

The Crucible

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The Cloud Forests of Shairusk

by Matthew Krepicz - Purity of Thoth

As far as the Grey Sages tell me, and they are certainly more reliable than the gossip-laden tales of bards, the Dark Coast is much more than simply a dangerous backwater jungle filled with savages, narcotic plants and strange vegetation; it's the last refuge of all the races Mankind has displaced across our vast world. Races which once flourished and built civilizations magnificent and, at the same time, totally alien to our own.

As impressive as the stories of sunken cities and wild magic places seemed to me, I had no intention of travelling to one of Talislanta's most savage tropical forests to have my head

shrunk and mounted on a ceremonial stick. Yet Fate has many mysterious threads which pull us in unforeseen directions, one of which happened to be the Cloud Forests of Shairusk. The Order of Reason also has its own motives, as I found out to my regret when a powerful Spell of Transference placed me unceremoniously in those same steaming jungles. Surely they had received my letter of dismissal for this delicate exploratory mission? It had not, apparently, made much difference to my esteemed guild, or to the twin fighting machines which were sent to guard me in the name of the Tazian Regime. This would have actually been acceptable were it not for the impromptu arrival of a specialist by the name of Druvak, an Imrian of many talents and deep pockets, whose disgusting habits and abominable behaviour were to be exceeded only by the creatures we encountered. Thus was I, a mere Master Patterner, saddled with a team whose sole purpose seemed to be to thwart my mission even as it began.

Travelling through the Cloud Forests would have been easy were it not for the small mistakes my companions made along the way; these included stalking a wounded exomorph for dinner (the thrall brothers were aching for combat; afterwards they were just aching), Druvak's ill-conceived breakfast of scintilla eggs (the hive-queen was less than pleased), and my own meddling in magical energies whose purpose eluded me until much later. Astral space was cold comfort, though several Forest Spirits aided me in finding water and shelter. The Mana in this area was extremely focussed in the 'Green' spectrum, as wizards like to call it, meaning life energies were strong and all my Destruction spells were severely hampered. This proved to be a boon later on, when we had need of phytomantic magic to save us from aquatic predators.

Nevertheless, after the fourth day of hacking through interminable fog encrusted forests and plunging through deep valleys, we became much more adapted to the jungle terrain. One must always remember to bring a map, a lodestone, and plenty of sharp implements. Otherwise the inhabitants will provide the last, at less-than-convenient moments. Exhausted and weary, we finally emerged unto ... a swamp. A refreshing change if nothing else. I had already begun to perceive a radical shift in the magical Essences around me, and discovered to my dismay that the Gauntlet shielding Astral Space had been strengthened to such a degree that entry through projection was well nigh impossible. Perhaps someone had placed these magical safeguards to protect hidden treasure? This thought suddenly enlivened my slime-coated comrade to new heights of searching.

At last Druvak proved useful for something: the slimy Imrian had dretched through the dank waters of the swamp and located a marble column engraved with strange glyphs and runes. Memories of my rune-smithing lessons recalled themselves from storage, and I quickly deduced that the column was a marker for travellers, showing a small map of a nearby city. Who could possibly want to build a city in such a place? As I was pondering this, I somehow managed to glimpse the strange magic emanating from the column. On a hunch, I traced the outline of the runes with my finger. It took me seven minutes to realize that I was swimming underwater through the foul swamp, breathing sewage, and enjoying every minute of it! When the Imrian brought me to my senses, I quickly explained to him how the spell-rune had bestowed water breathing and swimming upon me in a magical fashion. It took much longer to convince the brothers Grimblades that we could only continue our trip underwater, as the thin spread of vegetation was ending, and green waters spread across our horizon.

This was not the Azure Ocean, but rather a large inland lake, overgrown with lilies, lotus, and floating trees. The lake was very shallow, only a few metres in most places, and could often be walked through. On the horizon, a marvellous object appeared as we approached closer: a gigantic green orb protruding from the depths of the lake centre, with a brilliant red beam of light shooting upwards from it into the heavens. My hair stood on end as I beheld what could only be a Nexus point, astral energies plunging from the ether into realspace. The others, not sensing that this was a place of power, dove underwater and swam ahead towards some ruins which surrounded the giant orb. Druvak, smug in his home element, managed to navigate us through thick seaweed, past schools of colourful fish, and around playful dolphins covered with strange markings. The water was also full of unfriendly predators which resented our intrusion into their sunken ruins, requiring me to weave together a few Spells of Plant Molding and Fish Summoning to dispatch a shark, a nasty (and poisonous) snake, and an uncooperative skalanx. Altogether I would have preferred the skalanx to the Imrian, but necessity makes strange bedfellows.

Had I been more careful and utilized a Spell of Surveillance on the strange ruins, I would no doubt have noticed the multitude of creatures swarming over them, but as it was, we were surprised underwater by reptilian humanoids with nets, who quickly captured us. This was more due to our lack of underwater warfare expertise, rather than any fighting weakness on the part of the thrall warriors, who performed admirably against great odds. Not to worry, I gasped, just before we were pushed into a giant clam, and the lid closed with an ominous clang.

To be entering a new, foreign city is marvelous. One is filled with wonder and excitement as the sites and sounds unfold, and the inhabitants welcome you with open arms. To be leaving an aquatic city while the natives attempt to return you post-haste to their breeding pits is perhaps the worst thing an explorer can experience. To this day I have vivid nightmares of how, when the clam/prison finally opened, we stood on a small mound in the middle of a pond, within a submerged room, while a quirming mass of eggs and lizard hatchlings competed to be the first to tear the flesh from our bones. We were joined in this thrilling competition by a thoroughly miserable Sunra extreme-survivalist (by obsession rather than profession, we would later learn). When the melee was finally over, and the last of the green-and-red hatchlings had been dispatched (after attaching themselves to painful parts of our anatomy), the Sunra explained that the city we were in was definitely a stronghold of strange Sauran offshoot races, among them troglodytes, skalanx, crocs, thirkin, preservers and serpent-sons. Furthermore, when we emerged from the underwater rooms (which had air for the 'food'), we encountered another denizen of the deep: a 20-foot long snake, rainbow coloured, armoured with scales which resisted the thrall trueblades, and possessing a breath ejecting noxious chemicals into the water we were all now obliged to breathe. Thankfully the rune magic held out for many days.

In a hectic escape reminiscent of my early days as a dragon-hunter, we swam through sunken buildings made of green marble, limestone and molded plants, all containing families (or rather, broods) of semi-civilized trogs and crocs. The former are similar to elongated, humanoid salamanders, and are capable of releasing a horrible smell in combat. Even our iron-fisted warriors were barely able to fight amidst such putrid surroundings. The latter form of lizardman, called crocs, resemble in large part humanoid crocodiles, but very muscular, slightly scaled and adorned with primitive necklaces of skulls, bones, flowers and shells. Their most appalling

decoration is something I accidentally discovered while fighting these formidable warriors with magic: a thin camouflaged watersnake coiled around their body, which acts as a final attack when in close melee. These aquatic barbarians kept up the chase successfully through abandoned ruins, submerged streets, and through a waterlogged library before giving up and allowing us to rest and catch our breath in an abandoned, air-filled dome.

The next three days were spent exploring the vast, crumbling edifice, foraging for food, and deciphering the strange chthonic motifs engraved in the walls, columns and sculptures of the museum. Surviving on a diet of rock lizards, tender watersnakes, tropical fish (the imrian was useful for something else) and crustaceans is by no means easy, but our situation was tenous at best, and we had as yet not figured out a way to escape past the frequent aquatic patrols. Venturing out on the collapsed rooftop of our temporary home, I was able to observe the layout of the city in detail. Namely, that the giant green globe was in fact egg-shaped, and supported by enormous statues of reptilian gaints in an Atlas position. The city itself - though half-sunken, decaying under a forest of vegetation, and weathered by unknown millennia - was indeed a wonderful sight. Vast canals ran between buildings, converging on the ominous egg which towered above everything. Schools of fish, dolphins (which were apparently trained with symbol magic), ibises, quaaals, feathered avir, and many birds of paradise clustered in the vegetation, and quickly became food for the roaming bands of lizardmen. The confusion of reptilian races here, each with different colouration, smells and habits, lead me finally to believe that this was indeed the birthing ground for a civilization that once dominated Talislanta the way we do today. And yet their world had degenerated into a travesty, a pathetic attempt at survival amidst magic which they obviously did notcomprehend. My studies in the museum revealed wondrous tools and quite a few weapons as well. Everything shiny and fragile was long gone, but I did manage to salvage a suit of Blue Dragon Hide, along with magical harpoons and tridents. Dravuk proved useful in teaching us to fight underwater, and our survivalist Sunra friend (Maenad was his name) saved us from slow starvation by teaching us how to avoid the numerous poisonous fish, and how to make seaweed pancakes.

Thus equipped and armed to the teeth, we were just about to attempt an escape when we were rudely interrupted by a Serpent-Son which had stumbled upon our hideout. This monstrosity was serpentine beneath the waist, vaguely humanoid above, sheathed in crimson scales, and armed with twin Scimitars of Pain, as I found to my deep regret. The melee lasted only a short while before the foul serpent panicked and fled down the corridor. Consumed in battle-frenzy, the twin thralls pursued it, and as we emerged into the underwater streets, I glimpsed a monstrous shape out of the corner of my eye. With great urgency I performed a Spell of Invisibility upon myself, and watched in horror as 20' tall watery spiral humanoid engulfed my two companions in a bubbly embrace, no doubt crushing them in seconds! It's body was formed of cloudy foam and it gyrated and churned continously, throwing both thralls and grogs in every direction. As I burst upon the surface of the canal, I quickly noticed the Preserver perched atop a floating lily pad, watching - and controlling - the fury of the water elemental below the surface. Covered head to toe in purple feathers, clipped claws, bones, war paint and slime, he was indeed an impressive sight with his retinue of insectoid warriors around him. The giant (at least 7') six-limbed creatures were akin to mantises, but with twisting claws capable of holding very sharp blades, which were quickly hurled at poor Druvak when he emerged. I had read about these creatures - called Many-Boned-Ones - in a moldy tome, and had noted their incredible reflexes, smooth

motion, and multiple attacks. Their segmented bodies were covered in tough chitin, and their speed made could outmatch even a Nagra. As I desperately tried to recall any crucial facts about them (hmmm : lifespan only 10 years, four standing legs, two attack arms/pincers, refractive head casing, mossgreen colouration, nope nothing useful), I noticed that the current had suddenly picked up within the canal, and I was quickly moving towards the centre of the city, past the collapsed marble buildings. The Preserver, a shaman of no meagre skill, had already dispatched a fierce whirlpool after me (after shattering my magicks with a totemic counterspell), and was in the process of weaving a devastating bolt when my ThousandKnives spell cut him off.

Frantically trying to fight the current, I repeatedly flailed past surprised crocs and cisterns filled with breeding grogs, and yet had not managed to recover because the runes of water-breathing had failed at the worst possible moment. Having witnessed the savagery of young broods and their 'nannies', I struggled to stay afloat and as far away from the hatching chambers as I could. It wasn't long before I realized I was drowning, as swimming was one of my least-developed skills. Yet, in all the panic of sudden defeat, I had forgotten Maenad, who even now swam up silently and helped me onto a seaweed cayak. As he tended my wounds, I slowly regained my senses and he explained how his years of training paid off in those few seconds during combat. Alas, he too had forgotten the strong pull of the current, which was now inextricably rushing us towards the gigantic green egg which filled the horizon. The warrior lizardmen statues which supported the massive structure seemed to smirk at us we were sucked into dark and slime-covered tubes which converged on the massive building. Twice I felt magickal wards strip me of my own magical protections, and I watched in horror as the tubes filled with water and darkness - and us plunging through them in a flimsy cayak.

The next few hours were as a horrible nightmare of drowning, for that was surely what I would have done had the magickal energies of the nest not saved me - perhaps with the intervention of guardian spirits. A strange fanged face appeared frequently before me, and when I examined it, it had no limbs and the body of a armoured serpent. It writhed and chanted, even as I strained to hear and move. To no avail. Strangely coloured eggs formed of basalt, jade, ruby, fire, mud and ice all floated by me in a swirling maelstrom of Quintessence and embryonic fluids. The spell for Astral Immersion leapt unbidden into my head, and with a strange lurching sensation everything blurred into the light-speed flash one feels when entering a magical portal. A horrendous roar, as if from the bowels of some primal lizard, catapulted my physical body viciously into the Astral plane.

I felt the hand of Maenad clutching me, and instinctively created a shell to shield him from the powerful Essence flows which engulfed this Astral Realm. I had just witnessed a most secret and wondrous world filled with future generations of beings undreamt of by arrogant mankind. Only later would I come to realize the meaning of the visions I had seen in the Great Egg. My guildmasters in the Order of Reason spent months looking for me within the Astral Realms, by which time I had already retired to a more pleasant location in Zandu, free from worries of servitude. And free to keep to myself the beautiful and horrifying secrets I had learned in the Cloud Forests of Shairusk.

----- GAMEMASTER INFORMATION -----

LOCATION: Dark Coast, hilly terrain west of the Lands of the Ahazu. Within the realm of the Green Men, but who largely ignore this area because of its swamps and liquid nature. Further more, the magical protections the Yismak left would be a hazard and a barrier to any real invaders.

DIFFICULTY: Very high

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS: The most suitable one is extreme survival in a hostile and totally alien environment. Exploration of strange cultures. Analysis of strange magick and forgotten runes. Negotiation or Infiltration of 'lizardman' is possible, but great ingenuity is needed, as these diverse races share only a few things in common. Planned extermination of 'vile' races, and possible consequences. Kidnap a specimen (which leads to a lizard rescue mission), etc.

GREAT EGG: Nexus point, giant water container, womb of birth for all lizardlike creatures. Also filled with dragon eggs. The monsters contained within this mysterious and powerful structure can be mutated and created in a multitude of shapes. Some could even try to track down the pcs through the rift in Astral space at this Nexus point. Additional Mana is available for mages of shamanic/witch/druid traditions.

YSSMAK : Ancient race of highly civilized lizardmen. They transformed themselves into many different lizard-like races through powerful magic, but the change degenerated and fragmented their culture, allowing Mankind and others to steal their technology and exterminate them. They are now long dead, with only their guardian spirits, magics and undead remaining.

PRESERVERS: Lizardman Shamans

CROCS: lizardmen (standard AD&D®)

SERPENT-SONS: Yuan-ti halfbreeds

CISTERNS: Underwater homes

GROGS: troglodytes

MANY-BONED-ONES (Thirkin): Thri Kreen insectoids

SLINKERS: Nagas

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Comments to Matthew Krepicz at mkrepicz@calumet.yorku.ca

Talislanta's Most Wanted

by Aaron "Bud" Sell

It is not a good time to be a bounty hunter. Once dangerous roads are now doubly so with the presence of Tirshata's forces, which spread and destroy like the Red Death. The so called civilized nations were once willing to pay a handsome price for criminals, but now they only reinforce their military, having chosen security over justice. But all is not bleak, for everyone with a lead Yatma is wanted by somebody. Don't let the desolate state of our profession discourage you, there is still a place for adventurers such as we.

I am Strider, a Jaka. People call me a beast, hunting for survival like my primitive ancestors, but I say if I am a beast, who are these wretched villains that I bring to justice? I have prepared a list of criminals, ligatators, murderers, saviors, priests, heathens, traitors, heroes, anyone whose life is valued by another. The first in my list is an ex-associate of mine, but our history is another story.

Latearez, female Xambrian

Height: 6'1"

Weight: 120 lbs

Distinctive features: Latearez has a scar running up the inside of her left leg. She flaunts it by wearing a short, dirty, leather skirt; matched by a halter of land lizard skin. She carries an embroidered red iron sword given to her by a Xambrian named Kaal, a former lover of hers.

Having known her personally, I am able to give you a brief background on this woman. But I must warn you that what I say came directly from her lips, and may be a fabrication. But if my sense of character is equally acute as my other senses than what I say is truthful. She wouldn't lie, it is beneath her to care what others think. She was born to a Xambrian named Rune, a resident of Cymril. Her mother is unknown to me. Rune wanted his daughter to be more sophisticated than the others of their race, so he sent her to Cymrilian schools and paid for expensive tutors. She excelled and was inducted into the Lyceum Arcanum. There she studied mysticism, necromancy, wizardry, and metaphysical doctrines. She had to disguise her race under magical pigments and haughty dresses. But before graduation she was expelled, following an incident with her roommate, herself, and her professor. Bitter at the Cymrilians' sense of social acceptance, she left her home, her father, and all her social graces to become a wizard-hunter.

Latearez has an uncanny ability to modify people's opinions and beliefs, while they stand idly by and watch as she manipulates them. She is not subtle, but rather her bluntness is unnerving and almost too obvious. She makes no promises and does not heed implications. Her blunt charm has gotten her the attention of many powerful men, despite her unattractive appearance. Indeed I was also taken in by her deadly charm. I became like her, sinister and vengeful. It was this attitude

that led me to commit the only crime I will never forgive myself for, and neither will the husband of my victim.

Despite her overwhelming magical talent, Latearez's most powerful weapon is her intelligence. She once slew the priest of Jamba within a Dracartan temple. The temple guards would not engage her inside the church, but rather formed a barricade outside and waited for her to leave. I was trapped inside, with her. She took a misfired red hurlant bolt and put it in a hollow altar. She then lit a candle and placed it in as well, sealing the altar shut afterward. The candle burned away the oxygen. Then she dropped the altar out the window. The hurlant broke as the altar fell. When the troops opened it, thinking she had hid herself inside, it exploded in their faces. During the frenzy we escaped.

It was Latearez who taught me to write and be so distinct. She also taught me to kill efficiently, and it is for this reason that I do not track her myself. I do, however, make this post hoping that someone else will capture her, for she has wronged me in a great way.

Latearez is wanted by the Cymrilian government, for killing a magician, specifically, the professor whose sexual aggressions resulted in her expulsion. The Cymrilian King is offering 4,000 gold pentangles to anyone who captures her, or kills her.

Latearez is also wanted by the Dracartan government (recall the temple story). They are offering a 20,000 Dracartan pryimid prize for her capture.

It is rumored that the Rajan also want her dead, but they have not offered a prize, and I do not suggest you ask for one.

Finally, I must warn you that Latearez is incredibly powerful. I suggest only bounty hunting bands pursue her, but an exceptional warrior may be able to subdue the woman himself. You have been warned. She has torn out my sense of morality, my clear conscious, and my left eye. Do not make the same mistake. Don't listen to anything she says, for once you start down the path with her, you will march with her until she tires of you. And then only the Gods may save you.

Strider, Jaka Manhunter

The Kang Civil War Part Three, The Straits of Tian

The guys have defeated the Pirates and are sailing triumphantly to Tian (but they don't know *why*). The trip to Tian is mostly uneventful (there was a bit involving the Na-Ku, but I'll skip that for now... and don't worry, it wasn't that great. I think the Na-Ku have a lot of game potential, but that encounter was kinda lame. My fault.) Abdul works on his seamanship, and Crush watches the Kang do their Kanquan drills up on deck (minus Rakshan). Everyone congratulates Flynn on his exceptional bravery against the pirates (and teases Chris for his lack-

luster die rolls). Lucas shamelessly recounts his remarkable deeds of swashbuckling daring-do that the rest of the party somehow missed.

Okay, Tian. I actually have my notes from that session with me, so I'll quote from them:
[editorial comments in brackets]

[my notes for the description for the Players entering the harbor]

The ship enters the harbor and is immediately flanked by four elegant Sunra Dragon Barques (show drawings). Each Barque flies colorful banners and has trumpeters and drummers on its deck. They are playing a steady, triumphant march. Sounds like an anthem of some kind. The Kang are still below. The players ship is guided to a secluded dock adorned with massive golden statues of armored Kang Warriors. [The players give me looks of "uh... what's going on here?"]

Along the dock are thousands of figures, mostly Kang warriors in full dress battle armor -- standing in rank and file. There are also Vajra infantrymen (show pictures) and Mandalan servants. [Pat decides Vajra are cool-lookin']. A Crested Dragon lounges among the tiny humanoids as well [!!!!]. The Quan noble [oh yeah, there was a Quan with them, too. Forgot to mention that... the PCs expect all this is for him...] emerges and is swiftly and quietly escorted away by his handful of attendants.

There is silence. The ship creaks. The Dragon breathes. Everyone waits. [PCs gulp] Two Kang appear from below and there is a fanfare of trumpets. All the warriors salute in the Kang style. (there is that sound of thousands of arms snapping to attention... I love that sound).

The younger Kang (Dragonlord Kol) wears black full-dress battle armor with brilliant blue silk undergarments. Under his arm is a silver-bound tome. The older Kang is clad in gleaming silver dress battle armor and black silk undergarments. A black iron sculpted band crests his helm and his bracers bear ornately carved sigils. His rings glitter in the sun. As they pass the party, Kol whispers, "Follow me -- at a distance, do not speak."

They mount the dock and walk towards the throng. Three figures move from the group to intercept them: A Vajra engineer wearing costly garments and armor [*hint 2*], and two Kang Warriors. All three bow their heads deeply and salute. They all utter a single word in the language of the Kang, "Kirun". This is a Kang words almost everyone knows. It means, "Warlord".

[at this point the party looks at me with this, *look*. kinda like, "WARLORD?!!!" "THE KANG WARLORD?!!!" "ARE YOU KIDDING?!!!" "WE'VE BEEN TRAVELING WITH THE WARLORD?!!!" I think they remember how close they came to fighting him...]

If anyone knows Kang - they can translate [no one did], otherwise, the Sunra captain will.

The Vajra says, "My most honored lord, Rakshan," He turns to the younger Kang, "Dragonlord Kol, welcome back to Tian."

Lord Kol speaks, "Chief Lantu, Dragonlord Kalat, Dragonlord Kyreel, the Empire is again complete. Our journey is at an end."

Lantu speaks, "Was your journey fruitful, lord?"

Kol: "It was, my friend." he pats the tome. [*TWO hints*] Lantu grabs his wrist, a smiling gesture among the Vajra.

Dragonlord Kalat speaks, "Warlord, we are at your mercy. Do with us as you will." Warlord Rakshan looks at the Dragonlord and nods. The three retreat back to the head of the throng. Rakshan and Kol walk down the the aisle between the assembled troops. Another trumpet fanfare. Warlord Rakshan mounts the Crested Dragon.

The warriors and assembled personnel turn as one and march down the avenue on either side of the striding dragon, to the sound of drums. [that was fun to describe. the players responded well.]

[note: all of the above is accurate, but abbreviated] Next scene:

Each party member is given spacious accommodations in what was once the Emperor's Estate (it's being turned into a museum to Kang history, but in the interim, visiting big-wigs are housed there). The golden spires of the Former Imperial Palace can be seen from the estate (the "seat" of the empire is being moved to Shonan, but in the mean time, the throne remains in Tian. Tian will also remain the "heart" of the imperium... the trade routes and contacts are well established. The Warlord's Keep in Shonan will be the "official" capital, however). In their quarters they each find a leather pouch which contains 29 Quan Emperors (still official imperial currency) and a gold ring stamped with the imperial Dragon. Also in the room is an outfit of luxury quality in the style of the occupants heritage. It is made from fine silks and hides with silver clasps and buttons. [for Crush the Thrall this consisted of an exomorph hide loincloth and a vest of land dragon hide, dyed black. Flyn the Jaka received a similar wardrobe in brilliant red silk.] The Mandalan attendants show the adventurers the pools where they may bathe. [the party ate this up. especially Lucas (Pat). Most of them are used to sleeping on the ground and going weeks in the same clothes]

[Why the attention? Well, there are several reasons... I'd rather wait to go into them, though... you'll see...]

It's the 47th of Jhang, the party is invited to stay three days for the feast of the Red God (1st of Drome).

Okay, some editorial comments. I, as the GM, have *no idea* what's going on here yet. Granted, I know what's in the tome now, and why Kol calls Lantu (a slave) his friend. But that's it. The party is convinced that this is actually going somewhere. Me, I'm worried. It's obviously building toward something, but what? I have to come through in a big way. And fast. We're playing while I'm making this stuff up. I had about a week to plan the Tian return and the above is as far as I got. So, I'm strapped. And, as usual, the players save me. Pat gets the equivalent of 2900 gold for each of his characters (Lucas, Abdul) and he wants to go *shopping*. (Pat is notorious for this...

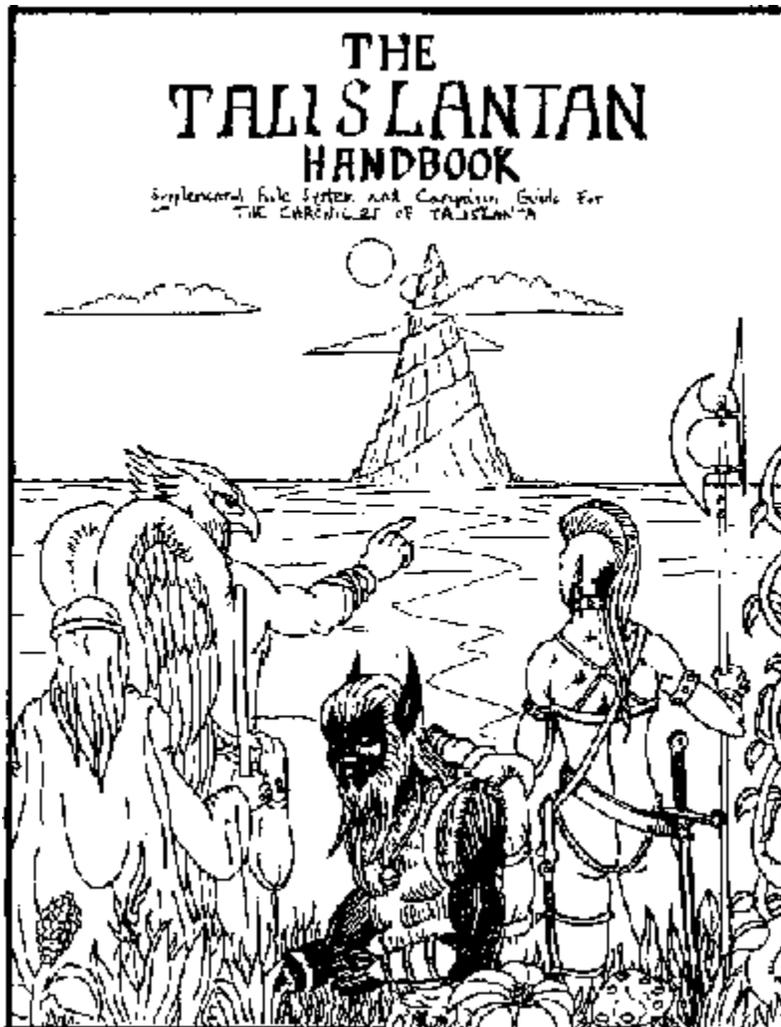
he spends his money as soon as he gets it) (in games, I mean). The other players are willing to take a look around the city. So, for the next THREE HOURS we shop. All I have to do is colorfully describe the city / shops / stuff (and I have been imagining Tian for so long it's easy to do... It's like I've been there). This gives my brain three hours to plan. I really needed it too. Unfortunately, those three hours go by and I'm still clueless. Ooops.

Oh, I just found a short description of the city... here it is, for those of you adventuring in the Kang Empire:

...by the way, the land around Tian is green and mountainous, like Hawaii (remember the great scenery in /Jurassic Park/?). Tian itself is a massive city, some say it's the most beautiful city in the world. The palace district is full of golden spires, arches, bridges, and walkways. Banners fly over the streets that arch and curve over and through the estates of the imperial elite. Mandalan parks and gardens fill every square or intersection, with canals, streams and waterfalls flowing between them. [anyone who has that great book /Dinotopia/, look at the scenes from Waterfall City and you'll get what I mean (just imagine a more golden look to stuff... richer looking)] All of this was built for the excessive Quan when they ruled the Empire but the Kang don't seem to be in a hurry to change it. Outside the palace district, however,....

That's where the notes end. Don't know where they were going, either.

Well, on that note, I'm done for now. Ick, the sun is coming up. I really ought to sleep one of these nights. Next... Part Four... the plot thickens... and Wu Tsen makes another appearance. See ya next time...



John "grins
maniacally" Harper

An original design sketch for the front cover of Talislanta's First Edition.

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