

The Accursed Well

Vassals from two allied Houses converge in Sadahm, capital city of Tishínia, on the eve of the Feast of Mürtyu, an important festival celebrating the dead, which is ironic considering that they have come in the hopes of saving someone from death's very clutches. Will the group of comrades unravel a community's superstitious fears in time to rescue a beloved great aryah's daughter from the terrors that seem to reside within the depths of an ancient stepwell?

The Characters:

Héshrim (House Guard and Assassin, male 32 year old rattlesnake, House of Sámtra, on loan to the House of Ayrram)- A calm, watchful snake with an air of casual, unsettling menace and strength, Héshrim proved his merits by helping to bring an end to a spying ring being run out of Magár on behalf of the Sustrümi Aminar. He saved the life of Sámtra during this affair. He currently acts as a warrior and assassin for the House of Ayrram.

Valnérah (Seer Sir'hibas, male 40 year old condor, House of Sámtra, on loan to the House of Ayrram)- A mature, wiry-looking bird in silk robes, known for his intense stare, Valnérah was trained under the Great Seer Arddjumul of Amnol before becoming one of the Line of Inuvkah. He is currently acting as Seer of the House of Ayrram.

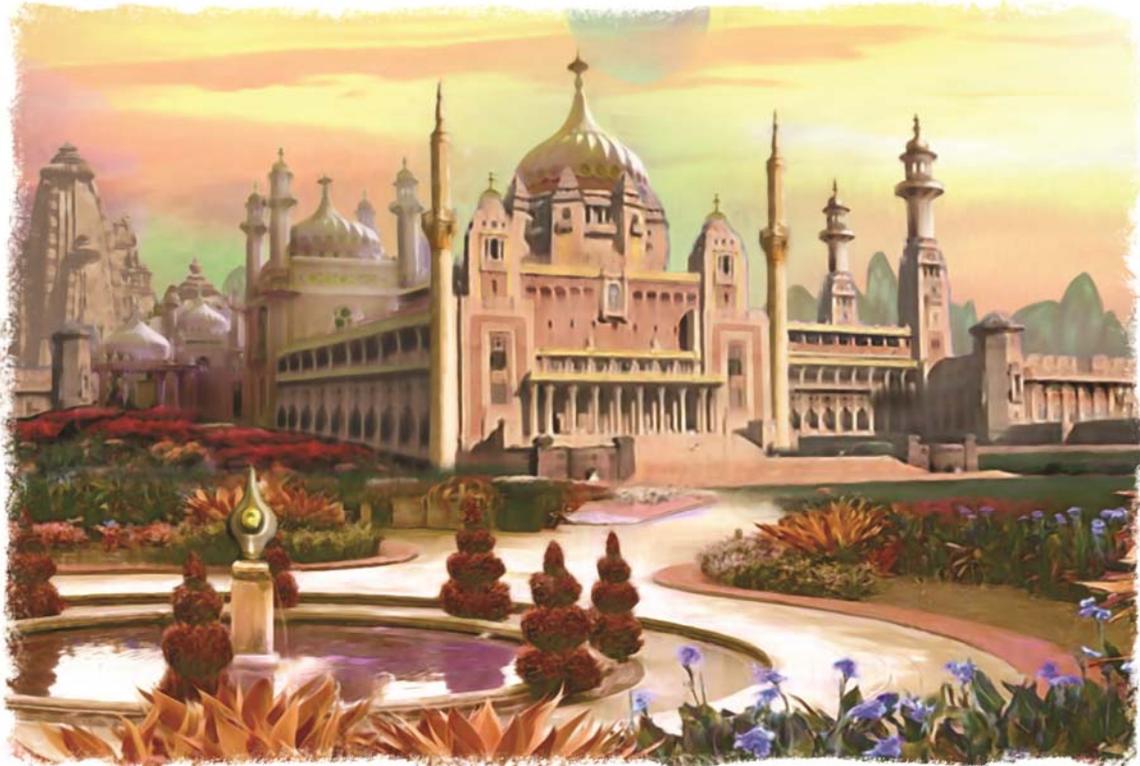
Dastánah (Assistant Weapons Master, female 27 year old mockingbird, House of Ayrram)- A sharp eyed, quick-moving little bird with a lot of weapons, Dastánah was trained with the Weapons-masters of eastern Tishínia and the Valah Masters of the lord Rajtármi before being gifted to the Line of Sisyáh by Rajtármi himself.

Arhazbür (Honor Guard, male 28 year old elephant, House of Ayrram)- A seasoned fighter with a serious disposition and intimidating stature, Arhazbür pledged his life to the Line of Sisyáh after having been rescued from slavery in Sustrüm as a child. He currently serves as an Honor Guard for the House of Ayrram.

Gramír (Assistant Suthra Master, male 25 year old wolf, House of Ayrram)- A savage looking jánah with a commanding presence and bold speech, Gramír hails originally from Ishpuria, where he studied for two years in the Academy of Sakrsa in Dar-Purám before coming to Tishínia to serve as a chinti and kellédu trainer in the House of Ayrram.

Umratáli (Mángai Healer, male 35 year old sea turtle, House of Ayrram)- A monkish-looking priest with a friendly smile and a wise disposition, Umratáli was trained in herbalism and medicine at the Academy of Nilám, this Mángai also studied the arts of mystic healing before returning to serve Ayrram's House.

Establishing Intro Scene (The Setup)



In central Dárdünah there lies the nation of Tishínia, trade capital of the world and home to jánah of a thousand varieties and cultural backgrounds. Situated as it is between the Sea of Vigára to the north and the Gulf of Bhütai to the south, the goods, the travelers, and the riches of the world seem to flow through its lands, all of which are controlled to some degree by those who sit in the seats of power within the walls of the mightiest of its cities, Sadahm.

This great city, like most across the world, expands outward in larger and larger circles from its very heart, where rise the grand temples of the Mángai and the palace of the ruler himself, Kémentos VI, Illustrious Aryah and Isvar over all of Tishínia. Around this stretches the lush estates of the Houses and Lines of the Noble Caste, the Sunborn. Past the walls surrounding the estates of the nobility one will find the heady scents and rich spices of the Merchants Circle, a place of teahouses and bazaars, auction blocks and gambling dens. Another set of high walls separates all of this from the Commons Circle, where lie the humble homes and some of the workplaces of the inner city's Peasant Caste. But it is beyond even these simple dwellings, at the very edges of the city itself among the squalid shacks and filth of the Outcaste, where our story begins. For upon the dusty western road, lined by the blue-barked maspéra trees that have long since dropped the last of their autumn fruit, rides two jánah bearing most dire and secretive tidings indeed.

Among the poor wretches the mounted jánah pass here, there are few who would ever hope to consort with jánah such as the travelers. For even covered with road dust and weary from their journey, despite the rough cloth carefully concealing the finer silks of their garments, the condor and rattlesnake astride their powerful

mountain chinti strike any onlookers as impressive and dangerous figures. They are obviously Sunborn, their bearing identifying them as members of the Noble Caste, even though their ceremonial caste-braids lie hidden beneath their traveling cloaks. The crystal and amber blades the rattlesnake carries attest to his skills, and the flail that lies coiled at his side brooks no curious banter nor any idle stares at either of them as he intently guides their insectoid mounts past the barefoot laborers and their draft-beasts towards the main gates of the city. Soon it will be False Dusk at the setting of the smaller blue sun Edü; once the evening prayers are through, and the second sun, fiery orange Lokáynü, has passed beyond the horizon, they will be expected before the presence of the one they have been sent to see, the Great Aryah Ayrram (EYE-rom), head of the Line of Sisyáh and ally to the travelers' own House and Line.

To help establish this scene the GM should call upon first Héshrim the rattlesnake's player, then Valnérah the condor's player, to each make a **Skill roll** that will inform them about aspects of why they have been sent to see the lord Ayrram, and about the dangers that seem to be brewing around the Line of Sisyáh. The more Successes rolled, the more detailed you may describe what they know.

Héshrim the rattlesnake –

Intrigue: The Line of Sisyáh is not a Royal Line, and thus would not normally concern itself with politics as would a Line where one of its members might someday sit upon the throne. In recent years, however, there has been talk among those well-connected within the halls of the Isvar's Palace that an interest has grown between Viálu, nephew of the Isvar, and Anavári, daughter of the Great Aryah Ayrram, leading to many conclusions concerning the bright future of the Line of Sisyáh, and its eventual relations with the ruling Line itself. Among the nobility, secret jealousy always seems to follow in the wake of such rumors. Though the line of Sisyáh itself has no open enemies, there are other Lines whose positions at court might be threatened if the Isvar's favor swings in new directions, should such a union arise. Indeed, if the Sisyáh Lineage proves its worth in the eyes of the Isvar, would its elevation to the place of a true Noble Line not be far away?

It is because of the traveling companion of the rattlesnake that the two riders have made this journey from the distant city of Telátah and why they have taken the dusty roads instead of much swifter passage aboard a skyship. The condor, swathed in his concealing cloak, bears the markings of a sir'hibas, a mystic seer of their own house, the House of Sámtra of the Line of Inúvkah.

Valnérah the condor –

Ritual Lore: In magic ritual, within private chambers laced with pungent incense and the sounds of humming crystals, you had gazed into the Dream and foreseen the gathering shadows of a malevolent danger to the Great Aryah Ayrram's daughter Anavári at the hands of a terrible figure cloaked in flowing white, like the specter of death itself, and you had envisioned great suffering within the House of Ayrram. It was within this same ritual of Dreamwalking that you had felt horrible, cold eyes upon you

and knew that another sir'hibas had observed your prying gaze. A final impression of poison crystal blades wielded by shadowy figures aboard a skyship was enough to convince you that any attempt to warn your ally must come in secret and over land, for the Great Aryah Ayrram has no Seer of his own, and time is of the essence.

Scene 1; Arrival Within the City Walls

And so, with the blessings of their own Aryah Sámtra, the Seer and his deadly companion and guard made their way across western Tishínia to arrive at the fortified walls of its capital city Sadahm on the very eve of the Feast of Mürtyu, judge of the Cycle of Life and Death, and Guardian of Souls. The whole city prepares for this solemn festival, honoring those who have passed on throughout the year who now go to dance at the Edge of Heaven. The festival also serves as a time when respected and beloved members of the community walk through the streets with painted lanterns lit to drive away wicked spirits and to guide good spirits to a feast held in their honor. Colorful ribbons and streamers dyed in the various blue, green, and purple hues of the three moons adorn windowsills and doors, and paper lanterns painted with lurid images of monsters, gods, and demons are hung across streets and over the open fronts of merchant stalls and teahouses. The smells of rich foods and sweet desserts assail the senses of anyone passing through the marketplaces as poor and wealthy alike prepare for tonight's feast by purchasing all that their guests may require. Past all of this do the travelers ride, well aware that there may be little celebration for them this night because of the word they bring, and the duties that honor may require them to perform.

It is beyond the great gates of the Nobles Circle, after having shown their caste braids so that they might be admitted by the guards there, that the travelers pause before a small shrine to the Devah, gazing into a reflecting pool and bowing their heads in response to the Evening Prayers whose mournful sounds now roll across the hushed city. The mángai in their tall minarets will continue to sing their devotions for the next hour till the setting of the second sun, but the weary riders pause only for a score of minutes before continuing on their way to the House of Ayrram, past the cultured gardens and rich palaces of the lords of Sadahm. Their duty weighs heavily upon them, for on this night, if they fail, the daughter of their noble ally may perish.

This Feast of Mürtyu (described below) is in honor of **Mürtyu**, goddess of change, Judge of the Cycle, guardian of dead souls who usually appears as a raven though other death animals are common - jackal, hyena, vulture, crow, wolf, etc. She is always shown seated and holding a scale.

Mürtyu is one of the Devah (gods of Dárdünah). There are many different devah, whose numerous shrines and temples can be found throughout the world, each one considered one of the sons and daughters of the Great Mother and Father. These two prime gods are often referred to but seldom called upon, since the teachings of the Satyan Faith (the primary devah-worshipping faith in central Dárdünah) say that it is through worship of their children, the Devah, that prayers are answered.

Though the players will pass straight through the city initially without interacting with festival-goers, the more detailed description of the holiday below will serve to help

the players understand what they may see as they venture out into the city as this scenario unfolds.

Feast of Mürtyu – The final celebration of the year, before the coming of Sheetál, the cold season, this feast celebrates the devah Mürtyu. It is she who is the Judge of the Great Cycle of Life and Death. On this day, which in most countries falls upon the evening of the last day of the month of Bhüta and heralds in the first day of the month of Atmáni, the month of souls, the spirits of those who have gone to dance at the Edge of Heaven are honored and the duhámas of the damned are driven away.



On this sacred night, dressed in flowing robes the color of mourning (white), sombre chanting jánah emerge from their houses bearing paper lanterns painted with the fearful faces of avenging and angry Devah, and even demons. These glowing lanterns, usually carried at the ends of long and bending sticks, are bourn through places generally associated with fear and caution (dark forests along the fringes of town, the sites of ancient battles, shadow-filled alleyways and abandoned buildings, and

any other place where superstition and childhood fear might take hold of one's senses) to drive away wicked spirits, who naturally fear the painted images upon the lanterns. The lights also beckon lost good spirits to follow them back to the bearers' homes, where a feast will have been laid out for the living and the dead alike (vacant seats with food left out for them till morning). It is believed that the goddess Mürtyu will take pity on these lost souls and judge them fit to follow her back to the Edge of Heaven once the feast draws to a close. Most houses, inside and out, are also filled with decorations and shrines that honor those who have passed on, before which are placed gifts of sweet candies and pastries. The children and adults also enjoy similar treats while listening to haunting, cautionary tales of excitement and terror as the festivities continue throughout the night, and the flickering lights of hearth and home drive away the shadows. This is the last feast of the seasons, and is intended to bring families together to share the final bounties of the harvests before the chill winds that blow during Sheetál blanket the lands in fouler weather and overcast skies during the whole of the month of Tuhína.

Scene 2; Ayrram's Palace

The walls of the palace of the Great Aryah Ayrram glimmer with torchlight in the cool mid-winter dusk, and guards of the evening watch can be seen on the parapets above, relieving the earlier watch of their duties after prayer. The last of the servants can still be seen making their way down from some of the upper walls, after having performed their duties lighting the various torches in preparation of night. It is apparent that the Line of Sisyáh is of no little means, as the richness of even the outer walls of the palace attest. Cultured lawns and gardens adorn the road's edge outside the palace, and the beautifully pruned scarlet canopies of ayurbála trees, carefully planted a wise distance from the outer walls, give the lush grounds a sculptural quality.

From a tall tower of the palace itself the fluttering and keening cries of messenger krátellah, keen-sighted and swift of wing, can be heard as the last of them return for the evening. A trained suthra such as this bore word of the travelers' arrival merely a day before. The warriors that stand before the tall gates observe the travelers' approach with interest but no surprise as they note their caste, and bright eyes scan casually over the embroidered sigils displaying the colors and heraldry of the House of Sámtra.

A large, fairly friendly, yellowish dingo, wearing polished chitin armor and smelling of minty pipe-smoke, will approach the players, addressing them in a slight Ishpürian accent, asking them if they are from the line of Inúvkah, and confirming that they are the jánah the aerial message spoke of. He is **Bograh, Master of the Evening Watch (male dingo, mid 30s)**. If all goes well with the questioning, they will be told they are expected before the Great Aryah and will be escorted by the dingo through the inner passages of the palace to the Reception Hall, there to meet his lord. He will also mention that the travelers are not the only members of Inúvkah who have decided to visit this eve, for others from a local House in Sadahm arrived just before evening prayers and are even now in discussion with Lord Ayrram, vassals of the kindly Aryah Arhidásah, a Seer and a Warrior as well.

The riding chinti will be stabled just within the outer gate; the players will be allowed to brush away the dust from the road, stow their travel packs, and arrange themselves as they wish before being escorted within. Bograh will continue chatting with them as they settle their mounts in, answering any questions he's able to, as well as asking any that may come to his mind, including why they come.

As you are led beyond the mighty gate and onto the private grounds of the palace, the very size is somewhat intimidating. Large, long pools of still water, adorned with flowering lily pads, reflect the gentle glow coming from numerous wicker cages containing fat and colorful bioluminescent jugánu worms, which are hung from arches that line the walkway. On either side, beyond these pools are the parade grounds and large open areas where can be seen several private skyships, anchored into the earth and floating gently in the evening breezes.

“Guests of the Great Aryah, from the island of Aytya, across the Gulf,” says the dingo. “The Lord Ayrram is known for his extravagant feasts and generous hosting. I’m assuming you’ll be staying here for the Festival?”

As you are taken into the main palace itself, you pass more guards who nod to your dingo escort and see servants scurrying here and there, apparently in response to the beginnings of some distant merry-making in warmly-lit chambers seen at the end of a long marble hall decorated with large vases from a dozen different countries, as well as rich tapestries and rugs of rough silk. But the sounds of music and merriment fade as you are led past these entry halls and eventually through an inner courtyard, more of a garden really, with the sounds of a fountain drawing your attention to a far corner.

There you see, bathed in the gentle glow of the evening sky and under the watchful eye of two large Honor Guards, one a huge rhino and the other an immense elephant, are two elegantly-dressed jackals who sit talking by the glimmering pool. You recognize them as the son and daughter of the Great Aryah, seen several seasons ago during a visit to your House. As you pass through the inner gardens, they both turn and notice; one of them, the young lord Márüh, rises, releasing the hands of his sister as he and the imposing elephant begin making their way across the gardens as if following you into the inner palace.

The elephant, another player character, is **Arhazbür, the Honor Guard of the young lady Anavári** (subject of the disturbing visions) who has been summoned by **Márüh (male jackal, mid 20s)** to their Lord’s side specifically because of the words of the other members of the Line of Inúvkah who have already arrived. The Great Aryah wishes to inform his daughter’s Honor Guard of the danger Anavári may be in without alarming her directly. In bringing the elephant to his father’s side, Márüh has left his own Honor Guard, the rhino, there to protect her. They will follow the travelers at a distance through the halls into the presence of the Great Aryah where they will join the audience gathered there.

Scene 3; Audience with the Great Aryah

Beyond the inner gardens and past a great banquet hall from which comes the delicious smells of the many sumptuous food being prepared in the kitchens nearby, you pass through a great passage lit by dozens of small braziers filled with glowing orange Stones of Rabíshu. Upon the walls of this large corridor, intricate mosaics depict colorful scenes, the history of the Line of Sisyáh, and at the far end large wooden double-doors bound in amber open to admit you into the reception hall of the Great Aryah Ayrram.

The Lord Ayrram, a male jackal of middle age, sits upon a chair of finely carved exotic woods covered comfortably in giant moth pelts dyed in the colors of his House and Line. To his right, an empty chair, equally exquisite, upon which you know once sat his beloved Lady, now dancing at the Edge of Heaven some seven years. A shrine honoring her has been erected for this holiday, and stands nearby wreathed in the smoke of incense and the sweet smell of her favorite fruit, which rests in a crystal bowl at its base. Behind the Great Aryah stands Diválu, a muscular bighorn ram, the lord’s imposing Honor Guard, who eyes you carefully as you approach the dais upon

which his lord sits. To the side of Ayrram, on his left, there stand three other members of his household: Dastánah, female mockingbird, the skilled Assistant Weapons Master of the House; Gramír, an athletic-looking male wolf and Assistant Suthra Master; and finally Umratáli, a male sea turtle bearing the saffron robes and ceremonial tattoos of a Mángai Healer Sir'hibas.

Standing before the Great Aryah there are two other jánah as well, each of whom turns toward you as you approach. One, a male genet cat, is dressed in purple and blue robes and bears the markings of a sir'hibas. You know him as Istvan, Seer of the Aryah Arhidásah. The other, a green male crested lizard, can be none other than Nutmál, Master of the Honor Guards for the House of Arhidásah and that lord's personal bodyguard during public occasions. They both acknowledge the arriving members of their Line with a respectful nod.

The fact that they are here means that they too must have brought important news before the Great Aryah; the somber mood of the gathered jánah seems to indicate that this news may be as dire as your own. As you bow deeply to the Lord Ayrram, there is the dull sound behind you of the servants closing the heavy doors of the hall; following that sound, the weighty footfalls of the armored elephant as he and the young lord Máriüh make their way forward to stand near you before the Great Aryah. It is now that the dingo Bograh introduces you:

“Great Aryah, it is my honor to bring before you, Valnérah, a Seer of her House, and Héshrim, warrior and guard, both noble Sunborn of the House of Sámtra of the Line of Inúvkah.”

The Great Aryah Ayrram will greet the new arrivals warmly and will introduce the elephant Honor Guard Arhazbür to them, noting that his son has brought the Honor Guard to this audience so he may be informed of a potential danger to his charge's life. The others have also been gathered because, within an hour, they will be accompanying other members of their House as well as many guests to an observance of the holidays near the edge of the Commons Circle. Though the guests from the House of Arhidásah have already mentioned that they have heard word through their spies of a potential threat and have come to offer the services of their Seer Istvan, Lord Ayrram wishes to hear the message of his newest guests now, since the House of Sámtra has apparently chosen to send a similar set of jánah bearing word as well.

Dire News from Inúvkah

The members of the House of Sámtra are now given the chance to speak the message they have come so far to deliver. Below are the main details of the Dream Vision that prompted their journey. Valnérah's player should make a **Wit Roll** to determine the clarity with which all these details are remembered.

Valnérah's full vision - While in the trance of Dreamwalking many weeks ago, a vision came to Valnérah of Anavári, the beautiful daughter of the Great Aryah, walking in darkness through mists, among the stone blocks of ancient ruins, the pale glow of a lantern lighting her way. This Dream seemed a symbolic one, for from some gathering of inky blackness behind her, a terrible figure arose swathed in pale and rotting funerary garments, with arms outstretched like some hideous hungry spirit, a khaujíva. From out of the shadows beneath its tattered white robes there came streaming what seemed like an endless array of vicious makri (large scorpion-like insect suthra the size of wolves or

bigger), except they were black like onyx with white stripes down their faces and scythe-like pincers covered in blood. These horrors descended upon the helpless Anavári stinging and tearing her asunder. This scene became veiled in shadow as in the night skies above, the faces of the moons became the faces of her father, the Great Aryah, and other loved ones of the Line of Sisyáh, weeping and lamenting her loss.

It was then that Valnérah became determined to travel by skyship here to warn the House of Ayrram of this terrible vision but, before emerging from the Dream, another vision indicated the folly of this plan. Valnérah perceived himself aboard a skyship, sailing straight across the Gulf of Bhütai. In this new vision, dark shadows crept toward the seer, emerging from the dark corners of the ship, glittering crystal blades dripping with poison fell upon him, and the Dream went dark as he awoke from the trance with a cry.

The Dream Vision convinced the characters from Sámtra of several things: the Great Aryah's daughter was in terrible danger, that attempting to take a skyship to bring this warning could mean death to them and, finally, that this could only mean that some aspect of this threat would have been aboard that ship, indicating its roots could be from their own home city of Telátah.

As this information is related, the two members of the House of Arhidásah, Nutmál and Istvan look at one another and react as if some aspects of the vision have meaning to them. Once the travelers have spoken their piece, Nutmál steps forward to offer more insight into the affair, corroborating the potential value of this vision in his throaty, sibilant voice:

“As you know, Great Aryah, my informants told me that they had overheard two unidentified jánah speaking in the more private back rooms of the bathhouse known as Jardeen’s Jewel, one with a great and deep voice who spoke in a central Tishínian accent that they believe was a Vajrah (a mammal of some kind), who seemed to be listening and responding to another who spoke mostly in harsh whispers with a hint of a western Tishínian accent, like those of our cousins here (motioning to the condor and the rattlesnake), whom they believed to be a Sarpah female (reptile or amphibian), perhaps a serpent of some kind.

“Though not all of their conversation could be overheard, the unknown Sarpah spoke of someone she referred to as the ‘Honored One’, who was apparently displeased with the closeness that has formed between the lady Anavári and the ‘royal whelp’, a title we assume refers to the Isvar’s nephew Viálu, whom we have heard favors your daughter. This unknown Sarpah apparently held some sway over the deep-voiced Vajrah, for she bid him bring a permanent end to this budding relationship in a way that would bring no harm to the Line of Varám, indicating that Viálu should not be targeted. The deep-voiced jánah was concerned that there would be little opportunity to fulfill this request, considering the secure nature of the Palace of Ayrram, but the Sarpah assured him that ‘what [he] had done at [her] master’s behest’ would insure he had his chance at Anavári’s next public appearance, she believed, in ‘that place’ so very far from the protective embrace of her father’s palace.

“Soon and with great silence the mysterious Sarpah woman left, and a short time later my informants could hear the other rise, with much displacement of bath water. Neither left by the front archway, so my people were unable to see who they were.

Great Aryah, it is my belief that they will strike tonight, when your beloved daughter walks among those who serve your house in the Commons' Circle, in honor of the Feast of Mürtyu!"

The Great Aryah's son Márüh, who has remained during these talks, will beg that his father Ayrram cancel the evening's agenda or at least excuse Anavári from attending the excursion to the edge of the city. The Great Aryah, though obviously concerned, grimly reminds his son that all their holdings and the welfare of their house and Line depend upon the good will of the lower castes who serve them. Each caste depends on the other to fulfill its role, as the Devah have wisely written, thus is balance and peace maintained. The roles of the nobility are defined by the service provided to their vassals and cannot be shirked, even in the face of danger, lest under similar circumstances those who serve the nobility abandon them as swiftly. If asked what they have planned to do this evening, the Great Aryah will respond:

"Tonight, as you know, is the Feast of Mürtyu where the duháma of the dead are honored and wicked spirits are driven away. As has become custom in Sadahm, the noble Lords of the Houses and Lines perform a service to those under their protection: the farmers, the merchants, the laborers in the fields. These jánah, though of lesser caste, are the foundation of our prosperity, for without them and their works we would have no wealth, no influence in the courts of the Isvar. Without their efforts, the power of the Nobles would diminish as would the strength we bring to our nation as learned jánah and warriors. On this night our task is simple, for we Lords send our children, as the Devah were sent by the Great Mother and Father, Mahiámbah and Mahitáyah, to guide and protect the jánah of the world. It may seem a rustic tradition, but it is one with great honor. Our children are sent to represent us before our people; the children lead the way in the evening processions, lanterns in hand, to drive away the haunts of the dark places and, once returned to the homes of the lower castes, raise the first drink in honor of their beloved friends and family, who dance now on the Edge of Heaven.

"Tonight, it is my daughter who is expected to represent my House and Line among the silk-dyers who have been a loyal fountain of wealth and prosperity for me and all my holdings just as you, my son, must walk among the warehouses of the auctioneer's samüt, where that fire took so many lives last year. This cycle has been a year of great sadness for the samüt of the silk-dyers, for some terrible curse seems to have fallen upon their children.

"Beyond the North Gate of the city, east of the road at the edge of the Commons' Circle, where the houses of the peasants are built among the maspéra trees, reside the families of the Silk-dyers' Samüt. The reek of their plastered dyeing vats insures that they must ply their trade far from the heart of the city itself but they are a good, hardworking people and highly skilled at their arts, the designs of their batiks unmatched throughout all of Tishínia.

"Just northwest of their community, near the edge of the forest and the crumbling stones of the old outer wall, is an ancient stepwell, many staircases deep, and richly ornamented in the fashion of the Dynasty of Ürud, though parts of it now lay in ruin. I visited there, once, when I was a child, on the way to the nearby shrine of Krilárah at the Natha River, and was impressed by the artistry of the forgotten hands that made

it. The stepwell is valuable to the silk-dyers and the surrounding communities, because it is a fresh source of calm water for them, and a safe place to escape the heat. Or at least, it has been until recent months.



“Three of the community’s children have died there under hideous circumstances, drowned in the depths of the stepwell. The waters are deep and dark, and the paving stones that surround it quite slippery, but children and adults alike often gathered there to swim. Still, word from the silk-dyers is that on at least one of the terrible occasions, a young cub who was accompanying a friend to the well to gather water in the evening, saw him stoop to fill his urn. There was a splash, and the child watched as his friend seemed to slip and fall into the water. Though many would tip into the waters as they played, this time it was different, for the child cried out and seemed to struggle to stay above the surface, then suddenly vanished as if something drew him below. When his friend did not resurface, the horrified cub ran back to their settlement to bring help; when the adults arrived, an elder supplied glowing stones of Rabíshu so that a diver could attempt to find the boy in the depths of the black pool. At the bottom, in a sunken grotto formed by the springs that feed the well, was found the child’s body, pale-orange in the dim light of the glowing crystals. In death, we

were told, his eyes were wide and mouth open, yet his body seemed relaxed, and sat upright in the very center of the sunken chamber seemingly at rest, his arms hanging loosely and drifting in the water as if beckoning others to join him.

“No evidence was found by any of the adults, even by those who are skilled hunters among them, of anything having entered or exited the waters of the well before the rescuers came, other than the children that night. They believe that whatever dragged the child to his death remained within the well. Two other children who have disappeared in recent months have been found in this same way, and the silk-dyers now fear the place, thinking that the once-kindly water spirits that they believe live there have become angered and evil. They have begged us to come on this Feast of Mürtyu to drive away the evil spirits and to bring the blessings of the Devah to the stepwell again. It was my daughter who chose this task for herself, and these members of my House who are to attend her.

“Soon my other guests who have arrived will begin dressing in the traditional white robes worn on this night as well, and some will join my son and others my daughter. They have come to enjoy my hospitality this eve. They see the night’s activities as a quaint and amusing local custom, albeit a solemn and eerie one, and look forward to returning here with my children afterward to enjoy the final harvest feast of the season. They must not know of these other concerns that you have brought to my attention, lest it strain my relations with them, nor must my daughter know, for already the thought of the silk-dyers’ woes seems to disturb her, though her honor and pride will not let her admit it to me. But, I am her father, I know....”

Nutmál informs the Great Aryah that he had not heard the tale concerning the drowned children, but fears that their deaths may have been orchestrated in some way to insure that his daughter would be asked to preside over the rituals of Mürtyu for them. Diválu, the bighorn ram, Master of the Honor Guards for Ayrram, will mention that no trace was found of a mortal assailant and mention again that it had been young lady Anavári herself who had chosen the task of the silk-dyers. But her brother Márüh will insist that any who know of her know that she has lavished gifts upon the samüt of the silk-dyers, for they had been generous to her with specially designed cloth dyed in patterns that had greatly pleased her. Many are aware that she is beloved of them, and that they feel their own fortune with the Line of Sisyáh is tied to her good will. It would seem only obvious that she would choose to serve them as a noble child if they are in need during the Feast of Mürtyu. Surely this must be a trap! It is Istvan the Seer of Arhidásah who then speaks, saying that he would agree with the young lord, if for no other reason than the fact that the vision of Valnérah seemed to confirm it. He feels that there is more to learn, and quickly, before the obligations of the Nobles must be met this evening, and recommends having the sir’hibasi here attempt another vision, hopefully better preparing those who will accompany the lady Anavári for what dangers may arise.

With all of this input, hopefully from the players as well as the NPCs, the great aryah will come to the decision that the seers should enter as swiftly as they can into Ritual to seek visions that might enlighten them further, warning them that they have less than an hour before his House members and the guests must depart for the community of the silk-dyers by sky barge. Istvan states that, with the help of the Seer of Sámtra, their ritual may go more swiftly. He offers, if others are willing, to attempt to

draw them into the Dream Vision to observe, if they are able to enter into a meditative trance first. Nutmál says he is willing, as does the young lord Márüh. This should be a clue to the players that they should volunteer their help as well, both in the Dream and at the stepwell; if they do not, they will be reminded of their duties by the great aryah, who will speak of the Mángai Healer delivering his prayers and any other help, his assistant Weapons Master offering extra protection of course, and the assistant Suthra Master watching for animal dangers lurking in the dark waters of the stepwell or in the nearby woods. Of course his daughter's Honor Guard will attend her, and the members of the House of Sámtra are invited to lend their expertise as well, if they feel it would bring honor to their House and Line. Armed with whatever knowledge they obtain from within Dream, they should accompany his daughter's entourage to the stepwell, hopefully bringing an end to the trouble there and unraveling the dangerous threat to the lady Anavári. Márüh, of course, must go into the city to fulfill his own obligations before the Feast. Nutmál states that, though he will also partake of the vision, he must go to his lord Arhidásah and report what has transpired before he can decide what he must do next.

Scene 4; The Sir'hibasi Convene in Ritual

Istvan will work with Valnérah, the condor Seer, to quickly prepare a Ritual of Dreamwalking in a private chamber provided by the great aryah. Servants will assist in helping to set up the chamber so that all the participants may sit, and guards will be posted so that privacy is assured. The player of Umratáli, the sea turtle Mángai Healer, should be reminded that there are many ritual supplies in his own chambers that would help, such as braziers, incense, crystal singing bowls, and other such accoutrements that may help them all enter into deep meditation. Umratáli also has skills in chanting droning meditative prayers that will allow them all to focus through the ritual. Once set up and ready to begin, the description below should be read to the players. Have them perform appropriate dice rolls, such as the various available **Magic Ritual Skill rolls** appropriate to the sir'hibasi, and base **Essence roll** modified by **Keen Focus Talent dice** made by other guests, to determine each player's success in entering the Dream and observing these visions. Specific dice rolls required will be noted after the description, and should not necessarily be read aloud.

Once you are all in place, gathered in a circle around the three sir'hibasi, the Seer Istvan rings an obsidian chime, Valnérah lights the incense and begins to hum deep in his throat, and the Mángai Umratáli slowly begins rubbing the edges of a shallow crystal singing bowl while intoning low murmuring prayers that fill the ritual chamber with a sonorous and soothing chanted melody, which is soon picked up by the other two in repetitive harmony. In the midst of the strange night's tidings that weigh heavily on all your minds, a sense of peaceful serenity envelops you.

Both Istvan and Valnérah must now make a **Dreamwalking Magic Ritual Skill roll** to each attempt the initial discipline necessary to enter the Dream Realm at no difficulty modifier, leaving their bodies behind in trance. If Valnérah succeeds, read the following aloud to his player.

In your mind's eye, you see the chamber you are in seem to vanish around you into strange mists and motes of light and a gentle glow suffuses your awareness,



enveloping everything around you. Before you, there seems to form a configuration of many glowing swathes of light, sparkling like motes of dust caught in the colorful beams of a prism. As you successfully invoke the Discipline that parts the Veils of Dream, the shimmering bands of light that float before you begin to unravel themselves, folding away from the center of their strange formation like vast petals opening upon a blossom or phantom-like silken curtains of light and color. With each intoning of the ritual's mantra, the passage beyond the Veils of Dream becomes wider, until your duháma is released from your body to slip through, enmeshed for a moment in the diaphanous portal before emerging on the other side, surrounding by the glittering vapors, shifting nebulae, and flitting

shadows of the Dreamworld. The strange sensations seem overwhelming for a moment before your mystic disciplines take firm hold, bringing stability to the scene around you and drawing focus upon the ethereal form of Istvan the Seer who emerges near you as if seated upon roiling cloud and vapor. His eyes are closed and he seems to be in deep concentration.

Istvan is attempting to bring the Mángai sir'hibas Umratáli into the Dream with them. Umratáli's player must now make a successful **Ritual Skill roll**, proving that he has achieved a meditative trance; the GM must make a successful **Ritual Skill roll** for Istvan to use his **Discipline to Bringing Others into the Dream Realm (6 Action Dice - 3)**. If successful, the GM will ask both mystic player characters to assist in attempting to draw the others into the Dream, provided the rest have successfully drifted into trance. To determine this, have each remaining player make a base **Essence roll**. Each who succeeds has entered into trance and may be pulled into the Dream if the collaboration of the other sir'hibasi is successful. Istvan, with the collaboration of the others (as per the rules of Assistance) may now make his **Ritual Skill roll** for Bringing Others into the Dream. Every two successes rolled by the collaborators equals one additional success added to Istvan's total. If all rolls are successful, then the others will all appear in the Dream and each of the Seer sir'hibasi may use their Disciplines to discover the information below, bit by bit. Istvan will urge Valnérah's player to lead the way, since it was her initial vision that prompted their long journey.

More Terrors Revealed

Within the Dream, if the Dreamwalking players make successful **Dreamwalking Ritual Skill rolls (at -1 difficulty)**, the GM should give them various indications of the

following bits of information, all of which the others in the Dream will be allowed to see and experience.

- They see the stepwell in its heyday as part of some great lord's estate, long ago when the capital of Tishínia was in far away Telátah, before the mighty city of Sadahm was even built nearby.
- They will also see the assassination of this lord's beautiful daughter in the stepwell, which was her favorite place to relax, play music, and sing.
- They see the estate being abandoned eventually and falling into ruin, but are given some sign in the vision that her gentle and benevolent spirit remains in the stepwell.
- Centuries later, they will feel her joy that a city thrives nearby and that children come to play in her well. Generation after generation of visitors to the well feel her blessings and her peace.
- The recent murders of the children in her well (though the vision does not clarify the nature of the killings) causes her great anger and sadness, which overwhelms the viewers and obscures that part of the vision with a fearful and terrifying darkness.
- The vision shifts and they see the stepwell and the land surrounding it as if from far above at night but this seems to fade, becoming a Vratha Spider's giant web. Three drops of glistening dew hang from its very edges, slowly trickling toward the center, attracting a beautiful dromi which flies toward it, unaware of the danger. A strange and haunting melody can be heard as if accompanying the fated dromi. Straying near the center of the web, which appears like a funnel winding down into darkness, the dromi remains fascinated by the sparking droplets, and then is suddenly caught unaware as the hideous Vratha Spider violently emerges from the web's funnel with a terrible noise as it snatches the shrieking dromi and withdraws into its hideous lair. The players will be thrust out from the Dream, followed by the haunting sound of a faraway female voice softly crying.

Scene 5; Walking with the Dead

With their awakening from the vision, they will all hear the gonging of the hour resonate through the halls of the palace, and the young lord Márüh, the Great Aryah's son, will tell them that the sky barges must leave soon, and that they all must prepare. He will express his gratitude to the visiting sir'hibasi, and will mention that he now feels more than ever that the only evil at the stepwell tonight will be that brought by their very mortal enemies. He begs them to take care of his beloved sister, and to teach their enemies fear. With that everyone goes to quickly get dressed in the season's traditional robes of white, promising to speak more once they gather on their sky barge.

Sky-barge Travel to the Edge of Sadahm

The transport to the edge of the city is one of the Great Aryah's grand floating pleasure-barges, held aloft by banks of large skycrystals lined along its sides that seem to glow dimly blue in the light of Dárdūnah's three moons. Once everyone is aboard and the servants and sailors have unscrewed the large land-anchors from the ground, the delicate amber sheets of rolling slats, which are infused with the mineral

dust that dampens the skycrystals' effects, are pulled away into the lower deck and the vessel begins its slow ascent into the colorful night sky.

The Great Aryah has many guests this night and their spirits do not seem to match those of your group as the journey commences. They, of course, have no idea that there is danger ahead and by the very command of the lord Ayrram it must remain that way, an order that applies to his lovely daughter as well. She can be seen mixing with the other guests, sharing in their jests and listening intently to their own tales that pertain to this night's festivities. Looking at her, though, one can see that in the back of her mind there is the thought of the somber nature of the duty she must perform, and this she eventually begins sharing as the flight over the city gets well under way.

The other guests, too, mix freely with you all from time to time, amidst the passing of drinks and small delicacies carried by humble and silent servants, and each of you must politely deal with them as the scores of minutes pass. Finally, however, comfortable groups seem to form here and there as the carousers settle, and you gather into smaller groups as well, so as to arouse less suspicion.

The first group that could form would be that of the mockingbird weapons-master and the wolf assistant suthra master, who will have brought his trained kellédu (a mantis-like suthra which fills a role similar to a dog), who will sit chattering obediently at his side. They will be joined by Nutmál, who it seems has asked the barge to drop down near the House of Arhidásah so that he may report to his lord. He changed his mind about coming aboard the barge after the Dream Ritual because, although he can stay only a short while, it gives him a chance to share some thoughts with the characters. At first he believed the assassins could be aboard this very ship, having arrived as part of the "guests" from over the waters of the Gulf. But after sharing the vision, he now feels that the greater threat may already be in place, waiting for the characters' arrival, and that they should remain very aware of their surroundings once they reach the stepwell. Further, he thinks that the threat may come from the Line of Yádruh, rivals of the Line of Inúvkah. He suspected this before, but the news of the vision carried by the House of Sámtra makes him surer, especially because of the strange black and white striped markings on the "faces" of the dream-makri that emerged from under the phantom's death-shroud. The Great Aryah of the Line of Yádruh is a badger. With this, the barge should drop to street-level in a park already filled with revelers in white robes, bearing the lanterns of the season, and allow Nutmál, dressed like all the rest, to disembark.

The second such group the GM should deal with could be the rattlesnake and the condor, from the House of Sámtra, who are speaking with the Mángai Umratáli when they are joined by Istvan the Seer near the prow of the ship overlooking the approaching city's edge. Istvan will ask what the others think of the vision they shared first, and will eventually let them know that he fears the rage and sorrow he felt from the spirit in the well, and worries that she may have become khaujíva, spirits twisted by what they have endured in such a way that they have become harmful to jánah. If this is so then there may truly be a supernatural danger awaiting them in addition to any assassins abroad seeking Anavári's life. He will especially warn the sea turtle Mángai Umratáli to watch the dark waters of the well and be prepared should evil arise from within it.

And the third group, unfortunately for the elephant Honor Guard Arhazbür's player, can only be composed of himself and the lady Anavári, since it is his duty to remain with her as she moves among her guests. He is allowed to interact with guests as they greet him, and the lady Anavári herself, of course, who has confided in him many times in the years he has served her. She will most certainly trade comments with him during their entire journey. At some point in time, however, she will notice (perhaps after a roll by the GM) that her Honor Guard seems to be in a strange mood, and will ask him if something is wrong. If she is unsatisfied with his answer, she will specifically ask him if something made him upset when he was called away from her to speak with her father and those strangers who arrived just as her brother came to relieve him of his duty to her momentarily. Further hemming and hawing will result in her deciding it is time to meet these strange guests, who have seemed quite distant throughout the flight, but as she begins to approach the other players, the barge will arrive at their destination, and she will be forced to attend to other matters.

The Crumbling Outer Wall

As the sky barge begins to descend, those looking over the railings will see the pale light of the moons shining upon the somewhat crumbled remains of the outer wall of Sadahm below them. This wall, built when Sadahm had been newly made capital of Tishinia many centuries ago, once separated the Commons Circle from the rougher peasantry and shambles of the cities outer edge, and had been well maintained in ancient days. Now, though it mostly remains intact, its gates are not guarded nor its ramparts patrolled, and seldom does the city pay to make repairs unless the lives of those who live beneath are in danger due to collapse. The gates themselves still have their beauty maintained, but here, near the forested edges away from the major roads, there are many sections where the walls have been allowed to collapse, and it is not uncommon for stray blocks to be used for other building endeavors.

Many sections of the Outer Wall are said to have been made from the stones of ancient palaces and holdings of former dynasties, such as the one that made the antique stepwell that can even now be seen peeking like a pale hole from within the dark tree canopy below, less than a sixth of a league from the lights twinkling in the nearby settlements. The sky barge, full of its festival-goers, circles lazily downward as the lanterns of the silk-dyers' families below can be seen to gather in a large paved square lined with numerous brick houses and huts. The spiked walls surrounding the drying yards seem to ascend like jagged teeth; the silks blowing on the skeletal lattice racks within seem to glow in their various colors this night, aided perhaps by a fine, barely-perceptible ground fog that has risen from the nearby river's edge, illuminate under the moons' collective gaze. The reek of the nearby dyeing vats can already be detected, lending an acrid quality to the air, and the guests have already begun to chatter in excitement. The lady Anavári busily moves among them now, quieting them, and reminding them of the solemnity of their duties this night, though a grand feast awaits them at her father's palace. Amphorae of wine are brought from below, as are simple delicacies for the families of the silk-dyers and sweets for their children, all gifts to be presented in the name of the Great Aryah. Servants gather to prepare the barge for disembarking as the vessel slowly settles into the square below.

The GM should now ask the players if there is anything they wish to do or prepare before they disembark. There is a general feeling of muted excitement in the air, and even the suthra master's trained kellédu will prance about momentarily, awaiting the command to leap to the ground below. Once they get off the barge, both the guests and the players are expected to act with honor and deference to the words of the lady Anavári as she speaks with the elders of the samüt and begins the process of her duties. Though some guests may whisper or make light of their presence here, any such things overheard by Anavári will be frowned upon.

The elder of the silk-dyer's community approaches, an old ring-tailed lemur called Namránu. Various other simians seem to have taken to this occupation as well, for a large number of them, of many different jenu (animal types), gather around the Sunborn and their noble guests, bowing respectfully in honor to their caste. All ages are represented here, from skinny youth to gnarled adults, and the heat of the suns as well as the nature of their work has given many a wrinkled and worn aspect to their countenances. Such is the way of things among the Peasant Caste.

The square has come alive with the light of the many lanterns gathered there, held by peasant and noble alike and more appear as servants upon the anchored barge busily light others to be handed down to the gathered lords and ladies below them. Now it is made even more apparent the stark difference between the lives of those near the center of the city, with their houses lit and decorated by hundreds of colorful paper and cloth lanterns of the season and their streets garishly adorned with bright streamers and elaborate shrines dripping with extravagant offerings, and here, among the peasant laborers of the outskirts, where dim hovels of mud-brick and thatch crowd together, untouched by the more mirthful aspects of the Festival save for the feeble lanterns they carry and the tattered pale robes that the luckiest among them wear, often handed down for generations.

It is now obvious that the old traditions are not as quaint to these peasants as the distant guests of the Great Aryah had first assumed. And it is this, more than anything else, that seems to lull the once-excited nobles into a respectful silence. Lady Anavári seems quite pleased at this change among them.

As servants begin unloading the gifts that have been brought and peasants begin quietly setting up the tables that will host the meager Feast the families of the samüt will share, the elders will gather to finish their audience with the Great Aryah's daughter. They formally enlighten their noble guests as to the nature of their woes, thanking them in advance for the blessings they bring, then eventually lead them along the moonlit trails through the maspéra trees toward the stepwell.

Players making observational rolls to perceive anything out of the ordinary will notice nothing, though feel free to add creepy details to the surrounding scenery just to put them on edge. It will quickly become apparent to the players, if it hadn't already, that in the dim light of the lanterns, as the gathered jánah begin making their way into the forest, the white robes of all the attendants to this event make everyone look the same, especially in the gloomy mist from the distant Natha river that continues to thicken.

The Stepwell of the Silk Dyers

The quarter-mile walk on winding trails through the shadow-filled Maspéra Forest should do little to calm the nerves of the players. It is filled with the strange night-sounds of chittering wild suthra and rustlings in the leaves. The peasants seem unaffected by these things. The light of the moons helps little here, for the shadows of the tree canopies are made even more stark and deep by contrast. At some point muffled cries will rise from one grouping of the guests, as if from muzzles covered by hands. Running across the ground nearby them, and climbing swiftly into the trees are what appear to be three glistening-wet skeletal children who cry out suddenly in terrible clicking and hissing voices. An atmosphere of fearful alarm begins to descend on the nobility until the elder Namránu hoots out loudly, cutting through the confusion, and telling the noble guests that what they are seeing is merely a trio of wild bandar (insect monkeys), whose shining chitin carapaces reflect the light of the moons. They are harmless, and merely attracted to the smells of the food carried on the noble's clothes. The bandar will vanish into the forests once they realize the jánah have nothing to give them. Finally, after passing the long-toppled foundations and ivy-covered masonry and carvings of an ancient and forgotten palace, the party will arrive at a large clearing, well-lit by the three moons but shrouded in the mists from the distant river.

The enormous clearing seems like a sunken place in the forest, a bowl-like depression filled with scrubby bushes, sparse trees, and the crumbling remnants of walls and columns rising above the wispy ground fog. At its center is yet another large square depression into which the fog seems to sink, surrounded on two sides by the ruins of intricate stone arches and walkways once covered by roofs in ancient days. There comes the smell of mineral-rich water and of late-blooming wild flowers that still spring from the remnants of what surely must have been ancient gardens when this estate was young. Wordlessly, the elder and the rest of the families of the samüt make their way across the meadow, weaving in between piles of rubble and shattered sculpture as the full view of the timeless stepwell is displayed before you.

Multiple levels of stone nearly fifteen feet high, descend to sculptured ledges of equal width, like an inverted ziggurat, with numerous sets of chiseled stone, double steps at least seven feet in breadth leading from level to level on each of the sides. Carved deeply into the many vertical surfaces beneath the solid stone steps and in the open faces of the large ledges are many shadowy niches and alcoves, some large enough to be supported by ornate pillars. A number of them have collapsed over the many centuries to reveal the remains of elaborately carved shrines of the Devah within, Krilárah in her obscuring veils, a dancing Kramah wielding his mighty axe. The width of the stepwell, as a whole, becomes smaller as it descends, and finally peering down over the edge toward its bottom more than six stories below, you all can see through the gloom and mist a square yard of sorts, ancient but beautifully-tiled artificial banks of stone surrounding a great, still octagonal pool of water some twenty feet across or more, reflecting the wan faces of two of the moons which float in the skies high above.

It is here that the lady Anavári will take the lead, heading first toward the ruined buildings upon the terrace surrounding two sides of the first level of the stepwell. Beside her walk two of her trusted attending servants; behind her, Arhazbür her Honor Guard, the other

members of her House, then her father's guests, and finally the families of the silk-dyers. Anavári carries before her upon a thin and bending wooden rod a large cloth lantern, painted by a holy Mángai with the snarling leonine face of Kramah, Devah of Valorous Battle. Her servants as well as the sea turtle Umratáli's player will be each asked to carry a large flickering flat candle carved into the shape of a beautiful white lotus and made to be able to float upon the still, dark water below, representative offerings to the three poor children who have recently died here.

Once organized, the entire party, most carrying bobbing paper and cloth lanterns of their own, will begin to pass through the upper ruins, noting as they do the remnant mosaics of the ancient lord's family who once dwelled nearby. Characters making a successful **Perception or Observation roll** will notice a rendering depicting a beautiful white female tiger playing a sitar beside the pool below: a noble woman, with young children of various jenu cavorting nearby. Those who shared the earlier vision will recognize her as the young lady slain here centuries before. As the party begins to take the first steps down, the lady Anavári will begin to sing the song of mourning she chose for this occasion, and any characters making a successful **Wit roll** or a successful **Music Knowledge roll** will recognize her song as the same haunting melody heard in the vision as the beautiful dromi flew toward its doom. As they continue to descend, players may make whatever **Perception-based Skill rolls** they please but will only discover the occasional nest of water-beetles disturbed from the numerous dark niches by the players' passage. The mist here seems to grow thicker as they descend down into it, blurring the lines of those around them, dampening their robes, and muffling the sounds of Anavári's song and the accompanying prayers intoned by Umratáli's player as well as other devoted Mahists among the group.

Once they reach the bottom, gathering around the edges of the pool itself, Anavári will conclude her song and the murmured prayers of others will die away, leaving the party in a sudden silence. The lady Anavári will abruptly break this silence as she begins to speak about the reason she has come, the nature of the season, and the sorrowful deaths of the three children. She will address whatever spirits that guard and protect the well, begging for their benevolence, after which she will, one by one, take the three scented lotus candles and place them into the water, speaking the names of the three children while kneeling down at the carved edge of the dark and utterly still pool.

Scene 6; Unwelcome Guests

Just as the lady Anavári releases the last candle to float upon the water, speaking the name of the most recent child killed here, an unearthly chorus of wailing sorrow can be heard from above, near the upper rim of the stepwell, and echoing down into its graven depths to surround you all. Over the topmost ledge can be seen rising three gaunt figures in flowing, translucent tattered shrouds, hideously backlit by the pale light of the gibbous moons. Their burning blue eyes glow out from a terrible darkness where their faces should be and as they raise their hands, an angry fire seems to blossom within their clenched talons. Their wailing now rises in pitch, becoming an unbearable shrieking that seems to come from all sides, joining madly with the terrified cries of the nobles and peasants.



All this is merely an elaborate distraction to hide the nature of what now happens. Only those players who specifically state that they refuse to take their eyes off of the lady Anavári may make a **Perception roll**. Those who succeed will catch a momentary glimpse of a hulking dark-grayish figure rising smoothly and silently from the misty black waters as if from the moon-shadow of the lady Anavári, its stubby and massive arms seeming to literally envelop her small form in its vast embrace before it effortlessly drags her down into the depths of the well. Her short-lived gasping scream is utterly drowned out by the screeching of the ghoulish “specters” above. Those who fail in this roll or whose attentions were drawn to the distraction above will have time only to turn and see the rippling waters of the pool and the unfortunate daughter of the Great Aryah suddenly gone. It is now time for the players to decide how they wish to react, if they haven’t begun shouting their actions already.

Dealing with the Three “Ghouls”

These three scoundrels are actually assassins and spies of the Line of Yádruh, from the House of Pünim here in Sadahm. Their costumes were cleverly created, their glowing “eyes” merely ever-bright, blue stones of Rabíshu sewn to dangle from their headpieces, the fire in their hands the red stones of Rabíshu, held to touch one another so that they would begin to glow in their grasp. As Nutmál suspected, it is they who have been commanded to participate in this assassination attempt, under the orders of Mocárrman, the female cobra agent of the badger Sagérruh, great aryah of the Line of Yádruh himself, who serves another master, of whom the assassins have no knowledge except that this mysterious jánah is referred to only by the title “Honored One”. None of this information, however, including their own names will they give out unless compelled by torture.

Once they see that their target has been pulled beneath the water or the instant they are attacked or pursued, they will flee into the woods as directed, after which they will attempt to make their separate ways back into the city where they will eventually rendezvous back at the House of Pünim. If confronted as they flee, they are willing to fight to the death if cornered but will otherwise continue attempting escape, using every deadly tactic they can think of. Each one is a skilled assassin in their own right.

Tsetrahm - (male black whipsnake, oily and manipulative, enjoys showing off, late 20's) Warrior and assassin for the House of Pünim. Uses twin crystal swords as primary weapons.

Action Dice: 6

Stamina Levels: 24

Darjin - (male barn owl, speaks only when spoken to, enjoys petty torture of others, mid 30's) Warrior and assassin for the House of Pünim. Uses blowgun and a pair of matching chitin sais as primary weapons, but will attempt to stay out of direct combat and use poison darts.

Action Dice: 7

Stamina Levels: 30

Sárdu - (male grey wolf, thin and athletic, a subservient schemer, late 20's) Warrior and assassin for the House of Pünim. Uses amber chain scythe as primary weapon, with which he enjoys the tactic of breaking jánah' necks.

Action Dice: 6

Stamina Levels: 24

Braving the Waters of the Well

There is nothing supernatural about what has dragged the poor lady Anavári below the cold waters of the well. It is Kirmah, yet another Yádruh assassin from the house of Pünim; though huge and bulky, water is his natural element. He is an excellent swimmer and capable of holding his breath for a very, very long time. It was he who has been coming to this stepwell in the recent months, on orders from Mocárrman, to murder the children of the silk-dyers one at a time, drowning them in the terrible waters of the well and placing them at the bottom in positions that would terrify their would-be rescuers. He was never discovered coming and going from the well due to a secret, natural underwater passage linking the deepest part of the well to the cool waters of the nearby river Natha, which he proudly discovered on his first reconnaissance visit many months ago.

After pulling lady Anavári below the water, Kirmah is not foolish enough to believe he has time to watch her drown, as he did with the peasant children. He knows that her protectors will soon brave the waters of the well to come to her aid despite the crude distractions above. To insure he has done his job, he will drag her struggling, drowning form with him down to the bottom of the well, remove the stone slab he used to hide his underwater exit tunnel, and pull her inside behind him as he attempts his escape. He has practiced this many times and knows where the exit is in the black, murky water but even he will be forced to use a small net bag of glowing red stones of Rabíshu, which he will hastily tie around his thick wrist, to aid his journey down the tunnel. This may be the only chance any diving character may have to see him as he escapes through the underwater tunnel. Any characters who reach the bottom of the well (over 40 feet below the surface of the water, requiring **two successful Swimming Skill rolls for those with the standard Swimming Skill, but only one roll for those possessing the Animal Ability Swimming**) will need to make a **Perception roll at a -2 dice penalty** due to the murky darkness surrounding them (or an **Observation Skill roll at no penalty**). If they succeed, then they will catch first a glimmering of reddish orange light out of the corner of their eyes then a flash of the white gown of the Aryah's daughter as she is spirited away into the depths of the tunnel. By the time they see this, the lady Anavári will no longer be

struggling but will be dragged limply behind Kirmah like the corpse the assassin intends her to be. If the players attempt to deal with the assassin underwater, they should use a **Hold Breath Animal Ability**, if they have it, allowing them to hold their breath a number of minutes equal to their Ability score plus successes rolled while using it. **Characters without this Animal Ability can hold their breath a number of rounds (six seconds each) equal to their Vigor before they begin suffering 1 point of Stamina loss per round due to air deprivation.**

Kirmah - (male hippo, fat, muscular, and thick skinned, gruff, sour, and quick to anger, early 30's) Warrior and assassin for the house. Uses chitin punch daggers as primary weapons, but prefers to crush his enemies with his bare hands.

Action Dice: 9

Stamina Levels: 38

Resolution of the Encounter

For the assassin "ghouls" above, the resolution would be either to let them escape, in which case the players might have to deal with the disappointment of their House and Line, or to use their skills to give chase, in which case the players will either capture them, kill them, or be either wounded and/or killed themselves in turn. The assassins will take no prisoners.

For the hippo assassin Kirmah, the resolution will take place within the pitch-black, six-to-seven-foot wide underwater tunnel somewhere between the bottom of the well and the river. When chased by the players (assuming they succeed on a few more of their **Swimming Skill** or **Hold Breath rolls** and can hold their breath long enough), they will eventually catch up to him deep within the winding and uneven natural tunnel, finally realizing what (if not who) he is (appropriate **Knowledge Skill rolls** might allow them to identify him). The only light-source in the tunnel is the dimly glowing net bag dangling from the hippo's wrist. If the player(s) grab the limp body of Anavári and attempt to wrest her from his grasp, the ensuing momentary struggle will tear the net-bag containing the glowing reddish-orange stones away, causing it to float to the silt-strewn tunnel floor, continuing to light the blurry underwater scene eerily from below. The hippo, however, is quite strong and dangerous; the conflict will doubtless come to blows as the combatants struggle for control. The hippo will be at a slight disadvantage (**-2 on his attack rolls** due to his size in this constricted tunnel, as would the elephant if he has attempted to swim down here. If, after a single round of attack, the players are unable to break the clutches of the hippo, he will attempt to use his great strength (**a Strength versus Strength Roll will be required**) to wrench the apparently lifeless form of Anavári away from the player characters and up beside him in the tunnel, apparently preparing to wring her neck with his bare hands. Either way, read the following description.

Ahead of the hippo you suddenly notice something strange, like writhing movement in the murky darkness. From out of the inky blackness of the tunnel ahead there seems to coalesce twisting forms that curl up from the silt and mud of the tunnel's floor and sides. At first it seems like fetid riverweeds mixed with shell and other decayed matter, and the water around the hippo becomes murkier still as he appears to be struggling with his hold on Anavári.

If there is more than one character in the tunnel to see this, make them all roll a **Perception Roll at a -2**, while those with the **Sir'hibas Talent may add that number of additional dice to their roll** as well. Those rolling no successes are only able to make out the fact that the hippo seems to vanish into the dark gloom, leaving the unmoving Anavári behind. A half-success (only one success rolled) means the player sees “something”, like tendrils of black ink, seem to wrap around the hippo’s head and upper torso, yanking him into the dark tunnel ahead and out of sight. Whereas a full success (or if there is only one player in the tunnel) means the player sees three small furred pairs of terrible rotting hands, like the pale clawing arms of children, reach from the sediment-filled black water of the tunnel ahead to clutch the struggling hippo and drag him away into the unseen depths.

Regardless of what is seen, however, there is the immediate concern of the lifeless Anavári who floats near them in the tunnel who may still be able to be saved. By the time any player reaches the surface with her (taking several more successful **Swimming Skill rolls**) she will be at -1 Stamina, essentially dead, and losing one level per minute unless she can be revived and brought above 0 Stamina using either natural healing skills or magical healing skills.

If she is saved, everyone gathered around her will see her cough up water (or observe the water magically drawn away by glowing golden light if she is healed using a Ritual), and watch as she brings her hands to the face of her savior, whispering, “Thank you...” before swooning into unconsciousness. What her healer sees is a very different thing, for at the moment the water leaves her lungs, the face of Anavári seems to shift and change before the healer’s very eyes to become the face of a beautiful white tigress, the exact likeness of the unfortunate ancient noble’s daughter murdered here centuries ago. It is she who then cups her healer’s face gently in her hands and says “Thank you...” to him before the visage fades away to be replaced by the living but unconscious lady Anavári.

Conclusions

It will be up to the players what to tell the families of the peasants before they leave, and the noble guests as well. Do they reveal the horrors of what they saw in the dark well? Do they speak openly of the gratitude of that ancient spirit after the healing? Do they discuss the attack, and who they think was to blame? Regardless, it is time to leave the outskirts of the city to bring the guests and the daughter of the Great Aryah back safely aboard the sky barge. As the GM, you must decide how either the guests or the peasants will react to any of the news the players give them. They may find relief if they are told of the thankful spirit, or they may be further terrified at reports of the angry spirits within the well. The issues concerning the obvious charade of the “ghouls” and the evidence that the children were murdered by a mortal assailant will no doubt be of concern to all, and will surely lead to further questioning if there are any prisoners taken. There may also be other players and NPCs in need of healing now that the combat is through, perhaps quickly. If any have died, then funerary pyres must eventually be arranged once the mourning is done. Players successfully completing this adventure should be given 2 Story Points.

Lasting Intrigue

In the world of Dárdünah, rarely do adventures tie themselves neatly up at the end; one thread often leads to another and another. What has happened at the stepwell points to a conspiracy far greater than the attempted assassination of the Great Aryah’s daughter. The players may have

recognized that it was, in fact, the Yádruh who have dared this affront though there may be no evidence that can prove it. However, if the Great Aryah of the Line of Yádruh, the badger Sagérruh, wasn't the one who ordered the assassination but merely the one whose servants carried it out, as indicated in the Seer Valnérah's initial vision, then who was the one who gave the order to have Anavári killed, and why? Will the assassins attempt to strike again? Deep beneath the waters of the well, did the hippo truly meet his final fate, or was he actually able to escape to the river beyond? And finally, are the angry spirits of the stepwell now truly at peace? All these questions and more could be the fodder for future adventures to come.

Lines/Houses important to this adventure

Here we have a short list of the non-player character members of the Houses and Lines that are relevant to this introductory adventure, along with their general descriptions.

The Line of Varám

The line of the Isvar of Tishínia (Sadahm chapter):

Kémentos VI - (male wolf, silver furred, regal and handsome, mid 40's) current Isvar of Tishínia.

Palanéss - (male white wolf, imposing and stern, early 40's) the brother of the Isvar, father of Viálu and the governor of the eastern provinces of Tishínia; lives in Samüdra.

Terüsi - (female dingo, pleasant and attractive, early 40's) the wife of Governor Palanéss, mother of Viálu, Lady of the House of Palanéss.

Viálu - (male dingo, slender and chiseled, smiles a lot, mid 20's) nephew of the Isvar.

The Line of Sisváh

Powerful line, not considered royal, though trying to arrange marriages with Varám line (Sadahm Chapter):

Ayrram - (male jackal, very accommodating, early 50's) Great Aryah of the line.

Diválu - (male bighorn, a bit brusque, dry humor, mid 30's) Master of the Honor Guards.

Márüh - (male jackal, sensuous look to him, friendly, late 20's) heir to the line.

Anavári - (female jackal, beautiful and alluring, mid 20's) second-born child of Ayrram.

The House of Sámtra (of the Line of Inúvkah – Telátah)

Sámtra - (female coral snake, slightly stuffy but good-natured, late 40's) Aryah of the house.

Anéka - (male ram, flirtatious, known for his love of women, early 40's) Master of the Honor Guards.

The House of Arhidásah (of the Line of Inúvkah - Sadahm)

Arhidásah - (male black bear with a spotted muzzle, 50ish) the kind Aryah of the house and lover of honeymelons; Head of the Family of Inúvkah in Sadahm.

Nutmál - (male crested green lizard, active and energetic, soft sibilant voice, mid 30's) the new Master of the Honor Guards for the house, in charge of general security and

assignment of house honor guards, also serves as Lord's personal honor guard. Master spy and tactician.

Istvan - (male genet, a powerful Dreamwalker, but often opinionated and willful, late 30's) Seer to the house, gifted to it by the Great Aryah of the Line.

The House of Pünim (of the Yádruh Line - Sadahm)

Pünim - (male cheetah, calculating and deliberate, tall, thin and slow-moving, mid 40's) head of the enemy house to Arhidásah's, his treacheries are renowned in the city.

Mocárrman - (female cobra, silent, very dangerous-looking, lithe, defined build, mid 30's) chief assassin to Pünim and very infamous killer, known throughout the nation, usually does not stay in Sadahm but resides with the head of the Yádruh line (on loan) in the northern Tishínian city of Telátah, doubles as his Arena Master.

Sardu - (male grey wolf, thin and athletic, a subservient schemer, late 20's) Warrior and assassin for the house. Uses amber chain scythe as primary weapon, with which he enjoys the tactic of breaking jánah' necks.

Kirmah - (male hippo, fat, muscular, and thick skinned, gruff, sour, and quick to anger, early 30's) Warrior and assassin for the house. Uses chitin punch daggers as primary weapons but prefers to crush his enemies with his bare hands.

Darjin - (male barn owl, speaks only when spoken to, enjoys petty torture of others, mid 30's) Warrior and assassin for the house. Uses blowgun and a pair of matching sai as primary weapons, but will attempt to stay out of direct combat and use poison darts.

Tsetrahm - (male black whip snake, oily and manipulative, enjoys showing off, late 20's) Warrior and assassin for the house. Uses twin crystal swords as primary weapons.

Creatures of Note

Bandar (BAN-dahr) - About shoulder high to a mouse jánah, this playful suthra lives in many of the forested areas of northern Dárdünah. Arboreal by nature, they generally live in small groups (from five to twenty) where they forage for native fruits and occasional dromi. Prized for their colorful bodies and fearlessly inquisitive natures, they are sometimes trained and raised as pets. They are considered uncommonly intelligent for suthra and have gained a certain amount of popularity amongst the southern nobles.



STAMINA: 3-9 levels

ARMOR: 2 points

NORMAL ACTION DICE:

Standard Movement, Great Leap, Bite, Night Vision, Clinging, Climb, Standard Sensory Rolls, etc. : 3

SPECIAL ACTIONS:

None

Chinti (CHIN-tee) - The riding and draft beasts of Dárdūnah, chinti come in many sizes and varieties. From the lighter swifter beasts of Amnol to the larger sturdier steeds bred in Dar-Purám, chinti all tend to be sociable creatures and sometimes form close bonds with their owners. Chinti mate for life and will reproduce every three years. Throughout the wide world, jánah and chinti have been together since the dawn of time. From the barbarous Hardazi hordes to the lone traveler crossing the plains of Háthiyar, the chinti is beast of burden, companion, friend, and sometimes even savior.



STAMINA: 10-20 levels

ARMOR: 3 points

NORMAL ACTION DICE:

Standard Movement, Bite, Standard Sensory Rolls, etc. : 5

SPECIAL ACTIONS:

Rearing kick : 7

Gore attack (horns) : 6

Dromi (DRO-mee) - A common pet animal found throughout much of Dárdūnah. There are as many breeds and variations as there are regions of the world, with many areas supporting multiple breeds, from the brightly colored creatures flitting about the trees and underbrush of the



Visedi jungles, to the more subdued looking species found in the arid regions of northern Bakári. Particularly colorful specimens are commonly sought after to be house pets, as are those dromi capable of a melodic song. Some breeds can be highly intelligent and can thus be trained to do little tricks or mimic sounds, while others can actually be trained to deliver messages of various kinds.

STAMINA: 1-3 levels

ARMOR: 1 point

NORMAL ACTION DICE:

Standard Movement, Bite, Hovering, Echo Location, Glide, Clinging, Flight, Standard Sensory Rolls, etc. : 3

SPECIAL ACTIONS:

Mimic : 5

Jugánu Worm (joo-GAH-noo) - Fat, foot-long, grub-like suthra that are kept in intricate and decorative wicker cages and, due to their bioluminescence, are used as dim light sources throughout the world. When kept well fed and happy, they give off a gentle glow that varies wildly in color depending upon the species, of which there are many. They glow brightest when they are petted and stroked, and seem to enjoy such physical attention, often emitting a low “purring” sound, and continuing to glow brightly until they eventually begin to dim and go dark as they slumber. Veils are often placed around their cages to hide their glow when desired. If harmed, they give off a shrill, keening wail unless instantly slain.



STAMINA: 1-9 levels

ARMOR: 0 points

NORMAL ACTION DICE:

Standard Movement, Standard Sensory Rolls, etc. : 3

SPECIAL ACTIONS:

When harmed, emits a keening wail that can be heard at great distances, and can awaken sleeping jánah within several hundred feet. : 6

Kelléndo (kehl-EN-doo) - Considered the guard and pet suthra of Dárdünah, the kelléndo is as varied as the many nations, with breeds ranging from tiny scrappy creatures you can hold in your hands to great hulking beasts that can grasp a small jánah's torso in its pincer's grip. Highly intelligent, generally personable, and easily trainable, they have been constant companions of the jánah since the Age of Splendor. Though some of the species have been domesticated, their wild cousins who live in the deep forests, rolling plains, and lonely mountains, can be quite fearsome, often hunting in vicious, hungry packs.



STAMINA: 3-12 levels

ARMOR: 2 points

NORMAL ACTION DICE:

Standard Movement, Sprint, Bite, Standard Sensory Rolls, etc. : 4

SPECIAL ACTIONS:

Keen Hearing, Tracking Scent, Sprint : 5

Piercing attack from the scythe-like forearms : 3 to 8 (depending on size of breed)