

KSÁRUL, “Doomed Prince of the Blue Room”

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The theology of the Temple of Ksárul, Ancient Lord of Secrets, Doomed Prince of the Blue Room, Master of Magic, Knower of the Inner Names of All the Worlds, He Who Confronts the Inner Being of Reality, is particularly difficult to describe since the very keynote of this Temple is “Mystery.” Most of his true doctrine is concealed from outsiders; his greatest shrines lie either in the labyrinths beneath the oldest cities or else in remote and inaccessible jungles and mountains; his true priests go masked; and his most important tenets are couched in the secret language invented by his worshippers long ago, the arcane and complex “Tongue of the Priests of Ksárul.”

Outwardly, his Temple closely resembles the structures and patterns of those of the other deities of Tsolyánu: certain clans support his worship; vast tracts of lands are operated in his name by fiefholders, tenant farmers, or slaves; and there is the usual progression of ranks within his priesthood from acolytes up through ritualists, scholars, military priests, administrators, etc., etc. Yet the power structure of his “Inner Sphere” is actually quite different. Certain priests and priestesses of very minor rank are in reality the masters of the Inner Sphere, the tightly organized, secret society within the Temple which maintains his secret doctrines and implements Lord Ksárul’s true plans and goals. A complex cell-like structure assures secrecy, and these “Inner Doctrines” are communicated to those in the Outer Sphere (and thence to outsiders) only indirectly and with great circumspection. Funds are diverted from the income of the Temple for these private objectives, and often those in the Outer Sphere are unaware of their true purposes.

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the doctrines of the Lord of Secrets should make little logical sense to those not privy to the Mysteries. The Outer Doctrines are only a shell meant to satisfy the uninformed, while the priests of the Inner Sphere pursue their own goals.

The Outer Doctrines were first formulated by the priest, Pavár, who was the founder of the pantheon which now pervades Tsolyáni life. Yet there are hints that Lord Ksárul was known and worshipped long before Pavár: there are references to a mysterious “Blue Lord” in the fragmentary records of the Empire of Llyán of Tsámra, and it is thought that at least one of the Shadow Gods of Livyánu has a strong resemblance to the Doomed Prince. The origins of Lord Ksárul may thus date back far beyond Pavár’s time, perhaps even to the Time of Darkness when

mankind still had access to some of the old sciences and technology. Legends has it that in earlier ages the priests of Ksárul were able to construct mutated creatures from the bodies of both the living and the dead: e.g., the Hrá, the Qól, the Mrúr, and certain others. The power of spell-writing, the construction and repair of “Eyes” and other devices, the art of writing “Books of Power,” and other skills were also theirs, and some say that certain of these attainments are still known, hidden away from jealous eyes in the remote temples and monasteries of Lord Ksárul’s Inner Sphere.

The Outer Sphere Doctrines can be summarized here. The following is taken largely from the majestic Lament to the Wheel of Black and the Song of the Reaper of Sighs.

In the “Times of the Gods,” before Tékumel was yet created, it is said that Lord Ksárul was the youngest of the gods, a brilliant and ambitious deity of great cunning and power. Through his arrogance and impatience, he came to strive for mastery against his fellows, particularly the Lords of Stability. His allies included the Demons of the Dark, the Dwellers in Shadow, the Spirits of the mythical aerial realm of Tu’unkélmu, and later, after Tékumel’s creation, even certain humans and nonhumans (e.g., the Mihállí). At first his foes were only the Lords of Stability: Hnálla, Avánthe, Thúmis, Karakán, and Belkhánu, together with their Cohorts. This struggle drew on from age to age and dimension to dimension, with Tékumel’s universe always at the center of the conflict, a sort of hub around which many interdimensional battles were fought. At first the other Lords of Change (Hrü’ü, Vimúhla, Sárku, and Dlamélish, plus their Cohorts) sided with Lord Ksárul, but as time passed they too perceived that his ultimate objective was not only the Rule of Change but rather his own personal mastery over all of the continua. Vimúhla and Dlamélish withdrew and became neutral, while the other two continued to support Ksárul. In the end, however, these deities also saw that a victory for Ksárul meant their extinction or expulsion from these planes. A compact was then made with the Lords of Stability, but it was agreed only that Ksárul would be contained and weakened, not destroyed.

The legends then speak of the Armageddon of the Gods, the great Battle of Dórmoron Plain (not the present Dórmoron Plain in Mu’ugalavyá, no matter what local folk say). Lord Ksárul’s minions were defeated at this battle and were driven forth from this universe, while the Doomed Prince himself was brought low and captured. (One epic has it that there are planes upon which these battles still rage, endlessly, and that occasional unlucky inhabitants of Tékumel who are drawn through into these dimensions find themselves used as warriors, killing and being killed, then being revived again and again to fight against the demonic foe until dissolution of the universe at the end of time.)

Lord Ksárul, the epic says, was imprisoned in a secret place, a “pocket dimension” between the larger dimensional matrices. A few humans who have achieved spiritual rapport with Lord Ksárul report that this “place” appears as a sort of chamber hung in flickering blue velvet and lit by sconces of azure flame. In these visions, Lord Ksárul himself appears as a human youth sunk in stasis-sleep upon a couch draped in indigo-purple. He is robed in black velvet, and upon his breast lies an ebon staff tipped with a glittering blue gem in the shape of a great beetle. His lips are curved in a perpetual smile, soft, dreaming, moonlike, yet somehow impersonal and emotionless. All of this is perhaps only a “seeming,” an illusion which makes the vision

comprehensible to human eyes and not necessarily “reality” (if indeed there be a single “reality” for all beings alike?).

The nine gods then erected walls around the Blue Room to prevent Lord Ksárul from escaping or his followers from rescuing him. It is said that there are ten such walls, but the builder of the tenth is never named and is referred to only as “the One Other.” Again, these are not material walls but rather barriers incomprehensible otherwise to our limited human perceptions. In order, from innermost to outermost, these walls were erected by Hnálla, Hrü’ü, Karakán, Vimúhla, Thúmis, Sárku, Avánthe, Dlamélish, Belkhánu, and “the One Other.” The Cohorts of the gods either play no part in this part of the legend or are named only as “assisting” their masters in the forming of these walls.

The Outer Doctrines hold that although the Doomed Prince lies sleeping, yet his intellect continues to control great powers and is operative in this universe. His abilities are weakened and diffused by his imprisonment, yet so great are his faculties that even in bondage he is mighty. Were he to be freed, he would again challenge the authority of the gods, and this time he would be victorious. His allies await him on many planes and could be called back to join again in the conflict.

The Outer Doctrines go on to say that each of the ten walls has a “key” and that it was a condition agreed to by all of the gods that these keys should be concealed somewhere in Tékumel’s universe. The reasons for this condition are not known--or known only to the gods--and it was further stipulated that these “keys” must have physical form and must be accessible to humans and lesser beings. Three of these keys are known now: one is in the High Temple of Ksárul in Béy Sü, another is in the possession of a certain young priest of Ksárul, and the third is kept in a crystal cave in the Hall of Dripping Doom in the House of Tenebrous Sighs in the Palace of Bássa, King of the Black Ssú, on the other side of Tékumel. The locations of the others are not known.

The Inner Doctrines of the Temple of Ksárul cannot be ascertained with any certainty, due to the secrecy in which they are maintained. There is a speculation to the effect that Lord Ksárul is not really imprisoned at all but has gone upon a sort of voluntary “retreat” in order to strengthen his powers, and that one day he will return to conquer all of the worlds. Another hypothesis holds that the legend of the Blue Room is but a fabrication put forward by Lord Ksárul’s minions themselves, and that in reality he continues to operate in this world under a variety of names and guises. Still another theory states that he has abandoned this series of dimensions entirely and has nothing more to do with Tékumel, and that only his allies and his worshippers continue to hold his order together for greedy motives of their own (this is perhaps a rumor favored by his foes). None of these statements are anything more than conjecture, however, since the priests of the Inner Sphere are totally close-mouthed and secretive, their lips and minds sealed even from the highest agents of the Imperium by magical wards and by the convoluted labyrinth of the Inner Sphere structure. All that can be discovered at this time, thus, is that the Inner Sphere has very real goals both inside and outside of Tsolyánu, that there is some form of cooperation between the Inner Sphere and certain secret societies within the Temples of Sárku and Hrü’ü, and that there is rivalry with the other gods.

Outwardly, as said above, the organization of the Temple of Ksárul is very similar to those of the other temples. Lord Ksárul is particularly popular in the cities of Mrelú and Púrdimal, and he also has power at Úrmish and Butrís in Pán Cháka. His adherents are scattered throughout the other great cities of the south, and he is weakest in the north and in the east. Much of his support comes from just a few ancient clans, again based in the cities of Mrelú and Púrdimal, although with branches in other places as well. Some of these are: the Clan of the Black Hand, the Dark Moon Clan, the Great Stone Clan, the Dark Flame Clan, etc. These clans trace their ancestry back to the Period of the Fisherman Kings or even farther, and they are by nature a proud and secretive lot. Their income is derived from the rich lands around Mrelú, Púrdimal and Úrmish, and the clan chiefs have never been slow to lavish donations upon their temple and those who serve it.

Militarily, the worshippers of Lord Ksárul have never been particularly strong; the very nature of his faith seems to demand this. Even so, however, certain Legions are devoted to him: e.g., the Legion of Héket of Púrdimal, 17th Imperial Heavy Infantry, the Legion of the Prince of the Blue Room, 35th Imperial Medium Infantry, and the Legion of the Night Shadows, 15th Imperial Medium Infantry. There is also a Legion devoted to Lord Ksárul's Cohort, Grugánu, the Knower of Spells: the Regiment of the Knower of Spells, 5th Imperial Crossbowmen, based at Mekú.

The Outer Doctrines of Ksárul also command that knowledge and science shall be acquired wherever possible, and thus much of the schooling of the Temples of the Lords of Change is done through the great educational complexes of this Temple. The greatest of these is the Hall of Sapphire Glory at Mrelú, in which the outer learning of the Temple is made available to the scions of the nobility and wealthy clansmen from all over the Empire. There are smaller schools at Mekú, at Púrdimal, at Béy Sü, and other major centers throughout the land. Literacy, foreign tongues, mathematics, philosophy, astronomy and astrology, history, ancient learning, and other subjects are taught, and there are specialized courses in theology (not open to those who are not worshippers of the Doomed Prince), music, the recitation of epics and praises to the Emperor, poetry, and other arts. If the student be a worshipper of Ksárul, he or she may then go on into the Inner Hall, where various forms of magic, the Tongue of the Priests of Ksárul, necromancy, geomancy, divine interpretations, and other less savory topics are available. Students belonging to the sects of the Lords of Stability are rare in these schools, preferring instead to attend their own institutions in the Temples of Thúmis or Keténgku, and devotees of the other Lords of Change attend only the "outer" classes and then return to their own temples for specialized instruction.

The Inner Doctrines are never taught in these public places, of course, but are instead imparted in the hidden fastnesses of Lord Ksárul's many monasteries and shrines. The exact locations of these places are never revealed (although they are known to the Imperium). A steady stream of "pilgrims" to the haunted ruins of the city of Hmakuyál seems to indicate that one center is located there, however, and another frequently traveled route leads off eastwards from the city of Thri'íl into the crags of the Kayál Peaks. Routes to these places are hedged about with traps, snares, illusions, and guards (both human and otherwise). Once a student has been accepted into the Inner Sphere, he may disappear for years at a time--and may never emerge again, at least not in the guise in which his friends and clanspeople had known him! Membership in the Inner

Sphere thus calls for great personal sacrifice and a willingness to submit to the dictates of the Doomed Prince. Relatively few students are willing to undergo the rigors of this training, followed by the complete submission then demanded by Ksárul's priests. For this reason, perhaps, Lord Ksárul's sect attracts a great many itinerant scholars, students who seek learning within the Outer Sphere but who are unwilling to undergo the dangerous and demanding instruction which would bring them into the Inner Sphere.

The Temple of Ksárul is careful to maintain excellent relations with the Imperium. Taxes and tithes are scrupulously reported and paid, lands are surveyed and kept up, records are meticulously made, and whenever the Imperium has called upon the Temple for aid, this has been given unstintingly. Only this way, perhaps, can the Temple continue to exist, for the temporal power of the Empire is very great, and an alliance between the other temples and the Imperium would soon see the end of Lord Ksárul's worship in Tsolyánu. At the very least, a breach between the Temple and the Imperium would result in the confiscation of the vast lands and wealth of the Temple and drive it underground. The Imperium thus winks at the existence of the Inner Sphere and does not muddy the already muddy ground of Imperial politics. (But cf. below.)

There is currently a danger of a confrontation of sorts, however. The Emperor's third son, Prince Mridóbu, is said--and this is only a rumor--to favor the Temple of Ksárul and perhaps even be a member of the Inner Sphere. The Prince is a closed-mouthed, overly clever young man, and he has successfully played off one group against another in Avanthár. His real sympathies are thus unknown. In order to counter a possible coalition between the Imperial Party (in which Prince Mridóbu is clearly a leading figure) and the Temple of Ksárul, the priests of Karakán have pushed their candidate, the Emperor's second son, Prince Eselné, into prominence, and they have also been seeking an alliance with the Temples of Vimúhla and Chiténg. This is not as strange as it may seem: the war-god, Karakán, has as a central point of his doctrine the promulgation of violence--but for the sake of stability: war for the good of society, heroism, loyalty, and military might. Vimúhla, on the other hand, represents violence for the sake of violence, destruction, and change. These two deities thus share a predilection for bloodshed and war, differing only in their eventual objectives, and they may thus be able to accept a temporary truce in order to combat the darker trinity of Ksárul, Sárku, and Hrü'ü.

Both the Temples of Karákan and Vimúhla have thus made overtures to the supporters of the Military Party, the descendants of those noble clans which trace their ancestry back to the warrior kings of the Bednálljan Age. Rural clan lords, particularly those in the West, have gathered at Katalál, Butrís, and Tumíssa for conferences.

Hostile both to Mridóbu and to Eselné, on the other hand, is Prince Dhich'uné, the Emperor's fourth and youngest son, who has become an adept in the inner hierarchy of the Temple of Sárku. While opposing those priests in the Temple of Ksárul who are in favor of his brother, Mridóbu, he has made allies of others who seek the ascendancy of the "Dark Trinity." Dhich'uné thus has both allies and enemies in the Temple of Ksárul and has split its hierarchy into factions. The Emperor's only daughter, Princess Ma'ín Krythái, also appears to be building up a power block of her own in the Temple of Dlamélish to which she belongs, and also in the Temples of Avánthe and Hnálla.

The situation is further complicated by the existence of secret societies within the Temples. These appear to pull in different directions. There are at least three known societies in the Temple of Ksáru itself: the dreaded Ndálu Clan, which represents the Inner Sphere and which seeks political power; the Society of the Blue Light, which seeks knowledge for knowledge' sake and wants no political involvements; and the Refulgent Blue Curtain Society, which also searches after knowledge but which holds that such knowledge must never be revealed and must remain shrouded in secrecy.

The Ndálu Clan is the most dangerous to the Imperium. Its members are in communication with the Cusp of Night Society of the Temple of Hrü'ü and the Copper Tomb Society of the Temple of Sárku. This coalition supports the overthrow of those who serve the Lords of Stability--and also those who desire the purification of the universe by Vimúhla's flames. It is their belief that the universe must be readied for Lord Ksáru's return: the worship of the Lords of Stability must be expunged, the forces of both the Light and the Flame must be dispersed, and the Temple of Ksáru must be expanded into a monolithic theocratic state. This is the essence of their doctrines: "the Land Repurified." They urge strong political activity, the removal of opposition by any means feasible, the support of missionaries, etc. Rumor has it that the Ndálu Clan receives aid (particularly in the form of magical devices) from the Lords of Livyánu, whose Shadow Gods resemble some of the Greater Aspects of Lord Ksáru. The Ndálu Clan is allied, as said above, to groups within the other temples of the Dark Trinity. The Cusp of Night Society of the Temple of Hrü'ü is politically active and seeks to replace worship of the Lords of Stability by the Rule of Change, by force if need be. The Copper Tomb Society of the Temple of Sárku holds similar views, although it is devoted to the accession of Prince Dhich'uné to the Petal Throne. Although Prince Mridóbu is a rival of Prince Dhich'uné for the Imperial throne, the Ndálu Clan is content to work with the Copper Tomb Society for the present, since the first goal of both must be the end of the Vimúhla-Karakán coalition and also the fall of the Temples of the Lords of Stability. Were these unlikely allies to succeed in defeating their foes, there would be a struggle between the supporters of the two Princes over the spoils. Moreover, if Eselné could be removed, the Temple of Dlamélish might not then be willing to support the claims of Princess Ma'in Krythái--indeed, legend has it that the goddess Dlamélish has a soft spot for Lord Ksáru anyway, and there are epics which describe a rather lusty love affair between these two deities back in the Time of the Gods. It is thus possible that the Temple of Dlamélish would force their Princess to abandon her claims once Prince Eselné were removed, possibly even coercing her to marry her brother, Prince Mridóbu, in order to cement an alliance against Prince Dhich'uné. (Brother-sister marriages are not uncommon amongst royal heirs in Tsolyánu.)

As a side note here, it may be mentioned that the Emperor's oldest son, Prince Rereshqála, will probably not take any part in the coming struggle for the throne. He is now too old for some of the more strenuous tests of the Kólumeja`lim, "the Choosing of Emperors," and he is currently too sunk in his pleasures in his villa in Jakálla to care. He will thus most probably renounce any claim to the Petal Throne.

Another ally of the Ndálu Clan is the Black Y Society, a clan of professional assassins. (The "Y" in the name is actually the Tsolyáni word / onél /, which denotes a road divided into

three; these three “roads” are the paths of the Dark Trinity, the Temple of Hrü’ü, Ksárul, and Sárku.) As professionals, the Black Y Society will work with anyone who can pay for its services, but its leaders seem to have a natural affinity for the objectives of the Ndálu Clan.

On the other hand, the Society of the Blue Light seeks no political involvement. It holds that Lord Ksárul can best be served by the acquisition of knowledge, and that it is their duty to rebuild Lord Ksárul’s ancient powers. This, they claim, cannot be done through political intrigue and assassination but rather through the slow gathering of science and technological knowledge. When Lord Ksárul returns, they argue, he alone will know how his powers must be used, and it is not for mankind to attempt to alter the current state of things and thus inadvertently frustrate his goals. Moreover, no harm can be done by allowing mankind to possess this knowledge in the interim, since all temporal matters are but ephemeral and transitory, and when Lord Ksárul comes he will sweep away all worldly things and reorder the very fabric of the universe to suit his needs. The knowledge which mankind had before the Time of Darkness must thus be restored in expectation of his return. This doctrine is called “the Land Restored.” The Society of the Blue Light has never refused Imperial demands for knowledge and is considered politically harmless.

The third of these groups, the Refulgent Blue Curtain Society, agrees with their colleagues upon the necessity to acquire learning. They differ in their view of the interim period before Lord Ksárul’s return, however. Knowledge and technology are to be gathered but are NOT to be shared with those who do not serve the Lord since this is in effect aiding his enemies. Taking the epics of the Battle of Dórmoron Plain quite literally, they state that he will need all of his powers in order to defeat his opponents, and thus all knowledge must be kept secret for him and him alone. They carry out their research in remote refuges sealed away even from others within the Temple of Ksárul. One of these places lies somewhere beneath the crags near Thénu Thendráya Peak, while it is said that another is hidden in the Chaigári Protectorate. They reject any cooperation with other sects, and for this reason their doctrine is called “the Land Refused.” They have been known to steal books and devices, or to destroy them if need be, in order to keep them from their opponents, and they have thus created almost a separate temple within a temple.

The Temple of Ksárul thus has many facets. Outwardly, it is a staid and loyal servant of the Imperium. Within, there are currents and cross-currents. A newcomer to the priesthood may be left alone to pursue his way up the slow ladder of the Outer Sphere, or, if he is seen to be useful, he may be approached by members of one or another of the secret societies (or by members of one pretending to be members of another!), and even those who would remain aloof may find themselves thrust willy-nilly into the maelstrom of temple intrigue and Imperial politics. It is almost impossible to ascertain who is a member of one of these societies and who is not, and even if a person wished to contact the Ndálu Clan, for example, he might not be able to find such a person--unless that person wished to be found. If one is asked to join the Inner Sphere, it is wise to consider whether one really has the stamina and the willingness to sacrifice personal goals for the total submission and the arcane objectives of the Lord of the Blue Room.

A word may be added regarding the physical appearance of a temple of Ksárul. Like most other Tsolyáni religious edifices, this consists of an outer walled court, with a Túnkel tower in one corner. On both sides of a central plaza within these walls there are administrative chambers for

taxes, tithes, records, etc., the schools, storehouses, guesthouses for visiting priests and clan chiefs who follow Lord Ksárul, and other such areas. To the rear of the main temple are its dormitories, cookhouses, and other secular buildings. The temple itself stands upon a flat-topped pyramid, with stairs leading up the south side to the north (this is done for some obscure doctrinal reason). Unlike certain other temples which are built quite high and which have swooping peaked and gabled roofs which add further to their awesome height. The outer gates of this upper temple open into a series of pillared halls, which in turn open upon small courts, porticoes, and arcades, and then into further pillared chambers, further courts and galleries, and at last into a rather small, dark shrine at the very back of the temple. This shrine is a replica of the Blue Room, draped in blue velvet and set with scintillating diamonds and crystals. Lord Ksárul is there represented in human form, as previously described, asleep upon a couch. Worshippers are not permitted to enter this chamber but remain without in an antechamber, where priests and priestesses perform rites and receive offerings. If one follows other routes through the maze of interlocking halls and courts, one comes to the smaller shrines devoted to the Greater Aspects of the Doomed Prince. There are sixty-two of these: e.g., the serpent-headed Chópruna, “the Dweller in Shadow,” the strangely misshapen hunchback form of Te’ekúna, “the Wanderer Below,” the thin and skeletal Ey’ún, “the Knower of Skills,” the black and amorphous Gorrúgu, “the Master of Black,” and a host of others. Each of these represents an aspect of Lord Ksárul’s being, a specialized and focused facet of him. Here one finds the deified forms of Tékumel’s four sister planets and her two moons as well, for the dark sides of these bodies are also considered to be aspects of Lord Ksárul, and he is said to have authority over their astrological influences. (Lord Thúmis has the domination of the light, bright sides of the planets and moons, and it is said that the natures of these two deities war with one another, sometimes one getting the upper hand and sometimes the other; this explains eclipses, the new moon, etc. to the Tsolyáni.)

Hidden within some alcove there is always a secret stairway down into the pyramid itself, for it is in the darkness below that further rites are performed. Lord Ksárul demands human sacrifices only in order to enhance the magical interrelationships of the dimensional nexus points, and this is thus not a common practice of this temple. The farther one goes down into the labyrinth, the more secret and esoteric his rituals become. The Demons of the Dark are propitiated here, the Dwellers in Shadow receive the minds and wills of hapless victims as nourishment, and the Nine Inner Aspects are worshipped in ways which cannot be described. Below these lower shrines, there is always another replica of the Blue Room, reached only through a series of secret passageways and guarded by every creature known to the ancient sages. Here the intricate Acts of the Velvet Dark are performed by priests and priestesses who dwell all their lives in total darkness and never emerge into the light. Below this, still farther into the labyrinths, the devotees of the Inner Sphere commemorate the doctrines of the Doomed Prince with ceremonies which have never been witnessed by any outsider since the days of the First Imperium. Any who violate this secrecy must be slain, even if it takes a thousand, thousand years, according to the Inner Doctrines, and none has ever escaped vengeance.

The outer worship of Lord Ksárul is by no means so mysterious—or so deadly. Many of the great clans of the Imperium participate in his daily and annual celebrations. Each day the Túnkel gongs at dawn signal the end of his Rule of Night and the retreat before his enemy, the sun. There are no daytime rituals. At sunset there is the Ceremony of the Opening of the Dark,

followed by the Awakening in Azure, and at midnight there is the Victory of the Master of the Planets. Among his yearly festivals, one may cite the great secret rituals performed in Púrdimal on the first of the five days there is the Drawing Aside of the Veil, celebrated at Butrís. On the tenth of Shápru, in the city of Mekú, the Temple holds the splendid Visitations of the Dormant Lord. Smaller ceremonies are found elsewhere throughout the year.

Everything about this Temple and its priesthood has symbolic significance. The black robes of his hierarchy denote the approach of the dark, the descent into the lightless and soundless void. The squarish, mortarboard-shaped headdress signifies the four quadrants of the universe. The smiling silver mask worn by his priests is both an imitation of Lord Ksárul's patient, emotionless, and totally inscrutable being, and also a concealment of his identity from the intrusion of others. The metal silver symbolizes the slumberous gleam of the hidden intellect. Priestesses of this deity wear masks of black wood, since it is thought that the thoughts and minds of females are concealed best by a softer yet intricately intertwined fiber, rather than by the harsh solidity of metal. Each priestly vestment has embroidered within—black thread upon black cloth—the verses of the Ritual of Obeisance to the Unknowable Dark. Priests and priestesses may also wear robes, stoles, and pendants which further denote their precise offices within the Temple, but these are too complex to be gone into here.

A few biographical notices of prominent persons in the Temple of Ksárul may be appended.

Lord Tsútel hiVoruséka, of the XIXth Circle, is the Administrative High Priest of Lord Ksárul in Béy Sü. He was born in Béy Sü and is about sixty-five years of age. His clan is the important Great Stone Clan. His political abilities are great, and he is thus entrusted by the Temple with its complex relationships with the Imperium. He is a slender, balding man, needle-sharp of eye, and with the beaked nose of the central Empire. His duties are many, and he thus tends to be hard to approach, impatient and snappish of temperament, and probably suffers from an ulcer. He leans somewhat towards the Society of the Blue Light but is not a member, so far as is known. He is almost certainly not a member of the Inner Sphere, or at least not an active one.

Lord Qurén hiKétkolel, also of the Great Stone Clan, is the High Ritual Priest of Béy Sü. He specializes in astrology and the magical arts, and is always invited to preside over the major ceremonies of the Temple. He is about seventy years of age, frail, and currently in poor health. He is a demanding and meticulous teacher, however, and has innumerable students of the magical arts. It is thus extremely difficult to find a place in his classes and tutorials. It is said that he favors the Refulgent Blue Curtain Society and is a member of the Inner Sphere, although this cannot be known for certain, of course. His exact Circle cannot be ascertained but must be somewhere around XXIIInd.

A clan-relation, Lord Ssurúsa hiKétkolel, also of the Great Stone Clan, is the High Priest of Ksárul at Avanthár. He is clearly a supporter of the Imperium, is outgoing and jolly, and loves good wine and good food. He is also involved in innumerable intrigues at the behest of his master, Prince Mridóbu. He is about fifty years of age, quite round, and maintains a large harem of several dozen wives and concubines. Although he is of the XVIIIth Circle, it is clear that he is not a

member of the Inner Sphere, does not care much for any of the secret societies, and serves best as a liaison with the Imperial Party at Avanthár.

At Mrelú the new Administrative High Priest is Lord Keléno, a foreigner whose services to the Temple have resulted in his advancement to this post. He is a young man, still in his twenties, reasonably handsome and affable, and independently wealthy. He has made no marriages as yet and continues to buy slavegirls and concubines. He is a member of the Outer Sphere, although he has been approached by the Ndálu Clan and seems to have leanings in that direction. He is of relatively low Circle, and it is too early in his career to say just what role he will play in the Temple of Ksárul. He is still clanless, since he is of foreign birth, but his rank and wealth would almost certainly buy him a marriage into one of the better clans of his sect.

The previous Administrative High Priest of Mrelú was Lord Keréktu hiKhánmu, a member of the prestigious Dark Flame Clan, about thirty-five years of age, and ostensibly a member of the IXth Circle. He has now been transferred to Bény Sü, where he is head of the Archives of the Indigo Tower, one of the greatest libraries of the Empire. He is married to a clan-relation, keeps only one concubine, has four children, and is outwardly a pleasant, soft-spoken, rather laconic individual of great smoothness and tact. It is said, however, that he is in fact a member of the Inner Sphere and serves the Ndálu Clan. It was he, rumor has it, who was behind the attempted kidnapping of a daughter of a prominent priest of Vimúhla at Tumíssa, the attempted assassination of Prince Eselné (a crime of high treason, if it could be proved), and certain other activities. He was the one who recommended the priest Keléno for his replacement at Mrelú. His agents are said to have infiltrated both the service of Prince Dhich'uné and also the Incandescent Blaze Society of the Temple of Vimúhla. His Circle is unknown but must be very high indeed.

Lord Mríktoken hiSsanyÚsa, of the Standing Stone Clan, about sixty-seven years of age, and hereditary guardian of the Azure Robe in the city of Hmakuyál, is now Senior Ritual Priest at Mrelú. He is a stick-thin, grim-visaged, gray-haired oldster, totally devoted to the Lord of the Blue Room, and probably a member of the Inner Sphere and of the Ndálu Clan. His present functions do not otherwise explain the constant stream of highly placed visitors to his shrines at Mrelú, nor his friendship with Lord Síkuoz nSúriz, the High Legate of Livyánu to the Tsolyáni Imperium at Bény Sü. He is most likely a member of the XVIth Circle, although in reality he may be much higher.

Hóru hiFershéna, a member of the Black Hand Clan, about twenty-nine years old, is ostensibly a priest of only the VIth Circle, but his influence within the Temple of Ksárul at Jakállá argues for a much greater role in the Inner Sphere. He is of pasty-gray complexion, tall, with hard black eyes ringed by dark circles, bony and yet very strong physically. He serves as a ritual priest but is to be found often around the port and in the foreigners' quarter, where he employs innocent foreigners for the nefarious purposes of the Ndálu Clan. He is unmarried and seems to have no interest in sexual matters, preferring instead to devote his time to the acquisition of the Inner Doctrines of his temple. He is also said to have been upon a "pilgrimage" to one of the secret northern shrines.

Túlkesh hiDaishúna, of the Dark Moon Clan, is a priest of the Vth Circle in Béy Sü, but he also may be of much greater rank than he appears. He is probably of the Inner Sphere, and his membership in the Society of the Blue Light is almost a certainty. He is young, about thirty years of age, rather weak and undersized, but yet possessed of much charm and vitality. His knowledge is not said to be great, but he possesses much information on the whereabouts of books, magical devices, and other sources. Although hard to approach, he is usually quite outgoing to his friends and cronies. He is unmarried.

Lord Fereshmá'a hiKúrodu, the High Ritual Priest in Jakálla, is of the XVIIth Circle, of the Dark Flame Clan, and is now also General of the Legion of the Night of Shadows, 15th Imperial Medium Infantry, based at Jakálla. Although this unit is as yet quite weak, Lord Fereshmá'a's energy and devotion will shortly bring it up to strength. (As yet it consists only of two Cohorts and has one in training, but other men are being recruited at Butrís and Mrelú.) Lord Fereshmá'a is married to a woman of the ancient Endless Circle Clan of Púrdimal, said to be related to the Old Ones who dwell beneath that blighted city, and he is almost certainly a high officer of the Ndálu Clan. He has close connections both with Keréktu hiKhánmu and with Hóru hiFershéna, described above. Physically, Lord Fereshmá'a is a tall, heavy-set man, about thirty-eight years of age, with a scarred and ugly face, which he keeps hidden behind his silver mask even when other priests of Ksárul would normally remove theirs.

Lord Chiringgá hiTishkólun is a devotee of Lord Ksárul from another clan, that of the Golden Bough, not a clan from which the Doomed Prince has drawn many worshippers. He is forty-seven years of age, rather fat and thick-set, and much given to pleasures. For a time he served as Governor of Jakálla, but after certain difficulties there he was removed and given command of the Legion of Mighty Jakálla, 27th Imperial Heavy Infantry, and sent to Khírgar, where he now sulks in what he considers disgrace. The Legion is an old one which had gone extinct, and he has been given the unpleasant job of revitalizing it—largely, it is expected, from his personal fortunes amassed while he was Governor of Jakálla. He is of noble stock, however, and may be able to draw aid from his clan. He is of about the XIXth Circle, although he is not a priest.

Lord Héketi hiBurusá of Púrdimal is of the Clan of the Black Hood, an old and noble clan of that city. He is of the XIXth Circle, a warrior, and general of the Legion named after him, the 17th Imperial Heavy Infantry. It now has some sixteen Cohorts and one or two in training in Jakálla. Héketi is a tough, seasoned warrior, about thirty-eight years of age, dark of visage and nearly bald (which may bespeak inbreeding with the Old Ones of Púrdimal). He is difficult to approach, given to bitter rages, and drinks more than is good for him. His generalship is considered quite good, however. He may be a secret member of the Inner Sphere of the Temple of Ksárul, but outwardly he gives no sign of much religious devotion.

Another general devoted to the Doomed Prince is Saku'ú hiFershéna, of the XIVth Circle, a military priest of the Temple and head of the Legion of the Prince of the Blue Room, 35th Imperial Medium Infantry, based at Púrdimal. This Legion has eight Cohorts and one in training. It is supported by the Ndálu Clan, and General Saku'ú is almost certainly a member of this group. He is forty-three years old, married to an Aridáni woman who serves as one of the Captains (Kási) of his Legion, and has one son, about ten years old. He is of the dark Flame Clan.

Physically, he is rather squat, hairy, and voluble, with beetling black eyebrows—all a sign of ancient Salarvyáni blood. General Saku'ú is working hard to develop both military skill and also the fanatic zeal which he feels necessary for a Temple Legion of this kind.

Sherésa hiDuruntláno is the High Ritual Priestess of the Temple of Ksáruł in Butrís. She is of the Dark Moon Clan, about twenty-seven years of age, and considered quite beautiful. She has the lighter complexion, high cheekbones, and gray-violet eyes of the Chákas, and indeed she was born in a village in Pán Cháka. She is an Aridáni, has never married, but keeps several male concubines. Her Circle is somewhere near XIVth, but this is not certain. She is a member of the Inner Sphere and acts as external liaison for the Refulgent Blue Curtain Society. She is a skillful user of magic, knows many ancient languages, and enjoys the company of the nonhuman Páchi Léi, some of whom serve her as personal bodyguards. She is said to know a little of their gobbling alien tongue. Lady Sherésa has little use for the Ndálu Clan and has attempted to root its agents out of her temple at Butrís through judicious transfers and promotions to other cities.

It may be useful to mention Lord Ksáruł's Cohort, Lord Grugánu, the Knower of Spells, Black Sword of Doom, Reader of the Incantations of Evil. The precise relationships between the "Gods" and their "Cohorts" are not clear, and one can only surmise from the epics that Lord Grugánu is one of the allies of the Doomed Prince. In the Lament to the Wheel of Black, Lord Grugánu is pictured as Lord Ksáruł's charioteer, as the rememberer of spells to whom Ksáruł turned at the Place of Reviving, and as his aid and comfort at the Battle of Dórmoron Plain. It is said that he now keeps watch just outside of the ten walls which hold Lord Ksáruł prisoner in the Blue Room, and he always seeks the keys which will free his master from that place which is not a place.

In form, Grugánu is only partially human: his body is of unknown shape, always concealed beneath heavy black robes, and he has a head like that of some evil carrion-eating bird. His powers include a knowledge of spells which surpasses even that of his master, the ability to move freely between dimensions, and overlordship over many of the creatures and being which dwell in the Underworlds beneath the older cities. His temples are always square (never oval or oblong in shape), and his shrines are kept in shadow. His ceremonies are recited in a tongue known only to his highest ritual priests, and he is not averse to human sacrifice. The darker rituals of his order, such as the Speaking of the Names, the Unveiling of the Way, and the Confrontation With Those Beneath, are said to take on some of the horror inherent in the rituals of Lord Sáрку and his Cohort, Durritlámish. On the fourth intercalary day of the end of the year there is an especially unpleasant ceremony held in the city of Úrmish: the Opening of the Gates of Night, at which it is said that many of Lord Ksáruł's ancient demon allies are invited and—fed. . . .

The High Adept of Lord Grugánu is presently one Lord Runmáru hiSsanyúsa, of the Dark Moon Clan. He is about sixty years of age, gaunt and small, and very secretive. He rarely emerges from his temple at Úrmish, except to attend those functions which are required by the Imperium. He was married but now is widowed, and he has five grown sons and three daughters, all of whom are members of his temple hierarchy. He is rumored to be a member of the Refulgent Blue Curtain Society. (The secret societies of the Temples of the gods are often shared with their respective Cohorts' Temples.) Lord Runmáru is of about the XVIIth Circle, very skilled both at

magic and the use of technological devices, and very learned. He has no known interests beyond his Temple.

Another worshipper of Lord Grugánu is Lord Srýqu hiTánkolel of the Great Stone Clan. This man is about fifty years old, rather jovial, and a close friend of Prince Mridóbu. He was Governor of Púrdimal until recently but has now been replaced by Lord Su'ún Tsel hiRayástqa, a worshipper of Hrü'ü. Lord Srýqu serves now as Legate of the Palace of the Realm at Béy Sü, a reward from Prince Mridóbu for services rendered. He is not a priest but must be of approximately the XXIInd Circle. He is married to three women, keeps a stable of pretty slavegirls, and enjoys a good feast (or a good sadistic orgy). His administrative abilities are of great service to the Prince and his party.

Militarily, the sect of Grugánu has never been strong. Only one general of this faith is currently found in the Empire: Lord Mriggadáshu hiTekku'únu, of the Clan of the Dark Moon, about fifty-six years of age. He has command of the Regiment of the Knower of Spells, 5th Imperial Crossbowmen, of the city of Mekú. This is not a particularly good Legion, being composed of city guards and temple soldiery, but Prince Mridóbu is encouraging it and providing it with funds. It now consists only of some five Cohorts, plus one in training. Lord Mriggadáshu is slender, wiry, and long-faced—not much of a field general but a good administrator. He is married to an Aridáni woman of his clan, who also has two other husbands. He has three sons, all in their twenties, one of whom is a priest in the Temple of Ksárul, another a soldier in his father's Legion, and the third is at present without employment. It is assumed that Lord Mriggadáshu is of the Ndálu Clan, or at least has its strong backing, as well as a personal following in his native city of Mekú. He is approximately of the XIVth Circle, though no priest.

A list of the important personalities of the Temple of Grugánu cannot end without mention of Lady Biyún hiTetengkáino, the “Seeress of Úrmish.” She is the daughter of the master of the Ripened Sheaf Clan, an ancient agricultural clan of Úrmish. She is about sixty-five years of age, of undetermined Circle (perhaps as high as XVIIIth or as low as XIIth?), and she is respected throughout the Empire for her predictions of the future. These are actually enigmatic verses in the Zhurulén genre of ancient Engsvanyáli poetry, and their ambiguity leaves them open to many interpretation. One need only cite the following example:

Grey clouds in the north, drowned in a sea of blood—

The leaf falls from the tree and is trampled by the autumn.

This is widely interpreted to mean that war will rise in the north, and that the forces of Yán Kór (the leaf, which is green) will be defeated. The red of the blood mentioned in the first hemstitch is taken by some to denote Mu'ugalavyáni intervention, and the “grey” of the clouds is currently thought to indicate the growing power of the Temple of Thúmis at Payá Gupá in the west and further north in Chéne Hó. Other meanings can be read into the verse, of course.

Lady Biyún remains cloistered within the temple of Grugánu at Úrmish. She sees only the Imperial Governor, occasional officials of the Omnipotent Azure Legion, and a few priests of her sect. She was never married and has no known interests other than her devotions and rituals.