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The Illumination
of
All the World,
The Radiant, the Glorious,
L O R D H N Á L L A,
THE LIGHT ETERNAL

by

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As Translated by

Fíru Bá Yéqer



**Fill the universe with Refulgent Brilliance!
Let Changeless Radiance suffuse the Many
Planes!**

**Rejoice! The Dark is driven back!
Give thanks that Scintillating Glory prevails!
Praise be unto Lord Hnálla,
Master of All!**



Like a battlefield fought over by two ancient foes, the Universe is the focal point for the conflict of the two Great Principles: Stability and Change. The former strives for continuation, peaceful transition, and continuing development to the final goal of utter changelessness. The latter seeks change, rebirth, violent alteration, and the continual destruction and rebirth of all that exists. This opposition is fundamental, eternal, and unforgiving: there can be no compromise. Should a balance occur, it is but for a moment, a teetering upon the brink of still more change, still greater attempts to quell that change, and even mightier conflicts along the path to the Goal.

We who serve the Stability of Endless Light know that the Goal is ours; Change can alter all things but must in the end subside and become stable. Darkness gives way to Illumination. The Supreme Principle of Change, Lord Hrü'ü, cannot gain the victory. His transitions, meaningless flickering, and displacements cannot be Eternal by their very definition! If change is eternal, then it is a stable phenomenon, the very antithesis of what Lord Hrü'ü preaches!

We Priests and Priestesses of the God of Light garb ourselves in vestments of purest white, adorned with polished silver plaques, golden medallions, and glittering

diamonds and such pure crystals as turn the light into a spectrum of a myriad hues. All colours are produced by light passing through light, and hence the spectrum, the rainbow, and the colours of the universe themselves are but the twisting and turnings of Light as it passes through the substance of the material cosmos.

This is not to say that we are plain or drab in our costumes; each of the fifty-one Aspects of our mighty Lord requires different garments, different head-dresses, some like gleaming helmets, others set with gems and plumed with the spectrum-like plumage of the beautiful Khéshchal-bird), and still more of designs too numerous and grand to describe here in words. The glyphs of the Aspects vary as well, each symbolising the wondrous Being and Substance of our Master's Forms. To see these things is to fall upon one's face with awe, for naught can withstand the puissance and majesty of Lord Hnálla!

The temples of our Lord are tall, high-arched, set with windows of coloured glass and precious stones that transmit the Light in patterns and hues unimaginable to most mortals. Incense smokes upon high braziers of silver and filigreed gold; draperies and tapestries depicting the triumphs of our Lord hang from the pure white walls; mosaics of crystal and white marble swirl across broad floors; stairways rise in stately grandeur to balconies and mezzanine floors, all the way to the dizzy, arching domes of the ceiling, decked with murals in all of the hues of the artist's palette. At the far end, the great nave ends before the altar dais. Stairways carpeted with white lead from either side up to the double-circle symbol of the God at the highest point in the chamber. Worshippers attired in white kneel here and there upon mats of carded, white Hmélu-wool, adoring the Person of the Godhead. Silence is ordained for all, unless it is time for one of the six daily ceremonies. Then there is the sweet sound of the priests' chanting, the harmonious antiphony of the choir, the mumbling response of the devotees, and over all the deep, thunderous

booming of the *Tunkúl-gongs* from on high in their mighty tower. Thus it is from one day to the next, from one century to another, for the many millennia since the founding of the Faith by the *Beatified Pavár*.

Persons of malicious nature claim that Lord *Hnálla* had no place in the Universe before *Pavár*. After all, was he not the first to discover the *Gods*? Did his pantheon exist before that discovery, or did it coalesce and come into being because of him? We know that before *Pavár* "discovered" the *Gods*, he worshipped *Dark Jráka*, one of the names of Lord *Ksárul* known from before the empire of *Llyán of Tsámra*. When he first "summoned" the *Gods*, thus, Lord *Ksárul* existed, albeit in another *Aspect*. Why, then, could not Lord *Hnálla*, Lord *Thúmis*, and the Others exist similarly, though unbeknownst to humankind? What great Truth caused *Pavár* to change from Lord *Jráka* (*Ksárul*) to Lord *Hnálla* as his favoured *Deity*? Why did he urge his colleagues and those in the government of the First Imperium to do the same? When the priests of the Old *Gods* resisted, did not *Pavár* stride forth in his humble, patched robes to preach to them? And were they not confounded, then converted, by his eloquence? Thus, we of the faithful hold that the *Gods* existed from Time Immemorial, from the Age of the Egg of the World itself, and yet they remained aloof from us until *Pavár* beseeched Them to manifest Themselves. Drenched in blood, the Old *Gods* could not withstand the Light, and so they mixed their *Essences* and *Substances* into the *Beings* closest to Their theologies. Lord *Jráka* entered into Lord *Ksárul*, and his miasmic temples became ruin, then rose again garbed in the deep azure of the Prince of the Blue Room. Thus did Queen *Nayári's* Burning *Chótl*, the Blinding Sun, fuse into the Being of our own beauteous Lord *Hnálla* and so become a part (though by no means the whole) of His Being, Glory unto the *Gods* forever!

When splendid *Gánga* sank beneath the waves and was no more, then did the first *Tlakotáni* Emperor take up the gauntlet from the dying hand of the last *Priestking*. There was never any question of the *Gods* to be worshipped in the new Second Imperium. Lord *Hnálla* and His Pantheon were accepted without question, and the Old *Gods* of the First Imperium were never brought back. Today only scholars recall Their names.

The first great battle for religious supremacy was not with the Old *Gods*, but rather with the minions of the Pariah *Deities*, who had bided their time through the long centuries of the First Imperium, and who now struck out to gain converts and seize the sceptre of power. *Méshek Tlandánu*, "the Despot of the South," strove to establish the worship of The One Other, while in the north the priests of what is now *Sunráya* spread the pernicious doctrines of She Who Is Not to Be Named. (Anathema upon them both!) The third Emperor, *Hórukel N'lén*, began the war with the Siege of *Katalál*, of which bard still tell tales. Nothing is known of the deeds of the fourth Seal Emperor, but the reign of his successor, *Trákonel I*, "the Blazing Light," (ruled 139-195 A.S.) is well documented. It was he who sacked the cities of the One Other, repelled the fanatics of the Pariah Goddess, and drove the ships of the *Hlüss* from the southern shores of *Tsolyánu*. He it was also who began the present shrine of Lord *Hnálla* in *Béy Sü*, expanded our priesthood to near its present numbers, and established academies, monasteries, and libraries all over our land. Later, he also further developed the custom of seclusion of the person of the Emperor within the fortress of *Avanthár*. This had been practised since *Engsvanyáli* times in one form or another; yet it remained for this Divine Emperor to establish the Golden Tower and the rite of *Kòlumejálím*, "the Choosing of Emperors," of which I shall say more below.

I will now give brief notice of the *Aspects* of Lord *Hnálla* and Their rôles and tasks. Fifty-one sacred *Aspects* are listed for Him, although some schools claim more or less.

Each Aspect has a shrine in House of Lord Hnálla, and celebrations, festivals, and commemorations are held for Their worship. These differ from city to city and region to region. In Sokátis, the Fortieth Aspect is represented by a giant crystal called *Méntukoi hiJér* "The Crown of Light,." On certain days the sun shines through a special window-shaft in this Aspect's shrine, illuminating the crystal like a veritable small sun itself. The priestesses bring small children who are in need of healing or solace to bathe in its rays and be blessed. In Jaikalór Lord Hnálla's Twelfth Aspect, called *Baján Ke'ún*, is pictured as a stern-faced man of many years in white robe and cowl and bearing a mighty sword. He is the Guardian of the Imperium and Patron of its armies. On the first day of each month singing and drumming and the blare of militant trumpets attend his rites. In great Thráya stands the Shrine of Lord Hnálla's Thirty-Second Aspect, named *Jérmochusùn*, "the Illuminator of the Dark"; He is also militant, but more against the dwellers in the lightless places, such as the Worm Lord and His Minions. In Jakálla our temple is famed for its Shrine of the Second Aspect, *Chiráshin Tuléngkoi* "the Shining Sun," who only accepts offerings of diamonds, crystals, and purest gold, and who gives His devotees the largesse of surcease from cares and freedom from fear and grief. His priests and priestesses go nude, save for necklaces, anklets, wristlets, and ropes of crystals hung about their persons, which make each motion glitter and flash. Oh, the sight bedazzles the eyes and sways the senses! On his festival days, the 9th of Firasúl and the 4th of Trantór, thousands of widows, widowers, and those whose Skeins have become tangled and sorrowful march in procession to His shrine and pay Him worship. Many miracles occur, souls are healed, and hearts are filled with joy.

I t is in Béy Sü, however, that our Lord's temple truly flourishes. Here is the Temple of the Ninth Aspect, *Parshálmokoi hi-Elítlayal*, the Teller of Skeins, to whom come those seeking omens and advice. Next to His shrine is that of the Seventh Aspect, *Markhóm, Tikákoi hiWadhél pekhósun*, "the

Master of Transcendent Contemplation," whose halls are filled with those who wish to meditate and consider the patterns of Reality. Each year the clergy of Lord Markhóm publishes volumes in the series titled "*The Perfect Compendia of Answers to Questions of Life and Existence Most Vexing to Humble Beings.*" These tomes are filled with solutions to such riddles as "Why evil?" and "Is Free Will Necessary?" and the like. Those of a philosophical bent can swim in a veritable ocean of wisdom. Being myself a devotee of Lord Néktulen, Lord Hnálla's tenth Aspect, "He Whose Eyes are Fixed upon the Light," I confess that much of my learning stems from these wonderful books. Last year my particular favourite was a disquisition that shrewdly examines the question "Where does the darkness go when a beam of light pierces it?" The author's reply was a revelation, but it would be lengthy to repeat it here.

I t is in Béy Sü, the Centre of the World and Capitol of the Cosmos, where the *Kòlumejálím* "The Rite of Choosing of Emperors" takes place. Lord Hnálla plays a major rôle is this, since the Stability of the Empire is the fulcrum of the balance of the Universe itself. Many of the Aspects of the God are concerned with specific rites and celebrations of the *Kòlumejálím*: at least fourteen Aspects seem to have no other functions beyond Their tasks in this lengthy ritual. These are called the "Aspects of the Stations of the Choosing," and their images are brought out, anointed with perfumed *Purú*-oil, dressed in costumes of the richest materials, adorned with gems, and paraded through the streets for the crowds to admire.

W hen a new Emperor or Empress accedes to the Petal Throne in Avanthár, the celebrations are ancient and tedious: the heir is led for the first time into the Golden Tower. He says formal farewells to his friends and kinsmen, turns his back upon the world outside, and enters to dwell only in the company of his Servitors of Silence until the end of his life. He may bring wives and concubines (males, if the sovereign be a female)

into a special area of the Tower and may have joy of them there at stated intervals fixed by the positions of the planets in the sky. When a consort gives birth, the ruler may keep her with him, have her slain, establish her in a special palace or residence according to his desire, or return her to her temple, where she assumes the rôle of the Mother of an Heir to the Petal Throne.

When a God-Emperor dies, the Servitors of Silence carry his body upon a golden bier to the shrine of Lord Belkhánu within Avanthár. There they wash the corpse, embalm it, and wrap it in finest *Thésun-gauze* and cloth-of-gold, and perform the first of many solemn funerary rites. In many cases, it is then borne to its last resting place in a sarcophagus of hardest stone in the catacombs below Avanthár. Some Emperors desire to be entombed elsewhere, as occurred with our last great Seal, the God Hirkáne, "the Stone upon Which the Universe Rests." His desire was to be buried in Béy Sü, and this was carried out.

Imperial funerary rites involve Lord Hnálla's temple only to a minor extent. We do have parts to play, rituals to carry out, and counsel to give. If an Emperor is a worshipper of our Lord of Light, then our rôle is commensurably greater, although it is left to the deceased sovereign's successor to decide on the precise rituals and their sequence. Thus, when Prince Dhich'uné ascended the Petal Throne under the title "Eternal Splendour," it was a contingent of his troops that accompanied the funeral bier down the river from Avanthár. Since the God-Emperor was a worshipper of my own beautiful Lord Hnálla, we then were called in grand conclave to perform certain final rituals. Then the Council of the Priesthoods was summoned, and the body was given over to the priesthood of Lord Belkhánu, who is charged with Life After Death. All of the temples joined in transporting the sarcophagus to the Portal of the Land Beyond Life beneath the necropolis on the eastern side of the river, and so it was immured to await the End of All.

It is after the interment that our most important task begins. Traditionally, the High Priest of Lord Hnálla leads the High Council of the Priesthoods. Not even Prince Dhich'uné's clergy of Lord Sárku dares to challenge this. The Council Hall itself is within our temple in Béy Sü, where it remains sealed and silent until the death of a sovereign causes it to be used once again. Twenty daises, in a square of fives, are set around a central golden image of the Seal of the Imperium. Our first concern is to make public announcement of the Emperor's passing. Heralds are sent on foot or by tubeway car where possible, to the farthest cities of the Empire. Letters are written upon sheets of gold foil and embellished with inks made of crushed gems. Telepaths are summoned, and messages are sent out by relay to those places otherwise unreachable. All is done according to a protocol written in Classical Tsolyáni in the time of Trákonel II, "the Victorious," in 261 A.S.

Many Emperors do not reveal all of their children as public heirs. Those born before the accession are automatically candidates, as are those deliberately revealed thereafter. Others are taken away secretly at birth by the Omnipotent Azure Legion, the guardians of our Empire, to be given over to patrons who will bring them up, teach them, help them find supporters, and train them for the arduous rites of the *Kòlumejálím*. This is done both to please the great temples and clans in whose care these infants are placed and to ensure that our land is ruled by strong, shrewd, and dedicated persons. Hereditary rule always fails because the children of a sovereign tend to become weak, foolish, and sapped by luxury and easy living. We hold that our Empress or Emperor must be the strongest, cleverest, wisest, most ruthless, and most politically aware of all of the candidates. To this end, we seek to achieve this by concealing some heirs until they are powerful enough to be revealed, while those declared to be princes or princesses at birth must heed their tutors and become strong enough to defeat all such hidden candidates. We thus

really care little for "blood" relationship: a clever, dedicated outsider who seizes the "Gold" (a symbol given to each putative heir by the Omnipotent Azure Legion) is just as good a candidate as any pampered prince born in the palace at Avanthár. There may thus be one candidate or as many as twenty. Some may "resign the Gold" and not compete, for to "accept the Gold" and enter the competition dooms any loser to death. There is no way out. The executioners stand prepared in the courtyard behind our temple in Béy Sü. The Omnipotent Azure Legion pursues any who would flee, and any candidate who attempts a coup or to bring up troops is liable to be assassinated by Imperial agents. Should an heir "resign the Gold," however, his life and property are safe, but never again can he be a candidate for the Petal Throne, not even if the Emperor dies without issue. Such cases have been rare, but then the Council of the Priesthoods must meet to determine which kinsmen of the Tlakotáni clan are eligible and willing to compete. In the meantime there is always a regent, usually a member of the High Council of the Priesthood. Legally, this person must bring about a *Kòlumejálím* in shortest time and can never stand for Emperor himself. The candidates are given time to prepare for the Choosing, and a date is set according to the astrologers' calculations. An important heir may influence the setting of the date somewhat, as occurred on the most recent occasion to the unhappiness of certain parties, but the final reckoning is the responsibility of the Council.

All of the heirs are then summoned to the temple of Lord Hnálla in Béy Sü. They take up lodgings, and gather their champions. Each is allowed a champion in as many as three contests since no one can be an expert in all skills. These champions must be of noble clans and are reliably recommended. One cannot thus go to the Arena and choose a gladiator, or to a priestly college to find the most experienced mage on *Tékumel*! The choice is often made by the heir's supporters in consultation with the Omnipotent Azure Legion

and his temple.

On the date chosen for the *Kòlumejálím* each candidate proceeds to our great temple in grand procession. Cohorts of troops, legions of musicians, contingents of priests and priestesses from each temple, foreign ambassadors with their entourages, high nobles and notable persons, huge *Chlén*-carts bearing Imperial symbols on tall poles, choirs of children, and all of the inhabitants of the city join these processions according to their choices. Factional fighting is severely put down by the City Guard and the Omnipotent Azure Legion, and the impalers remain busy all day. At the gates of our temple each candidate stands forth to speak, haranguing the crowd and declaring his powers and talents. The Each candidate must compete in all of the tests. These involve bravery, endurance, cunning, physical prowess, judgement, knowledge of history and the arts, competence in sorcery, and several other fields. Absolute victory is not always necessary, as in the case of a woman who cannot possibly compete physically against a man who has trained for war all his life. In all cases, the Council judges.

The *Tunkúl*-gongs roar, the crowds cheer, the trumpets shriek, and the gates of the temple close as the candidates are taken inside. None may view the *Kòlumejálím* save the officials and priests appointed to do so; else there would be chaos. Singers, mimes, dancers, and sorcerers performing illusions and other tricks entertain the masses outside. Within, all is silent. The candidates stand upon the central dais in the Hall of Choosing, one by one, in order of their ages. Each declares his intention to accept the Gold, then lays a sword, a book, a white headband, and one purple *Diél*-fruit upon the altar. He faces toward each cardinal point in turn, beginning with the north, and summons his rivals to appear. One by one they do so, repeating the same ritual. In the case of Prince *Dhich'uné*, no other candidate came forth since all were too distant, and he had arranged that the necessary summons could not reach them,

or that they were unable to reply in a timely way.

The sequence of tests is arbitrary and selected by lot, as is the order of the heirs. Each is paired with an opponent by a second series of lots. The contests then take place before the Council. If a champion is called, he alone may enter the chamber to stand for his candidate. All others are excluded: no servants, no courtiers, no wives or children. Only the guards of the Omnipotent Azure Legion are allowed. The tests are done with efficiency and speed to prevent rioting outside. Each candidate must enter all of the tests, using his three champions as best he can (in one or as many as three different contests).

When a candidate has completed a test, he leaves the room by another door and is escorted, alone and unable to speak to his rivals, to a private chamber to wait. Two new candidates are then selected and provided with weapons, books, or whatever is needed.

A loss in one trial does not mean that the *Kòlumejálím* is lost. Unless a candidate is slain or so severely wounded that he calls for the executioners to relieve him from life, the contests continue. No physicians or healers are permitted, and a wounded candidate may have to endure many more tests with nothing but a simple cloth to stanch the blood. He can declare himself a loser at any time, of course, and is then executed by a speedy and relatively painless method.

The Council secretly records its scores for each test. When all of the contests are completed (usually 9, 10, or 12, depending upon the astrologers), the results are compared, and the heir who has won a majority of the contests is declared the winner. Abstention is not allowed. If there is a tie, the vote is taken over again. The contests themselves are never repeated. Should a tie persist, each council member draws lots against all the rest, and the winner then casts

the deciding vote.

All of this is done with unutterable solemnity and dignity. The fate of the Empire may hang upon an unguarded word, a faulty choice, a parry when one should have struck, or some mistake in calculation.

Members of the Council cannot leave the chamber, sleep, or consume more than a loaf of *Dná*-grain bread and a cup of water. When all is over, the winning candidate is quietly conducted back into the Council Hall; the losers are led out one by one to face their doom. Most go bravely, singing their death-songs, but some have been known to require a squad of burly guards to bring them to their fates. No one speaks until all of this has been finished, and the executioners have departed by another door. Then the hall explodes in applause, cheering, and shouts of "Long live the Seal!"

The *Tunkúl*-gongs sound again -- and continue their wild outcry throughout the night and into the following day. Men and women dress in white -- even those of faiths other than Lord Hnálla's, and there is feasting, drinking, and revelry on a scale no one could imagine. Usually five days and nights are passed while the sovereign-to-be makes final arrangements, says farewells, and prepares for the journey to *Avanthár*. Then our temple's great, gilded palanquins are brought out of their storage chambers. A thousand slaves are selected to carry them, and on the morning of the sixth day the procession sets off toward the Citadel. All along the way folk stand to see their Emperor as he passes, high up like a God, dressed in Imperial finery and the colours of his temple. Thousand stand upon the hills behind, and the river is filled with boats and swimmers. Legion contingents march with the procession, each bearing its resplendent *Káing*-standard. Trumpeters, drummers, and dancing maidens accompany the march, and caravans of carts laden with gifts and goods trundle along behind all. Even those who do not favour the new ruler or his temple join in the celebrations, for who could be mean-spirited enough to dampen the

revelry and the joy?

Upon reaching the village of Avanthár, on the eastern bank of the river, all disembark, and the new ruler is escorted across the water by corps of soldiers from the Omnipotent Azure Legion. The prelates, Legates, and other high persons of the State come down to greet him; he is escorted up the many stairs into the Great Hall of the Petal Throne, where the Synod of the Court of Purple Robes awaits him. He greets these functionaries, advances up to the speaker's station just beneath the solid wall of translucent, carven petals of delicate-veined jade that make up the outer enclosure of the Petal Throne itself, and bows to the memory of

his departed parent. No light burns behind the screen. Indeed, his own hand will be the first to set flame to the lamp there, once he has become Emperor.

The Supreme Commander of the Omnipotent Azure Legion then comes forward to divest the candidate of his worldly garments, and he is led naked to the tiny door in the north wall that leads into a labyrinth of passages and on into the Golden Tower itself. Here the last rites of being human are performed, and then the Servitors of Silence advance to greet him and escort him within. Once that door shuts, he is no longer a mortal; he has become one with the Gods.

