

The Strategic Review

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TO THE EVERLASTING GLORY OF THE PETAL THRONE

Introduction and Translation by M.A.R. Barker

A number of players and referees of the Empire of the Petal Throne have requested further information and news of happenings within the Glorious Empire. It would be impractical to try to supply this information piecemeal to each person individually, but a brief series of extracts from Imperial dispatches to the Emperor in Avanthar may serve. There are no newspapers or other public media in the Empire, and those priests and nobles who would be informed must hire scribes to copy the public portions of the reports sent in to Avanthar by the Four Palaces, by certain temples, and by the Omnipotent Azure Legion. These documents are gathered together at the end of each month and made into another volume of the "Korunkoi hiGardasisayal Koluman hiTirikeludalidalisa" (the Book of Mighty Imperial Deeds of the Great and Glorious Petal Throne). Inscribed upon leaves of gold, this book is kept in the Hall of Blue Illumination in the Chancery at Avanthar, where those who are interested may see it upon application to the Provost, Lord Chaymira hiSsanmirin. Not all items would be of interest to those just learning about Tsolyanu, of course, since the Book contains tax reports, priestly enumerations, trade statements, and a thousand other types of administrative information, all neatly collated and indexed by the Lord Provost's myriad slaves. What follows, thus, is but a culling of individual news items from here and there. Naturally, much of this information is from the public records, but a little has been obtained from the "Inner Book," which is secret and which is submitted to the Petal Throne for the Emperor's own scrutiny.

Each item begins with a complex formula of praise and respect for the Emperor which need not be repeated here. Readers with more delicate sensibilities will forgive this absence of proper protocol.

... Know ye, O Perfumer of the Nostrils of the Gods, that an intelligence has come from your city of Urmish of most curious nature: to wit, one Priest of Ketengku has discovered an anomaly upon the maps of the Empire. To the east of Urmish [hex 3213: Translator] certain maps display a Sakbe Road leading south; our maps and those of the Omnipotent Azure Legion show no such thoroughfare. Thus, this priest did travel thence. He reports that after journeying several Tsan, a feeling of malaise came upon him and his party; the countryside seemed to darken, although the sun shone; and the fields near unto the Road appeared sere and barren of life. This Priest became affrighted and turned back; hence he has made report and seeks permission to form an expedition to go thither with soldiers and priests of greater powers. Whatsoever the Glorious Will decrees . . ." [Following this passage is the glyph for "taken under advisement": Translator.]



Priestess of Avanthar in her guise as an Agidani warrior girl - nude for battle in the arena but can wear armour for regular warfare
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... Know ye, O Omnipotent Eye Which Sees the World, that your excellent son, Lord Eselne, has travelled to Chene Ho to visit his patron, Lord Kettukal. What this bodes is not yet apparent, for the latter continues to prostrate himself before the Petal Throne and declare his loyalty. Lord Eselne's party was beset with Serudla near Atkolle Heights, but Hnalla smiled upon his fortunes, and he escaped harm, slaying three beasts. Such an incursion of these creatures upon the Sakbe Road is almost unheard of; troops were sent but found nothing amiss. Lord Eselne and Lord Kettukal continue to meet in apparent openness and loyalty, but they are watched closely. The affair is further muddied by the capture of a Mu'ugalavyani officer near Chene Ho; this person slew himself before he could be put to the question, and some device was used which prevented our priests from revivifying his body. Whether or not these occurrences are connected is as yet known only to the Gods. . . What action may be contemplated?" [There follows a glyph denoting "observe and report": Translator.]

... Know ye, O Tree of Life Whose Branches Overshadow the Universe, that matters continue to worsen between the Priests of Good and the Priests of Evil. Aside from that matter in Penom (passage deleted and replaced by the glyph "inserted into the Inner Book only": Translator), there are reports from several cities. From the slums and stews of Purdimal there are reports of a reviving worship of the ancient and detestable Goddess of the Pale Bone, who antedates the Ten Gods and the Ten Cohorts; efforts made to stamp out her pernicious practices meet opposition from some of the half-human descendants of that race which dwell there aforesaid. From Fasilum come intelligences that priests of the two alignments have clashed in the streets, with some heads broken. From Thraya comes the news that young hotheads in the Temple of Chegarrar attempted to raise the standards of a holy war to destroy all evil temples. As is known, only through maintaining the balance can the Empire prosper, and there are those on many sides who would tip it one way or the other. Should a holy war break out, the Yan Koryani would not be slow to seize the advantage. O our Lord, we pray for guidance!" [A series of glyphs follows which denote "make pretexts and seize those who lead these 'hotheads'; make examples of them but with great discretion, that more may not arise; reward those who seek balance": Translator.]

... Know ye, O Sword of Immutable Power, that a party of Yan Koryani did come south to make ritual battle [the "Qadarni," a form of highly ritualised and formalised battle between a selected force of invaders and a local army of equal size: Translator], and this was from the Legion of Foreign Persons, a favourite of the accursed Baron of Yan Kor. The forces of Your Effulgence gained the victory, losing only a handful of men, while the enemy suffered complete and total defeat. Death rode white and triumphant upon the spears of your forces, O Lord! The leader of your army was that selfsame young administrator of the principality of Ferinara, accompanied by other foreigners lately become citizens. This shows the glorious wisdom of your divine policy of not slaying foreigners but permitting them to serve the Imperium! The Baron no doubt burns with grief for his lost legions, O Lord." [This is followed by a glyph denoting "reward the victor and observe well": Translator.]

... Know ye, O Ever-present Spirit of the Green Jade Door, that your Priests of Vimuhla in Jakalla report that one of their number did penetrate to an unexplored area of the labyrinth beneath that city, where he did come upon a device which appeared like an egg of some size, having an aperture in its side. Entering, he engaged certain magics which caused this device to act: it hurled itself into a tunnel of endless length which then debouched upon scenes never visited by the Tsolyani. A city of red roofs which lay beside a sparkling sea, uninhabited by strange monsters not known to our scholars: for example, a great creature like unto two huge wheels with a central axis from which depended horrid tentacles. This being did hurtle about upon its wheels, if these were in truth wheels, and seize with its tentacles all whom it could come upon. Your priest stayed not long in that city, O Lord, but again made the egg-device perform its magic. Then did he pass into a palace where many incomprehensible devices of the ancients lay asleep. After brave adventuring, he managed to place one of these devices in an Eye of Retaining All Things and escape. This great device he subsequently placed in a hall in the Temple of Vimuhla in Jakalla. It has wheels and is made of metal. If it is awakened, it extrudes powerful arms of metal which seize things placed within its reach. It might thus function as a machine of war, but it moves but slowly and has no weapons outside of its ability to seize objects of some weight. This priest did also report upon other glimpses of strange places seen beneath the world. A complete report will be forwarded in the Inner Book." [The glyph "make further observations" follows: Translator.]

... Know ye, O Fount of Might and Victory, that a small Qadarni force did appear before Khirgar and seek battle. This was led by one of the henchmen of the Baron of Yan Kor. Your forces were led by Lord Srikolon of Khirgar, and it is our shame to report that he was defeated by the Yan Koryani, who then took prisoners and booty and returned to their land. Morale at Khirgar has suffered, and Lord Serqu, Sword of the Empire, has been sent thither. What commands are vouchsafed?" [There follows a series of glyphs denoting "send Lord Srikolon to the impaler if he is found; send a Cohort of Lord Serqu's Legion to challenge the Yan Koryani in Qadarni battle": Translator.]



“ . . . Know ye, O Sceptre of Might Over All, subsequent persons have made further investigation of the strange egg-devices, and their reports differ widely. The area is infested with the deadly Ssu, however, who utilise these machines, no doubt, to travel to and from their baneful places. Indeed, reports state that another sub-species of Ssu has been sighted: the Black Ssu, who are taller, thinner, and more powerful than their cursed grey cousins with whom we are familiar. There are whispers that they may have one of the Ten Keys to the Gates which Imprison Sleeping Ksarul, the Doomed Prince of the Blue Room . . . [passage deleted and replaced with the glyph “inserted into the Inner Book only”: Translator]. Some of these persons report that further storehouses of machines lie hidden in these tunnels reached only by the egg-device. This is of great import, should any of these machines be those of war.” [Further deleted passages are followed by the glyph for “utmost action”: Translator.]

“ . . . Know ye, O Shield of Impenetrable Defense of the Empire, that an assassination attempt was made upon the Princess Ma’in, your excellently beautiful daughter, which was thwarted by her half-brother, Prince Rereshqala, a Priest of Dlamelish, and certain others. There is rumour that the hand of the contemptible slave of the Baron of Yan Kor, the yellow being who calls himself a Mihalli, the wretched Fu Hsi, had a hand in this. As is known, the Mihalli were one of the mighty races of old, a species like unto Man, yet not Men, as we judge from their few surviving books and pictures upon the walls of certain places in the most ancient Underworlds. These yellowish beings, with many-jointed limbs and smooth hairless heads, having eyes like faceted red jewels and mouths like small bunches of polyps — no one of our people has lived to say whether the Baron’s servant, Fu Hsi, is one of these or but a man. Nevertheless, his spy network penetrates the Empire, and it was assuredly his men who attempted the life of your Efulgence’s daughter. The lady has now taken up with this Priest of Dlamelish, while her brother dallies with this Priest’s friend, a Priestess of Dlamelish. This is strange, since the Princess Ma’in was ever devoted to the service of the Good Goddess, Avanthé. Guidance is prayed.” [This is followed by a series of glyphs signifying “determine if magic has been employed upon Princess Ma’in; if so, seize this Priest and Priestess of Dlamelish and bring them unto Avanthar at once; intensify efforts to root out this Fu Hsi, sending men into Yan Kor as needed!” Translator.]

“ . . . Know ye, O Warrior of the Worlds, that the devious Fu Hsi has been sighted again in Ferinara — or at least a being identified as of his race, hidden under a shape-changing spell. The Baron apparently regrets the loss of his Qadami invasion force and would fain have revenge upon the young foreigner who dealt him the blow. Traces of the drug Zu’ur were also reported there.” [This is followed by the glyph “observe and report”: Translator.]

“ . . . Know ye, O Companion of the Ever-Splendid Gods, that the Governor of Jakalla still chafes under mild house arrest. His interest in the Royalist Party is unabated, and his clan places strong pressure upon him to defy your ban upon his movements — and also pressure is being placed upon your divine administration to lift this ban. Either he must be accused and brought to book for his speculations, or else he must be released. A list of his iniquities has been prepared, but these are in no wise more damning than those of other governors. His clan would take immediate action, were he to be seized or executed. The Royalist Party seeks just such a pretext, and certain men of the Imperialist Party await the opportunity to repress the Royalists with similar anticipation. The situation deteriorates day by day. What is commanded by the Divine Presence?” [This is followed by a series of glyphs taken from the Inner Book and not appearing in public copies (indeed, none of this is found in any source open to persons of less than Noble rank!): “release the Lord Chiringga; promote him to command of the ancient Legion of Mighty Jakalla, which has lain inactive for centuries, and give him funds to provide troops; then send this Legion to the border at Khirgar, where it is hoped the Yan Koryani will care for him . . .”: Translator.]

“ . . . Know ye, O Foundation of Supernal Magnificence, that our intelligencers in Mu’ugalavya have reported upon the discovery of a mighty labyrinth beneath the city of Chochi. The first exploits of several parties have been reported to Ssa’atis, and discoveries include a crystal tomb chamber which appears to shift between planes and which cannot be approached save with powerful magics. There are also catacombs of old, with the bodies of ancient priests buried in great panoply. The most intrepid party reached a level which contained the spoor of the dreaded Ssu, and there they found a river which rushed away into blackness. An inscription in Llyani spoke of this leading downwards to the Halls of Tenebrous Visitations and to a city older than time, inhabited by a principle so inimical to all life that the word “evil” cannot encompass the concept. The explorers fled upon the approach of a great snuffing beastly thing, the like of which has not been seen aforesaid. The place is rich in treasure and in items of usage, but its dangers are greater than any labyrinth thus explored within your Empire. What guidance is given?” [This is followed by glyphs denoting “investigate and act as deemed beneficial” and “observe and report”: Translator.]





Priest of
Yimúhla
Lord of Fire
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“ . . . Know ye, O Zephyr of Divine Victory, that a report of strange nature comes from your city of Penom: to wit, one Priest of Dlamelish did meet with the Governor of Penom and some of the latter’s colleagues at a celebration. This priest stated that he was then drugged and awoke in a chamber beneath the palace, where he shortly found a stairway leading down to a vast underground river. Upon that river was a barge containing a mighty and terrible Hlyss! My Lord, this being came to slay your priest but was at length defeated, whereupon your priest discovered several chests of Zu’ur, the deadly narcotic which has begun to plague your Empire. This greenish powder has been found in almost every city of the land, and once inhaled it deadens the senses and destroys the will with infallible surety. If indeed this narcotic is being brought into the Empire from or by the Hlyss, it is a matter of urgency indeed! The priest then set out upon the barge and after some adventures came out upon the seacoast, where he claims to have seen a mighty ship of the Hlyss hidden in a cove. He would surely have perished, had not a company of the city troops come upon him. Shortly thereafter he requested transfer to the district near unto Fasilum, where he now serves the local administrator of District Ferinara [hexes 3422 and 3423: Translator]. Action upon this event is earnestly prayed.” [This passage is followed by the glyph for “investigate and act as deemed beneficial”: Translator]