a wealthy and vain merchant whose proclamations unto the various clans in Koyél have caused chaos. Énganui of the wide-spread Ripened Sheaf Clan (Medium Status, High Lineage) frequently oversteps his authority, interfering in clan business. He does his utmost to pin the blame on others, a strategy that has, unfortunately, worked fairly well for him in the past. Most of the time, though, he pretends that nothing is seriously wrong - that it will all soon fix itself. If things do go right in Koyél, it will be in spite of Énganui, not because of him - but rest assured he will try and take credit!

Village of Vingasá (3814.BF) The clothing folks wear here is ragged. Brats run about in the streets naked except for a small wooden pendant denoting their clans. These clans are unable to provide even the simple education that is normal in the rest of the empire. Entertainers shun this impoverished place, and people of Medium Status and up will not find accommodations equal to their station here. Their small Hirilákte arena is now just a gambling den.

As retribution for their support of the regime of Prince Dchich'uné that harmed villages nearby, taxes were set very high. There are three abandoned clan houses, and it now has a slave market, which it did not before. Some came from troubled Koyél to the east.

Village of Beyá (3814.CD) Beyá is comprised more of Stability-oriented Clans. There are two food taboos observed throughout the entire village. First, onions

(Bashélikh) may not be grown or eaten in town. Second, purple wine of the Dlél fruit is forbidden.

At a tiny rectangular temple to the beast-headed Lord Qón (Cohort of Lord Belkhánu) on the south side of the village, young priests clad in white and yellow may be seen in rows practicing traditional movements with foot-long maces as selections from scrolls are read to them. They are trained in the specialized and complicated lore of identifying, opposing, and how to properly speak to demons. Those who complete their training here will be put through difficult conditioning involving spell-casters, in hopes of raising their resistance to magic.

Village of Ítlamu (3814.CI) The small sprawling village of Ítlamu is in a little valley. It is forbidden to build over two stories, so one does not see the settlement until one crests the rise less than a tsán (about 1500 yards) from the place, from any direction.

Some say the folk of Ítlamu live nearly as long as those of Chúshke up the road to the north. No one has any explanation of this here, either.

Village of Árana (3814.DM) Small groves of fruit trees and trellises of vining fruit plants punctuate the grain-covered hills. After the middle of summer, various fruit wines are made, including rich brandies heavy with honey. Alas, these delicious wines are slightly richer in methanol than usual, so, while harmless in small doses, they punish the injudicious with a truly hammering headache. In winter and early spring, rolling mists (or rather, the things that may leap out from them) make travel dangerous. Árana and the region to the southeast north of Hunter's Creek are part of the Golden Meadows (see the entry at 3815.DD). There used to be a road between Árana and Héshekel (3715.NB). All that remains of it is are stone bridges that connect the chasms.

Forest of Twenty Dlél (3814.ED) This is a patch of trees, many of which bear Dlél fruit. A local folk-song tells the legend of how the forest came to be.

The Legend of the Twenty Dlél

This story begins with Tamún, a widow who had outlived four husbands during a war, and her clanhouse had been destroyed. She was left with twelve children (six of whom she had given birth unto). She went to the other houses of her clan but they said she was unlucky, and turned her away.

So, Tamún took the children with her to live in the bush. Eventually, though, they were so hungry that they went back to the village to rummage through trash. As there was a famine going on, all they could find were the pits

of DléI plums. Tamún told her children to plant them in the woods. "But why?" the children asked. They grumbled, "These will never grow in time to feed us."

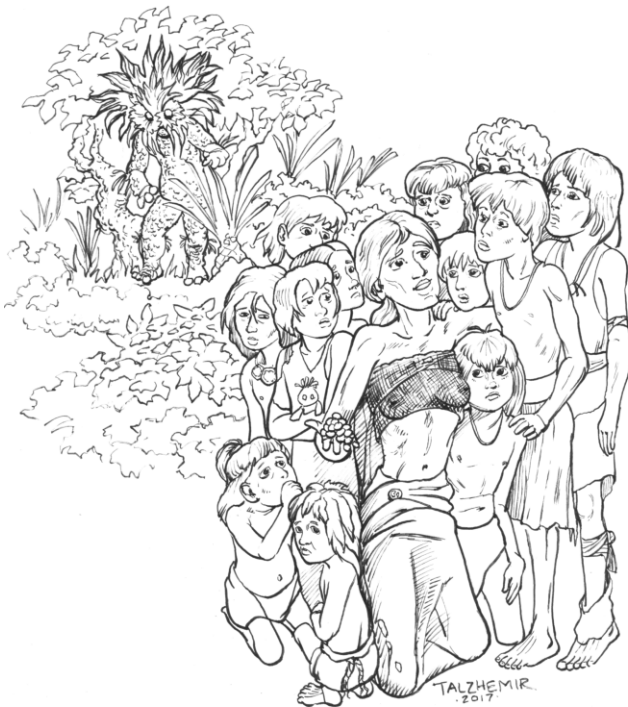
"True," said Tamún, "but at least they shall be there for others one day." Hearing these kind and wise words, Lady Avánthe sent the Grassy Hair, a small creature resembling a man made of dark earth, to follow them. It blessed the fruit pits, which grew into trees overnight. In time, Tamún's family joined a clan.

Thus, some say the Forest of Twenty DléI is the scene of a miracle. Others say this is all just a quaint ballad to sell more of the local DléI brandy (which is actually quite good).

Town of Hlarkú (3814.ED)

This is the seat of the fief. People come and go freely from this town to the numerous farmsteads down the road to the east, growing tall Yáfa rice. The long stems are used for weaving. There is an old saying that there is honor in weaving mats, so long as the mat is woven well. Mat weavers of Hlarkú have taken this to heart, producing excellent wares, and holding their heads high.

The oldest Chlén beasts that grow up here are hearty creatures, their peeled hide often of superior quality. The healthy appetites of the youngest Chlén make them prodigious producers of manure, and so, these are encouraged to go gamboling about the fields.



The Tale of the Twenty DléI

Ketúkel's Citadel (3814.FA) Tall and thin, this construct of many platforms and wooden lattices has walkways going out like spokes to various clan houses in the area. This place was built around 400 years ago, under the auspices of the 54th Emperor, Neshkirúma, titled "The Cloud-spinner". Ketúkel was either the name of his son, his pet Kúni bird, or both; the records are unclear. In any case, a number of Kúni birds are housed here by the OAL for sending messages.

Locals practice a peculiar pastime. They construct large oblong kites from Dáichu-fiber paper. Then they hang from the kites as they leap off the edges of certain cliffs, gliding down erratically. An eye, in homage to the god Thúmis, often adorns the center of the kite. They only weigh around 35 pounds; the frames are made from long splints of Séresh wood. Every few years, a kite glide ends in fatal injury.

Reservoir of Hrúgga (3814.FC) Locals note that this water is unusually cold, therefore excellent for drinking, but unpleasant for bathing or swimming. No one knows why it is so chilly. Fresh water comes out of cliffs to the west in numerous places, then gathers here before flowing eastwards.

Stories explaining local landforms through tall tales that reference Hrúgga "of the epics" are not uncommon, and here is yet one more. That mighty hero came to the town of Zhavún, where the local Hetman gave Hrúgga a magical stone cup that made his drinks cold. The hero proceeded to drink all the liquor that they had, then fall asleep. In the morning the Hetman tried to convince Hrúgga that he had pledged to marry three of the clan daughters the night before.

Hrúgga angrily slammed his fist into the ground. It split, and chilly water came pouring out. The flood destroyed Zhavún. Hrúgga threw the cup into the newly-created lake and left.

Village of Chúshke (3814.FJ) Striking longevity is the norm at Chúshke, where even the most hard-worked peasants and slaves live into their nineties. Why this is, nobody knows. Explanations range from the water of a nearby stream to the use of some secret herb to the blessing of Lord Hnálla Himself. This was once the site of a rare Tinalíya attempt at a settlement alongside the human community. Nominally worshippers of the god Keténgku, Cohort of Lord Thúmis and the patron of wisdom applied, they were said to be far more pragmatic than philanthropic. The abandoned stone remnant of their home is on a low hill to the west of town.

Village of Payalú (3814.GN) Payalú stands oddly apart from the nearby fiefs. The Temple of Sáрку supports this village, whose clans are primarily devoted to Lords Hrū'ū, Sáрку, and their two cohorts. By day, the buildings are

stately, with pale patinated swept greenish roofs above dark pillars and walls. Pentagonal ponds edged in dark stones are covered in a floating lime-colored weed nutritious for the large local population Káika.

As the sun goes down, however, sinister aspects become more prominent. The niches for the Káika to roost are designed to be the mouths of asymmetrical faces. Poisonous herbs in pots hewn to look like screaming heads adorn the railings of an assassin's clan. The silhouettes of the pillars and the ornate roof combs, likewise, reveal large demon faces. Their intent, it is said, is to remind humanity of its utter insignificance in the face of such forces at large in the universe, and the arrogance of thinking human notions of beauty should set the standard.

A number of woodworkers live here. They specialize in wooden screens, statues, and so on, covered in stylized representations of predators, monsters, and demons. (Perhaps one would like to purchase a hanging cradle of dark purple-stained wood, its sides lavishly adorned with horrors?)

There is a roofed well at the center from which no one will drink. Those who do, it is said, become permanently able to see many small actual demons living in the village. The demons eventually possess this person, causing them to attack their friends and relatives. Some say the best woodcarvers are driven to drink several drops to attain the heights of their craft.

Village of Tilárikte (3814.II) This is a fairly typical Sákbe road village. There are several small hostels for merchant caravans. An ancient law requires the farmsteads both east and west of the road here to grow red Dná grain and nothing else. A number of bland and eclectic clans have houses here. (Whatever it is that blesses the folk of Chúshke to the south with long life, it is absent from Tilárikte.)

Village of Qúrugaya (3814.JD) With its westward side a rocky slope leading up to cliffs and hills that bulge from the ground like monoliths, sundown comes early to Qúrugaya. Birds and bird-like creatures that nest on the stone can be seen snapping up insects in the early twilight. The village is a large collection of rectangular bamboo and mud huts built on wooden pilings the height of a man. Their equivalent of a clan house is a collection of huts that share a central communal fire. The sole stone building is an open-sided structure for curing logs. It is covered in netting from which countless bundles of aromatic herbs are hung, especially Tsúral buds.

Qúrugaya is said to be an ancient settlement. In the time when the chieftains of the Kúrt Hills ruled sovereign, it was called Líko or Nó'oliho. It was supposedly a fabulous city whose wealth came from aromatic lumber and the

iridescent feathers of rare avians. According to one story, it was once terrorized by a large troop of Chéhl, who tore the cages open and freed all the birds.

Fortress of Ghái (3814.JE) This dark and imposing group of trapezoidal towers was once the seat of a small fief; it is now a part of the Fief of Hléksa. Steel weapons may be commissioned from its master smiths (though not armor). It is officially in the Province of Alidlár. Warriors and soldiers of Ghái have answered calls for help from Jírgeren to Hlarkú since the days when this was an independent region ruled by authorities high up in the Kúrt Hills rather than the Empire of Tsolyánu.

It is also the traditional home of the lineage hiGarichái. This ancient ancestor, the legend goes, was granted four extra lives, but after a fifth death, would go to serve Lord Sárku. The demon-faced mask worn by Garichái of Ghái still hangs in the fortress. Many Kurtáni regard this place with dread and hostility.

Treeless Rise (3814.KG) It is said that long ago (perhaps it was during the time of the warring Priest-Kings), a temple wanted to promote the worship of Lord Vimúhla. They turned their priestly magicks towards a grove of incense-yielding Vrés trees sacred to an obscure god of fungus known as Babató, and destroyed it. Babató's shamans retaliated by setting that temple on fire using flaming arrows. The temple was indeed destroyed but the priests walked out unscathed. Babató's followers were subdued, and they joined the Temple of Lord Vimúhla; their little local god became a lowly servant of Lord Vimúhla.

Village of Yíla (3814.KI) Built upon one of several low rises, Yíla is locally renowned for the traveling clay-workers of the Clan of Earthen Scales. Fine pinkish and greenish clays are dug out from a long-dry river bed, then crushed in huge mortars. To acquire pigments and other ingredients for their colorful glazes, people from this village may travel as far as Haumá. Though the roof tiles are fairly durable, they are still unlikely to safely make the journey to another town. Thus, teams of ceramics-makers may travel to another place with a load of clay and their kiln upon a special human-drawn cart.

Stronghold of Áqtl (3814.KN) The prestigious Sword of Fire Clan established this citadel in a time of war, but after it was peaceful for a generation, left in utter boredom for a more northerly location. An old legend says that they left a large steel sword behind, sealed inside of a rose quartz casket because it would not stop talking.

The barest remains of a N'Lüss outpost, from the time of the Dragon Kings, can be found atop the prominence to the southeast (3814.JO). Also, there was once a road to

Chesúnen's Tower to the northwest, but it is now badly broken up.

Village of N'lén (3814.LB) The clanhouses of this town cluster along a cliff-face to the southwest, with perilously narrow roads leading up to their cantilevered wooden terraces. Because of Gré'a trees, it is always softly raining on N'lén, especially at dawn. (See text box for Gré'a trees under "About the Kurt Hills Forest".)

Village of Dundrigá (3814.LF) Clanhouses of different statuses and sizes cluster around a common plaza, one half of which is a shaded marketplace of shimmering blue awnings, and the other, a modest Hirilákte arena with green roofs over the spectator stands. There are no temples, just shrines to all twenty deities, and the clans tend to eclectic worship. Dundrigá is situated near the border between two provinces. The people here have a carved piece of green and black onyx which they spin on its edge. Depending on which face comes up, bundles of bags of coins and tribute goods are sent to either Qúrugaya Village in Alidlár or Hléksa Town in Khósa. Small gifts of spicy condiments in jars are included. An old story recounts how those who could not pay their taxes were sent down into the Pit of Esurience, either to bring up gems, or perish.

Town of Hléksa (3814.OA) This is the seat of the fief. The forest town of Hléksa upholds a litany of strict tree management, originally composed in the Temple of Thúmis, known as "The Hymn of Arboreal Disposition". The most precious of their charges are stands of Séresh wood that take a full three centuries to achieve the strength to make the finest bows.

A clanhouse of the (Very Low status) Turning Wheel Clan is found here, producing very durable Chlén carts. The carters hold a little ritual with an old Hu'hún (something like a Kurtáni shamaness) devoted to Makórsa, an aspect of Lady Avánthe, blessing each one. It is a bittersweet moment for the carters as it pulls away, laden with local goods, never to be seen again.

Some of the lumber comes from places where Chlén can not make it up and down the slopes, and there are plants they would get sick attempting to eat. The logs are felled using tarred ropes and black sand from near the Pit of Esurience (3814.SH), then dragged to Hléksa by teams of sixty-four workers using sleds, baskets of dry leaves, and large ropes. Some of the best of that wood is made into carts.

Chesúnen's Tower (3814.OL) This block-shaped edifice surrounds the Sákbe road; it is also a bridge. To the west, a zig-zagging ramp flows out towards Hrinúl and the countryside. Its two corners are popular market platforms. A matching ramp to the east is blocked by wicker chains and

posts supporting strings of colorful pennants. There was once a road to the Stronghold of Áqtl but it is now badly broken up.

Village of Hrinúl (3814.PK) Hrinúl is a place of several golden-brown clanhouses in good repair, a bubbling brook with an ancient mill that grinds grain, fruitful fields, contented grazing Hmá and Hmélu, and little else. A simple shrine to Lady Avánthe holds a blue stone from the Pit of Esurience (3814.SH).

When the people of Hrinúl tire of the sameness of life in this drowsy agrarian settlement, and they have a few extra Hlášh to spend, they go down the road to the beribboned Chesúnen's Tower, where the atmosphere of the market resembles a county fair.

Village of Dleí (3814.QH) Many generations ago, Dleí produced charcoal, but the local forest that supplied the wood is long gone. The people turned to farming on the vast swathes of cleared land, and this has been very successful. Shühúyal is a minor deity locally said to be the child of Lord Chiténg and Lady Dlamélish, identified with Dlamélish's Cohort, Hriháyal. She is celebrated as the purifier of fields in the annual rite in which the dry plant stubble on plots of land are burned. Loud humming tornado-like "fire whirls" that appear at this time in the smoke are interpreted as signs of Her approval. (Shühúyal is not officially recognized by any of the great temples.)

Village of Jírgeren (3814.RF) A large abandoned quarry for flint is to be found east of here. It is a huge bowl-shaped hole with many small holes leading downwards randomly into places where the stone was dug out for centuries by a community of Ninínyal ("Pygmy Folk"). The knappable minerals are not prized by humans, and the holes are now lairs for various hostile creatures, especially Dnélu. Daring young adventurers come here in search of Dnélu cocoons, from which Thésun gauze is made.

Though it may appear "centrally" located on the map, Jírgeren is the farthest village from two possible avenues to more populous regions. Sometimes people seeking to avoid civilization end up in this innocuous backwater.

Pit of Esurience (3814.SH) 11,000 years ago, some farmers plowing a field here found a few pieces of sky blue carnelian. Priestesses of a goddess (now identified with Lady Avánthe) proclaimed it a miracle, and, with the current fief holder's support, opened a mine. People flocked to the region hoping to make their fortune. Many of them did after the back-breaking work of chipping and chiseling limestone. In addition to the showy carnelian, they found stormy blue chalcedony and exotic opals of a light aqua to turquoise color. All three of the stones were nicknamed "Droplets of Alidlár".

The rock-carving continued for centuries, deeper and deeper, creating a maze of tunnels. Eventually the miners broke through to a natural cave system with much underground water, slightly milky but drinkable. As the supply of gems dwindled; fell creatures of the Underworld took up residence. Parties of treasure-seek would enter, never to return. Over time, the place acquired a new name: The Pit of Esurience.

Black Sand

Streams in this area are panned by peasants in their spare time. They may find tiny gems on very rare occasion. More valuable, however, is the Black Sand,

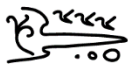
which is prized as an abrasive. Most of it goes to the town of Hléksa (3814.OA).

The Esurient One

Throughout the centuries, there have been reports of a pretty young girl with eyes of glowing blue in this immediate area. They call this apparition, "The Esurient One". Local folks are very reluctant to discuss her, believing her appearance foretells death.

Western Ridge (3814.JO) (See the entry for Western Ridge, 3815.KB)

Hléksa (3814.OA)



Tsurú (3915.FG)



Chethá (3915.MI)



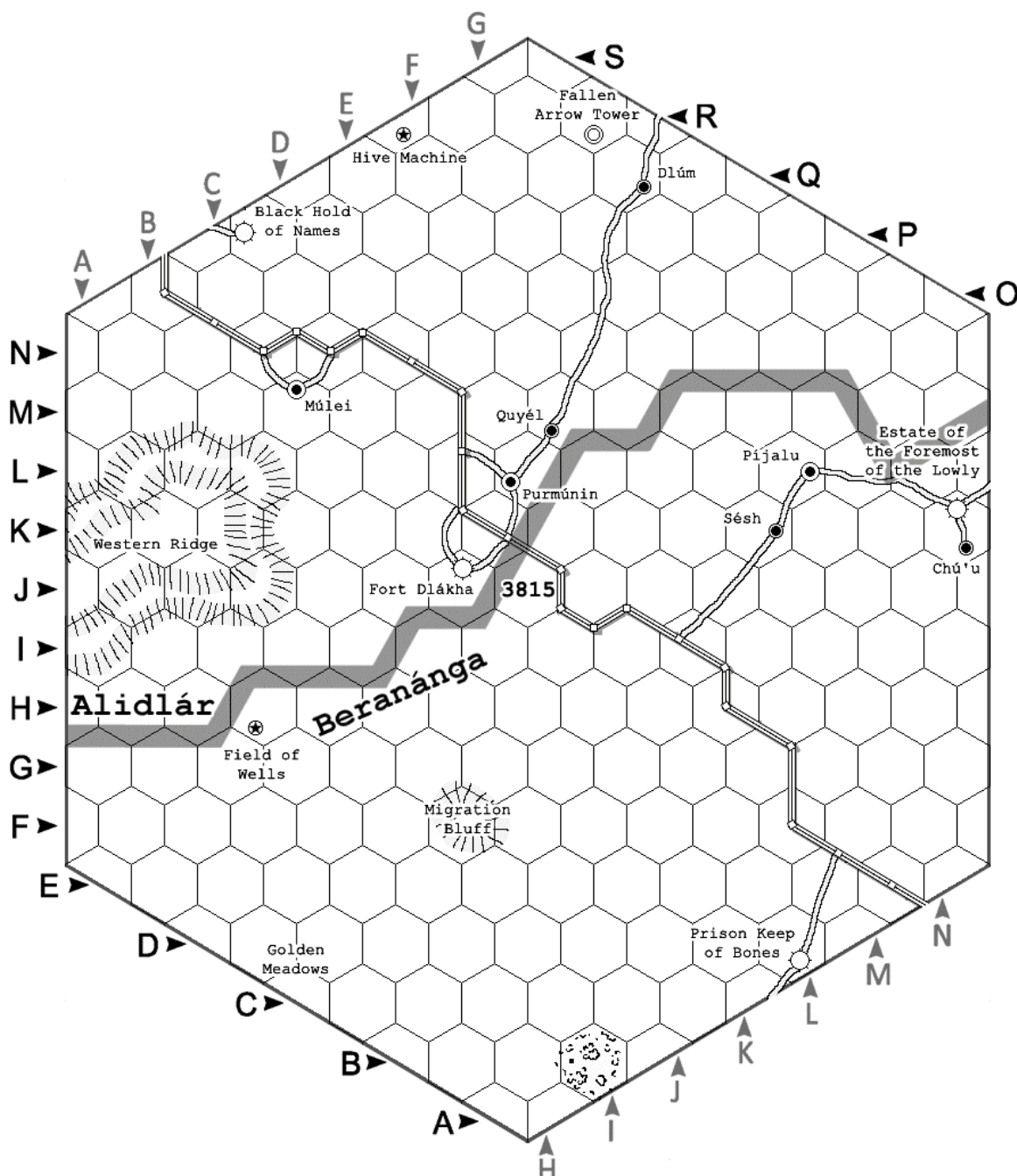
Chúsetan (4013.FM)



Drasá (4014.FK)



Brands for the Stations of Brave Peripitation of Alidlár Province



HEX 3815

The wheat-like Gáin is grown here, with less of the red Dná and rice-like Yáfa. Between the jutting hills that run from the northwest to the southeast, there are soft foothills. In ancient times, the indigenous Kurtáni people would attack from hilltop forts. As these were taken over by the Tsolyáni invaders one by one, the native retreated to the forests in the southwest of Alidlár. The southwest half of this Large Hex became part of the prosperous region known as the Golden Meadows, bounded on the northeast by a Sákbe Road.

(See also 'About the Golden Meadows')

(The House of the) Golden Meadows

(3815.DD) Once a part of Fort Dlákha's military holdings, it is now a storage complex belonging to the prestigious Golden Bough Clan. Granaries stand in a proud circle. Dozens of Chlén carts stand at the ready. Off to one side, parching houses, more like roofed platforms with four open walls and rows of small stoves. Given the lowly work that is done here, the owners seldom come by in person.

This misty plain is very flat, and there are many paths leading out from this point in a sunburst shape through vast fields of Gáin grain, but no official road. In the winter and early spring, thick fog blankets the area. Crops grow quickly;

there is often a fourth or even a fifth crop. The local Gáin cultivar grows to about human-height, the long stems having many uses.

Long ago, to prevent people from getting lost, numerous stone pylons, thrice human-height, were placed about the area on hilltops. They are marked in scraps of the archaic Thu'úsa ladder script. Aided by the pylons, different fields are ritually burnt in rotation at the end of winter, just before the spring rains.

This Small Hex and the surrounding Small Hexes are made hazardous by outcroppings of honeycomb rock, sinkholes, and caves. The dangerous Dnélu are also plentiful, and their cocoons are used to make the sheerest yet strongest Thésun fabric. There are countless random small clanhouse buildings spread out and not marked on the map; some belong to various villages such as Árana 3814.DM. Sometimes these are abandoned, and become a nuisance when wild creatures make lairs of them. Fireproofed with Tlethoggú sap, it takes a generation or two before they can be burned down.

Prison Keep of Bones (3815.DL) This place belongs to the governorship of the province of Beranánga. It has a very thick H-shaped wall around a courtyard, with towers at eight of the corners. The extensive parapets are covered with gabled clay roofs, the tiles glazed a gleaming black. Sculptures of many-legged creatures double as pillars in many places, hinting at some ancient connection to Lord Wurú in the past. There are no clanhouses, no private residences, no markets, etc. at this site. It is a prison, and nothing else.

The Empire favors the punishments of Impalement and slavery for many crimes but there are a few prisons too. An enormous bribe may lead to a comfortable room in the Prison Keep of Bones.

Both guards and inmates sent here are expected to never be seen again. All goods coming in are passed through a stone artifact called Shrigékk (not 'the' Shrigékk - it seems to be a personal name). Something here blocks inter-planar travel (possibly Shrigékk). For water, this citadel relies on rainwater collected in a cistern. Other than this, very little is known about what transpires here.

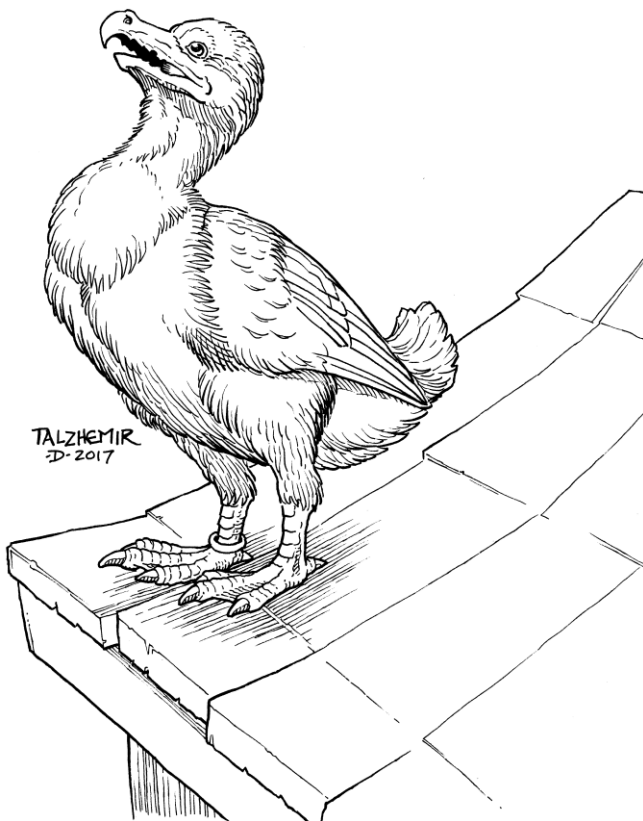
Migration Bluff (3815.FG) This is a distinctive landmark visible from a Small Hex in any direction: a large flat-topped hill. An early Qadárni battle between the Tsolyáni and Kurtáni resulted in this region being ceded to the Tsolyáni. Nothing remains of the village that was once built on its top because the locally-produced limestone cement only lasted 140 years before falling apart. Most of the settlers came from Béy Sü. They resettled in the Golden Meadows, the region to the southwest (see the entry at 3815.DD).

Field of Wells (3815.HD) This is a region of 72 oval stone rings upon a granite plaza, each about twelve feet across, leading to rock-lined shafts going down. The openings are regularly spaced about a region shaped like a fat oval. The site was founded seven centuries ago by a priest with a natural sensitivity to other-planar energies. This land is held by the Temple of Lord Keténgku, so they carried out the excavation. Coins dating to the First Imperium have been found in the dirt dug out, as well as clay and woven grass parcels with the preserved remains of cats. The deepest of these holes dug so far is ten man-heights. Each spring, though, rains fill the holes with water, making excavation more expensive each year, as the water must be pumped out. The digging is currently on indefinite hold; the Field of Wells is now an actual field of wells.

Fort Dlákha (3815.JG) Distinguished Kásikoi ("Captain") Jésumai hiNgalúm enjoys the title of Páchukoi ("Lord") with which this fort traditionally comes. He belongs to the Red Sword Clan (so, High Clan, High Status). The wealth of his clanhouse is based partly on the Yáfa rice fields to which a fan of small foot trails lead, to the southwest and south. During the recent Civil War, this fort held its own against troops of the Omnipotent Azure Legion loyal to Prince Dhich'uné.

Fort Dlákha is shaped like a seven-pointed star, about a large courtyard with buildings. There are tall walls that slope outwards and crenellated projections along the ramparts resembling halves of bowls. Its moat, teeming with toothy spikey tentacled creatures, forms the outermost defense. A sacrifice of numerous bowls of salt is made unto these creatures each year in a solemn ceremony over which the Páchukoi traditionally presides. It is said that at the culmination of the rite, several tentacles come forth, and respectfully touch his feet.

Western Ridge (3815.KB) This is an extinct volcano; its last eruption was during the Time of No Kings. Its peak is chilly and windy compared to the surrounding lands. It was associated with Babató, a local fungus deity said to have become a servitor of Lord Vimúhla. There are a few Vrés trees growing in the sharp and wrinkled green valleys of the Ridge. Sometimes a thin trail of smoke is seen rising up from the peak; this is said to be Babató burning incense to Lord Vimúhla. These trees grow very strangely warped due to a fungal infestation, but the response from the plant is to concentrate more of the Vrés sap. Many years ago, a forest fire upon Western Ridge filled the air with fragrant smoke, which could be smelled all the way to the village of Múlei. (Western Ridge extends into Large Hex 3814)



It is polite not to shoot Káika birds that are near dwellings, as these tend to belong to some clan or other.

Village of Sésh (3815.KK) Unlike other villages of the region, no grain comes out of the fields of Sésh. They only grow fresh fruits and vegetables, The fruit is cooked down and stored as sweet preserves for trade. Rumor has it that there is a friendly Sérudla living somewhere around here, but villagers will deny this.

Estate of the Foremost of the Lowly (3815.KN)

This land belongs to the Temple of Avánthe. A grand manor house, its buildings connected by walkways, hovers on pillars above a tiny shallow lake. The current manager is Matron Arukháni hiTsúnmidar of the Golden Bough Clan, an elderly and wealthy administrative priestess (Very High Clan Status, Medium Lineage).

A prosperous clanhouse of the Directed Water Clan (Very Low status; almost all Yáfa rice growers who follow Avánthe) is built to the west, in its shadow. There is no market here; commerce is best conducted in Píjalu to the west. There is an inexpensive hostel with a boisterous pavillion at night, mainly intended for (Very Low Clan) farmers and merchants transporting faintly yellowish Yáfa.

A number of Káika ducks paddle about contentedly in the water, roosting in niches below the eaves at night. The nearby rice fields are green with a kind of floating weed which the birds greedily devour. It is custom that these birds should not be harmed while one is in sight of the manor.

It was not always so. During the battles to conquer Kúrtur, there was drought here, and the people were near starvation. In desperation, Gíslan, a mere peasant boy, and his brothers explored a nearby cave system. Most of them were killed. The excursions had yielded none of the treasure he had claimed they would find. Their widows appealed to the clan for compensation. Gíslan was held responsible, and ordered to either find the promised treasure, or be sold into slavery. He chose to make one more trip into caves.

Climbing down a deep chimney with a complicated system of straw ropes, Gíslan stumbled onto a cave lined with white crystals. A trickle of water wound through the area. He brought some of the crystals back, and it was identified as salt.

The clan was able to mine, but not sell, the salt (as this would infringe upon rights reserved for other clans in this province). Gíslan was sold into slavery, and the proceeds used to buy a flock of birds, which were fattened on cooked grain scattered onto the water. The eggs and meat were then salted and smoked over Yáfa straw. Selling these two commodities was allowed. This development turned the fortunes of the local clan members around. Gíslan's clan eventually bought him back after ten years.

Today, there is also a clanhouse of the Nighted Tower Clan, to properly mine and trade the local salt.



To harm a Káika while in sight of the manor of the Estate of the Foremost of the Lowly is forbidden. When the weaker drakes are driven out by the stronger ones, away from hens, they may fall prey to persistent youngsters.

Village of Chú'u (3815.KN) This little village is surrounded by dirt roads radiating out from it in all directions. They divide the surrounding lands into twelve equal wedges. Fruits, vegetables, and flowers are planted according to what month in which they usually become ripe. Different clans preside over the various crops but it is a unifying community effort. Overall, this is a Very Low to Low Status settlement.

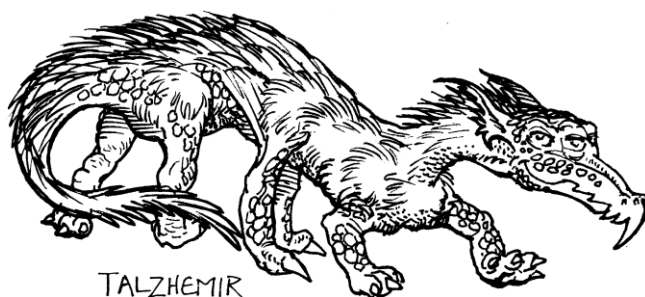
One wedge is left empty in honor of Lord Sárku; it corresponds to the month when the least grows here at that time. There is also a walkway associated with the five Intercalary Days, and at that time, a line of fires is lit at regular intervals along its length.

Town of Purmúnin (3815.LH) (This is the seat of the fief.) This town is an eclectic collection of clanhouses large and small. They are in various states of upkeep. There are small temples to all the Gods here, except for a slightly larger one that honors Lord Karakán. It is from the Temple of Lord Hnálla that a natural spring appeared in 1842 A.S., and this miracle is the source of much of the town's water.

A large clanhouse of the Wicker Image Clan (Very Low status) runs a busy system of street cleaners in cooperation with the Nighted Tower Clan (also Very Low status). By custom, these workers wear oval wicker face shields covered with Dáichu bark gauze. Those of the Wicker Image gather up human as well as Chlén manure, and it is hauled away to the neighboring village of Quyél. Those of the Nighted Tower collect urine, bringing it on their backs in covered wooden tubes to special fields several miles east of the town. Useful crystals form on these odoriferous patches, which slaves must carefully gather up.

The Boskage of Purmúnin

Parts of this fief are too hilly to plant with grain. The ridges are topped with copses of short trees, with dense tangled thicket below. These are not good for building but they do make good charcoal. Especially south of the road from Nalasa'á (3916.EC) to the town of Kikú (3916.IF), the thick patches are infested with pugnacious swarms of Kité and Kókh. Jakkóhl (their furry hides sometimes used to line the area inside of a shield along an arm) dart to and fro. Okhíba bumble about here, both in the forest and in the open, as well. Both the Okhíba and Jakkóhl are usually harmless, but their loud death squeals call together a larger-than-usual assemblage of hungry Zné.



A local variety of Kité near the town of Purmúnin have patches of scaly skin amidst their fur, making them potentially tougher to kill.

Town of Píjalu (3815.LL) This is the seat of the fief. The clanhouses here are arranged in a loose egg shape, with a big market in the center. Covered walkways connect shingle-roofed stalls and small shops. A large variety of housecat, which takes its name from this town, is cherished here.

The Cats of Píjalu

Sweet-natured dappled housecats the size of earthly lynxes roam freely; they weigh around 20kg (44 lbs). Their origin is a trade, centuries ago, with the Temple of Ksáru. What was traded back, no one seems to know, but the Tiúniyal ("kitties") of Píjalu are a boon, as they are capable of killing larger vermin than usual for a cat. One can find them around the granaries in other settlements in this region, adorned with collars of crocheted fiber with small Chlén-hide plaques set with small sparkling stones. A young cat with no such collar may be brought elsewhere in this Large Hex (3815) and traded for a few Hlásh. Outside of this Large Hex, its rarity and thus its value, increases.

Píjalu Cat (1)

Wandering: 95%, 1/2/3 Lair: 5%, 1/1/1

PHYS: 9	DEFT: 12	INST: 10
WILL: 11	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: +1
Initiative: 2/3/4 Movement: 8 ground		
Defenses:	Melee: 4	Missile: 4 Magic: 1
Armor: 0/0	Hits: 7	Energy: 10

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Bite	14-	2/4/6	

Other Abilities:

Night Vision: +2

Town of Múlei (3815.MD) This is a typical Sákbe Road Town. People come here to pick up the needful things that tend to come mainly from towns because of the proprietary nature of the deep knowledge of the crafting clans. For instance, Chlén hide is so easy to come by here that it is not worth much, but Chlén hide tools treated treated to near-iron hardness by the tanner's clans are valuable. Múlei is lower in status overall than Fort Dlákha and Purmúnin. One of its commodities is hay.

With all the grain, there is a great need for Chlén cart drivers in this province. The dirt roads that parallel the Sákbe between Múlei, Fort Dlákha, and the busy fief seat of Purmúnin are used as a kind of school by the Turning Wheel Clan (Very Low status). Scaled-down carts are drawn by Chlén the size of a doorway on its side. The use of diminutive Chlén is entirely for the sake of the carters-in-training, not the Chlén, which eat voraciously in order to grow, and are

thus far less efficient to keep than big wild-caught adults. Much of what they practice carrying is haybales.

Village of Quyé (3815.MH) This village is built a little distance away from the road, so that no one who does not wish to must set foot in it. This is a place of Very Low status inhabitants, mainly Wicker Image and Nighted Tower Clans. By longstanding custom, they wear oval wicker face shields covered with Dáichu bark gauze when in the presence of higher status people. To the northeast, the land slopes down and away, lush and green - the results of generations of diligent handling of manure.

Human and Chlén excrement arrives here daily, brought primarily on the backs of members of the Wicker Image Clan, but sometimes by Chlén cart. From here it may be carried away downhill to the many farmsteads.

Following a ritual decreed by local priestesses of Lady Avánthe, if it is the dry season, it must be spread thinly upon a dry patch of ground, to be hallowed by Lord Hnálla's sunlight. After five days of being thus blessed, it may be spread on the fields.

If it is a time of rain, it is placed below wicker awnings, in heaps outside the village, a layer of Chlén hide alternating with one of human ordure. These mounds can grow strangely hot. Sometimes they even burst into flame - the villagers say some mischievous elemental of Lord Chiténg has gotten loose. Water must then be poured over the blaze.

Black Hold of Names (3815.PD) About 350 years ago, an extremely wealthy and high-ranking scholar priest of Lord Ksáru named Vijésa'on hiRéru sent his agents to retrieve census information from Úrmish, Jakálla, and Thráya (the cities that were once the capitals of the Three States of the Triangle). In his old age, he had somehow become obsessed with lineages found within the Very High clans. No one knows precisely why.

After the Temple of Ksáru confined him to his brother's land, Vijésa'on had his underlings construct the Black Hold out of heavy blocks of dark basalt. It was an impressive feat of engineering. Then Vijésa'on purchased and organized 164 slaves to engrave his collection of venerable lineage names on the walls of his palace. It is said that he wrote indecipherable notes beside them in white chalk, using tall and rickety ladders.

At the center of the Black Hold of Names is a further curiosity. It is said that Vijésa'on hiRéru somehow filled an octagonal pool at the heart of the Hold with a liquid in which nothing would float. He tried to swim in this, and drowned. His brother had the liquid removed to retrieve the body. The slaves who performed this deed died of seizures soon after.

Village of Dlúm (3815.QJ) Along the road, stylized sculptures of the inimical Ssú have been carved from basalt and granite. In a show of contempt, they are caught in their death throes and other humiliating poses. As different historical art styles are represented, it is unclear when they were made, or why.

In the village, the corners and ends of clanhouse roofs are shaped into hideous demon faces. The lands to the southeast are property of the Temple of Lord Wurú. They are farmed by peasants who serve that Temple. They have superstitious little rhymes that praise their deity, beg Him to spare them from His demons' wrath if they have somehow displeased him, and so on.

Sometimes they leave a grape-sized ball of tarry bitumen as an offering at His shrine in the village: a knee-high meter-wide disk carved to resemble a stone mouth surrounded by tentacles. When performed in the hot month of Férsu for the ritual known as the Recognition of the Vicissitudes, the tar balls melt and drip slowly to the ground, enhancing that sculpture's appearance.

Peasant Self-Defense

Dlúm is a touch unusual in that its people use their farm implements as weapons. Wielding shovels or hoes like axes or maces persists in an underground tradition kept alive by the clans. The tools themselves are subtly different from the norm, balanced for fighting, with hooked corners for pulling down shields, etc.

Hive Machine (3815.RF) This thriving community is surrounded by Gáin grain farms, and it is presided over by a handful of members of the Devisors of Soft-clinging Beauty. This clan petitioned to change the name of their town four governors ago. They have since given up on a reply, suspecting their scroll to be lost. There is a hope that, if only it received a more appealing name, an actual road might be built, instead of the mud rut that meanders southwards, nearly petering out as it near the village.

This is a tiny and self-sufficient incipient village. The strange title of the place is incongruous with its idyllic appearance. The walls of their nearby clanhouse are spectacular fabric panels colored in shades of blue, green, gold, and orchid. The roofs are trapezoidal, tall, some with roof combs, their shingles made out of scales from opalescent Ghár (armored quadrupedal river monsters) that have been tinted. Marble pavilions are hung with translucent billowing drapery. Men and women work outdoors at elaborate looms, or use little tools to make designs in lace. Even when rain falls in a torrent, there is a dreamy air to the place, as the roof spouts channel water in graceful arcs into several small irrigation canals.

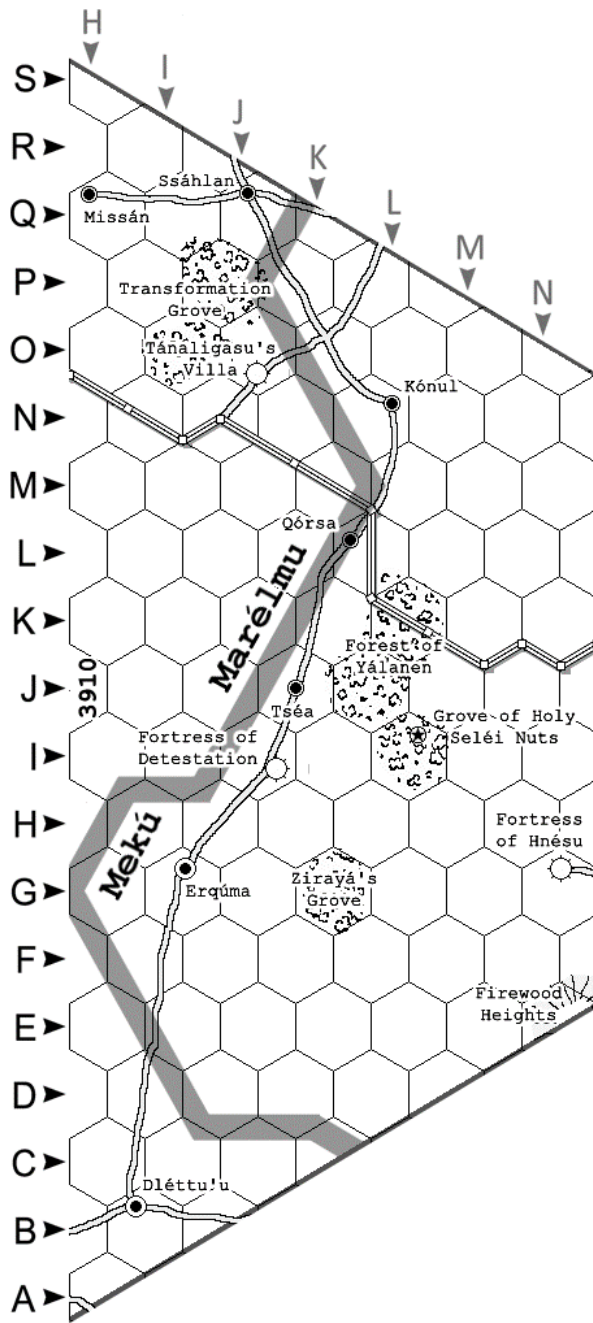
The Actual Hive Machine

There is a large mysterious device from which the place takes its name, and it is located far below ground. It allegedly connects mazes of tunnels in "impossible" ways (presumably, via inter-planar portals). This would account for the way the stories of those fortunate few who have emerged conflict wildly. The precise location of the Hive Machine was lost millenia ago, when a main tunnel collapsed.

Fallen Arrow Tower (3815.RI) This is the remnant of a cluster of buildings made from a handsomely mottled stone. On the eastern side, dirt has slid down a hill and buried them. On the west, blocks of stone have been carted off to build other things for thousands of years, and folk have even started digging to acquire them. By night the quarry is deserted, as sometimes unidentified creatures attack. No entrance to an Underworld has been found here yet, but some say it will.



TALZHEMIR



HEX 3910

This borderland between Provinces Marélmu and Mekú has a reputation for ignorance. It is treated with contempt by outsiders (although to do so to a person's face is to risk a conflict of honor). Clanhouse schooling tends to finish a year or two sooner than it might elsewhere. The knowledge of sophisticated crafts applied in the clanhouses of the towns of Erqúma and Dléttu'u is inferior to their counterparts in other towns. Even the ability to read is rare.

Long ago, this was a highly disputed region between the influences of the Temples of Lords Ksáru and Thúmis. They quietly came to a local "gentleman's agreement": both

withdrew the majority of their influence along the east-west Sákbe road, with the Temple of Thúmis allowed to dominate southwards, and the Temple of Ksáru holding sway at points northwards. Today, the Concordat allows the rival priesthoods to function side by side, but this area remains an intellectual backwater.

Many thousands of years ago, this region was the scene of countless battles between forces of various priestly lords in the Time of No Kings. Most of these ruins lie hidden by meters of dirt, rubble, and greenery, and look no different from the surrounding hills.

The Nest of Snakes

Between the villages of Kónul (3910.NL) and Tengá (3911.MB), the lands surrounding the temple-citadels of one particular deposed god were plowed with a salt, and tramped down flat. Time has washed the natron away; farmers once again cultivate in those places. The hilltops look different, though, bare and slightly bluish from a distance. In several places, the rains have revealed fallen statues of a god called "the Snake-faced One" by locals.

Upon subterranean stelae engraved in Engsvanyáli, he was called Ssa'ápi-T'ó, and bore the title of "Devourer of the Undecided". In some of the complexes that lie buried beneath the bare hilltops, there are stairs going down to strange underground towns. Today, some of these are overrun by Qól. They have taken it upon themselves to worship Ssa'ápi-T'ó as their ancestor-god. These snake-men have lost all knowledge of any other deities.

Town of Dléttu'u (3910.BI) Dléttu'u is a small town that does not have a Palace of Ever-glorious War, a Palace of the Realm, a Palace of Foreign Lands, or a Palace of the Priesthoods. There is one large Mayoral Palace; it is simply one structure, with eight sides. The town is built upon three hills, all of which are covered in clanhouses. The highest status folk live on the hilltops, and they get their water from three natural springs, one on each hill. The lower status people drink from a small foul-smelling lake between the hills. Especially in "The Valley", infant mortality is very high.

There are large shrines to Lords Thúmis and Ksáru in Dléttu'u but no temples. The House of Two Eyes, however, is a joint effort, a hospital staffed by temple-trained priests from elsewhere. (See the text box for House of Two Eyes.)

Dléttu'u produces crafted goods, of a serviceable but crude nature, seldom ornamented. The quality is below what one would find in almost any other town.

Children here are much-loved, and are left free to run in little feral hordes in the streets. Even in the wealthy clanhouses, schooling is rare.

Gálaku's Malady

People in Dlétu'u are very afraid of this painful disease that which causes the joints to swell grotesquely, while the bones soften for a period of months. Gálaku's Malady is seldom fatal but very contagious. The patient is left with a deformed face, ruined posture and deformed limbs. Poor victims are forced to go to a high-walled colony located five Tsán southwest of town, the former site of a village that was wiped out by the disease.

When the wealthy are afflicted, they are carried to a different place, under the auspices of the Temple of Thúmis, down a path from a point a third of the way to the town of Erqúma. They are confined to a sleeping mat and cushions, their symptoms greatly eased, and cared for by nonhuman servants, who are immune. Rich or poor, though, a former patient will move about slowly and clumsily ever after. Some say Gálaku's Malady was an ancient curse to protect the tombs of priests of the Dark Trinity.

The House of Two Eyes

This is a cooperative venture by priests of the Temples of Thúmis and Ksáru. The doctor-priests of Lord Thúmis primarily administer traditional treatments. The doctor-priests of Lord Ksáru tend to specialize in experimental treatments. Low-status people volunteer to try untested medicines or be the subjects of novel treatments. One of their biggest preoccupations these days is treatment of Gálaku's Malady. It is rumored that there are demon-summoning chambers deep below.

Firewood Heights (3910.EM) In the fall months, folks converge to pick up fallen branches, but it is considered bad luck to fell a tree here.

Town of Erqúma (3910.GI) (This is the seat of the fief.) Scraps of gold leaf still glint on the oldest buildings, but the days of Erqúma's glory are long past. Nevertheless, the people here wear the most ostentatious garb they can. Clanhouses of the clothiers flourish. Each high clanhouse employs several hair dressers. Goods are brought in from far away because the crafters of Erqúma and Dlétu'u are limited in their abilities. This usually means east, from Mekú. The noble family of hiRokémi (high Lineage), of the Golden Bough Clan (Very High Clan Status), rules the fief together; their main home is the Villa of Tánaligasú (3910.NK).

Dust Baths

There is a local quirk that, as an alternative to bathing with water, low-status people of this area sometimes use fine gritty powders to clean off. They say it was once a traditional part of preparation for hunting. Game that rely on scent do have a very hard time detecting grit-scrubbed stalkers.

Zirayá's Grove (3910.GK) Each year, ten trees are ritually felled. Once a forest area four Small Hexes across, this is all that remains of these woods. It is traditionally the property of a member of the Tlakotáni lineage. The current holder is Gétujan, a great-grandson of an emperor.

Fortress of Hnésu (3910.GN) Owned by an obscure Páchukoi ("Lord") named Apa'óme hiGiridúlme, this is a shell of a fort. Apa'óme rents it to the Legion of the Regiment of the Knower of Spells (5th Crossbows). Within the ancient walls, there is a hot spring that fills a series of little bathing reservoirs. Apa'óme lives in Erqúma (3910.GI). Members of the Legion who are convalescing may be sent here to grow strong again. Several minor officers and their families reside here. Menial functions are performed by lowly but contented members of the Clan of the Wicker Image, which has a small clanhouse on the far side, out of sight of guests.

Fortress of Detestation (3910.IJ) This is an ancient site, the last of eight towers that once marked the corners of a walled town. From a distance, one sees a broad tapering cylindrical structure, remnants of blasted walls extending like broken wings on either side. What at first appear to be soldiers on the parapets are wooden effigies in rotted Chlén hide armor. In the Time of No Kings, it was the western outpost for the rapid succession of rulers Mekú. Nobody is sure to whom it belongs today, nor even the name of the lost town.

Grove of Holy Seléi Nuts (3910.IL) A little shrine is set up here that belongs to the Temple of Hríháyal. The priestesses of the grove defend it with bows and arrows. Ivory-like when they dry, the gnarled peach-sized knobs are only known to grow here and in a few rare places in the Kúrt Hills Forest. Spicy enough to sting on the tongue, they are sacred to the goddess Hríháyal. If a small portion chewed, the senses are muddled - sounds become smells, colors evoke flavors, and so on. Seléi nuts are used in alleged cures for madness, so both priests of Ksáru and Thúmis come to buy them.

Village of Tséa (3910.JK) The Clan of the Incessant Rhythm and the Olóa'po, two stonecutters' clans, form most of the populace here. A quarry here provides black

marble which the residents shape into two-meter-long blocks, square on the ends. These are taken by Chlén-cart to the Sákbe Road to the north, and then, from there, east to Mekú. The sides of the blocks have neat shallow projections and depressions. Fitted together, these blocks form diagonal seams that resist earthquakes unusually well.

Forest of Yálanen (3910.JL) Alongside more typical trees, there are the beauteous and exotic crystal-trees. They have smooth slender black trunks and branches but instead of leaves, there are tufts of fragile slender crystals as long as a hand, varying from white to pastel colors. By ancient law originating in the provincial capitol of Mekú, the Forest of Yálanen is not to be harmed. Sometimes Páchi Léi of the Gr'gúzh traveling people gather near the Sákbe Road in the shade.

Village of Qórsa (3910.LL) An air of desperation and boredom attends this little village. They say there is nothing for the person of Medium Clan or above, here. At the height of the rainy season, locals fish in the streams that flow nearby. They salt their catch and sell it. The rest of the year they grub in the soil for pathetic yields of Dnó grain. The food is invariably a bland fishy porridge. The hostels are very rundown, with shoddy sleeping mats under roofs with holes. The clanhouses have walls of plaster through which interwoven twigs are showing in patches. There is perhaps little about Qórsa that could not be improved with a rigorous Dítlána but no one seems to care to do even that.

Tánaligasus's Villa (3910.NK) A pretty painted facade conceals the fact that the timbers of this structure are being eaten away by insects from within. It is a

clanhouse for the family hiRokémi, within the Golden Bough Clan, who rule the Fief of Erqúma. Although the hiRokémi are powerful in their area, none of them holds any noble title. They are unusually touchy about honor.

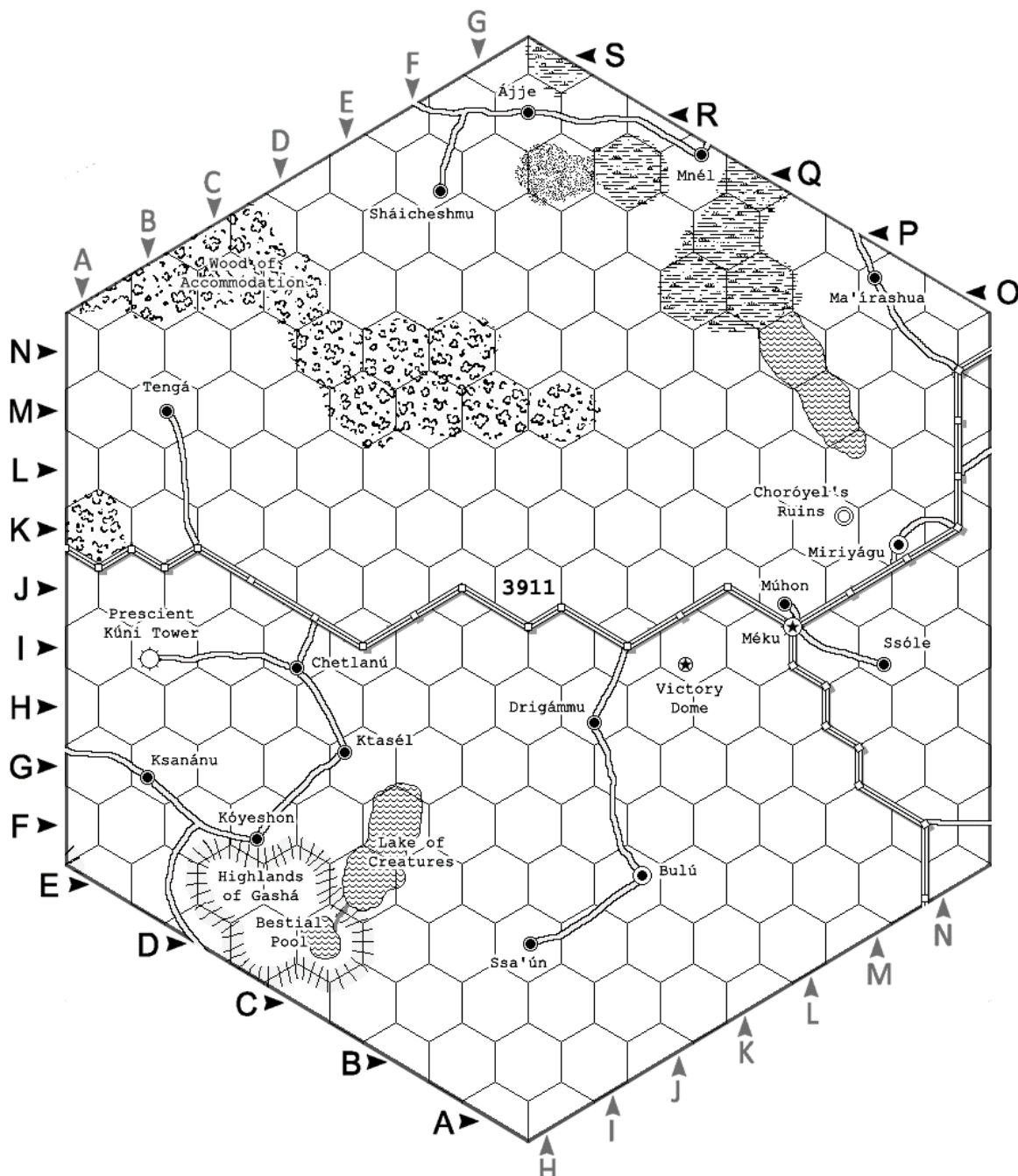
Village of Kónul (3910.NL) The primary occupation of this place is digging up pumice for locally-popular fine grit body-cleansers. The heavy taxation of the Ksárul-worshipping clans of Kónul is one of the signs of continuing disfavor from the hiRokémi family, who rule the fief.

Transformation Grove (3910.PJ) This place is thought to be very bad luck, with an additional reputation for sinister creatures. People stay far away from it. Somewhere out here, it is said, there is an ancient garden where peculiar plants and trees grow in a jumble. It is reputed to have belonged to a mad sorcerer who created an elixir that he used to turn his enemies into trees. Other rumors say there are nexus points that open and close here and there, letting in strange plants and animals.

Village of Missán (3910.QH) This (Very Low Status) village has a reputation for slow-witted people, and birth defects are more common than usual. Tin from a small mine provides most of their income.

Village of Ssáhlán (3910.QJ) There is a small temple to Lord Grugánu here, and these lands are owned by that priesthood. This is also the site of the Academy of the River of Dark Lapis, a small and very expensive school of sorcery. This is a magically fertile location. A small population of wielders of magic live here permanently because they cannot cast magic elsewhere.





HEX 3911

Life in this area revolves around the Sákbe Road that goes so far west and east. The land here is hilly but less rocky, and more green-topped and rolling. The easiest way to travel is generally from northwest to southeast, which pressed overland travel towards Mekú.

The Unmarked Moor Steads

As one goes northwards, clans that worship Lord Ksáru and his Cohort Grugánu become more common. There are lands that belong to the Temple of Ksáru farmed by

their clanhouses in small villages not officially listed on any rosters. The people are generally thought to pay taxes as they ought to, however. Coins are ritually brought in by a woman wearing a black mask, a veil, and three pairs of wooden arms attached to her own, making her resemble some kind of eerie creature.

It is not common knowledge, even to themselves, that most of the people of the Moor Steads originally came from the northwest (around Large Hex 4010). They were driven out by the approach of the swamp. As those lands were eventually claimed by other settlers (see the text

box for the Estate of Vrikú the Returner at 4010.FI), they could not return.

Moor Stead folk are required to keep to themselves. They each follow eccentric customs, and wear antiquated outfits, the significance of which they themselves, do not understand. For instance, in one Moor Stead, food is never eaten while the sun is up. In the villages south of the Sákbe, there are rumors that the Moor Steads secretly employ slaves magically reanimated as undead.

"Moonfooters"

The population of the nearby city has an enormous appetite for fresh goods. Teams menials must jog or even run to Mekú. They are mainly non-slaves of Very Low or Low status. Along the Sákbe, at the bases of many of the major bends, there are small roofed platforms with old mats for bearers to sleep. During the hottest months, the teams move along by night, resting through the day. This has earned them the local nickname of "Moonfooters." Though even slaves of this region may grow replete, Moonfooters are invariably wiry, with thickly callused feet. Sometimes they wear what appear to be necklaces, but which are, in fact, dried fruit strung on threads, to be nibbled at any time.

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')

Highlands of Gashá (3911.DD) The Highlands are a collection of flat-topped mesas occurring atop other mesas. According to an old Imperial decree, it is not permitted to farm crops here. Thus, there are few human inhabitants. It is mostly grasslands with patches of trees and shrubs - and the noxious indigenous purple Food of the Ssú. The lush canyons between the hilltops are swarming with predators, notably Dnélu and many varieties of Dlikkén. The Bestial Pool (3911.DE) is located on the eastern side.

Bestial Pool (3911.DE) An ancient law prevents these waters from being used for growing crops. Pure and clean, they originate somewhere inside the plateau of the Highlands of Gashá. It is very noisy, as countless flying creatures converge here, including Shánu'u and a composite diurnal predator known locally as the Khmélakh.

Khmélakh, the Mouth with Many Wings

Found only in the Highlands of Gashá, these are carapaced creatures, each with a pair of wings. They cannot fly on their own; it requires at least three, locked together. The largest individuals are at the front, their

mandibles much larger for hunting. They are possibly related to the segmented Dlikkén.

Khmélakh (.9)

Wandering: 100%, 3/5/7 Lair: 0%

PHYS: 9	DEFT: 10	INST: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: +1
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 6 ground, 16 flying	
Defenses:	Melee: 3	Missile: 3
Armor: 3/2	Hits: 7	Energy: 10
		Magic: 1

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Mandible	13-	2/4/6	

Other Abilities:

Formation: Khmélakh can fly only when they are in groups of three.

Village of Ssa'ún (3911.DH) The population here is at the high end for a village. Many villages are on hilltops but Ssa'ún is at the lowest point between several low hills. Near the top, large basins of stone catch the rain, the terraced scallops built thousands of years ago still functioning nicely. Irrigated fields of different kinds of grain thrive between groves of fruit-laden shrubs and vineyards. There are very few trees here; slaves and very low status people must constantly carry in baskets of firewood. Theirs is not a good life; many are lost to flying predators.

Lake of Creatures (3911.EE) Fed by the waters of the Bestial Pool (3911.DD) in the Highlands of Gashá, this area is well-flooded in spring. The villages of Kóyeshon (3911.FD) and Ktasél are on the edge of the lake for at least a month each year. It is a chaos of creatures blundering about in herds, loudly clashing with each other as the shoreline recedes. Only the Chlén beasts with human drovers do well. Unaccompanied Chlén are easily bullied away by other creatures, especially Kwezíl.

Kwezíl, the Spiny Nuisance

These are wide-mouthed grazers that resemble enormous six-legged hedgehogs with wide triangular heads. They are roughly elephant-sized. They are good swimmers, and they become pugnacious when there is something they want, such as long clumps of grass. They have no eyes; they apparently sense the world around them through their branching spines. If cornered on land, they scroll up into a spiked ball, then they try to roll at high speed at a threat, propelled by their short legs. Herdmates will try to protect each other. They are very resistant to missile weapons. Their meat is palatable. The juvenile form of the Kwezíl lives in the water.

Kwezíl (6.5)

Wandering: NN%, 2/4/6 Lair: 0%

PHYS: 15 DEFT: 10 INST: 10
WILL: 11 PSYC: 2 Size Mod: -3
Initiative: 2/3/4 Movement: 6 ground, 6 swim
Defenses: Melee: -1 Missile: -1 Magic: -2
Armor: 2/1* Hits: 57 Energy: 10

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Spines	13-	6/8/10	
Rolling Attack	13-	6/8/10	3" area effect

Other Abilities:

***Impervious to Missiles:** +5/+0 against any non-magical projectiles

Poor Vision: -2 to sense things at range

Rolling Move: only in a straight line, on land



Kurchúne hiWurúde was barely able to leap out of the path of the oncoming, thundering Kwezíl!

Town of Bulú (3911.EI) The various civic buildings are on the stone outcropping at the center of town but the clanhouses are built around this upon stilts. Wine is their primary business. Owing to the high population, wood is in high demand. The low hills of the area are covered in terraced fields, and almost no trees. As Khéshchal plumes are rare, some locals use the hollow quills and tufts from the Kwezíl to adorn hats, a rustic trait by which their representatives in Mekú are known.

The Twenty-Night Horror

During its last Diŋlána razing, roughly three hundred years ago, Bulú suffered an outbreak of Shédra "ghouls". It began in the area where thousands of the poorest people were camped out in the open. The undead plague raged for twenty days, their numbers increasing until they were destroyed by an army from Mirayágu

(3911.KM) and Mekú (3911.IK). To this day, every year a tribute of clay jars of wine is sent from the clans of Bulú to Mirayágu and Mekú in honor of troops that came to their rescue.

Town of Kóyeshon (3911.FD) Vast fields of sugar-rich Dmí roots are grown here, their juice refined into red-brown pyramids of raw sugar. Most of their output goes directly to the city of Mekú (3911.IK). Large spiny Kwezíl beasts (see the text box under Lake of Creatures, 3911.EE) sometimes take it into their wide triangular heads to munch on the tops of their root crops

Village of Ksanánu (3911.GB) Most of this land is agricultural, mainly grain and vineyards, with some Dmí fruit and sugar-roots on the side. Because of its proximity to the Lake of Creatures, the farmers here must fend off the spined grazing Kwezíl beasts. Sometimes they use a kind of carried log ram. It takes a number of teams to do this, because a Kwezíl is seldom alone, and they defend each other.

Village of Ktasél (3911.GE) Ktasél is a happy place, of mainly well-to-do farmers. A newly-built clanhouse of the Clan of Red Scarification raises and trains children who go on to serve light infantry legions sponsored by the Temple of Lord Karakán. Their elders are soldiers honorably retired to live out their days on sunny terraces with a full cup of local wine. These veterans have introduced an interesting response to the annoyance of the crop-molesting Kwezíl beasts: they use the spiny creatures as targets for stone-flinging catapult practice.

Village of Drigámmu (3911.HI) The ground is very porous here; the rains just drain away. Farms are thus built around cisterns with roofs to keep out debris. The main crop here is fruit from vines and shrubs that require little water. To conserve water, bathing in Drigámmu tends to be done with scented gritty powder. Some fruit for table consumption is strung on thread and hung up to dry in small conical black buildings with vents at the bottom and top. These garlands are a favorite food of the common Sákbe Road porters called "Moonfooters" often pass through (see the text box for Moonfooters at Large Hex 3911).

Prescient Kúni Tower (3911.IB) This fortified building was once an important outpost for the Legion of the Regiment of the Knower of Spells (5th Crossbows). They moved their western operations to the Fortress of Hnésu (3910.GN) some 350 years ago, and this place fell into disuse. It was occupied for a time by Mu'ugalavyani troops, during the Great War of A.S. 2020, and again abandoned. The Tower was originally a fortress for a priestly despot during the Time of No Kings. It gets its name from their religious practice of keeping Kúni birds for use in divination.

Village of Chetlanú (3911.IE) The main product of this village is shirts made from Dáichu bark pounded until it is soft and stretchy. The raw material is usually from the Wood of Accommodation (3911.MF), gathered by people of the Moor Steads (see the text box for the Unmarked Moor Steads at Large Hex 3911) and traded surreptitiously on the north side of the Sákbe Road.

Victory Dome (3911.IJ) This is a dome-shaped structure made of living trees of the Tlethoggú sort (see the text box at Large Hex 3813). They were somehow woven together to form a vast dome. The dome marks the site of a Kurtáni enclave dating to around 1460, when the Kúrt Hills were granted autonomy by Emperor Hejjéka IV, the "Restorer of Dignities". Now the site is a ruin, overrun by rapidly-growing Tlethoggú trees, infested by hordes of Chnéh apes and blood-sucking leech-like vermin as long as a man's arm.

City of Mekú (3911.IK) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) Passing through heavily terraced and very densely farmed lands, three Sákbe Roads converge here. The largest buildings are grimly colored, with sturdy tiered walls with diagonal seams. The darker colors offset numerous colorful feathered standards and strings of fluttering pennants. There are clanhouses of a number of military-oriented clans here, including some of the "Red" clans. The powerful aristocratic Sárku-oriented Íto Clan has a clanhouse here, as well.

This is a place of crafted goods and massive agricultural trade, including Dmí-sugar and an exceptional wine from the town of Bulú (3911.EI). The Sákbe Roads flow with trade both day and night, with large numbers of bearers carrying bundles as well as numerous slow-trundling Chlén beasts with carts.

Mekú is heavily walled and formidably fortified. From its frequent mentions in military history one can perhaps be forgiven for thinking that it is primarily a military city. It has channeled its wealth into training and upkeep of soldiers for many legions. The respected Legion of the Regiment of the Knower of Spells (5th Crossbows) has its headquarters in Mekú. They are mainly guards for the Temple of Lord Grugánu, and city garrison. It is a little surprising that Mekú fell to the Mu'ugalavyáni in "the Great War" of 2020.

There are noteworthy temples to the "Dark Trinity" here (Hrű'ü, Ksárul, and Sárku), as well as to their Cohorts. The governor is traditionally someone chosen from the Iron Helm Clan, which predominantly follows the Dark Trinity. (Incidentally, this Clan runs the Villa of the Iron Helm, an upper-class hostel.)

The post of governor carries the nickname of "The Disposer", a title that refers to their role as executioner during the Flower Wars. The current governor is Qáderan hiVazhú, a

follower of Lord Grugánu. In his 30's, softspoken, with a small neat goatee, he has a talent for inspiring confidence and hope. Prior to this, he was the Mayor of Ssa'ún (where he grew up), and then Miriyágu.

The Temples Aflame

Governor Qáderan is the son of the disgraced Zú'ine hiVazhú, the former governor. During the civil war for the Petal Throne, the Temples of Sárku, Hrű'ü, and Ksárul in Mekú were burned down. The governor is traditionally chosen from the Iron Helm Clan, which mostly follows the Dark Trinity. A fanatical follower of the God Chiténg, Zú'ine and his entire entourage were called to Avanthár by the new Emperor, Mirusíya, the Resplendent Flame.

Zú'ine, it was revealed, used his personal palace guards, the city guards, and the tomb police to deliberately begin the rioting. Some were encouraged to loot the temples. Others were incited to arson. This was apparently no impulsive "crime of passion", it was an orchestrated mass murder. The Temple of Lord Sárku was the original target, but the flames spread to its two neighbors.

Rather than being turned over to the Ecclesiastical Courts for thus grievously violating the Concordat, Zú'ine remains a "guest" of the emperor that no one is allowed to see. The temples have been repaired and re-opened. If there were any extenuating circumstances (such as, perhaps, a mind-bar spell) that pushed a hot-tempered man with lapses in judgment to outright madness, they most likely have already been discovered.

The Vanished Pé Chói

Just prior to the riots and fires of 2365 A.S., most of the city's small population of Pé Chói disappeared. Most of these were members in good standing of a number of human clans. Did they flee? Were they somehow murdered? Former governor Zú'ine relegated the matter to the Palace of Foreign Lands, even though these were all Tsolyáni citizens. Their fate remains an unsolved mystery.

Village of Ssóle (3911.IM) An obscure office of the Omnipotent Azure Legion exists here known as the Bureau of the Severed Dlíkkén. It is a modest two-story building in an inconspicuous corner. It does not seem to do anything. If asked, the handful of soldiers who staff the place say that they were simply posted there, and even they do not know what it is officially for. (Of course, that exactly is what one would expect them to say...)

Village of Múhon (3911.JL) Outside of Mekú, the farming is very concentrated but the "village" proper is a thin crescent of many growers' clanhouses northwest of the city. Little observation towers are built atop each, rising above fruit trees and high vine-covered trellises. There are many Kurtáni families here. For the most part, they are culturally Tsolyáni but their religion leans towards the rustic Sé'iyau religion (see 'The Sé'iyau Religion of the Kúrt Hills'). A reverence towards the trees is practiced, with stiff penalties for anyone outside the well-regulated woodcutter's clans chopping wood.

Choróyel's Ruins (3911.KL) This is a sinkhole filled with water, with the ruins visible at the bottom amidst enormous plumes of brown algae. Located south of Lake Choróyel, it was a small town built of black stone, of the same sort as Mekú. It was a center for metal-working, using some small bits of metal found in the mud on edge of the lake. The tragedy occurred in 1753 A.S. (during the reign of Emperor Durúmu, "The Copper Blade of Sárku"). Many automatically blamed the Temple of Sárku, but they denied any involvement. It is rumored that forbidden experimentation by priests of the Temple of Grugánu was actually responsible.

Town of Miriyágu (3911.KM) This is the seat of the fief. Miriyágu is a large town, a sprawling collection of civil structures and clanhouses perennially overshadowed by the grandeur of neighboring Mekú (3911.IK). The pits and extrusions of limestone make this a dangerous area. Though the local fields smell so sweetly of harvested Gáin-ears, Dná-stalks, and hay, movement amongst the crops may be due to deadly Dnélu prowling about. Dnélu cocoons are collected in this area for making some of the finest Thésun gauze.

Village of Tengá (3911.MB) A handsome wooden "castle", of many towers, spires, and bridges, dominates the center of the village. This richly carved dwelling, adorned with countless statues and effigies of demons, heroes, monsters, and damsels, belongs to the Lujík family of the Joyous of Vrá Clan. Mainly worshippers of Lady Avánthe, they appoint rangers to patrol the southern edge of the Wood of Accommodation (3911.MF). Between Tengá and the village of Konúl (3910.NL) to the west there is an area that was once the domain of a cult to a snake-god. The farmland was ruined, those hilltops laid bare. (See the text box for the "Nest of Snakes" at Large Hex 3910.) East of Tengá are the undocumented and secretive Moor Steads (see the text box for the Unmarked Moor Steads at Large Hex 3911). The folk of Tengá are instructed to keep strictly apart from Moor Stead people (see the text box at Large Hex 3911).

Wood of Accommodation (3911.MF) This is a forest preserve. It has a long history of being neutral land that stands between several fiefs; all hunting and logging are strictly forbidden here. The trees, having come from many different worlds long ago, are various odd colors, lending an unreal appearance to the place. The region just outside it is patrolled by a special contingent of the Omnipotent Azure Legion that includes a number of Ninínyal. The penalty for trespassing is impalement. This does not stop inhabitants of the Moor Steads (see the text box for the Unmarked Moor Steads at Large Hex 3911) from sneaking in and poaching such products as the bark of Dáichu trees.

An astounding variety of life forms co-exist here. Unfortunately, it is also haunted by Hli'ír, malignant and unpredictable creatures whose appearance somehow causes madness. It is said that those who venture into the forest risk somehow being turned into Hli'ír themselves. The ban on visiting is lifted during the five Intercalary Days.

In exchange for leaving this land untouched, all the adjacent fiefs receive gifts. Those owned by temples receive mainly precious Vrés incense, as resin made from the tapped sap rather than the wood. Those owned by clans receive mainly herbs. It is assumed that these come from the local Ninínyal but the truth of this is unknown (as well as how they manage to evade Hli'ír, if this is true).

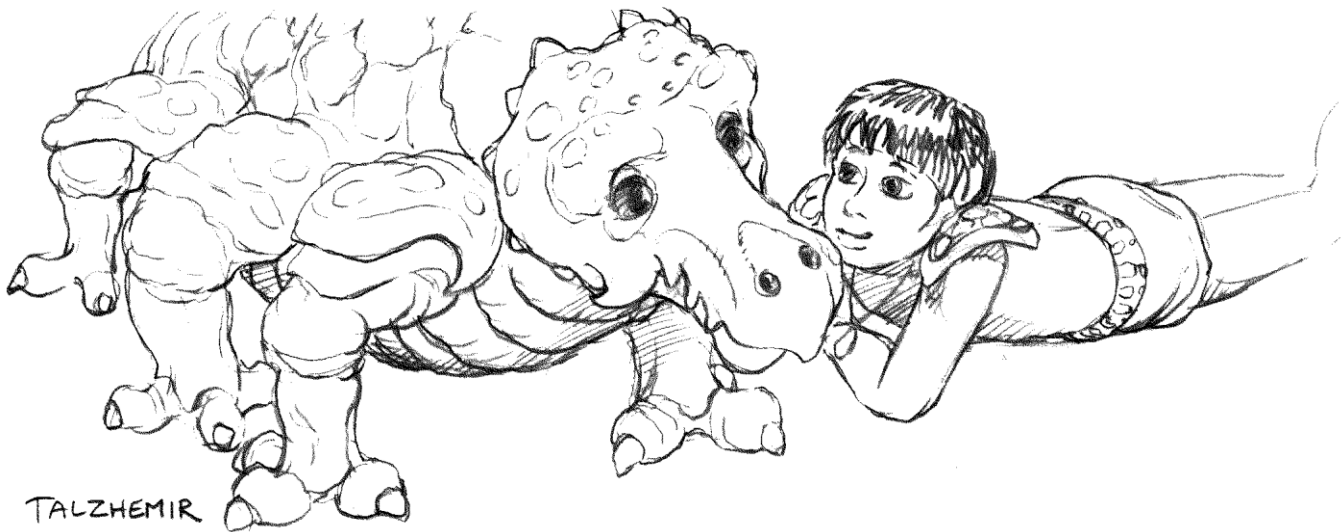
(Note: The Wood of Accommodation also extends also into Large Hex 4011)

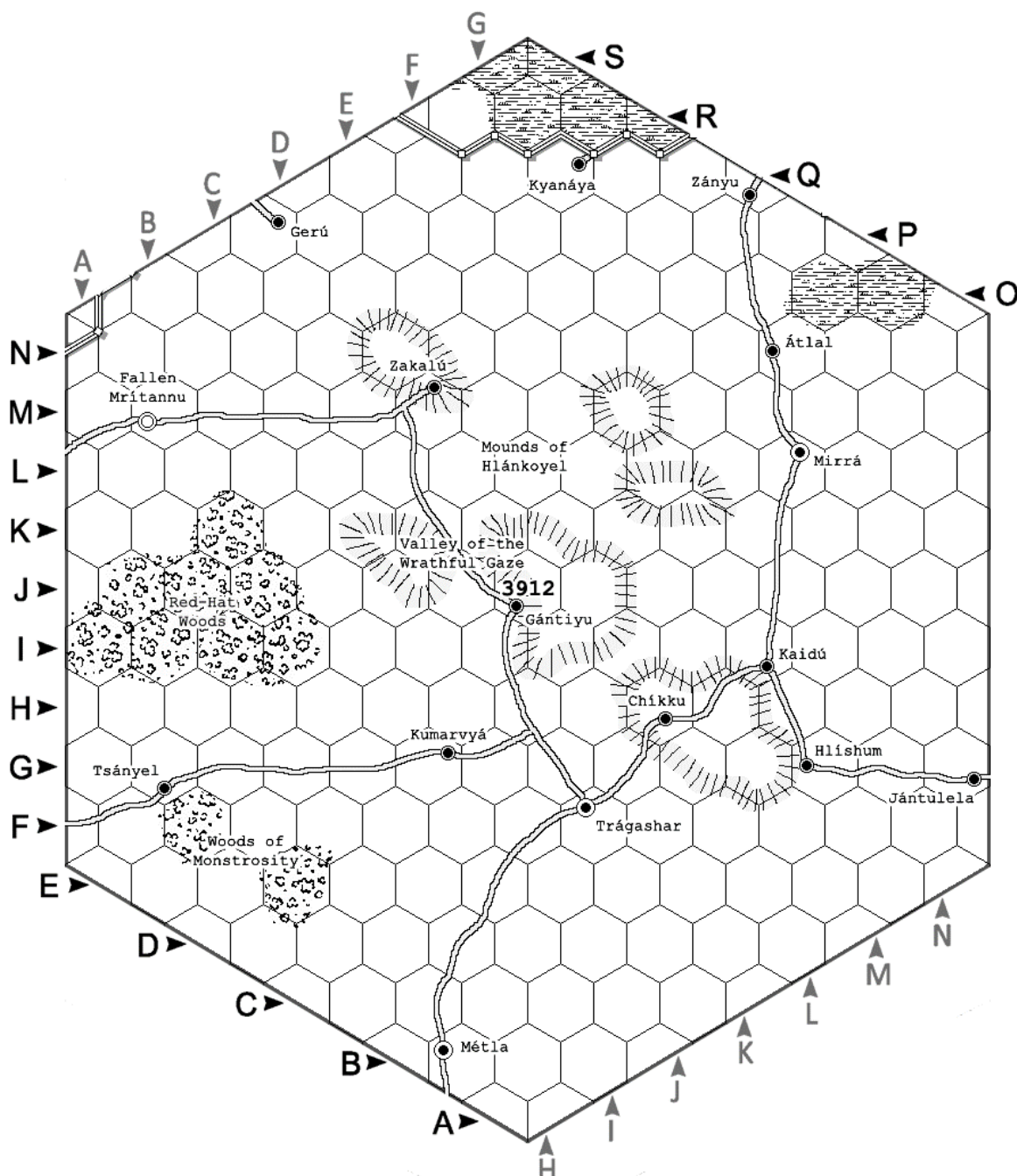
Village of Ma'írashua (3911.OM) Food for humans is very scarce here; most of it is brought from the Sákbe to the south. Four-fifths of the village's population is employed as road repairers. They bring baskets of gravel to the wettest places, endlessly filling the roads in. A number of small Chlén beasts are used to draw scaled-down carts. The grasses to feed them are plentiful.

Village of Sháicheshmu (3911.QF) For a time, Sháicheshmu enjoyed prosperity as a source of small nuggets of bog iron, sifted out of the nearby sands. Then, after several centuries, the finds petered out, and Mekú turned elsewhere for a source of material with which to make crossbow parts. Today the village is a ghost-town, the moss-dripping black frames of abandoned clanhouses slowly dissolving. There are instrument makers and masterful musicians that play the Qitsí, a moody-sounding local instrument like a primitive violin made of a bent piece of wood and a few strings. This would probably be of no account to the outside world, except that there are a few ancient rituals in the Temple of Ksáru that require it.

Village of Mnél (3911.QJ) A hostel owned by the prestigious Iron Helm Clan provides many of the comforts missing from other settlements along this road. Recreational powders are sold in its elegantly roofed market area. A unique and delicious cultivar of Yáfa rice is the main staple. There are also a few Shén living here, as members of various clans. They apparently enjoy the humidity, although they find the climate slightly chilly.

Village of Ájje (3911.RH) Like the village of Ma'írashua (3911.OM), most of the people of Ájje are road-repairers. Their days are spent hauling baskets of gravel to build up the road. They are allowed a regular ration of recreational powders each evening as a reward. Small Chlén are used as beasts of burden in Ma'írashua, pulling scaled-down carts. They are fed fairly often, and they grow fast.





HEX 3912

This region is known locally for the picturesque Mounds of Hlánkoyel, the huge hills that dominate the middle of this Large Hex. North of these, myriad little hills can be seen from the Sákbe Road that runs east-west along the north edge. They are considered poor growing soil, and they are overrun with thorny vines and shrubs. The Swamps of Ksáru once extended over some of this area, and when it receded, it left sand formed from the tiny shells of little creatures. The Mounds of Hlánkoyel are made of sandstone composed of this material.

About Bog Iron

In a few places, there are also pea-sized lumps of bog iron in the loose sand and sandstone here. Through a time-consuming process, the first part of which is mainly done by very low status workers, it can be forged into durable items with some of the properties of steel. It has the peculiarity that it is imbued with glass, so it resists corrosion, even in salt water. It is highly desired for certain ship parts. Once forged, however, it is not recyclable later into weapons. The natural silica is lost, and it can only be made into cast iron items that rust easily and cannot hold an edge. This one-time use property

generally makes it undesirable as a commodity. Deep in the Swamps of Ksáru, there are also places where "new" bog iron is slowly formed by acid-tolerant microbes. The ground can be searched up to once a generation for a handful of new bits. The fact that the swamps generate "living" iron in this way is a secret for which entire clans have been obliterated.

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')

Town of Méta (3912.BG) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) Méta is said to have an iron mine. Specifically, people of this town sift through the sandy dirt to find small nodules of bog iron. The clanhouses here are overfull with clan-cousins from Trágashar to the north. These guests from Trágashar have found the local work oddly enjoyable, and are contributing to their clans' prosperity with their finds. An old black sword on display in the mayor's office is said to be "the" sword for which the Lake of the Ruling Sword (3811.SG) is named. It is allegedly 4000 years old, yet it shows no sign of corrosion. A small number of finger-length blades of this black steel-like material are produced here, and sold for hundreds of Káitars - an exotic novelty. The Legion of the Regiment of the Knower of Spells (5th Crossbows), based in Mekú, buys up almost all the glassy iron nuggets that Méta produces.

Crossbow Parts

The most important thing the metalsmiths in Méta produce is crossbow parts, specifically, the prod (the curved bow-spring part). These are powerful, but only good for ten to fifteen shots, after which, they break. They are always wrapped in strong rawhide to prevent the wielder from being hurt when they snap. Without this covering, the fragments of flying metal would be very dangerous. These prods are so valuable that training is usually done using less powerful Chléen hide bow springs.

Woods of Monstrosity (3912.ED) Similar to the Red-Hat Woods (3912.IA), the Temple of Hrú'ü is said to have dessicated the bodies of their enemies, and buried them here. There are reports from villagers of Tsányel (3912.GB) of howling creatures suddenly growing up from out of the ground and injuring would-be wood poachers. The 'monstrosities' are said to resemble armed men crossed with many-limbed long-bodied giant insects.

Town of Trágashar (3912.FI) This is the seat of the fief. Relations between the various settlement in the fief tend to be friendly and sincere. East of here are the sandy flats haunted by the Esúsha worm (see the text box for Esúsha Worms under Hlíshum, 3912.GL). Trágashar is currently undergoing the ritual destruction of Dítlána. Most of the

town's inhabitants have left: they are spread about the other towns and villages, taken in by allied clanhouses elsewhere.

The Dítlána of Trágashar

Its temples and all Palaces save the Palace of the Realm have been leveled. There are a number of platforms and pavilions standing in for these, with only the most absolutely necessary administrative duties still being carried out. Some of the clanhouses yet stand, but they will soon be pulled down by Chléen trained for the purpose.

Those involved in the Dítlána are in temporary shelters on the western edge of town. Between here and the town grounds is a temporary road. On one side, there is a small shrine to Lord Ordunásh, an Aspect of Lord Hrú'ü said to spare supplicants from accidents, and across from this, another to Lord Keténgku, He Who Presides Over Wisdom Applied.

A great number of women, children, and slaves move along footpaths marked with ropes, carrying jars of water for various purposes such as cooking and bathing. The normal market is closed; they must subsist mainly on preserved goods rather than fresh produce. Merchants are not allowed near the site, but must sell from the Sákbe road plazas. Hawkers of pre-cooked wares, on the other hand, do a thriving business out of baskets attached to poles or balanced high atop heads.

A group of members of the (Very Low Status) Wicker Image Clan must dig latrines, while members of the (also Very Low Status) Nighted Tower Clan use large ornate soapstone spoons to cast quicklime onto the wastes.

Armies of small vermin have been driven out of their usual abodes by the hubbub. At night they skitter about, converging on these pits. Children using sharpened sticks for arrows try to shoot as many of them as they can, greatly reducing the incidence of bites amongst sleeping workers.

When the sun is nearing the horizon, musicians and professional mourners produce dismal-sounding music for a time. Túnkul gongs resound to indicate the work day is done. The mood shifts once the sun has set. Spritely folk tunes take over. Trágashar is hosting a number of soldiers of the Legion of the Inverted Hand to protect the people from various Tékmelyáni predators such as Káyi. Some whisper the Esúsha worms may come, but so far, none have been seen. (See the text box for Esúsha Worms in the Village of Hlíshum, 3912.GL).

In a few places, there are effigies made of wicker and cloth, filled with hollow wooden tubes that clatter as the

wind moves them. After dark, small lamps glow inside them, in the region of the heart. These are a bit like the opposite of scarecrows: they attract animals. It is hoped that predators will strike for these fake human forms, first, the noise giving others warning.

By day, numerous Chlén beasts are patiently led up and down to tamp the rubble down. Cart loads of crushed stone are brought in to fill gaps in as needed. Slaves and free workers alike are driven hard to construct the replacement sewage and water drainage systems, then set to building foundations. It is backbreaking labor. By tradition, if a clanless individual flushed out of the alleys of the town shows themselves to be a good worker, the city administration will help them achieve membership in a clan.

Soon, the place will be overtaken by the noises of hammers and chisels, and workers chanting together, as they pull on ropes to set up timbers. Load after load of material will be brought in from staging sites along the Sákbe. If all goes well, they will be finished within several years.

Village of Tsányel (3912.GB) This is a village of intricate gardens, its copious fruits and vegetables carried towards the villages of the Mounds of Hlánkoyel. Fields of Dná grain are arrayed along the north and south of the road. Water is carried by slaves, as well as hauled in jars by younger Chlén beasts with little carts. The non-slave farmers train with slings, while the slaves can sometimes drive off threats with hurled stones.

Village of Kumarvyá (3912.GF) This is a town with a busy marketplace owned by the White Stone Clan. There are popular shrines to Ladies Avánthe and Dlamélish here. Women in this village tend to enjoy a little more freedom than usual, and an option to hold senior job positions that they would not be considered for in most other places in the Empire. Clanhouses are surrounded by stone platform gardens. Farmers' fields flank the roads to the east and west.

Village of Hlíshum (3912.GL) Around here and the village of Jántulela (3912.GN), the ground is loose sand from centuries of mining. In this region, there are Esúsha worms, large burrowing creatures that swim through the sand, surfacing to catch human-sized prey. To escape this threat, the locals built their homes partly up the side of the huge sandstone mound. The fronts are more typical buildings, but there are chambers and hallways cut out of the rock behind.

Esúsha Worm, "The Tunnel Clearer"

Roughly five centuries ago, the Esúsha worms appeared as if out of nowhere, disrupting the mining. They are described as having a face roughly like a human's, only upside down with no nose. The smallest are twice the mass of a man. The largest are easily the mass of a full-grown Chlén beast. They typically attack by making a sweep from side to side with their heads (treat as an area attack). Outside this area, there are only the barest rumors of these creatures. Some whisper that they are fully as intelligent as a human, that they are the product of some Life-Vat of the Ancients. Some say they are demons, sent to punish the greedy.

Esúsha Worm (2.1)

Wandering: 95%, 5/7/9 Lair: 5%, 9/12/15

PHYS: 12	DEFT: 10	SEMI: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: 0
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 6 ground	
Defenses:	Melee: 2	Missile: 2
Armor: 2/1	Hits: 20	Energy: 10
		Magic: 2

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Head Sweep	13-	3/5/7	3" diameter area

Other Abilities:
None

Village of Jántulela (3912.GN) There are only a few clanhouses here, all of them built up on stilts in the Kurtáni manner on a light orange quartz outcropping. Bog iron was once chipped out of the nearby sandstone along with a milky bluish opal. Between here and the village of Hlíshum (3912.GL), centuries of mining left loose sand. About five centuries ago, the Esúsha worms appeared, and killed most of the inhabitants. Today, Jántulela is only sparsely populated by opal prospectors. (See the text box for Esúsha Worms under Hlíshum, 3912.GL).

Village of Chíkku (3912.HJ) This is a mine. The people dig into the top of the sandstone with picks. The places where they first dug are mud-lined reservoirs to catch the rain. Small farms produce fruits and vegetables; they trade their bluish opals for grain. The inhabitants of this village are descended from survivors originally from a village on the southern edge of this sandstone mound (at 3912.FK). Around 500 years ago, the Esúsha worms appeared (see the text box for Esúsha worms under Hlíshum, 3912.GL).

Red-Hat Woods (3912.IA) It is rumored that there is a shrine to a local aspect of Lord Hrű'ü somewhere out here. It is considered very bad luck to set foot on these grounds, which are claimed by the Temple of Hrű'ü. Here 731 Mu'ugalavyáni soldiers were ritually slain by priests. Their bodies were drained of blood, mummified in salts and sour

swamp essences, then covered in clay which was then shaped to resemble large black caterpillars balancing upon their tails. These talismans were buried in an irregular circle, upright, with gaze outwards. It is rumored that these somehow protect this patch of forest from being harvested.

Village of Kaidú (3912.IK) After the Esúsha worms appeared some five centuries ago, the people of Kaidú made the difficult decision to change livelihoods from sand miners looking for opals, to farmers. They terraced the slopes of the nearby sandstone hill. The clans sent an expedition north to find plants with low-water needs. The explorers were successful, bringing back a drought-resistant variety of Gáin wheat, and a fast-growing sweet-lobed succulent. The locals also hunt dog-sized three-eyed six-legged lizard-like creatures (related to the Kókh Blood-lizard) for meat.

Valley of the Wrathful Gaze (3912.JG) Between two of the Mounds of Hlánkoyel stands an immense pair of statues, their posture hunched, their faces worn to blank ovals except for a pair of holes: all that remains of two glaring eyes upon each. The region between them is a broad strip of glassy molten stone. A large bridge is built that goes well above that strip.

Village of Gántiyu (3912.JH) Several small crafters' clanhouses (of Medium status) are built here, around an ancient well. Very little grows in the sand; nearly all food is carried in from the south. A small temple to Lord Belkhánu also stands here, near to several clanhouses (of Low status) for body-washers and crypt-hewers. The ground is unsuitable for burials, so a great catacomb was built here, artistically hewn from the sandstone. It is prestigious to be interred at Gántiyu. Bodies of the deceased may be brought from all over the fief of Trágashar, packed with precious salt and carried by slaves.

Mounds of Hlánkoyel (3912.KI) These are huge hills of grassy scrub with bare patches revealing bland tan sandstone underneath. Hlánkoyel is the name of a legendary city, its location lost. Some say it is in the Valley of the Wrathful Gaze (see the entry at 3912.JG). There are also sparkling quartz portions in a few places. Clear orange-tinted quartz crystals as big as a fist are sometimes found in the area. In aeons past, the sandstone was the bottom of a wetland, a distant edge of the Swamps of Ksárul. Small buds of bog iron and opals are found embedded in the rock. Deposits of minerals of interest to apothecaries are occasionally found, as well. Southeast of the Mounds is an area formerly mined, but now infested with the enormous Esúsha worms (see the text box for Esúsha worms under Hlíshum, 3912.GL).

Town of Mirrá (3912.LL) (This is a Station of Brave Peripatation.) This is the seat of the fief. The clanhouses are comfortably apart from each other; they have covered

screened-in walkways between some of the buildings. Thésun gauze is much in demand here, not just for garments, but to hang in doorways and cover windows against the hordes of insects at night. Small lizard-like creatures called Hrákh are encouraged to live indoors amongst the rafters, hunting down any bugs that manage to get in. Children armed with little bows are taught not to harm these. Insect repellents made from Tsúral buds and other herbs; meat, wool, and hide products of Hmá and Hmélu; and Yáfa rice are amongst this area's chief exports. There are also bottles of a water repellent, good for Chlén hide and clothing, made from the oily seeds of a local swamp plant, the Búlu Malagá'a.

Fallen Mritannu (3912.MB) Dating back to the Time of No Kings, these ruins hold inscriptions that remain undeciphered. Some say Mritannu was the mortal enemy of the lost city of Hlánkoyel to the southeast. While this town is merely a jumble of crumbling blocks, its broad brick plazas are still serviceable as places for merchant caravans to camp. Several small wells still provide muddy-tasting but drinkable water. There is one corner of the ruin that travelers avoid because those who sleep there supposedly experience horrifying nightmares.

Village of Átlal (3912.NL) A local lowland lends itself to cultivation of plenty of Yáfa rice. There are a number of artificial ponds covered in the edible floating green Káika weed. Whimsical structures made to resemble miniature clanhouses house flocks of Káika ducks. There are numerous clanhouses here, and several hostels.



Near the village of Vrígal, there is a local variety of Káika that is gleaming dark-brown with a long, upswept light periwinkle purple crest.

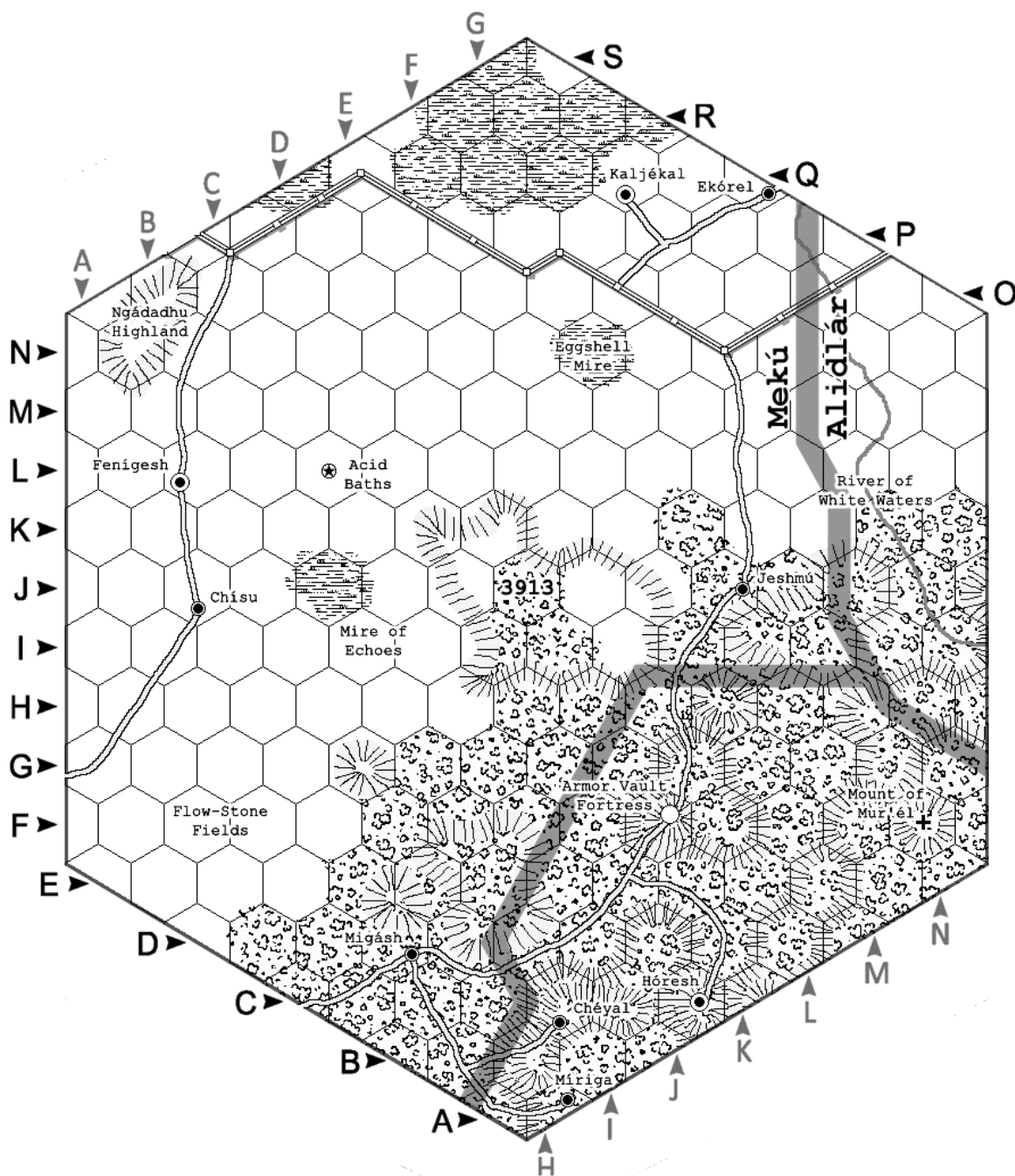
The Temple to the Lady in Turquoise

About eight miles to the east (Small Hex 3912.NM), there is a sunken temple to a goddess. It was deeply submerged centuries ago, but that water is draining away. Paint made from unfading crushed gemstones still colors the garments on the toppled statues a color between blue and green. Some say it was an Aspect of Lady Dlamélish, some say it was one of Lady Avánthe's, and still others say it was a heretical goddess from a bygone time. Fallen stones bear scraps of inscriptions in Engsvanyáli.

Village of Gerú (3912.PE) Even from several miles away, an unpleasant ammonia stench rises up from this place. This village is a collection of low-status preparers of Chlén-hide. The chunks of raw material are soaked in pools of crushed minerals mixed into large amounts of urine to produce exceptionally strong products. The rough shaping of the "blanks" is accomplished before this soaking. Many pieces are placed in cunning wicker frames to form them. There are many other processes; this one takes three years. Large teams of Chlén "peelers" from Gerú are sometimes found going up and down the nearby Sákbe Road, manhandling the terrified honking bellowing beasts into a laying position to harvest their hide by prying layers off.

Village of Kyanáya (3912.QH) This is primarily a merchant village. Its civil structures and clanhouses are built on large broad stone platforms with stairsteps going down. There are several marketplaces. One of their most popular commodities is insect repellents made from crushed Tsúral buds and other herbs. Covered wooden structures are maintained so that goods awaiting purchase will not be damaged. This stretch of the Sákbe Road, and that near Zányu (3912.QK), is built with a few arches in the base below guard stations with crossbowmen. Mounds of rubble stand ready, in case such a bridge-hole needs to be plugged. When the rainy season comes, it floods the area with inky-looking still water, and the arches are reflected in the water to form circular images. At this time, some of the shipping is done upon poled rafts.

Village of Zányu (3912.QK) Woven Hmá wool cloaks are made here, their surface treated with substances to keep off the rain. Bottles of the water repellant, made from the oily seed of a local swamp plant, Búlu Malagá'a, are cheaply available. Yáfa rice paddies dominate the view to the south. The high side of the wall blocks the sight of the Swamps of Ksárul beyond. This stretch of the Sákbe Road, and that near Kyanáya (3912.QH), has a few semi-circular arches below guard stations with crossbowmen. Near each, large heaps of rubble are kept on hand, in case the bridge-hole has to be blocked. When the area is flooded during the rainy season, their reflections in the dark water complete the circle motif. Rafts pushed along with poles can be used for shipping.



HEX 3913

The northwest half is a beautiful region of soft rolling hills, but with a subtly alien feel. It looks lush. Some of the plants are colored differently, with unfamiliar leaves and branch forms. Most of the crops common in the Five Empires can not grow here. Off the roads, the terrain can hold dangerous surprises. Sometimes, north of the Sákbe Road, there are unique animals, organisms drift out of the Swamps of Ksául. There are rare outbreaks of Food of the Ssú, the planet's indigenous purple foliage, which, if it is discovered, must, by law, be destroyed.

Runoff from the swamp lands to the north meet the karst terrain of the Kúrt Hills in a way that corrodes the bedrock. Slightly acidic underground water has gnawed at the limestone, leading unexpectedly to enormous cracks and collapses. In some places, stalactites protrude amidst chunks of shattered karst that was once a roof. In the forest, and sometimes in patches of trees on the clear terrain, from time to time, the foliage may move as if something were in the bushes, but upon investigation, there are no animals there.

The southeast half of this Large Hex is thick forest. There are still small bands of shy yet fierce Kurtáni nomads, uncounted and untaxed, who wander the most inaccessible woods,

living mainly off Dríkope Nuts (see the Dríkope nuts text box at Hex 3813). Known by the poetic words "the leaves that drift", these wild (and rather unloved) people must be very careful. The other Kurtáni who live part-time in the villages are just as territorial as ever, and trespassers may be shot on sight.

U'u'vrú, the Tree that Quivers

The Quivering Tree Clan takes its name from this unusual plant. It can be still, but sometimes, for no discernible reason, it will shake its leaves, then stop. It can give the unnerving impression that there is some creature moving about in the foliage. The U'u'vrú is exceedingly rare in the Swamps of Ksáru because it needs this area's sour and salty soil to live.

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')
(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

Village of Míriga (3913.AH) Located on a thickly forested plateau, this village has the feel of a Kurtáni village from many, many centuries ago. There are many clanhouses, built much farther apart, with no gardens or farm fields. The road is but a pair of narrow ruts. The village Hetman is Juté'o, a member of the Quivering Tree Clan (see the Appendix). In bygone centuries, the ancestors of this village were the Míriga Tribe, and, like most settlements of the Kúrt Hills Forest, the tribe gave rise to a village. They are known for their folk dancing to raucous rhythmic music, which the city Tsolyáni tend to find unruly and uncouth. True to traditions, the folk of Míriga are protective of their territory, and follow Stability.

Village of Chéyal (3913.CH) This hill protrudes steeply from a plateau. Upon the highest point, Chéyal has a shrine to Lord Hnálla, a sun-bathed watch-tower rising high out above the trees. This location holds significance for members of the Séiyau Arutáo, a Kurtáni religious society that reveres Lord Hnálla. Those who are not followers of that deity or his Cohort Drá are not permitted to enter the tower.

Town of Hóresh (3913.CJ) This is the seat of the fief of Hóresh. What is now the fief of Migásh was originally half of this traditional Kurtáni territory. The Tsolyáni cut off four villages (Migásh, Suyár, Ónu, and Sáiga) to accommodate a provincial border between Mekú and Kúrtur. The local people appeared to bow down to this decree on some parchment they could not read. Then, they pretty much ignored the division: Migásh (3913.DF) and the other three villages still staunchly look to the Chief Elder of Hóresh as their leader. There are clanhouses of the Quivering Tree Clan throughout this fief, and that of Migásh. (See the entry for the Quivering Tree Clan in the Appendix.)

Village of Migásh (3913.DF) This is the seat of the fief. Really, this "fief" is more just a collection of four villages (Suyár at 3812.OK, Ónu at 3812.PJ, Sáiga at 3812.QK, and Migásh), cut off from the Fief of Hóresh by the boundary between the provinces of Mekú and Kúrtur. The Tsolyáni officials claimed they were bestowing an honor. However, the folk of Migásh would not allow their heads to be swelled by what they believed was shallow flattery meant to weaken Kurtáni unity. Through clan ties and customs, the two fiefs remain closely affiliated, with the elders at Migásh deferring to the traditional authority of the Chief Elder of Hóresh. There are clanhouses of the Quivering Tree Clan throughout this fief, and that of the Fief of Hóresh (3913.CJ). (See the entry for the Quivering Tree Clan in the Appendix.) Because of a sharp ridge, people from Míriga and Chéyal wishing to go to Hóresh must take the road and pass through Migásh, or risk injury scrabbling over steep crumbly rock.

Flow-Stone Fields (3913.FC) There are odd broad stark white hills, roughly shaped like long diamonds running north-south and sloping downwards to the west. Up close, their upper surfaces are covered in a glittery texture resembling irregular wide fish scales. Layer after layer of crystalline calcite is deposited by water seeping up from below. Little pockmarks hold that water, reflecting the light brilliantly like silvery mirrors. On rare occasions, pilgrims afflicted with a skin ailment come here to bathe in Lord Hnálla's light to be purified.

Armor Vault Fortress (3913.FJ) In a part of the Province of Kúrtur that extends through mist-mangled forest towards Mekú to the north, the mysterious Armor Vault Fortress perches atop a high white stone hill, clanhouses nestled upon its skirts. This high hilltop location is actually the property of the Sríyal lineage, a bloodline of Vrá whose descendants married into the local Kurtáni clans long ago to hide. When Emperor Hejjéka IV, "Restorer of Dignities", granted the province autonomy, his agents discovered these lost Vrayáni. They were offered the chance to return to Vrá.

Their speaker, Mo'ahési hiSríyal, journeyed to Avanthár and begged the Imperium to allow them to stay. His refusal of an Imperial boon was so eloquent that his descendants were granted hereditary custody of this peak and he returned with a gift of wealth. The fortress was then built out of local limestone. According to legend, Mo'ahési even purchased magical treasures to protect it- demons bound to shards of white bronze cast into twisted arrow points; a reservoir that pours boiling water down onto intruders attempting to scale the steps cut into the stone. No one actually knows what is in the Armor Vault Fortress, however, or why lights are sometimes seen in the uppermost windows. There are still a few hiSríyal living in a small clanhouse of the Joyous of Vrá here.

Mount of Mur'él (3913.FN) Amidst very steep white hills, one rises much higher than the others: Mount Mur'él. It is referred to in old Kúrtur songs as the Spire That Salutes Gayél. There are a number of little shrines chiseled into nearby hills. Some hide secret claustrophobic little crypts or cave complexes. Climbing to reach them is risky because the stone crumbles unpredictably. Because of the altitude, it is unpleasantly chilly here, especially at night. Shánu'u here clamber about stealthily in the fog, attacking prey by dragging it off the rocks with their beaks and letting it fall to its doom.

Village of Chísu (3913.JC) Smoke clouds give this settlement's position away from afar. This is a notably low to very low status settlement, and its residents are forbidden by some hoary old provincial edict from owning or using bows. The pale hills are dusty and dry, all trees having been cleared away for use as fuel. A small amount of bog iron is worked into tools here. Specifically, produce branding irons for use by priests of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg. There have been very rare appearances of Esúsha worms in the Small Hexes immediately west of here. (see the text box for Esúsha worms under Hlíshum, 3912.GL).

Mire of Echoes (3913.JE) Thorny red-brown plants with pinkish egg-shaped fruits and black barrel-shaped succulents that ooze a pale bluish fluid if cut, dominate this odd patch of swamp. It is perhaps a remnant of a garden, these plants brought here from some other world long ago. The reason for its enigmatic name is lost in antiquity.

Village of Jeshmú (3913.JK) This village is odd in that it belongs to no fief. Thousands of years ago, this location was lost in a ritual battle to the Province of Mekú. It is inhabited by folks proud of their Kurtáni ancestry who feel little kinship with the people of the rest of Mekú Province. The land between Jeshmú and the Sákbe Road is no good for cultivation; it is a centuries-old region of dead trees standing on soggy salt-tainted land. The crumbly roads closer to the village wind to and fro to make it up and down the forested humps of karst. The village is sparsely populated, as the local people tend to only stop here part of the year. They spend most of their time in the woods hunting, and gathering up various valuable commodities, often crossing the border into Kúrtur Province.

The Bridge-Cutters

A generation ago, there was a project decreed by the governor of Kúrtur to build a rope bridge across the River of White Waters to the east (3913.MM). The folk of Jeshmu came into conflict with an unknown band of forest

people (known generically as Buráni; see text box at Large Hex 3914) who drove them back and hacked the bridge apart. The strangers were described as being completely naked except for necklaces and small kilts, and they employed Séresh-wood bows.

Town of Feníges (3913.LC) Circular tiers of stone blocks form an artificial hill along the flat north-south area of the road. The most prestigious clanhouses are in the center, and rings of lower status surround these. This mound is constantly being enlarged by workers with Chlén carts. Little trails radiate outwards to many farm sites. Local potters make rain-catching jars with drainage outlets kept corked at the bottom. Clusters of these can be seen placed strategically below places where the rock naturally funnels water. Crisp greens are grown in more little jars, and brought to market with their sweet edible roots attached. Small bows are common amongst the peasants, who need them to shoot down an edible pest, the Sa'áwi.

Sa'áwi, the Winged Browser

Roughly .6 meters (two feet) tall on the ground, these small flyers travel in herds. They are roughly shaped like deer with very short legs, four transparent insectoid wings, with wedge-shaped heads ending in small mouths. Thick forked antennae on their heads, actually organs of smell and scent-production, resemble antlers. Sa'áwi descend on farmers' fields, devouring fruit and pulling up plants to eat just the roots. There is not much meat on them, but they are edible, and some find them a delicacy.

Acid Baths (3913.LE) From a distance, this is a unique sight. The 'baths' are 71 large basins cut into a raised plaza made of rose quartz. All that remains of the clanhouse factories that once stood on this site are octagonal post holes in that rock. At the center of the monument is a circular hole large enough for a man to enter. It is said that a traveler once mistook the place for a well. He lowered a hide bag on a vine rope, expecting to draw out some drinkable water. Instead, there came a gushing sound, an acrid odor, and he drew out the end of his rope, the bag having been dissolved.

River of White Waters (3913.MM) Originating from Rymáhla's Basin (3914.IB), this strong and wide river cascades down the rock through the forest. Waterfalls alternate with rocky rapids.

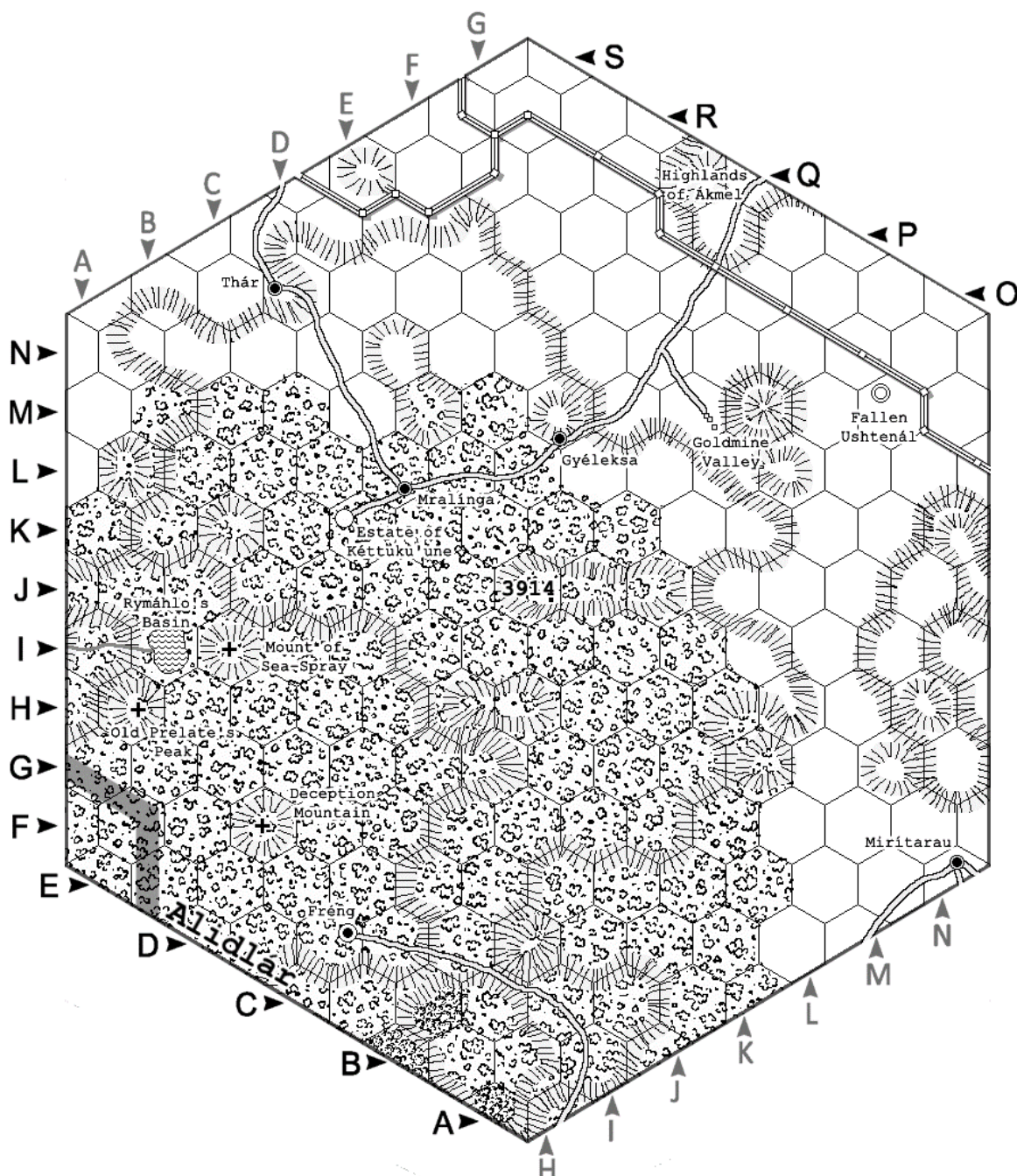
Ngádadhu Highland (3913.NB) Seen from the north, from the Sákbe Road, this is a high ridge of limestone that resembles some sort of long-necked creature with its head along its side. Some say it resembles a skinny Káika, and some say it resembles a crouching Sérudla.

Eggshell Mire (3913.NI) As one approaches the brackish dark green waters, there are patches of white mineral crust reminiscent of the crackled shell of an egg in texture. In some places, it breaks up when one walks through it. In other places, it has grown thick enough to walk upon. Members of an obscure clan in the town of Kaljékal and Ekórel Village, the Cleansing Rain Clan (see the Appendix), come here to harvest this material and refine it into a salt.

Town of Kaljékal (3913.QI) This is a tiny fief composed of Kaljékal and the village of Ekórel (3913.QK). It is in charge of numerous farmsteads across the Sákbe Road to the southwest (too small to be marked on the Atlas map). The Cleansing Rain Clan (see the Appendix) is based here. They harvest the whitish crust of Eggshell Mire (3913.NI). They are known to hire guards to protect them while they do their work.

Village of Ekórel (3913.QK) Some of the salt refiners who travel to Eggshell Mire (3913.NI) bring basket-loads of the crusty white exudate back here. The nearby River of White Waters (3913.MM) splits; a branch of it goes north of the village, westwards into swamplands. Fishers with nets and bows catch many a pale meter-long gilled amphibian, known locally as a Water Hmá. Meat of dried and salted N'dlák "the Water Hmá" is a popular local delicacy.





HEX 3914

Thick forest dominates this Large Hex. Trees of varying heights obscure the angular ridges and deep crevasses, making travel off the road very challenging. Trails frequently go from being on the ground to following fallen logs, trees growing at a low angle, and even the occasional rope bridge.

The daytime is quieter, while night time is a constant cavalcade of noises. Some forest creatures fill the air with their "booming", a rhythmic thrumming just at the edge of human hearing. Giggling Kurukú go skittering about the rocks and tree trunks, easily finding cover on the far side

should there be arrowfire. Deeper in, the Chnéhl bands routinely grow to a hundred and more individuals. They sometimes lay claim streams of drinking water with raucous hooting contests. The presence of predators is typically heralded by ominous silence.

Buráni, the Night People

These are a sub-type of Kurtáni. There is no Buráni tribe; "Buráni" is just a generic name for elusive nocturnal nomads who keep away from settlements. Physically, they appear much like other Kurtáni folks, but they usually cut their hair very short, and they look as if they are on

the edge of starving. Their seemingly-poetic nickname, "the Leaves on the Wind", actually mocks how little they weigh.

It is unknown how many different groups of them are out there, or what contact they have with each other. There are at least two different Buráni dialects, both difficult for speakers of the local Kurtáni dialect to understand, and unintelligible to Tsolyáni language speakers. People of the local towns and villages attack these wild nomads on sight, believing that they are thieves who will carry off their daughters.

The Buráni seldom wear more than a loincloth and some small amulets on a choker. Clothing adds weight; they need all their carrying capacity for their few practical possessions and some spare food (rarely more than 15 pounds in all). Stealthy and shy, they usually travel in bands of around 10; there may be larger groups the farther into the woods and uphill one goes.

Buráni are armed with Séresh wood bows. Their tools are wood, and they live mainly on Dríkope nuts and small game. They have no need for trade. They cannot carry much because they are so frequently running and climbing. They assiduously avoid leaving tracks and other traces. Rather than simply wandering, they follow traditional routes about the area, typically completing their circuit each two-year cycle. Natural ledges are common in this region, and these overhangs are used as shelters.

The religion of these nomads is the worship of a form of the god Qón which they do not call by any name, instead making a two-handed gesture that vaguely resembles an animal head with two upright ears. It is a benevolent and bestial being that accepts their souls, only interceding in their lives if there is some sort of supernatural incursion. They do have Hu'húns, shaman-like devotees of this deity who preside over rituals and there may be a Sé'iyau, a religious society, that connects them.

Small wooden idols of this deity are placed in niches high on karst hill-swells. Wide and relatively shallow holes for burials are pecked out of the honeycomb rock using stones. The Buráni ritual involves wrapping a body in pieces of beaten bark, binding this to a branch, and placing the bundle onto a shelf. They place traps to guard these graves, which are perhaps the most tangible signs of their existence. The semi-nomadic Kurtáni who live part of the time in villages stay far from these sites.

(See also 'About the Kúrt Hills Forest')

Town of Fréng (3914.DE) The road between Hléksa and Fréng seems to go up and down, back and forth, interminably, winding through light forest until one comes to a town atop a broad and breezy hill. The winds are fragrant with the aroma of the Tsúral plant. Along the side of the road are little frames, with netting spread between poles from which the bud-tipped sprigs are suspended to dry. These will be packed into tightly-woven bags made especially for the purpose, and carried down the road by proud members of the Clan of Fragrant Fingers (Low Status), the local Tsúral bud gatherers.

The town of Fréng at the terminus of this travel is perhaps surprising. Set against Ssár trees with white foliage, the buildings here are elegant, highly decorated, made of slightly tinted wood perforated with elaborate repeating motifs. If the structures were made of alabaster and granite rather than lumber and limestone, this location might almost pass for something out of Engsvanyáli times. There is a courtly atmosphere to the place, with wooden wind chimes hung near walkways, and pure-white feathered Khéschal birds with pink eyes perched on arches.

The hostel called the Garden of Timeless Ease is here, owned and operated by the Temple of Lady Avánthe. Spa treatments and sensual entertainments are offered. So long as they have coin, visitors will be pampered.

From this place, small teams go out into the forest to harvest the resin of living Vrés trees. A few will be cut down, the pieces steeped in the molten resin. During the season in which this is done, that pleasant aroma perfumes the breeze.

Village of Mirítarau (3914.EN) This is a sober and modest place where the primary occupation is making paper for scrolls. There are houses from clans primarily devoted to Lords Hnálla and Thúmis. It is believed that the paper-makers should be of a serene character, and that emotions such as anger or lust might adversely affect the subtle psychic qualities of their goods. The only music permitted is thus the soft singing of approved hymns, while the only reading is scriptures. To the east is the Pit of Esurience (3814.SH) but residents pretend it is extremely far away.

Deception Mountain (3914.FD) This is one of the few karst hills high enough to be permanently shrouded in fog. Enormous fog "piles" sometimes rise up from the canopy of the forest, giving the false impression of the presence of the mountain. Large Tlethoggú mazes surround it (see the notes at Large Hex 3813).

Old Prelate's Peak (3914.HB) There is a shrine to Lord Chegárta on the east side of this rounded and towering karst peak. The Kurtáni folk of these wooded hills also call

this Apa'átse's Hill. Apa'átse was a Hu'hún, leader, of the Sunggánmirai, the warrior Sé'iyau, who successfully pressed for peace with the Tsolyáni when others wanted to go to war after their autonomy was revoked in 1760 A.S.

Apa'átse's Visions

Torn between honorable battle and freedom, and wishing to save lives, the esteemed Apa'átse came to this place to seek answers. He climbed a high tree, slung his hammock, fasted, and took the drug Shrá. His men heard him screaming nonstop for days, from three full Tsán away. Apa'átse finally came down and counselled peace. He said that he had been granted visions of several outcomes depending on his choices. Whenever he attempted to describe specifically what he had seen, he dissolved into gibbering. This was taken as a sign that the gods had sealed his lips against revealing the future. He lived to a ripe old age, and his wives gave him many children.

Rymáhlo's Basin (3914.IB) Resembling a bluish milky opal, Rymáhla's Basin flows into the River of White Waters. These waters are drinkable, but with a chalky aftertaste.

Mount of Sea-Spray (3914.IC) Strangely, this high hilltop, in form vaguely resembling the top of an egg, has long been associated with the ocean, even though the local people have never seen the sea. Fragrant old Vrés trees are plentiful. There is a broad trail on the northeast side of it, with crude stairs hewn into the rock as needed for a palanquin to safely pass. Below this monument, one may perhaps find pieces of clay jars sculpted with flowers and skulls. At its summit is a landmark: an observation pavilion made to resemble the topmost deck of a huge ship. This part of the Kúrt Hills is claimed by the Fief of Kéttuku'une.

The Ship on a Sea of Trees

This mock-vessel at the apex of the Mount of Sea-Spray is sculpted from bluish marble. Its twin prows are oriented towards the west. It once had five stone masts, but only broken-off tapering pillars remain, the fragment strewn about within the carven railings. Some say this eccentric construct somehow marks the tomb of an ancient mariner. Others say it was for the funerary rites of a long-lost people who practiced cremation.

Estate of Kéttuku'une (3914.KE) This is the seat of the fief. As is typical of Kurtáni, these folk are very possessive of their land, hunting grounds, mineral rights, etc. A Kurtáni lineage of the High Pinnacle Clan traditionally rules here. This family hiKéttuku'une is very jealous of their Vráyani

Engsvanyáli-period blood. Brother-to-sister marriage is therefore the norm for those inheriting the title of Páchukoi ("Lord"). This is a wealthy fief; a regular tribute from Goldmine Valley (3914.MJ) is quite sizeable.

Village of Mralínga (3914.LF) The products of this place are wildcrafted upon trails that converge on Mralínga. Heaped upon the trade mats are Vrés incense, Tlethoggú sap, and Tsúral buds, to name a few. One slightly unusual commodity is Gjác Krr-Hsh, a fruit probably from the Shén homeworlds.

Gjác Krr-Hsh, the Heart Fruit

This local fruit, fist-sized with a glossy red exterior, does resemble a human heart. The proteinaceous pink interior has a flavor meat-like flavor. Edible by humans as well as the reptilian Shén, it is especially appreciated by local priestesses of Lady Avánthe who have vowed to eat no actual meat. If it goes bad, it produces a thoroughly vile rotting-meat odor.

Village of Gyéleksa (3914.MH) Gyéleksa is nicknamed, "Village of No Sunsets" because it is built on the east side of a steep hill. It is located in the lightly wooded rolling hills in the shadow of the Kúrt Hills Forest. Nráishu ("the Night Stag") is hunted here for its oddly sweet meat. Low clans here carve small utensils of wood by the thousands.

Tlátu Weed, the Eye-Opener

Traditional bowhunters of this area may ingest an herb called Tlátu, which improves night vision. Tlátu is a very rare plant only found in the forest of this Large Hex (3914). After being plucked, it rapidly loses its potency. Tlátu is toxic to many creatures, especially Kúni birds. Humans may use it safely up to once a month; to use it more often is to risk permanent blindness.

(Béthorm rules: For twelve hours, Tlátu negates up to two points of penalty due to darkness. However, during this time, their pupils cannot contract, and there is a two-point penalty to things requiring vision if attempting to do them by lantern or torchlight, or during the day.)

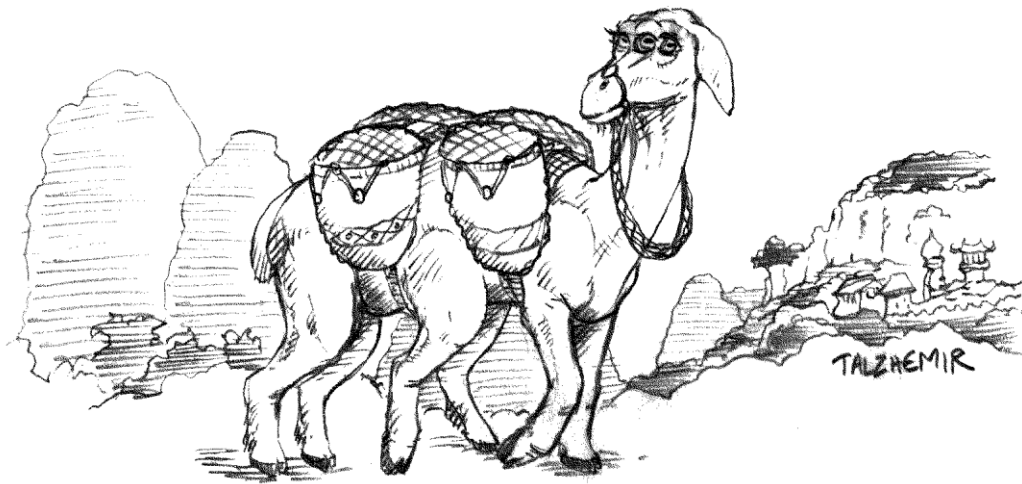
Goldmine Valley (3914.MJ) A fence of wood with many Chlén-hide spikes surrounds this place. Those who come here and wish to prospect must purchase a permit from Zhikét hiKasriyúq, a majestic and genial Pé Chói of the Green Kirtle Clan. His carapace, once black, has been lacquered iridescent dark green adorned with tracteries in real gold. Mining sites are assigned, with permits for higher-yielding areas going for a higher price. Within the same

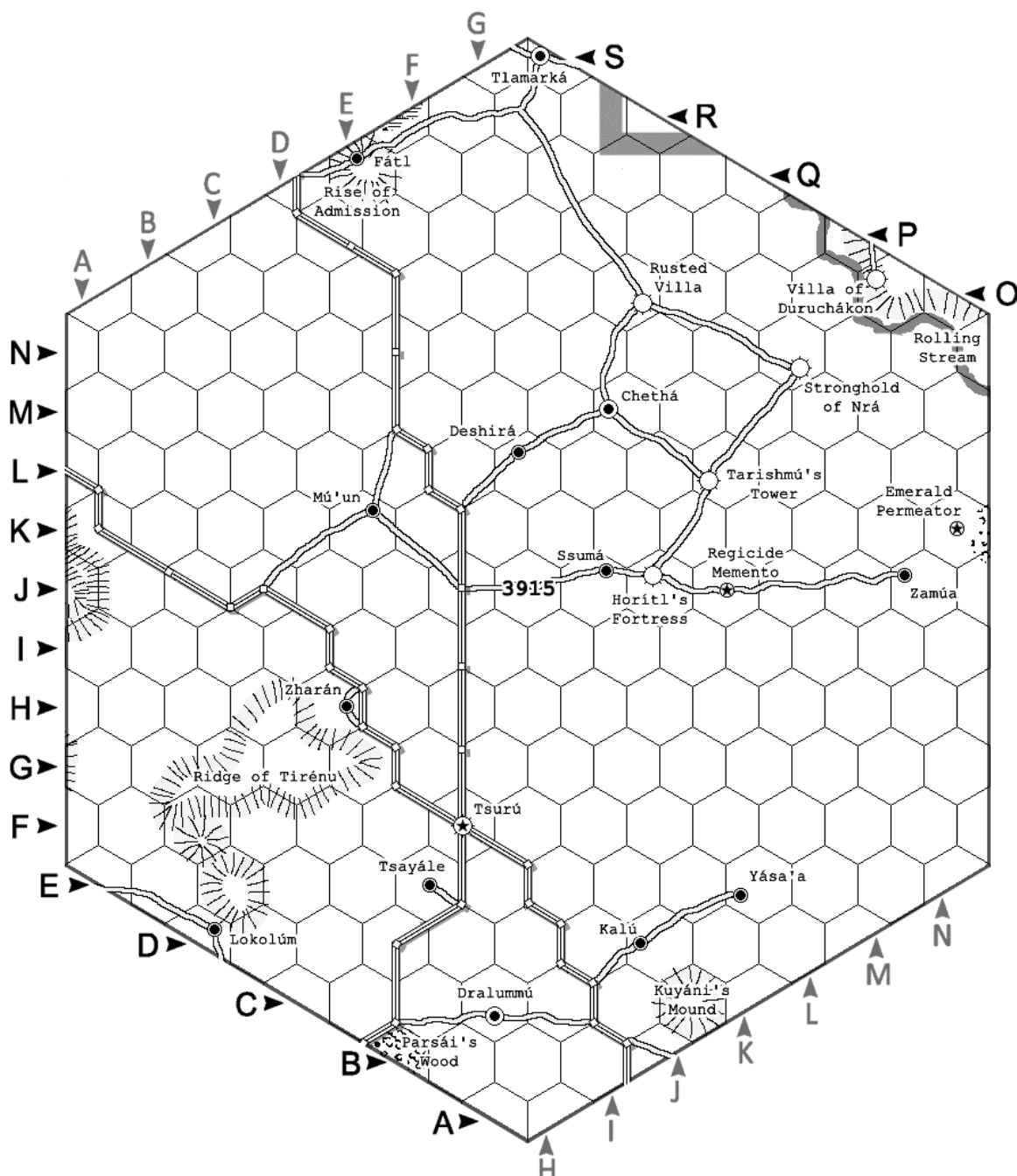
price bracket, mining plots are assigned by drawing lots. The worst lots are farthest from the stream, and the poorest prospectors must do their panning dry. A Hirilákte Arena is built at the center of a thriving settlement; gambling is greatly encouraged. Two sorcerors and a handful of pampered Kúni birds are part of the security forces here.

Mine-master Zhikét has three rules for gold-seekers. First, there are no markets in Goldmine Valley because merchants bringing in loads of goods were a security risk. Cooked food may be purchased very cheaply at eating pavilions run by the Green Kirtle Clan. Second, no bows or crossbows are allowed. Third, no children are permitted in this place. Judges tend to rule harshly against those who violate Zhikét's edicts for some reason.

Fallen Ushtenál (3914.MM) These ruins are visible from the Sákbe Road. Once, it is recorded, great clanhouses of fierce worshippers of Lord Vimúhla sprawled about this area. These were built upon a red-veined light tan stone brought from elsewhere. Thousands of years ago, they clashed with armies from the City of Sárku. Sappers of the Worm Lord undermined the city wall. Rather than surrender the city, the people of Ushtenál set it ablaze.

Village of Thár (3914.OD) Bound to the fief of Chúsetan (to the north), this village is a pleasant trading post. Human bearers and sturdy Hmélu bred for the job carry baskets of grain on the arduous winding trip to Mrálinga. They return with Tlethoggú sap nodules, Dríkope nuts, Tsúral buds, Vrés incense, and more, on the more pleasant downhill journey.





HEX 3915

This area was placid and rundown until the subjugation of the Kúrt Hills around 600 A.S. gave many people here work with the military, while sales of crops from new farmlands brought in money. During the civil war upon Emperor Hirkáne's demise, it was almost a replay of this situation. Many people joined the military, hoping to improve their lot, and yet more were conscripted - many of these from inappropriate clan backgrounds. This time, the casualties were very heavy. Their families, however, were compensated well, regardless of which side had employed them. Those who perished are regarded as heroes, and

faith in their eventual arrival in their gods' various afterlives is high.

The military-oriented clans hold more sway here. The temples have become more complacent. That is not to say that temple profits have slacked. This is the northern end of the profitable Golden Meadows, and the temples own much of the land here. The common blue plum-like Dlél fruit and red grape-like Nálum do well in this area. Wine is a significant export. After battles, croplands left untended were assigned new caretakers. Many of them were former latrine-cleaners and other very low status people from the city. Ultimately, here, war and death lead to opportunity.

Tsurú is contemptuously called a "village" by outsiders even though it is quite large and old. It is on the north edge of the Golden Meadows, a "breadbasket". It has fielded many soldiers in service to the Empire. Yet, it has never been accorded the honor it deserves. Lacking a firm community of old noble bloodlines or a mighty temple presence, it continues to be tagged as a backwater that smells of unwashed peasants, unwashed shepherds, and unwashed clanless hiding in the slums.

Then, the most recent Dítlána of the town of Tsurú did exactly what Dítlána's are meant to, revitalizing the city and rooting out old problems. Now Tsurú and its surrounding settlements have a sense of security and vitality. Several prestigious drama teams travel to present famous epic poems for the nobility, a number of them in languages hardly anyone understands. Most of them are related to great military conflicts of the past. Rather than considering them real places, the common folk somehow think of "Béy Sū" and "Jakálla" as places from these grand epics, with "Avanthár" nearly mythical, but even in the most out-of-the-way farm settlement of the fief, the name of Tsurú is spoken with especial pride. It might surprise them how seldom the name occurs in the world beyond this province of Alidlár.

This is one of the areas where there has been criminal activity attributed to Foundationists.

(See also 'About the Kurtáni Foundationists')
(See also 'About the Kráà Hills')
(See also 'About the Golden Meadows')

Srijéni, the Rock-Sitter

Every seven years, hordes of little Rock-Sitters come crawling out of streams onto land. Most become food for other animals. Presumably a rare few survive to adulthood. Children that live in this region sometimes keep these plump 36 cm (14 inch) creature as pets. They have appealing big eyes, soft leathery skin, ten small stubby paws, and they like resting on warm surfaces such as a person's shoulder or forearm. Left free to eat small vermin about the clanhouse, they eventually grow more and more aloof, slinking away when they are around 72 cm (28 inches) long.

Parsái's Wood (3915.BG) Purple flowers occasionally bloom in this wood. A prized incense, the Vrés of Parsái, comes from this place. It is closely associated with the Kúyok, a creature found only in this area.



Jaglība have variable numbers of limbs.

The Jaglíba, and the Vrés of Parsái

What look like torso-sized fleshy purple blossoms with 7 petals are actually the fruiting bodies of a rare fungus that can only infest Vrés wood. The lifespan of the tree is greatly reduced. The aroma of that tree's incense, however, is much richer, and noticeably different. The "propagator" form of Parsái's fungus is called a Jaglíba. It is an animal-like organism, purple with dark purple stripes, with around eight legs, roughly the size and proportions of a goat.

The Jaglíba attacks with two tough and flexible serrated appendages on its shoulders. These crack like whips, moving fast enough to cut through Chlén hide weapons and armor, often damaging it. Steel is unaffected. This Jaglíba "antenna" has value as a saw blade; it is strung on a small bow.

These creatures form in translucent cauls from the "flowers". They wait until a potential victim is sensed, then they fall out and charge living beings. Spores are implanted in the corpse. Later, a meter-wide ameba-like form of Jaglíba crawls to infest a Vrés tree. The highest quality material will be from the roots. "Vrés of Parsái" is considered especially appropriate in rituals pertaining to the Dark Lord Hrü'ü.

Jaglība (1.1)

Wandering: 100%, 4/6/8 Lair: 0%

PHYS: 10	DEFT: 10	INST: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: 0
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 6 ground	
Defenses:	Melee: 2	Missile: 2
Armor: 2/1	Hits: 10	Energy: 10
Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:
Antenna	14-	2/4/6
		Other:
		Cut Chlén (see below)

Other Abilities:

Cut Chlén: When their attack strikes Chlen-hide armor, or is successfully parried by a Chlen-hide weapon or shield, there is a 3 in 10 chance of damaging it. This breaks the weapon, or deals 2 damage to a shield, or reduces armor protection by -1/-1 until it is repaired.

Town of Dralummú (3915.CG) Long ago, this was a major trade town, with Tsurú its rival. Dralummú remains financially important but now finds itself in Tsurú's shadow, culturally. Its city walls are low; its main defenses are the steep ravines on three sides of it. Broad roads pass over bridges to the east and west. The mayoral mansion looms over the third gate, to the north.

Folks of Kurtáni ancestry are often disliked here. In the poorer quarters of Dralummú, those of Kurtáni and those of Tsolyáni ancestry live apart. About 140 years ago, the Tsolyáni side caught fire, while the Kurtáni side was largely unharmed. Parts have been shabbily rebuilt, but from a high place such as a clanhouse roof, the charred stone foundations can be seen. Even though it was clear that the disaster began with a lightning strike, a suspicion that the Kurtáni were behind it lingered, and the ethnic divide between the two groups became more pronounced. The most prejudiced point out the actions of Foundationists, shaking their heads knowingly.

The Hirilákte Arena is very popular, even moreso here than many other places. Successful gladiators may rise to great heights of popularity. In addition, there are also contests held annually, for foot races, acrobatics, and so on. Athletes of obvious Kurtáni background are not allowed to compete.

Tsaluón Grove in Dralummú is a garden kept fragrant all through the year by flowers and, as needed, small paper ribbons dipped in essential oils. It traditionally belongs to the town's mayor. Citizens are allowed, provided that they are appropriately dressed (approximately Medium status or above). The Treaty of Tsaluón was signed here in 1833 A.S. (during the reign of Empress Nrainué), between nobles of the City of Sárku and wealthy Stability-oriented clans from the Golden Meadows region, founding the high-status Association of Merchants. In 2100 A.S. (during the reign of Emperor Gyésnu Dálisan), the Second Treaty of Tsaluón was signed, doubling the number of clans pledging to

uphold the advice from Dralummú's Association of Merchants, and allowing a few medium-clan representatives to attend.

The School of Paths Convergent in Dralummú is run by the Temple of Thúmis. It is a place where ancient languages are studied, especially those that enable the epic poems to be recited. For a fee, non-magical texts, such as rubbings of inscriptions or old scrolls, might be translated (although mistranslations are a valid possibility). The valuable slave, Kúreng-ashézi Remiyonál, is housed there.

The Strange Case of Kúreng-ashézi Remiyonál

A few of those who study Engsvanyáli might be aware that this school harbors a beautiful man born during the time when that language was in use. He spent thousands of years in stasis due to an Excellent Ruby Eye. Kúreng-ashézi Remiyonál was found in the Underworld. He had no living relatives, so, still in stasis, he was sold as property. He was bought by the Temple of Thúmis, to be a language tutor slave. He was released from stasis by another use of such an Eye. Since then, he has been stolen, and recovered, twice.

The Wheel of Unceasing Industry

In bygone years, there was a short river that ran northeast of town. It was fed by a spring, and it flowed for three miles, where the water went down a sinkhole. Then, during the mighty earthquake known as "the Harbinger of Worse to Come", the spring stopped flowing. Upon this stretch, there was a large water mill, owned by the Golden Bough Clan. It was named the Wheel of Unceasing Industry, and it provided flour and cracked grains to both Dralummú and Tsurú. Its loss marked the beginning of Dralummú's decline. The mayor of this town wishes the river, or at least the mill, could somehow be restored.

Kuyáni's Mound (3915.CJ) The smooth white granite stone is like a bald head rising from amidst dark green trees. To the southeast, the Black Hold of Names can be viewed in the distance. From its northern slopes, the village of Kalú can be seen to the northwest. Hmélu herders' paths surround the mound, sometimes going a little up the sides.

Village of Lokolúm (3915.DC) This village is located on the eastern side of the Fief of Hléksa (3814.OA). It is not well-populated. Much of the land here belongs to the Temple of Sárku, whose adherents allegedly drove out the cult of a god called Qórgeshaz, in an incident called the Inquisition of Lokolúm. There are said to be no traces of this cult any more. The weaving clans living here changed over

to raising grain. Girls of those clans still make belts and bracelets, woven in the fiber of Dnélu-cocoons dyed all black, using stacks of small bark cards with holes as a sort of loom.

The Carpet God

Qórgeshaz was known as "the Carpet God" because his followers, weavers of Hmélu wool, allegedly worked magical symbols associated with the Pariah Gods into their weavings. It is only by the Temple of Sáрку that the cult of Qórgeshaz was documented. It was alleged to have sprung up several times in this region's history. An example of one of their tapestries is kept locked up in the Temple of Thúmis in Katalál. Had they been present at Lokolúm's Inquisition, they might have objected that a resemblance to the proscribed sigils of the language of Sunúz was too tenuous to declare guilt.

Village of Kalú (3915.DJ) Kalú is located on a round roughly circular table outcropping of granite. Admission to the village is by ladders. All water must be carried up jar by jar, while wastes are flung off the northern edge.

The Mouths that Sing Dust

Somewhere in this vicinity there is said to be an old played-out underworld with multiple entrances. It is known as the Mouths That Sing Dust. Their locations are forgotten, but not the history. At first, valuable artifacts from layers of past ages were recovered here. Then, they found a cache or strata from which heavy lumps were recovered. By chiseling away a thick crust, a small amount of good metal could sometimes be recovered. This stream of resources dried up around 1800 A.S. There is a local story of the herder who lost a beast and, upon searching for it, encountered the overgrown hole down which it had fallen; he gave up on recovering it and fled in terror after hearing the moaning sound that emerged.

Village of Tsayále (3915.EF) Approaching this location, the traveler sees an odd sight: numerous large mounds of baked dry mud, about ten feet high and about twenty feet wide, their tops open like miniature volcanoes. This is a traditional home of woodcutters and charcoal burners who bring cooking and water-heating fuel to Tsurú (3915.FG).

Charcoal Burning in Tsayále

Making charcoal is a rustic and very ritualized activity undertaken by clans of Very Low status. Once they could go out on foot, rolling back chunks of logs with their

traditional staffs with T-shaped tips. The forest has receded through logging, and they must now also take Chlén carts to bring back lumber on the Sákbe Road. The process includes nonstop singing of folk hymns that praise Lord Vimúhla and his Cohort Chiténg, asking for blessing upon the eventual charcoal. The villagers begin with little rites of purification, including fasting. They stack the wood into a large cone, then coat it with mud. After a fire is going, holes about the base are covered up. Eventually, children must climb up to the top and seal up the apex where fire and smoke are shooting out, a very dangerous chore. The process takes a total of nine days. Afterwards, as finished pieces of this charcoal are stirred about, they make a musical clatter, a brittle and almost glass-like tinkling sound.

Village of Yása'a (3915.EK) This is a village of farming, and also, there are makers of shawls and light-weight mesh bags. The farms cling close to this village and its many clanhouses. North of here, small gold banners on tall thin poles form a boundary beyond which there are supposed to be many dangerous creatures. Nearby, a huge faceless statue of a seated man has fallen over on its side. It is believed by some to represent Lord Hnálla. They would set it upright again but have not the immense resources needed to do so. Despite its position, it is believed to still protect those who are south of the markers.

Town of Tsurú (3915.FG) (This is a Station of Brave Peripitation.) Tsurú is both the seat of a thriving fief and the capital of Alidlár Province. Prior to the subjugation of the Kúrt Hills, 17 centuries ago, Tsurú was a populous but squalid place, with a reputation for clanhouses full of melancholy tomb guards, drunken slavers, and the illicit worship of illegal gods. Then, an earthquake cut it off from easy participation in the trade upon the Vishéna and Mssúma Rivers. People tended to move more westwards. The forests were cut down to become fields of grain. The Temple of Avánthe is well-attended, especially by the farming people. More recently, war with Yán Kór revitalized it as the hub of trade.

After Emperor Mirusíya's coronation, Tsurú underwent a most thorough Dítlána (a ritual levelling). The infestation by vermin, and accompanying foul odors in some quarters that Prince Eselné's forces had noticed while they controlled the city for a time, were remedied. The various civic palaces and clanhouses were rebuilt, with efficiency and flair.

During the Civil War that followed Emperor Hirkáne's demise, the town of Tsurú contributed a large number of both regular recruits, and conscripts from clans not traditionally war-oriented. These soldiers honorably joined both the legions under command of Prince Dchich'uné, and those under the other war-leaders. Many bodies were brought home afterwards, and, regardless of whom they had served, they were accorded full respect, complete

with a large number of hired mourners. (Should someone have need of such, the Keening Wind Clan, found mainly in this city, has a good reputation; see entry in the Appendix).

The Chantry of the Matrons

There is a cherished outdoor shrine to Lady Avánthe at the edge of town called the Chantry of the Matrons. It is a deeply peaceful garden with blue-flowering plants, surrounded by a thick circular wall, with an entrance at the north and the south. By custom, only the north entrance is used, and the other is deliberately left overgrown with vines. Local lore recounts that around 15 centuries ago, Tsurú was stricken by a flu-like disease that mainly killed a large portion of the female population. The survivors built the Chantry to honor the memory of the lost women and girls, and to ask for the blessing of Lady Avánthe. To repopulate at this time, a number of Aridáni returned to the domestic life. They hung small clay tools in the shrine, representations of the trades they left behind.

Shasmiyél's Pyramid

This is a three-meter-high pyramid of stones carved with symbols. It originally stood near the center of Tsurú, on a high point in its oldest section. Dedicated to a goddess of the air named Lady Shasmiyél, it was generally accepted by the people as an aspect of Lady Avánthe. Within that Temple, however, they were divided as to whether this qualified as one of the official Aspects. Some wished to destroy the little monument as heretical. It was carefully studied, however, and declared free of proscribed script. They compromised, allowing supporters to move it stone by stone to a site outside the city and requiring them to paint it sky blue. Eventually the city grew to surround it. The Pyramid of Shasmiyél was moved out of city limits a second time for the Dittlána. If the graven symbols were some sort of script or cipher, the meaning may have been disrupted through rearrangement.

Ridge of Tirénu (3915.GD) When the Mu'ugalavyáni invaded in 2020, they took control of these hills, taking a Sákbe Road to the northeast to become a fortress-like perimeter. This, they hoped, would block the Legion of the Scales of Brown, heavy infantry unlikely to climb the high side of the wall with much success. In a six-day, however, that legion's tireless sappers had, not one, but five tunnels. The Battle for the Ridge of Tirénu was brief, with Tsolyánu victorious.

Village of Zharán (3915.HE) This is a fairly ordinary Sákbe Road village. Its buildings are rather spread out. There are granaries, warehouses, and little huts on stilts for holding dry animal fodder of different kinds. It was taken over by the Mu'ugalavyáni in 2020, but was soon liberated. Zharán is home to Hmélu and Hmá herders, of easily-washed breeds intended mostly for meat. The numerous straw-lined pens where they are kept ready for sale have high walls and well-tended gates. Nearby hostels with minimal amenities cater to folks of Medium Status and below. Those of High Status and up usually stay at the House of the Splendid Khéshchal on the north road, upwind and well out of earshot of the animal pens.

Village of Ssumá (3915.JI) By longstanding decree of the governor of Alidlár Province, the lands south of this village are used for cultivating grasses and other fodder crops. These are gathered up and shipped out to wherever they are needed. The goods are often packed in cylindrical baskets, which the people move about using sticks with a T-shaped end. The largest baskets are well over man-height. It takes a team of skilled handlers to move one. Several prod it along, using a hook on the other end of the staff if there is need to halt it. One man off to the side must act as lookout. Several streams in this area utilized for irrigation flow eastwards, towards the Vishéna River (3915.OL)

Horítl's Fortress (3915.JJ) Seen from the air, this structure is laid out as a diamond intersecting two triangles, one pointing north and one pointing south. It is built upon a granite surge, and made of stone blocks. It is the personal property of a missing imperial, Prince Mridóbu. Rumor has it that these walls guard a huge lid placed over a hole in the ground called Horítl's Pit. Horítl is the name of an obscure demon. The Temple of Ksárul has charge of this fortress, and an official seal barring entry has been placed on all four of its gates.

Regicide Memento (3915.JK) This is a large old Hirilákte arena. It is only used several times a year by the Fief of Chethá. Its delicately decorated pillars that once held up the roofs have fallen over and shattered amidst seating tiers cut out of the stone. Around here, there are stone hints of other fallen buildings that peek out of the lightly wooded greenery. Big lazy Chlén beasts graze between them. A graveyard can be seen in the distance to the south. The place takes its name from a stelae at the site. Inscribed in Classical Tsolyáni, it states that here three nobles once conspired to kill their father, a Priest-King called Tsu'anggámi. They were thwarted by headdresses seasoned with a delicious spice mix, which caused them to rejoice and unite. Some question the translation; others question the original scribe's competence.

Village of Zamúa (3915.JN) This is a farming community that grows Yáfa (rice). Several small streams from from the southwest converge here, flowing onwards to the east into the Vishéna River (3915.OL). Also, a soft yet durable stone, pleasant to the touch, is quarried near here to make black board game pieces. A clanhouse of the Red Banner Clan thrives here as cultivators. Due to a clerical error, it has not been contacted by any temple or military representatives in centuries. Its boys are still trained to march in formation, to fight with spears, and so on, and they are the loyal protectors of Zamúa.

Village of Mú'un (3915.KE) This settlement is nicknamed "The Village of Details". It is surrounded by typical grain farms. It has extensive markets, all organized by different sorts of goods. Practical items such as tinderboxes, spare armor lacings, bow covers, and bug repellent are inexpensive and plentiful here. The Street of the Gem-sellers is the part most heavily guarded. Elaborately adorned wizards stand out amongst the security forces. A shrine to each of the twenty official deities of Tsolyánu is maintained. There is also a shrine to Lady Shiringgáyi. Visitors may note that there are many folk of Salarvyáni ancestry here. They felt they were not as accepted in the cities, so they established a place of their own, intermarrying with the locals over the centuries. Not surprisingly, delicacies imported from Salarvyá are popular here.

Emerald Permeator (3915.KN) This is a mysterious location owned by the Temple of Dlamélish. Situated west of the Forest of Chrí Flies (3916.KA), it is a bare scorched oval area upon the powdery ground, surrounded by a crude waist-high stone wall with no entrances. Roughly every four to six months, a ray of brilliant green light comes down out of the sky at an angle. The phenomenon lasts for about two seconds. Items placed within the oval explode, the fragments vaporizing to dust. The green light is accompanied by a deafening and bone-rattling yet melodious sound, rather like many enormous stringed instruments being played at once. Despite the obvious association of the color with their goddess, the priestesses of Dlamélish are uneasy. They have yet to make any sense of this place, and they leave it untended.

Village of Deshirá (3915.LH) Crops of many sorts surround the village, giving it the appearance of a patchwork blanket laid over the swell of this hill. The clanhouses at the center proudly display their sparkling rooftops from afar, colored white with grain-gold trim, or purple with black trim. The clans here are mainly worshippers of Lord Hnálla or Lord Hrű'ű; they live politely together on each side. There are two rival schools for gladiators here. The Courtyard of Shining Might is affiliated with Stability and the Courtyard of Roiling Shadow is affiliated with Change. An aspect of Lord Thúmis is also

loved here- that god whose effigy may be found above many kitchen door lintels throughout Tsolyánu. East of Deshirá, along the road, there are farmsteads that cultivate kitchen spices, and fields of flowers intended for perfumes.

Tarishmú's Tower (3915.LK) Several clanhouses cling to the skirts of this old dark edifice. Superstitious folks claim the place is haunted. When the City of Sárku was besieged by Empress Sháira Sú, the "Divine Daughter of Thúmis", in 973 A.S., this tower was held by the last cohorts of the Sárku-worshipping Legion of Unsleeping Mrlákshe. They were overwhelmed by a combination of Stability-oriented Imperial forces coming up the ladders, and a number of Kurtáni irregulars free-climbing the walls. The City of Sárku held, but control of Tarishmú's Tower went to the Legion of the Lord of Wisdom, 22nd Imperial Heavy Infantry. The Legion of Unsleeping Mrlákshe was slaughtered out of hand. The Legion of the Lord of Wisdom was subsequently disbanded, and control of the tower went to the Temple of Thúmis, which developed the immediate surroundings through agriculture. When the Legion of the Lord of Wisdom was reinstated to take part in the recent war with Yán Kór, some of its soldiers, mostly those from Mekú and Tsurú, were trained here. Currently, the place is understaffed, as most of this legion's troops were sent to Chéne Hó, and its headquarters are in Páya Gupá.

Town of Chethá (3915.MI) This is the seat of the fief. Like the stone from which Tarishmú's Tower (3915.LK) is built, the foundation of Chethá is black, but it is kept painted over in brilliant whitewash. Clanhouses are built upon the huge platforms of this stone. During the brief reign of Prince Dhich'uné, the former fiefholder, A'anúo hiAqó'che, a Kurtáni of most venerable lineage and son of a high priest of the Temple of Qón, was accused of treason and arrested.

In a move that curried favor with both the Temple of Lord Sárku and the Royalist Party, A'anúo was replaced by Lord (Páchukoi) Ganjémo hiVórudu of the Domed Tomb Clan (High clan status, High Lineage), a follower of Lord Sárku. The Foundationists have attacked caravans throughout the Fief of Chethá. They have also held high-born travelers for ransom, sometimes successfully, and sometimes not.

The Tainted Gifts

Lord Ganjémo is a terrifying individual, without fear or remorse. Roughly a year ago, he sent several shipments of grain out as decoys. That grain was poisoned. Eight hundred individuals of very low clan in the city of Tsurú died months later. The Foundationist bandits had apparently sent it south, and handed it out for free.

Stronghold of Nrá (3915.NL) This squat stone edifice straddles a small river that flows into the Vishéna River, with a few clanhouses built on either side. Travel by boat to the Rusted Villa (3915.OI) is relatively easy. It is owned by the (Medium Status) Jade Rope Clan. It is thought to have been constructed at the same time, and by the same people, as the nearest Sákbé Road to the west. Obscure local lore says these farmlands once paid large tributes to a N'luss colony that ruled from a small citadel in the Kráà Hills.

When certain fish are coming upstream to spawn, they gather in the shade of the Stronghold by the hundreds, sometimes stranding themselves on the rocky shores. The people can enjoy the sport of spearing them. Much larger fish can be caught upon the Vishéna River but fishermen are sometimes grabbed off the rocks by the Hlargékh, a huge leaping, thrashing water creature. (See the text box at Large Hex 3916 for Hlargékh.)

Mélukam, the Seer of Nrá

There is a man here in his thirties named Mélukam hiVranéno who suffers from nightmares in which he is someone else, and that person is somehow in immediate peril. As a boy, he was mocked as a liar. Nevertheless, Mélukam kept careful records of his dreams. When word of his dreams reached the Temple of Lord Ksáru in the town of Chethá (3915.MI), they sent Séthiya, a priestess and a scholar of psychic phenomena, to interview him. Séthiya was able to track down two of Mélukam's dream subjects, both of whom had survived their brushes with death. It was decided that he was manifesting an unusual, and deleterious form of telepathy. He is working on learning to control his ability so that it can happen by day, instead of waking him traumatically from sleep.

Rusted Villa (3915.OI) This is an attractive and luxurious mansion set in a vineyard, with defensible crenellated walls. The main building was made from light gray stone, and painted with red and yellow paint to honor Lord Chiténg. A reaction with the stone occurred, turning the red into reddish brown. People called it the Rusted Villa, and the name stuck. Now hardly anyone remembers that this is actually the Villa of Aljenúi. Peasants tend the Nálum fruit vines and produce a unique red wine with a dry flavor. Travel by boat to the Stronghold of Nrá (3915.NL) is easy from here, as a river leads southeast.

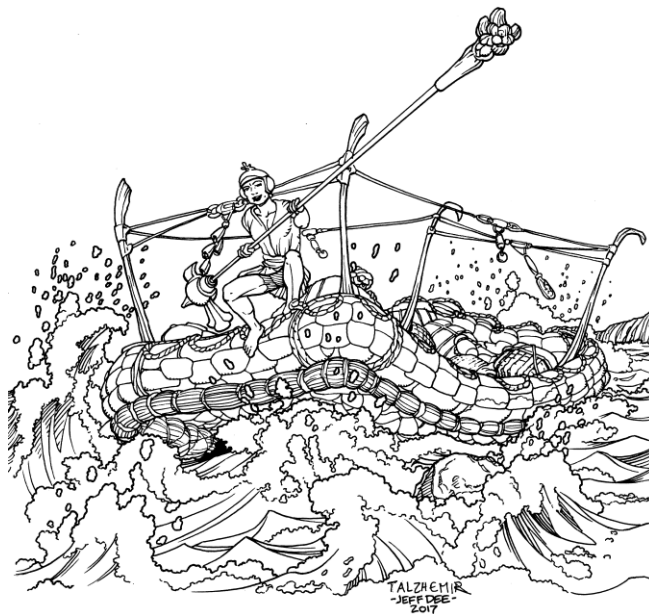
Villa of Aljenúi The original name of the Rusted Villa (see that entry at 3915.OI).

Vishéna River (3915.OL) Nicknamed "the Rolling Stream", this river flows to the mighty city of Avanthár (not in the Kúrt Hills Atlas). It is the waterway for which the durable and flexible Chlén-hide Utehíl boat was invented, but the

stretch that flows through this Large Hex can prove too rough even for that. This is a deep winding trench or crack. The river twists back and forth, and powerful rowers are needed to keep a craft from being thrown into the cliff walls. The Utehíl boats that come from the vicinity of the City of Sáрку in the northwest soon turn back. The southeast end of this Large Hex, 3915 is usually the farthest extent that craft from the ancient and famous cities of Avanthár (or even much more distant Usenánu) will come. To fill in the transportation gap, porters walk along a foot path. Water for irrigating the region south of the villages of Ssumá (3915.JI) and Zamúa (3915.JN) flows eastwards into this river.

The Flexible Utehíl Boat

Upon the fractious Vishéna (a fast and considerably broad river in this area), wooden craft soon crack, so the local people have developed an alternative. Known as the Utehíl, it is a wide rectangle in shape, usually five to six meters (16-20 feet) long, made of many pieces of Chlén hide sewn together. It is waterproofed with a thick layer of a dark resin produced by baking the bark of certain trees in little overturned airtight copper buckets. An Utehíl's ability to weather the pounding waters relies on its ability to flex. Utehíl boats may be commonly seen from here to the waters 24 miles east of the City of Sáрку (4115.DE), and beyond.



Dákon is one of the greatest Utehíl boatmen, something of a living legend of the Vishéna River.

Villa of Duruchákon (3915.OM) This is the seat of the fief. The Fief of Duruchákon consists of only the Villa itself, and the Town of Cháyil (4015.CF), near the Vishéna River (3915.OL). There were once three other small settlements,

but over the centuries, they were destroyed by war. Instead of being passed along as an inheritance, rulership of this Fief is traditionally given to a warrior who has loyally served the Empire of the Petal Throne and the most august Tlakotáni Clan. Accordingly, its current master is the elderly Haudír hiPe'yál, a man who served on Prince Rereshqála's personal guard. Born in the town of Thijál (4015.JL), Lord Haudír is a respected strategist and a scholar of artifacts of the ancients, as well an expert on the history of the Kráà Hills.

Rise of Admission (3915.QE) This is an enormous outcropping of black to dark gray stone. A quarry on this site supplied the blocks for the town of Chethá (3915.MI), Tarishmú's Tower (3915.LK), and the village of Fátł (3915.QE) which is built on its north side. This dark rock, novaculite, makes excellent fine sharpening stones. Because of this, it is said, this is where various priests would sharpen their small blades and shave initiates, hence its name, the Rise of Admission, as in admittance to their order. Another story, however, says that torturers found it convenient for readying their favorite tools, and the site was a place of admissions obtained through bloody interrogations.

Village of Fátł (3915.QE) Built upon the Rise of Admission (see the entry for the Rise of Admission at 3915.QE), this is a community of stone-cutters. Primarily worshippers of the Dark Trinity (Hrű'ü, Ksárul, and Sárku), they export large blocks for building, and they carve altars for the "dark" temples. Sharpening stones and material for sculptors also sometimes begin at this quarry. Foundationists have attacked and destroyed some of the shipments coming from Fátł.

(See also 'About the Kurtáni Foundationists')

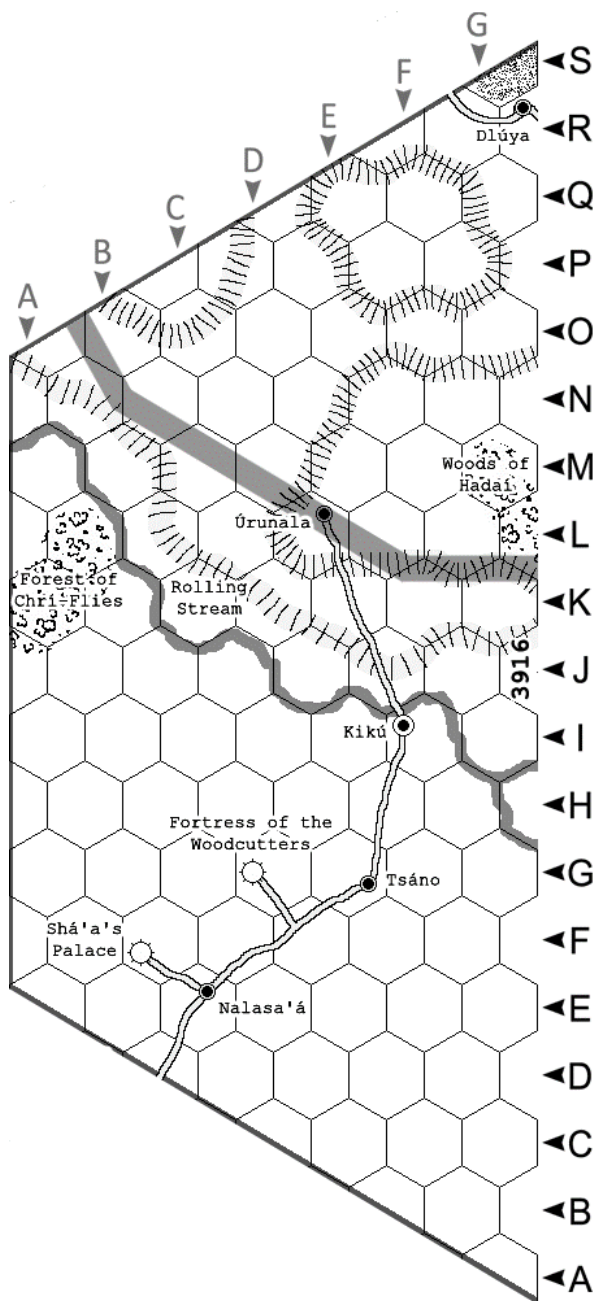
Town of Tlamarká (3915.SH) The people of Tlamarká are stereotyped by others as holier-than-thou fanatics. Even the lay people are constantly quoting scriptures. Children here are taught to be contemptuous of the Undead for they are weak, easily destroyed, and can be controlled with magic. Demons not affiliated with the gods of Light, however, are said to be a dire threat that potentially lurks under every sleeping mat and inside every mirror. As if that was not enough to worry about, the temple services also warn citizens of the threat of forbidden cults.

In other places, worship might be casual, often perfunctory, but Tlamarká's clergy make a stronger point of devotion. That is not to say that Tlamarká's people are delusional. The town has been the subject of various threats, including, it is said, a building-sized giant lizard-man made of bloodstone. Each time, it was defended by mace-twirling "holy monks" in the service of the god Qón.

When the Empress Sháira SÚ was forced to make peace, the aristocracy of the City of Sárku demanded, but did not receive, Tlamarká. This town is known to be a magically fertile location. Children are subjected to much more scrutiny in hopes of finding those with magical potential. Should such a hopeful be found, there is significant pressure to turn the child over to one of the priesthoods of Stability.

The Temples of Hnálla, Thúmis, Belkhánu and their Cohorts receive conspicuous funding. Their showy buildings are a way to remind the City of Sárku that the other priesthoods are still watching. Just like in the City of Sárku, the Concordat is grudgingly upheld, but there are many who resent it. This makes it a good candidate for a possible point of origin for the Foundationists. (See "About the Kurtáni Foundationists")





HEX 3916

To the northeast, the land slopes upwards beyond the twisting cliff-bounded Vishéna River to become the Kràà Hills. Old trails follow the shores of both sides of the river. There are a number of criss-crossing gravel roads out here, some winding and some cutting straight through the steep ravines. There are lichen-covered road markers so old they are worn to smooth nubs by wind and rain. During the rainy season, flash floods and mud slides can make it dangerous.

Between the hills there are sometime little settlements whose inhabitants refuse to tell strangers their names or the

name of their village. The impression outsiders often get is that here are folk with queer customs so archaic that even they themselves do not understand them. Thanks to the Concordat, though, the general policy is to leave them be.

To the southwest, it is more like the Golden Meadows region, with Yáfa rice grown via irrigation from small streams that generally flow towards the northeast. The cultivar here has light bluish-green grassy plants which eventually exceeds human height by a meter. The flexible corky stalks make nice soft and spongy woven mats. In the fall when they are gathered up, sometimes they are heaped below balconies so that children can have the fun of leaping onto the huge bouncy piles. These stems are also often used as packing material.

Between these two regions runs the prodigious Vishéna River (nicknamed the Rolling Stream), a major tributary of the Mssúma River. A special sort of boat, the Utehíl, is used to ply the river trades (see the text box on the Utehíl under Vishéna River, 3915.OL). People throughout this Large Hex get a good portion of their nourishment from shellfish, fish, fish-like creatures, and the various creatures that prey on those, such as the many-legged Feshénga.

"The Fifth Road"

Many millenia ago, streams that met at the city of Tsurú (in the next Large Hex over, at 3915.FG) formed deep but gentle tributary leading to Sha'á's Palace (3916.FC) and the Vishéna River. Nicknamed "the Fifth Road", it brought grain and many other products to and from the Vishéna River. An earthquake abruptly emptied this convenient transportation thoroughfare, cutting Tsurú off from commerce with glorious Avanthár and beyond. The same seismic event created the Kehíri River, and the obstruction of Demon's Rut (see the text box for Demon's Rut under the town of Kikú (3916.IF). Today, the area of the Fifth Road is used to produce a large amount of fodder for Chlén beasts.

Hlargékh, the River Lurker

This is a creature with ten paddle-like limbs and a long neck. It makes its home in fast-moving deep water. It is a predator of large fish. It is generally not seen, but when fish are spawning, it may surface. It has a dreaded habit of jumping from the water up to seven meters (23 feet) to snap human spear-fishers off their wooden platforms. Their bitter flesh renders them inedible to humans, but Shén, especially, relish them.

Hlargékh (.9)

Wandering: 90%, 5/7/9 Lair: 10%, 3/5/7

PHYS: 11	DEFT: 10	INST: 10	
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: N	
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 12 swim, 12 leap		
Defenses:	Melee: 2	Missile: 2	Magic: 0
Armor: 2/1	Hits: 14	Energy: 10	
Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Grapple	15-	Crush	2/4/6 Crush damage
Other Abilities:			
None			

(See also 'About the Golden Meadows)

(See also 'About the Kráà Hills')

Village of Nalasa'á (3916.EC) (The rare visitor from the Kráà Hills will tend to pronounce the name of this village with an ascending lilt between two "ah" sounds, instead of a glottal stop.)

The Annex of Parijému

About three miles from this village, a number of books and scrolls are stored by scholars of the Temple of Keténgku in a finely-adorned cave with beautiful doors set into the side of a hill. Visitors in good standing with that Temple may be admitted to peruse the material on-premises. For a local advanced student who longs to be a surgeon or sorcerer, the tuition may be a year of serving as a librarian here. The title of "Annex" refers to the time when there was a stately building outside of this place; nothing else remains of that structure today.

Shá'a's Palace (3916.FC) (Folks with a Kráà Hills accent will tend to pronounce the name of this village with a descending lilt between two "ah" sounds, instead of a glottal stop.) This is a fortress of great age. Its copper-clad roofs are modern but the style and layout of its stone pillars are antiquated. They are so worn that there is hardly anything left of the sumptuous carving that once adorned them. This palace is built upon a high point, chosen so that an invading force is more likely to be seen. To the northwest there is a grassy gorge that was once a port built on the oxbow of a river nicknamed "The Fifth Road". This waterway once connected the city of Tsurú (3915.FG) to the Vishéna River, but it went dry after an earthquake. Treasures such as misplaced nautical equipment and jewelry have been found in the ravine.

Fortress of the Woodcutters (3916.GD) This is a series of stone walls connecting clanhouses on stone foundations, with a common area in the center. An army of workers, their standing well below that of the farming peasant, goes out to harvest wood. Religious preferences

here are eclectic, as it belongs to an unaffiliated clan, that of the Wicker Image. Despite the name, many of the wood gatherers possess no axes, instead using club-mounted rocks to bash and shatter the brittle wood. (see the text box entry for the Boskage of Purmúnin, 3815.LH).

Village of Tsáno (3916.GE) This is a chatty place, garrulous as a school of high-spirited children. The accent of the Sárku-loving people of the Kráà Hills is seldom heard here. Lumber chunks gathered up by indigent inhabitants of the Fortress of the Woodcutters are carried by the heaping basketful to Tsáno's enormous charcoal-producing stone ovens. From here, most of the baskets of coal are carried to Kikú and exchanged for copper. From there, the coal goes to the neighboring province of Ssá Sárku.

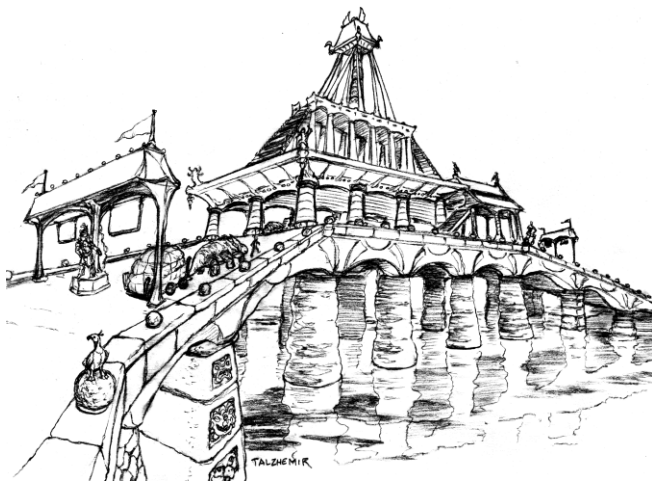
Town of Kikú (3916.IF) Fishing is a big source of income. Many impoverished porters make a living by carrying goods along the Rolling Stream (the Vishéna River) from the Stronghold of Nrá to a whirlpool known as Demon's Rut. Mshéqwu, an Aspect of Lord Sárku affiliated with death by drowning, is venerated by some clans here.

Demon's Rut

Downstream from the town of Kikú, south of Small Hex 3916.IG, the Kehíri flows southwestwards into the Vishéna River at a point called Demon's Rut. Here, the water roars and swirls in a violent fashion. River craft coming up from the south do not pass this point, but disgorge their goods and head back.

The Bridge of Kikú

North of this town, the road passes over the Bridge of Kikú. This is a handsome structure with a squat stone base straddling the river. Upon this, wooden platforms connected by sturdy scaffolding rise above it, giving access to a view from a height. Living architects marvel at the skill with which it was designed, and wonder what mortar holds the unmodified large round stones together. The busy bridge has four arched entrances, two on the north side, and two on the south. An odd custom is that a northbound Chlén cart should pass through the east half, while a southbound one uses the west. To encourage this, traditional méshqu door plaques signifying "Welcome" are placed above each of the right-hand entrances, but plaques signifying "Indisposed" are placed above the others. Locals have long accepted what they were told: that using the wrong gate is unlucky. This structure is proudly maintained by followers of Lady Avánthe.



Upon the busy Bridge of Kikú, giant-size Méshqu plaques keep Chlén carts from meeting awkwardly front-to-front.

Vishéna River (3916.JD) This vigorous river is quite large, flowing through a deep gorge. It is sometimes called the Rolling Stream. It comes from near the City of Sárku to the northwest. In this Large Hex, it winds to and fro, and rowers must struggle to keep from being dashed against the rocky sides. The area from the Stronghold of Nrá (3915.NL) to the town of Kikú (3916.IF) and the whirlpool called Demon's Rut is un-navigable. This danger isolates the immediate region from river travel. Following along the southwestern edge of the Kráà Hills, the Vishéna River eventually joins the Mssúma River after much twisting. The traveler can eventually reach the mighty city of Avanthár, some 150 miles to the east, and far beyond that, famed Usenánu. Goods may be shipped downstream, but returning is so slow, and so much effort, that river merchants tend to be reluctant.

Forest of Chrí-Flies (3916.KA) This is a small but lush forest, its wood unharvested. By day, it thrums with the buzzing of large Chrí, eight-legged flies as long as a man's longest finger. It is rumored that servitors of the god Durritlámish, He of the Roiling Rot, Cohort to Lord Sárku, come here with meat in order to collect unusually large maggots. A local story told to children says the flies were once men and women. They displeased the demon they had summoned, and for their offense, they were transformed into Chrí flies.

Village of Úrunala (3916.LE) When the weather is hottest, some of the high-born residents of the town of Kikú (3916.IF) come to breezy and slightly cooler Úrunala to go hunting. When the weather is coolest in Úrunala, the aristocrats there go to Kikú to go fishing. It is generally only the menfolk who do this. This is a slightly more male-oriented settlement than is usual in the Empire of Tsolyánu. In the past,

young ladies seeking to become Aridáni were given a hard time. In response to this, a temple of Lady Diliinála was built here. Its priestesses are mainly elderly ladies. Girls whose families try to obstruct their legal choice can appeal to the temple, going to live within its walls if necessary.

Woods of Hadaí (3916.MG) These hills rise up into two peaks too steep and rocky to be farmed. Their infertile slopes spread in all directions, but at the top, they are surmounted by dark dreary conifers. These are of a sort not found elsewhere in this region. So far from the sea, it is unlikely the trees of Hadaí would be recognized as a type excellent for masts. This is a traditional boundary marker between Alidlár and Ssá Sárku.

Village of Dlúya (3916.RH) The primary business of Dlúya is mining. Chlén beasts must bring up charcoal, food, and water. They bear away refined copper. The patron deity is an Aspect of Sárku called Véshkuru, "the Molten Artificer". A very large copper effigy of this being stands at the center of the village. It resembles a formless hovering glob with graceful curved limbs. Polished bracelets made from the copper smelted here are prized by high-status Sárku-worshippers living all the way over in the Chákas to the west. These eventually weather from gleaming pinkish metal to a yellowish-brown patina.

The Strip-Mine of Dlúya

Here is one of the many mines of the Kráà Hills region. Over time, the village has been moved again and again southeastwards to be closer to the most recent digging. For miles to the northwest, a vast field of pits has been dug. Many lead to tunnels; some lead to tunnel complexes. The deity Sárku opposes the removal of treasures from below but mining of ore is not considered to conflict with this doctrine. What is hacked out here is grit with flecks of bluish and greenish material. It goes from the clans of the very lowest status pick-wielders to the clans of the low status smelters, then to the clans of the medium status "low" refiners. Clans of high status "high" refiners apply the proprietary knowledge to produce the small thin pieces of workable copper.

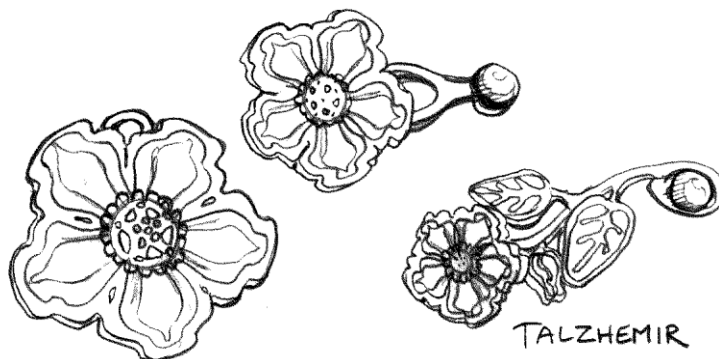
A Wedding in Dlúya

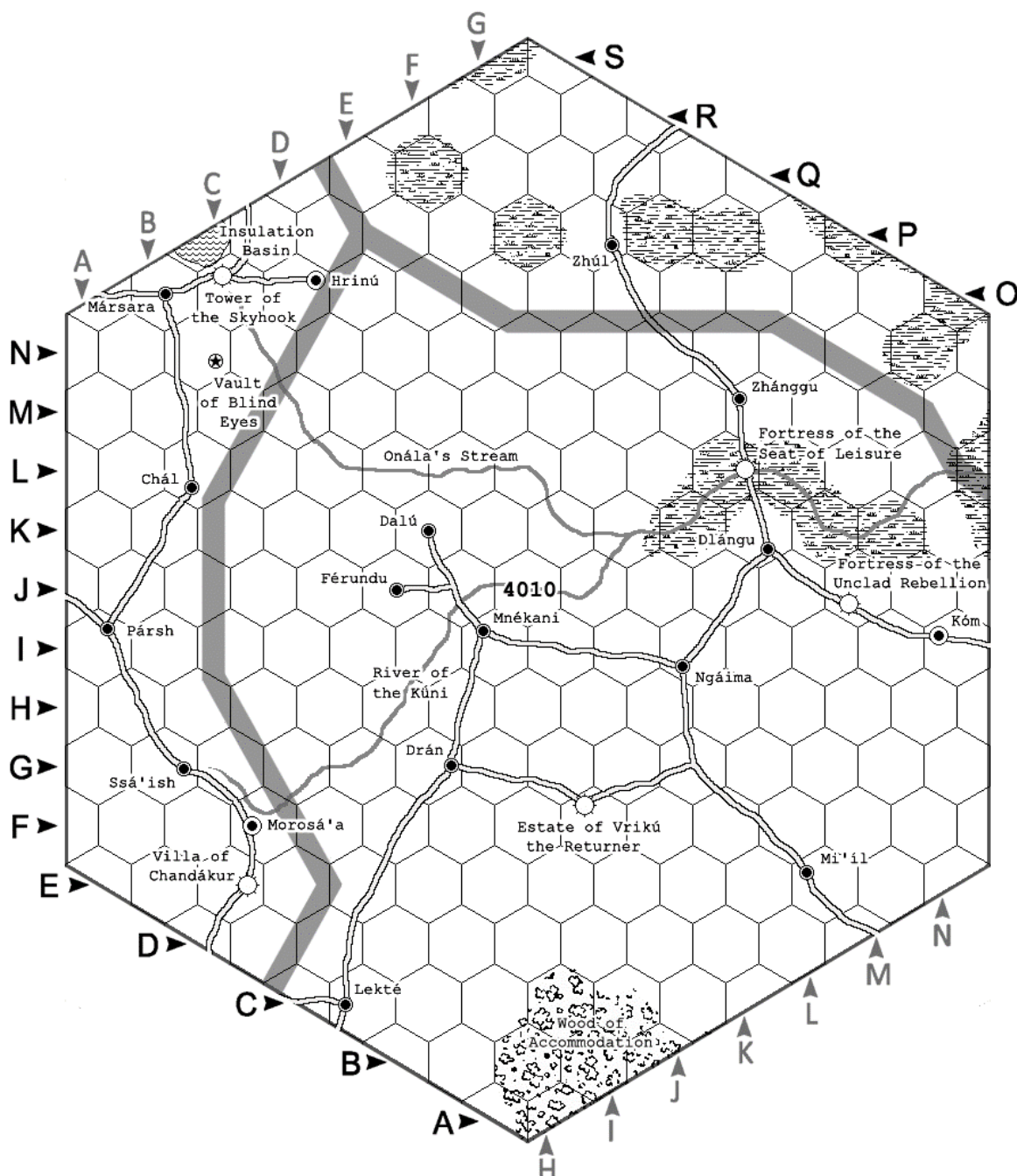
Since time immemorial here, the event of a man's first marriage has been an occasion for the entire village to attend. It is common for the bride to be visibly pregnant, the proof of her ability to bear the next generation. If she is not, she may wear a small apron-like garment with a small pillow underneath, the hopeful emblem of her potential. Work in the mines claims men's lives; a widow

who already has children is considered a desirable mate, since the family unit has a "head start".

Both the bride and groom are carried face down on litters, with a translucent piece of ochre-edged brown cloth draped over them. They go to the local cemetery so that, it is said, the ancestors may also bear witness. Rather than some sort of vows or speeches by relatives, each is given a dose of Melúi, a powder to inhale, which sends them into uncontrollable weeping and sobbing. This is followed by a light euphoria in which all anxieties

fall away. Then, everyone returns to the area outside the clanhouse (usually that of the groom's family) to share a rich feast. Here the bride is adorned with a tiara of copper set with locally-gathered Lapis Lazuli stone, a blue variety with green flecks crafted into flowers. Sometimes the guests receive small gifts of rich amber liquor (imported from distant Tsurú). Miniature Lapis Lazuli and copper flowers are given out to young girls.





HEX 4010

This Large Hex is mainly made up of farm lands. Teams of slaves laying down chunks of stone to repair the roads are a common sight here. To the northeast lie the Swamps of Ksárul. The people here have an unspoken and uncomfortable realization that the swamps are slowly intruding. Each year, the rains seem to fall for longer and longer, and even the water-loving crops such as Yáfa are withering under a dark fuzzy mold that breaks down plants into a slime with a very foul odor, known as the Sewering.

The Sewering

The agricultural profits of this, the northwest corner of the province of Mekú, are slowly slipping. Overabundance of rain and poor drainage keep the fields flooded longer than usual. On top of this, sometimes a patch of land is invaded by a very foul-smelling rubbery slime that renders several acres of soil "sewered". The odor attracts dense hordes of flying biting insects.

Although scholars have yet to become aware of it, this land slowly goes back and forth between swamps and cultivated fields over the hundreds of years. At this time,

it is mostly fields but the swamps are returning. The peasants chop shrubs and set slaves to digging trenches that drain incoming water into ditches. Peculiar creatures fly out of the swamps dropping various seeds and spores with their feces, renewing the cycle.

Some aspects of this quiet struggle are not "natural". The story of Vrikú the Returner (see the text box at 4010.FI) describes how several secret rain-making devices of the ancients were found and removed. It is unknown if there are any more such machines out in the Swamps of Ksáru.

Due to a lack of appropriate wood, bows are very hard to come by, here. Arrows, too, are hard to come by. They must be imported from elsewhere. This is usually a specific commission. People are savvy enough to be wary of purchasing something that looks fine, but is so old it cracks the third or fourth time it's used. There is a local kind of sling ammunition, however, made of clay with slivers of sharp Chlén hide at each end.

Most of the ancestors of people of the Moor Steads (see the text box for the Unmarked Moor Steads at Large Hex 3911) originally lived in this Large Hex. An Aspect of Vimúhla called Jamár is worshipped throughout this Large Hex. Jamár is popular in Khirgár to the northwest. (See the text box for Supplicants of the Burning Marrow in Morosá'a, 4010.FD)

Ksanómi Cloth

Produced solely in this region, Ksanómi is a valued polishing cloth that takes some effort to make. Very tough guard-hairs as long as a man's forearm are separated from the dense neck wool of a local breed of Hmélu. It is plaited into cloth that is used with abrasive to polish materials that are normally difficult to shine, such as very hard stone sculptures. Ksanómi fiber has another less savory use. It makes a thick garrote that leaves no marks, but can then be compressed into a very small bundle.

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')

Wood of Accommodation (4010.BI) This is a forbidden forest preserve established as a barrier between several fiefs. (See the entry at 3911.MF)

Village of Lekté (4010.CE) This is a farming village of mostly Avánthe-following clans. Chlén beasts with decorated hide dot the landscape. This is far from any tanner's vats, so they are seldom peeled for their hide. Local people have taken to shallowly carving big semi-abstract floral designs on them. Should a Chlén from Lakté come marching down the Sákbe Road, its place of origin can

easily be guessed. It is said that a Chlén born in Lakté and turned out to the wilds to graze will eventually return there on its own somehow. The Legion of Vrikú the Returner (see the text box at 4010.FI) established a fortress at Lekté. It has long since tumbled down.

Villa of Chandákur (4010.EC) The Villa belongs collectively to religiously-eclectic Ripened Sheaf Clan, who purchased the title to the land at a lower rate than usual. It is a complex of buildings connected by low bridge-like causeways with rope handrails. It is defended by walls and a few watchtowers. An outbreak of the Sewering blight has hurt all the farms in this area. They have fallen behind on their taxes. (See the text box for Sewering in the entry for Large Hex 4010.)

Village of Mi'il (4010.EL) There is a sense of kind-heartedness to this place. For instance, the slave teams that come by with baskets of limestone to repair the sinking roads are routinely welcomed for a hearty meal at little thatched platforms for the purpose. Deals in the marketplace often come with a small good-will extra. The Avánthe-oriented clanhouses of Mi'il display a friendly rivalry towards one another as they seek the honor of hosting priestesses with magical talents who sometimes come all the way from the town of Morosá'a (4010.FD) to visit this region. These women apply specialized spells of their temple. Most are livestock-oriented, such as a cantrip to make a Hmélu beast more tractable or a Chlén less anxious. There is a rumor within the Temples of Stability that somewhere near here, there is still one of the "Rain Callers", such as those found by Vrikú the Returner around A.S. 2320. (See the entry for the Legion of Vrikú at 4010.FI.)

Town of Morosá'a (4010.FD) This is the seat of the Fief of Morosá'a. This fief sprawls along the eastern border of the province Marélmú. Clanhouses of the Chlén hide tanners to the northwest decorate their gates with impressive lacquered Chlén skulls. Morosá'a does a thriving trade in tools of this material.

A temple of Lady Avánthe stands on the highest point of town, on the northeast side, overlooking the River of the Küni. There are members of the Sisterhood of the Joyous Burden, a society within that temple especially concerned with the welfare and improvement of Chlén beasts.

Built only two hundred years ago, a "new" temple to Lord Vimúhla stands on the western edge, with a proper dormitory for fiery young warriors and other ecstatic flame-worshippers on the far side of its courtyard. There is a rumor that the previous one burned down when a small demon they summoned refused to accept some wooden models of buildings as a sacrifice. Another story is that young acolytes in a dormitory built onto the side of the main building were showing off their firestarting skills to each other

indoors. No one was killed, and if the incident is mentioned today, the current priests will not elaborate on what exactly happened, but they will say they wish they had been there to witness it, and laugh.

The Supplicants of the Burning Marrow

At a lower-status site on the edge of town, not far from a livestock trading market and a clanhouse of meat-dressers, there is a wide rock garden shrine made of volcanic stone laid down in an intriguing design. It is devoted to Vimúhla's Aspect Jamár. This is where a small local cult, the Supplicants of the Burning Marrow celebrates additional rites in Lord Vimúhla's honor. Not normally overseen by a priest of that deity, these are essentially gatherings where they throw things onto a bonfire. Some write prayers (typically, asking for deliverance from the Sewering,) upon pieces of paper to cast into the flames.

The Supplicants of the Burning Marrow are mostly low-clan Hmélu and Hmá herders. They split lower legbones of mammalian animals and render the fat to make a special tallow for lamps and torches. It is considered especially appropriate to Jamár because, with aid of a wick, this liquid tallow burns without producing smoke or soot. Through clever use of tinder, it can even be used to burn densely-growing reeds on the water. It is a dangerous practice. Generally, the fire goes out, but floating patches of debris may reach the shore. Despite the moisture, the underlying peat will be set aflame, then smolder, in which case it may burn indefinitely with a noxious odor. This same oil is commonly utilized in Yán Kór to waterproof garments. It has another interesting property: it renders leather supple even in icy weather.

Estate of Vrikú the Returner (4010.FI) This is the seat of the Fief of Vrikú. There are several shrines to Aspects of Lady Avánthe here. The most prominent is that to the Kátha, Handmaiden of Battles (she is also revered in Khirgár). Vrikú is a first name commonly given to girls here.

The Legion of Vrikú

This was a temple legion dedicated to Lady Avánthe, established during the reign of Empress Aléya, "The Damsel of Purity", in A.S. 1894. Its general was Vrikú hi tla Tsúral (Vrikú of the Tsúral-spice). They established a fort (now the obscure Village of Lekté) to defend against the Milumanayáni. The blue-clad women warriors were not deployed in armed conflict. They complained bitterly that they would accrue no more glory to their fragrant standard here in this stinking backwater of swamps. They were right; for outside of this area, the legion is forgotten.

It has had its moments of glory, though, and locally, the name of Vrikú is still honored.

Around 2320 A.S. (in the reign of Emperor Hetkoláinen, "He Whose Glory Never Ends"), a force of Milumanayáni soldiers took the town of Hrinú and the nearby Tower of the Skyhook. It is unclear whether they were acting before or after the Emperor's invasion of Milumanayá. They had come by the Bridge of Thórsh (4110.II). Under a descendant of the original Vrikú, the Legion came charging forth. A Qadárni battle was held, both sides sending out only several hundred warriors. The Legion of Vrikú was victorious. The invaders surrendered; most were kept as slaves by the Legion of Vrikú.

Emperor Hetkoláinen and his strategists decided the legion should take no further part in these battles. Their commander was called to Avanthár to be honored. Then, the Legion of Vrikú was ordered by the Temple to disband. Vrikú was furious but there was nothing she could do: she had been dismissed from service, too, though given honorable title to the fief as a reward for defending against the Milumanayáni. After she came home, she was dubbed "Vrikú the Returner."

Those released from service to the Legion she hired to patrol the surrounding swamps. They discovered and disabled four "Rain Callers", devices of the ancients, and several patches of swamp dried up. The first was discovered southwest of the Estate. The eventual fate of the Rain Callers is unknown. One rumor holds that they were secretly sold to Milumanayá, but were lost en route to Pelesár in the Desert of Sighs. Another says they were given into the custody of the Temple of Avánthe, as she is goddess of air and rain, and that the priceless relics were sacrificed.

Village of Ssá'ish (4010.GB) Little streams in this area converge to form the River of the Küni (see the entry at 4010.HF). Most of the inhabitants here are of Kurtáni descent. Unlike most, they are followers of the gods of Change. Their religion seems to be garbled mish-mash that takes relatively modern worship of the five deities of Change, and overlays a nostalgic veneer of ancient tribal Sé'iyau customs. The local Hu'hún (similar to a shaman) of Lord Ksáru keeps himself stained purple with the juice of the Tsévu fruit.

River of the Küni (4010.HF) This river begins with streams at the village of Ssá'ish (4010.GB), eventually flowing into Onála's Stream (4010.LF). The River of the Küni is associated by some with the Goddess Avánthe, while Onála's Stream is associated with the Goddess Dlamélish. Wild Küni falcons from this area are caught by using fist-sized leather balls stuffed with Tsúral buds, decorated with securely-attached blue or green ceramic beads, an egg-

sized metallic bell, and a strip of white fur cut to resemble a fluffy tail. This is attached to a tree root so that the bird cannot carry it away. It lands, gnaws a hole in the ball, then starts nibbling a bud. It is soon drunk on the herb, its pupils dilated. The hunter returns when they hear the bell jingling, to find the Küni laying on its back, blissfully dazed, pupils dilated, dandling the lure with its clawed feet.

Village of Pársh (4010.IA) Carpenters here form wood into neat uprights, lathed balustrade posts, and the like. They are often called upon to send out teams to take part in building structures in some other settlement.

The lifespan of residents here is often around a decade shorter than elsewhere. During the dry season, Pársh is subject to very thin but eye-irritating haze and a burnt bitter-tasting grit in the air from the east. During the rainy season it lets up, but, a month after the rains stop, the Plume of Haze appears again.

The Plume of Haze

Roughly five miles away from Pársh, a trail of smoke rises into the sky. The source is a peat fire that has been burning for centuries. While the peat of Ghatón can be used for fuel, this region was home to such plants as the Food of the Ssú, rendering this peat toxic. To cook or do other things with it remains an unknown technology.

Village of Mnékani (4010.IG) Shrines to the war gods dominate the village square. Like creatures with gleaming fur over rippling muscle, the compact thatched clanhouses here look polished and strong. There are several of the "Red" clans here, raising boys who are sent to Mekú around the age of twelve to join a legion. It is a bittersweet parting at their coming-of-age as so few of them ever return. Armorer's clans ply their trade but the goods are admittedly substandard, as the substances they need are difficult to come by.

Town of Kóm (4010.IN) Kóm is a fairly populous town outside of any fief. As if it were a fief unto itself, its taxes are delivered directly unto the Empire. Many of the clanhouses here are decorated with leech-mouthed five-headed serpent effigies of Lord Sárku. A local proverb says "Inscrutable Kóm is best left alone."

The Sour Püwüss Berry

The main export is a small dried pinkish-white fruit known locally as Püwüss. By itself, the Püwüss berry is far too tart to eat. It comes from a moss-like plant that grows in soggy fields. It is used locally as a preservative for food, especially meat, whose flavor it compliments especially

well. In ancient times, it was prized as a reagent for especially natural-looking embalming.

(This is where one of the four "Rain Callers" was found by Vrikú the Returner around A.S. 2320. See entry for the Legion of Vrikú at 4010.Fl.)

Village of Férundu (4010.JF) This remote village upholds a custom in which unmarried girls are to be virgins. To this end, they are all kept isolated in a stockade overseen by eunuch slaves. The custom comes from a superstitious fear of raising children fathered by half-human monsters from the swamps.

Férundu has a dark secret known only to the male village elders: children born with any perceived deformities are immediately taken to an underground shrine of Lord Ksáru and sacrificed by means of a painless powder.

Fortress of the Unclad Rebellion (4010.JM) This is a military fort with a small skirt of affiliated support clanhouses. There are also two squat unattached observation towers, and a few cube-shaped granaries on stilts. It was originally a supply depot called the Campanile of Bright Resonance, the property of the Temple of Hnálla.

The Campanile of Bright Resonance, and the Unclad Rebellion

A shiny egg-shaped bell of an unknown metal hung in its highest tower, formed of white stone. After the ascension of Emperor Nríga Gaqchiké in A.S. 984, it was illegally placed under the guard of the Legion of Hékeþ of Púrdimal, 17th Imperial Heavy Infantry. It takes its present name from an incident around A.S. 1000 in which hundreds of local people, civilian worshippers of Lord Hnálla, unexpectedly attacked. Purportedly driven to religious frenzy by the sound of the great bell at noon, they arrived naked wielding maces and long clubs. Many died in that battle. The cohorts of the Legion of Hékeþ were subdued with little loss of life, and sent back to Púrdimal. Considered a violation of the Concordat if it actually held such mystic power, the bell was tactfully removed to a temple of Hnálla and the place was renamed. The Fortress of the Unclad Rebellion is held by the Legion of the Inverted Hand (27th Imperial Light Infantry) today.

Village of Dalú (4010.KF) The main occupation of Dalú is hacking small and simple river boats out of half of a log. A pilot at the back pushes it with a pole. While copper fittings are common in other places, they are considered bad luck on watercraft, here, and Chlén hide is used instead. Especially in rural areas like this, the veneration of

Lady Avánthe occasionally transcends Change/Stability boundaries. When it starts to rain here, even the worshippers of the other deities often pause briefly and snap their fingers a few times in quiet applause to give thanks.

(This is where one of the four "Rain Callers" was found by Vrikú the Returner around A.S. 2320. See entry for the Legion of Vrikú at 4010.FI.)

Village of Dlángu (4010.KK) A putrid and faintly metallic stench hangs over the area: the Sewering has set in (see the text box for Sewering at Large Hex 4010). Priestesses of Lady Avánthe have come by to bless the Yáfa rice fields, thus far to no avail. One of the clans turned to cultivating the sugary Dmí root. At first, there was hope, as a sizable crop was grown. This hope was dashed when they were found to have a foul sewage-like taste, and no way could be found to rid the syrup of that flavor.

Village of Chál (4010.LC) This is a haphazard collection of rickety clanhouses. They are so poor the doorways have no doors, for there is nothing anyone would wish to steal. Listless children wander about naked. Many (Very Low Status) folk here make a living as beasts of burden, carrying baskets about the fief at a jog. On either side of the road, they can pause to eat fresh or dry fruit off of abandoned Dlél trees. The bitter Tsévu fruit also grows wild here. It is locally known that it is of value to priests of Lords Ksárul and Thúmis. Why, though, is not understood. There are no hostels or similar establishments in Chál. The wise clanheads bow down to their social betters, swiftly offering to vacate the best room for the traveler. The wise traveler declines, thereby avoiding the acquisition of vermin such as lice.

The Venerable Dalshúz

There is said to be a wizened sorcerer called Dalshúz out here in a sturdy stone hut west of town. He is a tattooed Livyáni. A follower of Lord Ksárul (or at least some foreign god close enough to be called thus), he charges top money for his advice and his assistance. He has many servants and guards (some of them not human), and he no longer leaves his comfortably-appointed home. He has three apprentices (Pasémo, Rumíq, and Lilvéma) who appear in the village on errands they are not permitted to discuss. It is whispered that two of the three are creatures from other Planes, not human at all.

Onála's Stream (4010.LF) This river forms out of streams in the vicinity of the Tower of the Skyhook (4010.OC). It continues eastwards to the Fortress of the Powders (4011.IF). Onála's Stream is associated by some with the Goddess Dlamélis, while the River of the Kūni is associated with the Goddess Avánthe.

Fortress of the Seat of Leisure (4010.LK) This place is owned by several Very High and High status clans. It is described as a hunting lodge. It functions more as a place where the wealthy and powerful can meet in private and broker deals. The rules here are very strict. Those below High clan are not permitted entry, not even servants. One must know someone who is already a patron, to be allowed entry. Though called a 'fortress', this is not truly some bastion of war with crenellations and cyclopean walls. Rather, it is a large and graceful building alongside Onála's Stream (see the entry at 4010.LF). It is built on very sturdy pillars. During the rainy season, there is an arm's length of clearance to the water's turbulent greenish surface. During the dry season, that can go down as far as two person-heights.



At the Fortress of the Seat of Leisure, dancers like Dlána still perform weapon forms while wearing the livery of a legion disbanded over a thousand years ago.

Village of Zhanggú (4010.MK) A sad sight greets the lover of purple wine, as the Dlél fruit groves of Zhanggú are dead. Most of the fields are empty because the Sewering hit the village especially hard last year (see the text box for Sewering at Large Hex 4010). For some time, the people here had turned to hunting to supplement their diet and income. As the amount of game has become more and more scarce, they must travel farther and farther out. Sometimes, they all they find are sickly Chlén beasts, which they drive back to the village and slaughter. Káyi come drifting out of the wetlands, taking their toll, as well. Clanheads here have already had to make the sad

decision to send children to their affiliated clanhouses in other villages.

(This is where one of the four "Rain Callers" was found by Vrikú the Returner around A.S. 2320. See entry for the Legion of Vrikú at 4010.Fl.)

Vault of the Blind Eyes (4010.NC) Explorers have come here before, seeking to wrest knowledge and treasures from below. Centuries ago, a man who appeared in this area with his entourage claimed that something had called him all the way from Haumá. He and his party were never seen again. It happened again roughly 150 years later (about 70 years ago), only this time the traveler was from east of Katalál. Each time, dozens of peasants were hired as guides and bearers but none returned. Since then, the locals have firmly refused to go near the place. According to rumor, the Vault of the Blind Eyes is a small pyramid in a swamp. What are called "eyes" are regularly-spaced concentric circular patterns with a broad conical dip in the center. The local folk will go so far as to speculate over a glass of Dlél plum wine over whether this is the tip of an enormous pyramid, an obelisk, or something else entirely.

Village of Mársara (4010.OB) This is a hamlet surrounded by thinned ranks of Dlél trees. This variety flowers a yellow-green color, leading to plum-like blue-purple fruits. A folktale associates the flowers with a love affair between Lady Dlamélish and an innocent-seeming Lord Ksáru. The wood of these trees is easily carved when fresh, but grows very hard when it dries. It has a distinctive pleasant aroma. Dlél wood is used to smoke sausages here.

The Wine of Mársara

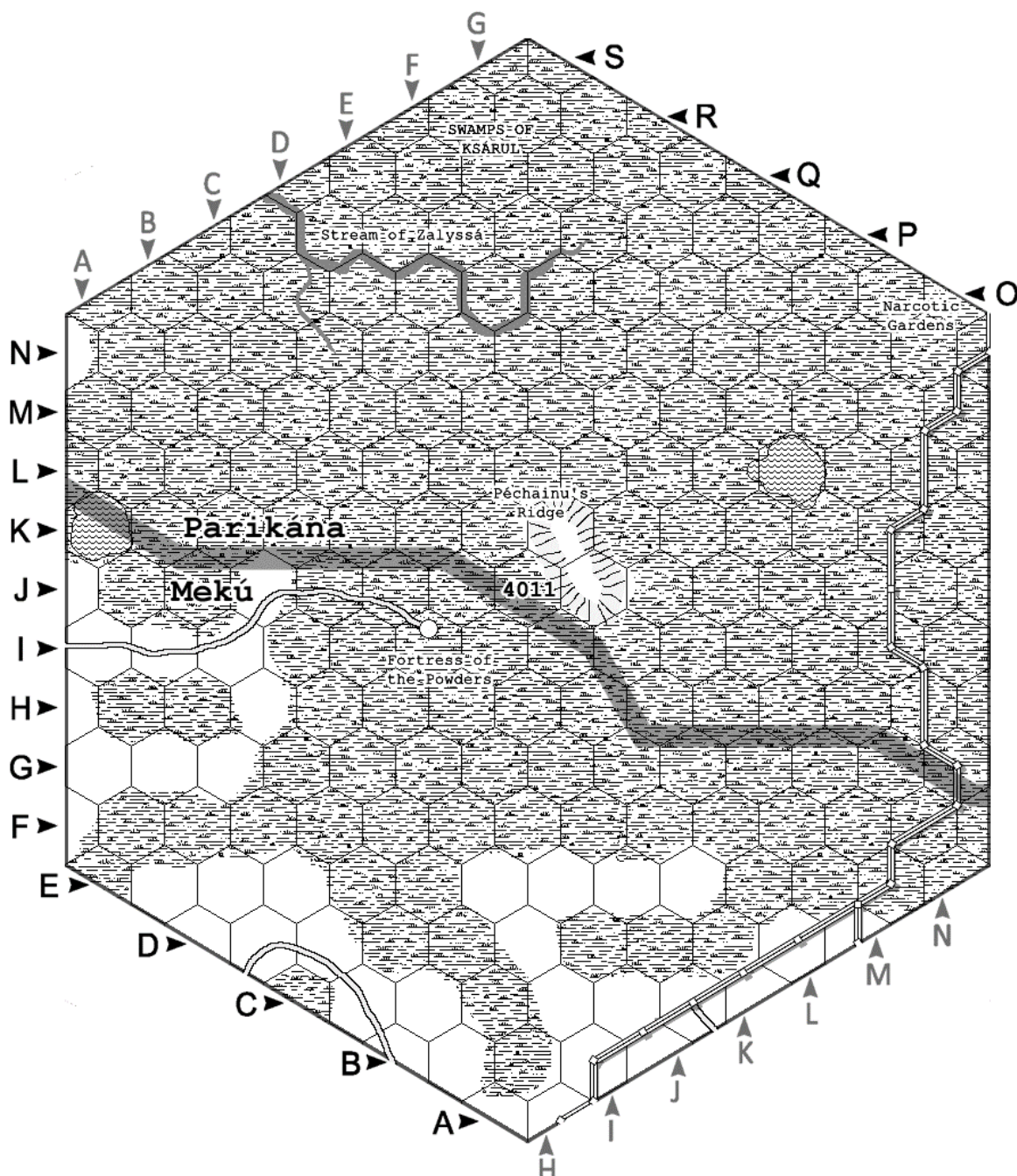
While golden Nálum fruit wine is popular in the south, people of the north often prefer the richly dark-purple fermented juice of the sweet blue-purple Dlél. Mársara is appreciated for this kind of wine. It is customary to ship it in large barrels bound with rope, the gentle jostling it receives upon its Chlén cart journey a part of the process of its making. Some of it goes all the way to the Kráà Hills.

Tower of the Skyhook (4010. OC) This is a tower with a number of open black windows that leans slightly. It has an irregular trapezoidal cross-section and an angled, vaguely gallows-like projection on top. It stands amidst the ruins of a lost city. The human-height walls that local herders use as Hmá and Hmélu pens are the remnants of long-abandoned buildings. A scroll in the provincial governor's library at Mekú says that this settlement was built around A.S. 1200 by invaders with "black quills for hair" (possibly so, or perhaps the illumination depicts what could just be interesting headgear). They settled near the swamps and the Stream of Onála. Their leader was called He Who Hunts Men, and they forced any they found into slavery. They were driven eastwards into the swamps by the Tsolyáni.

Town of Hrinú (4010.OD) The soft, soft hills about Hrinú are both good grazing and grain farming. There are many Ksanómi Hmélu raised here. (See the text box for Ksanómi Cloth under Large Hex 4010.) The Sewering that afflicts numerous other places in this Large Hex has not appeared about Hrinú. Locals sometimes wear footgear of the special Ksanómi fiber, braided and coiled into sandals. Herders sometimes use slings made out of Ksanómi fiber.

Insulation Basin (4010.PC) (See the entry at 4110.BJ.)

Village of Zhúl (4010.PI) The Ksanómi breed of Hmélu are kept here. Several nations north of this part of Tsolyánu, notably Yán Kór, are matriarchal. Zhúl follows this pattern, with women being considered the holders of land rather than the men. When a man marries, he will be expected to move into his mother-in-law's clanhouse, rather than the woman joining her father-in-law's extended household. Labor in Zhúl is also strongly divided along gender lines, with women staying nearer the clanhouse to farm and garden, and men taking the Hmélu herds out to graze. Most of these herd beasts will be eaten locally; there are few exports or imports. Losses to predators are heavy, and currently, the women outnumber the men two to one. (A visiting Aridáni who appears well-off may find herself politely approached by a clan matron or two to find out if she has enough husbands yet.)



HEX 4011

This area is mostly swamps. Travel ranges from "challenging" to "not possible". By Imperial decree, the main roads of a fief are to be kept usable but this is the farthest edge of the Province of Parikána and they have fallen into disuse. There is a long steady drizzle season, then a light mist and drizzle season. In the absence of stone, some places have roads made of half-meter chunks of logs set upright. Most of the transportation of goods is done upon human legs.

The few farms here are generally water-loving Yáfa grain. Groves of sweet dark blue Díél plums also provide significant nourishment. Dmí roots do fairly well here- but the sour soil

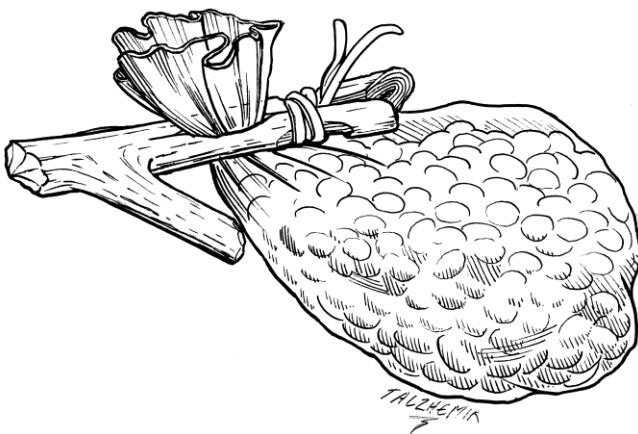
lends the sugar syrup a stinky off taste. Residents are used to it and do not mind, but it renders the stuff unsaleable elsewhere.

Travel off-road brings unique hazards. Crustaceans with a single spike atop their shell lurk in trail mud like living caltrops. The fordable points in murky streams are the favorite places for trappers to set Chlén-hide foot traps. Saw-toothed plants of obsidian sharpness lacerate the calves. Festoons of vines with droplets of a blister-causing oil hang at face-level. It can be nightmarish, and yet, with many sites undiscovered and unplundered, the rewards can be great.

The humidity in this Large Hex is such that it is extremely hard to start a fire using typical mundane methods. There is a bracket fungus with triangular dark reddish markings called Oqóq that is used for quick firestarting.

The Handy Oqóq Fungus

It grows solely on dead Ssár trees, especially those in clearings that have been struck by lightning. Kept dry, it will catch a spark and turn it to an ember immediately. If wetted, it loses this property.



In the Swamps of Ksárul, supplies are often kept dry by storing them in bladders held shut with a twig clip and a bit of twine.

Bladders

One of the most useful items one can bring here is the thoroughly cleaned bladders of various creatures. They are kept shut by a little hook-shaped bit of wood, with ends split such that they can be tied off around the bladder's bunched mouth. These can keep the parched and cracked Dná grain, Oqóq fungus chunks, narcotic powders, dried Hmélu jerky, and so on, safely dry. A colloquial phrase at the Fortress of the Powders (4011.IF) declares something excellent or valuable to be "better than a bladder full of bladders," referring to the capacious bladder of a Chlén beast.

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksárul')

Fortress of the Powders (4011.IF) Part of the path that leads here is a raised road formed of meter-long cylindrical pieces of logs pressed into the mud as cobbles. At the end of that road is a clearing with eight small towers arranged in a large symmetrical oval. These were once connected by walls which sank into the moist ground long

ago. It is also said that the towers were once much bigger, but their bases have also been consumed by the swamps.

The area between the towers is a collection of little clanhouses built on many stubby wooden stilts, in the Kurtáni building style. Between them is a marketplace of wooden platforms. At its edges are small wooden shops with three walls and one side open towards the middle of this plank plaza. Foods and powders for sale are usually contained in little translucent oblong bladders hung from rods or ropes by wooden hooks.

Raggúgje Bugs

Some Hehecháru catch the harmless omnivorous Raggúgje Bugs, bringing them for trade to the Fortress of the Powders in wicker pokes. These are crustaceans that vaguely resemble earthly isopods (such as the common pill bug). They grow to up to the size of a shoe sole, but half again as wide. They look and taste not unlike lobster tails when cooked, and some humans find them a delicacy. They are supposedly at their best if fed a last meal of the skins of Dlél plums, left over from pressing wine, mixed with Dná grain and just a little salt.

The Tale of Eyes-In-The-Night

This story is sometimes told as a salve to boredom. In Mekú, to the south, several dozen lowly guards were accused of tomb-robbery. They fled northeast, into the Swamps of Ksárul, into the neighboring province of Parikána, where they would not be pursued. They fell to various hazards (this story is sometimes stretched out by describing the ways they died). Three survivors made it to the Fortress of the Powders. They claimed that they had been attacked by humanoids with eyes like shiny yellow mirrors, faces like cats, tails, and backswept pointed ears.

Narcotic Gardens (4011.NN) From the Sákbe Road, pastel-colored beard mosses can be seen overgrowing the ruins of an enormous villa and its surrounding outbuildings. The festooned buildings and branches add to a sense that this is a place of repose. All that remains of the enormous statuary are a few enigmatic foliage-obscured forms.

During the time of the Priest-Kings, this was a prison, with "guests" kept in cages. Legends say that these captives were kept drowsy by the aroma of the flowers growing here. Today, this area belongs to the Temple of Ksárul. Below the Sákbe Road, several prominent stelae loom. They are engraved with the following message: "This land belongs to the Temple of Lord Ksárul Most Mighty. Traveler, stay away." Those who do not heed the warnings of the initial pylons will encounter a second line of them, which read as follows: "To

pass beyond this point is to give oneself up to Lord Ksáru forever." There does not appear to be a shrine or temple here, but, of course, who could know for sure?

Péchainu's Ridge (4011.JI) A few Hehegánu (or "First Ones") once lived peacefully between here and the Sákbe Road. They sold Oqóq fungus near a stone basin between roofs for collecting rainwater for humans to drink. (See the text box for Oqóq Fungus at Large Hex 4011.) None of those homely round-headed grey creatures has been seen here in generations, but they were apparently responsible wildcrafters, as there are quite a few Oqóq nodules on the Ssár trees.

There are also a number of gravestones with a stylized symbol of a slender snake. Apparently, walking about with one's eyes upon the dead branches overhead is a good way to nearly step on, and get bitten by, the little venomous Alásh serpent.

Péchainu's Ridge is mentioned in the text box Ókha's Talking Cat under the Stream of Zalyssá (4011.189).

Stream of Zalyssá (4011.PF) This is one of the rare dependable waterways that wends its way through the Swamps of Ksáru. It is home to many a water-dwelling terror.

The murky brownish-green stream has a nickname: "Lady with No Boundaries". This alludes to the fact that instead of shores, it has bands of shallows and soggy marsh that extend for miles. There are only a few stops where one might step off a moored barge onto a walkable place. One raised with its rhythmically buzzing, hissing, chirping, and screeching life forms might find its "music" soothing. Others might find it very difficult to sleep.

There is a loose community of members of the Nighted Tower Clan (Very Low; based in Púrdimal) who pole small rafts along the river. To offset their losses to predators, they encourage large families. They are worshippers of the Dark Trinity (Sárku, Hrū'ū, and Ksáru). They tend to have a very dark sense of humor that outsiders may have difficulty appreciating. They also have a superstition that the names of Lord Vimúhla and his Cohort Chiténg must not be directly named, only referred to by flattering titles and euphemisms.

Ókha's Talking Cat

An odd tale may be heard along the nearby Sákbe Road and along the Stream of Zalyssá. Years ago, Ókha, a scholar in search of a lost library, led his entourage into the Swamps. He received a dire leg wound from the claw of an Étla-crab. Those he had hired to be his guides and guards carried him for four days. When they were attacked by several robed Qól, they abandoned him. He was saved by a little humanoid creature. He described it

as lithe, with cat-like face, a long tail, and striped fur that made it difficult to see in the dappled shadows. Its eyes flashed reflective yellowish-white in the dark. He dubbed it a "Tiúnyu", combining the word for 'cat' and 'Rényu' (the genetically-modified intelligent biped of dog heritage). It returned with him to a camp at Péchainu's Ridge, but grew sickly, and, after two months, fled back into the wilds.

Tiúnyu (.9)

Wandering: 95%, 1/2/3 Lair: 5%, 9/12/15

PHYS: 9	DEFT: 11	SEMI: 12
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: +1
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 7 ground	
Defenses:	Melee: 4	Missile: 4
Armor: 1/0	Hits: 7	Energy: 10

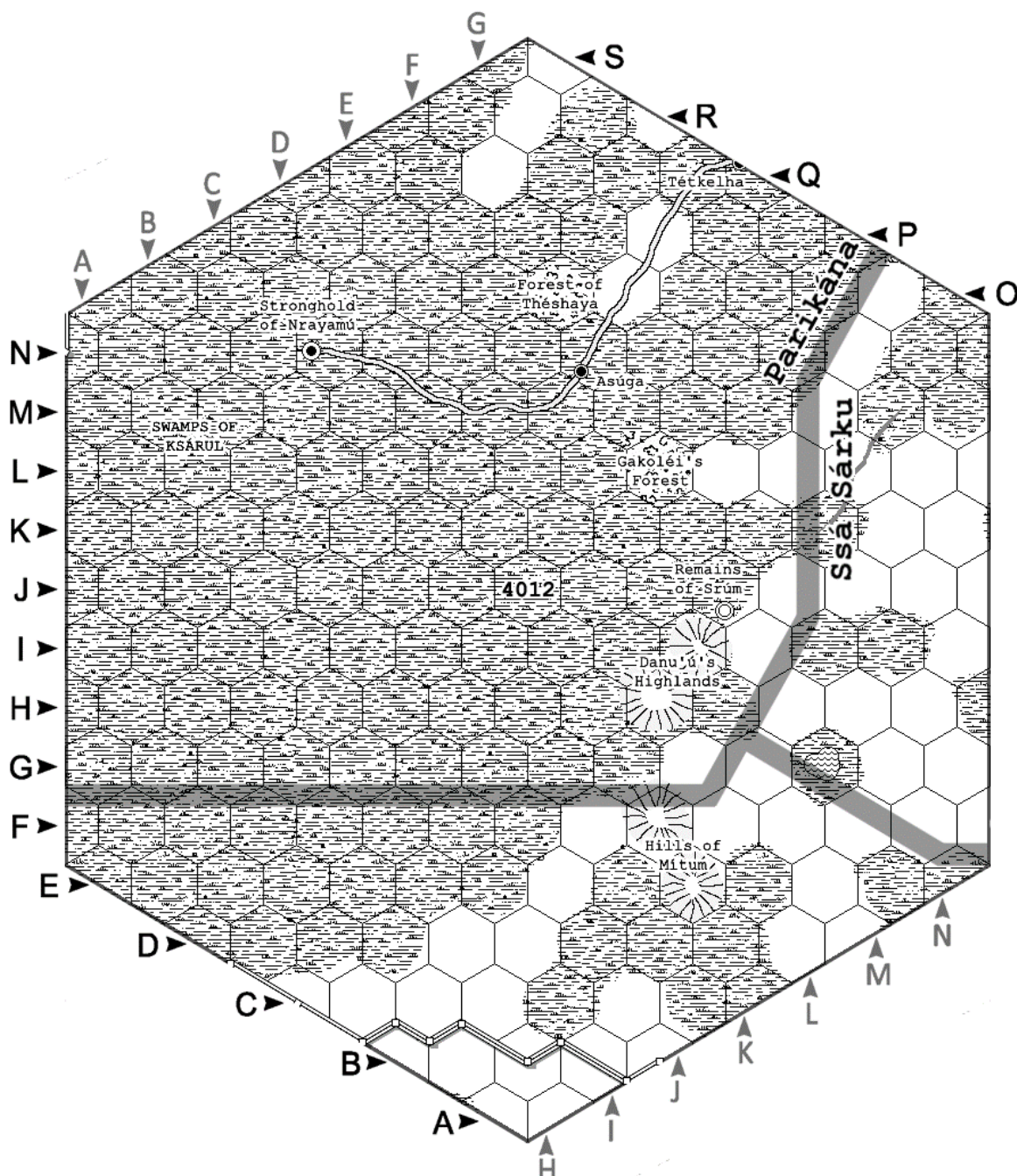
Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Claw	15-	2/3/4	

Other Abilities:

Camouflage: There is an additional -2 difficulty penalty to see a Tiúnyu when it is in shadow



The scholar Ókha was rescued by what he called a Tiúnyu. Was this cat-like biped some whim of the ancients? Could it perhaps have come from another plane?



HEX 4012

This is a backwater of the Province of Parikána, and it is filled with wooded swamps. Many places are so overgrown and misty that some natives have never even seen the full sun. These places are very hot and sweaty, even by tropical Téकुmel standards. Küni birds are very unlikely to be found in this area. The worship of Lord Ksáruk dominates; the worship of Ladies Avánthe and Dlamélish are also strong. The deeper into the swamps one goes, the more likely the Khéshchal birds have dark blue to dark indigo feathers.

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáruk')

The Large Hex is home to the eccentric Fief of Nrayamú, which touches upon no Sáकुbe Road. All civic areas and clanhouses are built on posts to keep above the wet ground. Adults tend to stay within eyeshot of at least two others at all times. Both hunting and farming are exquisitely difficult here. People often have only the barest minimum to eat. To the west of the Stronghold of Nrayamú, the remains of a large causeway road were swallowed up centuries ago.

In the Fief of Nrayamú, arranged marriages remain the norm just as elsewhere in the Empire of Tsolyánu. However, group sex is also extolled as a grand pastime. From Chumé to the Stronghold of Nrayamú, public gardens for gentle and

friendly erotic congress are built near the standard Hirilákte Arenas. (Though children are sent off to play when their elders go to the park to make love, they are familiar with the "facts of life" for humans from a very early age and they understand these activities are not for little ones.)

On a Tight Leash

It is usual throughout the Empire for the clanhouse families to take part in raising children. That is even more true here. In the Fief of Nrayamú, children are kept very close, not allowed out of sight of adults, and not allowed out of the clanhouse unless at a grown-up's side. The buildings sprawl, so they do have a bit of room to move about. "Going outside to play" is not a normal concept for most of them. The little ones are doted upon- and fed constantly. Adults are typically wiry, with ribs showing, but children must grow plump and stout. The clan's honor demands it.

The children of Karakán-worshipping clans have a slightly different role: they are equipped with little spears and javelins, and taught that they are to protect the other kids. They are resourceful, fashioning miniature outfits of armor out of pieces of giant insect chitin for themselves. They go skirmishing about the clanhouse, throwing play-javelins tipped with colored powders at each other between the platforms.

Tólgef Moss

A valuable dye is produced from a plant gathered here. It has a round pompom-like shape; it is light green, rubbery, growing to the size of a bushel basket. (Technically, it is a lichen.) Its color begins as a pink stain. Two or three washings in rustic soaps cause the color to turn a rich dark purple. Tólgef Moss is accepted as an offering at the shrines of the Gods Hrü'ü, Ksárul, and Sárku.

Unguents and Salves

Many clanhouses here are devoted to producing health-care products. There are flower extracts for perfuming bath products, lotions for curing fungal infections, powders that cause rain to bead up and run off one's hair and skin, and so on. The most important is insect repellent products, without which, life here would be unbearable.

The Black Stone Guideposts

During the reign of Emperor Trákonel I, all roads in this region were required to be clearly marked. The Imperial edict apparently came about because some favored bureaucrat (his name was Jihómikai) had once gotten lost here. Many arguments were given by the provincial government why this ought not to be done, including one that claimed this made things too convenient for an invading army and another that it went against a doctrine of the temple of Lord Ksárul. These were all overruled. To prevent using loopholes in the letter of the law, specifications were given about the type of stone, the size and color of the text (white upon black), the language (modern Tsolyáni), height, width, and other details. It was the roads themselves that would not cooperate. Annual flooding and mudslides often make it necessary to add in a detour, or even relocate a stretch. Thus, the signposts are occasionally incorrect. They are seldom fixed. Locals wryly observe that the edict does not require these posts to be accurate.

Hills of Mítum (4012.FK) These are mostly bare hills with a few sparse patches of plants here and there. Hú bats come pouring forth by the thousands each night, here. At dawn they return to roost in the many caves. An enormous local flying predator, the Mredú', soars in the skies. Küni birds brought to this area may refuse to leave the side of their handler in fear, while Hláka expend great effort not to come here in the first place. Humans would probably stay away if it were not for persistent rumors of caves full of vast treasures.

Mredín, the Befouler

A Mredín is a cat-sized insect-like creature that flies in swarms, preying on Hú bats. A head with a pointy segmented snout, four to nine iridescent wings, and a long tail give it a silhouette reminiscent of an earthly mosquito. It attacks with its pincer tail. It gets its sobriquet, "Befouler", from the way carcasses it contacted turn to slime. Wounds it inflicts appear to heal normally, but then develop a nasty infection suddenly, days later, often leading to amputation or death.

Mredú', the Harvester

Local people may warn the traveler not to light a cooking fire, for such will draw a dreaded creature, the Mredú'. It is an enormous version of the Mredín. Its approach is always heralded by the low thrumming of its blurry wings. It usually hunts at night, striking with terrifying speed, its flexible tail seizing up a person with two huge

claws (one rigid and fixed, the other like a "thumb"). It has no eyes, just myriad pits on its underside with which it "sees" heat. It may try to find a safe place to land and eat, or it may head straight back to its lair. It can maintain its grip on its prey for hours until it is hungry again. If a Mredú' was unsuccessful in hunting, it will place itself near a Hú bat cave around sunrise, eating hundreds of them. This fallback strategy is probably what limits it to this area. (This creature may be part of the original fauna of Tékmel).

Mredú' (1.4)

Wandering: 50%, 3/5/7 Lair: 50%, 5/7/9

PHYS: 11	DEFT: 10	INST: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: -1
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 6 ground, 16 flight	
Defenses:	Melee: 1	Missile: 1 Magic: -1
Armor: 1/0	Hits: 14	Energy: 10

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Claw-Tail	14-	4/6/8	Infection (see below)
Grapple	16-	Crush	

Other Abilities:

Infection: After 5/7/9 days, a target who took damage develops an infection which does 0/1/2 damage per day until it is cured

Noisy Flight: A Mredú' can't surprise any opponent which can hear

Danu'ú's Highlands (4012.HJ) Sometimes these three upswept pointy hills are a purplish-blue color, and sometimes they are dark greenish blue. Long vertical gullies form dark streaks down their sides. A thin wisp of blackish smoke drifts continuously out the tip of the shortest one, confirming their identity as little volcanoes.

Hlíng of Danu'ú

The nearby clear terrain is fed by run-off, and there are scattered clanhouses of Hlíng-seed growers. The Hlíng cultivar of this small area is said to be the finest in the Kúrt Hills. Proximity to the volcanoes furthers this spicy seed's unique flavor. The growers carry their wares to the village of Úrshi to the east. Nearly all of the crop is already spoken-for: it will be carried directly to Avanthár. These high-class Hlíng merchants have the wealth to hire guards of high caliber to escort their prestigious cargo.

Remains of Srúm (4012.JK) According to a report filed amongst Imperial records four centuries ago, there was nothing at this site but a nondescript hill that had always been called "Srúm". Over the years, rain washed the dirt away, revealing rubble. Upon closer inspection, it was realized that this was a ruin of some ancient lost village, with passages made by hewing into stone. The local fiefholder

excavated, and found the roofless remains of a building that appeared to have no doors, only windows. Further scrutiny revealed that the openings close to the pebble-tiled floors were found to be doors. The investigation was reluctantly abandoned. Whoever lived here, they were smaller people, similar in stature to the Ninínyal and Tinalíya, and it would take a group of young children or small non-humans to proceed further. They were definitely not willing to risk the children.

Gakoléi's Forest (4012.LJ) Gapúl and other trees thrive here. The place has a dire reputation, as the home of an evil wizard and his child-stealing monster, the Basket Demon.

The Gakoléi

According to local folklore, this was a large wicker figure brought to life by Painted Dlí'ú'e, a vengeful villain who uses a bitter salve that stains him burgundy. The Gakoléi, or "Basket Demon", steals children, putting them in the cage of its midsection. Its broad bushy feet leave no tracks. The Gakoléi and its maker are eventually captured, and set ablaze by Vimúhla-revering heroes. The story is celebrated every few years at a happy fire festival in Asúga (4012.NI). They build an effigy roughly twice human height, its hair a wild array of twigs, its face rectangular, with just two holes where the eyes should be. Some modern scholars of magic may find the notion of spells accomplished by applying magical ointment rustic, and even absurd. Others are still searching for clues to the composition of that ointment, quite sure it is some kind of enhancer or granter of psychic power or mental acuity.

Stronghold of Nrayamú (4012.NE) This is the seat of the fief. To reach it, one journeys westwards along a stone causeway between trees and vines so dense as to feel like a tunnel. Then, up ahead, a hill breaks through the canopy to sunlight. The Stronghold is a lonely keep made of mottled stone and high Tíu wood timbers surrounded by dozens of small clanhouses and little terraced farms. For most of the year it drizzles softly, and the water is caught in reservoirs. Little Yáfa paddies with covered walkways functioning as borders only provide a small portion of the grain needed for all the people here. The village that surrounds the Stronghold uses the same rice-growing system as Chumé (see the Paddies of Nrayamú at 4113.DF).

In most places, fiefs are more administrative formalities (like district zone codes for the purpose of mail deliveries). Here in this part of the Swamps of Ksárul, however, those who live in the Fief of Nrayamú have a stronger sense of identification with it. There is a seal of Nrayamú, a song to praise its dangerous natural beauty, and so on.

The Dark Water-Lily

Sometimes people come here to personally deliver an oath of allegiance to Lady Kasíl hiFilídz (High Lineage), of the Iron Helm Clan (High Status), nicknamed the Dark Water-lily. She is fifteen, of average looks, but with a rare talent for making others feel good about themselves. The real power is shared by her elders, with Lady Kasíl as just an oddly popular figurehead. She is worshipper of Lady Dlamélish. By arrangement of her elders, she is engaged to two men of other prestigious lineages within her clan. One (Jélan hiŠsremí) is a follower of Lord Ksárul, the other (Árishya hiTarkúyon), a follower of Lord Hrű'ü.

Hésal-Churéng, a Most Precious Flower

The Stronghold of Nrayamú is the sole known source of Hésal liqueur. It comes from the Hésal-Churéng, an exotic bromeliad with thick leathery dark green leaves tipped with orange. Though knowledge of its origins are lost, it was engineered from the earthly pineapple. A glistening clear nectar forms within the center of the blossom. It is said that Hésal-Churéng stimulates the feeling of being in love. (Others would say, "simulates".) The art of growing Hésal-Churéng plants is a jealously guarded proprietary trade secret of the Iron Helm Clan.

Each plant only flowers once every nineteen years. There are three strains and they are out of synchronization most of the time. Its blossoms are very showy, with turquoise petals about a golden-orange center. These blossoms are collected to make the rare Hésal liqueur.

Hésal liqueur has other associations beyond the erotic and the romantic. For instance, in some port cities, it is traditionally used to celebrate the forming a new ship's crew. Slipped into a prospective customer's drink, it is said to make them more trusting. A remedy for trembling hands is also made with this liquid.

There is also a counterfeit, the closely-related Hésal-Jámudan. Its flavor is extremely close to that of the Hésal-Churéng, but its nectar is yellowish, and it lacks any effect besides offering a rich and pleasant fruity flavor.

Village of Asúga (4012.NI) Clanhouses here are low and broad. Those that are more Change-oriented are arrayed at the western end and those that are more Stability-oriented clanhouses are on the east.

The roofs channel the water into storage pools. North of the main road at the center, there is a fully-roofed Hirilákte arena and, beyond this, a tranquil garden with roofed and trellised platforms for lovers' trysts and casual orgies. The

marketplace has many items, such as rare herbs, hanging in bladders. While, on the surface, this place appears to be under the ecumenical management of many clans, it is those who serve the god Ksárul who are really in charge.

The Festival of the Basket Demon

There is a local legendary monster known as the Gakoléi. Its general story is commemorated each year, culminating in the joyous burning of its effigy. (For more information about the Gakoléi, see the entry for the Gakoléi's Forest, 4012.LJ.)

Asúga's Hidden Sorrow

Behind the smiling and happy-go-lucky mood, the village has its troubles. Perhaps two or three times a century, Asúga is struck by a plague of Mredín, insect-like creatures, probably from the Hills of Mítum. Each time, the people hide until the Mredín have eaten their victims, and fly off. Typically, only half the village survives. It has been 77 years since their last appearance here. There is a standing reward for information that would put a stop to these creatures' predations. (See the text box for Mredín the Befouler, at 4012.FK).

Forest of Théshaya (4012.OH) By ancient treaty, this land is under the auspices of the Temple of Dilinála. Here, no one may harm a Khéshchal bird. They are protected by the Sisters of Théchu: a little order of longbow-wielding priestesses. The women live in small groups in a number of gauze-walled tree houses throughout this Small Hex. They drive off any creature that threatens the local birds with a variety of specialized arrows tipped with bulbs of non-lethal materials. To support themselves, they bring the valuable iridescent Khéshchal feathers east and then south to Asúga to trade. Could there be truth to the rumor that the birds, themselves, bring feathers to the ladies?

Those of a Different Feather

Birds are non-native to Téकुmel, having been brought by settlers long ago. Like the Kűni, the Khéshchal is semi-intelligent. It can not be tamed; it will not live in a cage or be tethered by a leg, etc. Khéshchals are not known to talk, but they have been known to mimic the calls of other creatures. There are even stories of these birds leading dangerous beasts to slay hunters.

Traditionally, the beautiful Khéshchal with its distinctive S-shaped feathers is regarded with respect. It is an icon of honor, nobility, and prestige. These plumes can be collected by "soft hunters", archers with long arrows

tipped with something sticky. The tail feathers these hunters cut off eventually regrow; it is just the birds' dignity that is wounded. Soft hunters may use an adhesive glop for the arrows that is edible, tasty, even mildly euphoric. Nibbling it off is a strange sort of treat, almost an apology. A human feather-stealer may be forgiven. Maybe.

The Khéshchals of the swamp lands in the area surrounding where the Provinces of Parikána, Ssá Sárku, and Mekú meet are predominantly blue to very dark blue. This is the result of followers of Ksáru! surreptitiously killing those that were not.

The Sisters of Théchu were originally just soft hunters gathering feathers to support themselves. Birds fleeing the Ksáru!-worshipping hunters found sanctuary in the Forest. Eventually, the Khéshchals of Thésaya learned to trust the Sisters of Théchu. This led to Khéshchals with light to white plumage in that forest. Those who seek the boon of a few particularly fine feathers may be sent on some kindness-oriented quest in a nearby village.

Village of Tétkelha (4012.QK) This village upholds an aesthetic of business-like efficiency. Status is still conveyed visually, but the wealthy are typically very conservative in

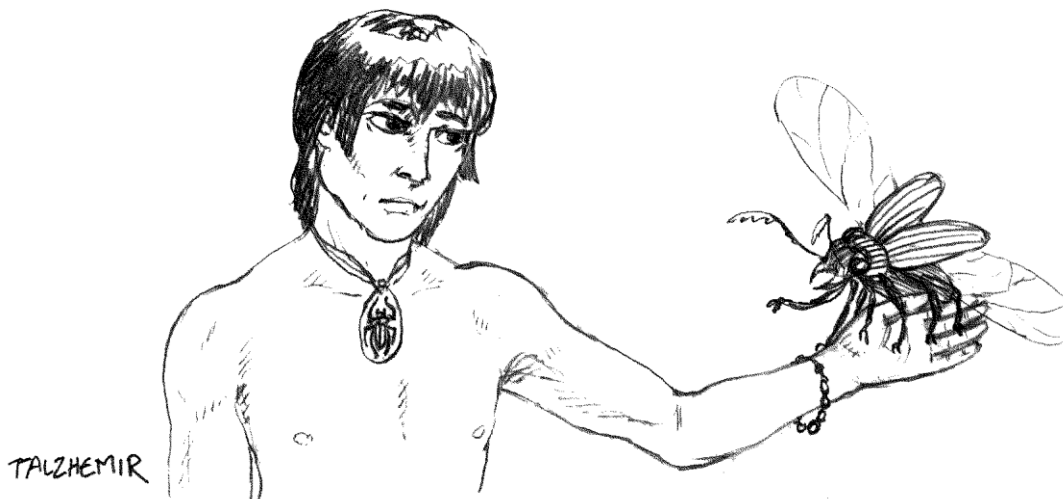
their displays of wealth. Clanhouses have simple well-appointed conference rooms. Drawing slates and chalk are readily available.

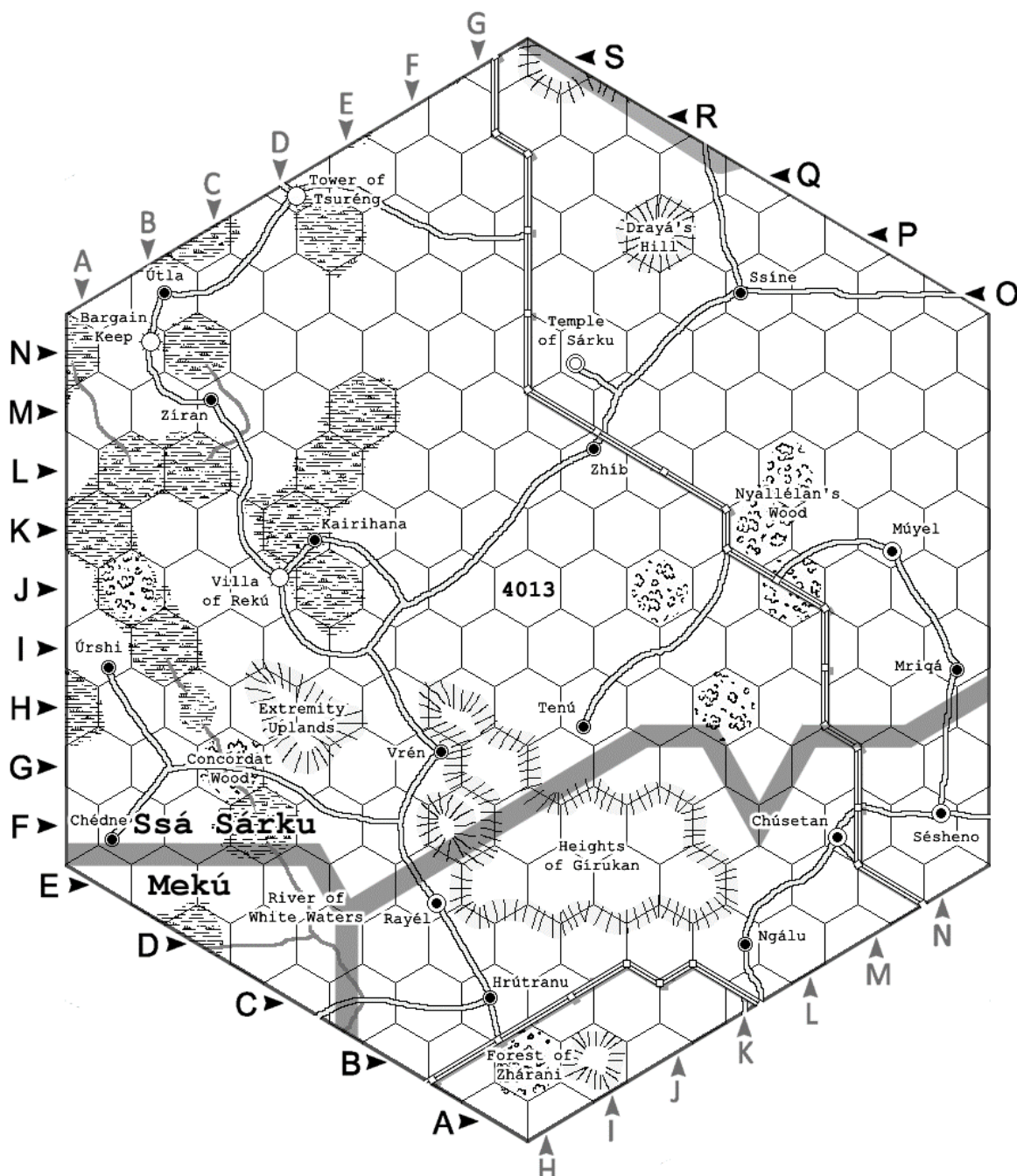
Youngsters here are groomed to join the legions of the Empire sponsored by the Temple of Grugánu. They eat various foods said to promote growth. Only the biggest and tallest youths are chosen for service. Those passed over may become boater-guards against swamp predators.

The schools for children here are the best in the fief, more generalized 'academic/temple' than specialized 'profession/clanhouse' education. Many paths radiate out from the village; Tétkelha uses the same rice-growing system as Chumé (see the Paddies of Nrayamú at 4113.DF).

The Shrine of Tétkelha

Young acolytes of the temple of Lord Ksáru! are traditionally given a riddle. There are supposedly three Küni birds, Tét, Kél, and Há. One always lies, one always tells the truth, and one squawks a random reply. There actually is a 'Shrine of Tétkelha', and the puzzle, if solved, gives a clue to the correct location of the Shrine (either to the north, west, or south of the village).





HEX 4013

From the rocky hills of the east to deep swamps in the west, the land drops dramatically. The Sákbe Road is inconsistent, its high side sometimes facing sunrise, and sometimes sunset. At first, it kept rival warlords loyal to the gods Ksarul and Sárku apart. Eventually, though, the forces of Lord Sárku prevailed, and the borders of Ssá Sárku surged west to what they are today.

The area west of this Sákbe is dotted with many lakes and ponds. A layer of bright green Káika-weed covers them. The rare herders of Hmá and Hmélu wander this region, taking their chances against the predators. Their loyalty tends

westwards, towards the Fief of Rekú, because they receive better treatment. In the Fief of Múyel, it was typical for nobles to simply demand and take their livestock.

Káika Flocks on Foot

A local breed of Káika bird, colored brown, with buff chest and black heads, migrates each year through this Large Hex. In several large groups, they waddle from north to south at the close of the harvest season, and return northwards again during the spring. They stay close

to the Sákbe Road. The great flocks are the official property of the High Princeps of the Temple of Sárku.

In fall, when they reach the region of the temple (located at 4013.NI), one in five hens and four in five drakes are rounded up. Out of sight of the others, these are slaughtered, salted, and carried to the City of Sárku. The dry season cull is a great annual feast for those of High status and above.

The avian survivors are welcomed in Chúsetan (4013.FM), where the locals like to feed them for fun. Concerned that Foundationist rebels will help themselves, the Temple of Sárku is putting members of the (Very Low Status) Nighted Tower Clan to work escorting the Káika. The Nighted Tower members are vaguely discontented with having to protect the animals with no promise of a share in the meat later.

(See also 'About the Kurtáni Foundationists')
(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')

Forest of Zhárani (4013.BH) This was once considered the northernmost point of the Kúrt Hills. The trees extended well over the high hill to the east (4013.BI). Lost amidst the trees, there are blocks of white stone roughly three meters (nine feet) tall, with fragments of inscriptions upon them in a mysterious script called Thu'úsa, or "Ladder Writing". During the reign of Empress Vayúma Sú, a temple to Lord Hnálla was built atop the hill. When her daughter Sháira Sú signed a treaty with the hierophants of Lord Sárku, its stones were carried away here and buried, leaving just a sundial to mark the spot where it had been.

Village of Hnútranu (4013.CG) Meat of an amphibian from the River of the White Waters, the N'dlák, is plentiful here. It is salted, smoked and sold. Despite the Province law that all brown Káika with black heads are the property of the Temple of Sárku, a good quantity of smoked and salted Káika duck is also exported. (With the proper 'inducements', it can be clearly seen that these Káika are featherless and headless, and therefore exempt from the rule.) Sárku-worshipping aristocrats once ruled this village with an iron fist. They forbade the eating of Káika meat, telling the peasants that this was a religious doctrine. The matter was brought to the ecclesiastical court in the town of Tsurú, who declared it a violation of the Concordat to impose this rule upon those of other sects.

Village of Ngálu (4013.DK) This is a large village, an incipient town mainly made up of grain-farming peasants. The local women observe a taboo against showing one's shoulders, and many of the men find bare shoulders on a woman incredibly exciting. Chlén-hide shoulder wear is the norm for both sexes. How this came about, nobody really knows.

River of White Waters (4013.ED) The name of this body of water does not speak of fast-moving rapids. Rather, it describes a milky color as it sluggishly meanders between regions of marsh. Handy tubular Nál reeds (good for light arrows) grow in boat-blocking thickets that reach three and four man-heights. Sometimes goods are brought along this way by floating barges pulled by wading Chlén beasts, their mouths muzzled to prevent them from eating foliage that would make them extremely ill. The creatures will not drink the water. They are very slow, but they leave deep trails that canoes with a very shallow draft can be poled through.

Town of Rayél (4013.EF) Built on a low plateau overlooking fields to the west, most of the highest roofs are colored dark brown, while lower ones tend to pale green patina. They are covered in square sheets of beaten copper, arranged like diamond scales. Wealthy plantation owners dominate the town. Most of the surrounding farm land here belongs either to the Temple of Sárku, or to clans loyal to Sárku. Entertainments are plentiful here, notably, the Hirilákte Arena under the auspices of the Temple of Hríháyal, and competing brothels of the Temples of Avánthe and Dlamélísh. The Temple of Thúmis runs the School of the Kitchen God. Other libraries may hold information about demons, ancient artifacts and the lore of other Planes, but theirs is perhaps the greatest collection of tested and annotated recipes.

Village of Chédne (4013.FB) This is a nondescript, religiously eclectic village. It is a sort of sister village to Úrshi (4013.IE) to the north. During the rainy season, when the farmers have little to do, they take their little canoes and, as a lightly-armed group, pole their way to Úrshi.

The Egg Woman

It is said that there was once a woman here who laid an egg. Her husband was a traveling merchant who either abandoned her, or was killed. He had at least left the clan a handsome sum for her upkeep. The egg hatched into a small but eventually perfectly normal son. Nothing else is known about the enigmatic "Egg Woman of Chédne" or her child.

Heights of Gírukan (4013.FI) Each year, in the winter, these cliff-edged hills are host to many brown black-headed Káika birds. They converge on foot and take up nests, squabbling loudly over the best spots. They eat mainly a prolific granular light green weed that floats on puddles between the rocks. (This weed is partly oil inside, and humans find it nourishing, too.) By spring, the whole area has a throat-burning reek from the droppings, and they begin the march northwards in the rain, the hens followed by neat queues of golden-yellow ducklings.

Town of Chúsetan (4013.FM) This is the seat of the fief. Long ago, these were villages that broke away from the fief of Kéttuku'une during the subjugation of Kúrtur. Chúsetan's Hetman, a member of the (Medium Status) Green Bough Clan, claimed that his local rank as an important Kurtáni chieftain entitled him to the title of Páchukoi ("Lord"). As this split the fief in two, the Tsolyáni opportunistically backed his demand. If the aristocrats of Kéttuku'une had not been strictly endogamous (not to mention outraged) they might have employed clever intermarriage to reunite the original fief, in power if not in name.

Nákome Raiders

The villages of Qáqtla and Thár have complained of being attacked by mysterious hordes of "nákome raiders": typically, groups of around 50 unarmed individuals looking like beggars, who rushed forwards with baskets, beat the drivers with their fists, stripped Chlén carts of their cargo, and then scattered. The people of the fief are baffled and angry. Some assume that this is the work of Kurtáni Foundationists.

(See also 'About the Kurtáni Foundationists')

Town of Sésheno (4013.FN) This place is the home of a number of Sárku-worshipping clans. Their squat dark clanhouses stand shoulder-to-shoulder along a ridge, looming over the town. There is a large slum inhabited by Stability-worshipping clans. Three years in a row, now, a number of Kurtáni have arrived with food and tools, significantly relieving the poverty. Yet, when the town authorities come to investigate, the alleged sacks of grain and large Chlén-hide kitchen knives are nowhere to be found. The residents give useless and conflicting accounts of the details of the clothing of the Kurtáni that could identify their village of origin. There are mutterings that this is the work of the Kurtáni Foundationists.

(See also 'About the Kurtáni Foundationists')

Concordat Wood (4013.GC) This is a forest dominated by Gapúl trees many meters across. Local history relates that here the Princes of the City of Sárku forced Empress Sháira Sú and the Hierophants of the Temples of Thúmís and Hnálla to call a truce in A.S. 975 to end a long civil war brought on by her attempted invasion. At that time, it was a bare plain amidst a vast battlefield, divided by the River of White Waters. From many Tsán away, it could be seen that the Empress's camp was lit to a pure white glow, while roiling darkness hovered above the other side. The treaty made here is notable for strengthening the Concordat.

Village of Vrán (4013.GF) This is a collection of Very Low to Low clanhouses. Their primary occupation is making soft comfortable sheer shirts for women out of bark brought out of the forests to the south. The process involves beating the bark with clubs; it is very noisy. Merchants who pass through regularly know better than to camp somewhere besides the roofed platforms; they make camp well outside of town (to the north and south). There are no good accommodations for those of higher station in the village. High-status people of other clans have claimed guesting rights many times, an annoyance their social lessers could do little to avoid. Now, if necessary, the peasants ritually pretend to vacate a cottage built for the purpose, apologizing obsequiously for its squalor with a rehearsed speech. The more considerate aristocrats are, the less likely they are to be "accidentally" awakened by the sound of a couple hundred clubs smacking Dáichu into cloth well before the sun has risen.

Village of Tenú (4013.HI) The fields here produce well, and stands of Dlél plums grow along the road to the east. The village is isolated and has little wealth, so traders rarely visit. Inhabitants must go down the road to the village of Zhíb (4013.LI) or the town of Múyel (4013.KJ) if they need Chlén-hide goods. In the hills to the southwest (the Heights of Gírukan, 4013.FI) there are places where bird dung accumulates and they "mine" this in the summer to spread on the land (a chore for those of the Clan of the Wicker Image).

Extremity Uplands (4013.HN) Many clans make forays here to obtain a durable yet carveable stone whose local name is "Guyozél". It mainly comes in bluish-purple, but patches of dark blood red, dark bluish gray, dark forest green, yellowish gray-green, and creamy tan also occur, as do swirled combinations. While masons cut neat slabs and blocks out of the quarries, their Chlén beasts gorge themselves on the lush foliage. Guyozél is used as practice material for high cartography. By far, though, its most prominent use is elaborate sarcophagi, and for this reason, the road to Zhíb (4013.LI) is always in excellent repair.

Clan Bowls

Throughout the Province of Paríkána, one of the favorite uses for Guyozél is "clan bowls", cookers made of one meter (one yard) roughly cubical blocks with a bowl-like depression cut out of the top. A special X or Y shaped fire pot, of clay or copper, is placed in the center, and various dishes are prepared in the adjoining depressions. Sometimes the word "Guyozél" is used to describe such a cooker in the Province of Khósa, though it may be of mud or clay. In general, the people of the Province of Kúrtur have no use for such a burdensome thing.

Village of Úrshi (4013.IE) This is a sort of sister village to Chédne to the south (4013.FB). During the rainy season, clancousins come paddling up the flooded valley to visit. The women gather to gossip and to plait straw into bundles. Various goods are moved by binding these straw bundles around them, as floats, then towing them on ropes between two raised paths flanking a canal.

Village of Mriqá (4013.IN) Mriqá is built upon the western slopes of a long and large hill. At the highest extents are the copper-roofed clanhouses of the village's Sárku-oriented families. The farms of this place are situated upon terraces, arranged in slender north-south strips, giving the hills a striped appearance. Káo squash vines share trellis-space with old Nálum vines for table fruit. There are also many dark, upright, roughly coffin-shaped boxes for drying both.

Villa of Rekú (4013.JD) This is the seat of the fief. Its early wealth is from beautiful stone used for making ovens and coffins (see the text box for Guyozél under Extremity Uplands, 4013.HN). One of the most magnificent examples of architecture from the early centuries of the Second Imperium has been preserved as the Villa of Rekú. Outside the Villa's walls (made of worn but colorful Guyozél) are clanhouses of exquisitely skilled stone crafters. They use grit and water poured into devices by slaves to do the fine carving.

The Deeper Rekú

Underworlds are scarce in this region of soft ground. The Villa of Rekú is built on a rare outcropping of stone, without which it would have sunk into the marsh long ago. Inhabitants are aware that the passages beneath the Villa go deep, but the only known entrance is in the basement of the Villa, sealed with a huge Guyozél door depicting some kind of puzzle, with precious stones for buttons.

Village of Kairihaná (4013.KD) Tall timbers hold up clanhouses that are seldom more than one floor in height. Roof-level bridges connect them to each other. The Hetman Gyerikh is a stodgy and stout follower of Lord Hnálla, who expects an organized and disciplined village, but during the rainy season he loosens up, enjoying cups of Nálum wine.

The Water-Lovers

Kairihaná is nicknamed, "the water-lovers' village". During the rainy season, the water around the farms exceeds a man-height. A brief festival ensues in which children are taught to swim, and youths dive off

platforms above a deep pool. A whimsical straw boat race is held between two traditional clanhouse groups, the Paddles and the Poles.

Town of Múyel (4013.KJ) This is the seat of the fief. Some sort of mildew darkens the roofs and walls. Most of the buildings are forever being cleaned or painted by men on ropes. There is an old prophecy that should this mildew overtake the town, then it will be swallowed up. On the northeast side are the clanhouses of the distillers. They turn Dmí-sugar and grain into spirits. It is used by prestigious physicians to clean wounds. Those who drink it go blind. It is Múyel's primary export.

Mysterious Sabotage

The dark mildew weakens wood over a period of a decade, and buildings whose timbers are not replaced eventually collapse. The town walls are scrubbed by the populous (Very Low Status) Gleaming Bowl Clan. Somehow, no matter how hard they work, the dark stains that afflict the town keep coming back. Some even dare to whisper that a secret society within the Temple of Lord Hrű'ü is responsible.

Nyallélan's Wood (4013.KK) Nourished by water that seeps in from the northeast and the north, this is a wholesome stand of tall trees, the thicket at the heart of patches of reeds interspersed with copses and meadows. Dense swarms of insects that pay no heed to various repellents form a humming, biting, stinging guard. Long ago, north of this area, an army of Stability worshippers force-marched worshippers of Change into the marshes and murdered them. A folktale says that at the height of the summer heat, one can hear their ghosts mourning, given a loud voice by the droning and whining noises of the insect clouds.

Village of Zhíb (4013.LI) This is a sleepy little Sákbe Road village. It is home to peasant clans that mainly give lip-service and tithes of grain to Sárku. It is situated such that one could begin at dawn, jog to reach the Temple of Sárku (4013.NI), explore for an hour or two, and hastily march back, arriving a few hours after sunset. True worshippers of this god of death prefer to be there at night. Fearful of ending up sacrifices or much worse, villagers of Zhíb will not go there in the dark.

Village of Zíran (4013.MC) During the wet season, this area is typically flooded and reachable only by small boats, broad with shallow drafts. After this, when the fields are very muddy, three or four farmers lay on their stomachs upon large wood sleds, planting seedlings while the contraption is dragged by a Chlén. On pain of death, the peasants of

Zíran are obligated to maintain the road between Bargain Keep (4013.NB) and the Villa of Rekú (4013.JD); it is a task that takes up a month or two of their time each year.

Bargain Keep (4013.NB) The 'keep' proper is a small building of gray stone with a drawbridge. It is surrounded by a moat that is filled half of the year. This is surrounded by eight small corner towers and high inwards-leaning walls between them. The 'bargain' of which this place's name speaks is the agreement that its owner must provide large quantities of clay and smashed stone. In dry times, hewn walkways, scaffolding, and ladders lead down. Several times a year, Chlén carts pull up to haul away material for building up this region's roads. A small amount of profit goes to the Temple of Durritlámish.

Undisclosed Favors

This is where many of the Phalanx of Lord Durritlámish of the Rotted Face (6th Imperial Medium Infantry) "serve". During the war with Yán Kór, it was posted to the City of Sárku at the behest of Prince Dhich'uné, in exchange for 'undisclosed favors'. Within the four years of Dhich'uné's reign as emperor, the priesthood of Durritlámish swelled its ranks with reanimated Tsolyáni veterans from this and other Sárku-serving legions. Currently, all undead of this legion are required to "guard" Bargain Keep. Listed on scrolls as 'sappers', they are being used as slave labor. Even though breaking rocks with picks and carrying them in baskets is what they might have normally done in a siege, this use of them would not sit well with many within the Temple of Durritlámish. From time to time, the human soldiers required to control them try to desert, fleeing into the swamps beyond in desperation. They find themselves doubly hunted, first, by the Empire, and second, by the Phalanx of Lord Durritlámish, which has its secrets to keep.

Temple of Sárku (4013.NI) This site appears to be an abandoned ruin. An almost maze-like graveyard surrounds it, a necropolis of mausoleums with inscriptions in different archaic scripts and eerie sculptures. There are tomb police; they keep themselves out of sight so as not to disrupt the atmosphere. At the center, the tallest of the temple's shattered remnants jut like dark broken fangs large enough to be seen from the Sákbe Road. Some say the best time to see it is by the light of the two full moons, in the cool of the night. There are, of course, many temples of Sárku; the formal name of this one is actually the High Sepulchre of Five Still Hearts.

Rumors in the marketplaces along the roads hint that there is more to it. Especially if the traveler follows a Change-oriented sect, a guide might request to be hired at a caravan-stop. This guide is, themselves, most often a worshipper of Sárku or his Cohort Durritlámish. The

prospective traveler is told of temple's antiquity, its desolate yet enduring beauty, and its indelible place in history. There is a folk-belief that touching the pedestal of a large statue in the graveyard known as the Mother of Memories grants a visitor improved mental acuity.

In addition to being a graveyard, the immediate area has also been a battlefield. The Empress Vayúma SÚ attempted to destroy this temple. Her daughter Sháira SÚ brought down much of the upper shrine but its foundation remains. Those who died defending it received great honors - but what exactly those "honors" were, is a private matter that outsiders can only guess at.

There are actually many rites still performed here, although not above ground. Only loyal devotees and higher clergy of the Temple of Sárku are taken below via discreet entrances in the surrounding necropolis. Some whisper that it is a repository of priceless funerary goods, all the sorts of things Lord Sárku decrees should remain interred and undisturbed.

The Mother of Memories

This is a locally famous sculpture of a monster with the overall form of a Dlaqó, a large carrion-eater, yet the face of a beautiful and matronly woman. She is called Driguásha; and she is a demon loyal to Durritlámish. Sometimes a follower of Sárku from the Kràà hills comes here on a pilgrimage, and may be found kneeling before the monument, whispering their lineage to it. (To actually call upon Driguásha for a boon would probably be the work of ritual priests of high Circle. No doubt such an endeavor is both costly and quite dangerous.)

Village of Útla (4013.OB) In spring, the land is hidden by sparkling light brown muddy water, typically up to a person's waist. The buildings here are built on numerous stilts of black Ssár wood, brought here from roughly 48 km (thirty miles) to the northwest.

Flatboats of Útla

Lightweight wood canoes, rather rectangular, with a very shallow draft, are made here, hewn with rock-weighted Chlén hide adzes. They are too large to be carried by a single person but two could manage. More commonly, they are towed over grass when it is too dry to pole them about. They are capable of carrying three (plus their cargo). Owners of a flatboat do not normally sell them because the wood to make them must be obtained over in the neighboring province of Parikána. A journey to acquire this only occurs every five or six years.

Village of Ssine (4013.OK) Broad and mazelike Ssine may really be a town by population, yet officially it remains a village. Streets are built over fetid canals that serve as sewers. Aristocrats primarily affiliated with Temples of Change rule, their dwellings rising high above a pervasive stink. Inducements flow freely; its alleys are rife with crime. Here, during the reign of Empress Vayúma Sú, devotees of Change were stripped of their lands and strangled, buried in a mass grave somewhere in a swamp north of the Forest of Nyallélan (4013.KK). Survivors of the purge secretly flowed into the village, organizing little gambling games and selling goods that “fell off the Chlén cart”. They took in the clanless, calling themselves the Trodden Chaff Clan. Officially, this “clan” does not exist. They have performed the job of butcher for many centuries, performing the “unclean” chore of gutting and dressing carcasses. Many Hmá and Hmélu are driven here for slaughter. The farther east one moves, the more flies there are, and the worse the stench gets. The blood and offal are thrown into a forgotten river that flows through the far east side into a reedy mire.

Drayá's Hill (4013.PJ) A temporary encampment was set up here during the War of 2020 by the Tsolyáni to guard Drayá's Well, the only source of clean water outside of the rainy season. A small wooden fort has gone up, since. It is currently held by some units from the Legion of the Clan of the Sweet Singers of Nakomé, a Legion with a prestigious history. Most are retirees. A few tiny clanhouses sit outside the stockade, receiving a strict ration of water in dry times.

Water-Discipline Within a Swamp

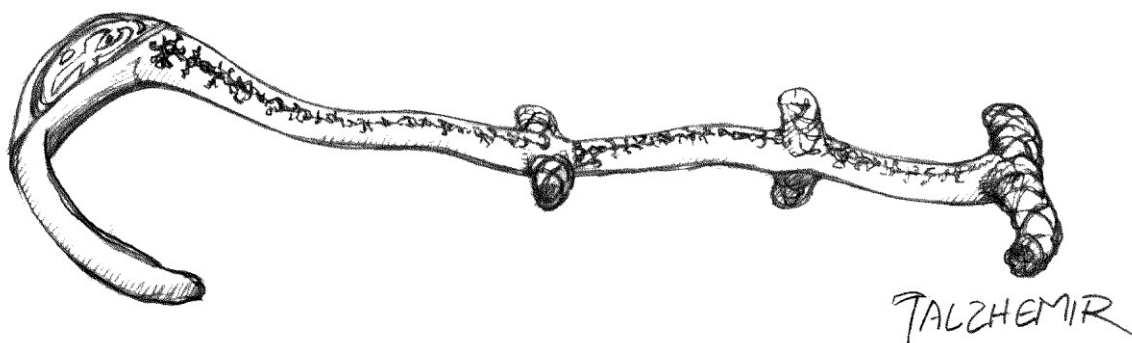
The Legion of the Clan of the Sweet Singers of Nakomé (12th Imperial Heavy Infantry) recruits only men of the tough semi-desert tribes of the far northeast of the

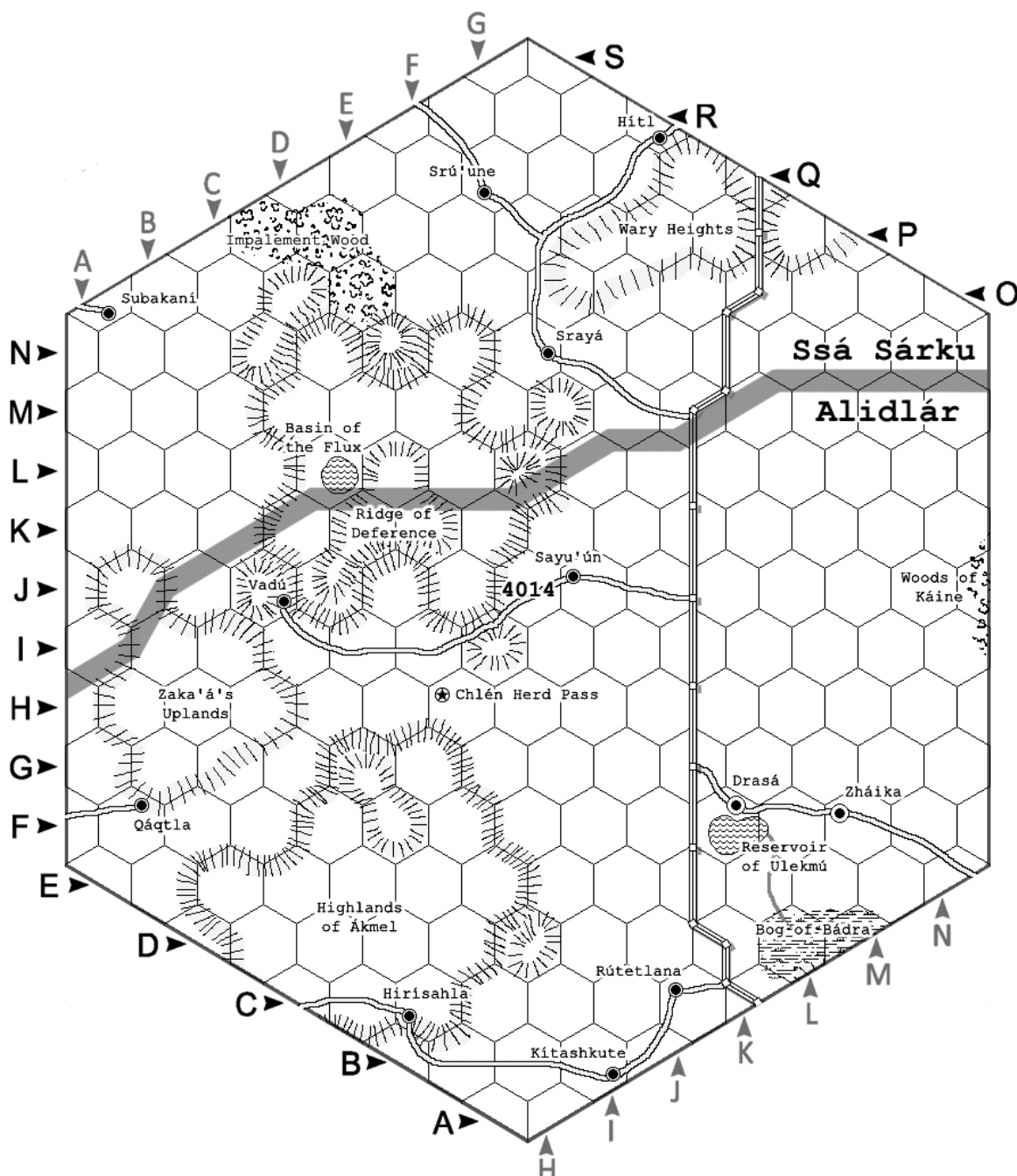
Empire. Most of these tribes follow Hrü'ü, and Wurú. It was built up to new strength by Emperor Durúmu around A.S. 1750.

It may seem odd that they were posted, therefore, to a swamp, but there is hidden wisdom in the appointment. Clean, drinkable water is extremely scarce. The Legion of the Sweet Singers of Nakomé are used to conserving it. They are thriving where others might live in misery, then perish for their prodigal water usage.

Prior to the civil war against Dhich'uné, the Legion was posted to the City of Sáрку (during the war with Yán Kór). Its present general, Shrüka hiVravodáya, is an experienced campaigner who has also seen service with General Kéttukal's Legions in Yan Kor.

Tower of Tsuréng (4013.QD) This choice citadel is held by the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation. Spacious, with two fresh springs, it is surrounded by farms for the upkeep of the Legion. Well-appointed barracks house soldiers that worship Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg. Surrounded by a second wall, clanhouses hold their families. Outside this, a little village mainly devoted to pursuits that relieve boredom thrives. A Hirilákte arena is the social focus. Perhaps unexpectedly, there are two music schools here. The House of Roaring Flame, owned by Red Devastation, teaches songs of glory appropriate to battle. Recruits not born to military clans attend to learn fiery chants and hymns their companions grew up knowing. The House of Malachite, owned by the Temple of Dlamélísh, teaches folk music to peasants given a break by the height of the rainy season, and sometimes wives of officers come to the higher-station upper story rooms to learn various courtly instruments.





HEX 4014

A Sákbe Road goes north-south through the Large Hex. East of the road there used to be farm fields but the wild creatures proved too aggressive, and settlements were repeatedly abandoned. The fiefholder and the Chief Elders of the villages asked the Province Governor of Ssá Sárku for help, but no succor ever came. An entire fief was lost.

The area west of the road holds patches of hills from which predators large and small come forth. Epéng skitter out of the crevices. Shánu'u soar and swoop to snatch up prey. Worse and more unique monsters are known to be at large.

Perhaps this is why bandits are extremely rare along the stretch of road north of Drasá (4014.FK).

All in all, the settlements here have far fewer people than usual because of heavy predation upon humans. These are peasants, and the aristocracy find it cost-ineffective to hire guards to protect people who must spread out each day. Yet, it is also somehow inappropriate to arm them. Local military legions looking to recruit are thus unlikely to succeed.

Chalócha the Forlorn

Perhaps five miles east of the Sákbe Road is the site of the abandoned town of Chalócha (4014.MK). It was once the seat of the Fief of Chalócha. The villages were mainly property of several different temples, all Stability-oriented. These were uninhabited lands granted during the negotiations between the prelates of the City of Sárku, and the Temple of Thúmis and Empress Vayúma Sú. Uninhabited by humans, that is. Bands of Sérudla in the area were apparently well-established. Some say they could control Zné the way humans control hunting dogs. Rumors of caches of stolen gold hidden in these villages persist. So do stories of adventurers set upon by hordes of thugs so that their metal weapons could be stolen.

Village of Kítashkute (4014.BI) This is a small village, with just a few clanhouses. Gold jewelry is made by artisans here. Some say they are under magical mind-bar spells from priests of the Temple of Thúmis to not pilfer, but they deny it, and take such intimations as a slur on their honor. The material originates in Goldmine Valley (3914.MJ). There are also very thin gold-plated bronze armbands and ear plugs that are traded and re-traded, ending up as far away as Katalál.

Village of Hirísahla (4014.CF) Its ancient names are Réthilath, Thú'a, and Hirésshia. Located upon the Highlands of ÁkmeI (4014.EE), here was the site of a stronghold held by the Kurtáni against the Empire long ago, when the plateau was heavily wooded. After the Kurtáni surrendered to the Empire, they were left unharmed, but the Tsolyáni immediately pulled down the stockade wall, selling the huge Tíu-wood timbers for many Káitars. Once the hills had been denuded of trees, the Tsolyáni simply left. Eventually, only a small handful of Kurtáni remained, and it has been a retirement community for Kúrt Hills people ever since.

Village of Rútetlana (4014.CJ) This is a Sákbe Road market town. An eccentric hostel owned by the Clan of the Glory of the Worm is called the Chambers of Excellent Repose in Silence. It features beds that are large black wooden coffins with gold leaf decoration. A heavy presence of guards keeps the peace; these are members of the Sárku-oriented Covered Lantern Clan. These experienced warriors hire themselves out to merchant caravans - and, with the support of the village council, they tolerate no competition in Rútetlana. They are known for their insistence on full pay up-front, and a bit of time to squander their pay before setting out.

Bog of Bádra (4014.DM) This is a hot and very humid area, even at night. There are hardly any plants, and few animals, out on the dark glistening muck. The farther out one goes, the stickier and deeper this gets, until it turns into obvious dark tar. Bones and pieces of carapace protrude. Successively larger basalt statues rise from the bog, leaning at crazy angles. It is a mystery how they were moved here. Some are so old they barely have any features at all, and they look like sarcophagi set upright. Water pours into this area from the Reservoir of Ulekmú (4014.FK).

Highlands of ÁkmeI (4014.EE) Long ago, this was a forested area. The sad little Kurtáni village of Hirísahla still clings to its southeastern edge. Sometimes, on rare occasions, Kurtáni of the Sé'iyau Mahé'zìyal, a cult-like religious society that reveres an aspect of Lady Avánthe, make a pilgrimage here to plant seeds. They are on warm terms with priestesses of that goddess who come here to observe the Chlén beasts of Chlén Herd Pass (4014.HG). Many patches of trees, including Gapúl, have re-established, but Kúni birds have yet to return (a prayed-for event that may take thousands of years to accomplish).

Village of Qáqtla (4014.FB) Folks here are simple basket weavers and ropemakers. The clanhouses of Qáqtla mainly serve Lord Chegárra, the Hero-King. They are not, themselves, usually fighters, and these clashes between merchants and road guards, and the Kurtáni Foundationists, both frighten and baffle them. They mainly work in Yáfa straw, but sometimes they trade with clancousins to the west for reeds and other materials.

Qáqtla Rope

It is thought that the name 'Qáqtla' refers to a rope weave that resembles the scale pattern of a swamp creature. That brown poisonous beaked serpent is not native to this region. Qáqtla rope is constructed on a loom like a small circular table with a hole in the center. Typically, two people work at the same time, handing strands back and forth. By using dyed fiber, the final product can have stripes, dots, or regularly-spaced flower-like splotches. Children here can make a few Qírgal-pennies by making a similar sort of twine on a loom that is a hand-held disk of bark.

Town of Drasá (4014.FK) For thousands and thousands of years, Drasá has been at war with occasional war parties of Sérudla living to the north. Warriors here take pride in wearing bits of iridescent Sérudla shell as ornamentation on their armor. As if that was not threat enough, the trade between the trio of towns (Drasá, Zháika, and Tlamarká) has been disrupted by Kurtáni bandits dragging wicker sleds. They left the insignia of the Climbing

Hook clan scratched into the ground: the mark of a clan that has not been recognized since it was abolished during the reign of Emperor Durúmu in 1807 A.S. A coalition of slaver clans has been hunting these "clanless" thieves, with no success yet. A number of slavers and their hired swords have been killed, and they have petitioned the Mayor of Drasá for assistance and compensation. The Mayor, Marujénu, a follower of Sárku, has assigned guards from the Covered Lantern Clan to standing posts along the small road to the Sákbe Road, but that is all they can afford.

Reservoir of Ulekmú (4014.FK) Rainwater drains here, and is diverted into irrigation canals in several directions. Water beyond what these can handle is shunted southwards, to the dark and viscous Bog of Bádra (4014.DM).

The Power of Death Compelled

A high ridge of ochre bricks rings an artificial lake. The mastermind of the project was named Ulekmú. It was built 600 years ago, during the reign of Emperor Durúmu, by many low-status people who strove to control the flooding in this region. They trod mud into molds and baked brick, pledging both their lives and their service after death. Most fell apart after only a few years, and they were carried to the Bog of Bádra, to be entombed in the tar at the foot of its enigmatic monoliths. A few were escorted to the City of Sárku, and marched down into the catacombs. Engineer-Priest Ulekmú went with them, and he was never seen again above ground.

Town of Zháika (4014.FM) A number of small streams flow southwards to irrigate Zháika's fields. Before the construction of the Reservoir of Ulekmú, flooding took lives annually here. Now, instead, a number of basins lined with yellowish-brown bricks catch the rainwater so that Zháika's fields and people prosper.

At a small temple to Lord Sárku here, stone altars are laden with offerings of pleasant foods preserved by drying. There is also a side-table with corroded copper coins: offerings intended to propitiate Mshéqwu, an Aspect of Lord Sárku who was once much more important here.

Zaka'á's Uplands (4014.HC) This is a plateau covered in high conical hills, resembling the pointed tops of enormous eggs in the distance. Towards the edges, they are perhaps house-sized. Further in, they are much bigger, their sides made very difficult to climb by loose flaking stone. Pieces of dark glossy carapace of large creatures can be seen embedded and somehow turned to stone amidst the white lime. Local people used to bring out chunks to sell as material for carving until some predator began catching them.

The Revived One

In Qáqtla, they tell the story that once a man pecking with his hammer found an unusually large creature, itself made of stone, embedded in the rock. He described it as an enormous crustacean. When he went back to collect it, however, a landslide had apparently shaken it free, and he could not find it in the rubble. From his sketch, some say he found an enormous Hlüss. Others say it may have been a Chürstállí, a semi-intelligent and dangerous distant cousin of the Ssú and the Hlüss, not native to these parts. The nature of "The Revived One of Zaka'á" remains a mystery.

Chlén Herd Pass (4014.HG) Some Chlén beasts head this way, slowly as ever, perhaps taking years to arrive. No one knows what attracts them. They eat and drink the region bare and dry, relying on energy stored in their great bulk for weeks. Some engage in tests of strength, planting their shoulders against each other and pushing. These conflicts are always gentle. If they go on too long, one or both beasts will fall asleep. A priestess of Lady Avánthe comes here each year to take a count of the creatures.

Village of Vadú (4014.JD) This is a mainly grain-growing region, with a few fruit and vegetable gardens. In the past decade, an unusually large number of peasants have vanished during the wet season, when the ground is covered in a handwidth of water. They may have fallen prey to Átlun, Káyi, Hyahý'u, and other locally common creatures, but no spoor was found. Nevertheless, Chief Elder Gírishte, the Hetman of Vadú, ordered all villagers to wear Chlén-hide sandals with distinctive patterns on their soles, and to shed them if threatened. Since then, groups of 10 to 20 peasants have disappeared. A priest of Ksáru applied magical retrocognition to sandals abandoned in the water. He saw creatures resembling large Hlüss carrying people off. Now farmers only go out in groups of 30. It is hurting their productivity badly, and has not stopped the attacks.

Village of Sayu'ún (4014.JI) Many people of Tsolyánu have no uses for any fabric beyond a loincloth but there is always great need for sturdy woven sacking for holding grain. This is most typically a product of towns and cities. Sayu'ún is an exception as a rural village devoted to producing rough fabric. Peasants beat retted (pond-aged) plant stems into fiber. Women and children make thin string using drop spindles. Men operate large looms. The work is so monotonous that it is usual for the workday to begin with inhaling Tribákh, a locally-produced herbal powder that reduces the capacity to grow bored.

Impalement Wood (4014.JO) (See the entry for Impalement Wood at 4114.PE.)

Ridge of Deference (4014.KE) This is a bleak plateau of foamy-looking limestone. On its northwest side is the Basin of the Flux (4014.LE), a pool of water that carries fatal disease. Sensible folk shun this place.

Basin of the Flux (4014.LE) Here at this pool atop the rocky plateau of the Ridge of Deference (4013.KE), so it is said, demons of sickness congregate like beggars after a banquet. Though the water looks and smells clean, those who drink it grow very sick, and die. In the lore of assassins, that water is known to have been used like a poison, thus it is illegal to carry away a sample. The Temple of Lord Durritlámish successfully laid claim to the Basin long ago but keeping control of it is very problematic. There is a shrine to that god near the Basin. Priests who attempt to tend it invariably contract its fatal flux. The most recent assigned to the task were warrior-priests of the Phalanx of Lord Durritlámish of the Rotted Face (a military legion rumored to be in disfavor with the current emperor). Following that, the Omnipotent Azure Legion stepped in and placed several Ru'ún, implacable metal-skinned devices of the ancients, to be the Basin's guardians.

Village of Srayá (4014.NH) The market place of Srayá has an excellent reputation as a place to trade or buy supplies for travel. Soldiers are allowed, at their own expense, to upgrade to lighter waterproof Vringálu-wing shelters fashioned to look similar to the standard-issue tents. Mundane gear such as climbing rope from Qáqtla, sacks from Sayu'ún, and storage bladders from hunting camps of the Kráà Hills are plentiful. Magical scrolls are rare, however: those who deal in such items usually have standing confidential arrangements to see that they go directly to certain high-status clans.



Tsalkishá tests an Eye while her companion Garúggme does the worrying.

Village of Subakaní (4014.OA) As one approaches the village, there are stone figures in poses of mourning stand side by side with those in attitudes of exultation. Mainly rock-carving clans populate this place. Fields of scree and boulders provide ample material. By Imperial permission, one clan also harvests tall Tíu trees from ten miles to the northeast, in the sacred preserve of Impalement Wood. In general, residents do not want to leave to deliver goods elsewhere. Passing through Ssíne (4013.OK) means going through a fly-infested horrible-smelling wetland, then crossing the crime-ridden neighborhoods. If the carving being delivered is on a Chlén cart, the going will be very slow, and it may be years before they get home again.

The School of Inspired Mallets

About thirty boys, mostly temple acolytes, attend this school for ritual stone carvers (of mainly Low and Medium status) run by the Temple of Sárku. Those whose families can afford it may go on to learn aspects of High Cartography, but this is normally something learned in the temples in the big towns or cities. Instruction at the School of Inspired Mallets includes "coffin writing", a cipher from the Kráà Hills meant to be read by means of fingertips alone. It is traditionally placed under ledges of coffin lids, along the outer edges of tomb doors where people do not ordinarily look, and so on. It is not considered so much secret, it is more private, usually a message to ones' descendants. In ancient times, some worshippers of the Dark Trinity would put poisoned needles, obsidian blades, and other traps in places where coffin writing might be found.

Wary Heights (4014.PI) These hills are said to receive their name from an uncanny sensation that one is being watched by many invisible observers. Most living creatures avoid it, even small insects. Kūni birds are filled with terror and can only say the place is 'wrong'. Oddly, pet Rényu share the same assessment, even using the same word to describe it.

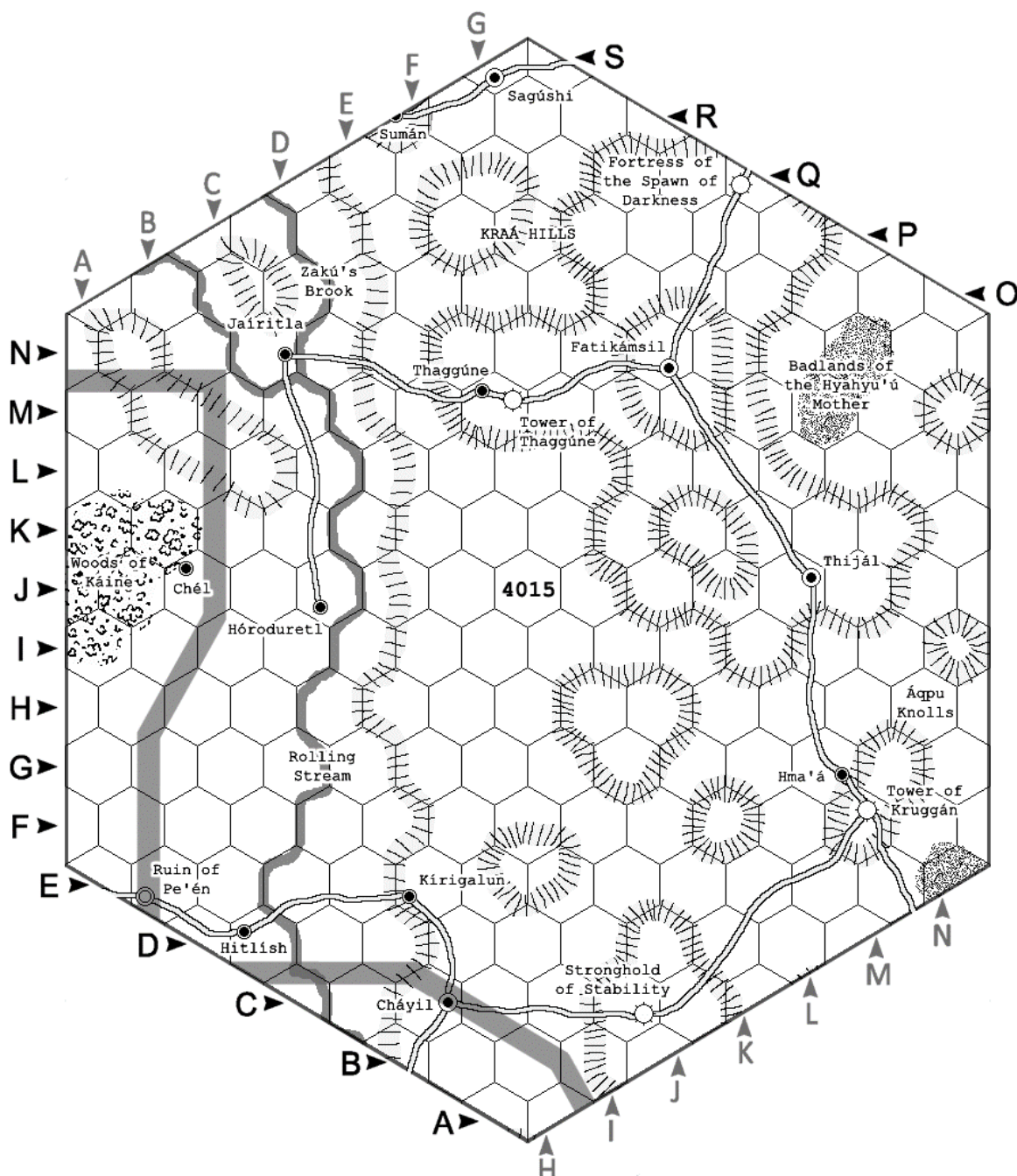
Village of Srú'une (4014.QG) Old Sárku-oriented military clanhouses with beaten-copper roofs colored dark brown totter upon the hill formed by many a Ditlána through the ages. Legions on the move make use of these otherwise-empty buildings. Sets of five old spears bound with pennants of gravecloth mark the perimeter. At dawn and dusk, Hú bats flutter around the uppermost roofs, which have openings so these creatures may nest within. By custom, only those who cannot bear children may reside here permanently.

The Hall of the Blameless

A small orphanage operated by the Temple of Sárku stands next to the somber marketplace. By custom, these children are not allowed to approach or speak to strangers. If those approaching are of high station, they kneel and bow, foreheads to the ground. They neither smile nor laugh, but instead stare, seldom blinking. Normally, a child whose parents are gone would be taken in by others of the clan. Folk belief holds that to end up here, a child must be truly luckless, and such people should be avoided lest whatever demons author their misfortune spread to others. The name of the orphanage, "the Hall of the Blameless", however, goes directly against this attitude. The priests here say these youngsters have been blessed by Lord Sárku with the truth of the transient nature of life. Those from a house stricken by plague were spared by Lord Durrilámish. Debt to the Temple may be waived in exchange for adopting.

Village of Hítl (4014.RJ) The fiefholder, Arsékmoi ("Baron") Ahalúk hiTolékussan, of the Domed Tomb Clan (High Status Clan, High Lineage), is currently living in a little manor house here. Ahalúk is a Bishop who stepped away from his priestly position to be the Baron. Far from a death-obsessed fanatic, he is an intelligent charismatic showman, known to dote on Chasúpi, his first son by his favored young concubine, Tiloméni. His first wife is Éluchan, older sister of Qútmu, the governor of the province of Ssá Sárku. An Aridáni, Éluchan has considerable wealth and power - or rather, she did, until Ahalúk decided to leave the esteemed court at the City of Sárku and administrate the fief from a tiny country estate. Fenced areas hold many naturally-brown Hmá beasts, their silky fleeces destined for soft light clerical robes. Groundskeepers bring the creatures into neat little houses with cushioned woven mats at night.





HEX 4015

These are foothills of a cluster of mountains to the east and northeast. Isolated communities nestle in the stony valleys. The high altitudes are slightly cooler by a few degrees, especially at night. Upon the highest peaks, snow is something they may see once a decade or so. The broad and vigorous Vishéna River flows from the northwest to the southeast here. Farmland for grain is scarce, and it tends to yield a paltry two crops per year. Tree crops bring in most of the money. Hilltop groves called "hangers" shower the ground with nuts. Orchards wedged into long thin valleys bring forth dark Dlél plums and other fruit.

Most of the people here are uneducated peasants (Low to Very Low Status). A few aristocrats live here as well, almost all from Sárku-worshipping clans. There are hardly any people from the middle strata, and so, few crafting clans. Even the poorest eat more meat here than is typical elsewhere in the Empire. Game is harvested by nobles shooting bows from litters. Sometimes peasants may be forbidden to hunt, but they are allowed to use traps. The various deadfalls, snares, tripwires, and venom-coated prongs on copper springs can make going off the marked roads quite hazardous.

Mining relies on a supply of neatly hewn timber. Chléen beasts here are pushed to their limits, made to drag carts

stacked with high broad loads of logs and food. They gasp open-beaked for air as they trundle up the few roads that zig-zag up slopes. Upon reaching their destination, they are most likely be slaughtered and eaten, the hide crudely tanned into inferior goods (not weapons or armor).

An Ancient Hostility

In the region covered by the Kúrt Hills Atlas, one long-standing animosity stands out. The Kurtáni and the people of the Kráà Hills tend to dislike each other. The conflict is partly religious in origin. The thickly-forested Kúrt Hills were a haven for the early adherents of Stability; the Kráà Hills are the origin-place of Sárku-worship.

The Kurtáni and the people of the Kráà Hills were most comfortable in the forests and the mountains, respectively. Both, however, were recruited by the city-oriented generals. The ancestors of the nobility of the City of Sárku were quite conquest-minded, so warriors of the Kráà Hills were recruited for their mountaineers' stamina and strength, and their archery ability. Kurtáni were taken into the armies as scouts and archers when the Empire of Tsolyánu was dominated by Stability-oriented rulers. They have eyed each other across the battlefield many times, exchanging arrowfire.

Over time, both ethnic groups lost most of their ancient heritage, melding into the culture of the Empire. Each region fielded legions of its own, and they cooperated respectfully under imperial rule for centuries.

However, for the Kurtáni, the civil war with Sárku-oriented supporters of Dhich'uné versus legions devoted to the other Temples was a chilling throwback to bygone centuries. When he ruled as emperor, the City of Sárku made a land-grab, reaching south towards the coveted Golden Meadows. A number of Kurtáni reacted by becoming the Foundationist movement: hotheads wanting to curb that power and revive "the old ways". Unfortunately, that includes spreading hatred for the folk of the Kráà Hills.

Meanwhile, Prince Dhich'uné had revived the Legion of the Peaks of Kráà, 12th Imperial Archers. Famed for poisoned arrows, they wear brown-lacquered armor, and skull helmets in the style of the Inner Circle of the Temple of Sárku. Many were recruited from this area (Large Hex 4015), and given an education in history: specifically, how the Kurtáni led the forces of Empress Sháira Sú, and then Empress Vayúma Sú like hunting dogs to try to destroy them.

Prince Dhich'uné is defeated and fled. Revival of a "kingdom of Sárku" is extremely unlikely now. The Concordat is still strong under Emperor Mirusíya (glory be unto his name) and above ground, civility between

people of the two backgrounds is required. Eventually, though, the Foundationists' search for their heritage (or even the power to liberate Kúrtur) is going to take them into lost citadels and forbidden tombs. The sons (and some daughters) of the Peaks of Kráà will probably follow, as what happens in the underworld, stays in the underworld.

(See also 'About the Kráà Hills')

Town of Cháyil (4015.CF) The Province of Alidlár bulges northeastwards into Ssá Sárku. This is the only other settlement in the Fief of Duruchákon. It is traditionally very loyal to the Tlakotáni Clan, itself, which maintains a small clanhouse high on the hillside to the east. Like a wise butler when the Master and Mistress quarrel, they maintained a tactful facade of neutrality during the civil war and Kolumejálim contests after Emperor Hirkáne's demise. Some of the things for which Cháyil is known are its excellent palanquins, Gūdrú cushions silky and cool to the touch, and elegant racks for holding one's collection of sandals. The slave market, on the northwest side of town, in the gully behind a little rise, holds a handful of rower and bearer slaves.

Stronghold of Stability (4015.CI) Seen from the air, this stone fort has three diamond-shaped portions. It was once cooperatively owned by temples of the Dark Trinity. It now houses cohorts of legions loyal to the gods Karakán, Chegárra, and Thúmis. It is used for training in the cooperative form of sorcery used in military conflicts. Although considered a place with crucial tactical value, it is also an undesirable posting because it is so very dull. Many a battle mage has lived out their lives here without ever seeing honorable action. The soldiers surreptitiously complain it is like being the special parade sword, incessantly polished but seldom actually used. The commander, Raqóq Dlému Visíryas, has invited the Temples of Hnálla and Avánthe to station troops here because, he says, "the weapon undrawn is also a victory."

Village of Hitlísh (4015.DD) Although it is many Tsán away, and up a river with a swift and unforgiving current, yet the village of Hitlísh counts itself somehow close to the City of Sárku. Any news of that grand and venerable metropolis is the most favored talk. A temple to Lord Durritlámish rises above all the other edifices. Its roof-comb is notched and pierced so that those in the plaza below may mark the movements of the planet Úlétl. (They would far rather have had deep tunnels below the ground, of course, but the soft river clay defies such construction.)

Ruin of Pe'én (4015.EB) This site is an enormous hill of mud under a black layer of a strange foamy glass-like stone. This city was destroyed during the century following the

Harbinger of Worse to Come (-12,857 A.S.). A scroll fragment preserved in the City of Sárku chronicles the events: A huge flow of mud, with hundreds of snapped-off trees floating in it like splinters, rolled uphill to completely bury it. Then, it was struck by so much lightning that it glowed red, while the air vibrated and sang with a song like "melodiously roaring beasts". A dark rumor persists: this was once a place under the sway of "She Who Must Not Be Named", a Pariah Goddess somehow banished to the Outer Darkness. There is probably some kind of Tsuru'úm, an underworld, here, but how to get in, is as-yet unknown.

Village of Kírigalun (4015.EF) This is actually the fifteenth site of a settlement called Kírigalun. The dead are interred several miles away in the cemetery of "Kírigalun of the Fathers". There are a number of villages like this in the Kràà Hills. They are based around small copper mines, some of them open pits and some, tunnels into a hillside. After a time, any farming lands below these sites become a dead zone, with skeletal trees and sickly stunted grasses. The mine will eventually become played-out. It will be sealed up with rocks, and the villagers will find a new site nearby if they can. Sometimes the old mine entrances open up again, giving dangerous creatures places to hide.

Ajodúm, the Copper Crawler

Abandoned sites become infested with the Copper Crawler. This is a worm-like creature with a circular mouth, roughly the size of a man's leg. It is considered sacred to Lord Sárku. It compresses itself in the leafy and rocky detritus, springing out like a Jack-in-the-Box at warmth and movement to deliver a venomous bite. By day it is more likely to be seen, the glint of its dark glossy black shell with metallic copper spangles giving it away. This creature is attracted to copper, and its presence may indicate a good mining prospect.

Death's Requisitioner

Some say there is a small temple to a lost Aspect of Sárku somewhere northeast of Kírigalun. She was called LÛchrál, and she appeared as a woman in armor resembling the corresponding parts of a skeleton. (This should raise few eyebrows, as women in some Sárku-oriented Imperial Legions wear similar items today.) LÛchrál was supposed to greet the recently-deceased in a welcoming manner, and issue them replacements if they were missing digits or limbs. The one thing she would not fix was a missing head. Her epithet was, "Lady of Gorgets". She seems to have been a goddess of the Undead, and a patroness of those who earned death through battle.

Tower of Kruggán (4015.FM) The Tower of Kruggán is on the ridge between Tétmi and Ayíshu, two of the Áqpu Knolls (see the entry at 4015.GM). It is used to garrison a number of soldiers of the Omnipotent Azure Legion formerly under the orders of Dhich'uné. The Temple of Sárku had soldiers of the Battalions of the Seal of the Worm formerly stationed here. Under Dhich'uné's princely patronage, they were sent to the battle with Yán Kór. So many were slaughtered there that it left the Tower of Kruggán largely unoccupied. Since His Highness's defeat and disappearance, a careful survey was taken. An unusually high number of inter-temple conversions had taken place within the past several years. These individuals are under observation here. Most have converted back to their original religion. It is suspected that a cavalcade of methods were used to coerce or replace them, including Eyes of the ancients, mind-bar spells, along with an as-yet not understood means for changing a person's appearance. A few of the changeovers, however, may be honest. Intelligence officers of the OAL are on their way to sort out this apparent breach of the Concordat.

Vishéna River (4015.GC) This stretch of the river is challenging, but navigable. It winds between broad shores of large chunks of rock, deepening erratically and then returning to shallow rapids. In a jocular understatement characteristic of the region, it is called the "Rolling Stream", the way the mountains of Kràà are called "hills". Going upstream (an arduous process requiring experienced slave rowers), one reaches the Sákbe Road that leads to the City of Sárku. Southeast of this Large Hex, around the Stronghold of Nrá (3915.NL), the river becomes unnavigable. Porters take up the goods south from here, or load things onto the Chlén hide Utehíl boats going upstream again (see the text box on the Utehíl under Vishéna River, 3915.OL). Only the most foolhardy or desperate would take a vessel over the violent whitewater beyond that point - rafts are easily dashed on the rocks and flipped.

(See also the entries for the Vishéna River, 3916.JD, the text box for Hlargékh in Large Hex 3916, and the text box for the Flexible Utehíl Boat under the entry for the Vishéna River, 3915.OL.)

Village of Hma'á (4015.GL) The clanhouses here are each built upon three meter (9 foot) tall stone platforms that lean outwards. These are polished to make scaling by wild creatures unlikely. Pedestals of dwellings of higher status are covered in sheets of copper to make this even more difficult. Although they are mainly worshippers of Sárku, the people of Hma'á are oddly fearful of the graveyard upon which their homes are built. They will not go outside after dark, and entering a clanhouse requires being drawn up in a sort of elevator platform by others. The folk here manufacture small items such as buttons out of sheet copper, which is made elsewhere.

Áqpu Knolls (4015.GM, 4015.IN) These are old volcanic cones with dark gray tips above emerald green foliage and sides raked with deep gorges. Local folk have names for each of the peaks. From north to south, they are Yému, Tétmi, Ayíshu, and (west of of the Tower of Kruggán), Srükél. Tétmi and Ayíshu form the saddle upon which the Tower of Kruggán rests.

Woods of Káine (4015.JB) These lands are under the protection of rangers from the village of Chél. Following a very obscure and ancient Imperial mandate, only folk of Chél may hunt here. Some of the animals bear little resemblance to those living elsewhere on Tékel. The trees are strange U-shaped things, with two trunks and a canopy that grows into a wide interwoven mass. Their tough thorny material was once used for strong handles on tools prized as heirlooms in this part of the Kráa Hills.

Mosáng, The Bellowing Brute

This is an inedible bear-sized beast with long chartreuse and magenta striped fur. It is noteworthy for its ability to bellow that somehow knocks opponents down. It has five eyes all around its shoulders, and it dodges with great alacrity. Its pelt is considered a fine, if somewhat garish, trophy.

Mosáng (2.4)

Wandering: 70%, 2/4/6 Lair: 30%, 2/4/6

PHYS: 12	DEFT: 11	INST: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: -1
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 7 ground	
Defenses:	Melee: 3	Missile: 3
Armor: 1/0	Hits: 20	Energy: 10
		Magic: -1

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Claw	14-	3/5/7	
Bellow	16-	Knock Down (see below)	

Other Abilities:

Knock-Down Bellow: 3" range, target must make a PHYS roll at -4 to remain standing

Village of Chél (4015.JC) Remote and isolated, Chél belongs to no fief. It is built upon an island, surrounded by a lake, which yields a healthy amount of fish. Except for these fish, their food must be brought in from elsewhere. No visitors are allowed without the express permission of the patriarch. The main export is white, yellow, and silver-gray diamonds, which also come from the lake. These are of limited value to followers of Change, but of great interest to many followers of Stability. Chél is home to a single clan, the Forbidden Gem Clan, which holds a single lineage. Their patriarch leads the mountain rangers, who protect the island and watch over the Woods of Káine (4015.JB).

Tribute Brides of Chél

Every five years, five women are brought here from nearby villages (including but not limited to, Hóroduretl, 4015.JE, and Jaiřitla, 4015.ND). They seldom see their birth-families again, and their children take on the High lineage name of hiSsesmúgakoi, regardless of their origins. The custom of the Tribute Brides is said to go back to when other settlement sent armies against Chél and were defeated. The women were required as hostages to ensure peace, and were originally selected from the aristocracy. Now when the rangers go out and find the young women, they tend to be of Very Low clan status. Some may even begin as slaves.

Over the centuries, Chél's neighbors reacted with outrage and retribution, but eventually they made peace. The women are now brought by their clans to appointed rendezvous points, and exchanged for a bride-price in diamonds left elsewhere.

Not all of the brides are willing. There have been some who escaped by swimming the lake. Rumors persist, of young ladies who declared themselves Aridáni, yet were still "sold" this way.

Gossip has it that a "tribute bride" was once allowed to speak with her sister, who arrived in a small boat. The "bride" gave her sister a gift of salted fish in which diamonds had been hidden. With these, the services of an assassin's clan were contracted to murder her husband.

Village of Hóroduretl (4015.JE) Painters journey here from various cities as far away as Ávanthar. Small but sumptuous clanhouses are erected as a sign of status. To the east is a long bridge, not large enough to bear a Chlén beast. Beyond this point are hill villages with miniature mines devoted to digging out indelible mineral pigments. The patron deity of Hóroduretl is Lady Hriháyal. She is sometimes associated with musical and artistic talent. As the goddess of gambling, it is considered appropriate that her gifts fall upon a wild diversity of individuals from all walks of life. The Temple of the Blissful is dedicated to one of her Aspects.

The Temple of the Blissful

This building is built on a nearby hill northwest of this village. Villagers readying what they thought were new fields stumbled onto table-sized green and purple jade tablets carved with inscriptions that one Feyárgo, a priest of Sáрку, studied. According to his translation, they are hymns to a goddess of obese pulchritude in which practitioners of her arts would wield "Needles and Glass Knives of Beautification", with devotees being granted,

"immense bodies, heavy and perfect in their untroubled repose". The relief carvings show men and women so fat they are nearly spherical, alongside tall naturally-corpulent nonhumans, Thunru'ú. A new temple to Lady Hriháyal was built on the site, and the jade blocks protected. There are mutterings that the tablets are forgeries. Others believe that the artifacts have to do with Balóth and Eshqúra, Lady Hriháyal's 6th and 22nd Aspects, respectively.

Tower of Thaggúne (4015.MG) The Tower of Thaggúne is an artificial spire with a vented room at the top for drying salted meat. When folk of the Kràà Hills came down from higher ground, they noticed that food would spoil in the warm air. At first they wrote it off as "Lord Durritlámish's Portion". Then they devised high towers for drying meat in the chilly wind at the top. Although most have fallen over the centuries, this one is intact. It is usable as a military redoubt but its wall was really only built to keep out scavengers drawn by the smell of the food. A ditch resembling a defensive moat is actually just a pit where offal is sacrificed to Lord Durritlámish, but the roiling mass of small Dlaqó, Feshénga, and other wildlife make it an effective defense nonetheless. Servitors must carry many jugs of water for butchery, which is accomplished in the lower chambers. When a group approaches with food animals and water, the archers with husky Ajátl wood bows use moss balls soaked in aromatic liquids tied onto notched sticks to drive back any aggressive scavengers. Those creatures are not to be harmed here.

Village of Thaggúne (4015.MG) This area is a food reserve for noble clans of high lineage in the City of Sárku, specifically, a place where Hmá and Hmélu are fattened up. The peasant clans here are required to forage for greens to feed them. Slaves carry in baskets of tightly-packed grasses, as well. For the finest flavor, the beasts are given portions of Dmí sugar roots and grain. Unless one loves the aroma of decades of animal manure never cleaned out but just covered over with straw and trampled down, this is not a good place for travelers to stay.

Badlands of the Hyahyú'u Mother (4015.ML) This is a rocky place where nothing will grow. Toothy shelled things like the many-legged Feshénga eat smaller skittering long-bodied things like the Epéng centipede and the snakey Sézhme. At various times in history, this was a place for bandit gangs to set up squalid little clanhouses with walls and lookout towers.

The Hyahyú'u Mother

A horrifying local legend is preserved as a wailing folk ballad. It is traditionally accompanied by a local

instrument that is a primitive violin or ravana or rabab, played with a bow, with several strings, and a gourd at the bottom (so, a primitive Sra'úr). Once, several slaves stole food and ran away from their owner into these badlands. In time, they had children they could not feed. They ordered their eldest son to secretly kill the other youngsters, to eat them. Unwilling to do this, he fasted, and in this state, was "touched" by "the Hyahyú'u Mother", an entity called Drüenué (said to be a demon of the goddess Avánthe). He was driven mad by the contact. He slew and ate his parents; then he went back and ate members of the slave owner's family. His brothers and sisters killed him with rocks before he could eat them too.

Village of Jaíritla (4015.ND) The most significant civic buildings and the markets are located on the land between the Vishéna River (4015.GC) and Zakú's Brook (4015.PE). Well-tended bridges strong enough to accommodate heavily-laden Chlén carts span both sides. Farms and other businesses sprawl in various directions.

The Optimists of Jaíritla

To the dismay of the more enthusiastic followers of Lord Sárku, Undead are said to be extremely rare here. Families will have their loved ones mummified through desiccation and place them in the grave chambers of the hills to the northwest. It is hinted in the local religion that Lord Durritlámish intends to resurrect a great number of the faithful at some unknown point in the future as "The Enshrouded". There are, it is said, secret rituals to reanimate the dead that may still work on preserved corpses such as these. Stories are told of how various Aspects and demons have granted such blessings in the past. Thus, Low and Very Low clan folk with no hope of affording such services from the Temple now still hope for a miracle later.

Town of Fatikámsil (4015.NJ) This is the seat of the fief. It is controlled by Sárku-worshipping aristocrats but the residents (mainly of Low and Very Low Status) seldom see their overlords. The hill on which it is built is a little slumbering volcano, with what looks like white smoke coming out of a crescent-shaped crater. The slopes as one approaches are covered in nut trees. These form the town's main export. Creatures for hunting are scarce, but nobles go through the ritual of dressing and arming for the sport, to be carried on palanquins on paths through the handsome bronze-barked trees.

The Cistern of Grief

Steam on the north side of this town conceals a large pool known as the Cistern of Grief. No one knows what pushes pure and boiling water up from the depths to fill it. Some say it is a device of the ancients. All of the clanhouses here use this water, channelled through polished copper pipes, to cook food and bathe and wash clothing. It gives Fatikámsil complete freedom from the need to burn fuel. A very happy family of Shén sincerely devoted to an aspect of Lord Hrű'ű tends the Cistern. These tall lizard-people mispronounce the name of Pémesh Tashqá (God of Mists and Smoke) as "Tséngesh Tashgáaar". Within the fog, the air is warm, and plants from the Shén homeland such as their favorite melons are growing in a labyrinth-like garden off to one side. Red plants that can also thrive in a hot damp cave adorn the paths.

Trails into the Tuff

Below Fatikámsil is dark gray volcanic stone, slightly porous, and easily chipped away with hammers and picks. The paths above ground sometimes lead to bronze gratings in the hillsides. Beyond here are countless Tsán of tunnels. They can lead to tidy storage chambers still used by the nearby clanhouse, secret accessways to various buildings, forgotten lovenests not used for centuries, children's secret playhouses, and private temples of various deities. The southern side of the town is a catacomb for crypts.

Zakú's Brook (4015.PE) This river joins the Vishéna (4015.GC) at the town of Jairítla (4015.ND). A few half-wild communities of Ninínyal, Pygmy Folk, have lived here for thousands of years, pecking out diminutive passages with simple hammers, the tunnel diameters only small enough for their own kind. Some live in complete darkness for much of their lives. Those who bother to employ a light source may find dark red stones with iridescent yellow and green highlights, usually classed as opals, but seeming to be some extinct creature's eyes. The Ninínyal take these to Jairítla (4015.ND) to trade. They are known to have a penchant for small magic items, especially working Eyes with counters.

Apakîr, the Milk Fungus

Part of the diet of these Ninínyal is Apakîr, a spherical white mushroom that they grow in total darkness. Ninínyal can eat it raw, but humans prefer to dry, crush, and simmer it lightly to make a milk-like liquid. Apakîr milk is pleasant for humans to drink. Ninínyal generally do not care for the milk, but they can ferment it into a pinkish curd that smells like a nut paste. Apakîr is very likely one of the organisms from a Ninínyal home world long ago, but it was probably genetically engineered to provide them complete nourishment.

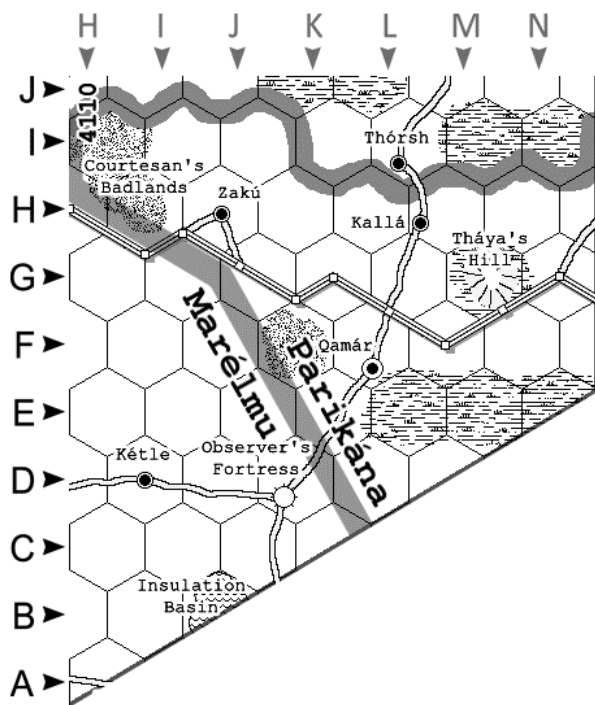
Fortress of the Spawn of Darkness (4015.QK)

This is a fort sitting like a dam in the notch between two steep stone slopes. It is supposed to be part of the Fief of Fatikámsil. At this time, no one is quite sure who is inhabiting it. There are soldiers with shields and short clubs studded with chips of dark brown obsidian, a weapon characteristic of the Kráà Hills. They display the standard of a black sun with a snarling demon face on a field of indigo and pale gold wavy lines. Merchants attempting trade were greeted in a language they did not understand; they reported that it sounded like Salarvyáni. They were driven away by a light shower of stone fragments, apparently a warning shot, so they retreated. Whoever these soldiers are, they are not allowing anybody to use the north-south pass.

A Deadly Defense

In the area within sight of this citadel, there is an unusual phenomenon that causes the winds to whip about in a wild fashion. Because of this, missile weapons are seldom successful. Some say there are demons bound to the place, living servitors made of air and razor-sharp fragments of whirling stone, and they are attracted to those who wield other-planer energies.

Town of Sagúshi (4015.SG) The surrounding region is relatively barren but Sagúshi is built on green fertile ground. There are Yáfa terraces and paddies across the valley. The clanhouses are a little spread out, clinging to the steep hillsides. The palaces of the bureaucracies and the mayor's mansion claim a flat-topped hill at the center. Local custom gives each clanhouse its own graveyard, and these locations are not divulged to outsiders, not even fellow clan members from other villages. Tin is sometimes smuggled from Sumán (4115.DM) to here, and then to points farther eastwards.



HEX 4110

The Sákbe Road turns to a large wooden structure for some distance to the west. Other roads of this region are often plank walkways raised up out of the marsh. Their timbers are dug from the sour bogs, a natural treatment that makes them rot-resistant.

This is a terribly pest-ridden area. Having to deal with this is a daily concern for humans. There are flying things, crawling things, and things that swim or float. Some creatures of the deep swamps have tiny airborne larva that infest the victim's lungs, and there are vermin that float upon the fetid puddles, scrambling up rapidly to lay eggs on any warm limb that comes near.

Despite the plethora of parasites, there are a few secretive human settlements. They are not part of any fief, nor registered with the tax collectors. To foil unwanted human visitation, the many branching trails may lead to especially dangerous locales.

Pé Chói will have no trouble with it at all, and some even find it pleasant. However, although they might have no concerns about the local crawlies and bities, an aversion to water past waist-depth makes them avoid this area. They dislike the frequent need to wade or canoe to get somewhere.

Shén and Ahoggyá can pay most of this no mind. Their reaction to human misery generally ranges from sympathy to smug amusement. With their shell-like skin, the Tinalíya are usually in no danger, but some may be driven to distraction by the incessant buzzing, motion, and crawling. Páchi Léi

have their own medicinal preparations against bugs. Unfortunately, there is a particular small parasite, the Ngádok, that troubles them here.

Ngádok Lice

This is a local pest. Páchi Léi who have not diligently applied ointments may find themselves infested with the Ngádok "louse". While Ngádok pay no attention to the other sentient species, one will crawl for some distance to latch onto a Páchi Léi. They feed on blood, then cause itching. If they are scratched, they burst open. Their microscopic larvae will infect Páchi Léi reproductive buds and go dormant. Several years later, an infant Páchi Léi may suffer an infection in which dozens of marble-sized Ngádok burrow their way out. Most, but not all, go looking for a new host; the event is horribly painful and disfiguring, but seldom fatal.

The weather is often hot and muggy. Here as elsewhere, Chlén hide shoulder pauldrons and shields are constructed with a clever arrangements of straps and/or netting to keep them from touching the skin. Sometimes priests and soldiers of legions that serve the gods of darkness Hrū'u and Wurú tuck special tiny censers into these spaces, making it look like they are clad in capes of wispy smoke. Devotees of the gods of fire and warfare, Vimúhla and Chiténg, employ similar things, sometimes placing them on the crests of their helmets.

Generally, the wealthy take grandiose measures against these insects. Doorways and windows may be shielded with Thésun gauze curtains with small weights about the edges. Slaves slowly wave fans, both driving off flying pests, and cooling the air.

Those who sell herbal preparations against being bitten are likely to get a few coins out of those who use the Sákbe Road. Although they can be generically called "repellents", most of these remedies do not 'repel', they are just 'anti-feedants'. The nuisance creatures will still hover about and land- they just do not find the prospective victim palatable. Also, many of the concoctions only last two or three hours after application. Humans who take no measures against the crawling and flying vermin are likely to suffer an inability to sleep.

(Béthorm rules: a human character must make a successful WILL check to ignore the swamp bugs and sleep. Use of a repellant adds a +4 modifier. Failing this roll results in a failure to sleep, which results in a -1 penalty to all actions the following day. Magic users recover no energy. Use of a sedative such as a powder allows sleep, but only half of the normal magical energy recovery.)

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')

Insulation Basin (4110.BJ) Located northwest of the Tower of the Skyhook (4010.OC), this appears to be a natural lake, its water extremely clean. Delicious clam-like creatures can be acquired here by diving. There are few fish, but divers have seen melon-sized gray automatons with leathery exteriors and small mechanical flippers. Several generations ago, a party of scholars of the Temple of Thúmis examined the Basin. Three of them drowned themselves after catching these globe-shaped Ru'ún (machine automatons) and experimenting upon them.

Village of Kétle (4110.DI) The one-story clanhouses here are made of black wood, with roofs of reed mats, dyed various bright colors. More mats of woven swamp reeds cover some of the main walkways. The peasant folk of Kétle tend to be pear-shaped when they are older, with slightly bulgy round eyes, broad noses, and wide mouths. It is rumored that they interbreed with the Hehegánu, or even the Hegléthyal (Swamp Folk, who are seldom seen around here despite their name). Those familiar with either race will see little actual resemblance. As for the Hehegánu, they seem to find folk of Kétle the least homely of humans.

Observer's Fortress (4110.DK) This tall observation tower is built with dark and heavy wood logs at the base, and successively lighter ones up to the top. Typically, a handful of young scholar priests of Ksáru are here, living up several flights of stairs in a small house. They do such things as observing the planets with their instruments. They are accompanied by protectors, perhaps a Thunru'ú or two. The isolation is such that they are aching to talk about their various study subjects, but their religion's philosophy frowns on giving knowledge away for free. Visitors may thus be offered a tour of their small observatory home for a fee. Those who are civil are offered some of the dark purple Díél wine that their Thunru'ú haul up here for them.

Town of Qamár (4110.FL) This is the seat of the fief. Farms that grow non-grain products surround the town. The roads are flanked by slender canals which Very Low clan folk must sweep each morning. Despite their diligent maintenance, outside of the rainy season, Qamár smells of human manure and mold. After living here for a long time, the ability to perceive these smells are lost. For new arrivals, it is often strong enough to lose one's appetite.

Somewhat ironically, a large market for essential oils and incenses dominates the west side of the town. It is a poor location for discerning which goods are of better quality. Incense is a widely sought-after commodity throughout the Empire of Tsolyánu. Priests all over need it for ceremonies. Most of it will be carried away by members of clans that make scented items in other towns and villages. The foul-smelling Olürech incense may be purchased here. (See also the text boxes About Olürech, the Sweet Death, Large Hex 4111, and Olúresh at 4115.DJ.)

The Endurants of Qamár

Sometimes priests and followers of Drá the Uncaring come to this region for a month-long rite to transcend the discomfort of the many insects and the unpleasant odors of this area. Generally, it is wealthier and older people. They become pale because they lose quite a bit of blood to parasites; there is a small risk of contracting a disease permanently. Success in the course leads to improved self-control that aids in sorcery as well as mundane scholarly pursuits. One who completes the regimen is known within that Temple as an "Endurant of Qamár". It is far less prestigious than being one of the "Perfected", but still respected.

Tháya's Hill (4110.GM) Tháya's Hill is around four centuries old. It is allegedly a monument that marks the Battle of the Adamant. The border had temporarily moved southwards with previous battles, and at this place north of the Sákbe Road, three invading cohorts from Milumanayá arrived. They were met by three cohorts of the Legion of the Clan of the Inverted Hand, who put down their bows and fought with swords because their opponents had no archers. The two sides annihilated each other to the last individual. Because they had all acted with nobility, the local people buried them together here. Stone being in short supply, baskets of mud and straw were piled over their graves to form this heap which can be seen from four miles away upon the Sákbe Road.

Village of Zakú (4110.HJ) This is a market town north of the Sákbe Road and south of the Stream of Zalyssá. Tall granaries, their roofs overhanging broad walkways, dominate the village. From here and westwards for some distance, the Sákbe Road is made of thick timbers and planks from iron-hard Tíu wood, plus logs of Ssár wood dug out of the swampy land. Digging up and moving these is the way that people of the swamps pay their taxes. This is typically done in the fall, during the monsoon season. Some of the wood is so dense it does not float. To move it, therefore, it is strapped between two buoyant logs. The base sections of wooden pillars, and sometimes heavy furniture, is made from this lumber.

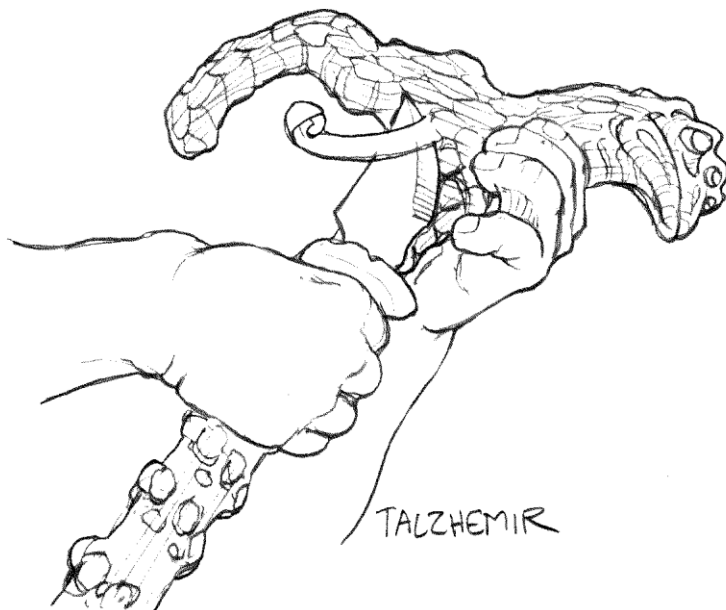
Village of Kallá (4110.HM) From a central Hetman's building, a set of walkway platforms radiate outwards to the clanhouses. Kallá is too small to have a market or a Hirilákte arena, but for those who have no clan connection that would enable them to stay in a house, there are a number of roofed pavilions two stories in height. In this vicinity, the Zalyssá widens to a lake-like river. Wood for cooking is in short supply. Chlén beasts draw carts of charcoal slowly this way.

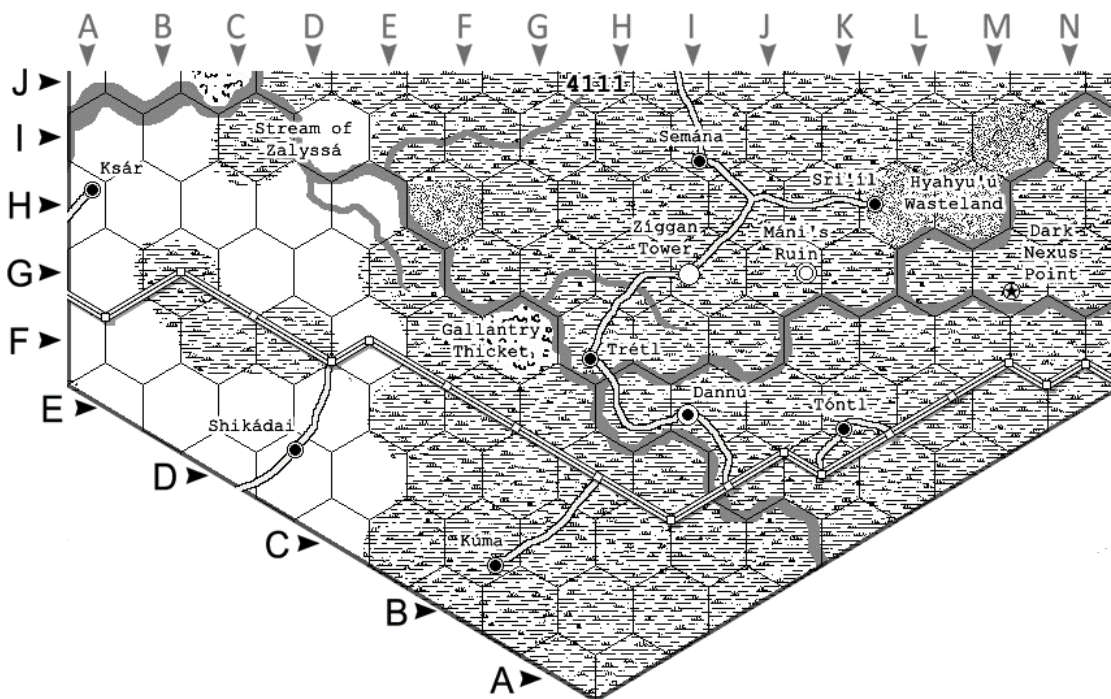
Courtesan's Badlands (4110.IH) Between the Stream of Zalyssá and the Sákbe Road is a region of yellowish cracked mud. No crops will grow here. For thousands of years, prostitutes nominally pledged to the Temple of Dlamélísh have maintained a community called the Floating Palace. Built so prettily above glittering waters, it does seem palatial to the bumpkin. During the rainy season, when little work can be done, wealthier farmers may vacation here. After the guests return to their clanhouses, the locals, primarily women, go out poling little boats to fish. This goes on until the rains return in spring.

Stream of Zalyssá (4110.IK) Flowing east to west, this body of water shows small ripples in the summer but by fall, it hardly seems to move at all, the water going an inky black. "Winter" is often a wet, not dry, drizzle season, and fall brings the full rainy season, so that the Stream and surrounding Small Hexes are turned into more of a slow lake the color of

milky coffee. Throughout much of this Large Hex, it is a slow lake, typically half a mile wide. This name refers to a number of tributaries as well. Which is the main stream, and which are branches, is often impossible to say.

Village of Thórsh (4110.IL) This is a typical village with clanhouses and chief elder's hut on stilts. It has a simple long rectangular wood-drying hut, again on stilts, with a ventilated floor from which wisps of smoke escape, the small charcoal fire protecting the lumber from vermin. Some of this wood is dark Ssár, brought out from the deep swamps by Hehegánu. The logs most prized are so dense that they do not float, a property that also makes them very durable. It is north of the Stream of Zalyssá where a handsome bridge is proudly maintained. Milumanayáni invaders once crossed this bridge in the unexpected invasion thwarted by the Legion of Vrikú. (See text box for the Legion of Vrikú under the entry for the Estate of Vrikú the Returner, 4010.FI).





HEX 4111

Nearly all swamp, this Large Hex holds a number of streams all called "The Stream of Zalyssá". Without bedrock, permanent structures are difficult to maintain. Trees start to lean when they get to a certain size. Only broad relatively light structures stand a chance.

Housing in this region is eccentric. Since the ground will not support stone, settlements are typically sprawling collections of wooden houses on stilts, houseboats, etc. Markets tend to be collections of canoes and rafts. Secretive enclaves pepper the shores of the Stream of Zalyssá.

Perhaps due to influence from another nation, being a slave in this region is especially unpleasant. Elsewhere in the Empire they might almost come to be treated as family. Here, the slave is often considered sub-human. The only human-flesh market is in the village of Tóntl (4111.EK).

The insects here range from distracting nuisance to health-draining hazard. Products of the region from the Large Hexes to the east are needed.

Around the delta-like network of the Stream of Zalyssá, hordes of nasty "fish" roil. The ignorant traveller who goes wading or swimming is rendered a few random chunks of bone in minutes. Tletlákha (toothy aquatic denizens) can grow to prodigious size on a diet of the smaller predators (See also the text box About Bog Iron, Large Hex 3912).

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')



Let the traveler take heed, for unusually large Tletlákha are to be encountered in the Swamps of Ksáru.

Olürech, the Sweet Death

One of the many, many kinds of incense sold here is known here as Olürech (called Olüresh in the Kráà Hills). When burnt, it has, at first, the smell of rotted meat. Then, a floral aroma emerges, hence its nickname of "the

Sweet Death". Olürech is used in Inner Temple ceremonies of Lord Sáрку and (even more often) those of his Cohort God, Durrítlámish. Laypeople are unlikely to encounter it in peaceful circumstances, but in battle, it is found in the copper censers of those who wield magic in the Worm Lord's service. Olürech is gathered as a nectar resin from the reeking throats of the blossoms of enormous carnivorous plants in this Large Hex. It once grew commonly in valley fens of the Kráà Hills, but now it is seldom seen. It is toxic if ingested. Even a small amount can slay the unborn infant of a pregnant woman. Some say that handling this substance renders women barren. (See also the text box for Olúresh at 4115.DJ.)

Village of Kúma (4111.CF) This is a Yáfa rice growing region. Planting begins while the gaps between hills as the spring rains drain into broad oval ponds and connecting canals fill with water. Farmers get about by poling tiny straw-bundle rafts sealed with pitch that they can easily carry on their backs. There are often also portable watch-towers consisting of several poles, some rope, and a few projecting sticks. It is generally girl children who are set to watch for dangerous creatures. A lowly and very elderly priest of Lord Ksáruk lives here in exile. Named Jepál hiTúkom, he is far more knowledgeable than befits his demeaning rank of First Circle. He once claimed that he saw three-eyed men and women in the village of Qállu (3711.JJ). When other priests came to investigate, they found no such people. For this slander, the Temple paid Qállu 213 Káitars in Shámtla. Jepál hiTúkom was stripped of rank and sent to spend the rest of his life in Kúma, as a schoolteacher.

Village of Shikádai (4111.DD) The philosophy of this basketmakers' village is traditionally 'neutrality'. They are simple peasants; whichever empire or overlord or mighty priest-king happens to be in power is the one they support. Currently, that is the sorcerer Menduhál hiDanyué, a follower of Ksáruk who offers magical restoration of limbs, for a price. These peasants have come to take pride in "their" wizard, making "Master" Menduhál feel like royalty with their deference. Truth be told, he is fond of them, too, though from his gruff manner, one might not guess. He lives in a stately brick tower on the edge of the village.

Town of Dannú (4111.EI) This is the seat of the fief. Dannú is a baked-brick town built on a low mound made from layer after layer of its previous incarnations. During the most sweltering months, their Hirilákte arena is kept deliciously cool by a large air-moving device of the ancients. Dannú has no slave market. That business was "banished" to the village of Tóntl (4111.EK) centuries ago for some unknown reason.

The Chlén of Dannú

This was a great cerulean-colored creature so big that it carried an entire clanhouse on its back. It loved to drink Tíálp, a local porridge-like alcoholic beverage made from Dná grain and dried fruit. One day, it was given too much. It fell asleep and rolled over on its side, smashing its burden. One might hear the phrase "a Chlén of Dannú" in this region. Colloquially, it means a grandiose plan doomed to fail because of its size.

Village of Tóntl (4111.EK) A few shabby clanhouses and a dozen big stable-like buildings stand here along the Sákbe Road. An air of despair hangs over it. This is the main slave market in this Large Hex, populated mainly by slavers and their wares. Because there is no chance of the town/city custom of the private auction, "specials" will be found with the others. Slavers come here to find choice "merchandise" that, in the more populous and prosperous regions, would automatically have gone to the aristocracy.

Gallantry Thicket (4111.FG) Tangles of twisty trees surround a rocky hill. A wall of stone stands here, sheltered by a large overhang. It is thought the wall was preserved by being buried but now the dirt of the ages has been once again washed away. The carvings date to the beginning of the Second Imperium. They show warriors in splendid outfits marching in rows and doing battle. In the treatise by Shártokoi Dűjél hiMrásyán, the warriors are described as wearing demon masks.

Village of Trétl (4111.FH) This is a hub for the river-merchants. They provide transportation all about the region of the Stream of Zalyssá. When the roads are out because of floods, these boaters bless the rains that give them extra mobility. They are generally Change-oriented and protect their customers' privacy.

Zíggan Tower (4111.GI) Built of large baked golden-orange bricks, the Tower is all that still juts from the fens. Fishing from boats is the main business. The settlement is now a great underground complex. Instead of clanhouses, there are a few clan corridors, very crowded. Something naturally in the water puts a whitish-brown crust on stones and bricks, mortaring them together and sealing them water-tight. Myriad personal boats cluster around an array of docks, like spokes of a wheel. Commerce is conducted politely from these craft.

Máni's Ruin (4111.GJ) Here there were once stone houses of great size built upon a blue-green rock dome outcropping. The blocks form dishevelled lines of rubble. They are dark mottled granite blotched with green moss. They were underwater until the level of the swamp receded

thousands of years ago, and were reputedly discovered by somebody named Máni. A stone effigy allegedly found here depicts a being with three legs, arms like paddles, and a humanoid face with no nose, sideways-facing bulging eyes, and what look vaguely like mutton-chip whiskers. (See also the text box for the Chlén of Máni in Dannú, 4111.El)

Dark Nexus Point (4111.GM) This area is avoided because people disappear here. According to travelers, a sound like an army of whispers is heard. Then the light goes out of the area. When it returns, some of the party have vanished, with no pattern to their choosing. Priests of the god Hrü'ü claim it has something to do with a demon from a Plane ruled by their deity.

Village of Sri'il (4111.HL) This place is perpetually flooded, and people get about by narrow plank walkways or small poled boats. The Olürech blossom can be found in this region. Harvesting its nectar is a cottage industry, one with a high mortality rate. (See the text box for Olürech in Large Hex 4111).

Hyahyú'u Wasteland (4111.HM) A dark region of tarry mud stretches from Sri'il (4111.HL) to roughly 30 km (19 mi) to the east. The creature for which it is named infests this place. The six little paws of a Hyahyú'u keep its weight spread so it does not sink. The scrawny scavenger is not much of a threat until a victim's legs have become trapped in the mire.

Village of Ksár (4111.IA) The swamps hold many things Chlén should not eat. This area is a safe "recharge" area where they graze. The export of this village is the sweet tall grasses, which are harvested and cured to hay in great open-sided roofed platforms on stilts.

Stream of Zalyssá (4111.ID) The name "Stream of Zalyssá" is applied to many branches. Being of equal size, it

is not possible to say which is the main body and which is the joining rill.

The Leaf Trick

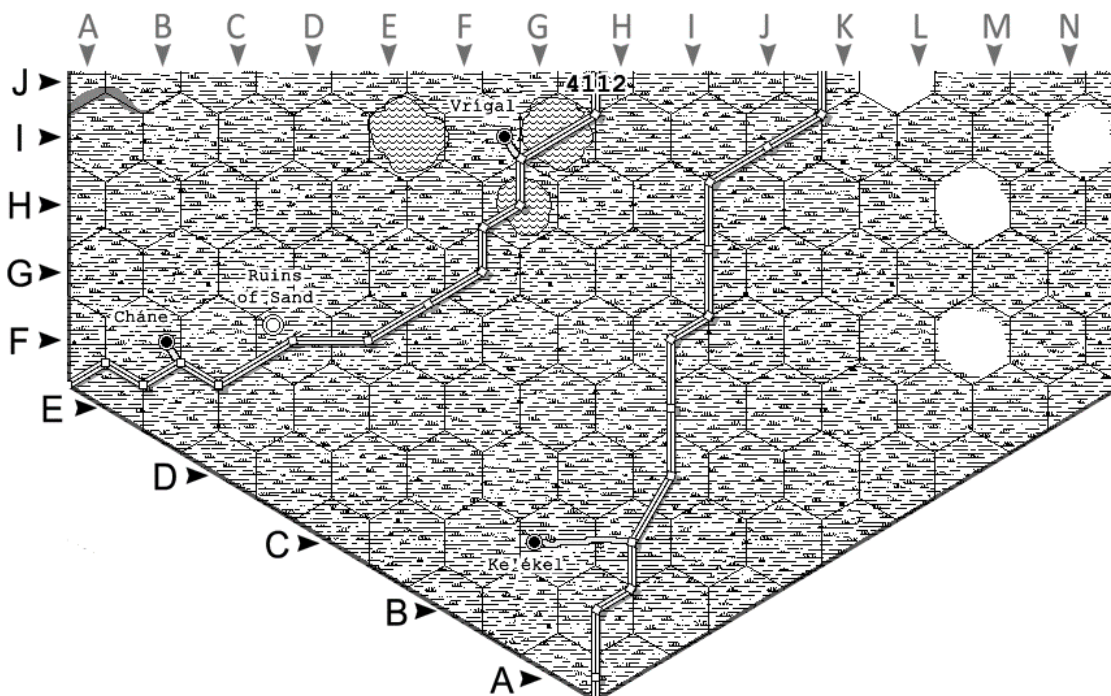
In some months, the sky is overcast for days, the sun not even a smudge of light, and the Zalyssá slows to a crawl. To find which way is roughly west, locals float a leaf in the bayou and watch the direction it slowly goes.

Village of Semána (4111.II) Semána is an entirely floating community. House-boats holding up to a dozen people are tethered to trees and each other. The social structure of the village finds visual representation in the branching arrangement of these homes. The market is a mass of people in broad woven reed hats, personal canoes, and loud haggling. Instead of coins, they use carved wooden slats which can be exchanged for silver Hlášh. Mishaps involving boats and voracious water creatures are common. A local breed of Élla crab can rear up, overturning canoes from underneath. Lady Avánthe, not Lord Ksárul, is their deity. She is venerated in both her capacities as the ruler of nature and the granter of fertility. Her shrine is a blue raft, elements of its design evocative of the adornments on the Temple of Avánthe in the cities. The village council of elders meets on a central platform with lightweight woven mat roofs.

An Unexpected Delicacy

Each autumn, the waters of this Small Hex and several around it become so infested with water larvae that the surface appears to simmer. When they are too young to have developed shells, and range from thumb to fist-sized, the creatures are caught and eaten, usually raw.





HEX 4112

Some communities in this Large Hex are matrilineal and matrilocal, having some cultural influence from the northern nations, such as matriarchal Yán Kór, and more egalitarian Milumanayá. Aridàni (including women soldiers) are more common here. However, men still generally follow traditionally male roles and occupations (which include herding), and women are generally the housekeepers and child-rearers. However, women are not expected to take a back seat in government, and the leading clan elders tend to be women. In battle, "northerners" find it natural for the Dritlàn (staff headquarters major, as opposed to their underling, a Molkàr, a field officer) to be a lady.

There are said to be ties between three temples of the gods known as the Dark Trinity: Hrü'Ü, Ksáru, and Sáрку. Púrdimal is to worshippers of Lord Ksáru what the City of Sáрку is to Sáрку's adherents, while a corresponding major stronghold of the worship of Hrü'Ü is present-day Mekú. In bygone millenia, the forces of the Doomed Prince of the Blue Room were the foes of those of Lord Vimúhla. Today, the power of the Concordat ensures that temples all of Pavár's other deities may stand here, but their prominence is something for which they must constantly struggle. By keeping a relatively low profile, most clergy throughout this Large Hex have learned to avoid being targets.

There are a few places outside of the villages here where bog iron is found. Slaves search the mud with sieves to find pea-sized nuggets. The sour-smelling slime permanently stains their hands and legs to a dark greenish-brown color. (See the text box About Bog-Iron at Large Hex 3912)

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')

City of Púrdimal (4112.MK)

Located in this Large Hex (but beyond the borders of the Kúrt Hills Atlas) Púrdimal is characterized as "The Black Toad of the Empire." It stands upon a foundation of maze-riddled dusk-gray stone, at the confluence of four Sákbe Roads. Squat, enigmatic, and brooding, it is one of the oldest cities in the Empire of Tsolyánu. It stands in the swamps, in the shadow of the slender needle of Thénu Thendráya Peak, which dwarfs its formidable attendant mountains. Some mutter that secrets from the mysteriously-destroyed city of Hmakuyál, were re-hidden here. Púrdimal's extensive watery Underworld is reputedly one of the largest in the Five Empires. The Armoury of Vrí hiKakúvu in this city is like a factory for Chlén hide and metal war goods. Those interested in the lore of weapons come here (or at least hope one day to visit). (This is all common knowledge; more, it is not for me to say.)

Bolas

Bolas, weights flung on connecting cords, are a local weapon specialty. The near-human Hehegánu and Hehecháru are sometimes experts with these lightweight entangling weapons. Beginners start with a single stone on a cord (once called a "Perdida" on Earth). The Tsolyáni Legion of Hekéth of Púrdimal (17th Imperial Heavy Infantry) has at least one Cohort of bola-wielders.

Fesúkh: The Creeping Mask of Gluttony

Large Hex 4112 has the greatest concentration of a pest found in the Swamps of Ksáru: the Fesúkh. It is an elastic creature with a shell marked with four eyespots; it ranges in size from dinner plate to serving tray. Both day and night, it crawls over the ground on four tentacles. It travels in packs attracted to animals' exhalations. They seek out sleeping prey. In unison, they extend themselves above the victim's head, then suddenly clasp tight with their arms. They extend a special feeding limb into the victims' mouths, causing them to cough and choke, making little sound, and typically passing out during the struggle. Each Fesúkh's goal is to suck its victim's most recent dinner from their stomach. Having accomplished this, they will quickly scuttle off. This attack can be fatal if the victim's stomach was especially full. This creature is sometimes kept magically preserved in a dormant state because it can actually be used to save a patient from an ingested poison. Tubes are placed in the patient's nostrils to prevent suffocation. They are also utilized in a very specific and ancient rite of the Temple of Hriháyal that is not discussed with outsiders.



Fesúkh, nicknamed "Creeping Masks", cling to their victims' faces while stealing the contents of their stomachs.

The Ómi Plant Powder

Villagers of this region also gather both the seeds and large amounts of a maroon-tinted leaves of a wild plant resembling earthly amaranth. The seeds are sprouted and eaten like grains. Large amounts of the leaves are cooked in a process that produces a precious crystalline powder known locally as "ómi". Large racks of these drying leaves can be seen from the road. Sometime people can be seen from the road, using sickles to gather up bundles of the locally-plentiful plant. Certain

steel-making clans use ómi to make steel, a fact they keep confidential by shipping the leaves along with other goods as if they were merely packing material. Ómi is also quite desirable to the glass-makers in the City of Sárku and Púrdimal.

Village of Cháne (4112.FB)

Found by following a raised stone road, Cháne is a cluster of small crowded wooden clanhouses sharing an elaborate stone foundation that once held a sprawling palace. Children push siblings on trapeze-like swings. At twilight, adults sit together pleasantly on balconies, with smoky incense to foil the insects. Villagers here are often excellent swimmers. Maybe it is true that they have webbed toes like some Hehegánu.

Stones from the Wet Quarry

This village is a source of a unique wealth: there are opals, ranging in color from pale blue to smoky purplish gray to pink, dug from deep muddy holes north and northwest of the village. The place to dig must be selected by a virgin girl, so it is believed. It has happened that a location did not produce any opals. Some say the unfortunate clan-daughter gets sacrificed, as it is reasoned that she must not have been pure. A darker rumor says the girl is drowned either way, as part of a ritual to find a place to search.

Village of Ke'ékel (4112.CG)

This is the seat of the fief. (No outsider knows how taxes are normally transported across the intervening swamps, but so long as they arrive on time, that is the fiefholder's own business.)

A raised road of stones leads westwards from the Sákbe Road to an elaborate village built from rot-resisting black Tíu wood draped in swathes of grey-green hanging moss. The clanhouses are built on a foundation of heavier dark-stained Ssár wood stilts. Hanging walkways connect them to a raised central plaza of stone. The edge of this structure is adorned with many carved demon faces as tall as a human. Pillars here and there hint it may once have been a roofed structure. Small wooden roofs serve to keep vendors and their wares dry.

Bodies buried here do not decay. Therefore, sometimes an elderly and devout worshipper of Lord Sárku or his Cohort Lord Durritlámish may come here to die. The body is held down with a log upon which their name is crudely hewn into the stripped blotchy wooden surface. Local tradition holds that those who are blessed by demons of death, their logs suddenly bloom with beautiful exotically frilled and twining fungi, colored with dramatic patterns of rust, black, and ivory-tan.

Ruins of Sand (4112.FD) There is little to see, here: a broad low mound, nearly a mile across and half a mile deep, of pale gray sand upon which nothing grows, and little moves. People come here to carry away fragments of a peculiar glass that varies in color from rich amethyst to a smoky purplish hue in color. They must sift for it, and only small pieces are found. There are also faintly yellowish pieces. These are less desirable but they will turn slightly purple if left out in the sun for years.

Misrómi the Obliterated

According to an old scroll in the possession of the Temple of Dlamélish in Púrdimal, this was the site of a very ancient place called Misrómi. It was destroyed during the time of the Fisher Kings and the States of the Triangle. The scroll mentions its purple glass appearing at this time. It advises people sternly to leave the place alone because it carries "the City Sickness".

Sometimes a very small piece of this material is used by sorcerors in their ritual spell paraphernalia. It is easily mistaken for an amethyst. Some say there are demon-summoning spells that require it.

Village of Vrígal (4112.IF) This village is located between three lakes. The clanhouses are built on stilts, joined by long platform walkways. Many pens and cages occupy various balconies of the buildings. The main export is young Káika fowl. The people of Vrígal gather and grind up a floating green weed that only grows up to pea-sized at most, "seeding" the lakes with this floating oily crop which

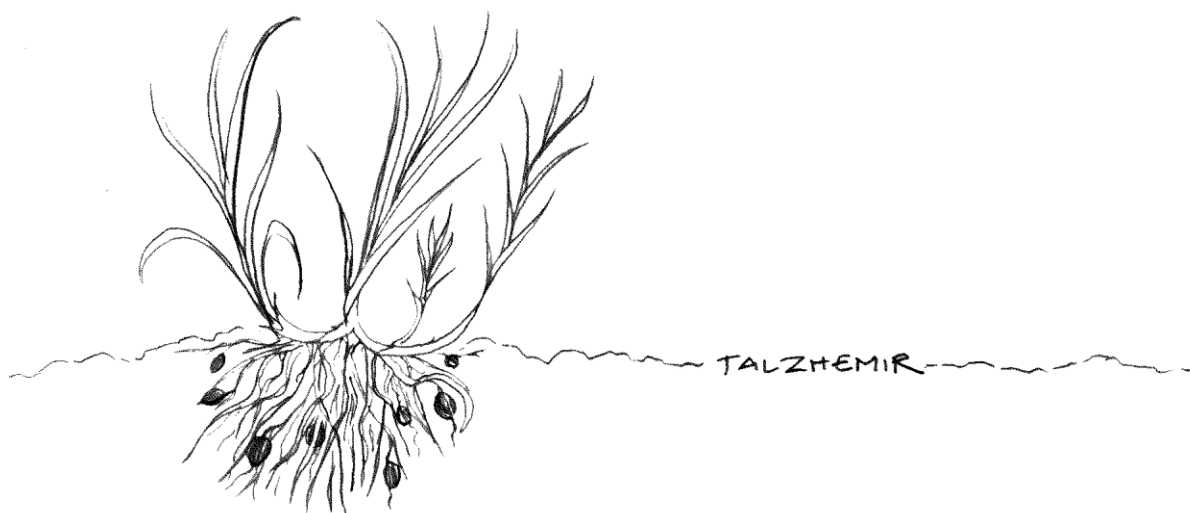
Káika love to eat. The birds also feast on little Ráyapu tubers, which they find by diving and digging.

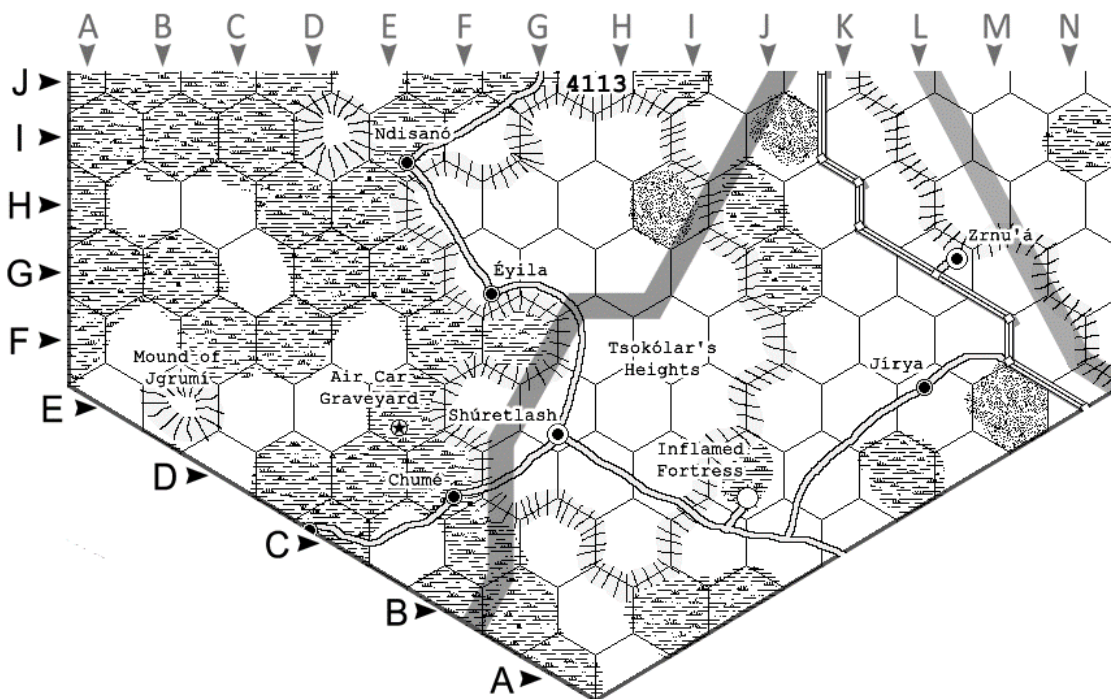
Floating Island Nests

In the autumn, flocks of a particular variety of Káika fowl, the Purple-crest, comes to reproduce here. The females are mottled brown; the males are gleaming dark brown with long upswept crests of a light periwinkle purple and white markings. Both sexes have relatively long legs for a Káika. This species is usually ground-living but can flutter up onto a rooftop. Purple-crests are only temporarily able to fly, growing wing feathers for the annual migration. They often eat little Ráyapu tubers, which they find by diving and digging.

These birds nest on a mat of weeds floating upon the lake. Local folk paddle small canoes out. Under the weight of an adult human, the weed mats would sink into the water, destroying nests. However, children under the age of six can be sent out into the colonies to take eggs. The Káika tolerate the children, and new eggs will be laid within several days. Gathered eggs are hatched in a special little heated building that is constantly warmed by a fire.

At the close of the season, roughly half of them head north on foot, pursued by predator all the way. About half of the birds are rounded up and put into the pens. They are carried off in baskets, to be sold for meat. Purple-crests are seasonal layers and do not produce as many eggs as other breeds.





HEX 4113

Watery channels, ponds, intermittent streams, and islands with huge trees with cascading thin branches draped with moss all the way to the ground form a natural maze. An old local nickname for this region is the Tatters. This is not just some place of mystery and surprises, this is a land of confusion, frustration, and bizarre deaths, both mercifully sudden and agonizingly slow.

There are regions where compasses do not work properly. There are a few places where magic works very erratically. There are also a few places where devices of the ancient will tend to malfunction, often with deadly results. Adherents of the god Ksáru openly praise the Tatters as a place of secrets, but in truth, they also find it quite maddening.

As it does in a few neighboring swampy Large Hexes, the ground slowly rises and falls over the years. Whole trees that were on little rises become half-submerged. Soggy ruts become paths. Why or how this happens, is unknown (or if somebody does know, they are not saying).

The occasional rare Hehegánu is sighted, but they tend to pass through and depart quickly, unwilling to talk. Even they get lost here.

The Oil of Colors

In a few areas, a scum or sheen forms; a thin layer of oil, between bits of dirty golden-brown foam, that reflects in iridescent colors. It has a distinctly "mediciney" odor. The Oil of Colors, as it is called, has a way of causing color to

be lost. Chlén hide exposed to it for several hours turns a milky greenish gray. Continued exposure of a few more hours un-does the tanning process, resulting in rubbery armor and drooping, useless weapons. As a way of removing stains, it is a valuable cleaning agent. Some say it symbolizes amnesia; in this capacity, it is rumored to have a use in rituals to Lord Wurú.

The Cone-spitting Kütlátli Plant

Vaguely resembling a water lily, the Kütlátli has long underwater roots that function as tripwires. Should they be trodden upon or tugged, the plant shoots many hard conical nuts in that direction. Then, when they strike something hard, they open their "petals", releasing a mist. Upon skin contact, this substance has a powerful narcotic effect on humans, starting with loss of balance. There are different varieties, some causing drastic sleepiness, some causing hallucinations, and some causing temporary psychotic delusions. The cones cannot be harvested for a useful narcotic, as their contents degrade upon picking, but the small seeds they release may be of interest to a botanist or gardener specializing in bizarre water plants. This is probably a genetically-engineered remnant of ancient times.

The Puzzling Méng-Méng Trees

This is a local species, stems attached at the center of green circular leaves. There are two things odd about them. First, they all grow in the same shape and

configuration. They can be of different ages and sizes; they may differ due to damage, but just left to grow, one looks very similar to another. Deeper into the Tatters, they become more common, their similarity possibly making it easier to lose one's way. The Méng-Méng's other peculiarity is that the first large branch juts from the trunk towards the same direction as its close neighbors, but this slowly shifts as they go. Thus, they are unreliable as indicators of direction.

(See also 'About the Swamps of Ksáru')

Village of Chumé (4113.DF) Selling herbs, spices, and healthcare products is bustling Chumé's primary occupation; it is the outlet for goods of the Fief of Nrayamú. Lots are auctioned off to merchants in a plaza owned by the prestigious Iron Helm Clan. The marketplace has an overwhelming array of products. The best bug repellent is made from oils of Tsúral buds and a specific variety of Tsévu fruit that bears a rich and appetizing "lemon cookie" aroma. Savvy buyers know that the finest products come, not in jars, but handy bladders held shut with wooden clips. These look primitive, and thus will not appeal to rich customers. When they arrive in towns and cities, these unguents will probably be re-packaged in glossy little fancy-looking jars.

The Paddy-fish of Nrayamú

Throughout this fief, a specific system of growing is used. It was pioneered here centuries ago under the direction of enterprising priests of Ksáru. The many little fields in which Yáfa rice is grown are bordered by mud and woven straw walkways a meter high or more. Woven mat awnings above them to keep the rains from washing them away. Some years the crops would be successful; some years a root blight would destroy them. A little bulgy-eyed fish called the Kütépi was introduced, again by the priests. These fish nibbling on the parts of plants below the water somehow encouraged stronger and deeper roots. Care is taken that there is always a water-filled little corner for these fish in winter, for if a paddy dries out, they will go walking off on the fleshy portions of their fins.

Inflamed Fortress (4113.DJ) The cyclopean architecture of this castle-like building has withstood the ages well. The stone is slightly translucent and red, brought here from the vicinity of Thénu Thendráya Peak to the north. Worship of an ancient form of Vimúhla took place here. They were driven out and replaced by adherents of Ksáru. According to an ancient pact, priests of the fire god are welcomed, and allowed to hold rituals here.

Mound of Jgrumí (4113.EB) This is a large karst hill that towers over its many "sister" hills. Based on a book found at Tsokólar's Heights, the scholar Gagramún claimed there was a lost settlement here, and that it used to be an island inhabited by fire-worshippers. (See the text box for the Book in the Ball in the town of Shúretlash, 4113.EG).

Air Car Graveyard (4113.EE) Rumors have persisted here for centuries, of the existence of a place with many air cars mostly submerged in the swamp. Several expeditions have gone to find it, none successful. The story might have died out long ago but for one thing: a small number of independent accounts collected by the Temples of Ksáru and Thúmis agree with on a few key details. One is that the exteriors of the machines were blotched and striped with hues and shades to match their surroundings. On the other hand, no two accounts agree on how to reach it. (4113.EE) is just one of several possible locations said to exist.

The Fourteenth Whisper

In some dormitories of the Temple of Ksáru, the older acolytes keep alive a fun tradition of imparting "The Eighteen Whispers" to the younger ones. A "Whisper" is an intriguing little tale, shared in exchange for a little favor. Some versions of Whisper number Fourteen, say that the Air Car Graveyard in the Swamps of Ksáru is north of Tétkelha Village (4012.QK), but other versions say it is north of Chumé (4113.DF). The story usually relates that some legion of Chegárra-worshipping soldiers blundered into it. Of course, they had no idea what they had found, nor the means to get back to it.

About That Word 'Car'

The world of Téकुमल is over 100 centuries removed from the automobiles of lost Earth, yet somehow a word apparently meaning a vehicle for people, persists. There are rare mentions of "air cars" in the epics. The phrase "air cars of the ancients" is therefore understood, even by low-born folk, to mean some sort of flying conveyance. A more imaginative peasant might picture a ponderous Chlén cart somehow hovering. It has even been speculated that the "dragons" upon which the N'lúss were said to have traveled were actually 'air cars' (perhaps with a prow ornament resembling the head of a Sró, like some rowed ships upon the distant Mssúma River?). A scholar-priest of one of the temples of the gods of knowledge, however, may have actually heard more: that they can resemble a great oval gravy bowls, and that there are even a few working examples in the world. This answer suggests a new enigma: if 'air cars' are machines, what are they doing in a 'graveyard'?

Town of Shúretlash (4113.EG) Many urban centers can be described as 'bustling' but Shúretlash is 'lethargic'. It is customary, for those who can afford to do so, to sleep between noon and roughly 6p.m. The roads are too narrow for two carts but drivers not familiar with the place frequently insist on goading Chlén beasts to make deliveries of items such as large wooden beams.

The Book in the Ball

Around A.S. 2100, the scholar Gagramún of the Temple of Thúmis in the town of Shúretlash translated a codex allegedly discovered in a large glass sphere in a cave in the Tsokólar's Heights (4113.FI). It spoke of an island rising above a sea, settled by fire-worshipping people. According to Gagramún, that island was the Mound of Jgrumí (4113.EB). Known as the Codex of Gagramún, the translation is considered unconvincing, and there has only been the most cursory exploration of the Mound.

Village of Jírya (4113.EL) This was the site of a city called Dhe'qírmne in obscure scrolls. There is hardly anything left of it besides small points of masonry that protrude from the surrounding mire. Here, a portion of the city wall is now used as a bench; over there, what was once a roof-comb holds up a squash trellis. Villagers loyal to Lord Ksáruł tend food gardens. There is still a small temple to that god here.

The God of Little Surprises

An ancient Aspect of Ksáruł is worshipped here, known as Essúl. He is depicted as a boy with a dreamy countenance. In whispers, it is leaked that in the past Prince Essúl possessed his priests. A ritual garment, full of little secret pockets, is still kept in readiness for such an event. Known as The Robe Re-woven, it is replaced in one-ninth sections, such that every eighty-one years, the whole of it is replaced. During that process, small animals, such as a child might keep as a pet, have been found in the pockets. As for the priests who served as the vessels for the manifestations of Essúl, they are left empty husks.

Tsokólar's Heights (4113.FI) These "Heights" are really more 'the area not sunken into the surrounding mire' than 'heights'. They are densely farmed by peasants bound to sleepy Shúretlash. There are a number of natural caves that worm their way steeply down into the earth. Some produce clean water during the rainy season, and slaves carry it out by the bucketful at the height of the dry. The Codex of Gagramún was reputedly found in one of these caves, preserved in a big glass sphere. (See the text box for the Book in the Ball in the town of Shúretlash, 4113.EG).

Village of Éyila (4113.GF) This bland and impoverished settlement occupies a slight rise, on stony ground above the surrounding swamps. Moody mists drift here for much of the year, drying up during winter months.

Chodhícha, the Bone Swallower

Centuries ago, the first creatures called Chodhícha were seen in the fog. They appeared as disjointed skeletons inside a thick layer of translucent dark slime, and they attacked villagers from ambush. They were extremely hard to slay. Spells for driving out the minions of the Lord of Worms had no effect upon Chodhícha. Terrified, the peasants huddled in their houses until the apparitions left. Now the prevailing opinion is that they are slime demons from another Plane that engulf and digest human prey.

Chodhícha (2.2)

Wandering: 35%, 8/12/15 Lair: 65%, 12/15/18

PHYS: 11	DEFT: 10	INTL: 10
WILL: 10	PSYC: 2	Size Mod: 0
Initiative: 1/2/3	Movement: 6 ground	
Defenses:	Melee: 3	Missile: 3
Armor: 3/2/2	Hits: 14	Energy: 10

Attacks	Hit:	Dmg:	Other:
Light Axe	14-	2/4/6	

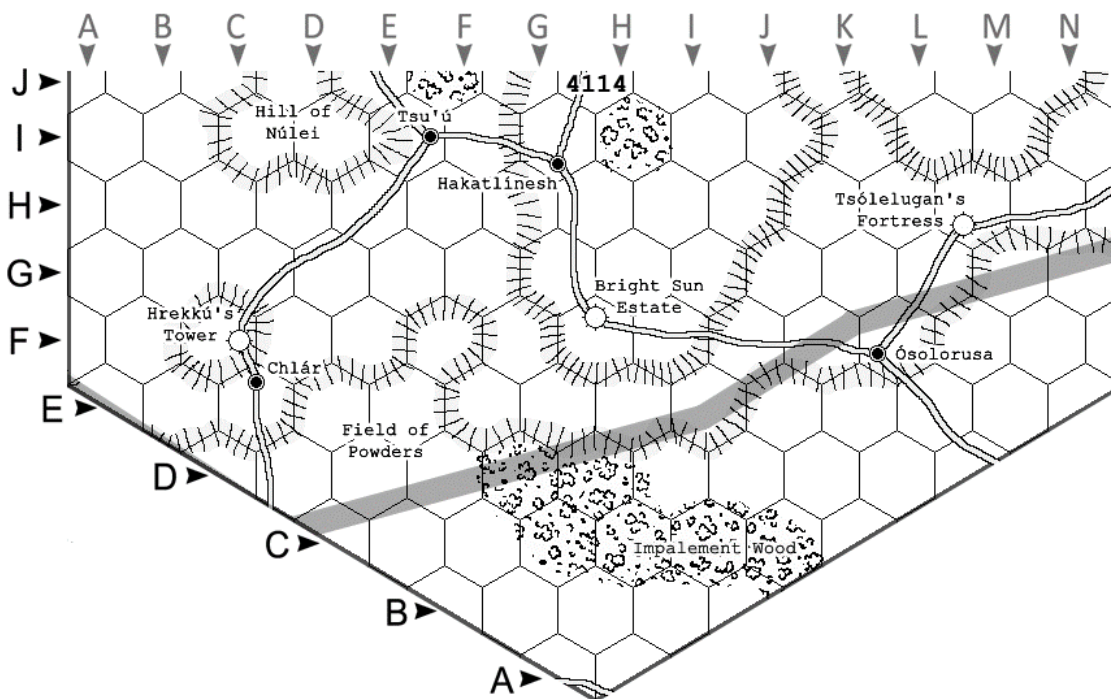
Other Abilities:

Pain Resistance: Remains conscious until its Hits = 0

Town of Zrnu'á (4113.GL) The Sákbe Road at this point is a boundary for Ssá Sáрку Province. This town is tightly controlled by stone-fisted aristocrats who happen to belong to the Temple of Sáрку. Much to the annoyance of that Temple, their religious leanings are very cursory and their donations are miserly. Zrnu'á is surrounded by walls, but without walkways along the top. Instead, there are arrow ports at ground level. Anyone wishing to enter will be required to pay a stiff fee proportional to their status. New arrivals are informed that it is against town rules to enter any Underworld without a permit from the mayor's office, and this, too, will cost money.

Silk from the Deadly Leapers

Herders east of town sometimes search for Dnélu burrows around here, marking sightings with tall pennants. Those skilled with weapons hunt the dangerous creatures. The Devisors of Soft-clinging Beauty will pay well for the cocoons. They weave a version of this sheer fabric so tight it is waterproof. A small but prestigious clanhouse of theirs is found here.



HEX 4114

As one approaches the Kráà Hills from the east or southeast, the soil goes from some of the most fertile in the Empire of Tsolyánu, to rocky and poor. There is less and less water and grass, consequently there are fewer and fewer Chlén beasts. Fields are tilled with hoes, and plows are pulled by small teams of humans. Despite a reputation for being hardy, the impression that this Large Hex's residents tends to give is "fired".

Older farms have stone reservoirs for saving up the copious rainwater of autumn. Elsewhere water drains readily into the gravelly soil. They keep farming through the winter because the crops will be meager. The day begins before dawn with pulling bucketfuls of water out of these ponds, or a well. Instead of flooding a furrow, they are more likely to go about with a copper watering can, meticulously giving each plant a dribble.

Spots of this Large Hex were held by worshippers of Lord Vimúhla, in the time before the Concordat. Today it is very strongly dominated by the Sárku-worshipping nobles of the City of Sárku. Some say there are lost armories of steel out here, vestiges of the Flame Lord's presence. The peasants know there is a standing reward for clues to the location of the old caches and battlefields, and sometimes discovery of an old buckle or ornament in some field sends treasure-seekers into a tizzy.

Despite Lord Sárku being a god of the intellect, education is hard to come by in this Large Hex. Each little valley has a body of superstitions, some shared by neighbors, others unique. "A plow must always be pulled by five people."

"The bodies and spirits of one's relatives serve as the guides to the afterlife, so do not go too far from the clan gravesite." "Stay indoors at night: fearful creatures walk the hills, and one's very spirit-soul is in danger from what they do." "Eat no fruit on the first day of the six day week." "Dusty yellow clothing protects infants from being bitten by snakes." "Hang a necklace of Feshénga teeth above the front door." "Why? No one knows, but that is how we do things here." The peasants also often live by little sayings that encourage hard work and a xenophobic attitude towards "the outside world".

There were once a number of the tall tapering Tíu trees here but they were taken for use as large timbers in building long ago. One area, however, has trees of this kind reserved for ritual execution, hence its name, Impalement Woods (4114.PE).

The "Field of Powders" is famed throughout the Province of Ssá Sárku. Its keepers claim to be the sole source of several powders used recreationally, but there are other sources, including many "renegade" growers, some under the discreet auspices of various temples. (See the entry for the Field of Powders, 4114.ED.)

Village of Chlár (4114.EC) This is an obscure but wealthy village. The primary business of this place is the making of some uncommon recreational powders and medicines. Clever devices, primarily created and maintained by Tinalíya, process substances hazardous in concentration. Administrative priests of the Temples of Thúmis and Ksárul control these together. Further work with the powders and other goods is done by the Green Kirtle Clan. As the powders are mainly from plants genetically-

engineered to not be harmful, problems such as dependency are very rare. Potential for abuse comes in more unusual forms, such as attempting to extort a town undergoing some disease outbreak.

The transport of goods from this place is primarily on the backs of clan members (seldom slaves, because they will be armed). There are known to be alternative methods of distribution, and the details are trade secrets.

A Hidden Botanical Doctrine?

The making of powders here is sometimes a combination of two or more ingredients, called "Locks" and "Keys". A few Locks are known to make several different end products depending on the Key.

In the Temple of Dlamélish, there is a very archaic liturgy preserved that allegedly describes her trysts with a young Ksárul in great erotic detail. The Temple of Ksárul has no sexual rites, however, and they find this salacious old poetry laughable. There is some speculation, however, that the "Song of the Keys of Pleasure" metaphorically alludes to which plants to combine to make various useful preparations.

Field of Powders (4114.ED) If it could be seen from the air, the place would resemble the cracked skin of some peculiar creature, each geometric scale colored slightly differently from its neighbors. There are rare plants that grow here in many large waist-high stone-edged plots, each separated from the others by neat five-meter-wide bands. The plots at the edge have sunken into the swamp, and it is unknown how large this plantation garden once was.

These plants are primarily sources of powders used recreationally, and medicines. Nicknamed "Gifts of the Gods", they were genetically engineered to be free from dangerous side effects. There are apparently later additions that reproduce sexually (by fruit, seeds, etc.); but most are "self-cloning" (multiplying by sending out runners with shoots, and so on).

The Green Kirtle Clan maintains a clanhouse here. In addition to sorcerous defense, rumor has it that unseen guardians protect this area from theft. The plants are tended by those who inherit their job along with their lineage name. The care of the different sections is recorded as poetic litanies which are orally passed down.

The Lost Jewels

Most of the plots of the amazing Field of Powders still visible are dead. Their hereditary keepers, however, are

still selected and trained in their litanies. The missing plants are euphemistically called "lost jewels".

On very rare occasion, a dried powder in a sealed container is recovered from some tomb in this area. The Blue Kirtle Clan may pay to have it brought to the Temple of Ksárul in Púrdimal (4112.MK). There is a small (perhaps 1%) chance that an old sample can be used to regrow the living plant using one of the devices of the ancients. If identified and placed in its proper plot back in the Field of Powders, it may live again.

Hrekkú's Tower (4114.FC) After Prince Dhich'uné fled, troops loyal to the Lord of Worms were ousted from this old base, and the Legion of Glorious Destiny (9th Imperial Crossbowmen) installed. The surrounding farm fields were re-deeded to this Legion for their upkeep.

Rocky Recovery

Traditionally followers of Vimúhla and Chiténg, many members of this Legion are sons and grandsons of the Milumanayáni who stayed loyal to Tsolyánu when Milumanayá seceded in A.S. 1976. Roughly 360 year ago, they were sent to Púrdimal in the Great War of 2020, when Mu'ugalávya invaded. It was seemingly an incongruous place for people from an arid heritage. Yet, it is said that their ability to go long stretches on very little water served them well amidst the noxious swamp water. Their numbers were depleted but they were victorious. The land they have been given here is poor soil - dry and mixed with chunks of random stone - but, as a people, they have known far worse. Outside of Hrekkú's Tower there are five small clanhouses where they may sow the crop of the next generation of soldiers.

Daughters of Amujásra Rock

This group began with the female children of the Legion of Glorious Destiny who reached adulthood while their parents were away in Púrdimal. Since then, they have often participated as support staff but they long for formal induction. Not officially part of the Legion, they live in a barracks in the shadow of Hrekkú's Tower where they train as light infantry. In addition to using long spears and slings, they practice a martial art involving small clay pots of burning oil on Chlén hide chains. Their performance with fire is part of the celebratory lore of this Legion. Amujásra Rock is the name of the desert stronghold from which a number of them came, four centuries ago.

Bright Sun Estate (4114.FH) This is the seat of the fief. Worship of the god Hrǫ'ǫ and his Cohort Wurú dominate here. The name alludes to the worship of the solar deity Lord Hnálla. Officially, the Bright Sun Estate is under the joint authority of highborn merchants of the White Stone Clan and the Black Stone Clan.

As usual, the truth is more complicated. Each of the twenty temples has a representative here, as do a number of influential families. A thick and rich broth of favors, inducements, obligations, and blackmail simmers like an apothecarist's kettle.

The centerpiece of the Estate is the luxurious Hostel of the Radiant Diadem. Behind their hospitable smiles and affable manners, there is high security, to protect their prestigious clientele (usually from each other). The political maneuvering that goes on here quietly often has nothing to do with this fief.

Botanical treasures from the Field of Powders account for a good portion of the Fief's wealth. That particular region does not have an official village but it is counted as part of the Fief as a grand courtesy. If it is threatened, the resident Green Kirtle Clan can call upon major favors to secure assistance.

Village Ósolorusa (4114.FL) This sparsely-populated place is nicknamed the Village of Good Drink. Modest clanhouses of winemakers dot the road. An area at the side of the local Hirilákte Arena is permanently devoted to an incredibly detailed debate amongst clergy of Lord Sárku. In laypersons' terms, it concerns whether or not human emotions actually directly give some kind of energy or power to any of the gods of Pavár's pantheon. It is said this discussion has been going on for two thousand years (and perhaps even far longer than that), originally in the City of Sárku, but when the discussion became too annoying, the participants were exiled here. A handful of the locals have listened so long that they have actually gotten caught up in this esoteric subject, and now they sit on the sideline, more interested in hearing the shabbily-dressed priests than arena combat. Local lore claims that once a highly-placed scholar-priest returning from a pilgrimage to the Temple of Sárku (4013.NI) stopped by. He turned from the solemnly bickering debaters to the ones watching, and opined that these old peasants were far closer to serving Lord Sárku's will.

Tsólelугan's Fortress (4114.HM) This dark brown stone building strongly resembles a temple to Lord Sárku. In general form, it is a squat trapezoid, an eye-boggling assemblage of towers, buttresses, stairs, parapet, and so forth. A plan to destroy it ended abruptly when the magistrate in charge of the effort killed himself. The place is known to have been built upon the site of a Ssú enclave. It

was also used by the original Legion of the Scales of Brown (9th Imperial Heavy Infantry), a body of soldiers notorious for their violent excesses. It was disbanded but the name revived by Prince Dhich'uné. Emperor Hirkáne required its officers to come from other existing battalions loyal to the Worm Lord, and forbade the inclusion of undead in its ranks. Around the time Dhich'uné vanished, roughly twenty officers of the new Legion of the Scales of Brown went missing as well. Some say they were brought to Tsólelугan's Fortress. An even more extreme rumor is that the missing imperial prince is, himself, in hiding here. Accordingly, the site is probably watched, and there are said to be magical spells in place that prevent leaving through other-planar means.

A Traditional Battleground

Tsólelугan's Fortress has a foul reputation now, but this was not always so. Two Tsán away stands the Sunset-Facing Crescent of Ever-Glorious War: a vast C-shaped stadium, divided in half at the center and open to the west. There are command platforms and stone bleachers. The site was used for Qádarni battles, ritual battles to settle larger conflicts with less loss of life. Sometimes blunt weapons and arrows were used for training exercises here. Both were anointed with a sap from a plant found on the slope. A warrior's penalty for being struck is long minutes of agony.

Hill of Núlei (4114.IC) This is a site sacred to Lord Sárku. Brown and tan headstones are arranged in neat rows that go so far as the eye can see. Up the weedy side of the hill there are trails leading to caves with bronze gate corroded shut. For a long time, fanatics of the Lord of Worms had their remains brought here to be closer to what they believed to be the "pure" and "original" worship of their god. Sárku is sometimes depicted as a five-headed snake-like entity; Núlei is a name given to the tallest head in the center. The folk of Tsu'ú (4114.IE) are generally terrified of this place.

Village of Tsu'ú (4114.IE) Although these are loyal worshippers of Lord Sárku, they do not care to visit the nearby sacred Hill of Núlei (4114.IC). They say that when the power of that god surges, humans nearby lose their minds and do very strange things. They prefer to inter their dead in a cemetery south of their clanhouses.

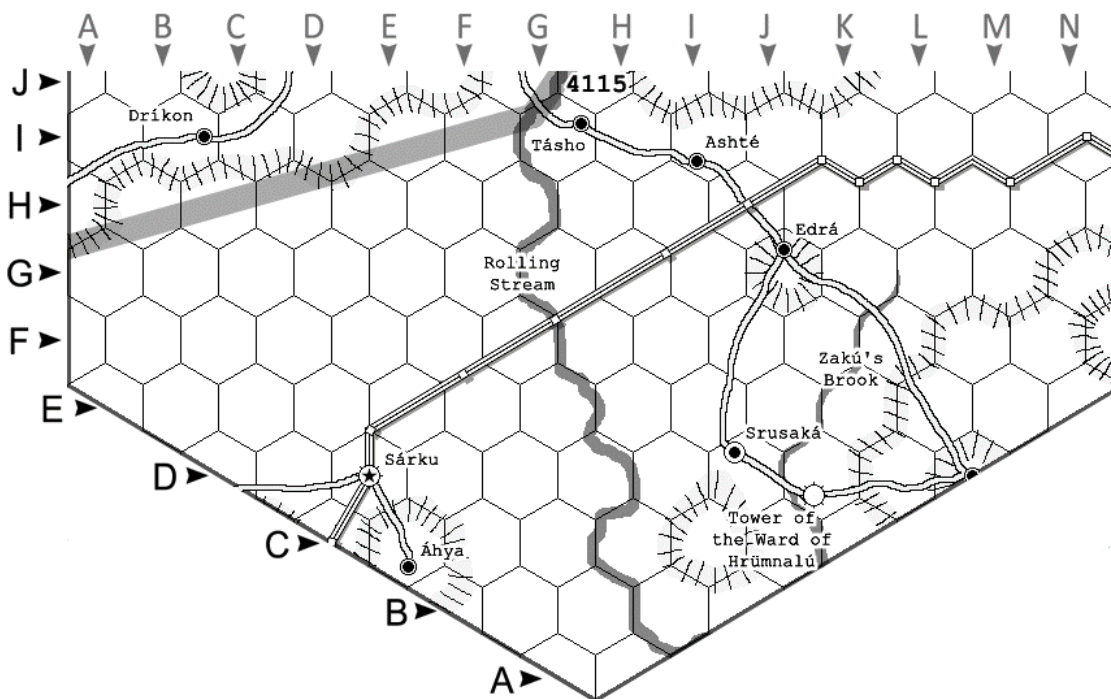
Hakatlínesh (4114.IG) Mysterious and shady, this is a forgotten hamlet. Groves of various kinds of trees top the little hills. Nut-brown clanhouses with plenty of balconies and railings wind between venerable trees, sometimes built onto the sides of them. An older name for this place is Gáka Tínesh. Women are usually close to the clanhouse, gathering up various goods from trees. Men go out hunting. Early in the morning, the children carry water for bathing

and cooking home from concealed wells, but then have the rest of the day to do as they wish. Hakatlíresh has no cemetery; the crypts of the ancestors are somewhere in the hills, their location a secret from outsiders.

Impalement Wood (4114.PE) This is a region of Tíu trees, which are not so common in this Large Hex. This area

is a protected forest because these are destined for use in "the High Ride", i.e. Impalement, ceremonial execution in which the victim is skewered alive. Members of the Dire Axe Society, devotees sworn to Lord Chiténg, prepare them. (These woods extend into 4014.JO.) (See the text box for Tíu Trees under 'About the Swamps of Ksáru!').





HEX 4115

The approaching Sákbe Roads traverse farmlands that grow steadily rockier. The unsmiling peasants that tend them begin much like peasants anywhere else in Tsolyánu, their lives neither ecstatic nor miserable, their religious practices tradition-bound yet shallow. However, as one travels to higher altitudes, there is a growing tendency for them to be armed, even if it is just with cudgels, quarterstaves, or slings. A few may possess a bow of the cherished Séresh wood, or sometimes that of Ajátl wood.

Serpents, such as the venomous Alásh, become more plentiful. There are monuments with mysterious inscriptions in what is known today as "the Tongue of the Worm-Lord". The local folk can not read them, while the spoken version of that language is preserved as a secret deep in the Temple of Sárku hundreds of Tsán away. Sometimes the locals refer to these engraved monoliths as "Ancestor Stones", and they are considered sacred. The region's heritage as the place where Lord Sárku's worship began is often reflected in the names of its clans: Domed Tomb (High status); Glory of the Worm (Medium Status).

Down below the road, there are often wide areas without anybody to be seen, and no physical signs of inhabitation. Settlements tend to be placed out of sight, to make invasion and attack more difficult. "Roads" are often just a pair of parallel tan tracks worn down by carts.

Along foot-trails that wind up the hills, shepherds utter inarticulate yelps, signals to their long-legged dogs. These beasts, their ribs typically showing, lope along, keeping flocks of thick-limbed shaggy Hmélu beasts in a group.

The valleys with villages are usually surrounded by groves of Diél fruit trees. These are eaten in a thousand ways, and made into liquor.

The governor of the City of Sárku occasionally sends out night patrols to scour the north-eastern Kúrt Hills in light forested regions, seeking retaliation against the Kurtáni Foundationist camps. It is rumored these patrols employ Dokémi Alán, pale children returned from the grave. If Dokémi Alán were to appear casually above ground in the city, it would be a violation of the Concordat, even in that city. (See the text box for Dokémi Alán, Large Hex 3714.)

The Willful Milumanayáni Women

When Milumanayá seceded from Tsolyánu in A.S. 1976, many tribesfolk still loyal to Tsolyánu retreated to the Kráà Hills. Women and young people of the northern culture often have more of a say, in general, than they would elsewhere in the Empire. Within just a century, a stereotype has emerged that women of this region are argumentative and demanding.

(See also 'About the Kráà Hills')

Village of Áhya (4115.CE) The existence of this small community upon a stony ridge, the Wary Heights, is not well-known. It is a grove for exceptional fresh fruit for the ruling nobles of the City of Sárku. A wall surrounds it, and outsiders are not allowed in without authorization of the authorities of that city. Aromatic herbs and fruit crops (notably, Diél plum trees) are grown upon waist-high ledges. Guards from the (Medium Status) Clan of the Glory of the Worm protect it. A

group from the Clan of the Devisors of Soft-Clinging Beauty also resides here, not allowed to leave. Servants walk up the long road and back, arriving upon the first day of the six-day week, and returning, somewhat mysteriously, with baskets of fruit regardless of the time of year. Some say there is a Nexus Point that makes this possible. Others claim it is some device of the ancients. Still others say that it is magical spells. Some of the fruit-bearers say that mighty invisible demons fly the skies above this place, themselves capable of seeing the invisible.

The Hall of Time's Cessation

Áhya is actually a place of three concentric walls. In the side of the hill there are doorways sealed by circular stones. Not just an elite garden, this is also a place of fine fabric storage, within a set of vaults owned by temples of Thúmis and Avánthe. Elaborately woven items that often took generations to create are kept here: cloaks, curtains, funerary shrouds, tapestries, and so on. It also holds copies, woven versions, of sacred scrolls. Fruit, too, is stored here. It is said that this place preserves its contents by means considered anathema to the god Hrű'ű. Yet, ultimately, it is the City of Sárku that tightly controls this place.

Tower of the Ward of Hrűmnalú (4115.CI) Placed beside Zakú's Brook, this enigmatic dark blue edifice is said to have originally come from elsewhere magically around the time of the death of Emperor Hirkáne Tlakotáni (some say shortly before). At its apex is a small round room with curved windows out of which light shines each night, too bright to look at directly when one is near it. This point of light can be seen as far away as the town of Srűsaká (4115.DJ), on the other side of a little marshy region. Its base stands in several meters of water, where green plants flourish wildly, along with flowers. Nearby, a bridge allows travel along the road over Zakú's Brook (4115.CK).

The Enhancers

This place is presided over by a handful of sorcerer-soldiers in the service of the Regiment of the Knower of Spells (5th Imperial Crossbowmen). Their specialty is the enhancement of others for combat. When they wish to travel, the Enhancers are carried on palanquins by runners whose stamina and agility they magically augment. They can be hired by other military units; the sole coin they accept is power for their temple. Enhancers can come from any social status. To prevent awkwardness, any of low station are discreetly raised up by the Temple of Grugánu. Alongside the Enhancers is a small crowd of attending women. It is claimed these female non-mages possess a deeper Pedhétl (psychic

reservoir). They are used as sources of mystical energy in battle. There are those in the Temple of Sárku who currently protest the placement of the Tower so near the City of Sárku. Perhaps it will soon be relocated.

Zakú's Brook (4115.CK) This small river wends its way into the steep hills to the south. The Tower of the Ward of Hrűmnalú (4115.CI) has somehow planted itself here. There are some primitive Ninínyal living near there. (For more information, see text box under Zakú's Brook, 4015.PE).

City of Sárku (4115.DE) This is the seat of the fief, as well as the capital of the province of Ssá Sárku. The current provincial governor is the sober Qútmu hiSenkólum of the Black Stone Clan (Medium Status Clan, High Lineage). Governor Qútmu has an identical twin brother, Qénak, who is ever at his side as bodyguard. His mother Sakémi and his father Rayésh are two members of his council. His first cousins, Dúyek, a priest, is the Commissioner of the tomb police who also serve as the city guard. Another of Governor Qútmu's cousins, Tomél, is the High Minister of Market Commerce. Governor Qútmu's elderly sister Éluchan is first wife to the fiefholder, Arsékmoi ("Baron") Ahalúk hiTolékussan (see the note on Hítl, text box at 4014.RJ).

As one nears the City of Sárku, there are vast cemeteries amidst the rocky slopes. The tips of dark obelisks and mausoleums protrude from the mists in the ravines. There is often a cool dry fog, and rather than being humid, the city is arid. For those who practice the mystical arts, another change may become apparent: this area is "magically fertile". (Béthorm rules: Spells maybe cast here at a +1 to chance of success. Mages recover energy at double the usual rate at night.)

The buildings with heavy wooden and stone foundations perch upon five mighty surges of the Kráà Hills. Buttresses with arches and ramparts both defend and unite it. Near-black ebony and earthy browns predominate. Some roofs are copper polished to a pinkish metallic shine. Others are brown, orangey or the patinated green of old copper. Some are topped with spires and roof combs, filigree adornments with projections to claw at the sky in defiance of lightning. The most august and prominent structure is the headquarter of the mighty Temple of Sárku.

Sárku-worshippers make annual pilgrimages to celebrate in the labyrinths below the city alongside the undead, creatures of the long-bodied sort sacred to Lord Wurú, and perhaps even demons loyal to Lord Sárku. They may visit the crypts of relatives privileged to be allowed interment here. Its highly active Tsuru'úm is one of the most extensive in all the Five Empires.

The City of Sárku is a known bastion of religious fanatics. The Concordat requires respect for all the Gods and Cohorts of Pavár's revelations; all twenty exist within the city. However, it also forbids proselytizing, a tenet that is upheld very strictly here. The Temple of Lord Sárku rules, and this balance of power is extremely unlikely to change.

Oppression of worshippers of the Dark Trinity ended in 975 A.S. with Empress Sháira SÚ forced to sign a treaty. In addition to the protections traditionally granted by the ancient Concordat, the safety of worshippers of the gods Hrū'ū, Sárku, and Ksáru are additionally guaranteed by this document. The City of Sárku was assured a number of slightly unusual dispensations. For example, no Imperial officer who is not also a worshipper of the Lord of Worms (or his Cohort) may enter the inner temple precincts "without the pleasure of the Masters of the Temple". Although temples to all the gods of Pavár's pantheon exist securely within that city, the decrees assure that it will be dominated by the Temple of Sárku in perpetuity.

The aristocrats of the City of Sárku keep apart from their social lessers even more than usual in Tsolyáni society. They may frown on the sharing of their lineage-names with those whose bloodlines are not at least equally ancient, with a reputation for dedication to the Worm Lord. The Sárku-worshipping Íto clan, based in the Chakás, is known to maintain connections with nobles in the City of Sárku.

Noteworthy Locations Within the City of Sárku

The Hospice of the Russet Master: an old upper-class hostel.

The Place of Achieving Noble Proximity to Death: a school owned by Númu hiCharkúnu

The Five Palaces of the Worm: a fortified and heavily-garrisoned prison, one of the most unpleasant and difficult to escape in the Empire. Former inmates whisper of an enormous spiraling staircase called "The Well Which Pierces the World." It is lined with great hordes of metal weapons and armor, but for some mysterious reason, the Temple of Sárku has not allowed these to be used in 2000 years - not even when Empress Sháira SÚ, "the Divine Daughter of Thúmis," besieged the city in 974 A.S.

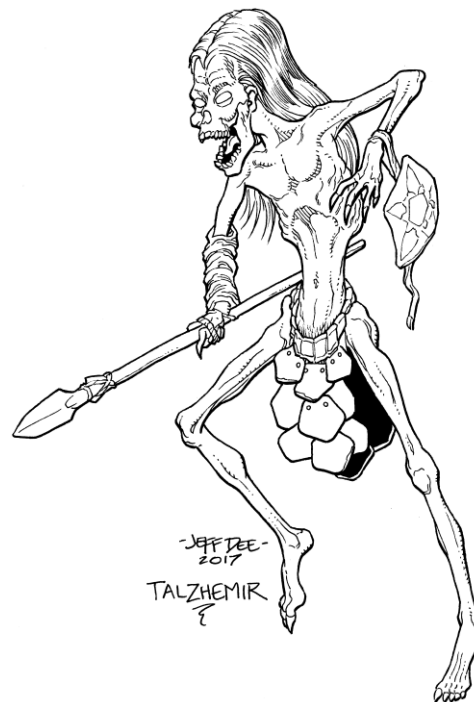
The Sappers Who Would Not Stop

The Empress Vayúma SÚ ascended to power in 916 A.S. She ordered certain legions devoted to the Lords of Change to disband. One, though, the Legion of Khúrmel the Burier (based at Púrdimal), refused. Instead, they dug down beneath their barracks into the catacombs below. According to a legend, they must hew their way through

stone to the City of Sárku, which is many, many Tsán to the east: "Dead are they now and dead shall they evermore be, yet they cannot find peace, cannot cease their digging, cannot lie in the quiet of their graves, until at last they shall come forth in their own city and worship once again in their temple and seek their long-lost homes, now touched with the hand of the dust of an aeon..." (Digging tunnels is actually quite a sophisticated feat of engineering. If the tale is true, one might well wonder who or what would be directing such an endeavor.)

The Battalions of the Seal of the Worm (9th Imperial Medium Infantry)

This Legion is based in the City of Sárku. It accrued more glory to its already-respected standard in battles against Yán Kór. Its current head, General Qurrúmu hiKhanúma, of the ancient and secretive Domed Tomb Clan, is a powerful warrior and a good politician in the intrigues of the military councils. It is rumored that, under the patronage of Prince Dhich'uné the Usurper, whole Cohorts composed of the undead and the other creatures of the labyrinths were added to this Legion. Since that prince's flight, this Legion has been required to keep its non-human contingents deep under the city, lest they be accused of violating the Concordat.



Mrúr are employed as undead guards. How this one sees when its eyes are but shrivelled sockets is a mystery to most.

Town of Srusaká (4115.DJ) This is a town of copper and bronze work. Charcoal brought slowly by Chlén cart is vital to their crafts. There are a number of sources for copper but tin is scarcer. The nearest tin source is Sumán. Tin-making clans ply their trade just outside of town, in smoke-belching stone furnaces. Southeast of this area is a swamp. Crossing the narrow road through this, one may reach the Tower of the Ward of Hrūmnalú (4115.CI). Club-tailed Tsi'il beasts occasionally wander in from the dry lands beyond, and quickly become food.

Olúresh

A rare carnivorous plant, the Olúresh, is grown in waist-deep waters here. It is the source of an incense of the same name. Olúresh from the Swamps of Ksárul is more plentiful, less expensive, and has a subtly different aroma. Some say that this imported sort is not as magically effective as that from Srusaká. Is it deficient in some mystical resonance? Has it lost too much potency by the time it arrives here? The explanations are not consistent. (See also the text box About Olúrech, the Sweet Death, Large Hex 4111.)

Village of Sumán (4115.DM) This village upon its knoll is at the mouth of a mountain mine. It has been in use so long that the passageways wend their way for miles into the ground. Rather than the more common copper, this is a source of mineral known locally as Tasérqa (teallite), an ore of tin with iridescent blue flakes. There are also small amounts of tin crystals with shimmery blue surface, found in bottle-sized ceramic cylinders. From here, Chlén draw carts to Srusaká (4115.DJ). By order of the governor of Ssá Sárku, all Tasérqa is supposed to go to the town of Srusaká. Some of the tin crystals are smuggled to the town of Sagúshi (4015.SG).

Vishéna River (4115.EG) (nicknamed the Rolling Stream) This is part of an important merchants' route that goes to the Mssúma River. Goods are carried along the Sákbe Road and loaded onto river boats (see the text box for the Flexible Utehíl Boats, under the entry for the Vishéna River at 3915.OL). Boat crews camp along the banks.

Village of Edrá (4115.GJ) High atop the Edrá Plateau, this inconvenient place is not often visited. The roads zig-zag from Srusaká (4115.DJ) and Sumán (4115.DM). Folk of Edrá live in a rather rugged fashion, with little water and slightly colder weather. Herders lead small flocks of Hmélu and Hmá beasts about the rocky area.

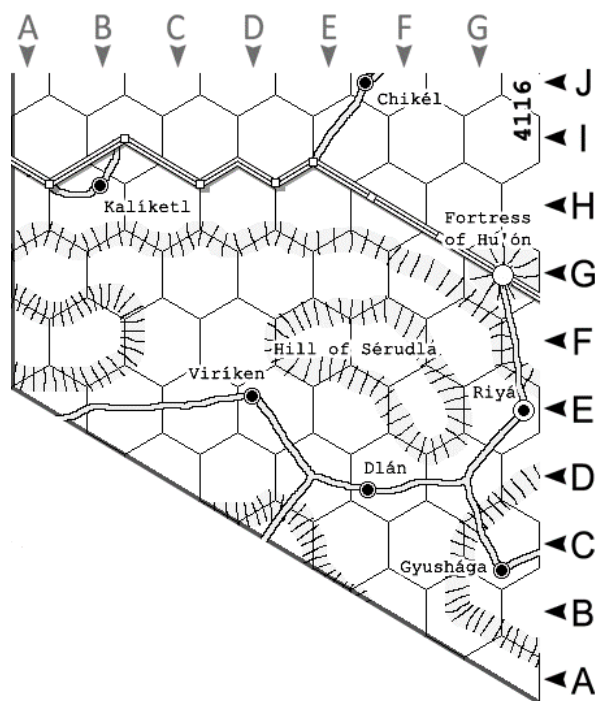
Village of Dríkon (4115.IB) In the distance, light forests make dark green blotches against craggy bluish-gray stone. Nearby waterfalls fall to dark pools from which streams meander down southwards. The buildings are not out in plain sight, but tucked behind ridges of stone. They are Very Low Clan loggers, cutting wood and curing it, until the next merchant with a Chlén cart comes by to purchase it. The people of Dríkon and Tásho (4115.JH) are thought to be the last remnant of the same hill tribe. People of Dríkon and Tásho both worship Alubél, the Crone with Bared Teeth, a female Aspect of Sárku depicted with a ghastly rictus grin. Her Cohort is a monstrous creature with many limbs and several rotting skull-like faces. Dríkon and Tásho both have a superstition against building all but the smallest fires (which prevents Dríkon from making charcoal).

Village of Ashté (4115.II) This is a Sákbe Road Town. It has two obvious markets. The first is a chaos of salvaged items that many other places would consider garbage: Chlén hide axes worn to nubs, fragments of river rope of highly dubious integrity, etc. Higher up the hill, the better merchandise such as used but still serviceable armor and sets of strong nested bowls of beaten copper can be found. There are hardly any luxury goods, however.

The Harbor of Bargains

A customer that flashes their cash may be directed to a village known as the Harbor of Bargains. It is located upon the Vishéna River north of the Sákbe Road. Much of the fancy merchandise from downstream ends up here before it is taken to the City of Sárku (at 4115.HG). With a little luck, a used Utehíl boat could be acquired here at a reasonable price. The Harbor of Bargains is not officially a village but it easily has enough people to qualify. Beyond the large trees with droopy leafy branches, there are clanhouses of splintery wood.

Village of Tásho (4115.JH) The small clanhouses perch on the tops of highly defensible natural ledges. This small village strikes outsiders as somber, almost grumpy. The emaciated people of Tásho are copper miners, but their mine is slowly giving out. They trade ore for Chlén hide tools with which to mine, and for food. In bygone centuries, the locals would go on raids of other settlements and bring back slaves. This is no longer allowed. Tásho and Dríkon are thought to be the last remnant of a hill tribe. (See also the entry for the Village of Dríkon, 4115.IB).



HEX 4116

The ground here is said to be dying. The local people's superstitious efforts to propitiate Lady Avánthe with gifts of the blue stones found near or in copper mines do not seem successful.

Out in the wilds, hummocks of stone and grasses give sparse clues to towns that rose up, only to collapse under their own population growth. (The use of the contraceptive Lisútl root is now common here. This subject, however, is very taboo.)

Aristocrats visiting their country holdings here trade their kilts for light tunics and diaphanous capes. If they are wise, they also adopt knee-high boots for their stay, especially if they wish to go hunting. Of course, the most highborn and rich are carried on litters, upon which they recline, sitting up to use a crossbow.

The rainy season is known for vast numbers of worm-and snake-like creatures flushed from their crevices by the water. At the height of the rains, irrigation canals are frequently full of swimming specimens.

(See also 'About the Kràà Hills')

Village of Gyushága (4116.CG) The folks here are Very Low Status farmers except for some members of the Calcined Ochre Clan (Medium Status). A stone that yields gold, sienna, and umber pigment when baked is found in this Small Hex. Gyushága was a sorcerer; the rocky ruins at the top of this dull brownish-yellow hill are what remains of his citadel. There are many odd little tales told of him, stories that those who wield magic today consider rustic nonsense.

Those who annoyed an Imperial heir named Prince Trenggádike were sent here to be turned into inanimate objects. In support of this tale, it is said that a brass cauldron with four jointed legs was brought down from the ruins. When the new owner tried to use it to heat the grain to brew a batch of beer, it made a noise like a man screaming in agony, then cracked. According to another story, Gyushága spoke to a demon using a magic helmet. Surely there is an Underworld here? So far, if there is, nobody has found a way in yet.

Village of Dlán (4116.DF) This is a hamlet, a village whose wealth is tied to the surrounding shady groves of the Lobipála, a local tree with dark purple fruits the size of one's fist. Its leaves are shaped like the footprint of some three-toed creature. Local folk harvest the fruit just before the rainy season. Then the overripe fruit falls, and the Hmá beasts eat themselves drunk on the mess. The best fruit is cooked into pots of sweet jam, which is enjoyed in the larger settlements in the province of Ssá Sárku. In the first week of winter, leaves from these trees are fed to animals whose cocoons are turned into sheer fabric or dried and used as Hmá and Chlén fodder. The wood can be made into bows. After the grubs are unwrapped from their fiber, they are eaten. In addition to the workers of these cottage industries, there are a few clanhouses of Hmá-herders.

A Giant Lobipála Tree

There is one immense fruit tree south of the village surrounded by a five-sided protective wall. The base of the trunk is easily as wide as six people laying end to end. The villagers of Dlán call it "Niméla". It is said to be the mother of all the other Lobipálas in the area. This plant propagates by runners, and new trees are grown from branches. It is likely that it was genetically engineered from terrestrial stock. Once, centuries ago, followers of Vimúhla burned "Niméla" down. The people here were very distraught. The other trees could be used as sources of cuttings, but the villagers had not really realized how fond of the old tree they were. Then, eleven years later, "she" put out a little green shoot. The wall was built, and in time, the tree grew to its original height once more.

Village of Viríken (4116.ED) Dná grain fields tint the surrounding soft hills reddish. Its relaxed shady marketplace is well-liked throughout the fief. This quirky village was once a producer of furniture and other goods. The woodcrafting clans have declined, but Viríken has smaller mostly-symbolic versions of the organizational complexes found in towns and cities. There is a modest Palace of the Priesthoods, a Palace of Ever-glorious War, etc. There is even a Foreigner's Quarter (which holds one hostel, at which a Shén and a shy elderly couple from Livyánu reside.) Twenty shrines, each patterned on its respective temple's traditional

architecture, surrounds a miniature plaza; that of Lord Sárku is larger than the others.

Town of Riyá (4116.EG) A small river, the Hu'ón, flows from here towards the Fortress of Hu'ón (4116.GG). The primary commerce of Riyá is the making of mordants, precious powders for fixing dyes. A constant stream of slaves is required to grind them. Though gauze shields their mouths and noses, they still eventually die from contact with the various materials. The graveyard for the slaves is a large pit at the back of a played-out copper mine.

The Beautified of Riyá

This village is home to a small cult of fanatical devotees of Lord Sárku, the Beautified of Riyá. They practice ritual abstinence from food in order to purify their bodies, trying to look like living skeletons, a feat which they believe will please their god. Senior members have their noses surgically removed. The most fanatical ritually sacrifice their eyes with consecrated copper tools made for the purpose. The cult began with the long deathbed ritual of Kremáz, a local priest of Sárku. He fasted to death at the age of 84 after decades of deliberately living on the edge of starvation. He drank herbal potions in his final days, with substances known to be toxic. His body was so cleansed of fat and water that when he died, his corpse was left out on a stone cot for days, but none of the usual odors that accompany death ensued. His eyes and nose, however, had blackened and shrivelled.

Hill of Sérudla (4116.FF) This landmark is a row of eight very tall and sharp peaks. They can be seen from Viríken (4116.ED), Díán (4116.DF), Riyá (4116.HB), and the Fortress of Hu'ón (4116.GG). Large streams flow down the slopes to the villages. This area was once dense forest but it was reduced to open land with patches of trees. Sérudla do live in this region, and they generally avoid humans.

Fortress of Hu'ón (4116.GG) A large stream, also called the Hu'ón, flows from Riyá (4116.EG) to here. This military outpost began as a copper mine, producing a beautiful green-blue ore that was also a semi-precious gemstone. Currently, units from the Legions of the Peaks of Kráà (12th Imperial Archers) are garrisoned here. It is likely that undead troops are kept here, as well. (See also 'About the People of the Kráà Hills', and the text box An Ancient Hostility, Large Hex 4015).

Village of Kalíketl (4116.HB) While it is most usual for graveyards to be located south of a settlement, here it is a ring completely around the place. The roads coming in pass over elegant bridges. The clanhouses at the edges are actually in the cemeteries. It is their opinion that "The Ancestors" love and protect them from under the stone.

Bejewelled Smiles

It is still the custom in this place for people to decorate their eyeteeth (canines) with matching gems set in gold. In former times, after death, bodies would be left in ritual pits for insects to consume. Most of the bones would be baked, crushed, and spread on the surrounding fields, while just the skulls were entombed. These practices were eventually replaced by a more usual embalming coating by Lord Belkhánu's priests, and burial, whole, in a coffin. Followers of Stability and Change alike took to putting huge flat slabs over the graves, to prevent robbery.

Village of Chikél (4116.JF) Isolated by many stony hills and misty valleys, the residents of this place believe they are descended in part from certain demons of Lord Sárku. They think that special warriors will be created from their population.

The Deformities of Chikél.

Marriage within one's clanhouse is the rule in Chikél as they do not want what they call "the sacred marks" to be diluted or spread amongst the other villages. Unlike elsewhere in Tsolyánu, where intermarriage within the same lineage is discouraged, here intermarriage between siblings is especially encouraged, as is intergenerational incest. Various clanhouses possess hereditary deformities such as club feet. The oddest are those of the lineage of hiTlé-Knáù, who are pale-skinned with red-brown hair, and extra fingers. There is a high number of stillborn infants. These are considered blessed: already chosen by Lord Sárku at birth.



Appendix: Additional Clan Info

Some of the clans mentioned in this book were not previously described in Béthorm. They are included here to give GM and players a few more options for player characters, and to provide background material. Additional material on previously listed clans is also presented here.

Very High Status Clans

Blade Raised High. (found throughout the Empire of Tsolyánu, but centered in Katalál and Usenánu) These are descendants of palace guards of the Engsvanyáli Priestkings. They are traditionally devotees of Karakán and Chegárra, so, mainly soldiers and military administrators. They dominate Yaggásh Estate (3614.HD). The Lake of the Little King (3713.FL) is named for Prince Daishélmú Tlakotáni, their onetime ward.

Golden Bough. (main centers in Jakálla, Thráya, and Jaikalór) This clan is eclectic with respect to religious and profession; there are many powerful officials and military personnel. They have an agrarian storage complex "The House of the Golden Meadows" in the Golden Meadows region at 3815.DD. The noble family of hiRokémi (high Lineage), of the Golden Bough Clan (Very High Clan Status), rules the fief of Erqúma (3910.GI). Their main home is the Villa of Tánaligasú (3910.NK). The defunct mill at Dralummú (see text box at 3915.CG) is also amongst their holdings.

Golden Sunburst. (clanhouses occur erratically throughout the Kúrt Hills region). Mainly devotees of Stability, primarily Karakán, Chegárra, and Hnálla. Lady Maluél hiViridáme, a member by marriage, is the hereditary owner of Ngétlon Castle, which is now part of the Fief of Asú (Large Hex 3511).

Sea Blue. (found throughout the Empire) They trace their ancestry to Bednálljan royalty. Religiously and professionally eclectic. Bureaucrats, administrators, and other court officials predominate.

High Status Clans

Domed Tomb. (mostly high lineage; mainly based in the Kráà Hills and around the City of Sárku). Ancient nobility from the City of Sárku, exclusively devotees of Sárku and Durritlámish. Wealthy farmers, priests, administrators, and soldiers. They have a palace in the City of Sárku, and clanhouses of lesser dark splendor in Béy Sü, Púrdimal, Sokátis, etc. (Large Hex 4015) Hehéllukoi Usólu Numé hiKálmiren who now rules the Fief of Síketla (in Large Hexes

3614 & 3714) is a member. Páchukoi Ganjémo hiVórudu who now rules the Fief of Chethá (in Large Hex 3915) is also a member. Yet another, General Qurrúmu hiKhanúma, is general of the Battalions of the Seal of the Worm (9th Imperial Medium Infantry), based in the City of Sárku (4015.DE).

Grey Wand. (based mainly in Páya Gupá and Chéne Hó, but with clanhouses in most of the large cities) Mainly worshippers of Thúmis and Keténgku. These are upper and middle-class administrators, landholders, merchants, etc. Ja'óm hiA'úsu, mayor of Zhaikél, belongs to this clan.

Iron Helm. (strongest in the Province of Mekú) Administrators, priests, military officers, merchants. Worship of Hrü'ü, Sárku, and Ksáru predominate. The governor of the city of Mekú is traditionally selected from this clan, and their title is "Disposer". The lady of the fief of Nrayamú (4012.NE), Lady Kasíl hiFíldz, the "Lily of Dark Waters", is a member of this clan.

Joyous of Vrá. (found throughout the Empire) These are Stability-oriented descendants of nobles from the Isle of Vrá. They have a clanhouse in the village of Tengá (3911.MB).

Pearl Shoulders. (found throughout the Golden Meadows region) This is a small and wealthy clan of merchants. They were originally prestigious captains of river boats, but they moved westwards for political reasons. Lady Chamisa hiMíndoi holds the fief of Pe'él. By ancient tradition, the hereditary title of this family line is attained through competitions of swimming, mathematics, martial skill, and daring acrobatics. In earlier centuries, they were bitter rivals of the Iron Helm Clan, who went to great lengths to see that the Pearl Shoulders Clan would be kept far from Imperial favor.

Rising Sun-Disk. (based in Jaikalór, with clanhouses at Sokátis, Thráya, Jakálla; found mainly throughout the eastern side of the Empire) Religiously eclectic. They are composed mainly of upper-class merchants. Members may hold minor noble titles. They rule with a strong hand in the village of Dlayá (3610.DF)

White Stone. (centered at Béy Sü and Sokátis but found throughout the Empire) An eclectic clan devoted to Avánthe, Dlamélis, and their Cohorts (but also containing members of other sects); many administrators and military personnel. They happen to hold lands in the village of Kumaryá (3912.GF).

Medium Status Clans

Black Monolith. (found throughout the Empire) They usually follow members of the Dark Trinity and their cohorts.

Mainly merchants, artisans, and laborers. Daséshmu hiMriyatláku, governor of Katalál, belongs to this clan.

Brass Awl. (not widespread, but found in a few villages about the Kúrt Hills region). These are makers of very strong footgear. They originally hail from Tsolyánu's northern border and thus tend toward matriarchal customs. Their women go about naked except for knee-length boots. They do not get much business; the modest family fortune is dwindling away. They have a clanhouse in Chorugá (3515.LA).

Calcined Ochre. (localized to the Kráà Hills, especially the Town of Thijál, 4015.JL.) Producers of many powders and salves. Their products are "recreational", not "healing" oriented, and they have a peculiar religious proscription against anything that causes visions. Mainly followers of Sárku, especially the elderly female Aspect Albél. Oddly, there are several Tinalíya members. This clan hires merchants to acquire rare ingredients from the Swamps of Ksáru every few years. There is a clanhouse in the Village of Gyushága (4116.CG) in the Kráà Hills.

Cleansing Rain. (based in the town of Kaljékal, 3913.QI, but also found in the village of Ekórel) is based here. They are known to hire warriors to protect themselves on their journeys. They harvest the whitish crust of Eggshell Mire (3913.NI), bringing it back in basket. Most of the labor of crushing and washing is done in Ekórel, in abandoned farming terraces converted to salt-cleaning ponds.

Covered Arm. (localized to the southeast side of the Kúrt Hills region, especially Large Hex 3516) Mainly farmers and dye-makers. All Tsolyáni deities, but tending to Avánthe-worship, Her Honor Zk'Káchi hiFáléng, Lumeharétokoi (fiefholder) of Srigá belongs to the Covered Arm Clan.

Devisors of Soft Clinging Beauty. (branches in Katalál, Úrmish, Mekú, and Central Tsolyánu) The finest Thésun cloth is reputedly made by this small clan. Fiber for this nearly transparent gauze comes from insects. A small clanhouse of theirs at Znu'á (4113.GL) specializes in a waterproof fabric made solely from cocoons from the dangerous Dnélu. Hive Machine at 3815.RF is a farming community that they manage.

Forbidden Gem. (Limited to the village of Chél in the Kraa Hills, 4015.JC) These are very wealthy diamond "miners" (they actually pan for them), all of High Lineage. They are religiously eclectic. Their home is an island surrounded by a lake. They are led by a patriarch, Túsrekh hiTsúrekoj, who is said to be very stern. Some of the men become rangers who hunt and guard the Woods of Káine (4015.JB). A number of women are brought into the clan as the "Tribute Brides", an ancient custom. The ratio of women to men tends to be two to one here. Their work is to pan gravel

brought up by the bucketful, on the shore. Except for fish, their food is brought in from elsewhere. Ssesmúga, their legendary ancestor, is said to have been a Priestking. If the tale is true, then the line goes back at least 14,000 years.

Glory of the Worm. (localized to the northwest of the Empire; the City of Sárku and the Kráà Hills but with clanhouses in Béy Sü and Jakálla.) These are mainly mountain folk who follow hill-cults to Sárku and Durritlámish. Many are Diél-fruit tree cultivators and landowners. The tiny obscure village of Áhya (4115.CE) is traditionally under this clan's protection.

Green Bough. (found throughout the Empire, but their largest clanhouse is in Katalál. They have no particular religious affiliation. They are known for their agricultural success. They are growers, gardeners, herders, grain parchers, and so on. They dominate the town of Chúsetan (4013.FM). They have a big clanhouse in the village of Kashríka (3514.NN), too.

Green Kirtle. (based in Béy Sü; found throughout the Empire) This was an offshoot of the Avánthe-oriented Blue Kirtle Clan long ago. A number of them (perhaps especially the winemakers) turned to the worship of Dlamélísh and Hríháyal. They are the hereditary keepers of the Field of Powders (4114.ED). They have a clanhouse in the village of Chlár (4114.EC).

Jade Rope. (localized to the Stronghold of Nrá, 3915.NL, and the nearby stretch of the Vishéna River. These are merchants, farmers, porters and fishers. It is mainly worshippers of Change.

Pure Touch. (localized to Large Hex 3713 in the villages of Hélash and Kírutle) Originally an endogamous Kurtáni tribe, it split into two groups which settled on Paramour's Plateau at the base of two mountains named for mythical ancestors, Chaliya and Zágursa. People in Hélash tend fungi in caves like Chaliya did (see the entry and text boxes at 3713.GE). People in Zágursa range through the forest tending stands of tree fungi as Zágursa did (see the entry and text boxes at 3713.HI). This clan has a high mortality rate, but also a little more wealth from its rare products.

Ripened Sheaf. (small clanhouses are widespread throughout Tsolyánu; centers at Úrmish, Penóm, Katalál, and Jakálla) This religiously eclectic clan especially spread around the same time as the establishment of the Stations of Brave Peripatation. The clan collectively owns the Villa of Chandákur, a fortified estate at (4010.EC). A great deal of the land here was purchased here for cheap- before they learned it was in the eventual path of the dreaded Sewering. Énganui, the mayor of Koyél, is a member of this clan.

Smiling Helm Crafters. (mostly localized to Large Hex 3814, and the town of Koyél, 3814.AG) Often followers of Lord Ksarul, they boast of secrets of tanning Chlén hide that date back all the way to the Empire of Llyán. The name is apparently not a reference to them smiling. Rather, they are the crafters of helms that smile.

Standing Pinnacle. (based at Haumá and Tsurú). Archers, bowyers, fletchers, quiver-makers, hunters, scouts, etc. Stability-oriented, with a tendency to the hero-gods Karakán and Chegárra. This is a major clan of the Kúrt Hills, traditional allies of the more farming and city-oriented Standing Stone Clan (High status). They are avowed guardians of the stands of centuries-old Séresh trees needed to make their longbows. (In some places, only Kurtáni may fell a tree of this kind.) Otherwise, what harm is visited upon the tree will be visited upon the body of the offender. Boy children begin learning archery as soon as they can run. Girls are tutored in stealth, picking up fallen branches for firewood, and cooking without making any smoke. Chieftain Mórúsaí hiBa'áshcha, fiefholder of the fief of Haumá is a noteworthy member. The most famous member would probably be Lord Ka'á hiSrygáshchene, General of the Legion of the Inverted Hand, and a loyal supporter of Prince Eselné. (D.o.t.E.G. p74)

Low Status Clans

Black Hand. (found throughout the north and west parts of the Empire) These are worshippers of Hrū'Ü, Ksarul, Sárku, and their Cohorts. Mostly miners and glassblowers, they make the purple glass for which Púrdimal is famous. They have a new clanhouse in the village of Mnék (3810.PD)

Covered Lantern. (all lineages are Low; localized to Large Hex 4014) These are well-trained seasoned warriors who hire out to merchants. Their home village is Rútetlana (4014.CJ), where they run the markets. Nominally, they are Sárku-oriented, but the clan is not particularly devout. They have a reputation for requiring full pay in advance, and time to squander their pay before setting out. Several non-humans are members of this clan, including a couple of Pé Chói, some Páchi Léi, and a handful of Ahoggyá. (According to Caravan Overseer Samáng from Tsurú, their combination of discipline and irreverence tends to make their company "an acquired taste", and he would trust his wares to no others).

Earthen Scales. (not widespread) These are makers of roof-top ceramics. Their insignia is a diamond-scaled serpent with two forearms. Though their status is low, they are traditionally supporters of the Imperial Party. They have a clanhouse in Yíla (3814.KI). Small groups may also be found on the road, their cart loaded with clay powder and a kiln, as they travel to various worksites.

Fragrant Fingers. (localized to Large Hex 3914) Cultivators, gatherers, dryers, and shippers of Tsúral buds and leaves. They also weave the glossy bags in which these are shipped. This clan traces its origins to urban gardeners of Katalál during the Engsvanyáli period. They have a clanhouse in Fréng (3914.DE).

Gauze Frame. (mostly localized to the city of Haumá) Thúmis-worshipping; originally lived on a plantation near the city. They produce paper made from the excrement of the largest oldest Chlén beasts. Despite its functionality, pristine aroma and bone-white appearance, Chlén-excrement paper is considered uncouth by those above Low social status. Intended for those whose status is lowly enough, there are many enjoyable tracts to order for a Qirgal or two, on such subjects as, "Rediscovered Recipes for Káika and Káika Eggs", "Fifteen Ways to Achieve Improved Chlén Hide Growth", and "How I Found My Sister a Second Husband". If ordered in the morning, the small scrolls are copied from codexes, and picked up or delivered around sundown. When their owners fire of them, they become fuel for cooking fires. (Large Hex 3613)

Incessant Rhythm. (all lineages are Low; localized to the village of Tséa, 3910.JK) These are stonecutters who craft the black marble blocks used to build in the town of city of Mekú (3911.IK). They receive their material from the Olóa'po Clan. They are extremely tradition-bound, carefully making each block according to ancient specifications. They cut the black marble blocks used to build in the town of city of Mekú (3911.IK).

Inverted Hand. (all lineages are Medium, with Kurtáni names; small proud clanhouses are scattered throughout the Kúrt Hills region.) Archers, scouts, military support services, plantation overseers. Almost exclusively followers of Stability, often Karakán. This is the Kurtáni clan from which the Legion of the Inverted Hand (light infantry; mainly archers and scouts) draws its name. Members of this clan manage much of the land belonging to the Legion (primarily in Large Hex 3812). There is a clanhouse at the village of Ónu (3812.PJ).

Keening Wind. (localized to Large Hex 3915, especially the city of Tsurú) This Clan is very loosely affiliated with the death gods of both Change and Stability, Lords Sárku and Belkhánu, plus their Cohorts, Lords Durritlámish and Qón, especially this last. Members of the Clan of the Keening Wind were hardly above beggars, but their discordant clamor brought honor to the processions in the streets when the remains of many soldiers were brought home after the most recent civil war. For weeks clan members were kept busy, day and night, by a stream of coffins, sometimes enough to require great slow-moving Chlén carts. Upon arriving at the temple quarter, they had to immediately run back to the city gates. With so much practice, they

developed their mourning into a kind of art, each time beginning with distraught moans and weeping, sobbing cries (mainly by the women), but then changing to a low harmonious chord (mainly by the men) evocative of some sort of mystical ascension. It was so cathartic that grateful relatives tossed them Qírgals and even a few Hlášh, and the Clan of the Keening Wind was accorded slightly more respect than they had been.

Open Hand. (found throughout the Empire, especially in rural areas.) These are peasants, workers, and tenant farmers. There is no religious affiliation. Those who live in their clanhouse at the village of Mirín (3610.GF) are pounders of Dáichu bark.

Quivering Tree. (often Medium Lineage; scattered clanhouses in the Inverted Hand lands northwest tip of the Kúrt Hills.) These are people of primarily Kurtáni heritage in the fiefs of Hóresh (3913.CJ) and Migásh (3913.DF). The plant from which they draw their name is the U'u'vrú, an exotic tree that can move its leaves, found mainly in Large Hexes 3812 and 3913. A particularly large specimen is located at 3812.NN - although most clan members have never seen it, and would not know precisely where to find it. Peasants of the area sometimes tell the story that wood from the tree can power love charms. There is also a legend that it can pull up its roots and walk about.

Red Banner. (once localized to the southeast side of the Kúrt Hills region, now mostly absorbed into the Clan of Red Scarification.) Mainly followers of Chiténg. In the village of Neshuné (3513.LI). They still pass on obscure knowledge of a fortress west of the place that they once owned. (There is actually a lost branch of this clan in the village of Zamúa, 3915.JN).

Red Scarification. (scattered clanhouses throughout the Kúrt Hills provinces; allied to the other "Red" clans). Soldiers, Sákbe road guards, alchemists, warrior-priests. Worship of Lords Vimúhla and Chiténg are favored. This clan has an unusually large number of Aridáni women. Children whose horoscopes indicate a strong affinity with the small red moon Káshi are dedicated from birth to the god Chiténg. The clan belief is that time spent with a bow detracts from the more noble prowess with hand-to-hand weaponry. Thus, learning archery is strictly forbidden. A clan rite of passage requires climbing bare-handed to the top of Kádi Bluff. This earns their mark of adulthood: a small red crescent brand below the base of the throat. They have a large clanhouse in Hëshkel (3715.NB), and a small new one in Ktasél (3911.GE). The older Red Banner Clan was absorbed by them years ago.

Stone Hill. (originally based in Béy Sú; now possibly extinct) This was once a much more prestigious clan. It was somehow associated with construction of Sákbe Roads. A

number of members broke off to become the Stone Maelstrom Clan, and the circumstances surrounding that event are rather mysterious. The ancient post of the "Breaker of the Rocks" comes from a lineage that dates back to long before that event.

Stone Maelstrom. (localized to the region of Large Hex 3711). Members broke off to become the Stone Maelstrom Clan. The last few members of this once-widespread clan are the Breaker of the Rocks and his family. (See text box for "The Last Breaker" at 3810.EN)

Taloned Sandal. (not widespread). Mainly worshippers of Lords Karakán and Chegárra. The Kurtáni people are legendary for their prowess with the bow. This clan, of Kurtáni ethnicity, is known to train boys and girls alike to wield Chlén-hide-tipped spears. Devoted and brave, they disdain armor of any kind, and for the men, to grow old is the highest dishonor. Their sandals do indeed sport small curved Chlén hide claws, in honor of an aspect of Lord Karakán. They have a clanhouse in Srigá (3516.MG).

Whirling Stone. (mainly Large Hex 3615) Makers of Chlén hide tools and weapons (but not armor). They are of Kurtáni descent. They are based in the village of Yaggá (3615.JK).

Very Low Status Clans

Bone Collar. (not widespread). These are slavers in the region of the Golden Meadows (see the entry at 3815.DD). Their proprietary methods of training usually give a slave amnesia. Their religion is eclectic. They have a clanhouse in Vársa (3715.MK).

Copper Prybar. (localized to Large Hex 3512) Often Avánthe worshippers. Primarily cart-drivers, Chlén hide tanners, and peelers of the hide of wild Chlén. Acquiring hide from wild Chlén requires especially strong cords, thick as a man's upper arm, to tip and hobble the creatures during the process. Once used this way, the ropes become weakened, so they must not be used again. Thus, the Copper Prybar Clan sends representatives to the Town of Beijenyél for new ropes every other year. Bringing them back requires a Chlén cart, so this is only attempted in the dead of winter, when most streams are either dried up, or easily forded. The most dangerous part is assaying the north edge of the Sayál Marsh.

Directed Water. (a small clan scattered about the Golden Meadows region) These are Yáfa-growers, followers of Avánthe, with a tradition of digging irrigation and terracing hills. They have a clanhouse at the Temple-owned Estate of the Foremost of the Lowly (3815.KN). There exists within this clan a traditional body of knowledge that uses

the surface of flood water as a tool for making things in the fields level.

Eternal Sky. (mainly found between Tsurú and Haumá) They are mainly affiliated with the Temple of Avánthe, but there is a spicy sprinkling of Dlamélish followers. These are Dná-beer and Yáfa-wine makers. In the larger villages and towns, they have small taverns of their clanhouses for Very Low status folk, but they send out street-vendors with poles tipped with bottles in nets just before sunset. Their humble clanhouse has a good reputation in the village of Srasú'u (3514.LI)

Flat Rock. (Found in or near quarries throughout the Kúrt Hills region) Religiously eclectic. They tend to be strong from physical labor. The menfolk wield picks while the women pound Dáichu cloth and smash dried Yáfa-rice. They operate a quarry at the Rise of N'lélu (3514.NE)

Gleaming Bowl. (Localized to the town of Múyel (4013.KJ) and other places in Large Hex 4013) While most businesses are performed within clanhouse walls, the specialty of these lowly citizens is scouring building and town walls, Sákbe Roads, etc. While other Very Low clan status folk are stigmatized as filthy and careless, Gleaming Bowl members are considered well-scrubbed and sanitary. Should there be a bumper crop of fruit, they may be hired for a pittance by grower clans, to help smash the abundance of Nálum "grapes" or Dlél "plums" for liquor.

Hollow Moon. (localized to Large Hex 3512) Specialized makers of unfired pottery. No particular religious affiliation. No one knows for how long the people of this clan have been crafting light balls of ruddy clay for the annual "Festival of the Rain of Moons" in the village of Zamashíl. The origins of the event, and their appointment to the task, are obscured by time and folklore. Nominally, it is connected to worship of Lord Drá. (An old tale says there was once a companion clan whose sole job it was to bake the red clay spheres. This is probably a joke, but who knows?)

Nighted Tower. (main clanhouse at Púrdimal; found throughout northwestern Tsolyánu) These are tomb guards and manufacturers of various chemicals, especially those for embalming and purification of tombs and corpses. They are primarily worshippers of Change, except for Vimúhla and Chiténg. Rightly or wrongly, Nighted Tower has a reputation for occasional tomb robbery, or at least pilfering. A Clanhouse in Hitlísh (4015.DD) mines natron.

Olóá'po. (mostly no lineage names localized to the village of Tséa, 3910.JK) These are quarry-workers who supply the rough blocks for the stonecutters of the Incessant Rhythm Clan. The Olóá'po are of Kurtáni ancestry but "modernized", i.e., culturally Tsolyáni. Nevertheless, they will not intermarry outside Kurtáni bloodlines.

River Brothers. (mostly localized to the vicinity of the Arjáshhtra River, from Haumá, almost to Usenánu) Mainly river barge and boat operators; a few slavers. Once a large affiliation of bandits from many clans, they were pardoned in 920 A.S. by Empress Vayúma Sú after three generations of considerable assistance to the empire during which a rebellion was put down. Many of their slaves employed to pole or row the boats, are hereditary chattel, descended from captives taken at this time. A particularly large clanhouse of theirs exists in Danéksa Village (3514.NH).

Standing Reed. (rural areas around Khirgár to the north, and clanhouses throughout the Empire of Tsolyánu) The people of the nation of N'lúss to the north are unusually tall. Perhaps they were a product of genetic engineering. Their breed dates back to before Téकुmel fell into a pocket universe. The Standing Reed Clan is made up of N'luss who settled in the Empire. They worship Vimúhla and his Cohort. They are soldiers, gladiators, and bodyguards. There are also archers, fletchers, and makers of armor (not treated Chlén hide, but leather). They have a clanhouse at Éka TŪl Tádli Tower (3610.DD).

Turning Wheel. (found throughout the Empire) This is a populous clan with no particular religious affiliation. They are Chlén cart drivers, wheelwrights, wagon-makers, and transporters of goods. Some are merchants who deal in non-perishables and dry goods; they may sell provisions to the military. Some of the Grghúzh Páchi Léi belong to the clan.

Wicker Image. (a widespread clan; found throughout the Empire) Latrine-cleaners, house sweepers, sewer workers, and the like are typical jobs. Some are corpse-bathers who belong to the Temples of Belkhánu or Qón. They have a large thriving clanhouse in the town of Purmúnin (3815.LH). In the village of Quyél (3815.MH), they are carrying baskets of food, a job that they usually cannot get elsewhere because of their reputation as unclean.

Non-Clans

Climbing Hook. (Has not been recognized since it was abolished during the reign of Emperor Durúmu in 1807 A.S.) The name of this clan alludes to a Kurtáni tool for rapidly mounting into the branches of a tree. It is shaped like the shepherd's stick, but with a wider crook, and two or three crosspieces or knots for gripping. Ancient scrolls reveal it was comprised of worshippers of Lord Hnálla. References found in Small Hex (4014.FK)

Grghúzh Traveling Folk. (Found erratically about the Kúrt Hills region, almost always on, or very close to, a Sákbe Road. See also the Text box for the Grghúzh at Large Hex 3513.) These are mainly Páchi Léi tinkers and buskers. Having

travelled so long and so far, they have fallen in love with life upon (and alongside) the Sákbe Road. They are stereotyped as harmless and helpful. In trade for scraps of food and a few coppers, they provide entertainment for rustics and others of low status.

Their easy smiles and merry demeanor often hide lives made difficult by prejudice and bullying. They are technically clanless. They may be treated together like a very low status clan by those who are inclined to be charitable.

They do their best to stay out of the slavers' clutches, some by purchasing membership in the Turning Wheel Clan. Should a "buddy" be carried off, a Turning Wheel Clan member can try to claim the other is their slave. (Sometimes this works.)

There is a story, told amongst their own kind, of a guard captain in Haumá who, unable to find the culprit in a murder case, blamed the deed on a Grghúzh, who was then impaled for the crime. The "buddy group" appealed to an assassin's clan for revenge, but could not afford the assassins' help. There the tale simply ends.

They carry little with them except tools and their cleverly-made portable wooden homes. They are descended from refugees of the Mu'ugalavyáni genocide of their people about 1000 years ago. The Empire has not allowed them to form a new permanent enclave of their own.

The wise Grghúzh bows low and listens intently to the words of their betters, curries favor, finds ways to ingratiate themselves. It is difficult and very unlikely for them to make friends in high places, but they are eager to try.

Grghúzh teach their youngsters an art of remembering what they have heard. Names and faces thus come easily to them. (Béthorm rules: a Grghúzh can buy a special Remember Talent and INT-based Remember Skill. 17 or less on 2d10 is typical.)

There is a site in a secluded patch of woods where they gather annually. See the text box for the Grghúzh Gathering at Túrume Grove, 3513.RG.

There is at least one former gathering site, from which they were driven a few decades ago. Carved stone pillars proclaiming that Páchi Léi are not allowed in that patch of forest still stand there today. See the entry for Séresh Tajúrk 3612.EH.

Trodden Chaff. (Actually clanless, but surreptitiously claiming to be a clan. Localized to the village of Ssine, 4013.OK) During the reign of Empress Vayúma SÚ, many followers of Change were persecuted. In Ssine, armed mobs (mainly worshippers of Thúmis, Hnálla, and Avánthe) rose up. They rounded up worshippers of the Dark Trinity (Ksáru,

Sárku, and Hrú'ü), force-marched them south to what was then the northern edge of Nyallélan's Wood (4013.KK), and murdered them in the swamps. The survivors of this "cleansing" banded together, becoming the Trodden Chaff "Clan". For centuries, they have done the "unclean" yet mildly lucrative work of dressing carcasses of food animals.



The noxious-smelling Gíriku haunts the area of Súmaranchu Mound.

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