

THE TEMPLE OF VIMÚHLA

by

M.A.R. Barker

The doctrines of Vimúhla, Lord of Fire, Power of Destruction and Red Ruin, Maker of Thunders, the All-Cleansing One, are outwardly straightforward: he is that part of each being's spirit that longs for violence and obliteration, the "simple and direct solution" to problems, the wiping away of all of the encroachments of time and reality by the most direct, pure, and final method: the Flame. Matter and substance are "impure," while raw energy is "pure." The catharsis of annihilation is pleasure, while existence is pain.

These concepts are Change in its most ultimate form. Lord Hrü'ü holds to a patternless dance of ever-shifting Chaos; lord Sárku focuses upon the survival of the intellect even after death and the withering away of all else; Lord Ksárul emphasises the acquisition of personal power and knowledge as a means to rule over the environment and the cosmos; and Lady Dlamélish cares little for anything beyond immediate, physical gratification, hedonism, and changes that wring pleasure from the body. Lord Vimúhla disdains all of these concepts as no more than partial and temporary distractions. The core of Change, his dogmas state, is immediate, final, and yet always undergoing transformation, beautiful and glorious in its deadly power, consuming all else, eternal even while shifting from moment to moment, the immanent but nevertheless transcendental victory of the Flame.

One may well ask how human beings can ever hold to these tenets. Are they not utterly opposed to the idea of "society" – the foundation stone of mankind's existence? Constant destruction cannot be reconciled with the survival even of the individual, much less of the state, the family, or any other social grouping. The violence of mighty Karakán, the Lord of War and Lord Vimúhla's counterpart among the deities of Stability, can be countenanced and used to establish a nation, to defend one's people, and to glorify those who fight for the survival of whatever one holds dear. But not the insensate, terrible purging of the Flame. Should not a devotee of Lord Vimúhla eschew all social relationships, run wild in a frenzy of burning and destruction, and end by sacrificing himself or herself in the incandescent heat of the Flame?

The answer one hears from Lord Vimúhla's priesthoods is based upon the cosmology of the Engsvanyáli Priest Pavár. He is said to have contacted the Gods in their present forms, and he it was who was first gifted with an insight into these deities' Divine

Plan, as it relates to life upon Tékumel. Pavár's discourse is often didactic, usually metaphorical or mythological, and sometimes turgid and oblique. He speaks of Lord Vimúhla's relationship to the other nine Gods and Their Cohorts in Scroll LXIV, Stanzas 12-31:

"When the Immortal Gods strode forth upon the land, when the mountains walked, when the seas rose in towers of raging steam, when rivers of scarlet stone flowed forth from the heart of the world, the Maid of Beauty, Great Avánthe, came before the other Gods. She held up Her left hand to Lord Hrü'ü and Her right hand to Lord Hnálla, and She said: 'Let not Lord Vimúhla have His way for yet a time, O Gods, for there are threads within the Cosmic Skein that must still be woven, pictures within the tapestry that are still to be made manifest, patterns that are unfinished and only dimly seen! O my Brother and Sister Gods, harness the Flame! Let Us cause the Flame to be a part of Us, yet not to consume all that We have wrought! The supernal Glory of Our creation cannot be perceived if all is to be raging conflagration!'

"The Gods took counsel amongst Themselves. They hearkened to the words of the Maid of Beauty. They saw that Their tapestry was indeed shriveled in the Flame; They foresaw that Their handiwork would be undone. Then did They summon Lord Vimúhla, who raged upon the land and upon the oceans, and They spoke thus: 'Hold Thy hand, O Flame Lord, for a time! Eternity is long, and Thou shalt still lay Thy obliteration upon the Skein! Yet We, too, must have Our way for yet a time, for there are threads within the painting which must be seen, as must all things created. Be of Us, under the banner of Lord Hrü'ü, upon the left hand, or under the standard of Lord Hnálla upon the right hand! Be not apart from Us, for all together do We form a Perfect Whole. What You desire shall be Yours, but not alone and not until We have ruled in this place for the aeons that are appointed unto Us! If the limbs and the head and the heart of a being all act without obedience and counsel, then that being perishes. O Flame, there are many Planes and many States of Being, and You shall rule Your part of them. We do not permit that You should rule them all!'

"Lord Vimúhla roared, 'I hear, yet I obey You not. What Lord Hrü'ü seeks, I provide most perfectly.'" And He dealt blows unto the lands, and He smote the mountains with fists of fire, and He was wroth with anger.

"Then did the Gods use Their powers and Their Words. They pleaded with the Flame Lord, and in the end They fought Him. They bound the Flame with the waters of the seas; They silenced Him with the all-covering earth; They cooled Him with the wind-driven mists and the pale curtain of the rains; and They held Him with the chains of Their Beings. And still They promised him a place amongst Them, for He could not be denied. Thus it was in the Time of the Gods."

The doctrines of Lord Vimúhla therefore urge fire and destruction, but He is "the Flame Cupped Within the Lamp," "the Burning Foretold," and "the Blaze Contained." His followers are enjoined to wait for the Time of the Conflagration to Come. Whenever the Lord of Destruction is unleashed, they are instructed, they may do as their Lord has commanded. If a city is rebellious, the devotees of the Flame may burn it; if a foe arises, he is to be purified in the fire; if a land is sunk in the apathy and prosaic tranquillity of Stability, it is their task to change it through the means given to them by the Flame Lord. All must be done, indeed, with the cooperation and consent of the Whole – the pantheon of the Gods – but Lord Vimúhla is only leashed and not imprisoned or even made docile. When the occasion demands, the Flame shall be brought forth to rule. Indeed, in the end of all things, the compact states, all that exists is to be the portion of the Flame Lord, a reward for His patience for a time.

This is Pavár's theology, his interpretation of the patterns of divine and human interaction upon Tékumel. Whatever the truth may be, the historical evidence adds little to this. The Dragon Warriors of N'lüss had worshipped a deity much like the Flame Lord long before Pavár came upon the scene. Spreading down from the mountains of the far northwest, these ferocious fighters established an empire in what is now Mu'ugalavyá and Tsolyánu, although ancient Livyánu managed to hold them at bay. The clans descended from the Dragon Warriors continued to worship the Flame throughout the First Imperium, and when Pavár formalised the complex relationships of the Ten Gods and discovered the existence of the Cohorts, the somewhat less-powerful beings who serve these deities, these clans turned to Lord Vimúhla without hesitation. Political power came and went, dynasties rose and fell, and eventually Éngsvan hlá Gánga sank beneath the southern sea, but this loyalty endured. After the Time of No Kings, the Tlakotáni clan of Tsolyánu founded the Second Imperium. Although much else has changed, still the west remains largely devoted to the Flame Lord.

The great city of Tumíssa is the center of Lord Vimúhla's sect in western Tsolyánu. In the east, Fasíltum – probably descended from some offshoot enclave of the Dragon Warriors – also holds fast to the Flame. There are temples to Lord Vimúhla in all of the other great Tsolyáni cities as well, of course, and the western clans have spread far beyond their original boundaries. One can find clanhouses of the Red Sun, Red Sword, Sweet Singers of Nakomé, Sword of Fire, Vríddi, Red Mountain, Red Stone, and a dozen other Vimúhla-worshipping clans all across the Empire. Many of these exist in Mu'ugalavyá and Yán Kór as well, sometimes under other names but always acknowledged as "clan-cousins." The converse is also true: there are clans devoted to the other deities in the cities of the west, in Fasíltum, and other regions once solidly obedient to the deity of the Dragon Warriors.

Mu'ugalavyá is almost entirely devoted to Lord Vimúhla, although the highest clans there have turned to the beast-headed Lord Hrsh, who is perhaps an altered form of the Flame Lord, with an admixture of Karakán and possibly Ksáru. There are temples to Pavár's other deities in the cities of Mu'ugalavyá, but in more remote towns and in the

countryside it is difficult to find a shrine to Avánthe, Hnálla, or even others of the Lords of Change.

Livyánu resisted the onslaught of the Dragon Warriors, as stated above, and her Shadow Gods are only distantly similar to Pavár's Gods and cohorts. Still, there is a clear relationship between Lord Ru'ungkáno and the Flame Lord that both hierarchies acknowledge. There is little direct cooperation, however.

Farther east, beyond the frontiers of the Dragon Warriors' empire, Lord Vimúhla exists in various forms in Salarvyá, Jánnu, Kilalámmu, and the little states of the northeast. Temples to Vimúhla as such are rare outside of such cosmopolitan cities as Tsatsayágga, Koylúga, Chame'él, and Herú, nevertheless, and the Flame Lord is almost unknown anywhere east of Tsa'avtúlgu. Throughout these vast regions the Goddess Shiringgáyi rules, said to be a composite of Avánthe and Dlamélish. Wherever the writ of mighty Éngsvan hlá Gánga once ran, thus, one finds worshippers of the Flame Lord, while beyond, in such places as Tsoléi, the Nyémesel Isles, and other distant lands there are hints of His doctrines in the tenets of the local deities, but no direct correlations.

The Temple of Vimúhla is essentially similar in structure to those of the other deities; this is again an Engsvanyáli legacy. The priesthood is divided into "Circles," ascending from the lowly acolytes and servitors, to beginners of the First Circle, to the active priests and priestesses of intermediate Circles, all the way up to the Adepts of the 30th Circle, who form the religious and political elite of the sect. There is the usual tripartite division into ritual priests, who perform the ceremonies and serve in the temples; administrative priests, who govern the temple lands and businesses, see to such practical matters as provisioning and staffing, and deal with the Imperium and other outside agencies; and scholar-priests, who teach in the temple schools, study, and perform research. All three of these groups are technically "priests," and they are housed, fed, and clothed in the temples, and have regular temple duties.

Outside of this hierarchy are the "lay-priests": persons with priestly training who have opted to remain out of the hierarchy and devote their lives to study, practical work, or other pursuits. Lay-priests are expected to fend for themselves and find their own living; they are not bound by temple regimens and responsibilities, nor are they usually involved in temple (and inter-temple) politics. A lay-priest or priestess may use temple facilities (e.g. the libraries) and call upon the temple for help or advice, but this is expected to be less frequent and less demanding than the assistance vouchsafed to regular members of the hierarchy. Lay-priests thus often function as bureaucrats in the governments, soldiers, advisors to the clans and noble houses, personal bodyguards to an employer, or specialists whose skills are needed by the society and who thus may remain independent and charge for their work (e.g. physicians, architects, engineers, and the like).

In Tsolyánu the hierarchy itself is unified under a High Council consisting of the Ritual and Administrative Preceptors, the High Proctors of the scholarly branch, and such senior lay-priests as are invited to join it. These then elect an Inner Synod, consisting of

10-50 members. Three to five of these are chosen as Lord Adepts, and one is made Grand Adept of the sect. The Temple of Vimúhla currently has an Inner Synod of 32 members, of whom 4 are Lord Adepts, and one is the Grand Adept. These exalted persons are usually old, of noble clan, and of considerable political importance within the Empire.

The armies of both Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá are strongly influenced by the devotees of Lord Vimúhla, as might be expected of a warrior tradition devoted to fighting and destruction. In Tsolyánu this is balanced by the worshippers of the war-god of Stability, Lord Karakán, while in Mu'ugalavyá it is the somewhat less violent sect of Lord Hrsh which prevails. Since most of the clans send their progeny to their chosen temple for schooling, it is easy for the hierarchy to separate out those young people who show military promise. The best of these are funneled into certain unites devoted to the Temple (e.g. in Tsolyánu, the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation, the 18th Medium Infantry). Others are employed in the temple guards contingents, while those who have little penchant for fighting are educated as clergy or sent back to their clans.

A knowledge of "sorcery" – really those techniques and psychic talents that permit the user to call upon the raw forces of the Planes Beyond and mould them to his or her will – is vital to all of the sects of the Five Empires. Each temple specialises in those branches closest to its theological tastes, of course. The Temple of Vimúhla therefore excels at spells connected with fire, with ravening energy, and destruction. The magic needed for battlefield healing, the treatment of burns, and other flame-related matters is also a specialty. The Temple has little competence, however, in sorcery dealing with the undead, with the acquisition of knowledge, or with other such areas as are logically the provinces of the other deities, as might be expected.

No group composed of human beings (or even of the non-human races existing side by side with mankind upon Tékumel) is ever completely uniform in its activities and objectives. Over the millennia the majority of those who serve Lord Vimúhla has always been largely traditional "worshippers" at best: "time-servers," as they are called by the more strict devotees, "rationalists" and "realists," as they would name themselves. As stated above, it is not even theologically necessary for a devotee of the Flame to spend his or her life in the Plane in acts of conflagration or end it in self-immolation. Most of the clansmen of the Flame Lord are thus fairly average citizens of the nation they inhabit: agriculturalists, traders, craftsmen, officials, bureaucrats, and whatever other professions have become usual for their clans. Aside from the predilection for the army noted previously, it would be difficult to characterize devotees of the Flame as particularly violent or destructive, as the societies of the Five Empires go. In all ages and locales people tend to leaven the stringencies of theological dogma with the softer, less purposeful, and more selfish and human-directed needs of the society in which they live. One thus sees little difference between an "average" worshipper of Vimúhla and a follower of Avánthe, Thúmis, or any of the other deities – except for a touch of flame-orange in the former's costume, an amulet or other token of the faith hung about the neck or fastened to an armllet, and in some regions facial tattoos that proclaim the individual's religious allegiance.

The situation is similar within the temples as well. The clergy becomes structured and bureaucratized; the professions of faith little more than ritual, the teachings only so many memorized words. Even those whose claims to faith are strong would certainly refuse to take up a torch and set fire to their city – or to hurl themselves into their own sacrificial flames.

These less-than-literal attitudes are fostered by the Temple itself, of course. In order to play a role in the politics of the state, one must be acceptable to the state. Temporal power means more benefits for the Temple, more worshippers, more lands and slaves and goods. The senior priests defend this by saying that more shrines, more armies, and more wealth bring enhancement to the faith of the Flame. The broader and more puissant one's base, the greater one's Temple and the more glory to one's God...!

There are others, the "activists," who do proclaim an adherence to the violence preached by the scriptures of the Flame Lord. These form several semi-secret societies within the priestly hierarchy. They are known, tolerated, used, and useful to the sect as a whole. When strong action is wanted, these zealots are available to implement it. Should the Temple be censured for a breach of the ancient Concordat (the treaty between all of the temples forbidding sectarian strife), these persons can be held up as scapegoats. If a military mission calls for daring, self-sacrifice, and blind loyalty, these groups can be summoned to undertake it. In turn, they strive against the "time-servers" for political power within the Temple, and the balance sways now this way and now that.

The most powerful of the "activist" groups within the Temple of Vimúhla is the Incandescent Blaze Society. The higher Circles of the great temples at Tumíssa, Fasíltum, and Katalál are heavily infiltrated by members of this sect-within-a-sect, and its agents frequent the halls of Avanthár and the Governor's palace at Bey Sü as well. These zealots hold to the ancient tenets of the Flame – destruction and annihilation – but they temper these with a shrewd understanding of political necessities. They are barely tolerated by the Imperium – and by the lords of the Four Palaces of the Square in Ssa'átis in Mu'ugalavyá – but they do occasionally prove useful, and their fanatical devotion makes them excellent assassins and soldiers. As might be expected, the best of the Vimúhla-worshipping Legions are riddled with followers of the Society.

Less known and much less numerous are the devotees of the Order of Devouring Conflagration. Members are usually priests (and a few priestesses). They hold that the scriptures enjoin burning and devastation, and to live as normal citizens is to live a lie. Therefore it is the duty of true believers to remain within the temple precincts until such time as Lord Vimúhla shall summon them to carry out the wholesale burning and destruction that will be His reward at the end of time. The members of this group are often charged with the dreadful duties of performing the human sacrifices that are the hallmark of the High Rituals of the Flame.

A still smaller number follow the Scroll of the Blaze Revealed: a schismatic party of extremists who lead an ascetic life within the walls of certain monasteries hidden in the Chákan forests, in the mountains north of Bey Sü, and in the wilds of western Mu'ugalavyá. This sect, founded by one Késhkuru Gama'án in late Engsvanyáli times, holds that its members must remain aloof from the mundane world. Outsiders – even other followers of Vimúhla – who penetrate its sanctuaries are slain, and it is believed that each member must also choose a time to sacrifice himself or herself in the ever-living flame. Some say that this is done by casting lots, while other sources indicated that each follower's fate is determined astrologically by comparing certain features of the person's horoscope with the positions and aspects of Tékumel's second and smaller moon, Káshi, whose reddish hue identifies it as "the planet of Vimúhla."

In Yán Kór there is a further secret society, the Three Fingers of the Flame, which bears a resemblance to the Incandescent Blaze Society, but which combats all of the other groups on various little-understood theological grounds. This has taken on political overtones in the light of the present war between Tsolyánu and the Yán Koryáni. The Baron's equivalent of the Omnipotent Azure Legion, the Surgéth, uses members of this small society as assassins and spies.

There are branches of all of these (except the group just named above) in Mu'ugalavyá. The degree to which these cooperate is not known, but both the Tsolyáni and the Mu'ugalavyáni governments suspect collusion, something that is now high treason on both sides of the border. In addition, there are several further small societies within Mu'ugalavyá, some of whom are politically oriented, while others tend to favour one or another type of asceticism, withdrawal from the world, mystical perceptions of the flame, and sacrifice of either themselves or others – or both.

The temples of Lord Vimúhla are architecturally different from those of most of the other deities. A temple to the Flame Lord is often surrounded by semi-fortified walls, within which are courtyards, barracks for the temple guards, priestly dormitories, kitchens, storehouses, a stout tower for the huge Tunkúl gongs that announce the rituals, and other public areas. Inside of this stands a tall truncated pyramid, upon the flat roof of which another, steeper trapezoidal building is placed. This latter contains the main shrine, plus smaller sanctuaries to several of the Flame Lord's 87 Aspects (minor, visible forms). The only temples to have shrines to all 87 Aspects are those in Tumíssa and Fasíltum. The central temple also includes sleeping quarters for the highest echelons of the clergy, administrative chambers, cloisters for the senior scholars, and other, more practical rooms. In most cases a temple sits upon an older city leveled and filled in by the Tsolyáni custom of Dítlána, and there are passages and galleries leading down through the present pyramid to the buried, secret shrines below. Public sacrifices and rituals are performed above, but the Rituals of the Ever-living Flame are celebrated in these subterranean fanes.

The daily rituals of the Flame Lord begin at dawn with the thunderous booming of the Tunkúl gongs. Animals – Hmélu, Hmá, great Tsi'íl, and others – are always available, and war captives and slaves (those too old or infirm to work – or those bought and given

to the Temple by devotees seeking divine favours) are also commonly immolated in the great fire-pits that stand before the altars. It is estimated that some 25,000 human sacrifices are made each year in Tsolyánu and Mu'ugalavyá to Lord Vimúhla and His Cohort, Lord Chiténg.

A word about Lord Chiténg is not out of place here. He is titled the "Lord of Red-Spouting Flame, the Drinker of Blood, and the Reaper of Cities." He has 20 fearsome Aspects and appears to be an even crueller and more vicious side of the power of the Flame. Chiténg's worshipers are often soldiers and professional tormentors, and it is his Company of the Edification of the Soul that is charged with the executions and interrogations demanded by Tsolyáni Imperial law. A Mríkh, a party four members of this society, is legally required to question or punish a malefactor, and it is unlawful for any other group (excepting the Omnipotent Azure Legion and certain temple inquisitorial bodies) to carry out such punishments within the Empire. Chiténg's followers are again drawn from the same areas and clans as those of Lord Vimúhla, and membership in one or the other sect appears to be a matter of personal preference, family tradition, and clan predilections.

As has been adumbrated above, the Temple of Vimúhla is very much of a political entity in the Five Empires. Its adherence to violence and indiscriminate destruction makes it somewhat suspect, of course, and the governments consider it a dangerous tool indeed. Revolts and attempts at local autonomy have chequered its long history, the most recent being the uprising of the more fanatic younger members of the Vríddi clan at Fasíltum some 15 years ago. This resulted in an Imperial coup-d'état, some executions, and the imprisonment of the Vríddi leader, the beautiful Elára hiVríddi, her half-brother Qárras hiVríddi, her clan-cousin Chekkutáne hiVríddi, and many others in the Tólek Kána Pits at Bey Sü – later to be transferred to the grim dungeons below Avanthár.

Subsequently, as Tsolyáni custom permits, the loyalists of the Vríddi clan brought forth an Imperial Prince as a claimant to the Petal Throne. It is customary for each royal heir to declare only some of his or her offspring as public Princes or Princesses; the rest are given into the keeping of the Omnipotent Azure Legion to distribute secretly amongst the great clans, the temples, and the ancient noble houses, there to be brought up – often in ignorance of their Imperial destiny until their sponsors wish to "play" them as one throws down a trump card. The Vríddi's Prince was thus known to himself and the world as Tórisu hiVríddi, a Dritlán of the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation, until the Temple of Thúmis attempted to break up a power stalemate between the existing heirs by revealing their candidate, one Surundáno, who had until that time been no more than a priestly clerk at the town of Haumá. The Temple of Vimúhla, in conjunction with the proud Vríddi clan, then countered by producing Tórisu, whose throne-name has now been revealed to be Mirusíya. He was already known as a soldier and has abilities as a warrior; he appeals to the ancient nobility and the Military Party alike; and he is a man of considerable sophistication and diplomatic talent – qualities denied to poor Surundáno. By bringing him out at this time (late in 2,357 A.S.), the possibilities of an alliance between Prince Eselné and his sister, Princess Ma'ín Krüthái, were interrupted, and the

war-temples (Karakán-Chegárra versus Vimúhla-Chiténg) split over their support in the coming Choosing of Emperors, the Kólumejəlím. Since then this new prince has managed to glean support from both the western Vimúhla-worshipping clans and the eastern Vrídidi and their allies; he has sponsored the current invasion of Milumanayá, drawing the Yán Koryáni and the Saá Allaqiyáni away from their incursion down through the northwest; and troops under his generals have captured Sunráya, the eastern capital of Milumanayá, late in the present year, 2,361 A.S. He has thus succeeded in building a power-base for himself and has added lustre to his chances through military conquest. The other heirs and their supporters have been badly shaken, and alliances shift almost daily within the palaces, temples, and ancient clanhouses of Tsolyánu. There was talk, for example, of a marriage between Prince Mirusíya and his sister, Princess Ma'ín (the Tsolyáni permit such incestuous unions for Imperial heirs), and there was also a rumoured offer from Prince Eselné, the original candidate of the war-temples and the Military Party, to devise some sort of sharing arrangement between himself and Prince Mirusíya. Neither of these plans has come to anything yet.

The current Grand Adept of the Temple of Vimúhla is Lord Nayúri hiTúkkimchash of the Red Mountain clan. He is usually to be found in Avanthár or in the great temple of Vimúhla in Bey Sü, the renovation of which has been one of his primary projects. Nayúri was a scholar of ritual and dogma during his youth, but he later specialised in administrative procedures, served as Administrative Preceptor in Mrelú, then in the same post in Tumíssa, and finally as a Patriarch on the High Council. Eventually he was selected as Grand Adept, a post he will almost certainly keep for the rest of his life. He is now 68 years old, corpulent, jolly, and "as shrewd as the Flame is hot." He still maintains an interest in the rituals and is most punctilious about their details. He tends to abhor extremists in all forms, and under him the Incandescent Blaze Society has been kept under tight rein.

Káyish hiTúkkimchash, one of the four younger brothers of Lord Nayúri, is 38 years of age, the Preceptor of the military arm of the Temple and titular General of the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation, although it is commanded in the field by Lord Kuruktáshmu hiKétkolel of the Red Sun clan. Lord Káyish is far more rigid and stern than his brother, and his lack of a sense of humour is proverbial. He is said to be a senior member of the Incandescent Blaze Society. He is as slender as his brother is rotund, balding, thin-faced, nervous in his mannerisms, and sharp-eyed, noting most of what occurs around him while saying little.

Lord Mríddu hiChagotlékka is the Administrative Preceptor in Tumíssa, an ex-warrior, a stern disciplinarian, a clever politician, and a man much given to sudden rages and whimsical kindnesses. He is a member of the Red Sun clan, and his devotion to his several wives and many children is well known throughout the Empire. He is 49 years of age, greying, and blessed – or cursed – with the sharply hooked nose of the ancient Tsolyáni nobility.

Osuméshu hiTangetláku of the Red Sword clan is the Ritual Preceptor in Tumíssa. He is perhaps 45-48 years of age, stoutly built, wide-faced, and strong, with the light reddish skin and hazel eyes of the Chákas or eastern Mu'ugalavyá. He is intensely devoted to the Flame Lord and offers support, both political and material, to all of the smaller factions of zealots. The Imperium suspects him of collusion with the Temple of Vimúhla in Mu'ugalavyá, with which he maintains constant ties.

One of the senior sorcerers and the Great Proctor of the scholarly priests at Tumíssa is Lord Kséshmurú hiTlekólmü, who is about 53 years of age. He is an expert in all types of magic and ancient lore. He favours neither the moderates nor the zealots of the Temple and manages to retain the confidence of both. His daughter, Oyáka hiTlekólmü, is married to General Kádársha hiTlekólmü of the Legion of Searing Flame. She herself is an expert demonologist.

Lord Mríddu hiZuomé, of the Rising Moon of Blood clan, a small and obscure southern offshoot of the "Red" clans of the west, is the Ritual Preceptor in Jakálla. He also has a hand in administrative affairs and is the person usually contacted by outsiders in regard to temple activities in the south. He is pleasant, ruddy cheeked (indicating a western or Chákan heritage?), small, and unprepossessing. He is 54 years old. His skills as a mathematician and astrologer were well known in his youth, however, and he is also widely read in matters of dogma and ritual. He functions as the Temple's propagandist and writes tracts for its missionaries.

Lord Nuromén hiSsáivra of the High Pinnacle Clan is the Administrative Preceptor in Mrélu and is also a member of the High Council. He is in his late 60's and is quite deaf. Although inactive now, he was once a member of the Incandescent Blaze Society and still favours the more "activist" positions of the Temple.

The local head of the Omnipotent Azure Legion in Tumíssa is Lord Qonqúlemesh hiSérekel, a retired officer of the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation. He is a squat, ugly, nearsighted man in his late 50's, a supporter of the "moderate" faction loyal to the Petal Throne, and impatient with extremists of all stripes. His intelligence and diplomatic talents are his most salient traits, together with an inordinate interest in women and the pleasures of hunting and hawking with Küni-birds.

The Patriarch of the Temple in Khirgár is Lord Sóroku hiTánkolel, of the Great Stone clan, about 60 years of age, and no longer in good health. He was a powerful sorcerer in his youth and followed a career in demonological research until he underwent an accident some years back that deprived him of the use of his left arm. He then took post in the administrative service and quickly rose to his present position.

Lord Sünkoretl hiSérekel of the Red Sword clan is the Grand Adept of the Temple of Chiténg in the Empire. He is 62 years of age, elegant and urbane, interested in all manner of social and political intriguing, and a thoroughly likable man in spite of his

service to his dread God. He has no wives but has a "collection" of several hundred pretty concubines – and hence an uncountable horde of children.

Lady Tlása hiSérekel is the Ritual Preceptor of the Temple of Chiténg at Avanthár. The younger clan-sister of Lord Sünkoretl, she is about 30 years of age, slender and intense, and completely devoted to the most extremist factions in her temple (these being the same or closely similar to the societies of the Temple of Vimúhla). She specialises in sorcery and is credited with much knowledge of the Demon Lord Jnekshá'a, one of those who serves the Flame on his (its?) own Plane.

The Ritual Preceptor of the Temple of Vimúhla in Fasíltum is Lord Ajái hiVrídidi, one of that hawk-faced, proud, and ancient clan that has ruled the northeast since time immemorial. He and his clan-cousin, Lady Dái'inal hiVrídidi, Administrative Preceptress, are in charge of the temple in the ancient City of the Chiming Skulls. Lord Ajái is about 48 years of age, and Lady Dái'inal is perhaps 30. Both are loyalists and moderates, although their clergy and many of their devotees are not of this persuasion.

An interesting character is Husó hiChiréngmai of the Red Star clan, a pleasant, soft-spoken man variously rumored to be between 29 and 47 years of age. He is said to be the clandestine head of the Incandescent Blaze Society. This may or may not be true, but it is certain that Husó plays an important part in this organisation, for he is often to be found in situations fraught with intrigue and peril. He is said to be a competent sorcerer and to have access to various devices of the Ancients as well.

Several Imperial generals are worshippers of the Flame. Of these, General Kádársha hiTlekólmü, called Ahànbásrim, "the Iron Man," is worthy of mention. A foreigner originally, he has risen high and now commands the Legion of the Searing Flame, a relatively new unit of heavy infantry that saw much active service in the war against Milumanayá last year. His comrade-in-arms, General Kárin Missúm (the name translates as "Red Death" – he never uses his original name) of the Legion of the Storm of Fire, is equally fascinating: as short and broad as General Kádársha is tall, Lord Kárin Missúm is a fanatic follower of the Incandescent Blaze Society. These two men are characteristic of the group of newcomers and foreigners that has grown up around Prince Mirusíya.

Of the foreign followers of the Flame Lord, one of the most fascinating is the beautiful Lady Déq Dimáni, who rules the island of Vrídu off the northern coast of Yán Kór. She is descended from an ancient splinter group of Vimúhla-worshippers who settled in the region and now serve the Yán Koryáni. She is herself a trained fighter, and she generals the excellent legion called the Fishers of the Flame. Tall, slim, and dark, Lady Déq Dimáni is called "the Red Moon of the North" by her Yán Koryáni comrades.

Space prevents any further listing of other important personages of the Temples of Vimúhla and Chiténg. There are many more priests, sorcerers, scholars, and military commanders, and innumerable Imperial officials and high functionaries who follow the

Flame could be mentioned as well. This is even more true of Mu'ugalavyá, of course, and an entire volume could be devoted to the important personalities of that complex land.

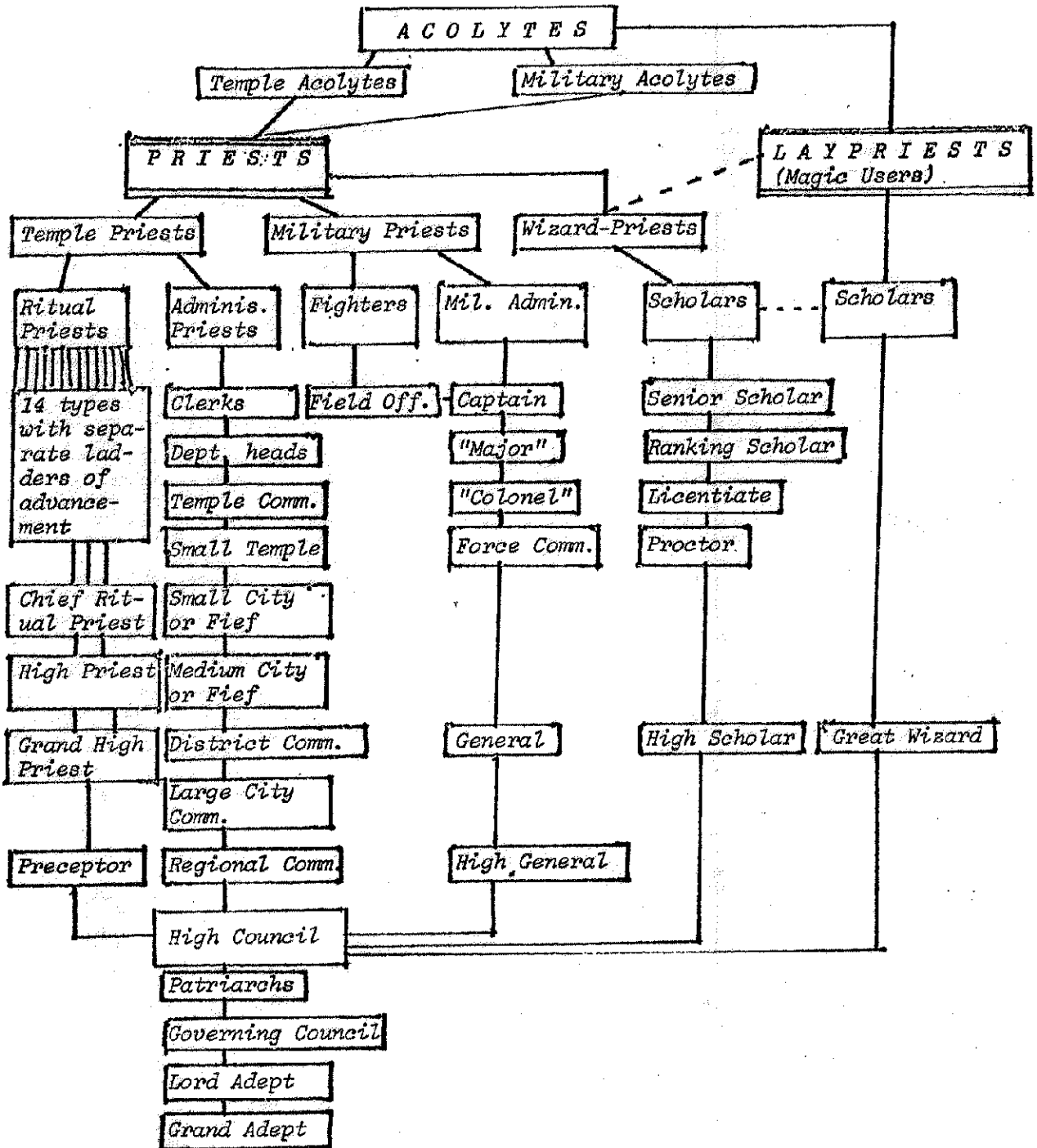
The following pages contain the pictures that were interspersed throughout the article.



THE TEMPLE OF VIMÚHLA

by M.A.R.Barker

STRUCTURE OF THE TEMPLE OF VINUELA



Worn by a 6th Level Ritual Priest at the Ceremony of the Consuming Flame of Devastation. Also worn by officers of the Legion of the Lord of Red Devastation, devoted to Vimúhla. The God's name is written within the triangle:

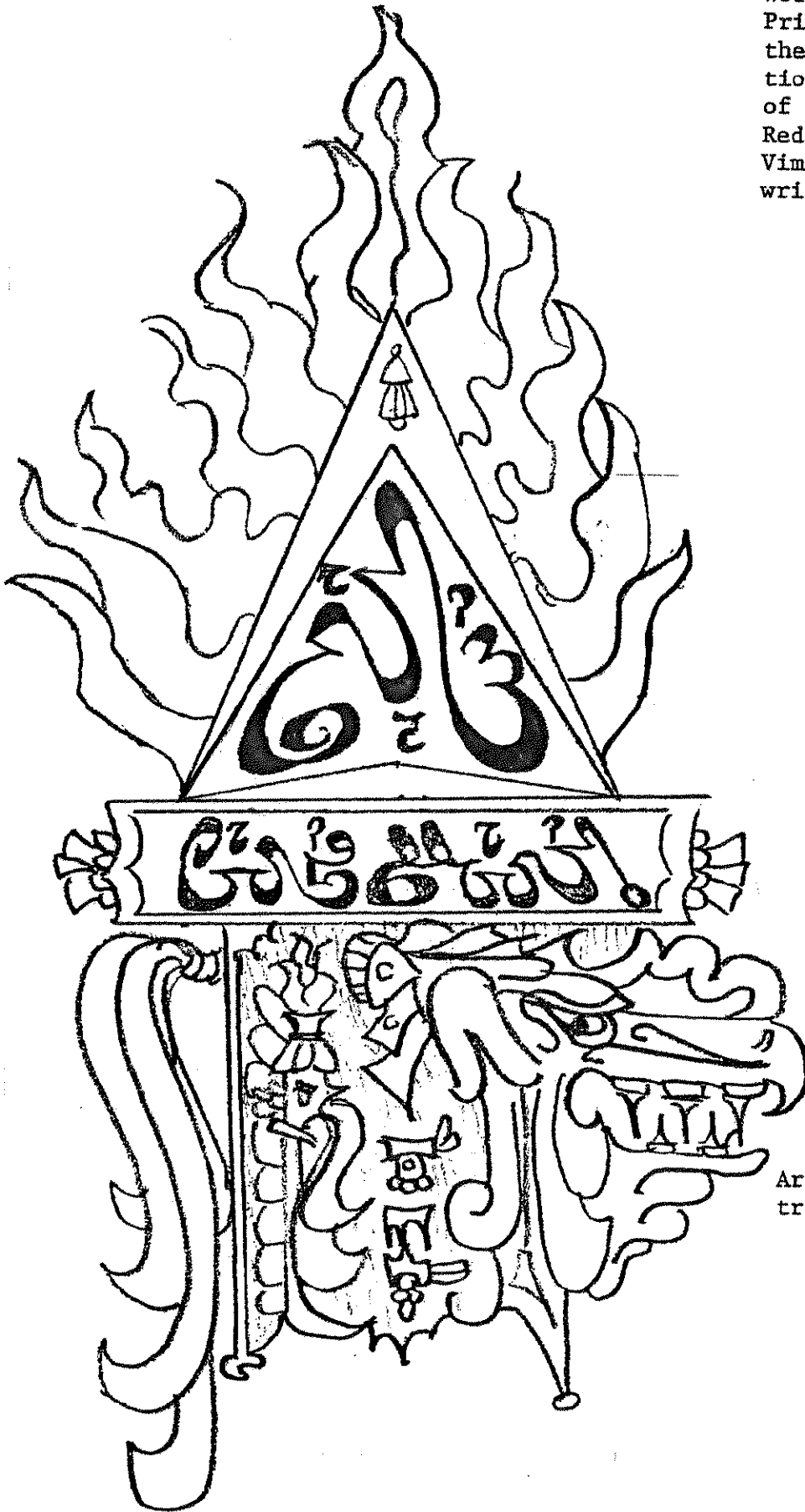
i a
V-M-HL
u

In the line below the inscription reads:
"Mítlan hiTlá"

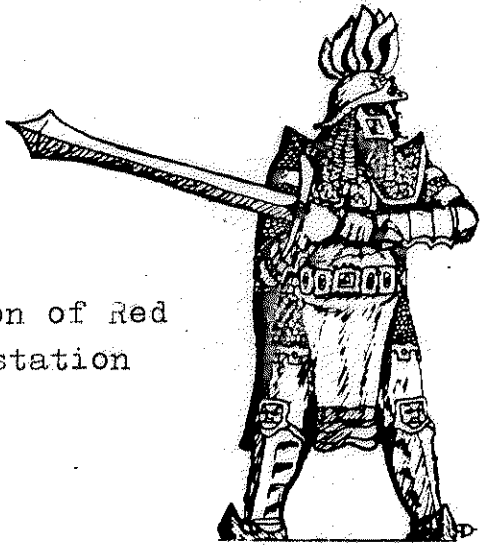
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"God of Fire."

Below this on the left is the Standard of Vimúhla, then a smaller standard within the closed area, to the right of this are two glyphs denoting "Destruction" and "Fire." To the right is the head of a stylised dragon, dating back to the Empire of the Dragon Lords, ruled by worshippers of Vimúhla. The flames at the top can be made symmetrical on both sides. Areas can be filled in with tracery and crosshatching, etc.



Legion of Red
Devastation



Priest of Lord
Vimuhla



Legion of the
Givers of Sorrow,
Dedicated to Lord
Chiteng





pikeman of the
Legion of Searing Flame
10th Imperial Heavy Infantry



Gurek of the
Fishers of the
Flame (Vridu)

Vridu