



HEROQUEST



HeroQuest Voices *Peoples of Glorantha*

Concept: Nick Brooke. § *Project Manager:* Nick Brooke.

Edited by: Mark Galeotti and Nick Brooke, with Chris Gidlow and Stephen Martin.

Illustrations: Marc Moreno, Tom Sullivan.

Layout: Stephen Martin. § *Runes:* Issaries, Inc.

A Personal View of Kralori Life
Mark Galeotti

Immortal Wisdom from the Kingdom of Splendor
Greg Stafford and Sandy Petersen; additional material by Mark Galeotti



*Legion are the peoples of the world, many and varied are their ways.
All are connected by the cosmic webs of Arachne Solara
Who brings and binds all together, in life as in this book,
Who takes and rends apart those who would tear her webs.*

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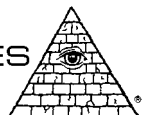
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A Personal View of Kralori Life

What My Father Told Me

Who are you?

I am Bi Yao of Tan Lo. My two names denote my importance in this village as well as my most productive role, as Ledger Scribe, whose duty and pleasure it is to maintain accurate records of births, deaths, livestock, produce, auspicious events, crimes, judgments and funeral offerings. Upon these records, good governance and just order depend, which is why, feckless Number Two Son, I had to beat you so severely when you ground ochre instead of cinnabar to make my ink, meaning that my Official Writings Three-Times Darkened Red brush was tainted with mere Semi-Formal Blushing Incarnadine pigment.

Who are we?

We are the Bi Dan family. We are the only Bi in the village, and so we handle all matters of writing, scribing and counting, except those who are quite correctly the work of the staff of the cantonal mandarin, the eminent Guan Li Chih.

What makes us great?

We are Kralori and thus the finest of all people: respectful, virtuous, diligent and happy in our reverence for Godunya, our Divine Dragon Emperor. Beyond the mighty Shan Shan Mountains to the west are only barbarians, devils, and ghosts. Remember the Third Yes and No. *Yes to Pride, No to Uncertainty*. The humblest Kralori ox-driver is nonetheless greater than a king of the foreigners, for they are so corrupt that they have become devils, even if they do not know it.

Where do we live?

Kralorela is the Kingdom of Splendor, where all wisdom, virtue and enlightenment reside. From the rolling terraces with their fertile paddy fields to the teeming cities, ours is a land of harmony, wonder and majesty.

We used to live in Beizu, a town outside Fuknama, capital of this province of Hanjan. There were many, many other registrars there, so I was known as Bi Yao the Silver Ring, after the adornment with which I awoke one morning after a particularly riotous revel in my youth. Beware Lur Nop rice wine, and the company of sailors!

We came to Tan Lo because the Village Elder, the most excellent Hong Ba of Tan Lo, was in need of a Ledger Scribe and he was my second cousin's third daughter's brother in law. Simply to demonstrate his respect and cousinly affection, he offered this fine house with, mark you, a wooden roof, and a purely token stipend.

How do we live?

We live well, for I am a man of some substance here, and work day and night. Even when you think I am sleeping of a summer afternoon in the cherry garden, I am contemplating the felicitous numbers of the Ledgers. Those scurrilous wretches who whisper in their hands that Hong Ba hides some of the tribute due our gracious mandarin and I write the Ledgers accordingly, are liars and tongue-biters. Their gourds will shrivel and their children will all be daughters.

What is important to us?

Remember the first Yes and the first No: *Yes to Reverence, No to Novelty*. Reverence is a step backwards into our eternal future. We have much to revere. First and last are the dragons. Second are the Emperors, now dragons themselves. Third and everywhere are our ancestors, who lovingly scorn our failures that we may improve and defend us from spirits and devils who would steal our hearts and livers in the night. Fourth and ever are our traditions, which show us Right Action that we may serve the Emperor after our deaths in the Excellent Palace of Pleasant Reward.

We rise with the dawn and join the rest of the village in the Imperial Adorations, the Prescribed Movements, and the Harmony Song, and to hear Hong Ba's announcements. We seek harmonious community, punctilious adherence to duty and the opportunity to place our insignificant and miserable lives at the service of our lords and betters.

Of course there are many lesser things of importance. An extra pepper in your bowl of rice, a beautiful sunrise, the delicate tones of a hei-pipe played by a graceful maiden. For me, it is important that every stroke of the brush I make is flawless and elegant, whether I am penning my seasonal report to the Exacting Preceptor of Cantonal Statistics or a letter for an illiterate farmer. It will also be a happy day for me and your mothers when one of you boys marries well and produces grandsons to take forward the name of Bi Dan.

Who rules us?

All power flows from the Divine Dragon Emperor, whose radiant wisdom is interpreted by the divine archexarchs and exarchs who lead his armies and rule each of the fifteen provinces in his illustrious name.

Tan Lo falls within Three Gold Pig Canton, governed by mandarin Guan Li Chih. He visits every season, to receive taxes, pass judgments and lead the Sunrise Rituals, but we more often have to travel to his manse on Chong Ho Hill for him to hold court or notarize wills. Hong Ba is chief in the village, though, and assigns duties and appoints the Watermaster in charge of the irrigation ditches and the Constable.

What makes us great?

Were you not listening, worthless ox of a son? I have told you: we are Kralori! What more needs to be said?

What is evil?

Rebellion is evil: the Divine Order is the ladder upon which we ascend to perfection. Ignorance is evil: knowledge of Correct Thought is the foundation-stone of virtue. Sin is evil: the Four Vices, unchecked, rob a man of wisdom, a woman of fertility, and a people of magic.

What is my lot in life?

If you study hard, you may be worthy of taking the exams to enter the mandarin caste. You are probably too stupid and lazy, though, but as you are a Bi Dan, you will probably not become a farmer. Maybe you could become a factor, taking goods around the country in the name of the Imperial Commissariat. Whatever you do, do it well to uphold the honor of your family. Then your name will be written in gold leaf in our family shrine and

HEROQUEST VOICES

your descendants will burn the good incense in front of it every Revered Ancestors' Day.

Marry well: two wives shows substance and authority, but as I know too well, three is a disharmonious number and leads to raised voices and broken pots. With two wives you should be sure to have sons. Daughters are just a burden, alas. Yes, I know that some families turn to the 'rocky cradle,' but this is illegal and immoral, and we are too well-known and -respected to drown our daughters.

What is the difference between men and women?

You must learn to value women. Your mother, for example, cost me two baskets of ginseng. Women have their virtues and their purposes in the great order. They raise the children, they cook the food, they attend to men's needs so they are not tempted into Incorrect Action.

However, they are clearly inferior to men, in whom the fiery upright powers of solar energy combine with the wisdom of the heavens. This is well known: all my brothers agree.

How do we deal with others?

If they are of a lower rung of the Divine Order, such as paddy farmers with but one name, treat them with polite condescension. But watch them carefully, for they are often feckless, idle and prone to strong drink and weak morals. Beat them fairly but firmly with a stout bamboo and they will thank you for the instruction and admonition.

To those above you, show respect and decorum. Practice the Seven Nods, Eight Kow-Tows, and Three Obeisances and be sure to know which to use when approaching whom, and at what time. Never again let me catch you using the Yellow Tiger Kow-Tow to a military officer during the morning!

Those who are not even of the Order, such as barbarians, outcasts, and the more sacred animals, are of little worth or interest. Some may have been born foreigners as punishment, but they have the chance of redemption. For others, their unfortunate birth may have been a clerical error by some minor functionary of the Celestial Court. In this case they may be judged *kralo-nei*, "Kralori Inside," and acquire the dragon tattoo of their status, but I have never yet met such a person.

Who are our enemies?

There are blights and predations against which we must defend ourselves. Within, there are the shadowy crimes of the hexads and the tongs, as well as covens who worship Chaos and other vile aberrations. Without, the beast-men of Prax periodically storm the Iron Forts guarding our western gateways. The Imperial Dispatch of Truth and Enlightenment reassuringly informs us that all such attempts end in failure, though, so we have nothing to fear.

To the north, the Kingdom of Ignorance is a blasted waste inhabited by beasts and near-beasts, who fornicate even during inauspicious hours, openly defying Right Action and the Emperor's just and divine authority. Even now armies muster to cleanse this suppurating pit of corruption.

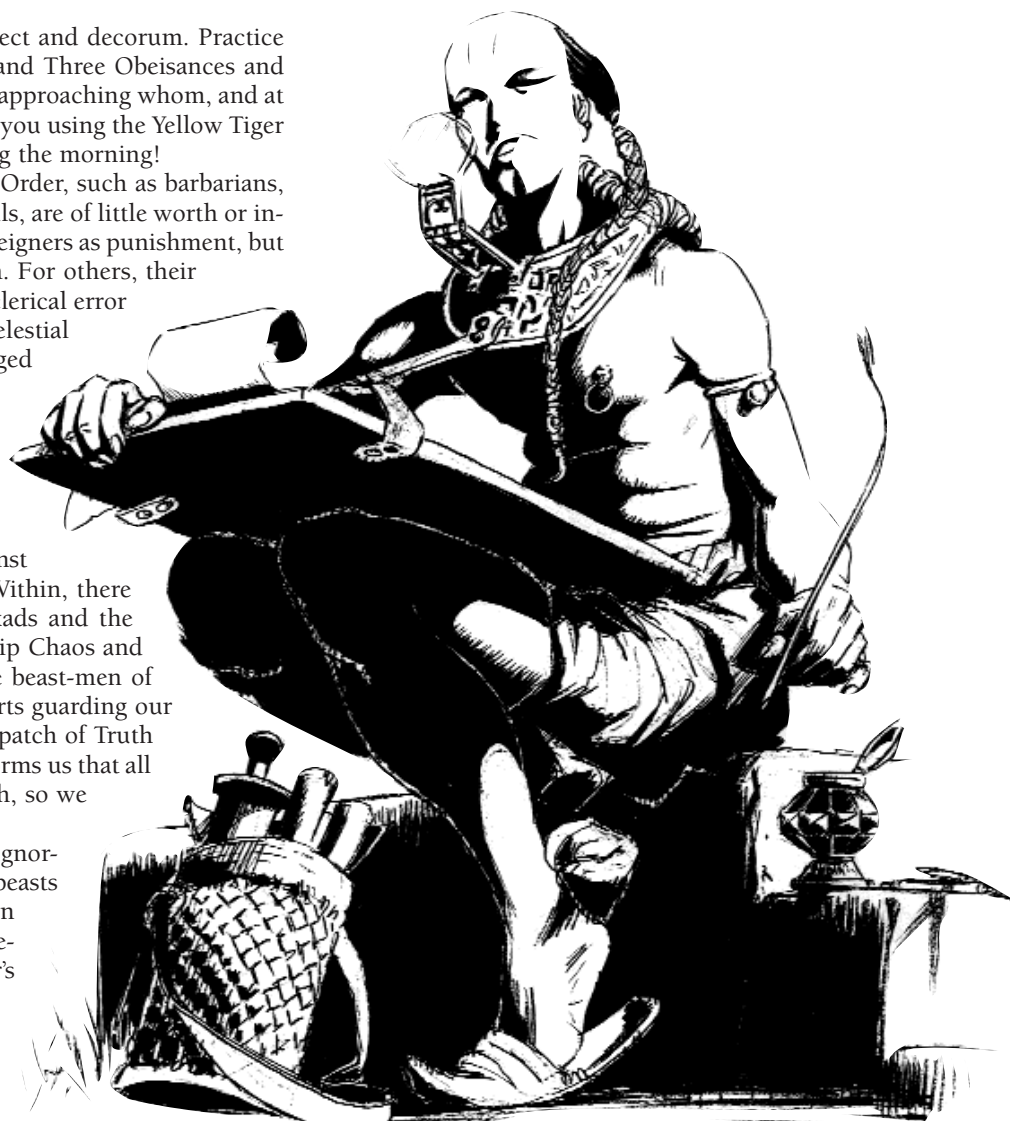
Who are my deities?

Every hill and village has its own gods, spirits, and powers, part of the Divine Order. Atop them all are the Cosmic Dragon and the Deified Dragon Emperors.

I myself pay special obeisance to Vashanti, Emperor of Sacred Nine, whose orderly mind and keen understanding led to his creation of the Web of Righteous Knowledge and thus the logical and perspicacious administration of the Kingdom of Splendor. The fine crystal lens that makes even the smaller ideograms as clear as the boil on Number Three Wife's nose was a gift from Hu Shen Gao, called the Orange Mandarin, for the great service I did the temple of Vashanti in Beizu, even though that meant I also gained powerful enemies there.

What is there to do around here?

Do not be presumptuous! You have yet to scour my jade inkpots, clean Number One Son's room, and gather in the garlic-pigs. Only then can you think about going and swimming in the canals with your friends or practicing Two Steps Kicks with old Fu Hu.



KRALORELLA

Immortal Wisdom from the Kingdom of Splendor

What the Dragon Lord Whispers

Where did the world come from?

The venerable Cosmic Dragon was the sole inhabitant of the former universe. In its inerrability, it comprehended that the many is superior to the one, and it dismembered its sacred form. From Cosmic Dragon's awesome breath came First Ocean. From Cosmic Dragon's consecrated bones came First Mountain. From Cosmic Dragon's exalted scales and hairs came animals and plants. From Cosmic Dragon's ineffable soul came TarnGatHa. First Ocean properly apportioned itself into many oceans, seas, lakes, and sky waters. First Mountain broke into ranges of peaks

and hills. The first creatures obediently bred to cover Cosmic Dragon's world. TarnGatHa formed the Sky Gods from his sacrosanct spirit.

Where did I come from?

From Cosmic Dragon's numinous heart came Ebe, Wild Man. The Empress pitied Ebe, and created Okerio Allgiver, first woman. Ebe was tamed to live in quietude with Okerio. Their child is the venerable Aptanace the Sage, and we descend from his divine children.

Aptanace's children each took his rightful place in society: one was the first potter, one the first builder, the first tailor, astrologer, herbalist, farmer, and so on. Thus arose the seven hundred Divine Arts of civilization.

Why do we die?

Death is the natural state of the universe. Ebe was the first of all to die. Correct Thought teaches us that death is a transition, a change. Just as a Dragon Emperor retires his luminous crown to progress to the sixteenth stage of existence, we must discard our bodies to reach our ultimate goals. The hallowed Sun Emperor shows us his path to the superior afterlife.

What happens after we die?

Most folk travel through the dread court of the Udam Bagur, the Archexarch of Hell, to the Excellent Palace of Pleasant Reward to await the Passing On of His Supereminence the Dragon Emperor. At that blessed time, their souls accompany him to the auspicious next stage of existence.

Why am I here?

Unrelenting service to Holy Ones is the secret for happiness. We exist to serve the Emperor, and he exists to serve us. Foreign lands are trapped in ignorance, knowing only inferior or false gods.

How do I do magic?

All life knows its own proper magic. Like eating and sleeping, it is part of existence. Our exarchs know powerful dragon magic. City officials have strong and true magic from the Gods of Light. Farmers in their fields know potent secrets of the Rice Mother that I shall never know and also the simple magic of the so-called Little Mandarins. Talk with me and I shall tell you what magic is meant for your life.

I have heard of other powers. Can you tell me the truth about...

...Chaos?

When the egregious Rebel Gods sought to overthrow the Divine Order they uncovered dreadful allies too powerful to control. Only the wisdom and sacrifice of our commendable land regenerated the pure universe.

...Magasta?

The monster gods of the oceans are enemies of both sky and earth, and ever seek to quench life with their liquid powers. Baneful secrets are hid within the lethal depths of the ocean and behind its blind banks of fog.





...Orlanth?

Orlanth the Rebel is the fearsome usurper who sought to tear down our benign Dragon Empire. He destroyed the Golden Age with pernicious wars. Yet he was conquered through the purity of our celestial truth, and is now tamed by compromise.

...Sedenya?

Those unfortunates dwelling in sordid lands beyond our own certainly feel their lack. The Red Moon is an inferior attempt by the inhabitants of Peloria to emulate our Dragon Emperor.

...Sorcerers?

The sorcerers of the West replace true devotion with empty philosophy. They fail to understand that what some call 'other worlds' are all part of the Cosmic Dragon. Emperor Thalurzni wielded sorcerer magic, but imbued with Correct Thought

...Spirits?

These are broken bits of the old universe, cut off from contact with higher planes. The poor and the lowly may deal with spirits, and these pathetic entities are grateful for any worship, but they are meaningless in the Divine Order.

I have heard of other races. Can you tell me the truth about...

At first, Ebe the Wild Man knew no restraint. Plunging through the world, he basely mated with trees, rocks, and beasts. These miscegenations produced the Four Hundred Sacred Races.

...Dwarves?

This strange race reveres a god who upholds cosmic order, but only by enslaving those who serve him and mocking true life. He is like an undead god.

...Elves?

These beings adore the Sun and are close to his presence always. Strong in summer and pitiful in winter, like the Sun, they and their mistress are tied to barren cyclicism, and can never be released to enjoy true spiritual progression.

...Trolls?

The foul and bitter smoke that preceded true creation could have become transparent and sweet, but the deplorable Rebel Gods prevented perfect completion. This corrupt residue still haunts the living and rules in the squalid lands of ignorance.

Gods of Kralorela

The Dragon Emperors

Before a Dragon Emperor is permitted to Pass On, he must bless all subsequent posterity. Thus did Daruda bring about the wondrous dragon magic, thus did Mikaday teach correct laws and ordinances, and thus did Vashanti create the Web of Righteous Knowledge to unite our nation under one government.

Even as we worship our present Dragon Emperor, Godunya, to attain spiritual progression, so do we worship past Emperors—save for Shang-hsa-may-his-name-be-cursed—to use their magic and skills to exalt our lives while we yet live. Their names tingle the tongue:

TarnGatHa, Face of Creator, the First, the immutable unity of all existence. He thought several beings and peoples into existence, then retired behind the Sky.

HeenMaroun, Peace of the World, the Second Emperor. All existence was his realm. He organized the world into its parts.

Metsyla, Light of Enlightenment, the Eagle Phoenix Emperor, who built the Palace of Eternal Light, made roads of gold

to link his cities, grew silver in the clouds, and created a light that people could eat like food.

Shavaya, Emperor of Splendor, who taught his language to all tribes so they could communicate with him and each other.

Daruda, the Dragon Emperor, who created and ordered the Summer Land Heaven

Thalurzni, Balancer of Elements and Alchemical Arbiter, the Great War Leader who defeated the Shadow Cancer, Earth Eater, Star Permutator, and Secret Waters, and who summoned the wrathful powers that destroyed and replaced the anti-gods.

Mikaday, Watcher of the Populace, who raised up the first mandarins to administer the Kingdom of Splendor and who wrote down his wise and ineluctable laws on stone obelisks for all to see and learn.

Vayobi, who became the War Dragon and brought down vile Sekever.

Vashanti, Emperor of the Dawn, who created the Web of Righteous Knowledge.

Yanoor, Who Stopped the Sun, and who committed ritual suicide rather than lead the frightened dead into oblivion.

Godunya, the Dragon Emperor of the Now.

Godunya and the Exarchs

We Children of Heaven are most fortunate. Even as we dwell in the pleasantest of lands, we are served by the wisest of rulers. In our Kingdom of Splendor are many exarchs whom we are blessed to worship. Through them, our souls touch the unattainable majesty of great Godunya, our sacred Dragon Emperor. Through him, our souls attain progression to higher planes of reality in the afterlife.

The Celestial Court

Beneath the Dragon Emperor is a mighty and glorious array of other deities, each with their appointed place within the Divine Order. They are many, but I speak here of only a few.

Halisayan the Good Wife and Mother of Life, who served Thalurzni, as the superior wife should serve her husband.

Miyo the Rice Mother, whose never-ending bounty blesses the basest of peasants and her generosity extends even to the scabrous and unclean. Other lands are cursed by her absence, forced to consume abominable provender.

Bodkartu, keeper of secrets and forbidden lore, who lurches through the nightmares of the Children of Heaven and bismirches the lovely robes of Halisayan. She strikes with disease, poison, and other evils. Yet gladly would we embrace a thousand such horrors to retain Halisayan's delightful presence.

Serelaloon the Compassionate One, who came to answer the prayers of the innocent with healing and kind actions.

The Mud-Faced Traditions

These are the simple but practical beliefs of the common folk, such as the Ebe and Okerio Tradition, through which they worship their ancestors; or the worship of Aptanace's Sons, such as Alou the Brushman and Julang Hombondol the Ditch-Digger. They lack spiritual depth and philosophical elegance, but they have an immediate and practical application to the shallow and inelegant but nonetheless worthy lives of the common folk.

The Path of Immanent Mastery

The thoughts of some among the Children of Heaven are clumsy and untutored. They foolishly believe that true inspiration and pure dragon powers can be attained through a hasty and crude approximation. The superior man comprehends their system's vanity. Our divine Emperor permits them to persist as a lesson in the folly of impatience.