Credits

front layout and design
Victor Raymond

cover illustration
Giovanna Fregni

editorial help
Chris Davis

Index
Krista Donnelly
The Ever-Glorious Empire:

Éngsvan hla Gánga

By Baréka N'Shanyál

Of the Clan of the High Pinnacle,
Librarian, and Curator of the Museum of
Our Lord Prince,
Rereshqála Tlakotáni,
At His Palace Near the Divine City
of Jakálla, the Mighty, the Glorious
1. A WORD...

Perhaps the greatest influence on modern Tékumel is that of Éngsvan hla Gánega, also named Engsvanyálú, the Golden Age, the Empire of the Priestkings. Gaze upon any city: those graceful spires and arched colonnades are Engsvanyálí. Listen to the languages of the Five Empires: they overflow with Engsvanyálí borrowings, grammatical categories, concepts, similes, idioms, and metaphors. Look upon any sculpture, any picture, any book-illumination: the influence of Engsvanyálú is there, from the Isles of Tsoléi in the west to the pastel domes of Ssórmu on the east coast of Salarvyá. Pick up any book: the voices of the ancient Engsvanyálí sages speak to you again from out of the past.

I, Baréka hiShanyál, of the Clan of the High Pinnacle, Librarian, and Curator of the Museum of the gracious Prince, Rereshqála Tlaktóni, do set down this brief account in order to delight those who seek wisdom. My treatise cannot match the offerings of those who have gone before.: I do homage to the Priest Dumán Langshá, who composed the learned Shártokoi Guál Dáimi ("A Priest There Was"), and to the Committee of Prelates who created the encyclopaedic Éngsvan hla Gánega, Kolumébabárdálisa ("Éngsvan hla Gánega, the Mighty and Powerful Empire") in the reign of our noble God-Emperor Arshú'u, the Ever-Splendid, in days gone by. I must also praise the various editions of the Jurrúmul Pavátíio ("The Scrolls of Pavár"), over which scholars have laboured all their lives, and I will furthermore speak highly of the records of the Chancery in Avanthár. I have also consulted other treatises without number and spent long nights sitting by my rush-light in the musty darkness of the Great Library of Tumíssa. My thanks, thus, to these, and to others who have aided me.

The Immortal Gods have seen fit to gift me with the curiosity, the perseverance, and the talent to set pen to paper in this endeavour. May they grant me the life, strength, and health to complete it!

[Baréka hiShanyál's text has been edited in order to make it intelligible to a non-Tsolyáni reader. Some data unknown to the author are also included, as are occasional comments. -- Translator.]

2. Lord Enomé:

The story of Éngsvan hla Gánega begins in the last millennium of the First Imperium. The Three States of the Triangle were already dust. The Dragon Warriors had come and gone, pillaging, ravishing, and ranging the land like the monsters they are said to have ridden. The Fishermen Kings ruled for a time, and were followed by the First Imperium, created by the ambitious and lustful Queen Nayári, named "She of the Silken Thighs." No one now knows the names of all of the deities these peoples worshipped, their customs, or their histories. As the adage says, "The world is different with every sunrise."

One of the major deities of Nayári’s realm was Lord Enomé, one of the Aspects of the deity we call Lord Ksárul today. He was not as bloodthirsty as hideous Jráka, that Aspect of Ksárul worshipped by the Bednálljans at Maryáhlu [Mrelú], or dazzling Chótl, the Blinding Sun, whose temples filled the skies of Ja’akáth [Jakálla] with the smoke of sacrifice. Among these, Lord Enomé was considered mild: he figured in many legends, and occupied himself with scholarship, magical research, and the arts. Yet he also accepted the blood of infants,
Éngsvan hla Gánga

whose corpses were then interred in pottery jars beneath the foundations of cities and temples to ward off such as the Wanderers Between the Worlds.

Enomé’s shrine on Gánga Isle in the Southern Sea was visited by pilgrims seeking remedies and miracles. The island was inconsequential of itself: "a haven for clam-diggers," as one Bednálljan writer puts it. Still, Ships crammed with devotees plied the waters from Jakálla, Vrá, Penóm, and even from Chame'él and Tsatsayága in Salarvyá to seek the Shrine of Lord Enomé. A fragmentary record preserved in the Bednálljan Chancery speaks of "85,700 Rachár [Bednálljan silver coins, each worth about 4 modern Tsolyáni Káitars], paid as taxes upon a year's income from this temple." A later text speaks of "crowding throngs of worshippers, garbed in robes of a myriad hues, singing praises, and bearing gifts of incense and treasure to Lord Enomé." Alas, there is no trace of this temple today; it lies beneath the murky waters of Msúmtel Bay, drowned in the catastrophe that overtook Gánga.

Pavár's temple was considered fairly large for its time: a sprawling complex of halls, shrines, offices, hostels, and courtyards, where priests and pilgrims jostled with administrators, guides, hawkers, pimps, seers, scribes, prostitutes, beggars, and gawkers. It included shops where visitors might purchase flowers, incense, amulets, talismans, copies of Enomé's texts, astrological readings, and religious artefacts. The redolence of smoke, Vrés-incense, spices, dust, and perfume vied with the stench of sweat, rotting fruit peels, and excrement. Hymns, chatter, laughter, braying horns and squealing flutes, dancers' bells and cymbals, and the droning thunder of processional drums constantly assailed the ears. This was a temple much like those found today throughout the Five Empires, familiar, yet different. In those far-off days the folk of Gánga Isle did not speak Tsolyáni but the harsh Salarvyáni of the Bednálljan overlords, the softer syllables of nascent Engsvanyáli, or a dozen, a hundred, other tongues from the lands bordering the southern ocean. Members of the nonhuman races, too, came to this shrine: the erudite Pé Chói, the Páchí Léi, the reptilian Shén, the Swamp Folk of what is now Mu'ugalavyá, and the gruff Ahoggyá of Salarvyá. Modern farmers tilling their fields have even exhumed the exoskeletons of Tinalíya and the bones of the sharp-fanged Pygmy Folk of Yan Kór, although these species must have been rare so far from their homes.

3. A Priest There Was ...

As with the forest that grows from the seed of a single Gapúl-tree, the Empire of the Priestkings arose from a single source: a priest named Pavár, who served in Enomé's shrine on Gánga Isle. It is not known whether he was born and raised on the island, or whether he travelled there as an adult, perhaps to escape the ugliness of the mainland where the lords of the First Imperium struggled and slew one another interminably. Nothing is known of his antecedents, his clan, or his childhood. We know only what has been preserved in later histories; this is all too often blurred by the fingers of the Weaver of Skeins, and so lost forever.

Pavar's position in Enomé's shrine is also unknown. The earliest texts speak of him as a "ritual priest" [Tsolyáni: Shártokoi]; others call him a "scholar priest" [Tsolyáni:
Kusijáktojí]. Did he officiate at one of the rites of his stern deity, or was he one of those who hunch over records and deeds and wills and scrolls? Did he kneel upon the dais behind the altars, chanting the praises of his deity? Did he collect prayer petitions from pilgrims and submit them to those who passed them on to the god? If he was lucky, he may have served as a teacher or even a researcher in the temple's Hall of Wisdom. It is certain that he was not a senior scholar or powerful prelate.

There are no contemporary pictures or descriptions of Pavár, although there are hundreds, thousands, of later depictions. Most of these latter show Pavár as small, thin, stooped, middle-aged, and crippled. This may be a conventional and fictitious portrayal, of course: an insignificant little man who brought down a mighty empire. Yet Pavár has also been drawn as tall and heroic -- a concession to artistic conventions that require important persons to be shown large, while minor characters are small. In Fasíltum he has been given the hawk-beaked nose of the noble Vríddi clan; in Salarvyá he is dark, hairy, and a trifle over-plump. At least the nonhuman Pé Chói have not painted him as one of themselves! In fact, we know little of his personal life and physical form.

4. The Gods of Pavár:

At some time during his later life, Pavár began those studies that eventually led to the formulations contained in his greatest composition: Jurrúmul Pavártio ("The Scrolls of Pavár"). He himself speaks of a "visitation" from the Gods of Stability: a vision, an actual meeting, a dream? He does not describe this, except to say that he was "contacted" first by gentle, grey Thám [Thúmis]; then came Nallál [Hnálla], the Lord of Light; then Lady Evuén [Avánthe], the Goddess of crops and fertility; then other-worldly Ba'álk [Belkhán], the Master of the Paradises of Those Who Have Gone On; and finally imperious Kerék [Karakán], the War-God. These are the Tlomitlányal, the Five Lords of Stability. To Pavár, these deities revealed their essences and attributes, their legends, their theology, and their commandments for humankind.

Each of these Gods is accompanied by one "Cohort": a lesser deity who embodies some particular feature of his or her master's sphere of activity: Kátén [Keténgku], the Healer, Cohort of Thúmis, Dhré [Drá], the Uncaring, the Hymn-Singer, who stands in endless adoration of bright Hnálla, Dhalé [Dilínála], the Chaste, who serves Avánthe, Khúan [Qón], the Guardian of the Souls of the Hereafter, whose master is Belkhán, and Chökhár [Chegárra], the Hero-King, who embodies statecraft and wise rule for the war-god, Karakán.

The terrible deities of the First Imperium also appeared to Pavár, but differently than they had been pictured previously by the Bednálljans and the priesthoods of the First Imperium. They had been worshipped under many names and guises since time immemorial: Khéri [Hrü'ü], the Master of Change and Chaos; Jráka [Ksárul], the Doomed Prince of the Blue Room, who loves knowledge for his own benefit alone; Vaomáhl [Vímúhla], the Principle of Fiery Destruction; Qúrgha [Sárku], the Lord of Worms and Tombs, whose province is the survival of the intellect, whatever may transpire with the body; and languorous Tyalméya [Dlamélish], the Emerald Lady of Fleshly Joys. These are the Tlokiriqáluyal,
the Five Lords of Change; Pavár included them, too, in his pantheon.

As with the Tlomitlányal, the Tlokiriqáluyal, have "Cohorts" too: Örú [Wurú], the Foe of Stability, who serves Hrü'ü; Göghün [Grugánu], the Knower of Spells, who aids Ksárul; Chanákh [Chiténg], the Drinker of Blood and Reaper of Cities, whose master is Vimúhla; Do'oróm [Durrítlámish], He of the Rotted Face, the Opener of Catacombs, who is the Cohort of Sárku; and seductive Hráil [Hriháyal], the Dancing Maiden of Temptation and Mistress of the Thirty-Two Unspeakable Acts, who aids Dlamélish. All ten "Cohorts" together are called the Hlimékluyal.

Pavár understood that these beings are interdimensional entities, rather than theological "gods." They are immanent and act within history, as do creatures of flesh and blood. They communicate with their worshippers and have their own objectives, unintelligible as these may be to less-powerful, limited beings. On occasion, they work "miracles" and answer prayers. Proofs of their existence and actions abound. There are thus no atheists on Tékumel, for the Gods demonstrably exist! These "Gods" differ from the constructs of humankind's theologies and philosophies, however, in that they are not simple projections of our own anthropomorphic instincts. As Pavár says:

"We strive, and yet our imaginings bring forth nothing but glorified portraits of ourselves. We see naught but a mighty Father, the magnified image of our own fathers, or else a divine Mother, who will take us to her bosom and comfort our tears as did our own mothers. Everywhere we perceive the cosmos in terms of our own sexual organs and urges. When we tremble before the Unknown, we exalt the rain, the wind, the sun, and the darkness. Why? Because we are limited, and we do not understand. Yet think: why should the Gods -- the Creators and Maintainers of universes -- conform to these petty fancies? Can we even recognise the Divine when we encounter it? What can the lowly Shqá beetle comprehend of the nature of the man who casually brushes it from its twig in passing? Should the man turn to the humble insect and somehow address it in terms it could understand, what else could it do but kneel in awe and obey?" Scroll III, Stanza 90.

In reference to what humanity can perceive of the "Gods." he says::

"The Gods are like stones seen through rippling water. They are neither of the shape we see, nor are They quite where we see Them. We know Their reality. The seeker can plunge his hand into the current and touch the stones. Thus it is with the Gods. Yet, like the boulders of the riverbed, They are elusive, slippery, and distant from our ken. They are the Gods." Scroll XXXIX, Stanza 76.

We are limited beings. The Many Planes contain other entities who are mightier and more puissant than we. Our bragging is:

"... The puffing and croaking of the Hórok-frog, who sits in his puddle and propounds his wisdom to an uncaring universe." Scroll XXIV, Stanza 43.

And again:

"... And if the Drí-ant is eaten by the Shqá-beetle, and if the Shqá-beetle is consumed by the Küni-bird, and if the Küni-bird falls prey to the beak of the Shánů'ũ [another large flying predator] -- what profits it to any of them to know that we are all composed of the same substance and essence? Each sees itself as the supreme pinnacle of being, and yet each is food for something mightier than itself.. To know that the Shqá-beetle is but a creature like the Drí, save mightier and more