

G U R P S

PLACES OF MYSTERY



By Phil Masters and Alison Brooks

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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by Alison Brooks and Phil Masters

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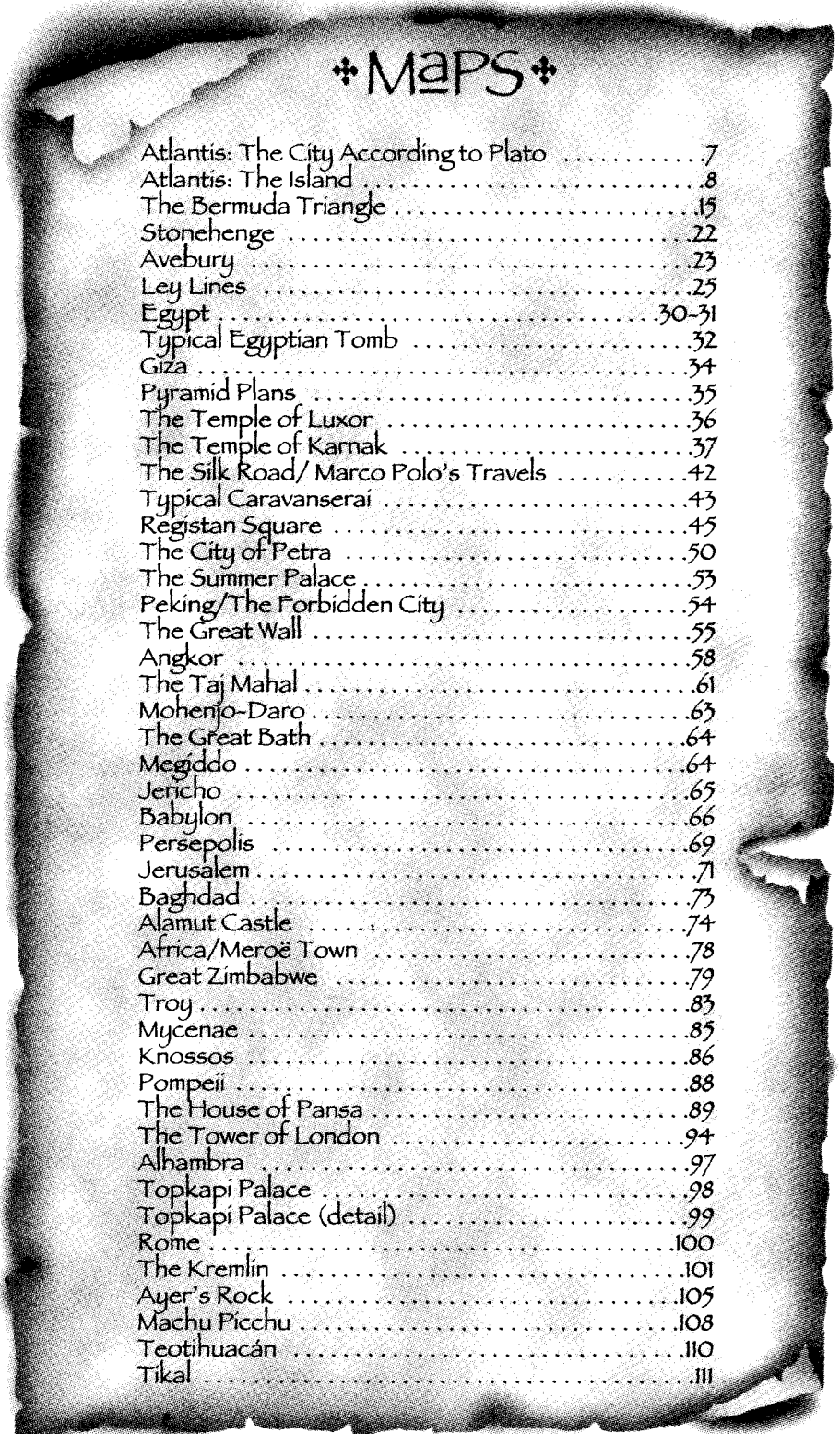
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❖ INTRODUCTION ❖

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the **GURPS** system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Pyramid. Our bimonthly magazine includes new rules and articles for **GURPS**, as well as information on our other lines: **Car Wars**, **Toon**, **Ogre Miniatures** and more. It also covers top releases from other companies – **Traveller**, **Call of Cthulhu**, **Shadowrun**, and many more.

New supplements and adventures. We're always working on new material, and we'll be happy to let you know what's available. A current catalog is available for an SASE.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all **GURPS** releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request.

Q&A. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

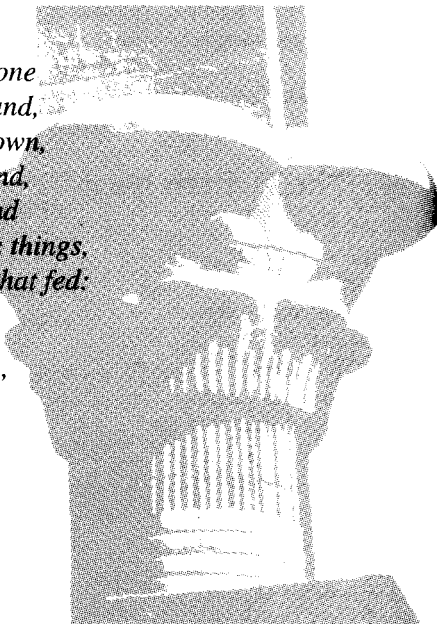
Illuminati Online. For those who have home computers, Illuminati Online supports SJ Games with discussion areas for many games, including **GURPS**. Here's where we do a lot of our playtesting! It's up 24 hours per day at 512-448-8950, at up to 28.8K baud (28.8 users should dial directly to 512-448-8988) – or telnet to io.com. Give us a call! Visit us on the World Wide Web at <http://www.io.com/sjgames/>. We also have conferences on CompuServe, GENie, and America Online.

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set**, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the **Basic Set** – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the **GURPS Basic Set**. Similarly, an M reference is to **GURPS Magic**, an IR indicates a page in **GURPS Imperial Rome**, IL means **GURPS Illuminati**, AZ means **GURPS Aztecs**, UT means **GURPS Ultra-Tech**, and an R means **GURPS Religion**.

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

– Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"



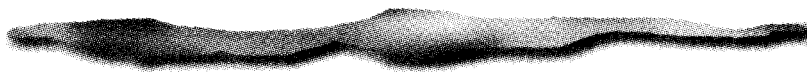
Welcome – to some of the strangest places in the world.

GURPS Places of Mystery is designed for use with a wide range of games. This is a book of places and locations, chosen because they all display a hint of the unusual. Some are widely believed to be centers of great magic; some "merely" have an interesting history, or unique features. Others are simply amazing tourist spots.

The sites chosen for this book are mostly buildings, cities, or other human constructions. We've slipped in a few *natural* places of mystery, such as Ayer's Rock (which is just as much a sacred site as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) and Loch Ness (which we just couldn't leave out), but they are exceptions. But this supplement is about the creations of humanity – in humanity's slightly stranger moments.

Some of the buildings and natural sites mentioned in this book are intact today, but time, nature, and the human tendency to fight wars being what they are, many are in ruins, or actually lost. (One or two may never have existed in the first place.) Still, ruins have lots of atmosphere: note the conclusion of Shelley's poem.

So let's explore!



How to Use This Book

The locations given in this book have a wide range of potential game uses, as discussed in Chapter 13. Here you'll find some notes on magic as it relates to "Places of Power," which are relevant to any campaign where magic works (or is thought to work). It also outlines a possible campaign which can be played as is or used for inspiration. The rest of the book provides an assortment of locations, ready to use or adapt as appropriate.

The descriptions and histories of sites serve a number of purposes. Apart from exploring what these places were for, they fill in background detail. This being a gamebook, we've thrown in some historically trivial but (we think) fascinating data that should provide adventure ideas as well as amusement value. We have aimed to provide enough historical data that any of these sites can be integrated into any "period" game, although obviously we can't cover everything; if you need to know what happened around, say, the Topkapi palace in June 1826 (the Ottoman Sultan massacred his own Janissaries), there are plenty of good reference books around.

Most of the descriptions of places in this supplement come with maps, drawings, or floor plans. These can fill various needs.

First, some pictures really are worth those thousand words; it's easier to visualize some things from a map than from description. GMs should consider showing players the maps and illustrations in this book as play progresses (provided the players don't learn too much that their characters wouldn't know).

Secondly, a GM might want to set a major incident in the location – maybe including a fight scene or a chase. GMs expecting to run anything particularly complex should take the time to make rough copies of relevant parts of these plans onto hex grids. (But *please* – respect copyright, as held by Steve Jackson Games or anyone else. Rough sketches copied from the book for personal use are fine, but distributing these things widely – for profit or not – is *not* acceptable. Persuade your friends to buy more copies of this or other books instead.)

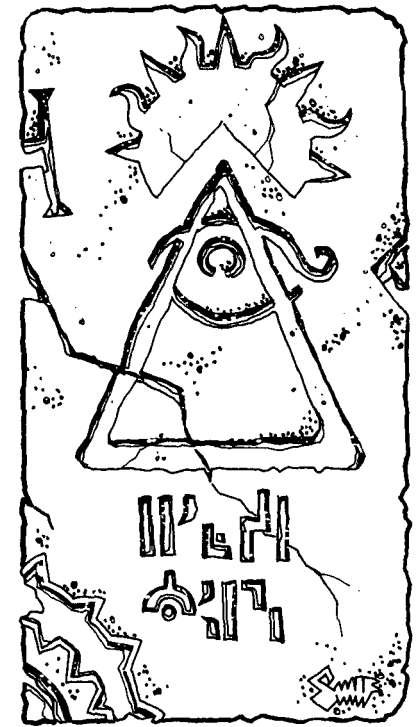
Third and lastly, maps like these can make useful references and aids when designing your own imaginary buildings and sites. After all, these buildings demonstrably function – they stay up, and people lived or worked in them. Too many game maps are like the infamous published plans for a fictional starship that had everything except bathrooms.

Gamers are imaginative people. These are interesting places. The combination should be remarkable!

A Note about Historical Accuracy

The authors took care to research the places presented here as thoroughly as time and resources permitted. However, this book is meant to provide ideas, inspiration and basic information useful to Game Masters. It is not meant to be a scholarly work explaining or debunking the mysteries surrounding these places (although, sad to say, respectable scientists have already done that in many cases). Nor is it meant to be a "fringe science" work promulgating the weirder aspects of these places.

So don't expect absolute historical accuracy, either in the descriptions and explanations of these "places of mystery" or in the maps and illustrations. They are here to give Game Masters something their imaginations can latch onto – how they use the ideas is up to them.



About the Authors

Alison Brooks found time to get a degree in Zoology and a PhD in Micropaleontology, until she was forced to go out into the world to earn a living. Unfortunately, the real world wasn't full of dragons, superheroes and high-tech cyber-ware supersoldiers, but she's working on that. Part of her master plan involves raising the level of consciousness about such things until enough people believe in them for them to really exist. She has written (in collaboration with Phil) parts of *Kingdom of Champions* for Hero Games. Her plan to conquer – er, educate – the world has continued with *Thicker Than Blood*, *With a Long Spoon*, *Foxbat Unhinged* and other devious plots still waiting to see the light of day. This book is the next stage in her plan. You have been warned.

Oh, and she used to keep a hedgehog.

Phil Masters contributed three monsters to the original TSR U.K. *Fiend Folio*, but he's better now. He's spent a lot of the years since then slaving over hot computers, but he's also found time to write *Kingdom of Champions* for Hero Games (with assistance from Alison and her husband), *GURPS Arabian Nights* for Steve Jackson Games and lots of other adventures and magazine articles. He lives in a small town in Britain and has a degree in Economics, but he's forgotten most of that. He, too, doesn't have a cat. He can be abused on the Internet at phil@philm.demon.co.u.k., or on CompuServe at 100044,3123.

1 ♦ ATLANTIS



Where humanity gets it wrong, by **your** time, is in imagining Atlantis as having any kind of **quantifiable** existence. Which of course it **hasn't**; not in the way they **imagine**, anyway.

There have been an awful lot of Atlantises, will be quite a few more. It's just a **symbol**. A symbol of the Art.

The true Atlantis is **inside** you, just as it's inside **all** of us. The sunken land is lost beneath the dark sea, lost beneath the waves of wet, black stories and myths that break upon the shores of our minds.

– Neil Gaiman, *The Books of Magic #1*

Plato's Story

Plato wrote a number of “dialogues,” imaginary philosophical discussions. Atlantis is described in one of these, the *Timaeus*, which mostly concerns natural philosophy (science). Plato claimed the story came to Greece through an earlier Athenian named Solon, a famous law-giver and poet who visited Egypt. Solon talked with Egyptian priests, who had access to historical records carved onto stone pillars. (The priests told Solon that the Greeks had forgotten most of their history due to natural disasters.) The story was that, 9,000 years earlier, the men of Athens had fought off the power of an island-empire “beyond the Pillars of Hercules” – that is, out in the Atlantic. (The Pillars of Hercules are the towering rocks on either side of the Straits of Gibraltar – the Rock of Gibraltar and the mountain called Jebel Musa.)

In those times, Athens was a great and noble city, but Atlantis ruled an empire which included not only the island, the size of “Libya and Asia put together,” but other lands as well. Atlantis invaded the Mediterranean, sweeping across North Africa and Italy. Athens became the leader of a defensive alliance, including all of Greece as well as Egypt and other lands, and although most of their allies were conquered or fell away, the Athenians were victorious, even liberating the conquered territories. However, at the moment of victory, a wave of earthquakes and floods swept the world, sinking Atlantis and wiping out the Athenian army. All that was left of the island was a mass of muddy shoals that made the Atlantic ocean forever nonnavigable. (A rather odd claim, as traders were sailing it in Plato's day.)

In the unfinished *Critias*, Plato described the history and society of Atlantis, as well as that of the ancient Athenians. Atlantis was allotted by Zeus to the sea god Poseidon, who fell in love with the mortal Atlantean Cleito. When she gave him ten sons, he divided the island between them and made them kings. The eldest was named Atlas (the name also of the titan condemned to bear the weight of the heavens upon his shoulders – possibly a deliberate cross-reference), and the island was named for him.

Atlantis had great natural resources, and its people became great traders; they were also noble and devout, and for many generations the place was a Utopia. However, the Atlanteans eventually became corrupt and greedy, leading to the war and their downfall – but here, Plato's writing breaks off.

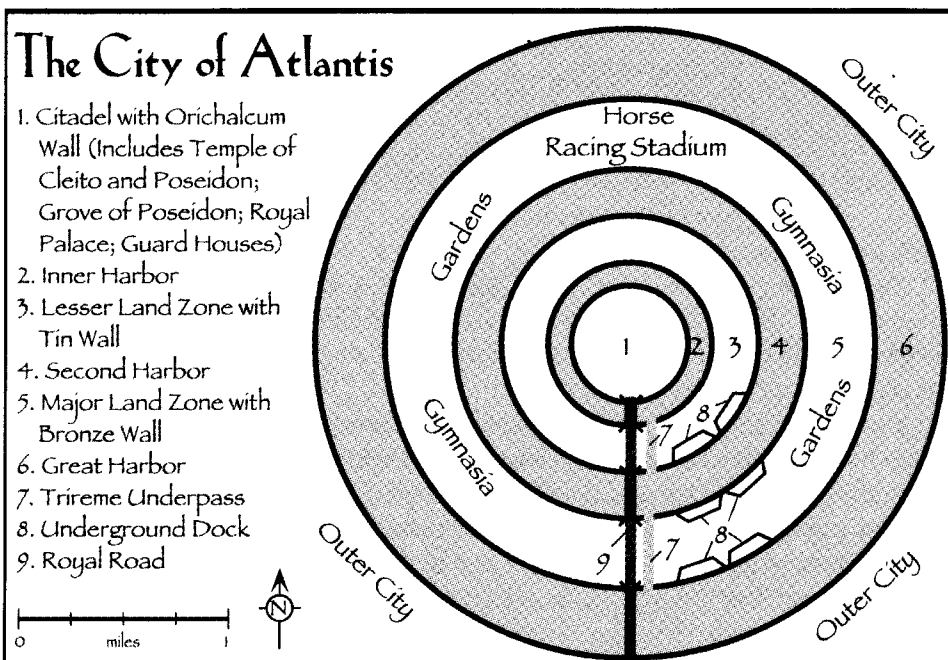
The City of Atlantis

The Greek philosopher Plato first wrote about this legendary “lost land.” He described an island in the Atlantic, ruled from a mighty city at its center. This metropolis was built around a circular hill which Poseidon, the sea god, had made into a home for his mortal lover Cleito.

Poseidon intended the hill as an idyllic retreat. It had two pure springs, one warm, one cold. The hill was 3,000 feet in diameter and surrounded by three concentric sea-water moats. Cleito's descendants built a town around it, and founded a nation on that town.

As their nation grew, the Atlanteans built a palace and a temple to Poseidon on the hill, creating a citadel. The temple was 600 feet long, decorated with gold, silver, ivory and “orichalcum” – a reddish metal, almost as valuable as gold, which could be mined in Atlantis. (This “ancient treasure metal” was long lost by Plato's time.) Golden statues adorned the buildings. The temple also held an orichalcum pillar, on which were inscribed the laws of the island.

The wall around the inner citadel-hill was covered in orichalcum. Its surrounding moat was 600 feet wide. Beyond was a ring of land, 1,200 feet wide, with an outer wall covered in tin, then a 1,200-foot-wide moat, then an 1,800-foot ring of land with a wall covered in brass, then a last 1,800-foot moat.





Atlas, Atlantis, Atlantic

The names "Atlantis" and "Atlantic" come from the same. Greek root – Atlas (plural Atlantes) – but the ocean was not named after the island. Atlas was the mythical Titan who held the sky on his shoulders; he stood somewhere off to the west, "beyond the known world." When the Greeks became aware of an ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules, they called it, in effect, "the Sea of Atlas," just as they associated the mountains of Morocco with Atlas. So it's no wonder that Plato (or Solon before him) named this fabled western land "the Land of Atlas."

The Canary Islands

Did the Greeks know anything about lands beyond the Pillars of Hercules? Well, they probably *had* heard of the archipelago known today as the Canary Islands, off the northwest coast of Africa. These were called the "Fortunate Islands" in ancient times (and may have become confused with the supernatural "Isles of the Blessed," where the virtuous went after death). The Roman writer Pliny said that they were occupied by many packs of wild dogs; their name comes from the Latin *canes*, dog. They are lush and fertile, and pleasant enough to serve as a popular European holiday resort today.

The Canaries are volcanic (hence their fertility), but there is no evidence that they have suffered particularly severe eruptions in historic times. The earliest human inhabitants, with whom the Greeks and Romans traded, were a Berber (North African) people, the slightly mysterious Guanche, who probably lived as simple cave-dwelling farmers (there is no trace of urban civilization).

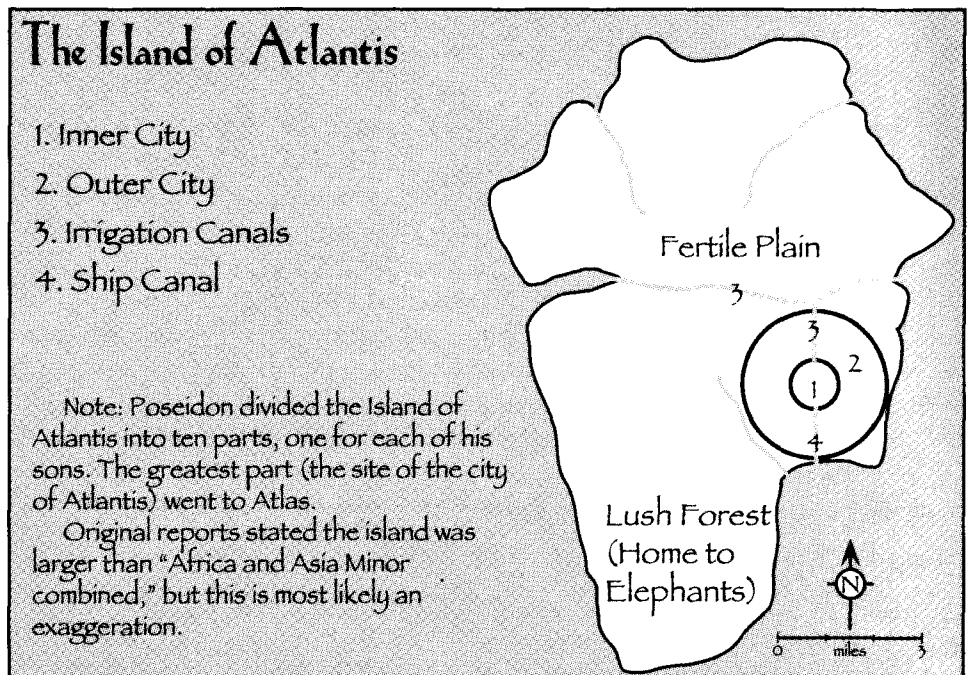
The Canaries were visited by the Arabs in the 12th century, and the French in the 14th. Eventually, they were claimed by Portugal and Spain. Spain took control of them in the 15th century, and they are part of that country today.

The Atlanteans had bridged the moats; the bridges also carried aqueducts to bring water from the springs to the rest of the city. They cut a canal, 300 feet wide and 100 feet deep, from the outer moat 17 miles to the sea. They also cut covered links between the moats, large enough for a full-size sea-going trireme to pass – so they had, in effect, three huge, circular harbors.

The city sprawled beyond the concentric islands, and was surrounded by a circular wall that came down to the sea. Such a city would be large by modern standards (nearly 40 miles in diameter), and staggering to the ancient Greeks.

The city buildings were of local stone, red, white, or black, skillfully built and beautiful. The outer zone was inhabited by merchants and craftsmen, while the inner rings were occupied by the rulers and their guards. The largest ring-island had a broad horse-racing track around its entire circumference, and all of this central area was dotted with gardens and gymnasia. In short, the place had everything the Greeks expected of a city – in massive quantities.

The island was lush and fertile, and inhabited by herds of elephants. It had lofty mountain ranges facing the sea, but the area around the palace was a huge rectangular plain, entirely surrounded by a vast canal which fed an irrigation system. This doubled as a transport network, carrying produce from the fields as well as wood from the forests of the surrounding mountains. The farming communities provided soldiers and chariots for the Atlantean armies.



Fact or Fiction?

This tale may be no more than a parable. A generation after Plato's death, Aristotle was calling Atlantis a poetic fiction, pointing out how neatly Plato disposed of it when its usefulness was ended; "the man who dreamed it up made it vanish."

However, Plato's account has an air of realism, and other Greeks were happy to take it literally. Crantor, who edited Plato's work, sent to Egypt to ask about the story, and was told that the record-pillars were still to be seen. Solon was a famously straightforward and direct character, and Plato traced the legend back to him with some care. The story had enough cohesion and detail to endure.

Later Appearances of Atlantis

When the 17th-century philosopher Francis Bacon wrote a treatise on the possibilities of the new science, he called it *The New Atlantis*, and based it around an imaginary community in the New World, founded by survivors of the original lost continent. In the 19th century, Jules Verne brought the ruins of Atlantis into his *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.

Ignatius Donnelly

Many writers tinkered with Atlantis, using Plato's philosophy or merely the name, but most knowledgeable folk treated it as a myth. This was not enough for Ignatius Loyola Donnelly, 19th-century U.S. congressman, scholar, proto-SF author and eccentric.

In 1882, Donnelly published *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, in which he treated the story as literal truth. Donnelly's theory was all-encompassing and detailed; he saw Atlantis as the original seat of the Aryan and Semitic peoples. It was the original Garden of Eden, Elysian Fields and Asgard, and gave the world sun-worship, bronze, iron and the alphabet.

Donnelly believed that the Atlanteans colonized both sides of the Atlantic, thus explaining similarities between the Egyptian and South American cultures. Donnelly's book is an academic grab-bag; he read widely and uncritically.

Some people tried to find evidence for Donnelly's ideas. In the 1920s, Lewis Spence developed the idea of a prehistoric land-mass in the Atlantic, and the possibility of communications across it between the Old and New Worlds.

Donnelly's greatest influence was on the far fringes of scholarship. The legend of Mu, and the theosophists' use of Lemuria, may well have drawn inspiration from his Atlantis. Donnelly's theory has been credited (or blamed) as the spiritual ancestor of much 20th-century "fringe science."



Modern Theories

The trouble is that every advance in geology and archaeology seems almost designed to demolish literal readings of the Atlantis story. Plate tectonics (see sidebar) just doesn't allow a continental land mass in the middle of the Atlantic, let alone one that sank suddenly a few thousand years ago. Meanwhile, archaeologists have found no sign of globe-spanning civilizations 11,000 years ago.

But that doesn't mean there *isn't* more to Atlantis than simple parable.

The Santorini Hypothesis

The best-known re-analysis of Atlantis in recent years links it to Minoan Crete (see Knossos, pp. 86-87). This theory runs something like this:

The early Egyptians knew of the Minoans as a distant but wealthy island empire, far off to the north and west, long vanished by Solon's time. This memory formed the seed of the Atlantis legend. Plato's story of Solon learning of Atlantis in Egypt was true, but Plato inflated the tale for literary effect, pushing the island-empire from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. In reality, the Minoan empire disappeared as the result of a natural catastrophe – the eruption of the volcanic island of Thera, or Santorini.

Geology

Today, the idea of a real Atlantis seems less plausible for the same reason Lemuria is no longer taken seriously; theories of geology change over time.

Continental Drift

The idea that the Earth's continents were once differently arranged, and that they moved apart or collided over very long periods of time, was first proposed early in the 20th century. It was based on the fact that the continents have shapes that appear to fit together, and geology and fossils on these matching parts also match. At first, there was no known mechanism to explain such drifting, and most geologists rejected the idea.

Since the '50s, the theory of *plate tectonics* has developed. This states that the Earth's surface is divided up into a number of "plates" which move around, sometimes colliding, splitting apart, or scraping together. Continental and ocean plates are markedly different; the continents are largely granite, ocean floors mostly basalt. The Atlantic Ocean is a region where two plates are splitting apart, allowing volcanic magma to surge up through the gap. Hence there are a number of volcanic islands along the "Mid-Atlantic Ridge," but little chance that any continental land-mass in the area could have sunk in recent eras.

Land Bridges

It is still possible to talk about certain areas being drowned in the past. This is because continental plates aren't cut off sharply at the edges; they slope away gradually. Most water near shore is shallow, and parts of the "continental shelf" may once have been exposed. Movements in water levels can result from ice ages (which lock water in glaciers), and continents can rise or sink slightly. Continental drift may bring land masses together, or split them apart.

For example, 30,000 years ago it was possible to travel from Asia to North America across what is now the Bering Straits, which is how the Native American peoples first arrived. Conversely, until 3,000,000 years ago, North and South America were completely separate. This is comparable to the Victorian theory of "Land Bridges" such as Lemuria, but the scale is a *lot* smaller.

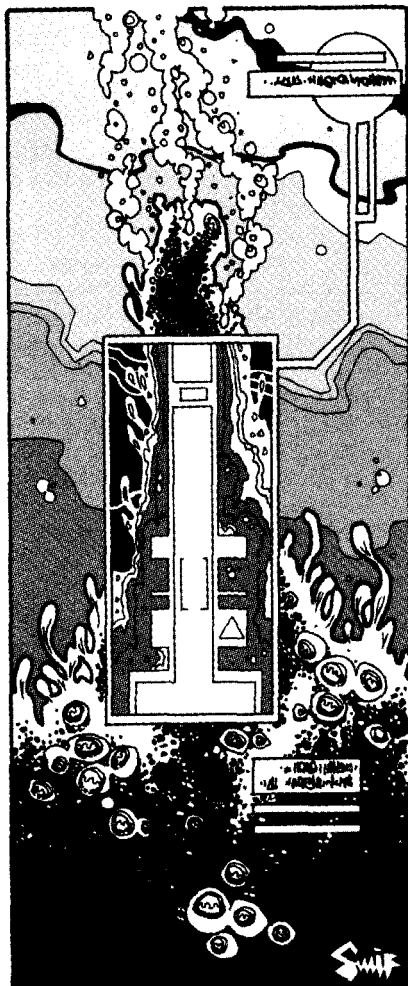
Alternative Geologies

Of course, none of this means that Atlantis (or Lemuria, or Mu, or any other "lost continent") can't exist in your own campaign. Game Masters are quite welcome to throw all these arguments against Atlantis out the window.

Secret of the Deeps

In volcanic areas where tectonic plates meet, there are often “thermal vents,” where volcanic heat raises water temperatures – sometimes to boiling. In recent years, researchers probing some very deep vents have made a striking discovery; whole ecologies of previously unknown life forms, drawing energy from the volcanic heat rather than the sun, with chemical functions based on the sulfates that abound in these areas.

This discovery could be treated as something more in a campaign using “weird science.” Perhaps there are “Atlanteans” living in domed aquatic cities – but they are an *alien race*. The heat “signatures” of their civilization are conveniently hidden by the nearby thermal vents of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (which they also use as a power source), and the so-called “black smoker” faunas are actually their gardens and crops – the reason for their unique chemistry being that they are imports from another planet. The “Atlanteans” would be an utterly bizarre, inhuman species – a strange and unnerving encounter for even the most jaded player characters.



This theory appeared after archaeologists discovered the Minoan palace at Knossos, at the beginning of the 20th century. Thera lies 70 miles north of Crete, at the southern end of the Cyclades archipelago. Today, it consists of three islands in a rough circular shape, but this is merely a relic. In the second millennium B.C., the island blew itself apart in an explosion comparable to the famous eruption of Krakatoa.

The eruption destroyed all communities on the island, including a large Minoan settlement. Devastating waves radiated out from Thera, and clouds of dust and ash blotted out the sun. *Tsunamis* (giant waves) smashed into coastal lands – there is evidence of 750-foot waves striking islands near Thera. Other effects – earthquakes associated with the eruption, destruction of merchant shipping at sea, and so on – would have exacerbated matters.

Minoan Crete appears to have been taken over by the Mycenaeans (see p. 84) around 1450 B.C.; this led to suggestions that the Mycenaeans were taking advantage of the collapse of Minoan society – and the destruction of its defensive battle fleet – following the eruption.

There are other similarities between Minoan Crete and Plato’s Atlantis. For example, the palace of Plato’s Atlantis was on a low hill some 3,000 feet across, midway along the island, about 17 miles inland, and near a fertile plain. This is a good description of the site of the palace of Knossos (p. 87). Atlantis was described as mountainous – like Crete. The princes of Atlantis conducted religious rituals involving the capture of bulls, armed only with nooses – and the famous Minoan bull-rituals included such hunts. Atlantis was divided into principalities; the Minoans ruled sections of their island from their “palaces.”

Other features of the story make sense if the Egyptian account exaggerates some elements by a factor of ten. The fall of Minoan Crete was about 900 years before Solon’s time – Atlantis was placed 9,000 years in the past. The plain of Atlantis was described as 340 by 230 miles – the largest plain in Crete is about 35 by 25 miles. Other similarities were suggested, although some are strained.

The “Santorini Hypothesis” has a great deal going for it, and it’s very dramatic; the destruction of a civilization, transformed into a great myth.

However, the “Santorini Hypothesis” has problems.

Places and Times

Excavations on Thera have found Minoan ruins *on top of* deposits of ash and lava from the great eruption. Palaces on Crete’s south coast were destroyed at the same time as those to the north – despite being protected from tidal waves by the bulk of the island. Although structural damage to some buildings could have been caused by shockwaves or earthquakes, the number that were destroyed by fire doesn’t fit well with the destruction caused by tsunamis. While most of the Minoan palaces fell around 1450 B.C., the capital at Knossos survived pretty much intact until about 1400. Clearly, whatever happened was complicated.

Then there is the pattern of damage caused by the eruption. Most of the effects of the main Santorini eruption seem to have spread east, rather than south towards Crete. Agriculture in eastern Crete may well have been devastated for years, with ash-falls more than eight inches deep, but the area around Knossos got off lightly. Fitting everything together into a clear story seems harder as more information is found.

But recent geological research has made the largest dent in the Santorini Hypothesis. Analyses of ice-cores from Greenland and ancient tree rings suggest (among other things) that the great Thera eruption actually occurred in 1628 B.C. This implies that Thera can have had little to do with the fall of the Minoan palaces in the 15th century B.C.

Theosophists and Nazis

Ever since Donnelly, fringe theorists have been obsessed with Atlantis, placing the Lost Continent everywhere from Nigeria to the Baltic. Some have identified its destruction with Noah's Flood.

The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, took their name from an ancient mystical philosophy. They constructed an elaborate theory of the spiritual evolution of humanity that involved a number of previous human races – the fourth of which dwelt on Atlantis. The Austrian academic, mystic and sometime Theosophist Rudolf Steiner claimed to have mystically determined much about Atlantis, including the fact that the Atlanteans thought in pictures and traveled in airships powered by energy derived from plants. Other Theosophist theories involved the other “lost lands” of Mu and Lemuria (see p. 13-14).

The Theosophists influenced other groups – including weird sects who lurked on the fringes of the German Nazi Party. The Nazis despised most of what the Theosophists stood for, but they were very fond of ideas about ancient, blond, blue-eyed super-races. Their vision of a far-northern Atlantis, sending swan- and dragon-ships out to conquer the world, was too outlandish for widespread propagation – but Himmler, one of the leading Nazis, believed it.



Atlantis in Fantasy (and SF)

Atlantis has provided writers of fiction with a useful blank slate. It can be shown as a technological Utopia or a land of dark and twisted magics, a symbol of brilliance cast down or a prosaic setting that need not be kept consistent with trivial facts. Images of power, arrogance, destruction and ruin always have their uses.

Early Writers

Philosophical parables aside, Verne was probably the first novelist to use the Atlantis legend, but others soon followed. Victorian reincarnation fantasies had characters recalling past lives in Atlantis, while others wrote about ancient manuscripts telling of life and adventures on the lost continent. By about 1900, one writer had come up with the idea of Atlantis surviving under an airtight dome on the sea bed – an image that survives in comic books to this day.

In 1929, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle used much the same idea for *The Maracot Deep*, which starts out as an SF story about deep-sea research, quickly shifts to Atlantis, drags in reincarnation, and culminates in a mystical battle. But by then, Atlantis was becoming old hat; at best, it served as a handy plot device for wild SF adventures, or (along with Lemuria and Mu), as a place to set sword-and-sorcery fantasies. Players of *GURPS Lensman* may note that E.E. Smith threw the destruction of a high-tech Atlantis into the past history of his universe.

Robert E. Howard

One of the most significant fantasy writers to employ the Atlantis myth was Robert E. Howard. In Howard's “Hyborean Age,” Atlantis was long sunk beneath the waves, but elements of its culture remained as significant factors in Conan's world. See *GURPS Conan* for more details.

Vegetarian Storm-Trooper Sky-Ships from Dimension X

A good roleplaying game usually includes ideas from a wide range of sources, and they don't come much wider than ideas about Atlantis. Throw in a few stock SF/fantasy ideas, and pulp, Illuminati, or superhero game GMs might find a use for the following plot:

Plato's story is accurate in many details, although dates may need a little adjustment. The reason no one has discovered any remains of Atlantean civilization is simply that the place wasn't really an island; it was an extra-dimensional realm, which sent its conquering hordes through a gigantic portal just beyond the Straits of Gibraltar. The high-tech, arrogant Atlanteans were defeated by a brilliant guerrilla campaign, led by the ancient Greeks; this culminated in a daring sabotage strike which turned the Atlantean portal-generator into an anti-matter bomb. Fortunately for Earth, most of the blast remained on the far side of the collapsing gate.

Over the past few thousand years, the Atlanteans have been recovering and rebuilding. The Theosophists made some limited psychic contact across the dimensions, but became confused and thought that they were reaching into the past. A few insane Nazi scientists made more direct contact, and in 1945 even managed to escape across the dimensions with an assortment of mystical items, experimental technology and plundered gold.

Now the rebuilding is complete. Atlantis knows that Earth has progressed somewhat since the last, failed invasion, but its people aren't worried; they still have the “unbeatable” advantages of psychic science, sophisticated power systems and fanatical arrogance. They also have secret Nazi allies and the advantage of surprise. How the PCs (or anyone else) can stop them remains to be seen.

Alternatively, time-traveling PCs could be sent on a mission to trace the origins of Plato's story. As they uncover more and more corroborating evidence, they have to travel farther and farther back – eventually finding themselves in the middle of an interdimensional war, while trying to keep time-travel technology out of the hands of the invaders.

Early Atlantic Crossings?

If there was no *land* in the Atlantic, could there still have been communication between the Old and New Worlds in early times? Well, there are some theories . . .

The Egyptians

Thor Heyerdahl, already famous for the “Kon-Tiki” expedition (sidebar, p. 113) believed that the American civilizations were founded by Egyptian travelers. The obvious question was how the Egyptians could have reached America. Heyerdahl’s idea was that ancient papyrus reed boats would have sufficed, and he set out to prove this personally. In 1969, his first craft, *Ra I*, foundered at sea, but the next year, *Ra II* reached Barbados. However, archaeologists do not consider this heroic experiment sufficient evidence.

St. Brendan

St. Brendan was a sixth-century Irish monk who loved to travel. His first great journey took him to the Hebrides, Shetland, the Faeroes, and then on to Brittany. A second trip took him to continental Europe and the Canary Islands (p. 8).

The much-embellished story of St. Brendan’s voyages was popular in the Middle Ages, and old maps show an island, far out in the Atlantic, which he supposedly discovered. This has led to suggestions that he reached America, and even to a Heyerdahl-like expedition in a reproduction medieval ship.

The Norse

It is now generally accepted that the first Europeans to reach the Americas were Norse. In about 1001 A.D., Leif Ericson, son of the man who had discovered Greenland while dodging a manslaughter charge, ventured south from there, reaching a country he called Vinland – modern Newfoundland.

Ericson established a colony, but it soon failed; it was too remote to support, and the colonists got into a war with the natives. The Greenland colony lasted from the 10th to 15th centuries, but faced with a worsening climate, disease and malnutrition, it died out.

Just Before Columbus

Historians periodically suggest that Christopher Columbus was not the first seaman of his time to reach the New World. There are some suggestions that he was working from the log of an earlier ship that had become lost in the Atlantic. This is hard to prove or disprove (although it could make an interesting time-travel scenario), but it is certainly possible.



Other Modern Fantasies

Meanwhile, other writers have gone their own way (or borrowed older ideas). Even J.R.R. Tolkien had his “Numenor,” the wondrous island in the west that sank beneath the sea when its people over-reached themselves, known thereafter as *Atalante*, “The Downfallen.” This image of a place of lost wonders, simultaneously a moral parable and the source of really powerful plot devices, has also slipped into roleplaying games – including the various games set on M.A.R. Barker’s world of *Tékumel*, with its sunken island of *Éngsvan hla Gánga*.

Other modern fantasy writers to employ Atlantis include Jane Gaskell, Marion Zimmer Bradley, David Gemmell, Lin Carter and L. Sprague de Camp (who also wrote a nonfiction study of the Atlantis myth).

Horror Under the Sea

For the creators of horror, the idea of sunken lands has all sorts of interesting resonances. H.P. Lovecraft led the way with all manner of hints and explicit terrors, including sub-aquatic races that haunted the coastlines and ports of the human world, and the sunken city of R’lyeh, where Cthulhu lay dreaming – although that was in the Pacific. He also used Atlantis in his short story “The Temple.” Others have followed his lead.

Uses of Modern Theories

It’s possible to use a more “rational,” modern version of Atlantis, such as the Santorini Hypothesis, in SF. Examples include Poul Anderson’s time-travel story, *The Dancer from Atlantis*, which GMs planning a time-travel scenario on the theme should read. SF and other fiction writers have also used this era as a basis for historical stories, in which characters from Minoan Crete travel to other parts of the Bronze Age world.

Lost Lands of Legend

Many ancient peoples told tales of lost lands and sunken cities. These tended to be fairly local – they related to places just off some local stretch of coast, or under some nearby lake. (Irem of the Pillars is a desert variation – see p. 46.)

Western Europe has a good selection of such tales, inspired by ancient Celtic myths of a paradise lying “beyond the setting sun,” some serious floods in late prehistory, and local disasters and subsidences.

Avalon is a direct descendant of the Celtic paradise idea. When King Arthur was dying from his wounds after his final battle, he was taken away to Avalon to be cured – and perhaps to wait for Britain’s hour of need. Avalon has been identified with Glastonbury Tor (see p. 93), which was once surrounded by marshes.

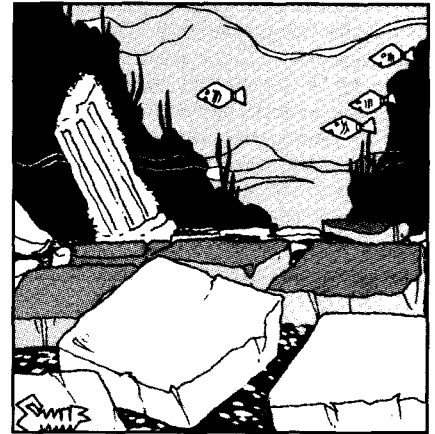
Huy Breasil (pronounced “Hi Brazil”) was a supernatural island said to emerge off the west coast of Ireland, briefly, once every seven years. The stories claimed that if it were touched by fire, it would remain visible and accessible to mortals. It too seems to have been a “Western Paradise.”

Lyonesse was the home of one of Camelot’s greatest knights, Sir Tristram. It lay near the Scilly Isles, west of Cornwall, or possibly between those islands and the mainland. (The Scillies have suffered some subsidence in historical time, and may once have been a single island.) There are various legends about its fall, including the tale that it sank beneath the waves when attacked by the forces of the evil Mordred.

The city of *Ys* (or *Ker-Is*) lay off Brittany, and vanished as a consequence of its people’s corruption and evil. Wales had *Cantre’r Gwaelod*, the “Bottom Cantrev,” a lost city in Cardigan Bay. Other tales involved routine trade with fairy-folk from hidden islands, who might have powers such as invisibility.

Ruins of ancient buildings have been seen beneath the waters of the Caribbean. These reports usually involve the Bahamas, although sometimes the coast of Mexico is mentioned. The ruins include roads, terraces, plazas and stairways. There are even tales of great underwater pyramids (although these seem to involve misinterpretations of sonar images of ordinary undersea ridges).

The most likely basis of most of these tales is the “Bimini Road.” This appears to be a large, smooth causeway 20 feet below the surface and hundreds of yards offshore from Bimini, westernmost of the Bahamas islands. It is over 600 yards long, and is made up of stone blocks about 15 feet square and three feet thick, in a single layer. The “road,” clearly visible through the water from the air, bends through more than a right angle at one end, then fades away.



In fact, the Bimini Road resembles “beachrock” – calcium carbonate which precipitates out of warm water, then erodes and cracks in strikingly regular patterns. But this doesn’t mean humans couldn’t use such beachrock as a building material – and the “road” is much longer than other beachrock deposits in this area. At least one piece of what appears to be worked stone has been recovered from the site by divers.

One other oddity showed up on the seabed a couple of miles from the “road.” This was a collection of pieces of shaped marble, not native to the area. Of course, this could be ballast, dumped by a passing ship in modern times – but surely marble is an odd choice of ballast!

At the very least, the Bimini Road is a curious freak of geology. If it is man-made – well, this area was last above the surface of the sea over 4,000 years ago. There was no known stoneworking culture in the Bahamas then – but perhaps there was an Atlantean outpost?

“Lost Continents”

In the Victorian era, a mixture of new science and spiritualism led to a small boom in the market for lost lands. Two in particular became popular.

Lemuria

The primates called “lemurs,” along with other wildlife, are found in Madagascar and India, but nowhere else. With no theory of continental drift, 19th-century scientists suggested that there was once a link between these two areas – a continent, now lost under the Indian Ocean, labeled “Lemuria.”

This respectable academic theory was promptly adopted by other factions; anthropologists looking for a “missing link” in humanity’s ancestry, Christians seeking the Garden of Eden, and the Theosophist Madame Blavatsky, who placed the prehistoric “Third Race” of humanity in Lemuria. Madame Blavatsky said that the South Sea Islands (in the Pacific) were Lemuria’s last remnant. She described our ancestors as 15 feet tall, psionic, hermaphroditic, ape-like beings who used instinct rather than reason. Lemuria became a catch-all “vanished continent,” as likely to be found inside the Hollow Earth as in the ocean.

Undersea Cities

Stories about a sunken-but-surviving Atlantis often involve domed cities beneath the sea. The idea of underwater colonization was raised as a speculation in the 17th century, and the first story of a domed, inhabited Atlantis appeared in 1895. There have been many since.

The problem with applying such ideas to the Atlantis legend is that the writer needs to explain how the Atlanteans knew in advance that they would need water-tight dwellings. (Conan Doyle gave some vague hints of psychic precognition.) The idea also credits the Atlanteans with much better technology (or magic) than Plato.

Modern technology does permit the creation of sealed underwater dwellings, although nothing close to the size of a city has been attempted, and experience has shown many technical problems with deep-sea diving. Conan Doyle shows no interest in the effects of extreme pressure, let alone “the bends” and such.

An alternative is to change the Atlanteans themselves, by genetic engineering (or surgery, or magic), into water-breathing beings. But as a practical explanation for the survival of Atlantis to modern times, this has many of the same problems as a dome. Note also that Plato said that the Atlanteans were descendants of the sea-god Poseidon; perhaps the god kept some of his people alive in some way when their land sank.

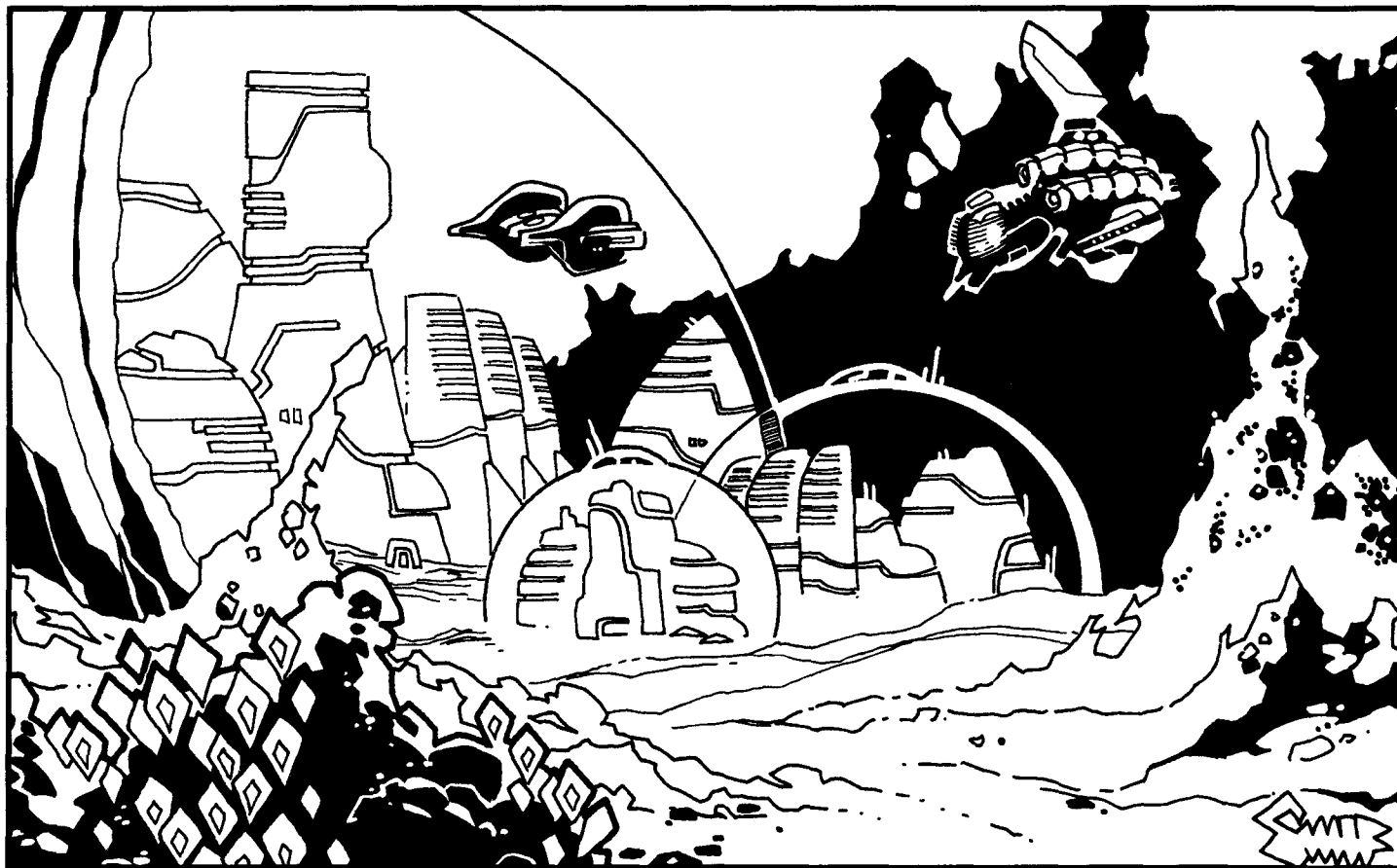
Mu

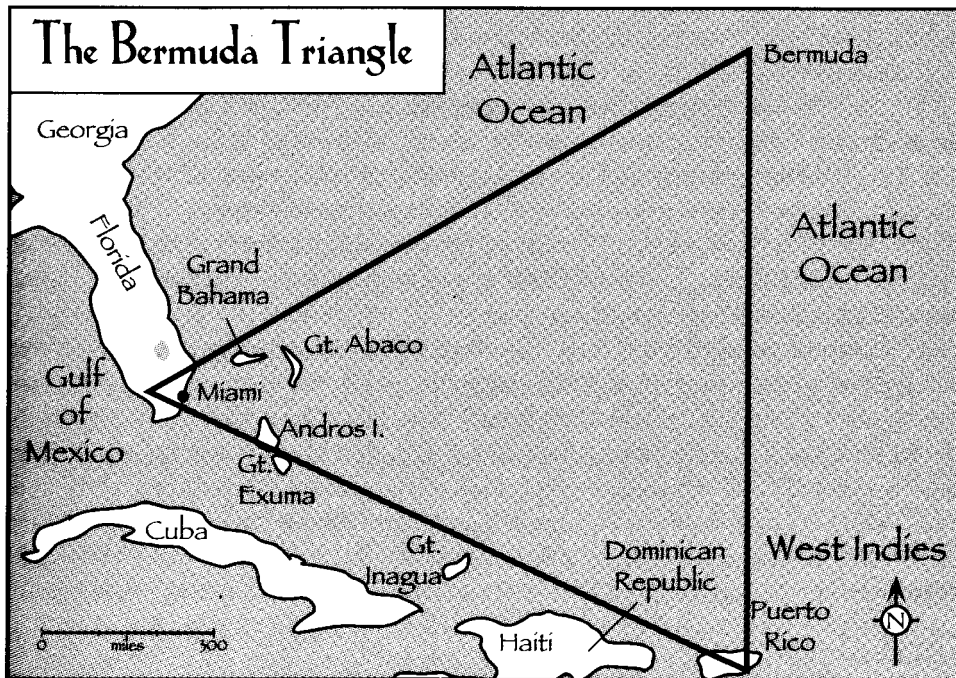
Mu was probably invented in 1896, by the Frenchman Augustus Le Plongeon. His book, *Queen Moo and the Egyptian Sphinx*, was supposedly based on “ancient Mayan documents,” which Le Plongeon refused to show to anyone else. He placed Mu in the Pacific, much as Lemuria was in the Indian Ocean.

In 1926, the British Colonel James Churchward published *The Lost Continent of Mu*, announcing that, in the 19th century, a Hindu priest in India had shown him a set of ancient stone tablets and taught him the language, “Naacal,” in which they were written. These tablets proved that humanity had originated, 200,000 years ago, on Mu, which was 6,000 by 3,000 miles in extent. Its civilization supported a population of 64 million, but was wiped out by volcanoes in 12,000 B.C. However, one of its colonies founded an “Uighur Empire” in what is now the Gobi Desert; the Uighurs (also known as the Magyars) were in turn the ancestors of the Aryan races.

Churchward declared that, in Mu, the white races ruled all the others. He flaunted the paraphernalia of Victorian occultism; the Indian priest was his guru and taught him to travel through space and time on the astral plane. (He may have begun his writing as early as 1870 – during a Victorian spiritualist boom.) His ideas became widespread for a while, and he published three more books about Mu. Like Le Plongeon, he never showed his ancient texts to the world.

In “period” games, Le Plongeon and Churchward could make interesting NPCs. They can be portrayed as cranks or con men, while in more “mystical” campaigns, they could have genuine access to ancient secrets – in which case, they should be played as tough, smart explorer types. They would make useful allies, but could also have problems with shadowy enemies who want the ancient texts for themselves – or who don’t want humanity to know the truth.





Mysteries of the Devil's Triangle

Here are some of the legends linked with the Bermuda Triangle (also known as the "Devil's Triangle"). Many have since been disproved or explained, but they still make a good story.

- 1492: Columbus sailed into the area of the Bermuda Triangle, and encountered strange atmospheric disturbances and compass troubles.

- 1781-1812: During this period, four United States naval vessels supposedly disappeared, without explanation, in the general area.

- 1918: The *USS Cyclops*, bound for the U.S. with a load of Brazilian ore, disappeared without a trace. Of 280 people on board (including some court-martialed mutineers bound for prison in the U.S.), none were seen again.

- 1945: Five TBF Avengers on "Flight 19," a routine training flight looping from Fort Lauderdale over the Grand Bahama Island and back again, reported compass problems. Communications were lost, and so were the planes. The search plane sent out after them also disappeared.

- 1948: The *Star Tiger*, a plane flying from the Azores to Bermuda, ceased radio contact two hours before its expected arrival. There was no hint of trouble, and weather was fair. More than 100 search and rescue missions failed to uncover any clues. This disappearance remains unexplained.

- 1963, 1968: Two nuclear submarines (the *Thresher*, in 1963, and the *Scorpion*, in 1968) disappeared without warning. In each case, their hulls were later found, but no causes for their accidents could be determined.

- 1973: The *Anita*, a large cargo ship carrying a load of coal, left Norfolk, Virginia (destination Europe) and was never heard from again. One life-ring was found, but nothing more.

Bizarre Explanations

One of the more unusual explanations for the disappearance of Flight 19 involves an alien spaceship, a bomb, and the remains of one of the five planes now held in orbit in a great ice ball above the Bermuda Triangle.

Other explanations for Triangle events involve UFO abductions, space-time warps, and, of course, the mysterious "Atlantis Force" (remnants of the magic or super-science of the sunken continent).

The Bermuda Triangle

Another mystery sometimes linked to the legend of Atlantis is the "Bermuda Triangle." This is an area of the Atlantic where ships and aircraft disappear in bizarre circumstances, navigational equipment becomes unreliable, and geomagnetic forces run amok.

This legend evolved after 1950, although individual mysteries go back further. The supposed position of the Triangle varies, but the most popular version is defined by Bermuda, Florida, and Puerto Rico. However, many events ascribed to the "Bermuda Triangle" phenomenon occurred outside this region.

The classic incident was the loss of Flight 19, in 1945. A routine training flight of five U.S. Navy torpedo bombers took off from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Despite multiple radio conversations between the aircraft and their base, they became lost, and eventually vanished. At least one search plane sent after them also vanished. Other vanishings include the *Mary Celeste* in 1872, the disappearance of the famous lone sailor Joshua Slocum in 1909, and a multitude of ships, boats and planes since the war.

Cynics have a lot of fun with the Bermuda Triangle, as the theory is extremely vague, and each supporter seems to have a different idea as to its cause. Speculations abound, often involving ancient Atlantean weaponry, UFOs, strange magnetic forces, or supernatural powers. In actual fact, this area has huge amounts of air and sea traffic. Not surprisingly, a small proportion of it goes missing, occasionally in puzzling circumstances. The Caribbean is prone to storms and hurricanes. A few "Triangle" incidents involved sailing vessels in the infamous Sargasso Sea, a part of the Atlantic where unreliable winds and negligible currents can leave craft becalmed for weeks.

Unfortunately for those intrigued by the Bermuda Triangle, the infamous loss of Flight 19 appears to have been caused by the failure of the lead plane's compass, compounded by radio problems, a commander who was unfamiliar with the area, and the onset of night and bad weather. The search plane, a model with notoriously leaky fuel tanks, was seen to explode. Other incidents took

Sample Character: Master of Atlantean Lore

ST 9, DX 11, IQ 15, HT 11.

Speed 5.5, Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Allies (admiring students, or fellow Secret Society members); Intuition; Literacy (if appropriate); Reputation +1 among students of Atlantean Lore (if known in this group – “Acknowledged Expert”). Money and Status should be sufficient for the character’s function in the campaign – probably Comfortable Wealth and Status 1 or better. An Unusual Background might be required for a character to have access to Atlantean Lore.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Behavior (pursuit of Atlantean secrets); Fanatic; Reputation -2 among “sensible” scholars on 10 or less (“A crank, and possibly a dangerous one”); Stubbornness; others (usually mental) as appropriate and at GM’s discretion.

Quirks: GM’s option – for example: Dresses oddly; Spends hours staring out to sea; Laughs at mentions of Ancient Greece or Egypt.

Skills: Archaeology-16; Area Knowledge (Atlantic and its coasts)-15; Area Knowledge (Ancient Atlantis)-15; Engineer (Weird Atlantean Tech)-13; Geology-13; History-13; Literature-14; Mathematics-13; Navigation-13; Occultism-17; Secret History-17 (with default from Occultism); one weapon at skill-12 (usually Physical/Easy).

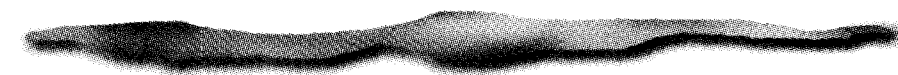
Spells: If the campaign includes magic – especially if the Atlanteans were expert in it – this character could wield an appropriate selection of spells, probably boosted by a level or two of Magery. (Similar comments could apply if Atlantean scientists or mystics knew how to unleash human psi powers.) Choices are a matter of GM taste, but the selection should ideally be “atmospheric” and slightly weird – good possibilities include Mind-Reading, Rain, Fog, Staff, Seeker, Analyze Magic, Shatter and Fear. The “Gate Spells” in *GURPS Grimoire* are also suitable.

Continued on next page . . .

place during severe storms, despite legends to the contrary; some involved ships or planes that reported trouble or which were seen sinking. Some actually turned up again later. Other reports became exaggerated in the telling, or involved incidents that took place in other oceans.

But, for game purposes, the Bermuda Triangle has vast potential. *GURPS Atomic Horror* makes it the work of time-traveling kidnappers from the far future. Campaigns in which Atlantis possessed super-technology can adopt the “super-weapon theory”; and *GURPS Illuminati* says that the Triangle is the work of a particularly eccentric conspiracy.

Adventure Seed: The PCs are an elite undercover force, pursuing some deadly threat in the Caribbean (drug smuggling, Cuban-linked espionage, or terrorists threatening U.S. Naval operations). When they go undercover, they reckon without one complication. An eccentric but alert civilian researcher notices the “disappearance” of their vessel, and alerts various tabloid reporters and UFO-watcher groups about this new “Bermuda Triangle” incident. From then on, the PCs have to preserve their cover in the face of dozens of eager “researchers.”



“Lost Atlantis” in Games

Game Masters can use Atlantis however they see fit. In a fantasy game set in prehistory, the continent can still lurk out in the ocean – as either a threat or a Utopia.

The following offers suggestions for incorporating Atlantis into more modern campaigns, with Atlantis as something real – but in the past tense.

If Atlantis existed in history, its remnants can have all sorts of plot uses. They might be “magic items” or “super-technological” gadgets (see *GURPS Magic Items* or *GURPS Ultra-Tech* for ideas). Or they might just be incredibly important to scholars – worth a fortune, even if they aren’t made of some valuable material. The “orichalcum” which Plato mentions could be a puzzle – where might it fit on the periodic table? Perhaps it’s an alloy, combining great strength, beauty, and some other magically or technologically useful attributes.

Some artifacts can lead on to other adventures; maps might identify the sites of ancient Atlantean outposts, or detection devices might point to others. Larger “remnants” could be the ruins of those outposts, which scholars would want to explore – but if the Atlanteans set up defenses that were made to last, this could be an adventure in itself. (Time for a “dungeon crawl.”) Of course, items would have to be very robust to survive 12,000 years – but that just shows how advanced the Atlanteans were. None of this sort of stuff *has* to be Atlantean in origin – but the name can be an excuse for conflict with rivals from cranks to Nazis. One 20th-century setting in which Atlantis existed and disappeared in ancient times is detailed in *GURPS Atomic Horror*.

Searching for Traces

If Atlantis ever existed, there *must* be remains and traces to be found – and a lot of people would love to find them. This makes “Atlantean research” a valid theme for modern-day (or historical) campaigns. Research can range from realistic archaeology around Santorini, to mystical studies of Theosophist and New Age beliefs.

Prime examples of a mixture of archaeology and swashbuckling adventure are, of course, the “Indiana Jones” movies. Other campaigns can emphasize horror, with the PCs alternately struggling to keep dark secrets out of the hands of cultists, and hurrying to discover enough about some returned evil to find its weak points. Alternatively, the PCs can be out-and-out treasure-hunters – anything from respectable archaeologists to profiteering tomb-robbers. If Atlantean remains start to look valuable, such characters can race with less likeable rogues to recover them, while facing traps and defenses. For a campaign mixing melodrama, SF, and weirdness, the PCs could discover Atlantean technology that transports them to other planets, or even through time – say, to the great age of Atlantis itself.

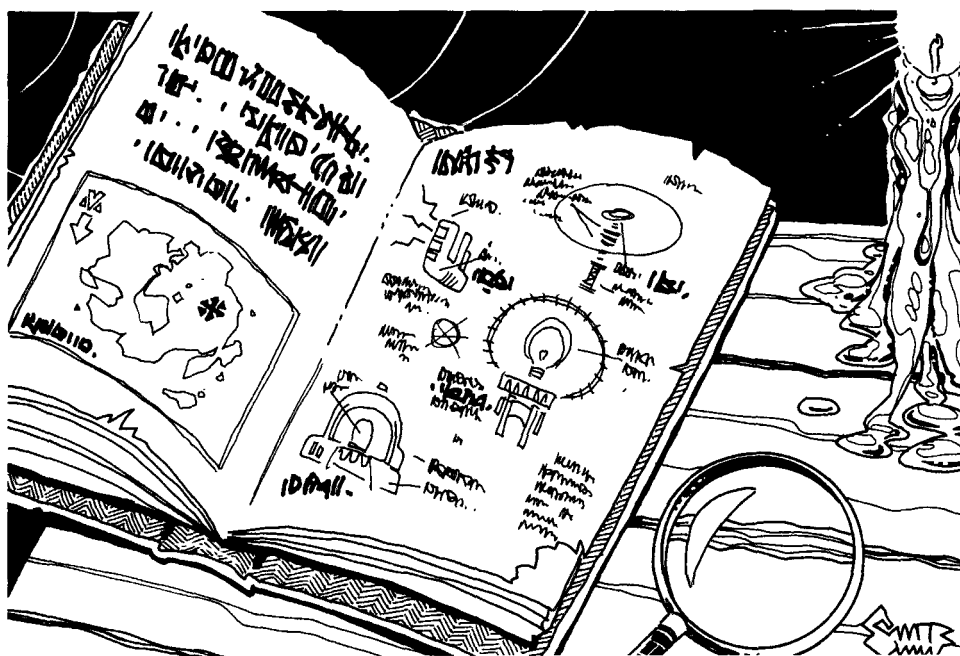
Atlantean Lore as a Source of Power

One popular use of Atlantis is as a source of power – usually high magic, occasionally super-technology. This can make it a useful background feature for campaigns whose main themes are superheroes, the Illuminati, or secret magic.

In such games, Atlantean lore should be both rare and powerful. The GM may throw in the occasional written (or traditional, oral) reference to powerful magic (or exotic mental disciplines, or ideas beyond the edge of modern science). This should tell the PCs that there was once, in the ancient past, a culture with impressive knowledge, now lost; characters and NPCs can become interested in this, and should then pursue these references through ancient and obscure texts and libraries.

This might eventually lead to the discovery of something less subtle . . . actual survival of Atlantean power. *Really* powerful items can become the basis of whole campaigns, as various interest groups struggle for control of them – or work to counteract them.

Another level of complexity can be added if some group has survived from Atlantean times, perhaps wielding some of those “lost secrets.” This might be just a brotherhood of magicians – or a conspiracy of Atlantean aristocrats, made immortal by bizarre arts, with millennia of experience in plotting and manipulation. They *might* be benevolent, or just disinterested – but if they are villains, the PCs should find them incredibly dangerous. (Again, see *GURPS Atomic Horror*.)



Master of Atlantean Lore (Continued)

Languages: Native and “Atlantean” to some level (perhaps written only – and it’s always possible that only a few texts, with limited vocabulary, survive); Ancient Greek (to study Plato in the original); Ancient Egyptian (to study Plato’s sources); Classical Mayan (for alternate viewpoints) and such are appropriate. One or two modern foreign tongues are always useful, if the person isn’t too monomaniacal to bother.

This is a character to use in a campaign where Atlantis really existed in the distant past, and secrets deriving from Atlantean lore, science, or mysticism, are available but not widespread. This individual has gained access to some of these secrets, either by diligent research, or through membership in some secret society.

Most of this student’s skills are based on either the search for or the use of this lore. As this has occasionally involved some risk, he has learned to use a weapon – probably something reliable and fairly concealable, such as a large knife or a handgun.

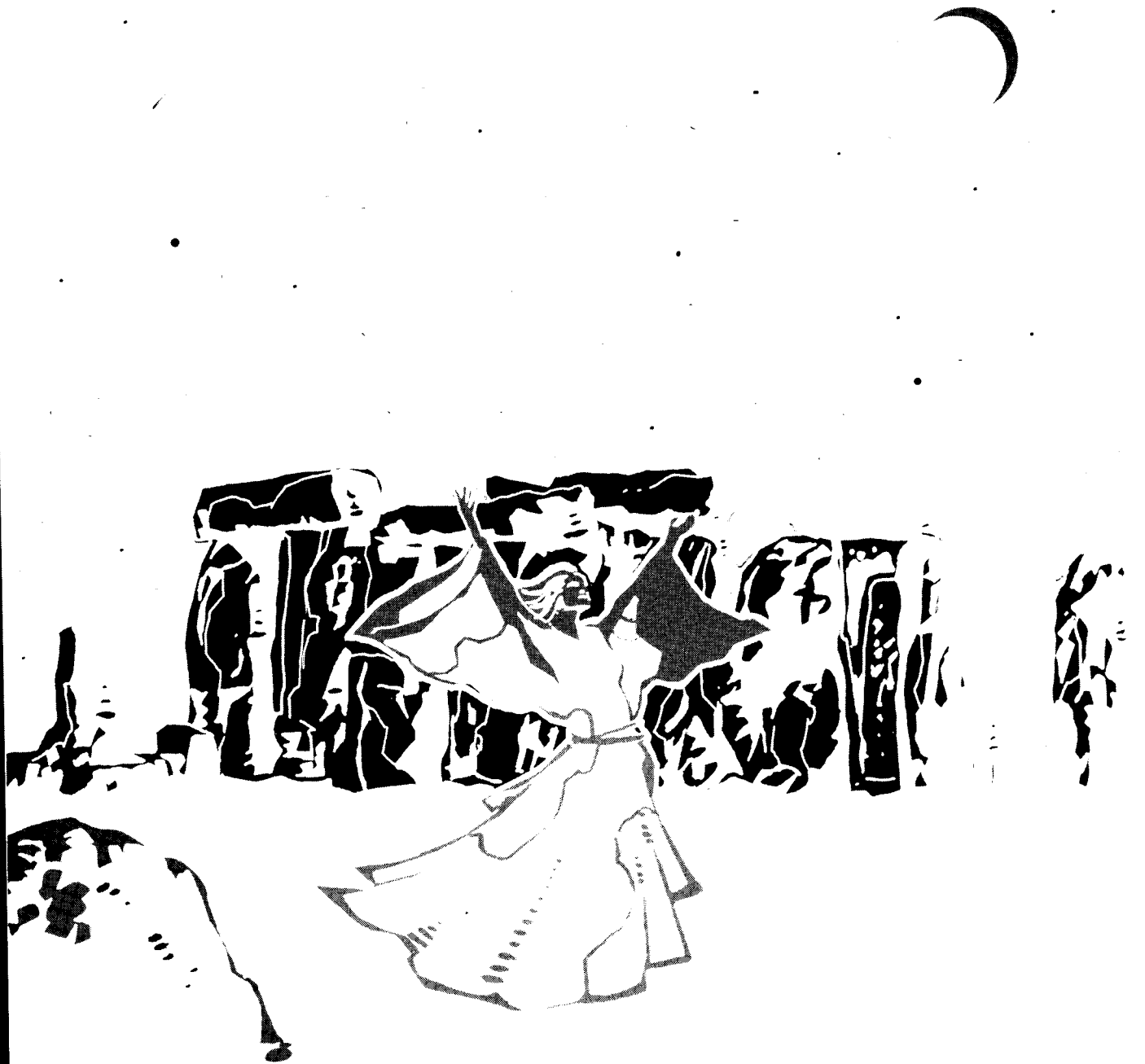
The “Master of Atlantean Lore” has several possible objectives, and hence campaign uses:

1. To learn even more. He is a fanatical scholar, who’d sell his own grandmother for the intoxicating thrill of a new discovery. Such a person is a worrying patron and a dangerous rival.

2. To restore the ideals of Lost Atlantis. The character has adopted some set of ideals associated with Atlantean studies, and now seeks to propagate them. This could be blatantly evil (an Atlantean cult of Dark Gods), socially damaging (Atlantean political philosophy was arrogantly fascist, dementedly anarchistic, or bizarrely communist), or just eccentric (he wants to restore the worship of Poseidon, make the world appreciate Atlantean art, or spread the use of Atlantean base-17 arithmetic). Such a character can be anything from comic relief to a deadly supervillain.

3. Personal POWER! The master sees Atlantean Lore as a means, not an end. Now, having extracted all that is practically useful from it, this maniac is going to go after a primary objective – wealth, revenge, the throne, whatever. Assuming that the PCs disagree with this aim, he becomes a villain.

2 ♦ STONE CIRCLES



Stonehenge! Where the demons dwell,
 Where the banshees live, and they do live well!
 Stonehenge! Where a man's a man,
 And the children dance to the pipes of Pan!
 Stonehenge! 'tis a magic place,
 Where the moon doth rise with her dragon's face!
 Stonehenge! Where the virgins lie,
 And the prayers of devils fill the midnight sky!
 – Spinal Tap, “Stonehenge”



The Builders: Neolithic Europe

After the Ice Ages, Europe was occupied by nomadic hunters and gatherers of the *Paleolithic* and *Mesolithic* (Old and Middle Stone Ages). They left few signs of their presence (although they did produce cave paintings – see p. 81).

Between 6000 and 4000 B.C. the new *Neolithic* (New Stone Age) culture spread across Europe. Traditionally, archaeologists interpreted such changes as the immigration of a new group who exterminated or drove out their predecessors; modern archaeology assumes that the techniques spread less dramatically, as people learned from their neighbors.

In about 4000 B.C. the Neolithic revolution reached Britain. It combined the first pottery, new and better tools, and agricultural inventions from the Middle East that encouraged people to clear the native forests to create farmland. The Neolithic people also began to build communal monuments – a variety of extraordinary structures, including great stone circles, that leave their marks on the landscape of western Europe even after 6,000 years. Some 1,000 stone circles still exist, but they are only a fraction of those originally built in the British Isles over a period of 2,000 years.

In Britain, Neolithic folk built long barrows to bury their dead, and *causewayed enclosures*, consisting of a circular ditch and bank, which may have been used for religious ceremonies, meetings, or simply as dwellings. These enclosures gave way to similar but larger monuments known as *hengese*. The setting up of stones within henges, or as a substitute for henges, led to the development of stone circles.

Stone circles may be divided into three phases. The early ones (3300-2600 B.C.) were stone versions of the henges; the stones are closely set, with a conspicuous gap flanked by larger stones serving as an entrance. Outside the circle there was usually an isolated monolith. Some of these may have been placed with an astronomical significance; others may have pointed to landmarks, settlements, or other monuments. These early circles had open interiors, and their position (in valleys, usually near a river or lake) and size indicate they were used for communal ceremonies.

In the middle period (2600-1975 B.C.) some enormous circles were built (Avebury is half a mile in diameter), although most circles were smaller (60-100 feet). The new circles were more complex than earlier ones, and included ovals and paired rings. In southern Britain, three-stoned structures thought to be tombs (*coves*) were common. In the north and west there was usually a cairn, barrow or other burial structure (often containing a child's bones) inside the circle.

Circles Through History

“There are no remembrances of the founders, any other than as an uninterrupted tradition of their being sacred” wrote William Stukeley, one of the first antiquarians to study stone circles in the early 18th century.

In the absence of true knowledge, speculation has filled the gap. To Geoffrey of Monmouth, who recorded the Arthurian tales in the 12th century, Stonehenge was a burial monument raised by Merlin to British nobles killed treacherously by the invading Saxons. Some scholars believe that Geoffrey's story of Merlin bringing the stones east from Ireland after a battle, using mechanical contrivances, may be a real historical tradition. Stonehenge's small bluestones were indeed brought east (from Wales). Later versions of the legend embellished Merlin's part into magically causing the stones to fly.

Stukeley and John Aubrey, both in the 17th century, agreed that the druids must have created the stone circles, an idea which has remained popular to the present day.

The function of the circles has also been the object of speculation. To Geoffrey of Monmouth, Stonehenge was a burial monument; to Aubrey, Stukeley, and the 19th century, the circles were temples. Theories in the 20th century propose that the stone circles were not temples but astronomical observatories.

Human Sacrifice?

Ancient temples mean one thing in traditional fantasy: Bloody Human Sacrifice. There's a white-robed maiden, a large knife, and – on a good day – a passing hero to keep the two apart and generally interfere with time-honored cultural practices. This association is well-established with Stonehenge.

To Aubrey and Stukeley, the first writers to take a "tourist guide" view of the subject, ancient British monuments were raised by the druids. According to the Romans, the druids performed human sacrifice. So flat-lying stones (such as Stonehenge's "slaughter stone" and "altar stone") were labeled as spots where the maidens were chained down.

The first catch is that the druids had nothing to do with the circles. The second is that there is little evidence for human sacrifice associated with stone circles – let alone the sacrifice of white-clad virgins.

Although many stone circles had human remains placed in them – burnt bones enclosed in small cairns or placed in holes – there is no proof that the bones were those of unwilling victims. Often, the bones are those of a child – but natural infant mortality rates were appallingly high in ancient societies, and the bones may be those of children who died natural deaths. These "blood sacrifices," if that's what they were, seem not to have been needed once a circle was complete.

The druids were the priests, judges, and lore-masters of Celtic society. Little is known about them; the Romans described them as murderous resistance leaders. They *may* have gone in for the odd human sacrifice – the bodies that occasionally turn up in European peat bogs have been interpreted by some as their victims. Ritual drownings might have been on their agenda, but stories of burning wicker figures full of live victims are unconfirmed.

Modern "druids" persist in worshipping at Stonehenge and other circles, especially on significant dates (midsummer, midwinter, the equinoxes, and so on) – although without human sacrifice. But the Celts (and druids) did not reach Britain until centuries after Stonehenge was abandoned. There are no traces of their presence at Stonehenge. They probably ignored the place, perhaps with a hint of superstitious dread.

That said, there is an intriguing theory that the astronomical alignments built into some stone circles matched the major Celtic festivals, including Beltane (May Eve). Whether this implies some continuity of religion (just as the timing of the Christian festivals reflect those of older religions) is unknown.

The late period (1975-1200 B.C.) was one of decline. Circles were small, probably created by individual families. Even the largest – Callanish – used relatively tiny stones (the largest is 17 feet tall but weighs less than 7 tons) and could accommodate perhaps 40 people. Often the structures were not circles at all; in northern Scotland lines of stones lead to cairns. After 1200 B.C. a change in religious beliefs led to the abandonment of both circles and barrows.

What Were the Circles For?

Structures which were built over such a long time and such a wide area cannot have had a simple, single use. Theories abound.

Burial

Human remains are certainly found in stone circles, but neither in sufficient quantities to account for the entire population, nor in sufficiently grand burials for the circle to have been raised as a marker to a chief. It is most likely that the remains were some form of religious offering.

Astronomy

Astronomical alignments were built into some circles. Solar and lunar alignments, especially for midsummer and midwinter sunrise and sunset, and for moonrises and setting point, are used in stone circles and other monuments (such as Newgrange – see p. 91). These alignments were for ritual rather than scientific purposes, and are rarely exact.



Ritual

While stone circles were surely used for rituals, we have little idea of what kind. From the common astronomical alignments between circles, long barrows, and megalithic tombs such as Newgrange, it may be that they had ceremonies in common. The tombs were more than just places for the dead, and fertility rites involving the use of ancestral skulls and other bones appear to have taken place. It is likely that similar rituals took place in the circles.

Fringe Theories

Perhaps more interesting for a GM are wilder speculations on the purpose of stone circles. One theory held that Avebury was a center of pilgrimage for much of southern Britain, and that ritual matings there ensured that small, isolated farming populations did not become inbred.

One theory that came out of the 1980s craze for crop circles was that in the Neolithic, such mysterious markings would have been regarded with awe, and that people commemorated them in a permanent form by stone circles.

The junctions of ley lines (see p. 26) are believed to be rich in earth power, and stone circles were perhaps raised by prehistoric peoples to mark these sites of power. Dowsers claim to have sensed strong emanations from stone circles.



Circles and Avenues

Stonehenge

Stonehenge, most famous of all stone circles, is located on Salisbury Plain, in Wiltshire, in the heart of southern England. Stonehenge is not remote; hordes of tourists visit it without difficulty. Despite thousands of years of neglect and vandalism, milling crowds, and barriers to keep the latter from making the former worse, the site remains unique.

The earliest structures of Stonehenge date from about 3100 B.C.; a henge about 375 feet across, with an entranceway in the northeast, marked by a pair of stones. The heel stone, the marker of midsummer sunrise, may date from this time, as do the 56 enigmatic "Aubrey holes." About half contained cremated bones. The four station stones outside the bank, which form a rectangle around the henge, were also possibly set up during this phase. The lines between them may have astronomical significance (midsummer sunrise and sunset and Mayday sunset), although their original positions are uncertain.

At the same time, the 2-mile *Cursus* and 1,300-foot *Lesser Cursus* were constructed nearby. They are long, narrow areas defined by banks, which may have been used for processions or races.

At about 2500 B.C. Stonehenge and the other monuments in the area were abandoned, as the ritual centers in the area shifted eastward. Three more henges were built at Durrington Walls, Woodhenge and Coneybury.

During the period 2100-1800 B.C. Stonehenge was rebuilt. The entrance was modified to align with sunrise on the summer solstice, and a straight processional avenue was built from this entrance. Over later centuries, this avenue was extended, and swung around until it finally reached the River Avon.

Legends of Stone Circles

Here are some legends and folklore that gathered around stone circles:

(1) It is not possible to count the stones in the circle and get the same answer twice.

(2) On a particular night (often All Hallow's Eve), the stones come to life and dance.

(3) The stones are the remains of evil knights (or witches or trolls) turned to stone by a holy man (or the sun, or a witch), or villagers who were punished for dancing or playing games on the Sabbath.

(4) The stones are good knights sleeping until they are needed.

(5) The stones were placed by giants.

(6) They are burial markers or dwelling places for "other-world" folk (possibly with riches), but are guarded by powerful curses.

Intriguingly enough, ghosts are rarely (if ever) sighted around stone circles and other such ancient monuments. One witness claimed to have seen a long-haired Celtic warrior riding into a round barrow, but round barrows were not built by the Celts. Reputable ghost hunters have a theory that ghosts fade away over the centuries, and that stone circles are simply too old to have ghosts still associated with them. The ghostly "half-life" seems to be around 300 years, so that there are about half as many 15th-century ghosts left as 18th-century ones; Roman-era ghosts are very rare, while older ghosts are truly exceptional.



Other Sites

Durrington Walls, more than 1,500 feet in diameter, was discovered from the air. Centuries of cultivation had nearly flattened the ditch and bank. Inside it archaeologists have found the remains of several large timber buildings similar to those of Woodhenge (see below).

Coneybury, also leveled by farmers and only discovered from the air, was smaller (160 feet across), and appears to have been used for a very short time.

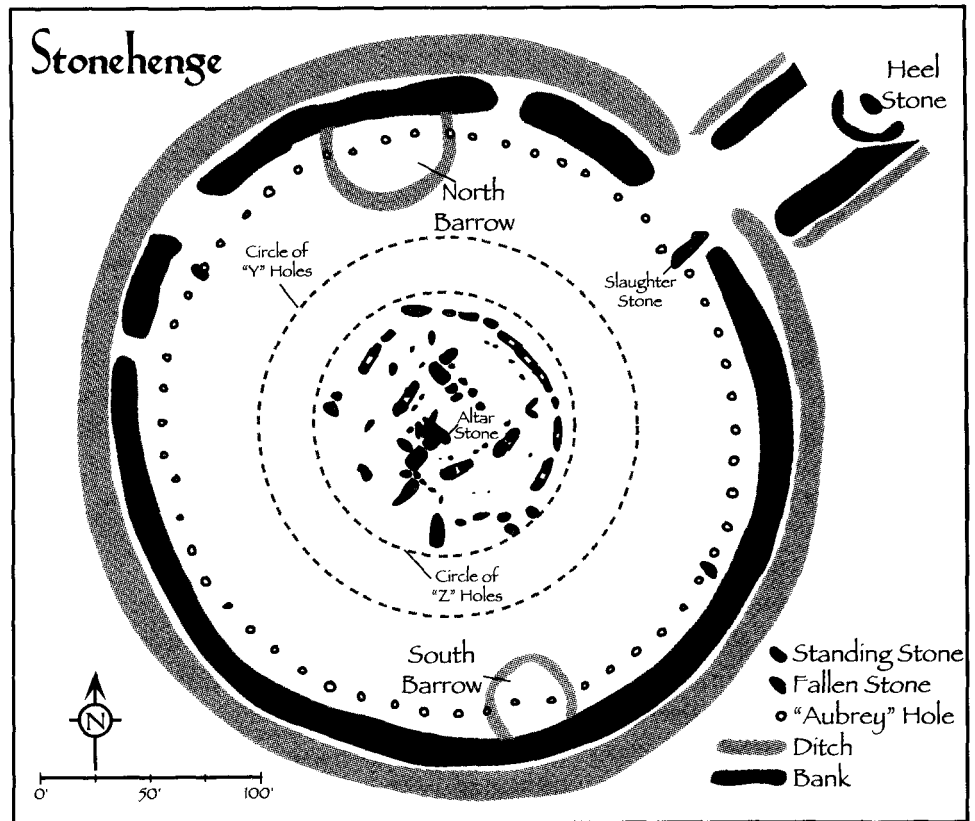
Woodhenge

Woodhenge was only discovered in the 1920s, by crop-marks visible from the air; in the 4,500 years since it was erected, its timbers had decayed almost entirely away. At first, it was assumed by archaeologists that it was a wooden version of a stone circle (hence its name, paralleling that of the nearby Stonehenge); archaeologists now think it was an enormous building, in which meetings, feasts, and other rituals took place. The site nowadays is a grassy patch on the bend of a small road, with short concrete posts marking the sites of the original posts.

Callanish

Callanish, on the island of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides off Scotland, is sometimes compared to Stonehenge for its dramatic appearance and sense of mystery; it is also far more remote, and so less often plagued by tourists. It consists of a tiny circle (40 feet across) with a 405-foot processional way leading to it and radiating spokes to other compass points. Callanish bears a resemblance to a Celtic cross; Stukeley thought it was an early Christian site. The radiating arms may represent the sun's rays. A tall stone at the center of the circle may have acted as the gnomon of a sundial.

Much of the area within the circle is taken up by a small chambered tomb, so that the available space within the circle is far smaller than for earlier monuments like Avebury or even Stonehenge. This, its situation in bleak terrain, and the relatively light stones (less than 7 tons), suggest that it was used by a small community.



The stones were set up at Stonehenge at this time. The outer *sarsen* circle is of 30 uprights linked by lintels; inside this was the *bluestone* circle (originally about 60 stones), inside this the horseshoe of the truly huge *sarsen trilithons*, and an inner *bluestone* horseshoe, at the focus of which is the "altar stone," which may originally have been a pillar. A double circle of *bluestones* may have been started and then removed: modifications and rebuilding went on as long as Stonehenge was in use.

The *sarsen* stones were originally boulders on Marlborough Downs, about 20 miles to the north. The *bluestones* (which are actually a darker grey) come from the Prescelly Mountains of southwest Wales. The *bluestones* also show signs of some of the woodworking techniques used to balance the *sarsens* on each other; they may also have been placed in the same way. It has been suggested that they formed a stone circle earlier in Wales – some religious or political squabble was perhaps solved in a rather energetic manner, by carrying off the losers' temple. (Alternatively, geologists have suggested that these stones *may* have been brought all or part of the way from Wales during the Ice Ages, riding in glaciers.)

Around Stonehenge, there are over 340 visible barrows, and at least another 130 are known. Many are in clumps along the skyline.

Even if draft animals were used, more than a million and a half hours of labor went into the construction of Stonehenge in the 300 years 2100-1800 B.C. Later on, the stones were rearranged and the avenue extended. Two rings of pits, the Y and Z holes, were dug outside the circles around 1500 B.C. The last modifications to the avenue came later.

Among monuments, Stonehenge stands unique. The *sarsens* and *bluestones* were worked in a way resembling wood rather than stone. The stones were shaped: the lintel stones are held in place by a mortise-and-tenon structure, that is, the uprights had projections from the middle of the top, which fitted into hollows on the underside of the lintel stone. Presumably, the lintels were raised on enormous ramps of earth.

Avebury

"Avebury doth as much exceed in greatness the so renowned Stonehenge as a cathedral does a parish church," wrote John Aubrey in 1663.

Avebury is one of the biggest and best-preserved circles, and has the unusual distinction of a village built within and around it.

The two inner, smaller circles are older than the main ring by several hundred years. The main circle is about 1,100 feet across, with unshaped boulders of up to 60 tons – brought over a mile from Marlborough Downs. The stones tend to be tall and straight-sided or diamond-shaped and set on edge. Popular tradition has it that these represent male and female principles, and that anyone who touches both at the same time will change sex. (This requires long arms, as the stones are about 30 feet apart.) Around the circle is a ditch and bank.

The smaller circles originally had about 30 stones each. Within the northern circle there remain two stones of a cove (see p. 19). In the southern circle there are a line of stones; there used to be a single taller stone known as the Obelisk.

From the southern entrance ran the West Kennet Avenue, a processional way. Two lines of large stones (of which little remains except concrete markers to indicate where stones and posts once stood) ran about a mile and a half to the Sanctuary, a much smaller circle on Overton Hill. Another avenue may have led from the western entrance, but is largely lost. Avebury was completed by about 2400 B.C., and finally abandoned 1,000 years later.

The Anglo-Saxons settled near Avebury, which they did not regard with any particular awe. They called it *Waleditch* (British dike) and *Avreberie* (Afa's fortification). From the 12th to the 14th century, the circle was regarded as devilish, and some stones were pushed over and buried. One, now known as the Barber Stone, landed on top of one of the desecrators, whose remains were found when the stone was excavated in 1938. He lived around 1320, and judging by the tools he carried, he was a barber-surgeon.

The first full account of the circle was provided by John Aubrey in the mid-17th century, and the circle was surveyed in detail in the early 18th century by William Stukeley, which was fortunate as the stones were once again under attack, for building stone and for agricultural purposes, damage which continued until the 19th century.



Carnac

The megaliths of Brittany (northwestern France), especially in the Carnac area, strain belief that such numbers and sizes of monuments could exist in such a small area. Standing stones are everywhere, as are tombs, stone circles and lines of stones.

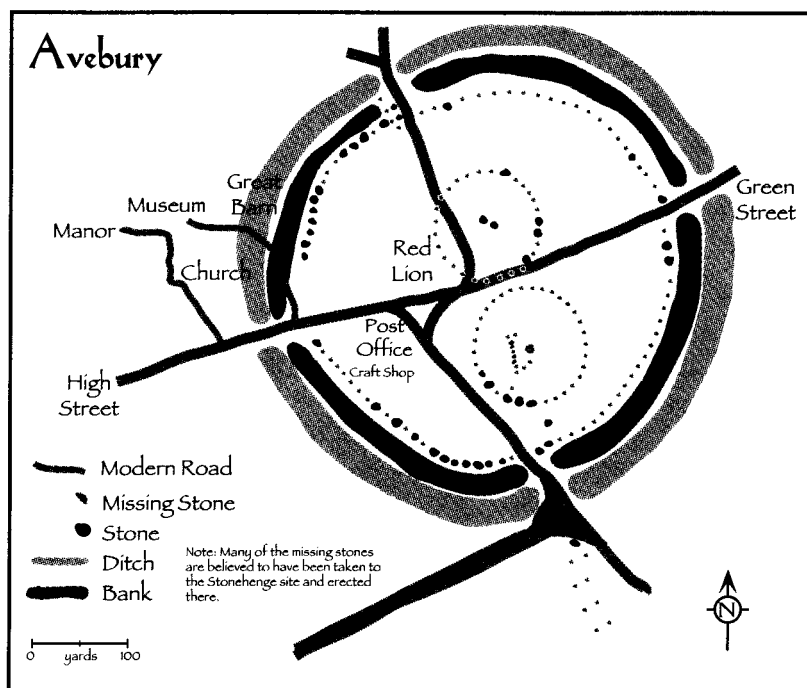
Many of the monuments are single standing stones (menhirs) – relatively rare in Britain. It appears that these do not mark burials, but their function is not known. Menhirs were tall and smooth and slender. Many were "Christianized" in later centuries by the addition of a cross at the top. Most are less than 25 feet high – some are up to 40 feet. The largest of them all, Le Grand Menhir Bris, at Locmariaquer, would have been over 65 feet tall, and weighed over 250 tons. It was moved at least 2 1/2 miles before being set up at its site. It has since fallen and broken in four pieces; it may have been deliberately toppled.

Carnac is most famous for its lines of stones. There are at least three sets of these, which may have once been linked to form a massive ritual complex. In each case, the lines run NW-SE or WNW-ESE. The stones are largest at the western end, and the rows are wider there. At one or both ends of the row there was originally a stone circle.

The Kerlescan row consists of 13 rows 1,160 feet long (594 stones survive). The stone circle at the western end is more like a square. If there was another circle at the other end, it has not survived.

The Kermario lines contain 1,029 stones in 13 lines, extending over 3,700 feet. At the western end it is 315 feet wide; at the eastern 118 feet. Originally there was a stone circle at the eastern end.

The lines at Menech had egg-shaped stone circles at both ends. The twelve rows extend 3,140 feet between them; they are 380 feet wide at the west and 206 feet at the east. The western circle was 299 by 233 feet, and could have accommodated 1,000 people. Its short axis is oriented to the midsummer sunrise/midwinter sunset. The eastern circle is now badly damaged, but was about 350 by 295 feet and oriented in the same way.



Sample Character: Earth-Priest (Geomancer)

ST 10, DX 11, IQ 15, HT 12
(90 points)

Speed 5.75, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 8 (staff).

Advantages: Charisma +2; Clerical Investment; Empathy; Immunity to Disease; Literacy (in pre-modern settings); Magery 1; Magery 2 on any ley line; Magery 2 *more* at *major* nexus points; Reputation (among those who know of the cult – details are up to the GM); Allies (acolytes and cult guards – numbers, power levels, etc. at GM's whim; may substitute an Ally Group).

Disadvantages: Age (usually at least 50); Fanaticism (cultist); Stubbornness; Unattractive Appearance (details vary, but could be based on hooded and staring eyes; dark, unadorned clothing; or simply age and wrinkles); Vow (cult code – details are campaign-specific); Sense of Duty (to cult ideals).

Quirks: GM's option. May include rhetorical styles of speech, somber clothes, odd hairstyles (or a shaven head), or the carrying of cult symbols, a carved staff, etc.

Skills: Administration-15; Animal Handling-14; Area Knowledge (home region)-16; Bard-15; Botany-13; Detect Lies-13; Diagnosis-13; First Aid-15; Interrogation-14; Leadership-16 (incl. Charisma); Literature-15; Meteorology-14; Naturalist-13; Navigation-14; Occultism/Occult Geography speciality-14/20; Prospecting-15; Staff-12; Stealth-11; Survival (home area terrain)-15; Theology/cult beliefs as speciality-14/20; Throwing-11.

Spells: (Note: all the following rolls *except* that for Sense Leys include 3 levels of magery, as these spells can only be cast on ley lines. Sense Leys is at +2 if the mage is standing on a ley at the time of casting. If standing on a major nexus, the character gets an extra +2 to *all* spells.) Sense Leys-14; Ley Communication-18; Ley Flight-16; Ley Telekinesis-16. (Other, non-ley-related spells may be added at the GM's option; Elemental and Healing spells are especially appropriate.)

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Moving the Stones

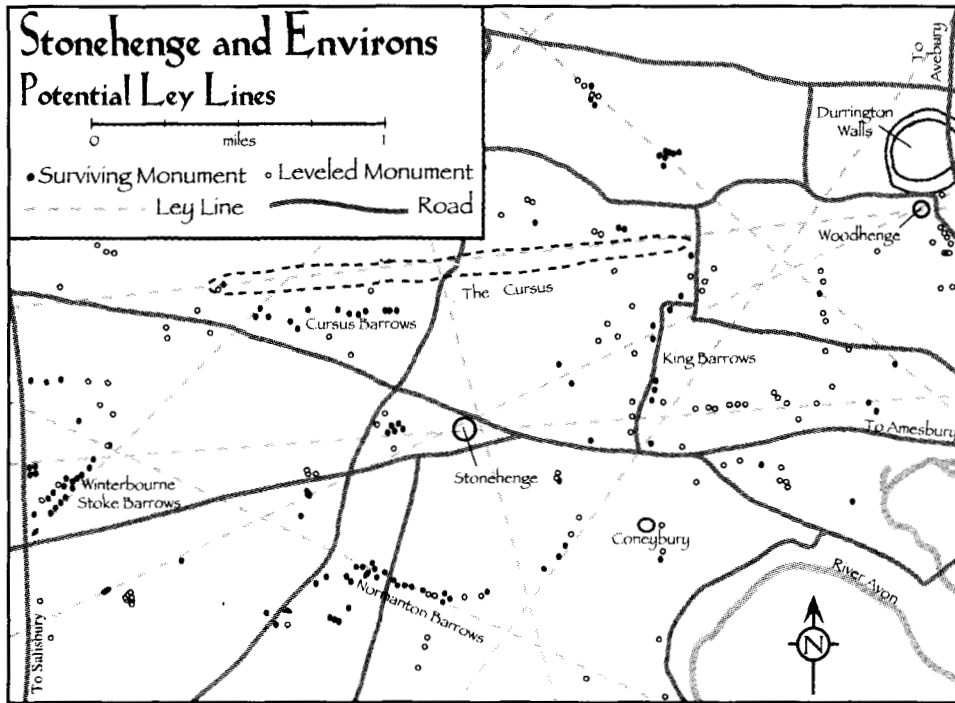
Stone circles were usually built with local stone. The larger stones may weigh up to 60 tons. A great many people were involved in the construction of the larger sites – implying an organized society with powerful leaders or priests. The later circles which served a single family or village had smaller stones.

In the case of Stonehenge and Avebury, there was no need to quarry the stones – they were boulders on the surface of the Marlborough Downs. When quarrying was necessary, stones were split off by hammering wooden pegs into natural cracks, then making the pegs swell by flooding them with water. Heating and cooling (by building a fire on it and then dowsing it with water) could also split rock.

Wooden rollers are often pictured in reconstructions of people hauling the stones. In fact, over uneven ground, strapping the stones to wooden sledges would have been more practical. The stones were erected at the sites – probably hauled up earth ramps, to be toppled into position.

The only stones known to have been brought any great distance were the bluestones of Stonehenge. These comparatively small stones (up to 4 tons) were apparently brought nearly 200 miles from western Wales, probably on boats up the River Avon to within two miles of Stonehenge. Why is a mystery; the “military conquest” theory is as good as any. Time-traveling PCs might wish to investigate the matter.





Sample Character: Earth-Priest (Geomancer) (Continued)

Languages: Whatever is standard for the campaign; may also have studied one or two archaic, "scholarly," or "mystical" tongues.

This is a "generic" character template, suitable for use as the NPC priest of a cult which uses (or perhaps *worships*) the power of ley lines. GMs should feel free to adapt all aspects of the priest to suit the setting; skills should suit the local TL and social patterns. A secret, "part-time" priest might also have one or two professional or craft skills with which to earn a living; if the cult is disliked and suppressed by society, the priesthood is a Social Stigma or a Secret. Really annoying, irrepressible cult leaders could have advantages such as Luck ("Nobody could have survived that!"), to balance their Bully and Sadism disadvantages.

The character may be either sex – he might be a patriarchal druid, or she might be the representative of an earth-goddess. Use this template for anything from a friendly, tolerant individual, dedicated to defending a benign natural order, to a fanatical maniac who lives to drench the sacred stones with the blood of human sacrifices. The geomancer is assumed to be fanatically devoted to his faith; PCs who threaten anything that such a priest regards as holy could see even the nicest old cultist turn nasty.

Although this priest has learned to wield a staff – a symbol of office with some practical applications – he is not primarily a combatant. What makes such an individual a dangerous opponent is the cult's followers, who may be either a large proportion of the local population (hence being formidable for sheer numbers), or a smaller band of complete fanatics ready to die on command. (For a more combat-effective version of the character, add some battle magic, or just a few good weapons.) What the priest *can* do is maintain the cult's lines of communication, speaking with followers, acolytes, and colleagues at nearby sites, and sending messengers and warriors around the countryside at great speed. PCs should learn that, if they make enemies of a ley-wielding cult, they will find it very, very hard to escape their opponents' reach.

Ley Lines

In 1921, 66-year-old businessman Alfred Watkins had a sudden insight about the English landscape. He found that straight lines across maps of the English countryside could connect many ancient sites. In 1922 he published *Early British Trackways*, and in 1925, *The Old Straight Track*. Watkins found that places named "-ley" often turned up along his lines, which inspired him to call them "ley lines." Watkins' theory was that early Britons preferred to travel in straight lines, and that the sites he chose to align were markers for their travels. Markers for these "prehistoric roads" included medieval churches and castles, 17th-century roads, and features like ponds and fords.

Conventional archaeologists met this theory with resounding silence. But ley lines were modestly popular, and formed an agreeable hobby for ladies and gentlemen who could discover their own leys on maps at home and confirm them on Sunday afternoon walks.

The theory was resurrected in the 1960s and 1970s – modified with the idea that leys were built along lines of power by ancient Britons attuned to the energy currents of the Earth. This allowed for the irrational shape of the network, and explained why sacred sites should be important markers. Dowsters proclaimed they could detect the earth energy in ley lines, giving enthusiasts a new means of detecting leys.

Sightings of UFOs, the Loch Ness monster and other mysterious things were claimed to occur along ley lines. There were speculations that flying saucers were using the ley energy to power their machines. Or perhaps, in common with ghosts, Loch Ness monsters and other visions, the saucers were visible there because the ley line is a weak point in the fabric of space-time, allowing glimpses into other times and places, and maybe even (for those who know how, or those who are unlucky) travel in time or space, or the irruption of fantastic creatures into the everyday world.

Ley Lines in the Campaign

Ley Spells

The following spells may be available to PC spell-casters in worlds where ley lines have mystical significance. They may form a college of their own, or GMs may link them to Elemental Earth.

At the GM's option, these spells *might* be worked into amulets – usually silver jewelry – for about 100 times casting cost.

Sense Leys

Information

Leys appear to the caster as softly glowing, silvery “tracks” at ground level. At the GM's option, the caster may get a sense of leys “somewhere nearby” even if his view is blocked.

If ley lines vary in power and significance, the caster can analyze any in sight with an IQ roll, gaining an idea of their relative power. Major nexus points will be obvious (surrounded by a “glowing silver halo” or such).

Leys *cannot* be hidden by spells such as *Conceal Magic* (p. M61); they are too powerful.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 2 to cast, 1 to maintain.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Ley Communication

Regular

Lets a caster who is standing on a ley line communicate telepathically with one willing subject elsewhere along the same line. The result is a two-way conversation, “feeling” like speech and conducted at the same speed – although neither participant needs to speak out loud while the spell is active. Simple pictures may also be sent, in about the same time it would take someone to sketch such an image.

The caster may communicate either with an individual known (or believed) to be somewhere on the line or with whoever happens to be standing at a known point. The recipient's attention is drawn by a mental “noise” somewhat like throat-clearing. Communication may then begin (or be refused). Distance poses little problem; there is no penalty for “calls” up to ten miles, -1 for sendings up to 100 miles, -2 for up to 1,000 miles, and -3 in the unlikely event of anyone finding a longer ley line. If either caster or recipient moves off the ley, the contact is instantly broken.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 4 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery, Sense Leys.

Continued on next page . . .

In campaigns in which ley lines are truly lines of power, Dowsing can be a Mental/Average skill with no default. If Dowsing can also serve the mundane but useful task of finding water and perhaps minerals, the GM might require that the character also take a 5-point advantage, Dowsing Talent. (This could be worth 10 points or more if it works over *maps* of an area.)

Map-based ley-finding (with a ruler and a sharp pencil) can be a Mental/Easy skill, defaulting to IQ-2 or Occult Geography (p. 119, sidebar). In all cases, a simple roll vs. skill is enough to sense a ley, although a few minutes of testing may be required to determine its direction.

Ley Lines and Mana

If a campaign includes magic and ley lines, the GM must determine how the two are related. One easy approach is to decide where on the campaign scenery the lines lie, and then to say that a line has a higher mana level (see p. B147 or p. M6) than the surrounding countryside. Lines can be as long as the GM likes, but shouldn't be very wide – perhaps just a single hex, certainly no more than 20 or 30 in even the most magic-saturated campaigns.

Crucial “nexus points” where two or more leys meet can have even higher mana levels. These will be sites of vast power, grabbed and held by mages or temples – and very likely to be built on, unless this somehow “pollutes” the ley. Another possibility is that ley lines are not normally special, but under certain conditions (usually the light of a full moon), they “turn on.”

GMs should remember that well-known, powerful leys will become absolutely crucial to a world's magic-wielders. If they are meant to be occasional features only, they should be made rare, obscure and difficult to use.

Drawing Strength from Leys

Mages may recover fatigue faster on leys due to the “ambient power flow.” In this case, a mage can “tap” a ley for 1d points of fatigue by rolling IQ + Magery, with one attempt permitted every five minutes (or every minute, if the GM wishes to make ley lines very important); on a critical success, the mage recovers all currently lost fatigue!

Ley-Linked Magery

Ley lines may provide power for some mages but not others. This can be simulated by a form of ley-linked Magery that only works on ley lines. Following the guidelines in the sidebar on p. 121, the cost per level depends on the frequency of functional leys in the campaign. If leys are common, use the 10/6/10 costs; if they are rare or active only under special conditions, make it 8/6/8. If mages must seek out major nexus points, where a dozen leys intersect, that's effectively one small, remote location (Magery 1 costs 6, and so on).

Limitations

There are many ways in which use of leys can be restricted. Wizards may have to spend hours “attuning” themselves to a line to use it. Perhaps they even have to “reset” their magic every time they cross a ley (making leys a distinctly mixed blessing). Or perhaps leys only boost ritual magic (pp. B147-148), not quick castings. “Negative” leys might even drain magic . . .

Threat of the Deadly Killer Black Leys

Most ley lines are benign, if powerful, but the materialistic activities of modern people have allegedly disrupted some, turning them into “black leys” or “black streams.” Black streams cause illness and accidents to those who live along them, just as normal leys supposedly stimulate growth in plants.

Fortunately, the same dowzers who can detect black streams can reconvert them to “good” leys by sticking angle-irons into the ground at specific points. In campaigns including black leys, roll against Dowzing-3 or Occult Geography-5 to determine the key points. On a critical failure, the GM is welcome to get as weird as the campaign can stand.

Ley Spells (Continued)

Ley Flight

Regular

Lets the subject fly, without wings – but only along ley lines, and no more than 50 feet above the ground. The spell must be cast while both the wizard and the subject are on a ley, and if the subject moves off the line, the spell is instantly broken. (Trying to fly too high doesn't cause a crash – it just doesn't work.)

The subject is in full control of the flight, has a Move of 12 (reduced normally by encumbrance), and can move and fight normally while in the air, with a possible height advantage (see p. B123).

Duration: 10 minutes.

Cost: 4 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery, Sense Leys.

Ley Telekinesis (VH)

Regular

The caster can telekinetically move large objects along a ley, at up to 50 feet above the ground. This is similar to the psionic ability of Telekinesis (see p. B172); the spell has Power equal to the caster's effective skill. Power may be increased by spending 1 extra fatigue for every 2 extra points of Power. This extra cost applies even with a critical success on casting.

The subject may be a living creature. Unwilling subjects can resist the spell with DX (to avoid its “grab”). If they can hang on to something solid, they can break the spell's hold by winning a Quick Contest of ST vs. the spell's Power – but once they are lifted away from any kind of anchor, the victim is helpless in the caster's “grasp.”

The spell simply “lifts,” and cannot restrain limbs or the like, so the victim may be able to swing or fire a weapon, but the usual Speed/Range penalties will apply.

The caster cannot lift himself alone, but can ride an object of at least twice his own mass being moved by the spell.

The caster must be able to see the subject at the time of casting, and takes double range penalties (-2/hex) if not touching it. The spell loses effect the moment the subject moves off the ley, although it may continue on a ballistic trajectory. The spell can hurl improvised missiles – damage is as per the Telekinesis psi power (see p. B173). Roll vs. the caster's Throwing skill or DX-3 to hit, with double range penalties (the spell is clumsy).

Duration: 5 minutes.

Cost: 4 to cast and maintain. +1 to cast and maintain for every +2 Power, not reduced by casting roll success.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery 2, Ley Flight.

Adventure Seeds

Barbarian Secrets: Ancient Rome, late first century A.D. A wealthy patrician employs the heroes to travel to the remote province of Britannia, to help him investigate a strange open stone temple there. The locals deny any useful knowledge (the temple was built by “giants” long ago). The patrician is sure this is a cover story, and that native druids must use the place for their foul rituals. The druids are plotting against the Empire, and this place is a rallying point!

Unfortunately for the PCs, a druidic underground *does* exist – although incapable of organizing an effective revolution and totally uninterested in Stonehenge, they are vicious in their responses to intruders. And, in campaigns with magic, all this attention awakens *something* among the stones.

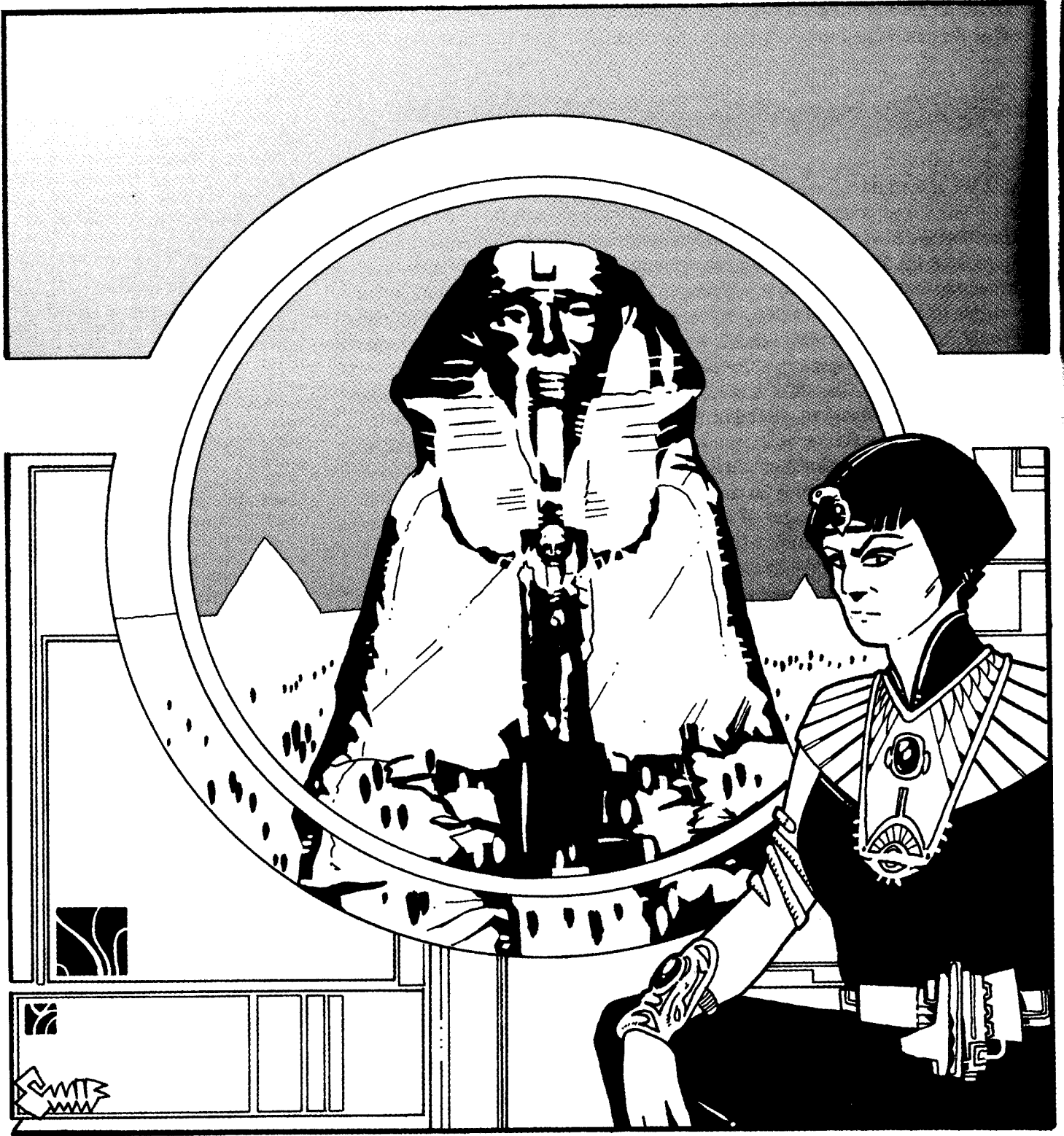
A Moving Experience: In a fantasy campaign, the PCs are in a Bronze-Age land, caught up in the last stages of a small but ferocious tribal war. When it is over, the victorious chief, drunk with success, announces how his triumph will be celebrated. The losers' temple – a stone circle up in the mountains – is to be transported 200 miles across country to be incorporated into the victors' bigger circle. The PCs become involved in arranging (or preventing) this. And how will the tribal gods feel about the idea?

The Word of a Druid: These days, even members of the general public may well know that Stonehenge had nothing to do with the druids, but this doesn't seem to worry the “druidic revivalists” who like to use the place for ceremonies. Enter Sir Geraint Jones, wealthy Welsh baronet, would-be druid, and maniac. Since Sir Geraint has been ejected from every known druidic, bardic and Welsh nationalist group for obnoxious behavior, crankish theories, or assault on other members, he's organized his own group. His insanity gives his rhetoric a power that convinces a minority of hearers utterly.

In order to “prove” his idea that Stonehenge was an ancient Celtic ritual and political center, Sir Geraint has arranged for a great new “archaeological discovery.” He's rich enough to organize a convincing forgery, but most academics have dismissed his announcement. His followers are responding by firebombing the homes and offices of his “enemies.”

The PCs could be mainstream academics, professionals hired to act as bodyguards, reporters investigating this affair, or other interested parties. They are up against a small but very determined force. As Sir Geraint slips farther into madness, his followers will perform increasingly bizarre acts. This may culminate in the attempted sacrifice of a white-robed victim at Stonehenge.

3 * THE PYRAMIDS



Egyptian Chronology

5000-3000 B.C.: Predynastic Period

3000-2647 B.C.: Early Dynastic Period (Dynasties 1-2)

Union of upper and lower Egypt

2647-2124 B.C.: Old Kingdom (Dynasties 3-8)

Djoser (2628-2609 B.C.): Step Pyramid, Third Dynasty

Snofru (2573-2549 B.C.), Fourth Dynasty: building of the pyramid of Meidum, the Bent Pyramid and the Red Pyramid

Cheops (Khufu) (2549-2526 B.C.), Fourth Dynasty: the pharaoh of the Great Pyramid

2460 B.C.: End of the age of the Great Pyramids

2123-2040 B.C.: First Intermediate Period (Dynasties 9-11)

2040-1648 B.C.: Middle Kingdom (Dynasties 11-14)

Menhotep II (2050-1980 B.C.): Egypt reunited

1648-1540 B.C.: Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties 15-17)

Collapse of central authority. Hyksos Dynasties (15th and 16th) rule lower Egypt; 17th Dynasty rules simultaneously at Thebes

1540-1069 B.C.: New Kingdom (Dynasties 18-20)

Hyksos expelled; Egypt begins imperial conquests in Asia

Akhenaton (1353-1337 B.C.): attempts to institute monotheistic worship of Aton

Tutankhamun (1336-1327 B.C.): return to orthodoxy

Rameses II (1279-1213 B.C.): prodigious builder, less successful imperialist

20th Dynasty (1186-1069 B.C.): Egypt enters the Iron Age

1069-332 B.C.: Late Dynastic Period (Dynasties 21-31)

Period of decline, often under foreign rule

27th Dynasty (525-404 B.C.): Persians

28th Dynasty (404-399 B.C.): Persians ejected with Greek help

31st Dynasty (343-332 B.C.): Persians

332 B.C.: Alexander enters Egypt

323-30 B.C. Ptolemaic Period (Dynasty 32)

Library at Alexandria founded by Ptolemy I (323-282 B.C.)

Pharos lighthouse (see p. 118) constructed by Ptolemy II (282-246 B.C.)

Cleopatra VII ("the" Cleopatra, 51-49, 48-30 B.C.)

If thou shalt undertake to perform for the deceased that which is ordered in this "Chapter of the Four Blazing Torches," each day, thou shalt cause the form of the deceased to come forth from every hall, and from the Seven Halls of Osiris. And he shall live in the form of the God. He shall have power and dominion corresponding to those of the gods and the Spirit-souls for ever and ever. He shall enter in through the secret pylons and shall not be turned back in the presence of Osiris. And it shall come to pass, provided that the following things be done for him, that he shall enter in and come forth. He shall not be turned back. No boundary shall be set to his goings, and the sentence of the doom shall not be passed upon him on the Day of the Weighing of Words before Osiris – never, never.

– *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*

Egyptian History

Tutankhamun knew the Pyramids as a thousand-year-old mystery; more than another thousand years separated him from Cleopatra. So Egypt appears timeless, with a tranquil past in which people grew their crops and built pyramids without interference. In actuality, the great days of pyramid-building lasted for only a couple of centuries early in the history of the country.

Early Dynasties

In the Predynastic period, two separate kingdoms grew up, nourished by the Nile. They shared many cultural features, and came into frequent conflict. Lower Egypt occupied the Nile delta, while Upper Egypt took in the Nile valley. The Early Dynastic Period began when the king of Upper Egypt, Menes, conquered the Delta and united the country. He established his capital at Memphis, near the junction of the two kingdoms. During the First and Second Dynasties, nobles and pharaohs were buried beneath substantial mud-brick buildings called *mastabas* – flattish, rectangular structures with sloping sides. The tomb itself was a subterranean house, divided into rooms.

The Old Kingdom

The Old Kingdom differs from the Early period in the use of stone – in the mastabas of the nobility, and in the pyramids.

The pharaoh was the recipient of divine power from his divine father, and dispensed it to his subjects. This power (also known as the *ka*) was eternal so long as it was linked to the pharaoh, so an eternal stone dwelling-place would enable the pharaoh to continue dispensing his power forever. The nobility were buried in their mastabas around the pharaoh, to benefit from his divine power. The symbolism of the pyramid was important to the Egyptians. Creation myths speak of a primal hill rising out of chaos. Later obelisks were topped with small pyramids (originally coated with electrum) representing the sun's rays.

The first pyramid (the "step pyramids") was built for the Third Dynasty pharaoh Djoser. In the Fourth Dynasty, someone thought of smoothing the sides to create the archetypal pyramid shape. It took some experimentation to get the

Some Useful Terms

Acropolis: Originally a Greek term for a fortified hilltop stronghold at the heart of a city – the most famous today being that in Athens (see p. 85). The word is sometimes used for fortified hill-towns anywhere in the world; see, for example, Great Zimbabwe (pp. 78-79).

Bas Relief: Literally “low relief”; sculptures carved out of a flat surface that are only raised a little above their background.

Cenotaph: A tomb-like monument, but with no burial.

Mastaba: A type of early Egyptian tomb – a simple mud-brick structure.

Mausoleum: The original Mausoleum was the tomb of King Mausolus at Halicarnassus (see p. 115). The word is now used for any magnificent above-ground tomb.

Obelisk: A smaller type of Egyptian monument – a four-sided, tapering pillar, with a pyramidal top, often (originally) decorated with gold, bronze, and carvings, frequently set in pairs on either side of an entrance. The term may be used more generally for any monumental stone.

Sarcophagus: A stone coffin, usually massive and ornately carved.

Ziggurat: A type of Babylonian building, usually a temple, in the form of a large stepped pyramid.

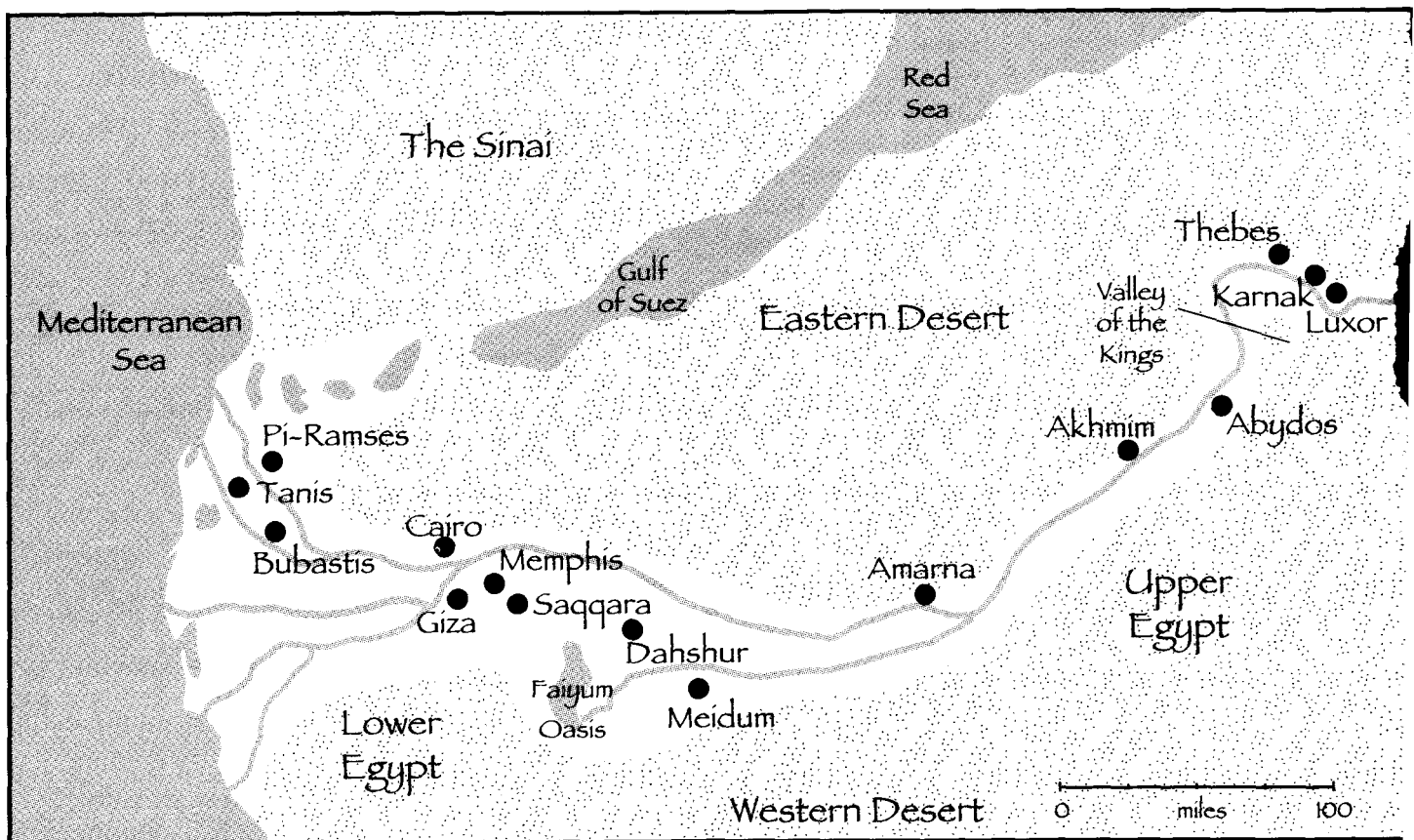
formula right: the pyramid of Meidum was built with sides rising at an angle of 52° , and later collapsed. The Bent Pyramid uses the angle of 52° for most of its height, and then abruptly shifts to 43.5° – it was possibly still under construction when the Meidum pyramid collapsed. The Red Pyramid was also built with this angle. Later pyramids reverted to 52° , but with careful engineering to ensure no repeat of the Meidum disaster.

Because pyramids took years to build, and one couldn’t anticipate when a pharaoh was going to die, pyramid construction went on almost continually. This led to a surplus of pyramids during the Fourth Dynasty, some of which were never used for burials.

During the Fifth Dynasty, the power of the pharaohs began to decline. The priesthood of the sun-god Ra rose in prominence, and built magnificent temples. Pyramids continued to be built until the 18th Dynasty, but these were small and often shoddy: rubble faced with proper stone, or mud-brick. Such pyramids have not survived the centuries well.

Poor floods, foreign raids and the weakening of the pharaoh’s authority combined to bring about a collapse of the empire. Northern Egypt was ruled from Heracleopolis, and southern Egypt from Thebes. During this time the first tomb-robbing took place: the builders of the great pyramids had never envisaged a period of chaos in which a watchman and a few blind turnings in the tombs would not be sufficient protection.

During the 11th to 13th Dynasties, the Middle Kingdom pharaohs had their capital at Memphis. The supremacy of the priesthood of Ra was challenged by the cult of Osiris, who promised immortality to all virtuous believers. Invasion by the Hyksos caused the collapse of central authority during the 14th Dynasty. They founded the 15th and 16th Dynasties (a period of anarchy called the Second Intermediate Period). The 17th Dynasty, ruling from Thebes, drove them out.



The New Kingdom

Amosis I, founder of the 18th Dynasty, pursued the Hyksos into Asia and annihilated them. Now with territory in the Middle East, the imperialist New Kingdom came into conflict with the other superpower in the area, the Hittites. The Hittites had iron weaponry. Egypt, with no iron sources of its own, purchased iron from Asia – sometimes paying with treasures robbed from tombs..

Tuthmosis I abandoned the pyramid tradition and began the habit of burial in the Valley of the Kings (see sidebar, p. 32). His daughter Hatshepsut named herself “pharaoh” and her stepson co-regent – a position he was apparently happy to have until he was 22, when she died. After assuming sole rulership, Tuthmosis IV dashed off to war, won a sizeable empire, and enriched the priests of Amon, who built the temple at Karnak.

Later attempts to limit the power of the priests of Amon culminated in the heresy of the pharaoh Akhenaton, who declared that there was only one true god, Aton, worshiped as the sun’s disk. These ideas – and his capital city, Akhetaton – did not survive the pharaoh himself. His successors, Smenkhare and Tutankhamun, were both short-reigned; Tutankhamun died at the age of 19.

The 21st to 31st Dynasties were a time of decline. Egyptian kings ruled as much of the land as they could from various capitals in the delta, while the priests of Amon often ruled Thebes independently. The 25th Dynasty (“Ethiopian” – from Meroë, see p. 77) had troubles with invading Assyrians, who sacked Memphis and Thebes, and were in their turn ejected by the Egyptian 26th Dynasty, using Greek mercenaries. Many of the tombs and pyramids which had been open since being robbed were finally sealed, some with fresh burials inside.

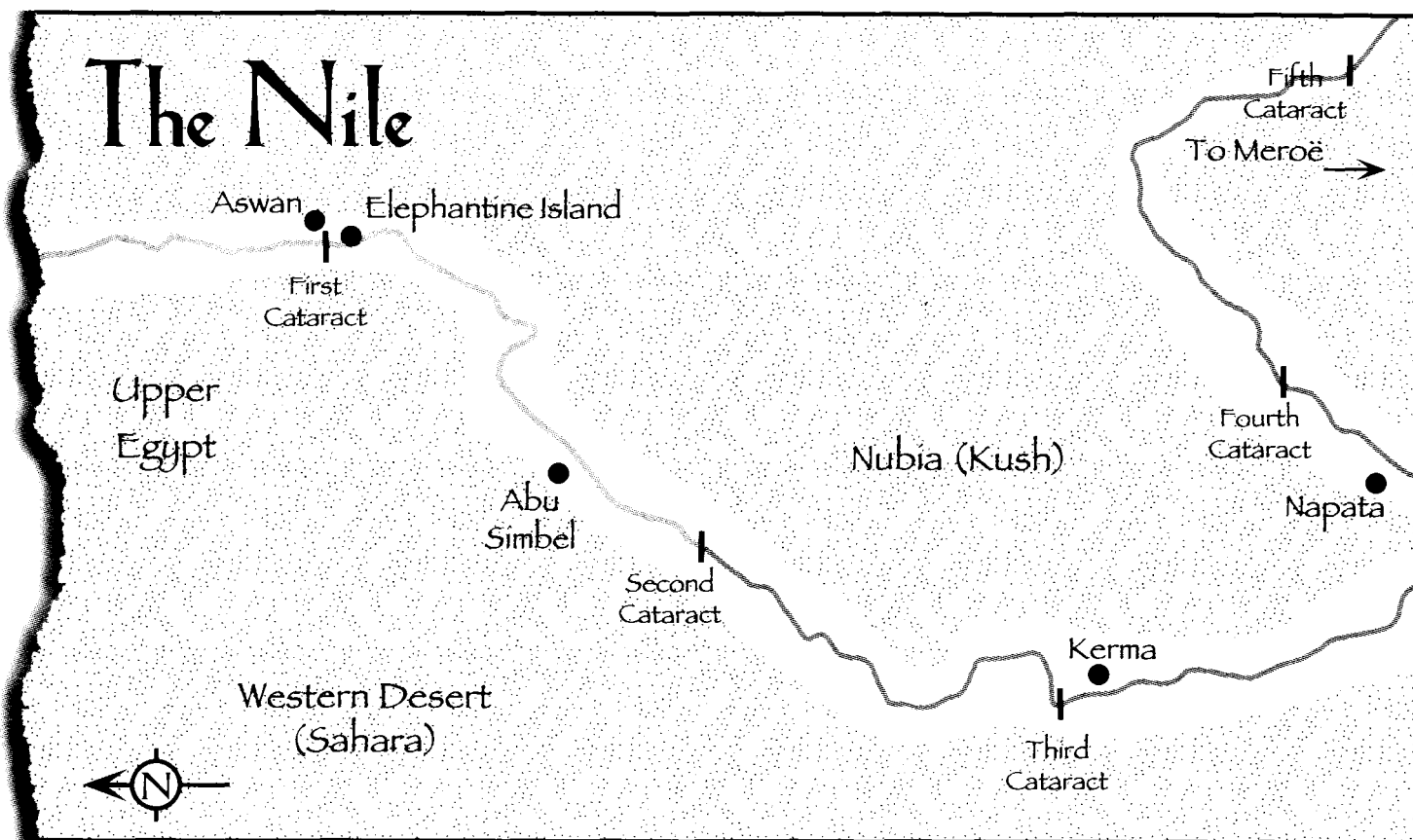
The Persians invaded in 525 B.C., and were expelled in 399 B.C. (with Greek assistance), but returned in 343 B.C. and remained until Alexander the Great came to Egypt in 332 B.C.

New Skill: Pyramidology (M/H)

Pyramidology represents knowledge of the most arcane and complex aspects of pyramid architecture and engineering. In campaigns where pyramids embody or conceal mysterious secrets (see p. 38), this skill also covers the occult sciences revolving around pyramidal structures. (The GM may restrict this to Egyptian pyramids or include pyramids of other cultures.) Pyramidology should be treated as a Science skill with no default. (The GM may let it default to Occultism or some other occult skill at -3 or lower, if desired.)

Any pyramidologist knows the dimensions of all the major passages and chambers in all the major pyramids, how they are aligned to the compass points and astronomical bodies, the critical ratios of different measurements, and so on. On a successful skill roll, he can identify the most auspicious places to perform rituals, uncover or unlock a minor secret, or correctly interpret the significance of a particular measurement or alignment. At the GM’s option, Pyramidology can serve as a divinatory occult skill (basing predictions of the future on glyphs and symbols found within a pyramid).

Mathematical Ability gives a +1 bonus to all uses of this skill, and +2 when performing a detailed analysis of a previously unknown pyramid or set of chambers and passages.



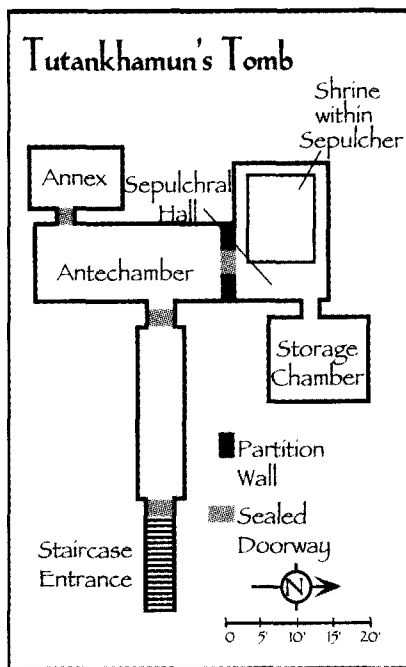
The Valley of the Kings

Pharaohs of the 18th to 20th Dynasties – and a few privileged non-royals – were buried in the desert Valley of the Kings. The decorations of their tombs concentrate on formulae for safe transfer to the next world and portrayals of the pharaoh as the sun god sailing through the underworld by night, avoiding enemies and dangers.

Construction of the tomb began at the start of a pharaoh's reign, but probably took less than 6 years, with only 50 or so workers. Once the tomb was dug from the soft limestone, it was carved, decorated and painted.

The 60-odd tombs which are known have similar layouts: an entranceway leading to an antechamber, which gives into a main hall with a sunken floor to receive the sarcophagus. Side-chambers (if present) were for tomb furniture. Most of the tombs were robbed in antiquity. In 1995, a major new tomb, believed to hold dozens of the sons of Rameses II, was discovered in the valley; details are unclear as yet.

Because the Valley of the Kings was rather cramped, mortuary temples commemorating its inhabitants were built on the adjacent plain.



The Valley of the Queens

In the Valley of the Queens are over 70 tombs of queens, princesses and princes of the 18th-20th Dynasties. The tombs are on a far smaller scale than those of the Valley of the Kings, and undecorated.

Greece, Rome and the Middle Ages

After the death of Alexander, one of his generals, Ptolemy, claimed Egypt. He established a which lasted 300 years, until the Romans took over from Cleopatra. The Greeks respected Egyptian traditions, and developed Alexandria into the greatest commercial, cultural and scientific center of the age, The famous library at Alexandria contained 700,000 books, including priceless Greek manuscripts; it was burned in 391 A.D., and probably also at other times.

The Romans set themselves up as the successors of the pharaohs, and even completed temples begun by the Ptolemies. But the constant drain of wealth from Egypt to Rome had harmful long-term effects. By the 3rd century A.D. the irrigation systems were falling into decay.

Islam reached Egypt in 640 A.D. and Alexandria surrendered in 642. Egypt became a part of the Ottoman Empire in 1517; the heavy taxes it endured helped to further impoverish the once wealthy land.

Egypt Rediscovered

Egypt came back to world attention with the expeditions of Napoleon in 1798-1801. Napoleon took along some of France's leading academics; they collected antiquities and made drawings of sites which were published in 20 volumes between 1809 and 1828. One treasure found at this time was the Rosetta Stone (now in the British Museum), which enabled the deciphering of hieroglyphics, since its inscription is in three languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics, Greek and Demotic. The stone itself dates from the age of the Ptolemies.

The French expedition to Egypt also proved the catalyst towards the modernization of the country under Mohammed Ali.

Building the Pyramids

The pyramids were built without mortar, without complex machinery, and using only human muscle-power. (Most pyramid workers were peasant conscripts, rather than slaves. One estimate calls for 100,000 men working three months a year – typically during the flood months – for 20 years to raise the Great Pyramid.) The sheer magnitude of these projects is mind-boggling – it's no wonder that some writers have proposed extraterrestrial builders for them.

In constructing the Great Pyramid, workers leveled the site with an amazing degree of accuracy – probably cutting channels in the bedrock and filling them with water to serve as guides. They used stone and copper tools to quarry the rocks, and perhaps wooden wedges that swelled when wet. They may have used rollers to help move the two-and-a-half-ton stones. Or they may have dragged the stones along tracks of mud (one modern experiment found that a single man could easily move a 1-ton block over a thin layer of mud on level ground).

Ramps made of rubble and mud were most likely used to get the blocks from the low-lying quarries and from the barges that brought limestone and granite blocks from 400-600 miles away. A similar ramp spiraling around the pyramid raised stones and workers to the current height of construction. Once the giant limestone capstone was in place on top, workers added the polished limestone outer casing in a top-down manner as they dismantled the ramp. Humans did all the labor – there was no room on the ramp for draft animals.



New World Pyramids

The Surviving Pyramids

Egyptian houses were built of mud-brick, so Egypt's great capitals of Memphis and Thebes are today represented by a few lumps and bumps, while their necropoli and temples of stone remain.

The Step Pyramid

The first pyramid, this looks like a set of *mastabas* placed on top of each other. Its structure is the same as that of the later pyramids, with tilted courses of blocks. Unlike the later pyramids, it is surrounded by copies of the palaces the pharaoh had inhabited in life, in one of which a simulacrum of the pharaoh himself was found, his gaze fixed skywards. The pyramid, originally a proper *mastaba* before being raised into a four- (and then six-) step pyramid, contains over a million tons of stone.

The Pyramid of Meidum

This pyramid was originally designed as a seven-step pyramid. Before construction was complete, the design was changed to an eight-step pyramid. Still later, the pharaoh Snefru ordered the steps filled in and a smooth outer casing of polished limestone added, creating the first "true" pyramid.

But the pyramid was poorly designed. It was built with too few retaining walls, and between these the filling was irregular and poorly-squared. The new, flat sides did not simply overlay the existing pyramid, but extended a further 20 feet out – off the rock foundation on which the bulk of the pyramid rested, and onto sand. The designers attempted to provide stability by using giant blocks embedded in the sand, but the combination of circumstances was too much; at some point (possibly during construction) the sides tumbled away, leaving the stepped inner core amid a pile of rubble.

Many theories have been put forward to explain the similarities between the Old World and New World pyramids. They include extraterrestrial visitors, Greek colonies in Central America, the tribes of Israel migrating across the Atlantic, and transfer of designs by psychic powers across the continents

These theories all have at least one problem – and that is that the two styles of pyramid are not very similar.

The Old World pyramids are smooth-faced structures surrounding a tomb, with plain exteriors and considerable architectural effort invested in the interiors. New World pyramids are stepped structures designed to raise a temple at the summit as high as possible, with elegant surfaces covering a solid structure, and stairways leading up the outside.

Both New and Old World pyramids are associated with prophetic numbers. While the Old World pyramids make use of their dimensions as esoteric means of revealing a wide variety of physical constants (see p. 38), New World pyramids are less subtle. They have the numbers and the hieroglyphs enscribed on their surface.

The two styles of pyramid are similar in their scale. The Pyramid of Cheops and the Pyramid of the Sun (see p. 110) have almost identical base sizes, although the former is twice the height of the latter.

New World pyramids have more in common with the ziggurats of Mesopotamia, especially those of Babylon (see p. 67), than with Egyptian pyramids. If one of the Lost Tribes of Israel wandered to the American continents to inspire the pyramids, it is more likely that they did so following the exile in Babylon rather than the earlier exile in Egypt.



The Sphinx

The Great Sphinx of Giza guards the most famous pyramids in Egypt. The man-headed lion statue stands 66 feet high and is 240 feet long. There are theories that the Great Sphinx of Giza is much older than the Pyramids – theories supported by such evidence as erosion patterns. The more commonly accepted history places the Sphinx's age at about 4,500 years.

Workers quarrying stone for the pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) apparently left an outcrop of alternating hard grey and soft yellow sandstone, as it was useless for building. Khufu's son Khafre ordered it sculptured into a sphinx – a symbol of wisdom and power – with his own portrait sculptured into a sphinx – a symbol of wisdom and power – with his own portrait the model for its head. Masons added the outstretched paws.

Over the centuries, drifting sands buried the Sphinx. The future Tuthmosis IV (18th Dynasty) ordered the sand cleared sometime around 1400 B.C., in response to a dream that promised he would become pharaoh if he did so. Tuthmosis commemorated this feat with a stele (the "Dream Stele") carved from granite and inscribed with the story of his dream. Tuthmosis IV also had the Sphinx encased in fresh limestone blocks and painted red, blue, and yellow. To honor his father, he placed a statue of Amenhotep II close to the Sphinx's chest.

A chapel was later added around the Dream Stele, and repairs made to the time-damaged paws. But by 300 A.D., the Sphinx was once again buried up to its neck in sand – and remained so until the 19th century. (In the 15th century, a Muslim zealot hacked off its nose. Napoleon's troops were later blamed for this – in actuality, all they did was pepper its head with rifle shot.)

In 1818, a Genoese sea captain cleared some of the sand away from the Sphinx's chest. He was looking for a rumored opening into the Sphinx – and treasure, of course. He found nothing. John Perring, an English surveyor, was similarly disappointed when he drilled holes into the Sphinx's body 20 years later. However, recent high-tech surveys by Japanese investigators have hinted at hitherto unknown tunnels and cavities *beneath* the Sphinx...

The Bent Pyramid and the Red Pyramid

The Bent Pyramid was the first to be designed from the start as a "true" pyramid. But partway through its construction, the architect suddenly changed the angle of the sides from 52° to a gentler 43.5°. Some theorize that the Meidum pyramid collapsed while the Bent Pyramid was still under construction, causing the architect to change the design to avoid the same fate.

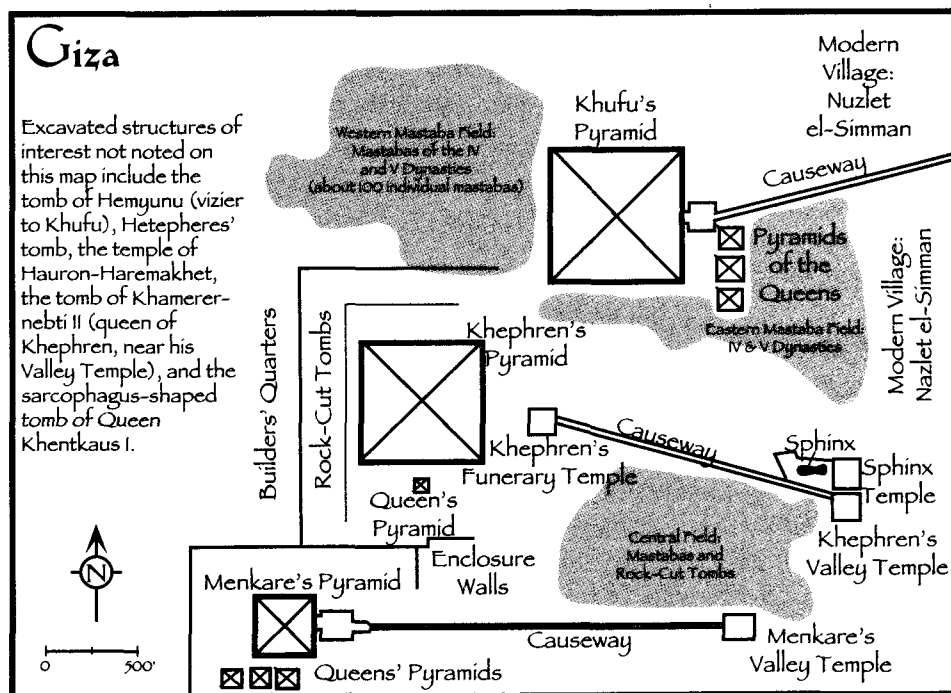
Snefru, who ordered construction of the Bent Pyramid, was apparently unsatisfied, and had yet another pyramid built. The Red Pyramid, constructed of reddish sandstone underneath the white limestone facing (now missing), is the only pyramid designed entirely with its sides at a 43.5° angle. Later pyramids returned to the original angle of 52°.

These and later pyramids were built with extremely exact entrance passages pointing to the pole star, linking the pharaoh with the "eternal stars" that never rose or set. Many had small accessory pyramids, often thought to be tombs for relatives, but perhaps actually for the separate burial of the pharaoh's viscera.

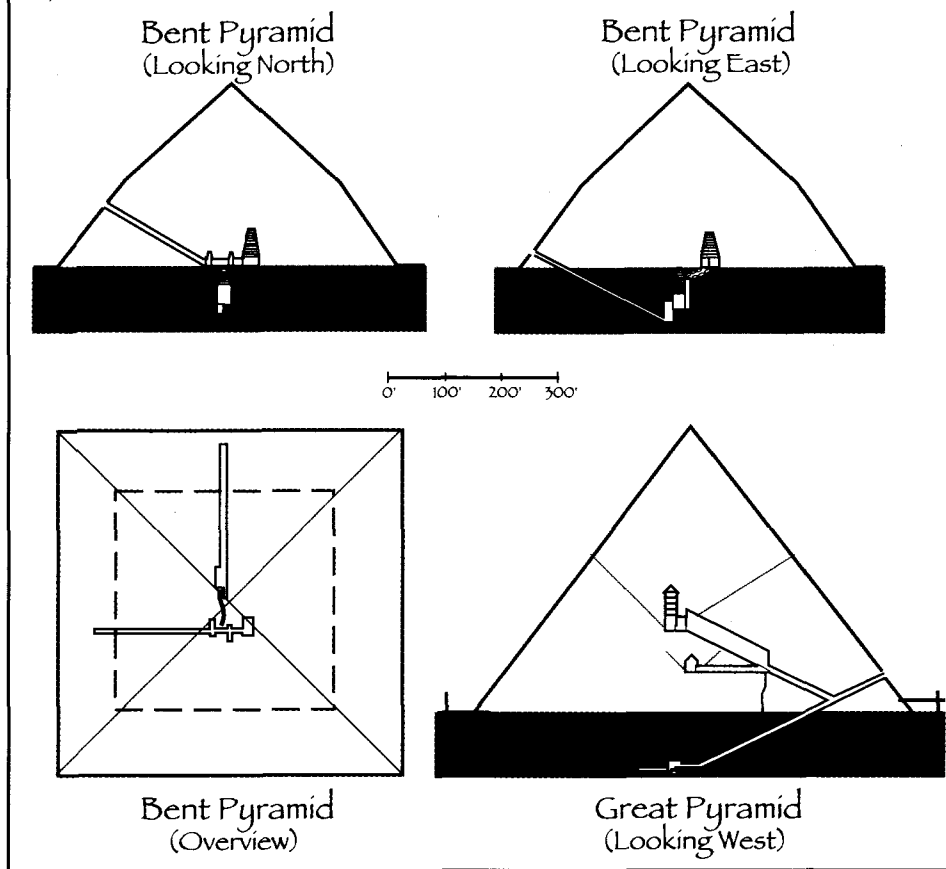
The Great Pyramid of Cheops (Khufu)

This pyramid, formally titled "The Pyramid which is the Place of Sunrise and Sunset," is better known as the Great Pyramid – and with good reason. The largest of the Egyptian pyramids, the Great Pyramid is 450 feet high (originally 480 feet), covers more than 13 acres, and contains more than 2.3 million blocks of stone (each weighing an average of 2.5 tons, with some up to 15 tons). Each side is 755 feet long (differences between sides are less than 8"). The interior is undecorated, reflecting the builders' confidence both in offerings to the deceased continuing on a regular basis, and on the certainty of a glorious after-life for the pharaoh, without need for protective spells and rituals such as are found in the Valley of the Kings.

The Great Pyramid was built only 75 years after the first stepped pyramid. There are three burial chambers. The original design called for the pharaoh's body to be interred below ground, in touch with the earth. But Khufu decided he wanted a larger sarcophagus – one which would not fit through the passageway.



Pyramid Plans



A second chamber (the “Queen’s Chamber”) was made, but plans changed once more, and a third burial chamber (the “King’s Chamber”) was added.

The passageway up to the “King’s Chamber,” the Great Gallery, is built with such precision that it is said that neither a needle nor a hair can be inserted into the joints between the stones. The king’s chamber itself is 17 feet by 34 feet, with its long axis oriented east-west. Above this chamber are five chambers of decreasing size, meant to direct the weight of the pyramid away from the King’s Chamber. Each is roofed with a granite slab weighing some 50 tons – the top chamber’s roof forms a peak. It is in these upper chambers that the only inscriptions were found: the name of Cheops inscribed several times in hieroglyphics.

Outside the pyramid are the remains of an enclosure wall and of the funerary temple, as well as traces of the causeway leading up from the valley temple. Inside the pyramid – who knows? There are tales of hitherto undiscovered secret passageways and chambers rich with treasure – and traps.

The Pyramid of Khefra (Chephren)

Built by the son of Khufu, this is slightly smaller than the Great Pyramid. (It appears larger because it is set on slightly higher ground, and its outer covering is intact at the top.) It is 448 feet high (originally 470 feet) with a volume of 3 million cubic yards. The nearby pyramid of Menkare (Mycerinus) is a mere 215 feet high and a tenth of the volume of the two great pyramids. Neither of these two is particularly interesting inside. The granite sarcophagus from the pyramid of Mycerinus was lost at sea in 1838 while being taken to Cartagena, Spain.

The pyramids at Giza are surrounded by small pyramids, mastabas, temples and pits which contained ritual solar boats.

Treasure Hunters

It seems that everyone who has looked upon the pyramids and tombs of Egypt has dreamed of treasures buried with ancient kings. Unfortunately, most of the tombs were picked clean in very early times.

In medieval times, Egypt had professional treasure hunters, the *mutalibun*. These bold characters were said to be expert in ancient lore, underground exploration, and the disarming of traps. They also had to be knowledgeable in the art of magic for use in locating their objectives and in order to defeat the mystical defenses they might encounter. Theirs was seen as a high-risk occupation, with, presumably, corresponding rewards.

“How-to” books were written, advising beginners interested in taking up treasure-hunting. One such treatise was *Kashf al-Asrar*, by Al-Jawbari, who wrote:

Imagine you are in a long narrow passage descending into the depths of the earth and the passage is lined by sword-bearing statues. Beware! Beat out the ground in front of you with a stick, so that the swords fall on emptiness.

(Translated by Robert Irwin, in *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*.)

Al-Jawbari also warned of fake *mutalibun*, confidence tricksters who planted dummy “treasures” in the course of ingenious scams.

The Missing Corpse

In 820 A.D., the Arab caliph Abdullah Al Mamun entered the Great Pyramid in search of accurate maps of the world said to be hidden within its secret chambers. As the entrance to the pyramid was then unknown, the Caliph and his men laboriously tunneled through the stone blocks. (Later visitors gained entrance to the pyramid through this 100-foot passageway – until the original passageway was opened to the public in 1989.)

The Caliph broke through to a narrow, 4-foot-high passageway that angled steeply upward (to the original opening, hidden behind a revolving stone door on the north side) and steeply downward (to an empty, unfinished burial chamber). Disappointed, they were about to leave, when they noticed another corridor that sloped upward – but was blocked by a large granite slab. The Caliph’s men tunneled around the slab – only to find several more granite obstacles. When at last they reached the King’s Burial Chamber, they found the enormous sarcophagus. It was empty. Obviously, tomb robbers had already been here.

But how had they gotten around the enormous granite obstacles that so vexed the Caliph and his men?

Sample Character: Secret Priest of Set

ST 10, DX 11, IQ 15, HT 11.
Speed 5.5, Move 5.
Dodge 5.

Advantages: Allies (cultist acolytes); Clerical Investment; Immunity to Disease; Literacy; Longevity; Magery 2 (if applicable); Night Vision; Patron (Cult of Set); Reputation +2 among cultists; Status 1 ("cover ID" is a noteworthy figure in local society), Wealth at least Comfortable (access to cult resources).

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Enemies (the authorities or cultists of Horus and Osiris); Fanaticism; Reputation -1 in general society on 10 or less ("creepy"), Secret (cultist); Unattractive.

Quirks: Always wears black; Keeps tight control on facial expressions; Enjoys nasty pleasures (but suppresses these tastes in the interests of the cult); Dislikes plant life.

Skills: Egyptology-12/18; Area Knowledge ("normal" Egypt)-15; Area Knowledge (Secret Places of Egypt)-15; Astronomy-13; Axe/Mace-11; Bard-14; Diagnosis-13; First Aid-15; Holdout-14; Knife-12; Leadership-15; Naturalist-13; Occultism-15; Poisons-13; Pyramidology-16; Stealth-13; Survival (Desert)-14; Teaching-14; Theology (Cult of Set)-13/19.

Spells: If magic exists in the campaign, this character should make use of it; appropriate spells include Reptile Control, Mammal Control, Lightning, Darkness, Blur, and Fear, along with others in *GURPS Magic* or *GURPS Grimoire*. If the GM is using *GURPS Religion*, priests of Set would use Clerical Magic rather than Miracles or Shamanism; this is a religion of raw personal power, not one where the god takes much personal interest in his followers or where lesser spirits count for much. In a non-magical campaign, Hypnotism and Sleight of Hand might substitute.

Languages: Native in the standard language for Egypt in his era (Egyptian, Greek, Latin, or Arabic); also Ancient Egyptian-14, and possibly a few words of other useful archaic tongues, or knowledge of useful international languages such as English in the modern world.

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Temples of Thebes

Luxor

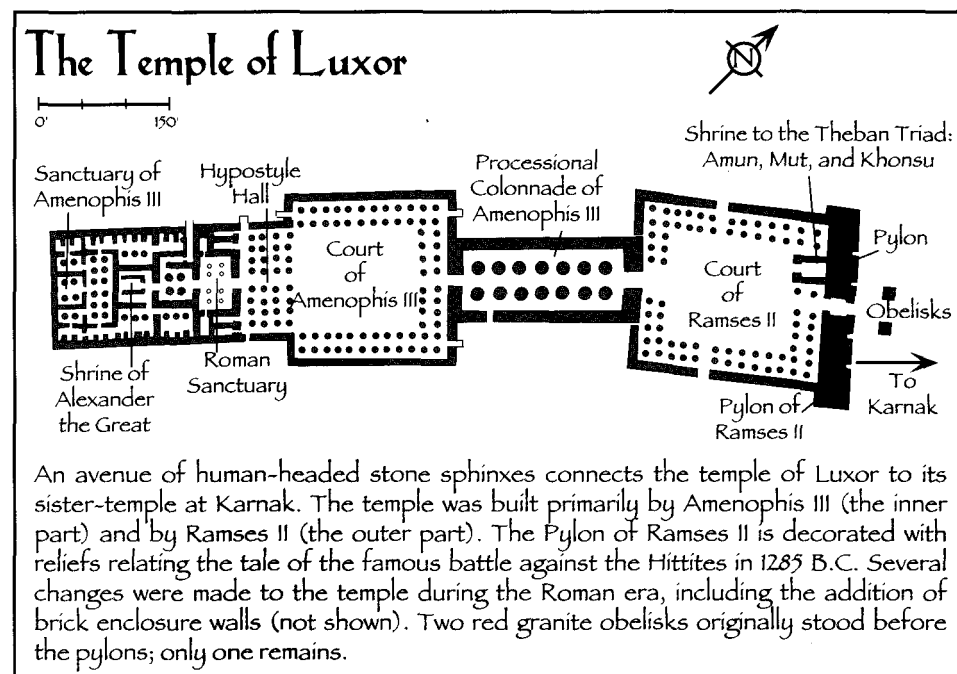
The Luxor temple was begun by Amenophis III of the 18th Dynasty. Ramses II added an outer court. Later rulers (including Tutankhamun, Haremhab and Alexander the Great) added smaller buildings, decorations, and inscriptions. In 300 A.D., part of the inner temple became the sanctuary of a Roman cult. The Romans added many brick-built structures, including walls enclosing large courtyards. A 13th-century mosque occupies an outer courtyard.

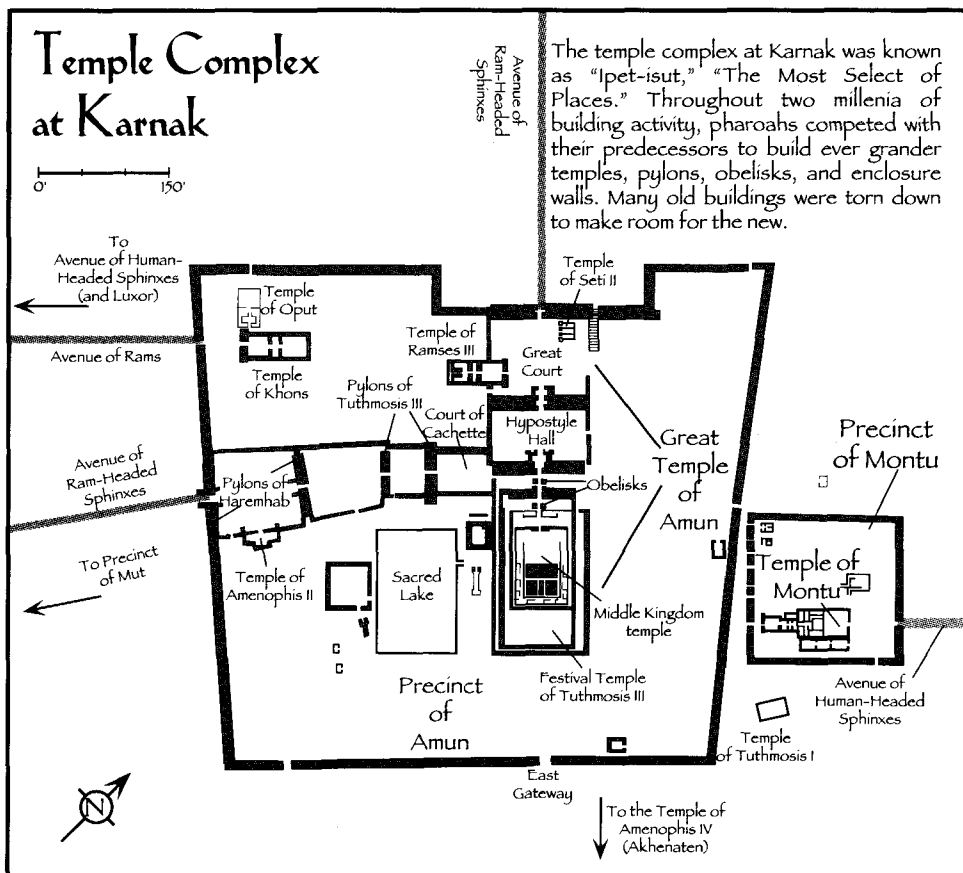
The original temple centers around the Sanctuary of the Sacred Boat of Amon, an offering chapel where sacrifices of calves and incense were made. A hall connected the sanctuary to three chambers, the center one once containing the "divine image of millions of years."

On the other side of the sanctuary are two antechambers leading to the Hypostyle Hall, with four rows of eight columns, and with reliefs on the walls showing the coronation of Amenophis by the gods. The hall leads to the Court of Amenophis, which was enclosed by double rows of clustered columns. Between two columns is a later Roman altar dedicated to Constantine. Slightly out of alignment from the axis of the temple is the Colonnade of Amenophis, over 50 feet high, with walls covered with reliefs of celebrations.

One hundred years after the temple was built, Ramses II added a court at the front, enclosing a small temple to Amon, Mut and Khonsu which had been built by Hatshepsut. The interior of the court is covered with reliefs to the glory of Ramses showing how he vanquished all of Africa and Asia.

Outside the Court of Ramses is a gateway which boasts of the dramatic victory of Ramses over the Hittites at Kadesh (actually an inconclusive draw). In front of the gateway were originally six colossal statues of Ramses, of which only three remain, badly damaged. There were also two obelisks covered with scenes of the greatness of Ramses. One obelisk was taken to France in 1836 A.D., and stands in the Place de la Concorde, but the other remains.





Sample Character: Secret Priest of Set (Continued)

This character makes a good villain in historical-fantasy, "pulp-style" and "weird" campaigns in which some of the less likeable Egyptian cults have survived. The Secret Priest has access to the cult's resources; ancient secrets passed down in the group's writings give him access to strange knowledge of Egypt's ruins and hidden sites. The cult should have secret meeting-places, and concealed passages and the like under Cairo, the Pyramids, or the Valley of the Kings. For a really dangerous foe, the priest could deploy dark forces of magic. He wields a dagger or a blackened bronze mace in combat, but usually prefers that his underlings face danger on his behalf.

Even if the PCs can match the secret priest's personal power, his followers and allies may be spread throughout Egyptian society and perhaps beyond. They will strike, subtly or brutally, at their priests' command. The cult's objectives are up to the GM; they may range from simple survival (with the occasional blood sacrifice to appease Set), to subtle manipulations of many levels of society in order to gain the cult power to obey Set's will. Or they might involve the single-minded pursuit of devices of great power.

This priest rates the objectives of his cult far above the satisfaction of his personal tastes. He dislikes being obstructed, and regards most people outside the cult (and some within it) as obstructions. If he attains a position of power where he had time to develop hobbies, he might slip into a more personal and much less efficient style of evil behavior.

The Cult of Set

After a long history of worship and changing religious and political scenes, Set was identified as the treacherous murderer of the benevolent Osiris, whose cult obliterated Set's name from prayers and inscriptions. Set became the god of the desert and its wild animals, enemy of Osiris' avenging son Horus. He was usually depicted as a human male with the head of a bizarre animal with a long, thin snout and square, projecting ears. Set was a shape-shifter, able to transform into other animals, such as a black boar which wounded Horus in the eye and threatened to devour the moon.

For game purposes, GMs can assume that the cult of Set went underground, and turned twisted and brutal, perhaps mastering evil magics appropriate to their god's spheres of influence.

Powerful magic-wielding priests of Set may be shape-changers themselves.

Karnak

The site at Karnak covers an enormous area and 13 centuries of Egyptian history. "The Most Sacred of Places" (*Ipet-isut*), Karnak was the home of innumerable temples, chapels, obelisks, columns, statues, stelae and inscriptions dedicated to the gods of Ancient Egypt. Its beginnings were humble – in the 12th Dynasty, a shrine was built to a local deity. Soon, a series of small temples facing west and dedicated to Amon were added.

In the 18th Dynasty, Karnak became the principal residence of the pharaohs. Tuthmosis III built two colonnades and two gateways. Hatshepsut built a girdle wall and a festival temple. Amenhotep III changed the front of the temple and built a gateway over those of Tuthmosis I. An avenue lined with ram-headed sphinxes linked the Great Temple of Amon to its daughter-temple at Luxor. Two smaller enclosures housed the temples of Montu (a local Theban deity) and of Mut. Smaller chapels and temples to other "guest" gods abound.

Changes and additions increased in the 19th Dynasty, with walls, gateways and obelisks added to outdo previous work. Karnak became known as the "Throne of the World." The most heavily modified section of the Great Temple of Amon (the centerpiece of the temple complex) was the Hypostyle Hall, with successive pharaohs adding bigger and better columns. At one time, there were over 200 columns, some with a circumference of over 50 feet. Reigning pharaohs habitually altered the inscriptions of a predecessor to take credit themselves.

The complex continued to be modified over the years, until the 25th Dynasty built half of a grand entranceway intended to be over twice the size of that at Luxor. It was never finished, but it did have a number of ram-headed sphinxes lining the processional way. After the 25th Dynasty, the pharaohs gave up rebuilding Karnak.

A map of Karnak is included, but the GM is encouraged, in the tradition of the pharaohs, to make changes.

Pyramid Powers

One modern belief surrounding the pyramids is that the shape itself possesses innate mystical powers.

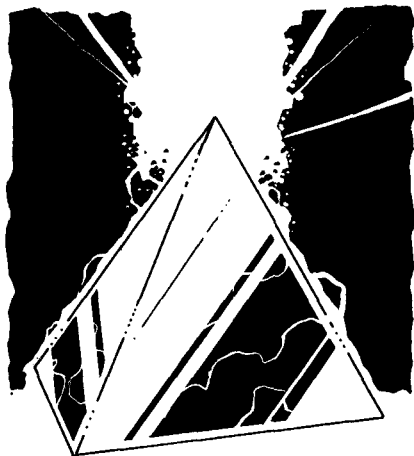
The initial suggestion was that a pyramid could “instantly mummify” the corpse of an animal placed into it. This was first noticed by a Frenchman called Bovis when he visited the Pyramids and noticed the desiccated corpses of animals inside. Once back home, he made a model pyramid, put a dead cat in it, and announced himself satisfied.

A Czech named Drbal then found that keeping a razor blade in a model pyramid allowed him to reuse it 100 times. He was granted a Czechoslovakian patent for this in 1959.

A whole series of claims followed. Preserving food is one (although possibly opposed to the idea of instant mummification). Some French investigators claimed that pyramids helped wine mature more quickly (an idea that may contradict the fresh food and mummification theories). When taste tests were held, wine lovers and pyramid fanciers alike were sadly disappointed.

Other powers attributed to pyramids include: helping seeds germinate faster, making water “tastier,” making pets and plants happier, causing crystals to grow unusually, regenerating batteries, calming children, improving sleep, sharpening thought processes (like razor blades?) and enhancing psychic powers.

Although the occultist Aleister Crowley did not know of pyramids’ powers of sharpening razor blades, he did spend a night of his honeymoon with his first wife in 1903 in the King’s Chamber of the Great Pyramid. According to his account, after reading an invocation the chamber came aglow with astral light. Luckily for light bulb manufacturers, this property does not seem to be possessed by cardboard pyramids – although perhaps all that’s required is the correct invocation.



Pyramid Mysticism

It wasn’t a mathematician or historian who first discovered that the ratio of the height of the Great Pyramid to the length of its edges is $1:2\pi$; it was John Taylor, a retired Englishman, who published his theories in 1859 in *The Great Pyramid, Why Was It Built and Who Built It?* He believed that the incorporation of π into the structure was a sign that the Egyptians had worked under divine guidance. Furthermore, according to Taylor, the Egyptians had apparently used a measurement system remarkably close to the British Imperial system.

This theory was taken up by Charles Piazzi Smith, Astronomer Royal for Scotland, who had an extreme abhorrence of the metric measuring system (the introduction of which was being proposed in Britain at the time). The suggestion that Imperial measures were divinely inspired was too good to miss. In 1864-1865, Piazzi Smith visited Egypt in search of the primordial inch. Smith measured the circumference of the Great Pyramid (in “pyramid inches”), and discovered that it equalled the length of the year (in days – 365.2) times 1,000. He concluded (as had Taylor before him) that only God could have designed the pyramid.

Smith discovered other significant numbers encoded in the pyramid, such as the distance to the sun, the density of the earth, and the number of people alive (in 1870). He also claimed that the internal passages of the pyramid were calendars of world history which stretched into the future (one “pyramid inch” equaled one year – changes in masonry and other clues marked the death of Christ and other significant events).

These ideas were at the core of “pyramidology,” and were quite the fashion for a while (see sidebar, p. 31). Estimates of the end of the world had to be periodically revised. Smith calculated 1881 as the probable date, a date which he himself outlived; a later pyramidologist claimed 1953 would mark the end. Unfortunately for pyramidologists, later, more accurate measurements belied Smith’s calculations for the “pyramid inch.”

The Old Kingdom Egyptians did not know the value of π , so why should it be incorporated into the pyramids? John Taylor thought that it could only be explained by divine inspiration. Archaeologists now believe the height of the pyramid was measured in diameters of a drum or wheel, which was then wheeled along the ground for a given number of rotations to determine the base size. This is given added plausibility by the fact that 52° and 43.5° (the angles of the pyramids) are made by a whole number of wheel rotations (3 and 4 respectively).

The role of astronomical observatory – a popular role for ancient sites, including also Nazca (p. 107), Stonehenge (p. 21) and Machu Picchu (p. 108) – has been suggested for the Great Pyramid. If so, this role was most likely played while the pyramid was still under construction, before the Great Gallery was closed to the sky. Recent theories suggest that the monuments of Egypt are set out as a map of the Milky Way, with the heavenly “river” and the Nile following similar paths, and the Pyramids echoing certain major stars (especially those in Orion’s belt). The pharaohs were perhaps trying to create Heaven on Earth.

Modern-day pyramidologists promote a number of claims surrounding the Great Pyramid, some apparently new ideas but most drawn from ancient legends. Chief among these is the conviction that the Great Pyramid is a repository of ancient knowledge (including forgotten lore from Atlantis) – secrets that will be revealed with the discovery of a secret chamber within the Great Pyramid.



Adventure Seeds

A Definite Edge: A master villain, with connections in Egypt, discovers a hidden chamber under one of the Pyramids, in which the builders, for some reason, stowed a collection of bronze weapons – axes, short swords, and so on. Due to the weird energies focused by the structure, these blades have not only survived completely untarnished, they have become incredibly sharp, with edges a bare molecule thick.

The villain has issued the blades to his followers. Apart from being deadly in melee, these perfect cutting edges can shear through steel bank doors or any lock; the mastermind's organization has gone on a spree of robberies, and is becoming fearsomely wealthy. The heroes must track down and disarm the villains, preferably ensuring that no other such caches exist. The weapons are equivalent to monowire blades (see p. UT53); targets have no more than *one-tenth* DR against them (adjust this to taste), and they do an extra die of damage.

Built to Last: Traditional adventurers love exploring ruins, and may sometimes fall for vaguely plausible offers of “useful” maps. Imagine their annoyance, then, when after a long, hard journey, they discover that the temple complex they are visiting has been re-built five or ten times in the last 1,000 years.

Mummy's Boys: People love to imagine secret cults surviving in Egypt since the time of the pharaohs. If a campaign features such an ancient cult, it might be best to assume that it is directed by a powerful intelligence that takes the *long* view. Perhaps, somewhere in the Valley of the Kings, a hidden tomb holds a single funerary jar, inside which is a carefully extracted brain. A brain with mental powers that transcend the logic of biology. A brain which is now taking a close interest in cloning and advanced surgical techniques.

Tutankhamun's Curse

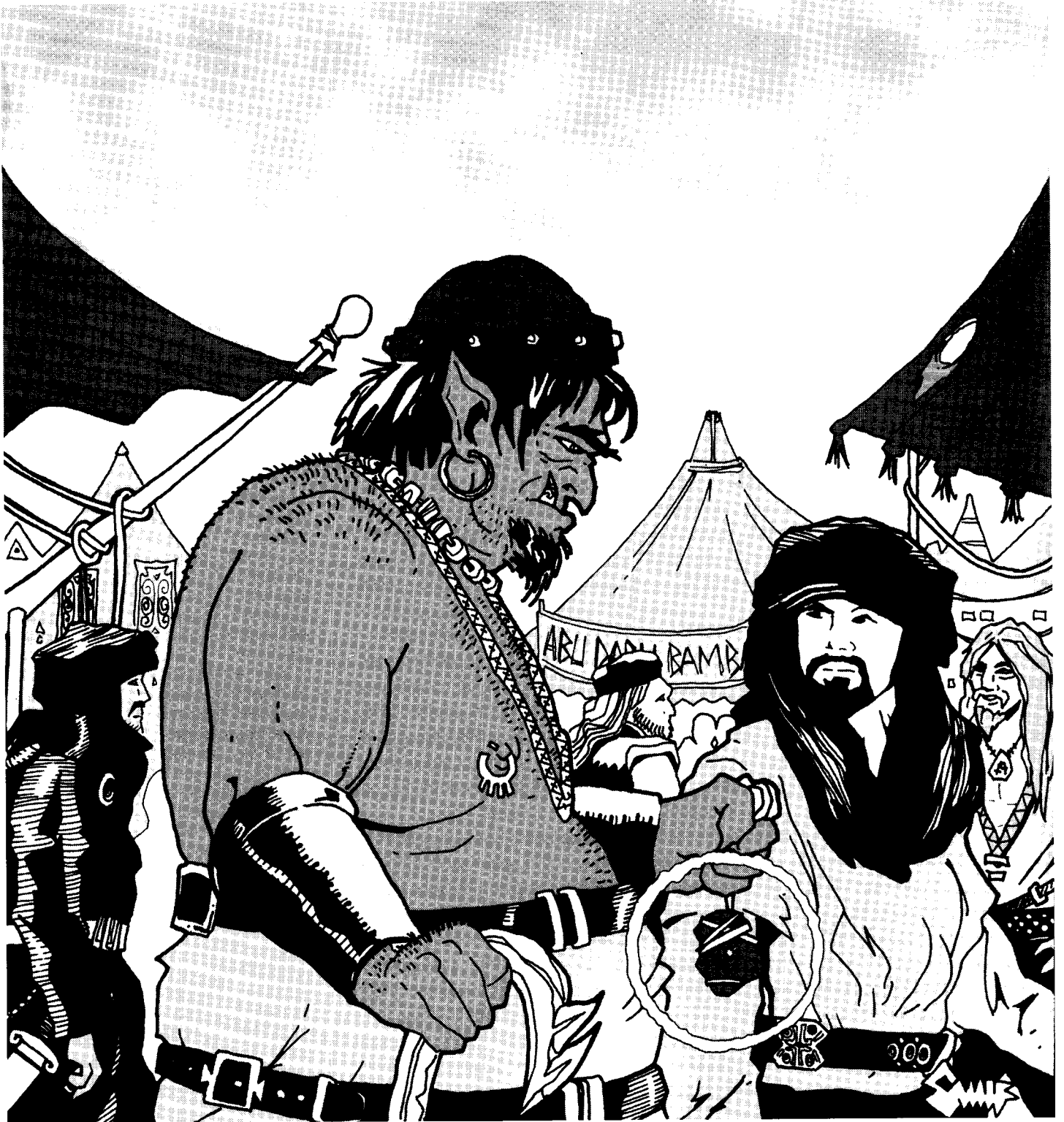
As one of the few unrifled tombs discovered in modern times, Tutankhamun's tomb has become famous out of all proportion to its occupant, who was a minor and short-reigned pharaoh. The tomb was neither as large nor as sumptuously furnished as others. Still, it survived to give an idea of the treasures lost to centuries of pillaging.

One enduring legend is the Curse of the Pharaoh, which supposedly struck those who first disturbed the tomb, and those who were present later at the opening of the sarcophagus. Lord Carnarvon, who financed the excavations and was present at the opening of the tomb in 1922, died the next year from an infected mosquito bite; the legend of the curse was made much of in the press. Ten years after, only one of the five present at the opening of the tomb, and only one of 22 who witnessed the opening of the sarcophagus, had died.

Various other stories of “curses” associated with Egyptian mummies, or parts of them, have been told over the years.

But many brave such curses in search of treasure – or in search of medicinal cures. In the 19th century, thousands of Egyptian mummies were ground and mixed into cure-all elixirs, to be applied internally or externally.

4 ♦ DESERT CITIES



We take the Golden Road to Samarkand.
– James Elroy Flecker, *Hassan*

One of the greatest of fantasy images is the desert caravan – the string of camels striding across rolling sand-dunes in the burning sun, laden with packs full of rare spices and gorgeous fabrics.

This chapter looks at something very necessary to the caravans: the desert cities where merchants could rest and barter.

Game Uses

GMs using desert cities in a game should try to balance three elements, of which the first is trade. The very idea of a city in the desert would be ludicrous – were it not for trade. These cities *bustle*. Every city has at least one market place, and often several. Anything, it seems, can be had – for a price.

The second element, a consequence of the first, is *wealth*. Traders take their profits from the caravans; kings and sultans take their taxes from the traders. When some major figure gets it into his head to build something – a mosque, say, or a palace – it’s probably going to be big, opulent and startling.

But the third factor is *uncertainty*. That wealth is a tempting target for everyone from bandits to emperors. These cities lie in remote regions, and are hard to defend. The caravans that bring their wealth are more vulnerable still. Nomads and raiders sweep through the desert every year; in bad times, conquering hordes may arrive, burn down the place, and massacre everyone. Political infighting among the lords and governors of the cities can become brutal. In short, these are towns for adventurers and risk-takers. The rewards can be high – but the dangers can run higher.

The Silk Road

The Silk Road, as usually defined, starts around Peking, in northeast China, and follows the line of the northern border and the Great Wall (see p. 55) to the “Jade Gate” near Yumen. It then strikes out across the deserts of the Tarim Basin, where strong Chinese dynasties placed fortifications to guard and control it, eventually reaching Yarkant.

Travelers then cross the high plateau of the Pamirs, and enter Central Asia. Once again, they would use oases as stepping-stones across a desert region, eventually reaching major trade towns such as Samarkand.

From there, they would strike south to skirt around the Caspian Sea, then head westwards once more. Unless they preferred to visit the Levant, they would pass beneath the isolated peak of Mount Ararat, in the east of modern Turkey – the mountain where Noah’s Ark is believed to have come to rest.

Now, the Silk Road would carry the traveler to the southern shores of the Black Sea, through Anatolia, until it reached Constantinople (see p. 98). This is usually considered the end of the Silk Road, though of course many goods were carried on from here (or diverged earlier). Some writers talk about it continuing across the Bosphorus and up into Central Europe. Goods heading for the wealthy trading-houses of Venice would have gone by sea from here.

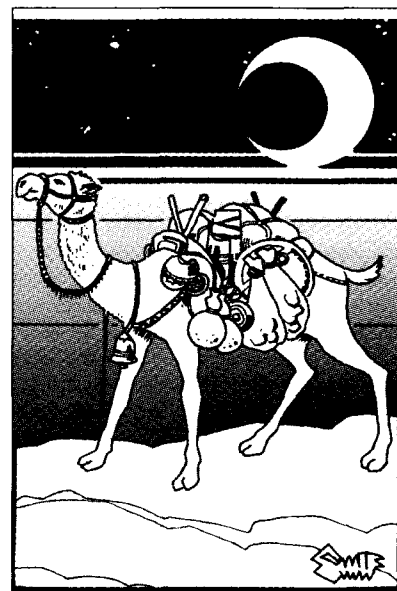
Medieval Italian merchants published their notes on Asian trade routes and goods. Russia and the Caucasus produced amber, furs, hides, hone, and slaves,

Trans-Asian Trade

No one knows when long-distance trade first developed, but even the ancient Indian Mohenjo-Daro civilization (see p. 63) had commerce with the cities of Mesopotamia. Trade gave the empires of the Middle East further importance. Caravans from Egypt, Africa, Europe, India and Central Asia, as well as the sea-traffic of the Indian Ocean, all met here. Goods came from all of these sources; exotica from Africa, metals from Europe, gold from India, rugs and carpets from Asia, and spices from distant islands. However, perhaps the most important trade was with China. Fine porcelain was one valuable commodity from that source, but the Chinese “miracle product” was silk. In Roman times, China had a monopoly on this luxury, which commanded fabulous prices in Rome.

As the Roman Empire and later Sassanid Persia decayed, the Silk Road became more dangerous. In time, the secret of silk – the moth, and the mulberry tree its grubs feed on – leaked from China (legend has it that moth eggs were smuggled west by a monk), and the Byzantine Empire became a producer rather than an exporter. Nonetheless, the Silk Road was re-established under the Mongol Empire, when other items were traded along it; Tibetan powdered rhubarb was an important and expensive medicine (a purgative) in medieval Italy.

It might be thought that modern transport would have completely destroyed the Silk Road, but nothing is that simple; some communications routes still pass this way. The area is a strategic and commercial crossroads, and traditional products such as elegant carpets still earn foreign currency. Still, the Asian trade routes are no longer the key to world politics that they once were.



The Polo Family

In the 13th century, the Polo family of Venice were successful merchant adventurers, with a trading-house in the Crimea. In 1260 A.D., two brothers, Niccolo and Maffeo Polo, sailed to this outpost, then decided to explore trade prospects further inland, among the Mongol "Golden Horde."

This trip went well, but a war broke out across their return route. They decided to detour around the Black Sea. This brought them to Bokhara (see p. 44), where they stopped for three years, uncertain of their options. A passing Mongol ambassador told them that, if they came with him, they would be the first Europeans at the court of Kublai Khan, in Peking – which would ensure them a warm welcome and trading opportunities.

The Polos traveled, via Samarkand, to Peking, where they were treated well. The khan suggested that they return to Europe and return with missionaries from the Pope – hinting that he might be willing to convert.

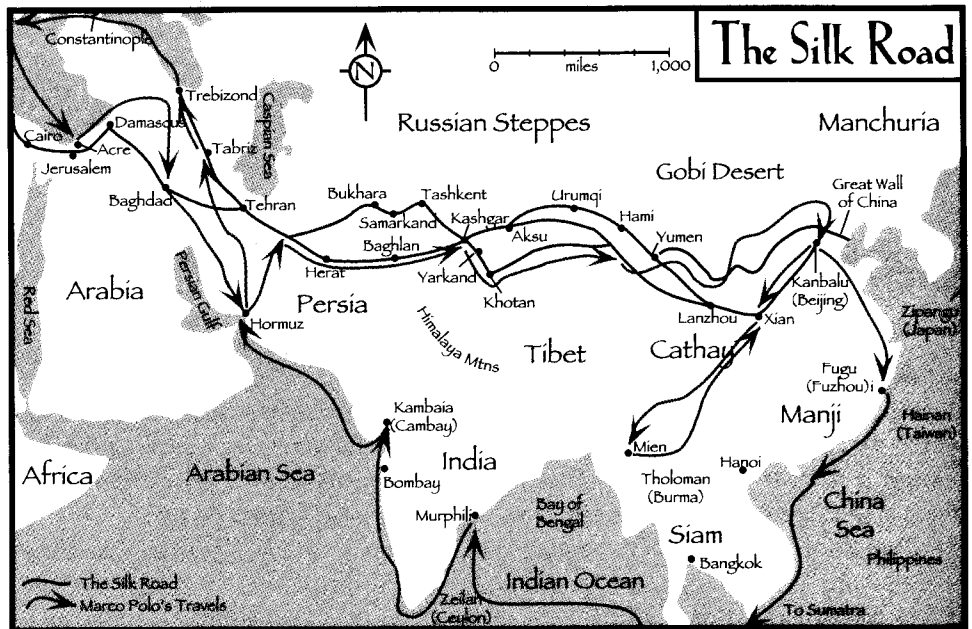
So the Polos set out again with the khan's personal passport – a tablet of gold. They eventually reached Acre in 1269, where they received the news that the pope had died, and his successor was still being elected. So they returned to Venice, where they found that Niccolo's wife was dead, but his son Marco had grown into a promising 15-year-old.

After two years, with the papal election still unsettled, the Polos decided to set out again, with letters to the khan to explain their problem. They went via Jerusalem, because Kublai had requested a sample of oil from the lamps of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (p. 71), and then Armenia. Then they heard that the new pope had been chosen – and he was a friend of theirs, a churchman in Acre. So they turned around, obtained a papal blessing and a couple of missionaries, and set out once more, in late 1271.

But the missionaries turned back after only a few miles, when they found themselves in the middle of a minor war. The Polos carried on. They traveled through Tabriz to Hormuz, on the Persian Gulf, in the hope of using a ship for the rest of the journey, but changed their minds at the sight of local naval technology. Instead, they struck north through the Persian deserts to Balkh, then up the Oxus River to the Pamirs, and then Kashgar, in Chinese Turkestan.

From here they followed the Silk Road, skirting the Taklimakan desert and the great Desert of Lop, and crossed the Gobi Desert. These deserts were said to be haunted by the ghosts of lost armies, and travelers took precautions to avoid joining the specters. In truth, they are lonely regions, prone to mirages and sandstorms.

Continued on next page . . .



while Tabriz, further east, was a place to buy damask cloth, mercury, spices and medicines, and "ceremonial parasols." Samarkand had silk – which was still traded, even after the secret had leaked out (see sidebar, p. 41) – and rhubarb. Ports on the Indian Ocean imported gold, frankincense and myrrh from southern Arabia and Africa. Equally remote from Europe, but well off the Silk Road, were India, which produced its own spices as well as cotton and dyes, and the East Indies, with their tropical woods and spices such as cinnamon and cloves.

Few travelers ventured along the road's full length; rather, goods were traded from city to city. If a single caravan did attempt the complete trip, it would have been on the road for about a year. The courier post of the Mongol khans, highly organized and efficient, could take a message over that greater part of the route that lay within their empire in about three months.

Although the Silk Road is not used in its entirety today, it's still possible to travel most of it – especially since China and Pakistan collaborated to construct a paved highway between the two. Unfortunately, in such remote regions, roads are often unreliable and even dangerous – but in theory, this one exists.

The Travelers

Individuals who traveled any significant part of the Silk Road's length are often considered remarkable historical figures. Along with the Polos and Ibn Battuta (see sidebars, pp. 42-43 and 47), they included Hsuan-tsang, a seventh-century Chinese Buddhist who traveled to India to visit Buddhist holy sites, and Friar William of Rubruck, a missionary and emissary from the King of France who reached Central Asia even earlier than the Polos.

Trade and pilgrimage caravans usually form up as a line of baggage and riding animals in single file. The preferred baggage animals were camels, which can cover long distances with minimal water intake, but messengers and missionaries usually preferred horses, which are somewhat faster if competently tended, and don't have the camel's distinctive swaying motion. The great *Hajj* caravans bound for Mecca sometimes used as many as 10,000 camels. Today, motor vehicles have mostly replaced animals; however, such transport isn't always reliable, and modern-day travelers report a lot of trucks in distinctly variable states of repair, and bus services crammed to the ceilings and running at highly unpredictable times.

Caravanserais and Lighthouses

Although they may not have trekked the full length of the Silk Road, ancient merchants did cover long distances. Because towns were often more than a day's journey apart, there was a need for *caravanserais* – secure shelters with room enough in their courtyards for 400 kneeling camels. These were sometimes erected by rich men and rulers to flaunt their generosity and wealth, and can still be seen around the desert landscape. There were also land-lighthouses to mark roads; some were attached to caravanserais, others stood alone in the desert.

Of course, merchants also required places to stay in towns. Often, they would find friends or partners to provide hospitality, but when they could not do this, they would go to “inns” (*Khans*). These were more like desert caravanserais than “inns” on the Western pattern, although they were smaller than typical caravanserais and offered food and better lodging. They were generally plain blocks of bare rooms arranged around a courtyard. If there was a danger of rioting mobs, the inn might have only one stout door, and few external windows.

Although a caravanserai or inn would have few staff – perhaps just a lone caretaker – it would not necessarily be without “services.” Peasants and traders knew that travelers have to eat, and would wander around the place, offering their produce. Inns in larger towns would be the setting for other trade, as merchants bargained with each other and set up deals. The central courtyard would be full of travelers cooking over open fires, chatting and comparing notes and ideas. This could be a very atmospheric setting for a scene in a roleplaying game.

Adventure Seed: Blood and Sand. The PCs are traveling around the edge of the Gobi Desert when a sandstorm blows up and they become lost – very lost. This is more than just unlucky weather; somewhere in the wastes, some malicious wizard, whimsical djinn, or long-forgotten god is unleashing raw chaos on the world. The PCs eventually reach safety, but then, the merchants of the city they have reached make them a tempting offer (backed by a hint of a threat). They are the only heroes close enough to the heart of the haunted lands to venture in and destroy the evil, before it consumes the world. If they succeed, trade goods will be theirs in great profusion. *If . . .*

The Polo Family (Continued)

The Polos entered China at Yumen, near the Jade Gate in the Great Wall (p. 55). In 1275 A.D., they finally reached Shangdu, summer capital of Kublai Khan.

According to his own account, Marco, his father and his uncle became important figures at the court of the khan, who liked them too much to let them go. Marco was sent on diplomatic missions as far south as Pagan, in Burma (which the Mongols conquered), and perhaps even governed a city for three years. However, in 1292, the Polos found an excuse to return home – as escorts for a Mongol princess, being sent to marry a western khan.

This time, they traveled in a flotilla of Chinese junks via Sumatra, India and the Persian Gulf. They then headed for home via Persia and the Black Sea. On arrival in Venice in 1295, they were not recognized, having been long since presumed dead.

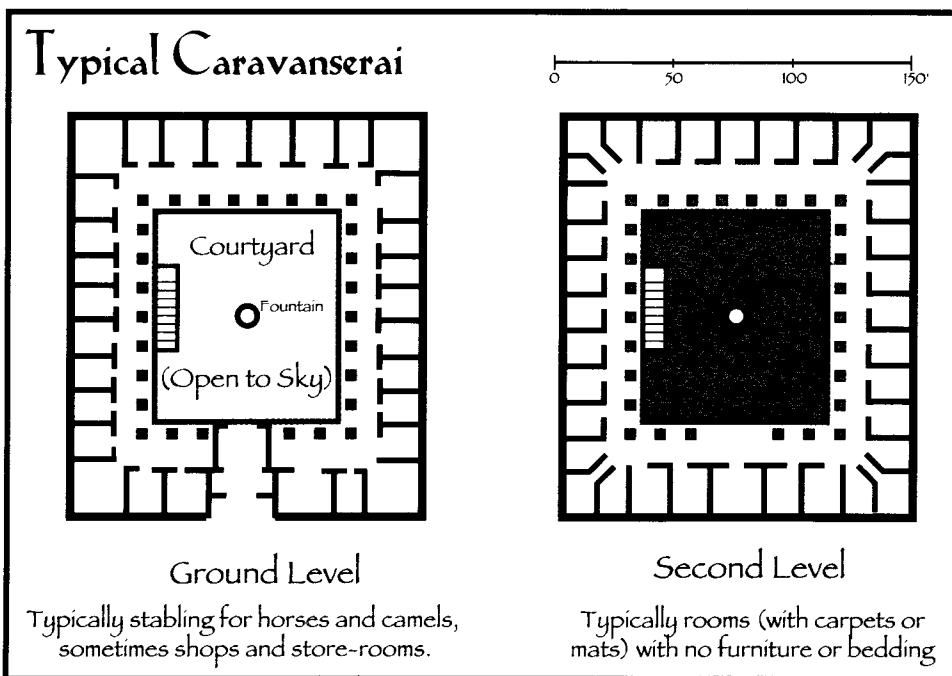
In 1298, Marco was made captain of a war-galley in a battle with Genoa. Taken prisoner, he was held for a year, when he told his story to his cellmate, one Rustichello, a professional writer who turned it into a book. The result, originally published as *Il Milione* (originally titled *Divisament dou Monde*, “Description of the World”) was one of history’s best-sellers; it is usually known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Marco died in 1324, rich enough to leave his family comfortable for generations.

Marco Polo can be credited with inspiring more interest in foreign lands than any other individual in history – despite the fact that his book is written as a dry handbook for travelers. Christopher Columbus read it before planning his attempt to find a sea-route to the “Indies.”

Some modern scholars have their doubts about Polo. Even in his own lifetime, people suggested that he was making everything up; “Marco Millions” became Italian slang for an implausible braggart, and Rustichello was a novelist specializing in romance fiction. Despite all his claims of importance in the khan’s court, there is no mention of Marco in Eastern records. Some of his data doesn’t correspond to other historical knowledge. He doesn’t mention the Great Wall of China, or tea-drinking.

On balance, however, the amount of verifiable information in his story, on subjects which few or no Europeans knew *anything* about at the time, suggests that he really did make the journey – although perhaps some of the details should be taken with a pinch of salt.

According to one legend, Marco Polo announced on his death bed – in response to demands that he recant his tales – that he had not told the half of it.



Bokhara

Samarkand's sister-city, Bokhara, lies 400 miles to the west of Samarkand, at an oasis, also on the Zeravshan River. It was founded in the first century A.D., and captured by the Arabs in the eighth. It was subsequently ruled by a variety of Muslim dynasties, and became a center of learning. It also had dozens – perhaps hundreds – of mosques, most of which were closed down under Soviet Communism. The other noted building is the Ark Fortress, a palace and prison – now a museum. Today, Bokhara is an industrial city within Uzbekistan, dotted with natural gas processing plants, with a population of about 225,000.

Timur the Lame

Timur, the last of the great Mongol conquerors, was born in Transoxiana in 1336 A.D. He was a Muslim who destroyed the Nestorian Christian Church and carved a bloody path through India – but most of his battles were with other Muslims. He was injured by an arrow in an early battle, and henceforth was known as Timur-i-Lang, “Timur the Lame” – also rendered as Tamerlane, Tamberlane, or Tamburlaine.

Like Genghis Khan before him, Timur built up his support slowly and carefully at first. He expanded into Khwarizm and Khurasan by 1384; he never went as far east as China, but he canceled all tribute to the nominal Great Khan there. He took Georgia and Persia in 1386-1388. Beginning in 1391, he struck north, at the “Golden Horde” who controlled the Mongol conquests in Russia. The battering he gave them made it possible for Christian Russia to rise to power. He campaigned into India in 1398-9, capturing Delhi, leaving his customary pyramids of skulls at every city he conquered and butchering 100,000 Hindu prisoners in one day. In 1400, he turned on the Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor, and defeated and captured its sultan (temporarily saving Constantinople from conquest). He died in 1405, and his empire soon collapsed, although the later Moghuls of India were proud to claim him as an ancestor.

Timur and his hordes would be a deadly, terrifying enemy in a historical campaign; he was a master of the Mongol art of large-scale terror. Although he was a Muslim, he seems to have been superstitious as well as intolerant of dissent. His empire may have made the roads safe at times, but they can hardly have been *comfortable* under his protection.

Samarkand

Samarkand, arguably the archetype of desert cities, is one of the oldest cities in Central Asia and perhaps the greatest stopping-place on the ancient “Silk Road” between China and the West. Not every Silk Road traveler passed through there – Marco Polo (see sidebar, p. 42) didn't – but it was a major stop.

Samarkand is located in modern Uzbekistan. The site was inhabited from at least 2000 B.C., and developed into the capital of Sogdiana, a border province of the Persian Empire. In 329 B.C., it was conquered by Alexander the Great, who is said to have written, “Everything I have heard about the beauty of this city is true, except that it is more beautiful than I could imagine.” In the eighth century A.D., it was conquered by Muslim Arabs as Sogdiana was absorbed into the Caliphate, and in 1220, it was thoroughly sacked by the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan.

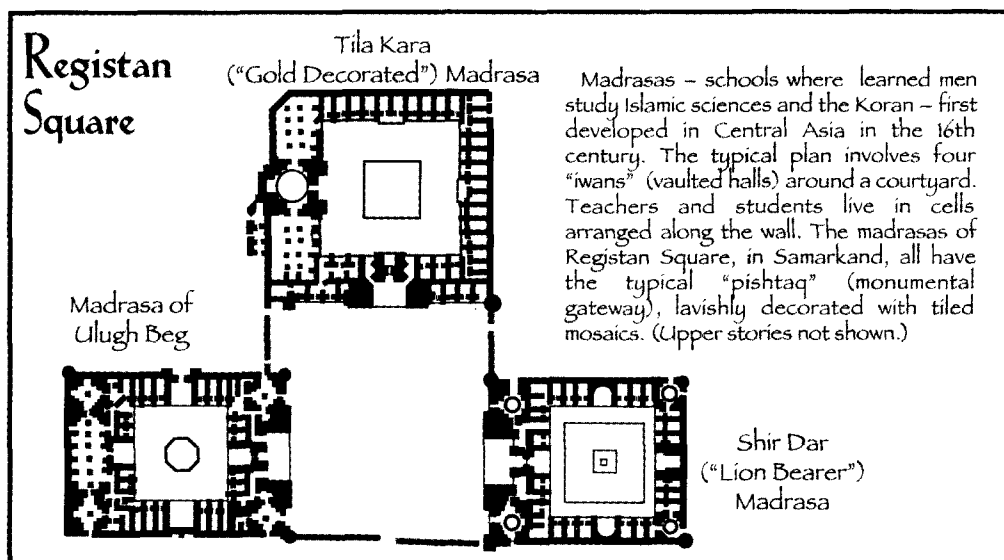
In the 14th century, Tamerlane, the last of the great Mongol conquerors, took control of the city as one of his first steps to power. Samarkand became the capital of his empire – the place where he exhibited his wealth and power. Samarkand prospered, while other cities that fell before Tamerlane were sacked, their people slaughtered, and mountains of skulls piled up before their walls.

Eventually, Tamerlane died, and was interred in a great tomb in Samarkand. His empire was too ill-organized to survive intact, but his descendants held power in the region – as the “Timurid Empire” – for a few generations. They moved their capital to Herat, but Samarkand remained wealthy. One of its Timurid rulers, Ulugh Beg, was a scholar and patron of astronomy who attracted a number of eminent thinkers to his court; he and they revised the calendar, and their writings eventually spread to the West, where they were translated and respected as major advances. The observatory he built just outside Samarkand was rediscovered in 1908.

With the collapse of the Timurid Dynasty around 1500 A.D., Samarkand fell into the hands of the Turco-Mongol Uzbeks, who gave the region its modern name. In 1784, it was conquered by the Emirate of Bokhara, and in 1868, the Russian Empire took the area. Thus, in time, Samarkand became a regional city within the USSR.

Uzbekistan broke away from the USSR when that super-state collapsed in 1991. Today, it is an independent member of the CIS, with a nominally democratic government. As the population remains predominantly Muslim, Samarkand may feature in yet more historical events.





Islam in Central Asia

When talking about early Islam, Westerners tend to concentrate on its meetings with Europe. However, the conquerors also encountered the land-locked kingdoms of Central Asia – and beyond that, the ancient civilization of China. In a more-or-less historical “Eastern” campaign, Central Asia could be the scene of much complex and dangerous diplomacy, with pocket kingdoms locked in many-sided struggles.

The Muslims took Khurasan, on the northern edge of Persia, in 651-2 A.D., during their conquest of the Sassanid Empire. Beyond that lay Sogdiana, where Persian culture survived, mixing with Arab immigrants and some Turkish (steppe-nomad) influence. There was also a surviving Sassanid statelet to the west, in Tabaristan, by the Caspian Sea.

The Arabs continued their advances between 706 and 715, when they took Sogdiana, Ferghana and Khwarizm, reaching the shores of the Aral Sea. This gave them control of Bokhara and Samarkand. (Tabaristan fell in 765.)

But there, Arab conquests stopped. Beyond lay the open steppes, controlled by the Turks and Alans, nomadic peoples who could disappear before an advancing army, then return to harass them with horse archers. To the east lay the Tarim Basin, a sparsely-watered wilderness, nomad territory which the Chinese sought to control, to provide a buffer zone against raiders and to protect trade. And in the eighth century, China was ruled by the strong, outward-looking T'ang dynasty.

The Arabs tried making alliances with the tribes of Tibet. (China had previously been working to prevent the Tibetans from allying with the Turks.) But a Chinese army marched across the high passes of the Pamirs, threatening to encircle their enemy, and the invaders were forced back. Although the Chinese would subsequently be forced to retreat themselves, Islam had found its limits.

Later, as Arab rulers weakened, their replacements came from this part of the world; the Seljuk Turks, among others, were invited across the border as mercenaries. And later yet, the Mongols came from the region of the Aral Sea to crush everyone.

The City

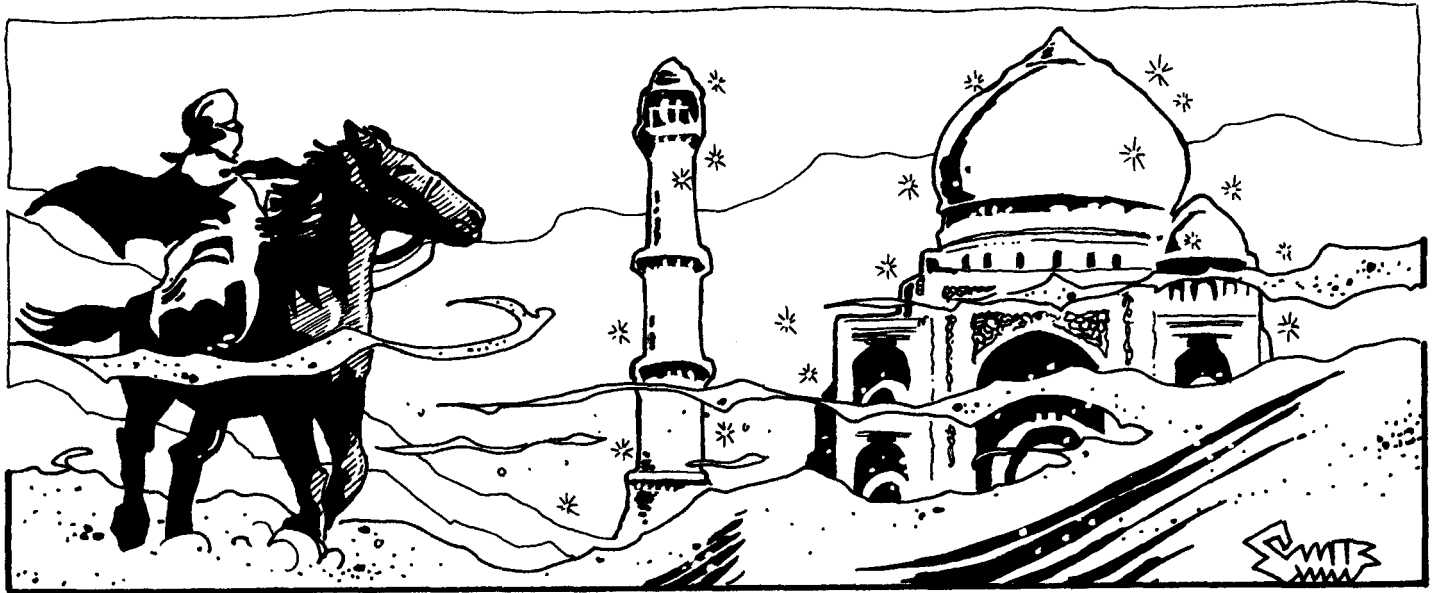
Samarkand lies in the irrigated valley of the Zeravshan River. As with many ancient cities, its center has shifted; the original site known to Alexander and sacked by Genghis Khan is accessible to archaeologists. Modern Samarkand is an industrial, university and commercial city, with a population of over 370,000. It lies in an earthquake zone, which is always bad for ancient buildings. However, it still has at least four sites of importance.

The Gur-i-Amir Mausoleum was built by Tamerlane to house the body of his favorite grandson, Muhammad Sultan. When Tamerlane himself died, he was buried in the same building, and the same honor was paid to other Timurid lords. It is a rectangular building with minaret towers at the front corners, and a huge pointed arch between them. It has a slightly bulbous, onion-shaped dome atop a cylindrical central tower. The exterior is decorated with intricate designs in (mostly) blue tiles. Tamerlane is said to have ordered on his deathbed that he should be commemorated with “only a stone, and my name upon it”; he was obeyed, but the stone is a massive slab of dark green jade, from Chinese Turkestan – now broken in two.

The Registan is a huge public square; in Tamerlane’s time it was a marketplace, but since then, *madrasas* (Muslim colleges) have been built on three of its sides – one by Ulugh Beg, in about 1420. Opposite is the 16th-century Shir Dar madrasa, and the 17th-century Tial Kari madrasa stands between them. Each is the size of a Christian cathedral, and each is fronted with a huge pointed arch, and decorated with vast areas of tiles. The result has been called one of the greatest city squares in the world.

The Mosque of Bibi Khanum was built by Tamerlane – some legends say that his favorite wife, Bibi Khanum, was responsible. It was a “Friday” or “Congregational” mosque, for large gatherings of the faithful. It is said that 95 elephants were used to haul the building materials. The entrance portal is 60 feet wide, and the mosque once housed a copy of the Koran that was six feet high. Today, it is largely ruined, with just a fragment of its huge dome remaining; a public market is situated just outside.

The Shah-Zinda lies just outside the city. It is a necropolis – a string of building-sized tombs alongside a steep flight of steps. These were built in the 14th and 15th centuries, and mostly house members of the Timurid royal family, as well as Shah-Zinda – a legendary Muslim martyr – and one of Ulugh Beg’s chief fellow-scientists. These tombs display the finest tile-work in Samarkand.



Palmyra

Palmyra, in what is now eastern Syria, was an ancient community that rose to prominence with the growth of trade in Hellenic times. It came under Roman control in the first century A.D., was granted the privileged status of “free city” in the second century, and achieved something of a golden age in the third. It lay on the road from Damascus to the Euphrates, and its merchants did business with India and Egypt as well as Rome and Persia.

When the Sassanids replaced the Parthians in Persia, trade declined. Meanwhile, Rome went through its own third-century troubles. Amid this instability, Odaenathus, ruler of Palmyra, was able to grasp more and more power. He was granted the title of “Governor of All the East” by Rome; Roman and Palmyran armies fought together against the Persians. However, he and his son and heir were assassinated – allegedly by his wife, Zenobia. She took over, and ruled with some skill, but when she conquered the Roman province of Anatolia, the emperor Aurelian took his legions against her. Although Zenobia had the help of some of the Roman army of the East as well as her own Persian-style cavalry and archers, Aurelian won, and captured her in 272 A.D.

Palmyra survived as a provincial trading and garrison town in the Roman and Byzantine Empires, eventually falling to the first wave of Muslim expansion in 634 A.D. The Arabs liked to look back on Zenobia as a great early Arab leader, but Palmyra was a cosmopolitan place, influenced by the many nations it traded with; its language was Aramaic, not Arabic. Today, a few thousand people live near the ruins that are admired by adventurous

“Irem of the Pillars . . .”

Have you not heard how Allah dealt with Aad? The people of the many-columned city of Iram, whose like has never been built in the whole land?

And with Thamoud, who hewed out their dwelling among the rocks of the valley?

. . . They had all led sinful lives . . . Therefore your Lord let loose on them the scourge of His punishment . . .

– *The Koran, Surah LXXXIX*

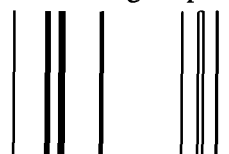
Thus speaks Islam’s holy book of the city of Irem, destroyed for its sins like Sodom and Gomorrah. A tale in the *Thousand and One Nights* shows a glimpse of this city’s fabulous wealth. H.P. Lovecraft knew of “Irem, the City of the Pillars” (which “dreams hidden and untouched”), and hinted it might be the center of the cult of Cthulhu.

Bedouin tales tell of Ubar, the city that controlled the trade road along which merchants carried frankincense, an aromatic resin once more valuable than gold. The British soldier, traveler and writer, T.E. Lawrence, called lost Ubar the “Atlantis of the Sands.” It was said to have vanished around the fifth century A.D., despite having been thousands of years old. In the 2nd century A.D., the Greek Claudius Ptolemy wrote of an Arabian city called “Omanum Emporium” which controlled the frankincense trade. It does not seem too implausible to suggest that these stories may have had a common root.

Now, it seems that Irem may have been rediscovered.

The Frankincense Roads

Frankincense is a strongly-scented resinous gum, extracted from various species of tree. It was (and still is) a component of ceremonial incense, and thus had religious significance. It was also used in the process of embalming corpses.



wider area. A healthy trade developed in ancient times, with roads along the southern and western shores of Arabia, up to the Levant and the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. Large caravans were needed to cross desert regions safely; as early as 4000 B.C., substantial towns may have developed to service them. Certainly, there were flourishing states in what is now Yemen by around 1200 B.C. One of these, the Sabaeen Kingdom, may have been the land of the Old Testament's "Queen of Sheba."

The Romans and later empires expanded trade by ship on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and this reduced the importance of the "Frankincense Roads." When Islam moved its capitals from Arabia to Mesopotamia, much of the area went into long-term decline, and although frankincense is still traded, it is rarely carried by camel-train through Yemen or Oman today.

The Modern Discovery

In 1992, American and British archaeologists announced that they had found traces of an ancient city under the village of Shis'r, in Oman. This is on the very edge of the "Empty Quarter," the vast and terrifying expanse of bare desert that covers most of southern Arabia.

The key pointer in their search had been 1986 space shuttle photographs which had revealed an ancient road, leading out into the desert. It probably passed near to or through Shis'r, which has the only "sweet" well in this area – making it an obvious site for a trading community.

This was enough to send archaeologists and explorers to Shis'r, where they found a 300-year-old fort. Some of the stones used to build its walls had come from buildings 2,000 years older than that. Excavation and earth-penetrating radar then found the remains of city walls around six to eight feet thick, eight towers that stood about 30 feet high, and pottery, glass and frankincense burners.

This city suffered from serious earth subsidence in around 500 A.D., due to a fall in local water levels. This would have seemed cataclysmic at the time – the hand of an avenging god. The archaeologists believed that this might well have been Ubar, Irem and "Omanum Emporium." The site is still being studied.

Game Uses

What a GM chooses to make of all this is a matter of personal taste and campaign type. But in, say, a modern-day campaign, things might start with a party being recruited by some powerful NPC to escort an expedition to excavate further around "Lost Irem." Is Irem truly lost? Is the recruiter being honest as to the reason for the quest? Who might want the expedition to fail? And what might be found among the buried ruins? (GMs can also note that this part of the world has seen its share of civil wars and political unrest, although Oman is currently more stable than its neighbor, Yemen.)

At the very least, this is an opportunity for a certain amount of pseudo-Indiana Jones archaeological swashbuckling. At worst, the PCs might discover that they should have taken Lovecraft's hints a lot more seriously.

All that the Koran and modern archaeology say of Irem is that it was a great city that fell into ruin, but the *Thousand and One Nights* story, with its fantastical vision of a city barely in this world, can inspire a rather wilder, "high magic" plot. Apart from the tale that shows Irem itself, the *Nights* features a story of an expedition to a lost "City of Brass" in North Africa, so this sort of adventure is very much part of the genre.

Ibn Battuta

Marco Polo was not the only great traveler of the late Middle Ages. The Berber Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Battuta, born in Tangier in 1304, began his journeys with a pilgrimage to Mecca (see p. 72) in 1325, and traveled on for a lifetime total of around 75,000 miles. Fortunately, he took a lot of notes.

His land pilgrimage took in Syria, where his studies earned him a universal license (and effective passport) as a Muslim teacher. From the holy city, he accompanied a caravan into Central Asia, then he took ship down the East African coast to Somalia and Tanzania. A few years later, he was in Constantinople when he heard tales that inspired him to travel to India; from there, he was sent as an ambassador to China. Traveling by sea, he was shipwrecked and captured by pirates, but he did eventually reach Peking.

His travels also took in Spain, the Volga River in Russia, and Timbuktu. He also witnessed the court of the Byzantine emperor and the Black Death in Baghdad. Ultimately, he retired to his home city. He died around 1369, leaving an account of his exploits entitled *Rihlah* – "Travels."

Travelers and Nations in Islam

Medieval Muslims did not have much idea of what modern folk call "the nation state." There were the lands of Islam, all nominally under the authority of the Caliph; beyond were unbelievers and barbarians. Within were whatever sultans, chiefs and kings fate had thrown up.

One effect of this was that rulers could not depend on citizen-soldiers for personal support. They employed slave-warriors, whose personal loyalty was unambiguous. Conversely, there was less suspicion of "foreigners" than in later times. A good Muslim gentleman was respected, whatever his place of birth.

This meant that traveling scholars such as Ibn Battuta could not only find work as teachers or academics wherever they went – they could obtain government posts. Tales in the *Arabian Nights* show this in action; educated, cultivated heroes become viziers and courtiers in lands where they are complete strangers.

So a rare but plausible encounter on the Silk Road would be a wandering gentleman-scholar. PCs should treat such a man with respect; the next time that they meet him, the scholar may have become a prime minister.

Underground Cities in Turkey

Traditionalist fantasy gamers will be pleased to know that multi-level underground communities have actually existed in a few places in the world – most notably, in Cappadocia, in modern Turkey. Ancient Cappadocians carved underground granaries out of the soft “tuff” (compressed volcanic dust) of the region, and in the first few centuries A.D., persecuted Christians extended these excavations into defensible hiding-places. These remained in other uses until the Muslim Arabs conquered the region. The great underground complexes were then forgotten until the modern day.

The greatest of these “cities” has eight levels, the deepest of them 175 feet below the surface, but all well-ventilated and habitable; some meeting-rooms and churches are 80 or 100 feet long. Spread over almost a square mile, such a community may have included from 20 to 60 thousand people. Given the lack of natural underground voids in the area, the creation of such complexes must have been a monumental task.

The underground cities were the subject of a fascinating article by Allen Varney in *Dragon* magazine, issue 201, which is very much worth finding and reading.

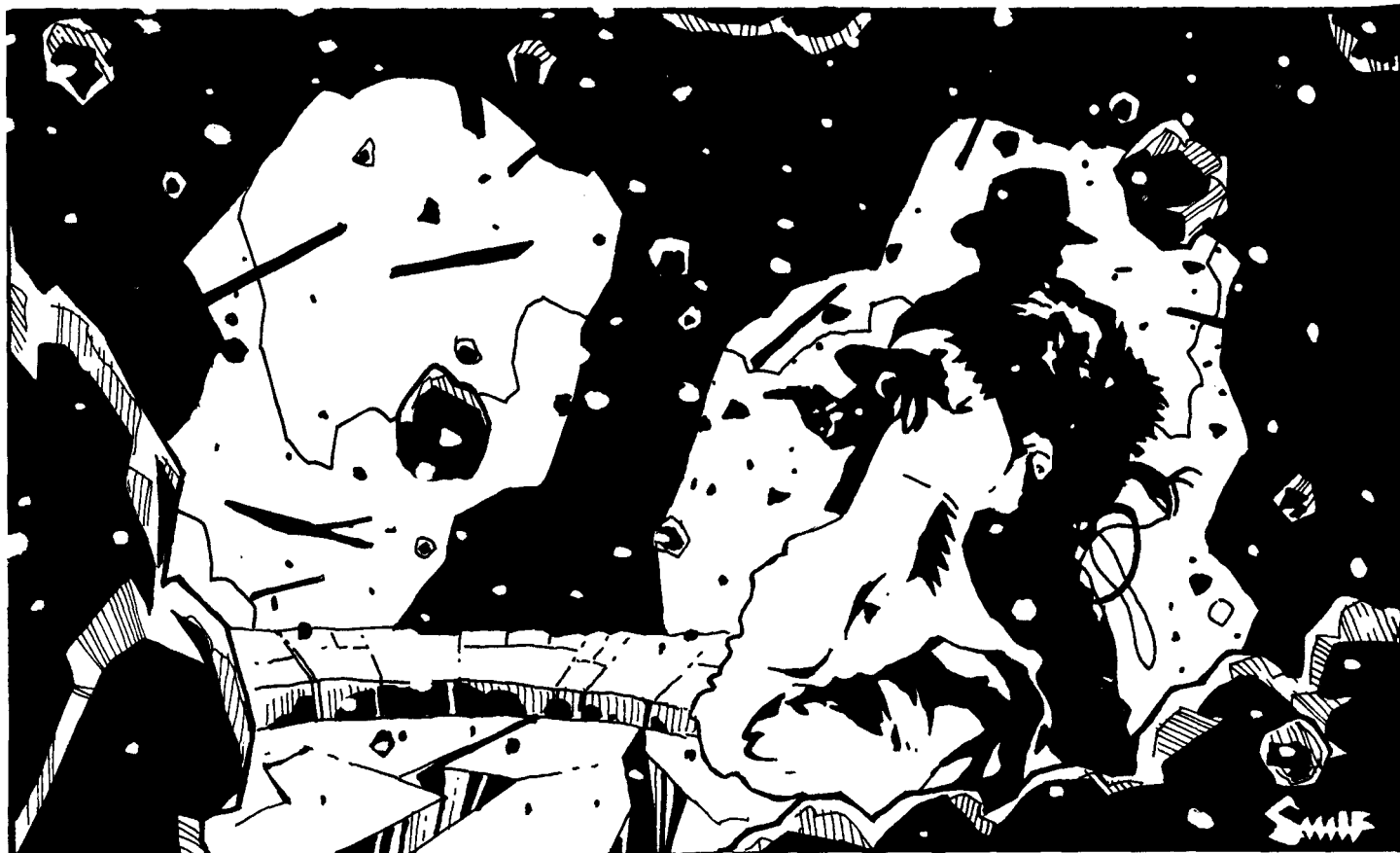
Petra

*Match me such marvel save in Eastern clime,
A rose-red city half as old as time.*

– John William Burgon, “Petra”

Petra is one of the world’s finest, strangest ruined cities, noted for its spectacular rock-cut buildings. Historically, it is yet another product of ancient trade. It lies in southern Jordan, in the rift valley which dips to form the Dead Sea further north and the Gulf of Aqaba to the south. Thus, it controls the obvious route between the Red Sea and coastal Arabia in one direction, and Israel and Syria in the other. It also lies on one of the possible routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia.

This alone would have been sufficient to make Petra a great source of inspiration for writers and GMs, but there’s more. Petra sits in the midst of a maze-like complex of canyons and ravines. This had a double implication; travelers needed guides through the region, and when the Petrans chose to tax travelers they were able to enforce their demands very effectively. Anyone trying to force passage through the area would have become trapped in the canyons, to be boxed in and ambushed by the natives. Some merchants thought the Petrans little more than bandits running a protection racket, while others shrugged them off as a local government charging tolls for guidance.



The Rise of Petra

The builders of Petra were the Nabataeans, nomadic migrants who moved into this area – the “Land of Edom” – around 600-400 B.C., apparently mingling peacefully with the existing “Edomites.” By the third century B.C., they were building villages; a hundred years later, there were Nabataean pirate ships in the Red Sea. By 168 B.C., they had a kingdom, and in the first century B.C. King Aretas III ruled lands reaching as far as Damascus in Syria.

That same century, the Romans extended their power into this part of the world, pushing out rival powers. The Nabataeans probably saw the Romans mainly as a source of peace and stability, guaranteeing the trade from which they profited. They lost their pocket empire, but not their wealth.

But trade routes shifted as politics and transport technology changed. Merchants started using ships rather than land caravans to move goods up the Red Sea coast from the Indian Ocean to Egypt, while east-west trade was increasingly done through more northerly cities such as Palmyra (see sidebar, p. 46). The last Nabataean king, Rabbel II, who came to power in 70 A.D., moved his capital north to Syria, but the days of Nabataean autonomy were vanishing.

The Decline

In 106 A.D., Rabbel II died and the Romans turned the Nabataean kingdom into their province of Arabia Petrea. Many of the city’s finest surviving buildings date from the Roman era, and Roman irrigation was probably essential to support Petra’s populace as it over-exploited the local ecology.

But power *had* shifted away. Arabian coastal trade was focused on other cities, including Mecca (p. 72). Although Mecca conquered this region in 636 A.D., archaeologists believe that the city was largely uninhabited by then.

Petra was fully and mysteriously abandoned around 700 A.D. Some historians suspect a natural disaster; climatic shifts may have caused repeated floods. Over-grazing and over-farming may have caused an ecological disaster, and the irrigation systems were badly maintained after Rome fell. The Crusaders built a small fortress on the site in the 12th century, but that aside, Petra became a forgotten ghost town.

The Remains

In 1812, the Swiss traveler Johann Burkhard persuaded locals to guide him to the “fantastic ruins” in the mountains near the village of Wadi Musa. The 19th century was fascinated by the idea of an ancient lost city, remote enough to retain its mystery but accessible enough for adventurous amateurs to visit. Petra fired the imagination of poets and writers.

Since then, archaeologists have teased out some of Petra’s mysteries. It is not certain what the surviving “buildings” – most of them cut into the sheer cliff faces – were actually used for. The accepted idea is that they were tombs, perhaps with shrines attached.

Petra is usually approached along the “Siq,” a narrow canyon a mile long but only 12 feet wide in places, and with walls 400 feet high. (This cleft was created by an earthquake, and further eroded by water; it occasionally floods.) At the end of this comes one of the most spectacular sights in the city; the “Khazneh,” or treasury. This consists of a two-level, classical frontage, about 100 feet wide and 130 feet high, cut into the rock. The lower level has six columns supporting a pediment. The upper level has six more, but is split into two “wings” with a central circular section, which is crowned with an urn.



Adventure Seed: The Gods of the City

In fantasy games, it is often assumed that the power of a god is proportional to the number and devotion of his worshipers. So it is that the PCs become entangled with the affairs of a desert city where dead kings and ancestors are worshiped. Unfortunately, the city is dying as its intricate irrigation systems collapse. The ancestors seem unable to do much about this; they seem to have sunk into complacency, demanding formulaic sacrifices and caring nothing for the living.

But there may yet be hope. A foreign pantheon is growing in popularity. It includes a sophisticated god of farmers, whose priests have a lot of useful secular knowledge of irrigation systems linked to a sincere reverence for the balance of nature, and a goddess of wisdom whose scholar-priestesses give excellent, impartial advice to rulers and traders.

Unfortunately, the old gods are jealous, and will not give up their power without a fight. Outright civil war would simply destroy the city faster.

The PCs are friends or employees of a merchant of the city, a secret devotee of the new religion. Now, he is asking (or hiring) them for help. Can the old cult be discredited or subverted enough to allow the newcomer pantheon an open place in the city?

Sample Character: Desert Merchant

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 14, HT 12.

Speed 6, Move 6 (less if in armor).

Dodge 6 (or less).

Advantages: Allies (trade partners); Charisma +1; Literacy; Reputation +1 in local markets and caravanserais; Status as appropriate (usually 1; 0 if down on his luck, 2 if rich); Wealth as appropriate for his plot function; Common Sense and Empathy are plausible.

Disadvantages: Merchant's Code of Honor (keep promises, respect hospitality); Dependents (family members – GM's option); Enemies (rival merchants, annoyed over past deals, or local officials who dislike his face). Most others are too bad for business, but Greed and Miserliness are good "villain" options, while Compulsive Generosity, Honesty, Stubbornness and Truthfulness are interesting but not crippling.

Quirks: Prefers High Returns Over Safe Options; Minor superstitions about preferred trade goods, times and places to deal, and the like.

Skills: Animal Handling-14; Area Knowledge (Trade Routes)-16; Brawling-13; Carousing-12; Detect Lies-14; Diplomacy-13; Fast-Talk-13; First Aid-14; Gambling-13; Holdout-13; Knife-13; Law-12; Leadership-14 (including Charisma); Leatherworking-14; Merchant-18; Navigation-14; Packing-15; Riding-13; Savoir-Faire-14; Streetwise-13; Survival (Desert)-14; Veterinary-12; two missile weapons appropriate to TL at skill-14 (usually Physical/Easy).

Languages: Native, and a smattering of anything spoken in cities along his favorite routes. This may include a Mental/Easy "trade patois" or two. (Note that a clever merchant may not admit to knowing some languages, in the hopes that others may let slip something important during multi-way, multi-lingual conversations.) The Language Talent advantage is very useful to wide-ranging merchants.

Continued on next page . . .

Bedouin legends said that a pharaoh had hidden a fortune in gold inside the urn – hence the name, "Pharaoh's Treasury." The locals used to take pot-shots at it with rifles, in the hopes of releasing a torrent of treasure. In actual fact, the Khazneh was probably a mausoleum, perhaps that of King Aretas III. Inside is a large, plain, square chamber, with a smaller room behind (the actual tomb?), and other rooms to either side. The tomb may have doubled as a temple.

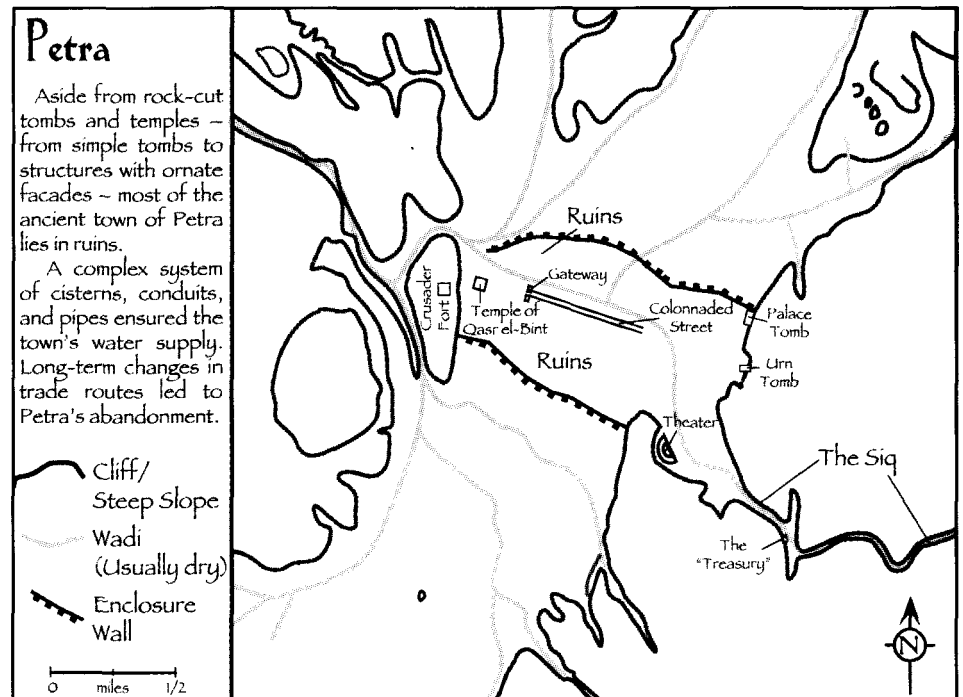
There are many rock-cut tombs in Petra, which appear to evolve from plain rectangular designs, through those with multi-step frontages on a Mesopotamian pattern, to the great classical-Hellenic creations such as the Khazneh. Being carved out of solid rock, they are the part of the ancient city that has survived best – giving descriptions of it a misleadingly morbid quality. Most of the city was built for the living, but is now in ruins.

The Petrans had a semicircular theater capable of seating 3,000 people (out of an estimated population of 20,000), a reservoir that held nearly 90,000 cubic feet of water and was linked to the city by an aqueduct, and a temple area. At one end of this is the only large free-standing building surviving in Petra – a temple, now called the Qasr el-Bint. This was approached along a colonnaded street and through a monumental triple gateway, which partially survive. There were also at least three marketplaces.

The Siq is not the only way into the town, although it is both convenient and dramatic. A broader wadi (the Wadi Musa) leads in from the north and south; this can be monitored from nearby mountains. At some stage, the Petrans made certain of their security by building town walls, too – the best of these dating to the Roman era. Water channels guaranteed the city a steady supply of water.

The Jordanian government has recognized Petra's tourist appeal, and has moved the Bedouin who previously camped there into a new village. There is a nominal charge for modern visitors, and a few tombs have been converted to serve as cafes and a museum. Travel companies organize regular tours, and there are a couple of convenient hotels. Tourists rent horses or mules to ride to the city, then mingle with local Bedouin (who aren't charged for entry). There is some controversy over the amount of modern building around the site, with another, large, hotel being erected near the entrance to the Siq.

Petra has gone back to its ancient function: making money from travelers.



Sample Character: Desert Merchant (Continued)

This is a typical trader who might be met in the commercial district of any desert city at most points in history; the type is not entirely gone today. He is more adventurous than most, being willing to travel between more than a single pair of cities, and he has the resources and skills to organize a large caravan.

Because he sometimes travels through bandit country, he has learned how to handle missiles, and rough moments early in his career, in back streets or remote caravanserais, have left him competent with fist or knife (sword and shield skills might also be useful). His first instinct, however, is always to talk or buy his way out of trouble. He's not overly dishonest – that would lead to a bad reputation, which is bad for trade – but he's looking to make a profit, and he feels that the risks he runs entitle him to a fair return. Similarly, he's not especially corrupt, but he knows that sometimes a bribe – sorry, a present – is the only way to get anything done. After all, local officials are entitled to their share of the good things in life, too. Still, he hates it when they get greedy, and he'll look to bypass such fat fools the next time around.



Timbuktu and the Sahara

Most commerce in North Africa stuck to the coastal areas, where goods could be carried by sea or through relatively habitable lands. However, some bold traders did strike south, and although the Sahara is for the most part a ferociously hostile environment, routes were found through it to the populous, sometimes wealthy regions of the western coast. There was probably some trade in pre-Islamic times; the Romans had dealings with the desert tribes on their borders. However, serious commerce first developed in the Middle Ages, which saw the founding of cities such as the fabled Timbuktu.

The Arabs conquered North Africa in the eighth century, although they did not really incorporate the Berber tribes into their empires until the 11th. Before that, nomads acted as a trade link between the northern coasts and African kingdoms such as Ghana (see sidebar, p. 79). Once they controlled the southern routes, the Muslims built large-scale trade with Ghana, until it was destroyed by the Almoravids – fanatical Berber Muslims who snatched control of the caravans.

Crossing the Sahara was a strenuous project, so trade had to be rich to be worthwhile. The main goods were salt, horses and cloth from the north, and gold and slaves from the heart of Africa. (Even today, Timbuktu sees a fair amount of trading of salt, on a strictly local basis.)

The Location

Timbuktu is in modern Mali, a little way north of the Niger River. It was probably founded in the 11th century by the Tuareg, and was absorbed in the 13th or 14th century by the Empire of Mali, which had conquered Ghana's successors. The rulers of Mali were Muslim Africans of fabulous power and wealth (see sidebar, p. 79). The "Madugu," or emperor's palace, in Timbuktu, doubtless reflected this. (It is long gone.) A later Tuareg resurgence did the city little long-term harm.

In 1468, Timbuktu was taken over by the Songhai Empire, who fortunately respected the city's Muslim scholars. By the 16th century, Timbuktu had a population of around 40,000. The Sankore mosque had a religious school which recruited its teachers from the great Islamic universities of the Middle East.

In 1591, the Songhai Empire was destroyed by an invasion from Morocco. After this, Timbuktu decayed; trade went by other routes, while desert raiders made trouble for the city. Today, after French colonialism has been and gone, Mali is an extremely poor country, and Timbuktu is a local trading town with a population something over 20,000.

Timbuktu was a fabled name for European travelers. They heard about it from Muslims, who thought of it as a center of scholarship. The Muslim world knew a little more, although even the Arabs considered it remote; it was the furthest point of one of Ibn Battuta's journeys (see sidebar, p. 47). Religious scholars from remote locations were often regarded with suspicion by fanatics and fundamentalists, who thought that their religion might have wandered from the true path. In a historical campaign, this city should be thought strange and mysterious by *everyone*.

There are still a few Muslim scholars in Timbuktu, but with no railway or paved road, it seems more remote than ever; travelers usually reach it by boat, air, or one of the few remaining Saharan caravans.

5 THE FAR EAST



"We wandered in astonishment, and almost with awe, through labyrinths of courts, cloisters, and chambers, encountering at every turn some new marvel, unheard of, undreamed of, until then."

— Anna Leonowens, writing her impressions of Angkor Wat in *An English Governess at the Siamese Court*

The Forbidden City

Peking (Beijing), the capital of China, is a series of "cities within cities." The city proper consists of two adjacent walled cities – the northern, "inner" city (also known as the "Tartar City") and the southern, "outer" city (the "Chinese City"). For centuries, the Tartar City was reserved for the Manchus, while the southern Chinese City was reserved for the non-foreign Chinese. Inside the main city lies the Imperial City, once reserved for the Chinese nobility. Inside *this* lies the Forbidden City, with high red walls and four elaborate gates. Only the emperor, his entourage and his servants were allowed entry; all others were excluded on pain of death.

The Forbidden City was first built in 1406, and is divided into two sections – the southern Outer Court and the northern Inner Court. It has been enlarged and embellished over several centuries. The only wood used is rare and fragrant *nanmu* wood; the roofs have golden tiles, and the marble walkways are engraved with Imperial dragons.

The entrance to the Forbidden City is the Wumen (Meridian Gate), with five doors. The central door was reserved for the use of the emperor alone. A guard of Imperial elephants was drawn up on ceremonial occasions beside this gate, and victorious generals presented captives to the emperor here.

Inside the Wumen wall is the Jade Canal, lined with jade. Beyond this is the Outer Court. In the Outer Court are several halls: Taihedian (Hall of Supreme Harmony), Zhonghedian (Hall of Central Harmony), Baohedian (Hall of Preserved Harmony), Wenhudian (Hall of Literary Glory), and Wuyingdian (Hall of Martial Valor). Taihedian is the main hall, and is set on a three-tiered marble terrace, with a double-eaved golden roof. The hall is decorated with dragons, phoenixes and scenes of martial glory. Bronze incense burners around the courtyard are in the shape of tortoises and cranes, symbols of long life. For ceremonies, officials would take up their positions in the courtyard to this hall, with civilian officials in the position of honor to the east and military officials to the west.

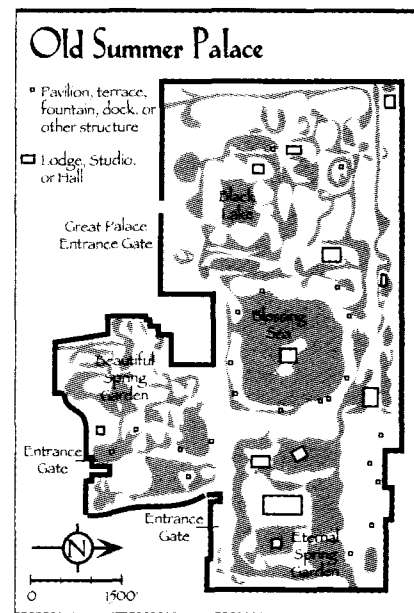
The Inner Court was the home of the Imperial entourage, and contains numerous palaces: Qianqinggong (Palace of Heavenly Purity, where the emperor conducted state affairs), Kunninggong (Palace of Earthly Tranquillity, where the empress, the ladies of the Court, and the emperor's concubines lived), Jingshifang (Palace of Tranquil Affairs, where the eunuchs lived), and Jiaotaidian (Palace of Perfect Union, where the emperor had his bedchamber).

The whole of the Forbidden City was designed to ensure that the emperor was isolated from the cares of the world, desired for nothing, and lived in as close an approximation of heaven as human ingenuity could devise. Despite this, even the official records state that two emperors were poisoned and one crown prince was drowned in a well at the age of six.

The Summer Palace

The Forbidden City was where the emperor of China worked; the Summer Palace was where he relaxed. Building began on the original Summer Palace in the 12th century. Much later, European-style palaces were added to the garden complex, with baroque statuary.

In 1860, the old Summer Palace was burned by British and French forces in retaliation for the torture of emissaries after the signing of a treaty.



In 1888, Dowager Empress Cixi began rebuilding a Summer Palace on the site of Kunming Lake, a shallow man-made lake and Imperial garden complex (first begun in 1750) not far from the ruins of the old Summer Palace. This Summer Palace burned in 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion. It was restored again in 1902.

The new Summer Palace is a country villa set in a landscaped park covering 7,000 acres (12 square miles), built on Wanshoushan (Longevity Hill) and overlooking and surrounding Kunminghu (Kunming Lake). It contains many pavilions and landscaped gardens; the main ones are Ewen-ming-ewan (Enclosed and Beautiful Garden), Ching-ming-ewan (Golden and Beautiful Garden) and Wang-shaw-ewan (Birthday Garden).

The pavilions were filled with every conceivable luxury – huge prayer wheels made of gold, mechanical toys encrusted with precious gems, and solid silver scissors (used for trimming the grass). Following the Boxer Rebellion, one pair of shoes trimmed with pearls looted from the Dowager Empress sold for £25,000.

There were also regular displays of magnificent fireworks and kite-flying to amuse the emperor.

Shangri-La

"A group of colored pavilions clung to the mountainside with . . . the chance delicacy of flower petals impaled upon a crag . . . Beyond that, in a dazzling pyramid, soared the snow slopes of Karakal. It might well be . . . the most terrifying mountain-slope in the world."

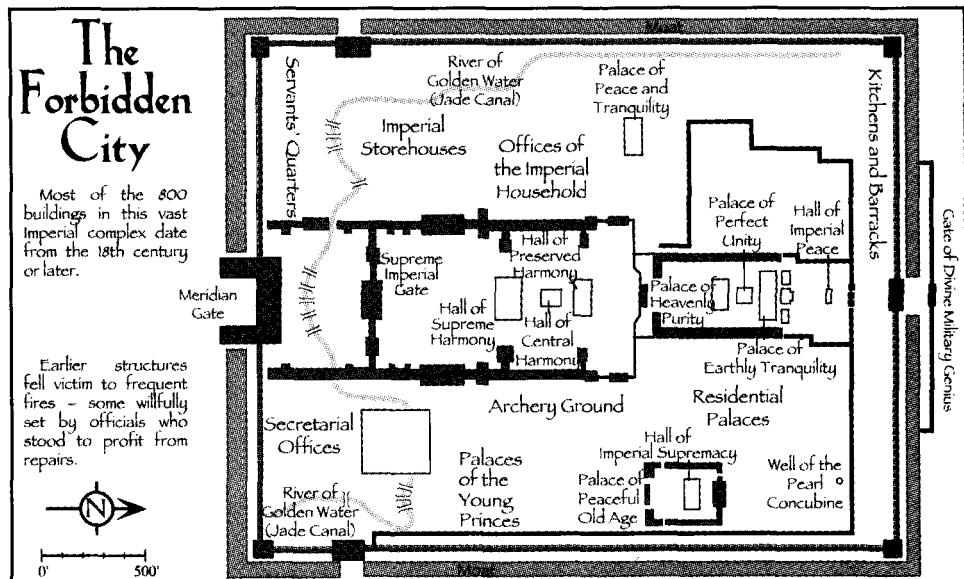
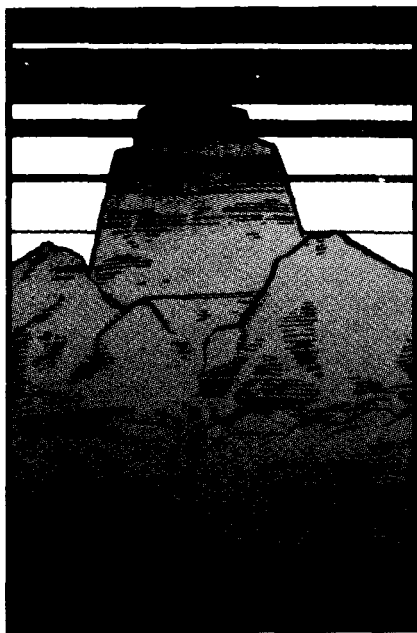
— James Hilton, *Lost Horizon*

The legend of a secret community of lamas, living beyond the normal mortal span and possessing mystic powers, is a popular tale. Early Buddhist writings talk of Chang Shambhala, describing it as a source of wisdom. In China, the K'un Lun mountains were rumored to contain Chang, a hidden valley where immortals lived, while Indian tradition said the same of a place "north of the Himalayas." Russian tradition says that Belovodye in Mongolia is where the "White Waters of Immortality" may be found.

The Dalai Lama's Potala Palace (see p. 57) in Lhasa was reputed to be linked by secret tunnels with Chang, Chang Shambhala and Shangri-La. (The Chinese, who invaded in 1951, claimed to have found no such tunnels.)

In 1928, Nicholas Roerich asked a lama whether Shambhala was a real place. He received the reply, "It is the mighty heavenly domain. It has nothing to do with our earth. It is a state of enlightenment, to be found by searching within oneself."

Past suggestions for the location of Shangri-La include: the Gobi Desert, Syr Daria, Belovodye, the K'un Lun mountains, Tebu, the River Tarim, Tashi-Lhumpo Monastery, the Altai Mountains, Lhasa, Turkestan, Mount Everest, Tunguska (well, *that* might explain something, somehow) and Darjeeling.



Following the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), the Western powers obtained permission to set up embassies in Peking. Following the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, General Gaselee announced that there would be a victory parade through the Forbidden City. There was no interference, and the myth of the Forbidden city's isolation from worldly cares was shattered forever.

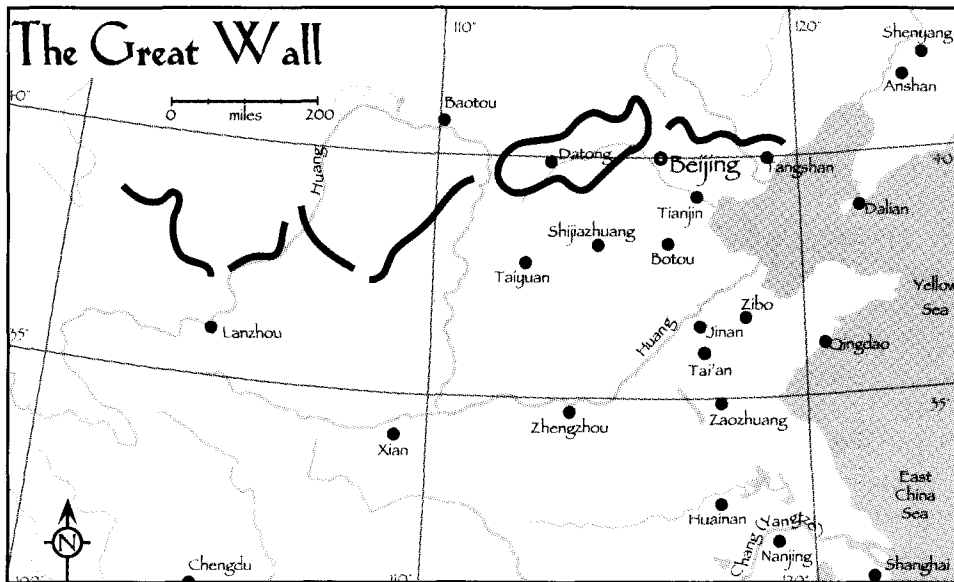
T'ai Shan Mountain

In ancient China, many prominent mountain peaks were regarded as divine. One such is T'ai Shan, overlooking the flood-plain of the Yellow River. T'ai Shan is the most sacred of the five sacred mountains of Taoism, the faith of the magician and the alchemist.

The first Ch'in emperor, who began the Great Wall of China (see p. 55), worshiped at T'ai Shan in 219 B.C. Following his example, other emperors worshiped here; in the 11th Century, a Sung emperor proclaimed T'ai Shan an "Equal of Heaven." In 1736, Emperor Chien Lung presented the mountain with a slab of "magical" jade, installed in the temple at the top. At the foot of the mountain, in the town of Tai'in, stands the Temple of the Peak (Yue Miao). Large murals in the main hall of this temple depict a procession escorting the image of the Spirit of the Peak, Yan Wang (Judge of the Dead).

There are 7,000 steps up the mountain, with several temples, groves of cypress and pine, and many wayside shrines. The climb takes over six hours for a reasonably fit walker. The path leads over the Valley of the Sutra Stone, an enormous flat slab of rock on which the Buddhist Diamond Sutra is carved. Higher up, there is a gateway inscribed with the words "The Peak Where The Horses Turned Back." At this point, the Sung emperor Zhen Zong was forced to dismount from his horse. Higher still is the Pine With The Rank Of Official Of The Fifth Degree, where legend says that an early emperor, grateful for the shelter of a pine tree, gave it an official rank.

The final stretch is a steeply rising staircase of over 2,000 steps climbing to the South Gate of Heaven, and the Temple of the Goddess of the Dawn. The peak of the mountain is crowned by a temple dedicated to the Jade Emperor, the head of the Taoist pantheon.



The Great Wall of China

The story begins in 246 B.C., when, at the age of 13, Qin Shi Huang Di inherited the kingdom of Qin. He became the first emperor of China 25 years later. There is a legend that his first act after unifying the country was to fly to the moon on a magic carpet. From there, his new country looked vulnerable, so he decided to build the Great Wall.

It is said that the Great Wall of China is the only man-made object that can be seen from the moon. Unfortunately, this is a myth; the wall is so overgrown with vegetation that it blends in with the surrounding terrain. And that terrain varies a great deal as the Wall traverses 3,900 miles from the Gobi Desert in the west to the eastern mountains. The longest single stretch is 1,850 miles, with 40,000 watchtowers, some only 100 yards apart.

The most commonly visited section of the Wall is north of Peking, part of the Ming building, which has been reconstructed. Much of the rest of the Wall is in poor condition. Toward the western end, many people have built their houses in the rubble interior of the Wall.

The Wall linked earlier fortifications that stretched westward from the Yellow Sea for about 2,500 miles. The Han dynasty (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.) extended the Wall further westward to provide a springboard for campaigns in central Asia and protect the Silk Road (see p. 41). The Ming emperors (1368 to 1644 A.D.) added to the Wall after a series of disastrous wars with the Mongols.

Emperor Qin conscripted 500,000 laborers each year to work on it, and later emperors conscripted even more. About half died in the construction and were buried in the Wall: the longest cemetery in the world.

The Wall has a core of rammed earth and rock faced with stone. (In desert regions, the Wall was constructed of mud.) It averages 23 feet in height and 18 feet in width. There were Battle Terraces (*Zhan Tai*) at vantage points, with stores of bows, arrows and, in later dynasties, cannon and ammunition. The top-most tower of each terrace served as a beacon. The smaller Battle Terraces had accommodation for ten men and two officers, the larger ones for 50-100 men and two officers. There were always two officers, one Chinese and one Manchu, to prevent treachery. Despite this, raiders often bribed their way past the wall.

The Tomb of the First Emperor

Qin Shi Huang Di's tomb was his second great monument. A Chinese historian writing a century after the emperor's death recorded that 700,000 people labored for 36 years building it. It was filled with untold treasure, including models of his palace and a map of his empire – complete with flowing mercury rivers and heavenly constellations depicted in diamonds above it. Those of his wives who were childless were interred with him, as were the coffin-bearers and artisans. Traps and automatic crossbows were set to slay any intruders, and a mound of earth 165 feet high was raised over the tomb. Trees and grass were planted to make it look like an ordinary hill. Despite all these precautions, the tomb was plundered in 206 B.C.

No one knows how destructive the break-in was. It was only in 1974 that a group of farm workers digging a well a mile away from the mound discovered the first of what turned out to be vast pits containing thousands of life-size terracotta soldiers. Each figure was apparently modeled on a member of Qin Shi Huang Di's bodyguard: infantry, archers, crossbowmen, cavalymen and charioteers with their horses and bronze chariots. When the tomb was plundered, the pits had been looted for genuine military equipment, but enough survived to enable archaeologists to reconstruct the scene.

Test borings have found three more pits, two with more terracotta figures, and there may be yet more.



Adventure Seed: To Catch a Thief

Throughout history, tomb-robbing has been a dishonorable but lucrative trade for adventurers. Who better, therefore, to advise on defenses?

The PCs are approached by a powerful emperor who is having his tomb prepared. They are to devise defenses to protect the tomb for all time, and money is no object. There is, of course, one secret snag – it's traditional for the designers to be buried in the tomb so they cannot reveal its secrets.



Tibetan Buddhism

Buddhism centers around the belief that everyone has a soul. When the body dies, the soul is reborn in another body. Karma determines the kind of new life one receives – good deeds bring good karma which brings a better birth; evil deeds bring a worse birth. Eventually, the soul gains enough understanding and karma to attain Nirvana, and is not reborn.

Tibetan Buddhism emphasizes meditation and the use of mantras (short prayers sending good karma into the world). These mantras are frequently written on objects. The most famous mantra is “Om Mani Padme Hum.” This translates as “the jewel is in the lotus,” or, metaphorically, as “the truth is in the teaching.”

In Tibet and Nepal, there are many Hindus as well as Buddhists. The two religions are intertwined, and many people profess both religions at the same time. Hindus believe that Buddha is one of the incarnations of Vishnu (the chief Hindu deity), and that he developed the precepts of Buddhism from Hinduism.

Common Buddhist Religious Objects

Prayer Flag: Prayers printed on five colors of cotton cloth (white, yellow, blue, red and green) are thought to be carried heavenwards by the wind. The flags are about a foot square, and strung in large numbers.

Prayer Wheels: A hollow bronze or wooden cylinder with prayers inscribed on the sides. Every rotation of the wheel is a recitation of the prayer. They come in many sizes. Most are hand-held or in fixed vertical rows around temples and lamaseries. Some are attached to water wheels and rotate automatically, spreading good karma into the world.

Dorje and Bell: The *dorje*, or hand-held striker, represents a thunderbolt. The note of the bell drives away evil.

Mani Stone: A smooth stone inscribed with the mantra “Om Mani Padme Hum,” often placed along paths to holy places.

Juniper Hearth: Large fireplaces found near holy places, fueled by juniper wood and incense.

Lamaseries

Traditionally, a Tibetan *lamasery* (monastery) is a secluded retreat for wise mystics knowledgeable in magic and martial arts. The hero visits the lamasery and emerges refreshed and with greater wisdom and new skills.

In reality, lamaseries are built close to settlements – typically on a hilltop which cannot be used for cultivation. Since the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1951, Tibetan monks have been persecuted; most surviving lamaseries are in Nepal or India. The layout varies, but the following features are common:

An ornate and brightly painted archway. Even if the archway is free-standing, with no wall or fence around the lamasery, it is *very* bad karma to enter other than through the archway.

One or more chanting halls, or chapels, often with a gilded roof and bell towers covered with religious designs. The chanting halls are usually of stone, but the woodwork is invariably intricately carved. The stonework is painted with religious designs. There are usually statues of deities.

A debating garden, where the monks prepare for examinations by mock debates. Examinations involve the student debating with a senior lama. The garden is as level, grassy and idyllic as possible.

An assembly hall, where visitors can observe and worship. This is painted, and has the finest statues and roof in the lamasery.

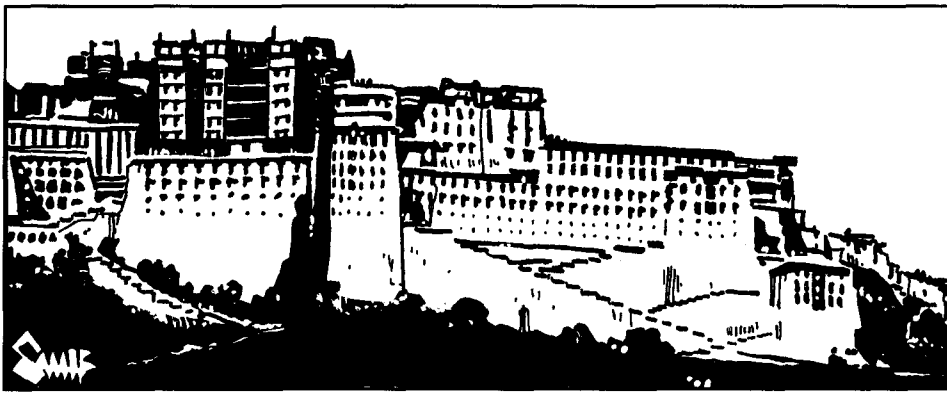
A small building for visitors to stay in, and a building where handicrafts are made for sale to visitors.

There is also a place – usually an isolated rock some distance away – where “sky burials” of monks take place. The monks break the bodies of their dead into small pieces, and feed them to the birds. Thus, the last earthly act of the deceased is to make a compassionate gift of his body to feed other creatures.

The road or footpath to a lamasery is lined by prayer flags, rock paintings, small shrines, piles of mani stones, and hearths burning juniper and incense. Because of the altitude, lamaseries are often covered in clouds in the morning. At some lamaseries, the mountainside above the buildings is adorned with rock paintings – typically huge depictions of Hindu gods.

Monks follow a course of study that lasts for 20 to 25 years. After mastering his studies, a monk can take examinations to become a lama. When a lama reaches an advanced state of learning, he is eligible to follow the path of esoteric studies, and it is believed that he could develop paranormal abilities.





The Dalai Lamas

The Dalai Lama was originally the chief of the “Yellow Hat” sect of Tibetan Buddhism. This was founded in 1400, and the Dalai Lama had equal status with the Panchen Lama and the Mapa Lama, leaders of the Black and Red Hat sects.

For over 500 years, the Dalai Lamas were the rulers of Tibet. Fourteen Dalai Lamas ruled in succession, each a reincarnation of his predecessor, according to Tibetan belief. The title “Dalai” (“ocean of wisdom”) was given to the third by a Mongol king, and applied posthumously to the first two. The fifth named himself, his four predecessors, and all future Dalai Lamas as incarnations of the God of Compassion, Chenrezi.

When a Dalai Lama dies, a search for his reincarnation begins at once. High lamas scour Tibet for a boy with special physical traits such as big ears and long eyes, who, in addition to other tests, can identify the late Dalai Lama’s possessions from among a pile of similar objects. Until the Dalai Lama is 18, a Regent rules.

(As the monks may take years for the search, in a game even adult PCs might be identified as reincarnations of important figures, leading to a certain amount of confusion and soul-searching as to whether they want to become religious leaders.)

The first Dalai Lama (1391-1474) founded Tashilhunpo Monastery, and was its first abbot.

The second (1475-1542) was the abbot of the three Yellow Hat monasteries, while disputes raged between other sects.

The third (1543-88) revived Buddhism in Mongolia. The King of Mongolia, Altan Khan, became his patron.

The fourth (1588-1616) was the great grandson of Altan Khan – and the only non-Tibetan Dalai Lama.

The fifth (1617-82) unified Tibet under his rule, suppressed all rivals, and deposed the King of Tibet. His death was concealed for ten years; his absence was explained as a religious retreat.

The sixth (1683-1706) preferred women, wine and poetry to religion. Angry Mongolians killed the Regent and kidnapped the Dalai Lama, who was never seen again.

The seventh to 12th (1708-1875) are not particularly noteworthy. Most died young, the Regents staying in power.

The 13th (1876-1933) withstood a British invasion in 1904 and a Chinese invasion in 1912.

The 14th and current Dalai Lama was 16 years old when China invaded Tibet. He ruled in partial capacity until 1959, when he fled to India. In 1989, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent efforts to gain independence for Tibet.

Lhasa

Lhasa is the capital and religious center of Tibet. It was the forbidden center of a forbidden country – foreigners were excluded until 1951, when the Chinese invaded. Old Lhasa centers on the Barkhor, a holy street encircling the Jokhang Temple. Many pilgrims travel clockwise around the Barkhor in ritually abasing ways – crawling, or progressing by body-lengths. The streets are narrow and wind between whitewashed stone buildings with sloping walls. There are several marketplaces along the Barkhor. In 1985, part of the city was torn down to front the temple with a landscaped plaza.

Jokhang Temple is the holiest site in Tibet. The oldest part of the temple dates from the seventh century. According to legend, the king of Tibet threw a ring into the air, promising to build a temple wherever it landed. The ring fell into a lake, and a white temple – the Jokhang – miraculously appeared. Even today, there is a pool under the main courtyard.

The Jokhang consists of an elaborate porch leading to a frescoed cloister around an open courtyard. Outside is a long gallery of prayer wheels. A passage lined with guardian statues (fierce on the left, benign on the right) leads into a main hall with many small chapels around it. A shrine at the rear of the main hall holds a 1,300-year-old statue of Buddha, gilded and jewel-encrusted, the oldest, most precious, and holiest object in Tibet. The top level of the Jokhang is a maze of craftsmen’s workshops and monks’ living quarters. The roofs are gilded and adorned with bells, figures, birds, beasts and dragons. The monks consider it bad karma to make maps of the Jokhang.

An avenue leads from Old Lhasa into New Lhasa, which has been built over the last 40 years around the base of the famous Potala Palace (see illustration, above). The “Winter Palace,” Potala was built on the Red Hill in the seventh century A.D. The building was greatly enlarged between 1645 and 1693. The part known as the White Palace was built by the fifth Dalai Lama, who died in 1682. The Red Palace was built by his Regent after his death.

The White Palace contained living quarters, offices, a printing house, and a seminary for government officials. The Red Palace contained the tombs of the Dalai Lamas, chapels and shrines, libraries, and debating halls for monks. Between the palaces is a yellow building housing giant religious banners.

The Potala is 13 stories, 330 feet high, 1,300 feet east to west, and 1,150 feet north to south. Its stone walls are 16 feet thick. Copper was poured into the foundations to help it withstand earthquakes. The palace contains over 1,000 rooms, and is filled with gilded statues, painted murals and numerous artifacts. The Potala is now open as a tourist attraction.

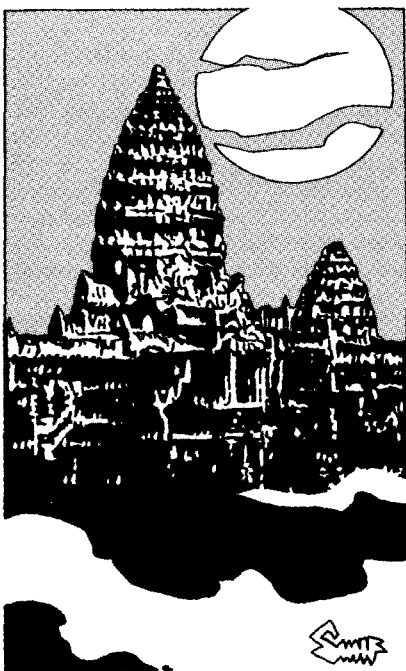
The Khmer Empire

In the eighth century A.D., Khmer (now Cambodia) was ruled by the Javanese. The princes of the Khmer people were held hostage in Java. In 802 A.D. the Khmer prince Jayavarman II escaped, returned to Khmer, killed his father, took the throne, and announced that he was founding the Angkor kingdom. The Javanese killed his brothers in Java, leaving him undisputed king. They sent an army, but the Khmers won independence. In 803, Jayavarman declared himself a god-king, and laid the foundation of the Khmer Empire.

The prosperity of the Khmers was based on a complicated system of irrigation that enabled them to produce four rice harvests a year. The capital of Angkor had a population of about one million. The successors to Jayavarman all built temples – each king building a bigger and better temple than his predecessor.

In 1113, the building of Angkor Wat began – it was the last big temple to be built. The Khmer Empire turned its attention from building to expanding. By 1181, the Khmer Empire stretched from the Malay peninsula in the south, to Burma in the west, and to China in the north.

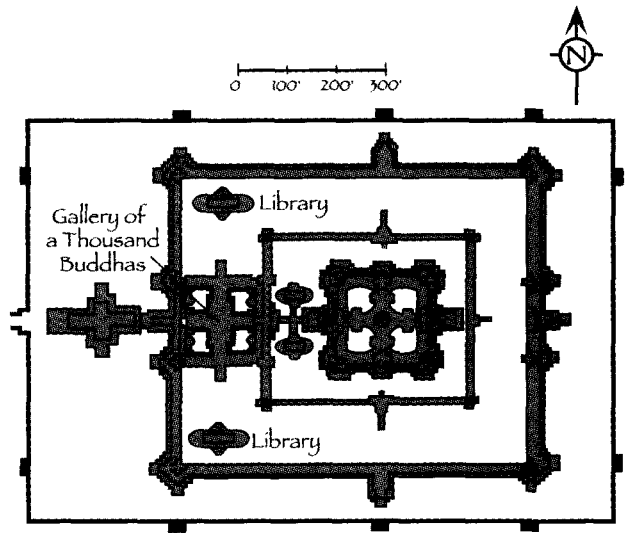
The Khmers then returned to temple building. Work on the Bayon temple was started in 1200. Thousands of peasants were taken from the rice fields to build it, and the work continued for 21 years. As a result, not enough people were left to maintain the irrigation system, which collapsed. In the resulting chaos, all the enemies the Khmer had made during the expansionist phase attacked. The Khmer Empire was destroyed.



Angkor Wat

Deciding the city of Angkor Thom was too crowded with monuments and canals, Khmer king Suryavarman chose a site outside the city for his great temple-tomb.

Angkor Wat required as much stone as the Great Pyramid of Egypt. Nearly every surface is covered with intricate reliefs. The temple rises on three terraces to a height of 90'.



Angkor

The city of Angkor Thom was abandoned in 1431, when the Khmer Empire collapsed. In 1860, the French naturalist Henri Mouhot rediscovered it; locals told him that the city was built by giant gods from the sky. The discovery of the capital of the Khmer Empire, lost in the jungle, fired the imaginations of archaeologists, adventurers and treasure-hunters alike. The site was reclaimed from the jungle, but many of its treasures departed to museums and private collections.

Beside the Royal City of Angkor Thom were the temple city of Angkor Wat, and two giant reservoirs (*barays*) for irrigation. Both Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat were surrounded by 100-yard-wide moats stocked with crocodiles. Angkor Thom's moat was eight miles long, while Angkor Wat's was a mere two and a half miles.

The moat of Angkor Thom was crossed by five causeways, which led through massive gateways in a 30-foot stone wall. Inside the wall were ornamental pools, landscaped gardens, statues of giants, nymphs and *nagas* (snakes which guarded treasures and water sources). At the center of the city was the king's personal temple, the Bayon, with 54 towers, each with 16 chapels. Reliefs of everyday life show people fishing, playing chess and drinking. The palace, however, has been completely destroyed.

Angkor Wat was built in 1112-1152 as a monument to the glory of the god-king, a temple, and a sepulcher. The temple is built on three levels, the topmost level supporting the inner sanctuary and crowned by an immense central tower, with four smaller towers at each corner of the galleried platform. The complex represents, in miniature, the Hindu universe – the five towers represent the sacred Mount Meru, the center of the Hindu universe, on whose summit the gods reside. The enclosing wall represents the mountains around the edge of the world, and the moat the oceans beyond.

The moat is crossed by a single causeway lined with naga balustrades crosses the moat. The causeway leads to a cruciform platform, guarded by stone lions. The temple is entered through a colonnaded processional gateway, leading to a gallery that once contained 1,000 statues of Buddha. Around the walls of the outer gallery is the longest continual relief in the world, eight feet high and nearly a mile long. Originally covered in gilt, this has almost entirely decayed.

The relief shows legends from Hindu epics. In niches around the gallery were hundreds of statues of celestial nymphs in erotic poses, most of which were taken to France.

The second terrace has a tower at each corner, and 12 steep stairways (representing the slopes of Mt. Meru) rise to the third terrace and the five square towers. The towers were once covered in gold.

Despite the grandiose scale of the complex, and the decorative detail, the building techniques were unsophisticated. Stone walls were often reinforced with timber beams; when the wood rotted, the stone blocks fell. No mortar was used, and the masonry is stabilized by its own weight. The style of vaulting only allows for small spans, and hence each room is small.

East of Angkor Thom are a number of smaller temples that remain concealed and uncleared in the jungle. They would make ideal places for modern adventures.

There are difficulties, however. Tourists are legally required to travel with an officially accredited guide. Medical facilities in Cambodia are rare and medicines in short supply. Rabies and cholera are endemic, as is drug-resistant malaria. It is dangerous to walk after dark, as petty theft and violent crime are common. Banditry is rife, especially by soldiers who are rarely paid and regularly hold travelers at gunpoint. Traveling in the jungle is dangerous. Landmines are common. In the dry season, poisonous snakes are a problem. In the wet season, poisonous centipedes and insects are common, as are leeches.



Mount Fuji (Fuji-San)

The serene cone of Mount Fuji, about 60 miles southwest of Tokyo, is one of the best-known images of Japan. Its name means "everlasting life," and thousands of Japanese climb to the shrine on the peak every summer.

According to legend, Fuji was formed by an earthquake in 286 B.C. Mount Fuji has long been a sacred mountain; one sect, the Fujiko, regard it as a person or a deity in its own right.

Until the Meiji Restoration in the mid-19th century, women were not allowed to climb Mount Fuji. The male climbers traditionally wore white pilgrim's robes.

Fuji is surrounded by temples and there are shrines even at the edge and bottom of the crater.

Actually, Fuji is not one volcano, but three: Komotake, Ko Fuji and Shin Fuji. The most recent of these is Shin Fuji, which became active about 10,000 years ago; it covered the other two volcanoes, and shrouded the slopes to give the mountain its present form.

The base of the mountain is about 80 miles around; together with its broad lava fields it covers an area 30 miles across. At the summit, the crater is 500 yards wide and 820 feet deep. Around the crater are eight peaks: Oshaidake, Izudake, Jojudake, Komagatake, Mushimatake, Kengamme, Hokusandake and Kukushidake.

To the northern side of the mountain are five lakes formed by the damming effects of lava flows; from east to west are Lakes Yamanaka, Kawaguchi, Sai, Shoji and Motosu. The lowest of these, Lake Kawaguchi, at 2,700 feet, is famous for the reflection of Fuji in its still waters.

The mountain is over 12,000 feet high, and has been dormant since 1707, although it is still classified as an active volcano. (What might PCs do if they received information that the volcano will erupt in a few days time, during the pilgrimage season?)

Shinto Shrines

Shinto is "The Way of the Kami." *Kami* means "strange and mysterious power" (natural spirits, minor gods). Anything out of the ordinary – an albino person or animal, an unusually shaped tree, an especially large rock – might be a kami. Shinto shrines honor these kamis.

Originally, a sacred site would be surrounded by a fence (*tamagaki*) with an entrance gate (*torii*). Shrines were later built to welcome and house deities during agricultural festivals. By the sixth to seventh centuries A.D. they became year-round sites of worship. It has since been customary to rebuild shrines every 20 years. Each shrine has two adjacent sites, one for the present shrine, one for the one being built. Shrines are copied faithfully, and are the same as when first built.

Shrines vary in size from nine feet by six feet to 60 feet by 50 feet. The *torii* consists of two pillars embedded into the earth and two beams, either straight (*shimmei torii*) or curved (*myojin torii*). The gates may be connected to the shrine, and may be decorated or painted.

The shrine itself is a single large room with an elevated floor. The columns supporting the room are set on stone bases. The interior of the shrine is richly decorated with sculpture, lacquer-work, paintings and metal-craft. Timbers and walls are carved and covered with black lacquer and red and green coatings, highlighted by the gold of the metal fittings. A veranda surrounds the shrine. A roof over the steps leading up to the shrine sometimes extends to the gateway.

The main roof, which forms a steep-sided V shape (*moya*), is made of either heavy planks or complex patterns of concave and convex tiles. A more gently-sloping roof, called a *hisashi*, may be present on two or four sides of the *moya*. The shrine is designed to blend in with the surroundings. Itsukushima Shrine, for instance, is on an island, and at high tide appears to float on the sea.

The Moghuls

The Muslim Moghul dynasty of northern India traced their ancestry back to the Mongol Tamerlane (see sidebar, p. 44). The first Moghul, Babur, started his career with attempts to conquer Samarkand. Thwarted and forced back into Afghanistan, he turned to India, which his ancestor had plundered, and by a combination of tactical skill, superior weaponry, and sheer determination, his small army carved out the beginnings of an empire in the early 16th century.

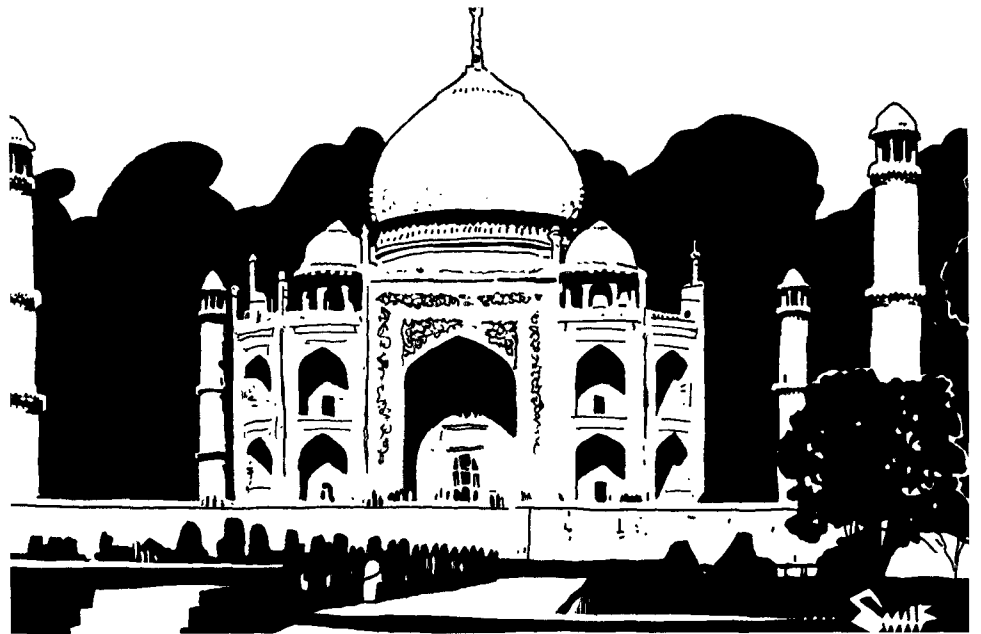
Babur's son Humayun lost nearly all this in struggles with his brothers and rivals, but Humayun's son Akbar regained it and more; he is often called the true founder of the empire. Akbar recognized that the stability of his empire demanded religious tolerance, healthy trade and efficient administration. He was a patron of the arts – despite being illiterate.

His son Jahangir (“Lord of the World”) was another art-lover, and a writer and artist, but his reign had problems; although he was victorious in battle, he behaved unpredictably and drank heavily. Jahangir granted great power to his wife, Nur Mahal, who was no better as a ruler. Furthermore, a new Persian dynasty carved a slice off his empire.

Shah Jahan, Jahangir's son, tried to continue the tradition of wise government (and kept his mother locked up). But he had problems with his provincial governors, and his military adventures and building programs (including the creation of the city of New Delhi as well as his wife's tomb) pushed taxes up. There were more attacks from Persia, and a terrible famine.

Shah Jahan's four sons fought one another on his death in 1666; Aurangzeb was the winner. Unfortunately, he was a fanatic Muslim who abandoned his grandfather's policy of religious tolerance. Most of his subjects were still Hindus, and Hindu kingdoms began to encroach.

The process of decay took a century, and the winners were – the British. The Moghuls had permitted European “factories” (trading posts) in their ports; now, foreign adventurers used these as bases from which to fight each other and interfere in local politics. European weaponry gave them an effectiveness out of proportion to their numbers. Eventually, matters came down to a struggle between the British, the French, and local rulers. The British won, while the Moghuls were pushed back to a section of the north, which was eventually absorbed into the British Empire.



The Taj Mahal

To begin with, a love story. The opulence of the Moghul court of the 17th century was renowned. Court life was inflexibly formal, with the exception of the Royal Meena Bazaar, held next to the harem. On two days in every month, the women of the harem, wives and concubines of the powerful, posed as stall keepers, and the men of the Court were permitted to enter and haggle for purchases – an agreeable, harmless entertainment.

Prince Khurram, at 15 the most handsome of the Moghuls, was strolling through the bazaar when he noticed a beautiful girl selling silk and glass beads. He asked the price of one of her pieces of glass. She replied that it wasn't a piece of glass, but a rare diamond, worth a vast fortune, 10,000 rupees, a sum no one could afford. Without a word, Prince Khurram took the amount from his sleeve, gave her the money, picked up the piece of glass, and left. The next day, Prince Khurram asked his father to let him marry the girl, and was given permission to marry her when the stars were right.

Five years later, shortly after Prince Khurram had been named heir, the astrologers decided that the stars were right. The wedding was as grand an affair as Moghul wealth could devise. The emperor gave the bride the name Mumtaz Mahal, “Chosen One Of The Palace.”

Their life together was idyllic – although Prince Khurram had a large harem and other wives, Mumtaz Mahal was his favorite. Khurram went on many military campaigns, and impressed everyone with his bravery and intelligence. Mumtaz Mahal accompanied him, her bravery, beauty, intelligence and political wisdom being remarked on by all.

A series of plots against them convinced Prince Khurram to rebel against his father, murder his brothers, and claim the throne. He was crowned in 1628, and proclaimed Shah Jahan, Emperor of the World. He showered those who had helped him with exotic gifts.

In 1630, Shah Jahan set off to put down a rebellion, and Mumtaz Mahal accompanied him, even though she was expecting her 14th child. On June 7, 1631, the child was born. On the same day, Shah Jahan won a decisive battle. As

he surveyed the scene of battle, he received news of the birth. A healthy baby girl, he was told, but no news of the mother. At dawn, he was summoned to her side, and she died. Shah Jahan, the grandest of the Moghuls, broke down and wept inconsolably for eight days.

The queen lay buried in Burhanpur, her head pointing north, her face turned to Mecca. The traditional 40-day period of mourning was not enough. Nor would the emperor grieve alone – he ordered the entire kingdom into mourning for two years. Public entertainment, music, jewels, perfumes, brightly colored clothes and laughter were banned throughout the land, on pain of death. Shah Jahan decided to build for his queen a mausoleum more perfect than anything that had ever been built. It was named for the queen – Taj Mahal.

It took 22 years and the toil of 20,000 laborers to build. Price was no object, and the material in the Taj Mahal was the most precious that could be obtained: flawless white marble, solid silver doors, jewels, and the finest work of the finest artisans and architects throughout the world. It was completed in 1654.

In 1658, Shah Jahan was deposed by his son Aurangzeb, and imprisoned in Agra Fort, within sight of the Taj Mahal. Aurangzeb had a wall built so that Jahan could not see the Taj. Jahan died, broken-hearted, in 1666, and was buried in the Taj Mahal, next to his beloved Mumtaz Mahal.

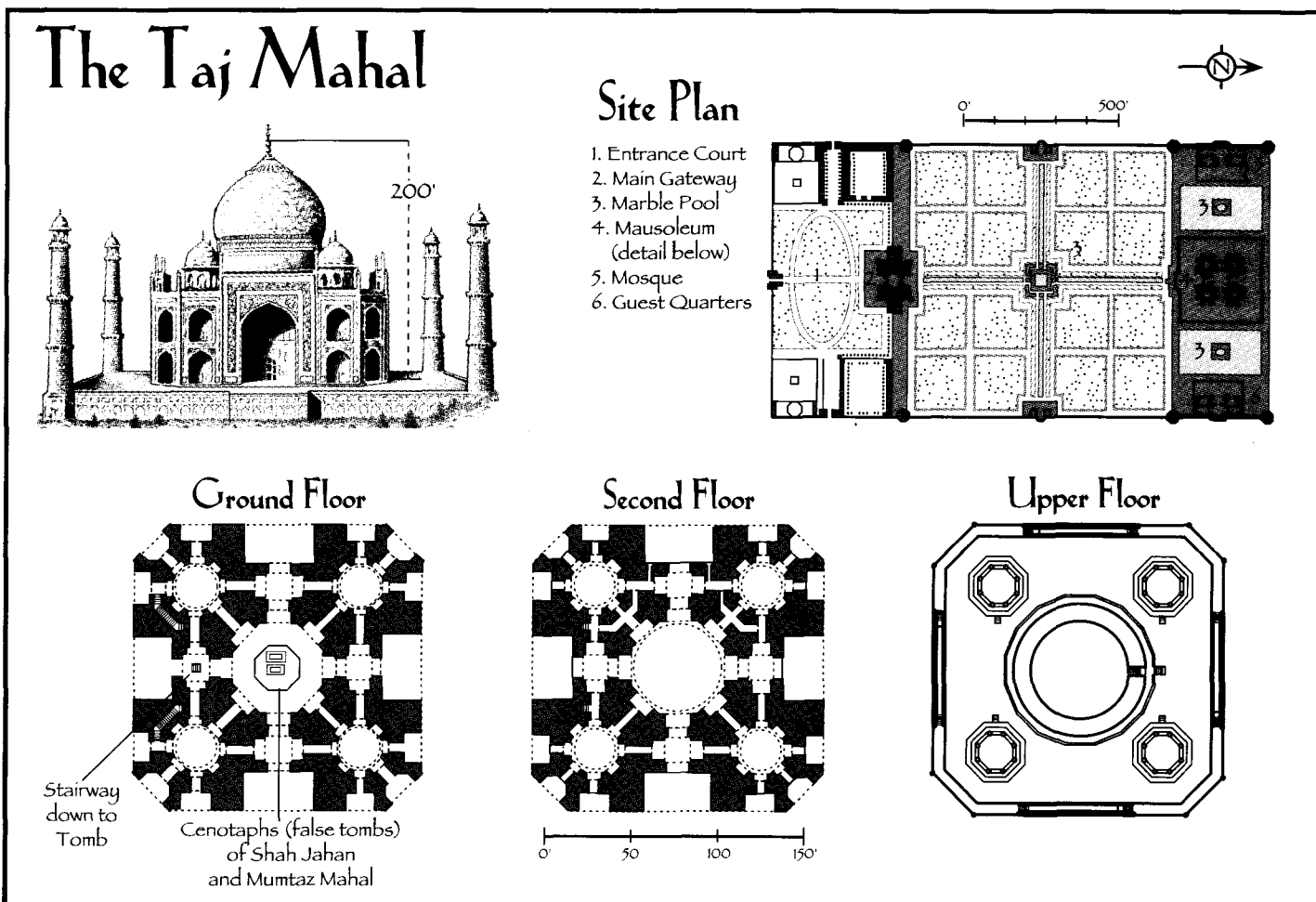
That is the legend. There is only one more footnote to add to the history. When the British Empire took over India, the Taj Mahal had fallen into disrepair. The British restored the monument; it is now a major tourist attraction.

The Mausoleum

The three-storied gateway is of red sandstone, with white marble inlay. The archway is framed by inscriptions from the Koran, which appear to be the same size from base to top – the script increases in size to create this impression. To either side of the mausoleum are red sandstone buildings; one is a mosque, the other is a jawab, or “answer,” whose only purpose is to provide artistic balance.

The Taj Mahal occupies a rectangular space, about 1,900 feet by 1,000 feet. A central garden, 1,000 feet on a side, leaves an oblong space to north and south. The southern oblong is taken up by the gateway, the northern by the mausoleum. Intersecting water channels divide the garden into four parts, with a raised marble pond in the center and many fountains.

The mausoleum consists of a plinth with a detached, octagonal minaret at each corner. Four octagonal towers marking the corners of the plinth are capped with smaller domes. An inner dome over the central sepulcher is 81 feet high and 58 feet in diameter. The outer dome is 200 feet high. Elaborate marble screens inlaid with precious stones surround the tombs in the center.



6 ♦ THE NEAR EAST



*Is it not passing brave to be a king,
And ride in triumph through Persepolis?
— Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine the Great*



Mohenjo-Daro

Mohenjo-Daro (the name means “mound of the dead”), in India, was the world’s first planned city. It covered a massive area for the time: 620 acres (with a circuit of 3 miles). Twelve main, beaten-earth streets 30 to 45 feet wide divided the city into a dozen blocks 1,260 feet by 750 feet.

These blocks consisted of standardized, closely-packed, flat-roofed houses, shops and workshops, built of baked bricks. The houses opened onto a network of narrow alleys; neither doors nor windows looked onto the main streets. Dwelling-rooms looked onto a central courtyard, with a well and stairs to an upper story. Houses had elaborate drains and most had baths.

Houses varied from a single room to a dozen grouped around multiple courtyards. The Indus Valley civilization consisted of priests, merchants and peasant farmers – there were no apparent nobles. Artifacts are utilitarian, although some jewelry, small sculptures of deities, and children’s toys have been found. Business seals with beautiful designs – including elephants and other wildlife – are a frequent find.

To the northwest, 500 feet from the city, was an artificial mound 20 to 40 feet high, fortified by brick walls and towers. This citadel may have served as a refuge from floods, and from enemies. Municipal buildings in the citadel included the Great Bath, the Granary and the Assembly Hall, as well as what may have been the chief priest’s residence.

The Indus Valley in History

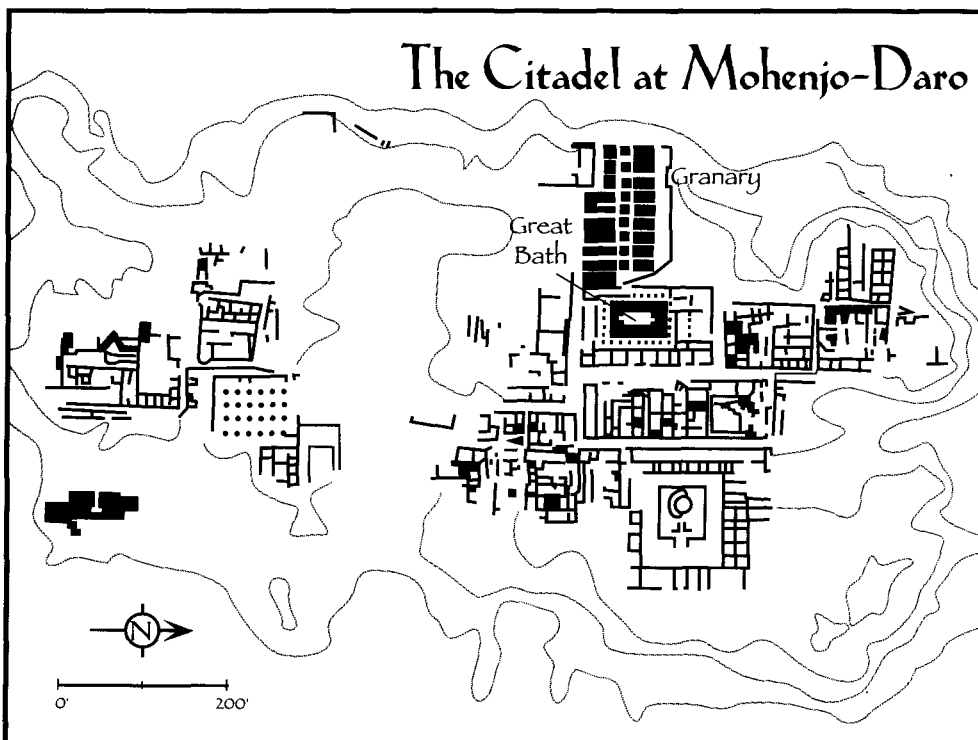
The Indus Valley civilization, although less well known than its contemporaries in Egypt and Mesopotamia, was larger – its cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were the largest cities in the world. Whether these were twin capitals, or whether Harappa took over from Mohenjo-Daro after it was devastated by a flood, will probably never be known; most of Harappa was dismantled in the 19th century to build a railway line. The heyday of this civilization was 2500-1700 B.C.

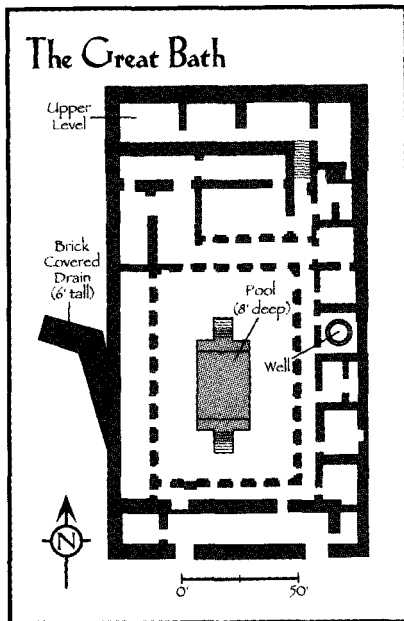
Like the Mesopotamians and Egyptians, the Indus Valley civilization depended upon irrigation from the river, which required a stable, centralized authority.

It is usual to refer to the Indus civilization as “enigmatic,” because its writing has still not been fully deciphered and the reason for its fall is unknown. Further, the cities were laid out in a remarkably standardized way: even the mud-bricks came in a uniform size; and there are no signs of an aristocratic class or palaces. This has led to speculations that the civilization was ruled by priests, and even wilder ones of an early form of communism or totalitarian state (Utopia? Dystopia? The appearance of one, but actually the other?).

More is known about the civilization than was the case a few years ago. It had trade links with the rest of the civilized world – the oldest known ocean-going boat (2300 B.C.), a 60-foot ship made of reed bundles, carried Indus goods to trade in Mesopotamia: ivory, copper, semi-precious stones and foodstuffs.

In the south, the Indus civilization seems to have survived the invasions which destroyed Mohenjo-Daro, and provided a link with other Indian civilizations; the Indus Valley may have been the source of parts of the Hindu religion.





The Great Bath was a brick tank made watertight with gypsum and bitumen. Sunk into a brick platform, it measures 40 feet by 23 feet and eight feet deep. At each end is a flight of steps; wooden changing rooms surrounded it on three sides.

The Granary included platforms for threshing grain and storage space for wheat and rice – the latter with underground air ducts to keep the grain dry.

The Assembly Hall was a rectangular building, its roof supported by four rows of columns. Statues have been found in adjacent buildings.

The chief priest's residence was a massive 230 feet by 80 feet, with an open courtyard 33 feet square surrounded on three sides by verandas.

Mohenjo-Daro was in decline by 1900 B.C. – possibly because of floods from the river Indus, perhaps because it had exhausted wood supplies used for fuel and firing mud bricks.

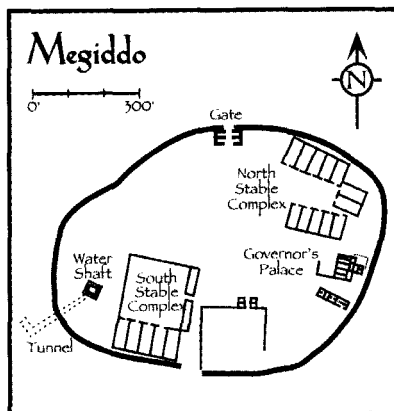
Even so, Mohenjo-Daro was far from deserted. The uppermost layer of the city contained many skeletons of men, women and children who had met violent deaths. The conquest of the land by the Aryans is celebrated by an ancient epic, the *Rig-Veda*. It tells of the god Indra, who “destroyed 90 forts and 100 ancient castles.” This was long thought to be purely mythical – until Mohenjo-Daro was rediscovered in the 1920s.

The End of the World

One of the most strategically located cities of Late Bronze Age Palestine was Megiddo, commanding the Arah Pass, the main route to Egypt. Many battles were fought here. The earliest recorded was between Thutmose III and a coalition of Palestinian kings in 1500 B.C.

Josiah, an Israelite king, was defeated and killed at Megiddo in a battle with Pharaoh Neco 800 years later (2 Kings 23). Megiddo became the symbol of a great battle that would be fought in the future, in which Good would ultimately defeat Evil and Josiah would be avenged.

Megiddo consisted of a walled town, with an underground pumping system to bring water from the valley to within the walls and (in the 9th century B.C.) stables for 450 horses and chariots. The word for hill in Hebrew is “har” – the town is formally known as har-Megiddo. The Greek form of this is “Armageddon.”



Jericho

And the walls came tumbling down . . .

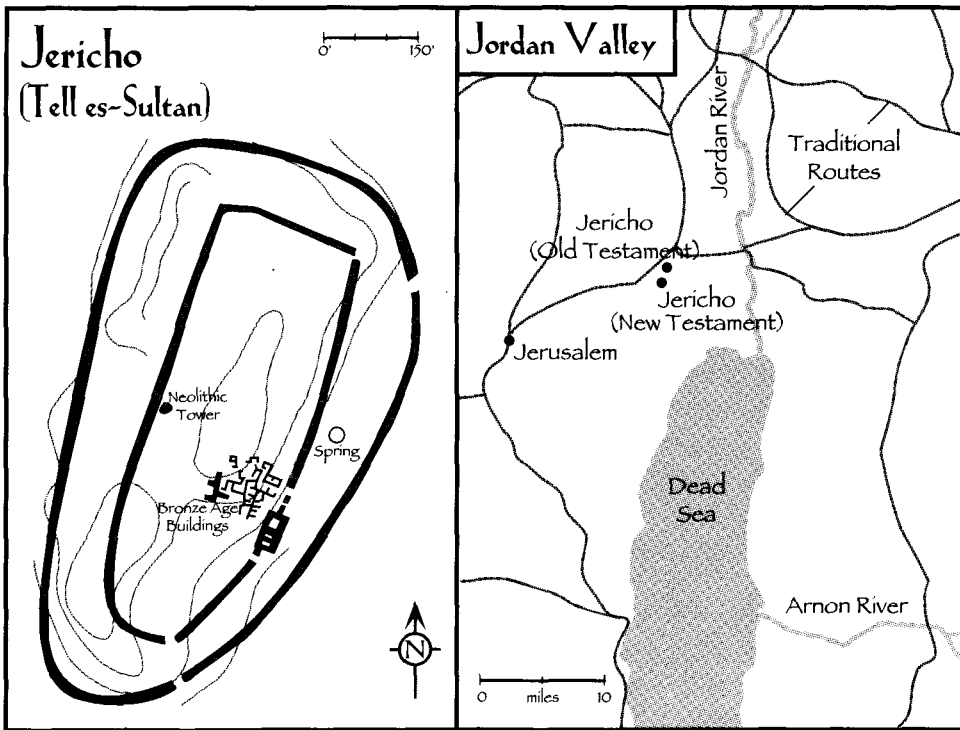
That happened quite late in the story of Jericho, the world's first city.

Jericho lies in the great rift of the Jordan valley, a few miles north of the Dead Sea and 750 feet below sea level. Most of the Jordan valley is a white desert of baked stone and sand. Yet it was in this unlikely spot that humanity adopted a settled life, in about 8000 B.C.

The key was water. One copious, perennial spring made Jericho a green oasis in the middle of the desert. The spring now emerges at the foot of a great mound known as Tell es-Sultan, on the outskirts of modern Jericho. Many settlements in the ancient Near East used mud bricks as building material. While easy to make, mud bricks require careful maintenance. Old buildings are often allowed to fall to ruin, with new buildings built on top of the mound of mud that results. These mounds – as much as 150 feet deep under important, centuries-old settlements – are called *tells* in Arabic (*tepe* in Persian, *hiyyük* in Turkish). Tell es-Sultan was the site of Ancient Jericho.

Jericho attracted nomads, who built a small sanctuary. Some of them settled there. At first, there was an annual harvest of wild cereals, which later developed into deliberate cultivation. Several features of that first settlement still survive: fragments of a stone wall some 25 feet tall, and a great stone tower that still stands to a height of 30 feet, with an interior staircase of stone. The houses were round, about 15 feet in diameter, with solid walls, wide doorways, and with the bricks supporting a domed roof made of branches covered in clay. The houses were closely packed, linked through screen walls and courtyards. Archaeologists found a group of human skulls on which lifelike features had been modeled in plaster – probably portraits of venerated ancestors.

Being in a strategic position, Jericho was attacked many times. The area was also prone to earthquakes. The walls of Jericho were destroyed at least 17 times between 3000 B.C. and 2300 B.C. alone. The last time was catastrophic; Jericho was nearly abandoned. Around 1900 B.C. a new city arose, the Jericho of the



Middle Bronze Age. This was the period of Jericho's greatest prosperity. The walls were regularly improved, and Jericho was once again a powerful city.

Around 1500 B.C., the city was destroyed by the Egyptians and once again abandoned. The site was reoccupied in 1300 B.C. by a small number of people; no new walls were built, few buildings were added, and the new inhabitants made do with what had been left by the previous inhabitants. In 1250 B.C., along came Joshua and the Israelites. According to the Bible, Joshua first sent two spies into Jericho to get information about the city. They were given shelter in the house of Rahab the prostitute, whose family was thereby assured of their lives. Joshua then laid siege to Jericho in a rather unusual way, following the advice of an angel. Day after day, for six days, his army marched around the walls in silence. On the seventh day, after six silent circuits, he gave the order for the trumpets to be sounded. The walls of Jericho collapsed, and the Israelites stormed in and slew every man, woman and child in the city, except for Rahab's family (Joshua 6). Joshua placed God's curse on the place: "Cursed before the Lord be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his first-born shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates" (Joshua 6:26). Nevertheless, Jericho was rebuilt: "In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord" (1 Kings 16:34). This was in the ninth century B.C., and may refer to a revival of paganism involving child sacrifices. The site was finally abandoned some time later, and was covered with sand until excavated in the 1930s.

The Jericho of the New Testament was a separate city, to the south of Tell Es-Sultan. Herod built a palace here, with gardens, halls, pools and baths in the Roman style. The Romans burned it to the ground in 70 A.D. Soon after, the Byzantines rebuilt Jericho. The Arabs built a luxurious winter palace here in 724 A.D. which was unfinished, being wrecked by an earthquake in 746.

Modern Jericho is at yet a third site, about a mile east of the Old Testament site. This city was first built during the Crusades, and nearly abandoned in the Israeli-Arab war of 1967.

Chatal Huyuk

Even older than Jericho is Chatal Huyuk, a Neolithic town that goes back to at least 6250-5400 B.C. (There are older, unexcavated levels.) The mound formed by the ruins covers 32 acres, but it is unlikely that it was all occupied at once; estimates are that the town had 4,000-6,000 people. Only a small area has been excavated, and this may have been the temple district; one building in four has been identified as a shrine.

Houses and shrines were rectangular, single rooms of about 270 square feet, with plastered walls and floors. The buildings were contiguous; the only access was over the roofs with ladders up to a hole which served as smoke hole and door. The houses had hearths, ovens, storage bins and built-in beds. The walls were decorated with simple geometric designs, and the floors covered with rush mats. Occasional open areas between houses were used to dump rubbish.

The town is on a dry plateau 3,000 feet above sea level. In the earliest layers, the people were hunters and gatherers. Later, wheat was grown with the aid of simple irrigation – the earliest known – and cattle were domesticated.

The shrines in the earliest levels often had decorations featuring leopards; in the later levels, bulls and pregnant women were common fertility symbols, although vultures, symbols of death, are also present.

The burial practices of the people involved exposure of corpses outside the town. The bones were then brought back and interred in the shrines and houses; most typically adult females were buried with their children and adult males on their own. Stone for implements was imported from over 100 miles away. Not all of the dead had weapons or ornaments, suggesting differences in wealth even though the houses themselves reveal few differences.

The average age of death was 30-35, and the only frequent disease was anemia. Many of the dead had broken bones, possibly from tumbling from the roofs.

It has been suggested that Chatal Huyuk spans not only the transition to agriculture and domestication of cattle, but also the discovery of the male role in reproduction, and resulting reduction of women's status; it has also been suggested that the priestly population were dancers, perhaps even engaging in an early version of the bull-dancing known later from Crete (p. 87).

Chatal Huyuk was abruptly abandoned about 5400 B.C.; we do not know why.

The Babylonian New Year

The Babylonian year began with a New Year festival intended to ensure good crops. The Spring equinox festival lasted 11 days. There were prayers for the first four days; on the evening of the fourth day the Epic of Creation was recited or acted out. On the fifth day, the king underwent ritual humiliation by the High Priest of Marduk, who slapped the king's cheek and pulled his ears while the king assured Marduk that he had not committed any sins or neglected Babylon. The more painful the treatment, the better, since tears in the king's eyes meant that Marduk was pleased. In the evening, a white bull was sacrificed. The next day, the King took part in the Sacred Marriage with the High Priestess of Ishtar, which lasted for the rest of the festival.

During the reign of Nabonidus (555-539 B.C.), a serious calamity occurred – Nabonidus left Babylon and lived for ten years in northwest Arabia. There was no king in Babylon. No king meant no Sacred Marriage, which meant no festival, and no celebrations.

When King Cyrus of Persia took the throne, New Year Festivals resumed. They became legendary for extravagant and unrestrained pleasure-seeking.

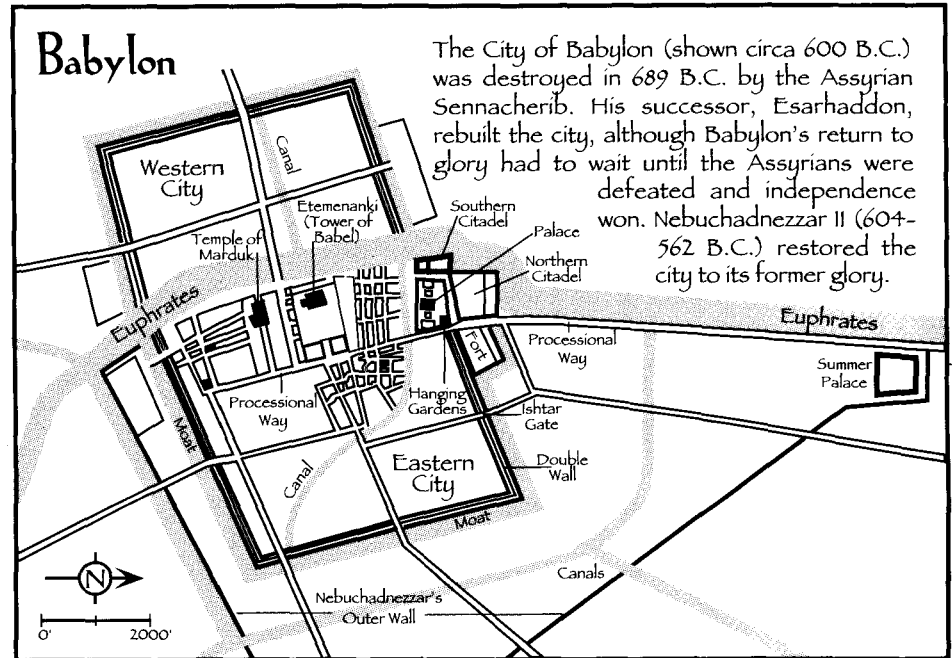
The Ishtar Gate

As well as the "Tower of Babel" (see sidebar, p. 67) and the Hanging Gardens (see sidebar, p. 116), Nebuchadnezzar II (605-563 B.C.) had the Processional Way built, which terminated at yet another marvel of the age: the Ishtar Gate.

The Gate, made of blue glazed brick, was built in 575 B.C. and encompassed both the Inner and the Outer City walls. The Gate was 40 feet high, decorated in yellow and white with reliefs of dragons and young bulls, symbols of Marduk (Lord of the Gods) and Adad (the Weather God). There were also numerous statues and brick reliefs of lions, symbol of Ishtar, after whom the Gate was named. Ishtar was the Goddess of War and Sexual Love, and the patroness of, among others, warriors, prostitutes and brewers.

According to Nebuchadnezzar, on either side of the Gate were guards of "mighty bronze colossi of bulls and dragons." No trace of these have been found.

The Ishtar Gate was first excavated between 1899 and 1917 by Robert Koldewey, on behalf of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, and then removed to Berlin, where it is now on display. A reconstruction now stands in the original site, the German authorities having declined to return the Gate.



Babylon

Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.
– *The Bible, Revelations 17:5*

For a long time Babylon was an unimportant village in the midst of great powers; Nineveh, Ur of the Chaldees and Eridu all competed for power and prestige. Babylon first rose to greatness around 2000 B.C. when its neighbors lost agricultural land through over-irrigation. Babylon lay on fertile soil, and was in a good position relative to trade routes. As Babylon grew, it produced several able rulers who were quick to take advantage of the power vacuum.

The most famous of these was Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.), who founded the "Old Babylon Empire." In the second year of his reign, Hammurabi wrote an extensive legal code, containing over 250 laws on subjects as diverse as murder, perjury, adultery, inheritance and slander.

Babylonian society fell into three basic groups; the *awilum* (landowners), *mushkenum* (dependents) and *wardum* (slaves). There was no warrior class, and the priesthood did not have any special status. Slaves were of two types: foreign-born (bought or captured in war) and local-born. Foreign slaves built roads and temples and dug canals. Local slaves were used in domestic service; many received their freedom upon the owner's death.

Hammurabi developed an incredibly efficient courier service. Babylonian letters were usually dated; royal letters frequently specified time of day. Old Babylon was equally efficient in other areas, such as tax collection, census-taking and, above all, justice. (One case involved a man who took the village elder to court because his daughter had run off to the bright lights of Babylon, and the elder hadn't employed enough administrators to prevent this.) During this time, the ziggurat of Etemenanki (see sidebar, p. 67) was built. Under Hammurabi's leadership, Babylon defeated Assyria, Elam, Subartu and a number of smaller city states. Babylon became the dominant power in Mesopotamia.

After the death of Hammurabi, Old Babylon declined. The Hittites sacked it in 1530 B.C. For a thousand years, Babylon was dominated by the Hittites, Assyrians and Egyptians. Occasional attempts to regain independence were unsuccessful. In 689 B.C. the Assyrians destroyed the city entirely, leveling the buildings and putting the inhabitants to the sword.

But the Assyrian Empire's conquest of Egypt overstretched its resources, and in 626 B.C. Babylon regained its independence. Babylonians destroyed the Assyrian capital in 614 B.C., Nineveh in 612 B.C., and defeated the Egyptians in 605 B.C. In 604 B.C. the founder of the New Babylonian Empire died. His son, Nebuchadnezzar, succeeded him.

Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon began massive building projects. The city was the largest in the world, covering 2,500 acres. The ziggurat of Etemenanki was rebuilt. The Ishtar Gate, the Hanging Gardens (see p. 116), and the Processional Way were all built during his reign, and the outer wall of the city was raised to a height of 300 feet – according to Herodotus, at least. (Archaeologists calculate a more believable but still impressive height of 75 feet.) The Processional Way, lined with statues, was a raised road wide enough for a chariot to turn around; it was used for festivals and victory parades.

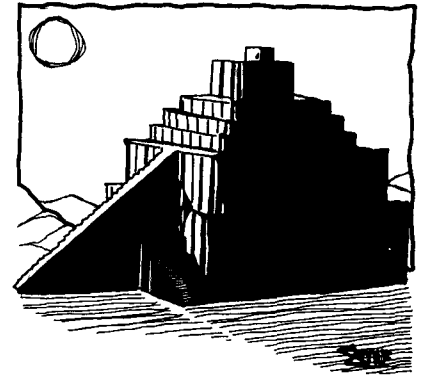
And there were many victory parades. Babylon defeated Egypt, Mesopotamian city states and Israel. A famous battle of this period, between the Lydians and the Medes, took place on May 28, 585 B.C. Just before the battle, a total eclipse of the sun occurred. This was taken as an omen against fighting; the Babylonians were brought in as arbiters, and the armies went home. This is the earliest historical event that can be verified to the day – a useful landmark for time-travelers.

The Babylonians conquered the Israelites, and installed Zedekiah as king in Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Zedekiah rebelled in 587 B.C. The Babylonians returned and, despite Jerusalem's heroic defense, again defeated the Jews. The Babylonians burned Jerusalem to the ground, and took the nobility and religious leaders and their dependents back to Babylon. This was the great Jewish exile in Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar died, the unpopular Nabonidus became king (see sidebar, p. 66).

Then the Persians, led by King Cyrus, came. As legend has it, the Crown Prince of Babylon saw fiery writing on the wall of his palace during a feast, and sent for Daniel, a Jewish sage, to translate it. Daniel read the four enigmatic words "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin" (numbered, numbered, weighed, divided) as "You have been weighed and found wanting." Cyrus diverted the Euphrates and sent soldiers into the city under the wall along the riverbed. These soldiers opened the gates, allowing the Persians in before any defense could be mounted. Cyrus was a liberal ruler, allowing the captive peoples to return home and making Babylon the capital of the richest province of the Persian Empire.

In 482, an abortive revolt led to the destruction of the ziggurat of Etemenanki. In 331 B.C., Babylon surrendered to Alexander the Great without a battle. Alexander rebuilt the ziggurat, but died before he could turn Babylon into the capital of his empire, as he intended. Babylon passed to the Seleucid dynasty in 312 B.C. The city faded in importance when the Seleucids built their own capital, Seleucia. Babylon was much damaged by civil warfare, and the ziggurat was destroyed again. Babylon was finally abandoned around 64 A.D.

Adventure Seed: The king has taken an army to capture a powerful city, surrounded by an impassable wall. The good news is that a picked team *might* be able to swim along the river into the city, capture and open the main gate, and hold it until the army can get inside the city. To add to the fun, there is a festival going on inside the city. The city guard are still competent, alert and watchful, but the majority of the citizens are having a thoroughly uninhibited time.



The Tower of Babel

The ziggurat of *Etemenanki* ("the Foundation") at Babylon has been credited as the origin of the Biblical legend of Babel (described in Genesis 11: 1-9). The ziggurat was 300 feet square at the base, rising to a height of 300 feet in seven stepped stages, topped with a temple (called *Babilu*, Gate of God) to the god Marduk. It had a triple stairway approach, and was surrounded by a ditch.

According to the legend, originally "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech." The people of Shinar (Babylon) decided to build a tower "whose top may reach unto heaven" to build a name for themselves. This excessive pride was a sin comparable to the *hubris* that occasionally got Greek heroes into trouble (as when Icarus flew too close to the sun, or when Bellerophon tried to ride Pegasus to Mount Olympus). In response to this challenge to heaven, the Lord made it impossible for the workers to understand one another – they could not finish the tower. "Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth."

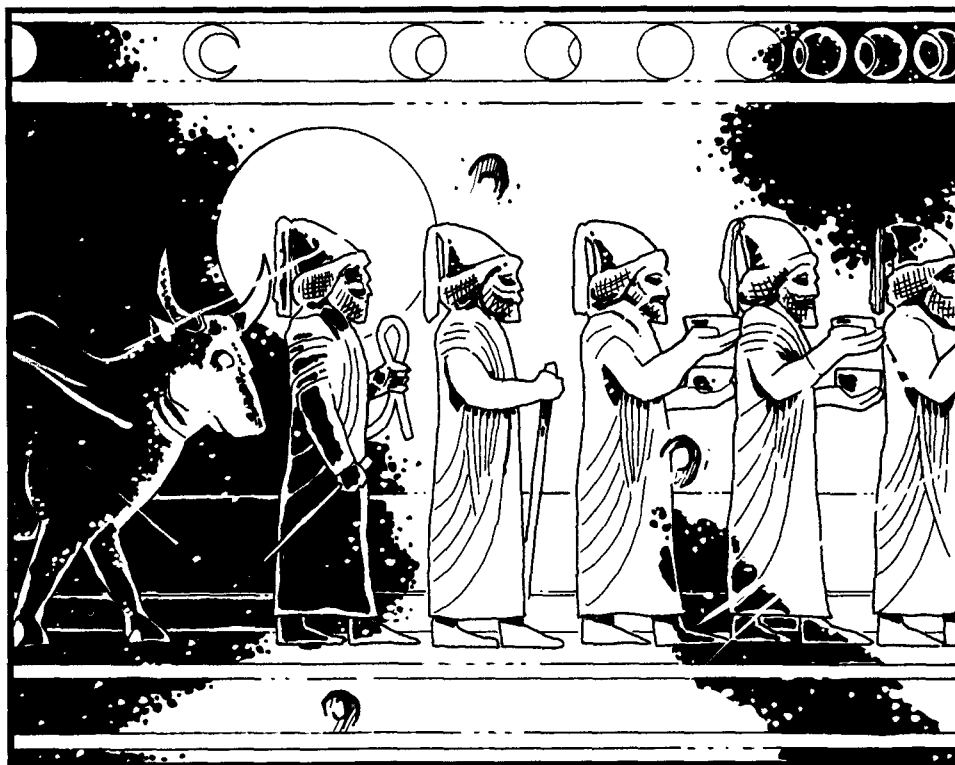
The Hebrew word for confusion is *balal*; the Hebrew form of the name *Babilu* is *Babel*. One interpretation is that the legend attempts to explain the origin of languages – with a pun.



Processions in Persepolis

Once a year, subjects of the Persian emperor brought their tribute to the emperor's palace. The emperor sat on a throne on a raised wooden platform, while representatives from each of the 20 or so provinces of the empire approached him with gifts. These included live animals – okapis, antelopes and giraffes from Africa, as well as horses, camels, bulls and rams. More conventional wealth might come by the wagon-load if the provinces wished to flaunt their loyalty: gold, jewelry and silks, ivory or decorated weapons. There would also be exotic foodstuffs; the Greeks of western Anatolia, for example, sent honey bees in decorated hives.

Carvings show all of these peoples wearing their regional costumes, and while it is hard to say how stylized such depictions are, the event must have been spectacular and colorful – a symbol of the size, variety, and unity of the Empire.



Adventure Seed

It is 450 B.C., and the PCs are (or can pass as) citizens of an ethnically Greek city under Persian rule. Their mission is to deliver to the Tribute Ceremony their town's offering; a huge, pure white bull. This gift should reflect well on the temple of Poseidon, which came up with it, and on the city, which would appreciate a reduced tax bill next year.

However, not everyone wants to play at being good imperial subjects. The travelers are approached by a would-be rebellious faction wanting to hire them to assess the current state of the empire, with a view to calculating the long-term possibilities for revolution. If they accept, their job is to keep their overlords happy (for now), their eyes open – and the bull healthy.

Unfortunately, as they join the long procession of tribute-bearers outside Persepolis, their gift breaks free. This leads to an exciting few moments as the PCs seek to restrain the bull without marring its beauty – before some nervous royal guard spears it. The trouble is, when they've succeeded, someone discovers an important under-chamberlain. Dead. With a Greek knife in him.

Well, that explains the frayed halter. Unfortunately, finding out who was responsible means getting the hang of Persian court politics. The PCs have to solve the murder, deflecting suspicion from themselves and the emissaries of their neighbor cities, all while maintaining their image as simple, loyal tribute-bearers.



Persepolis

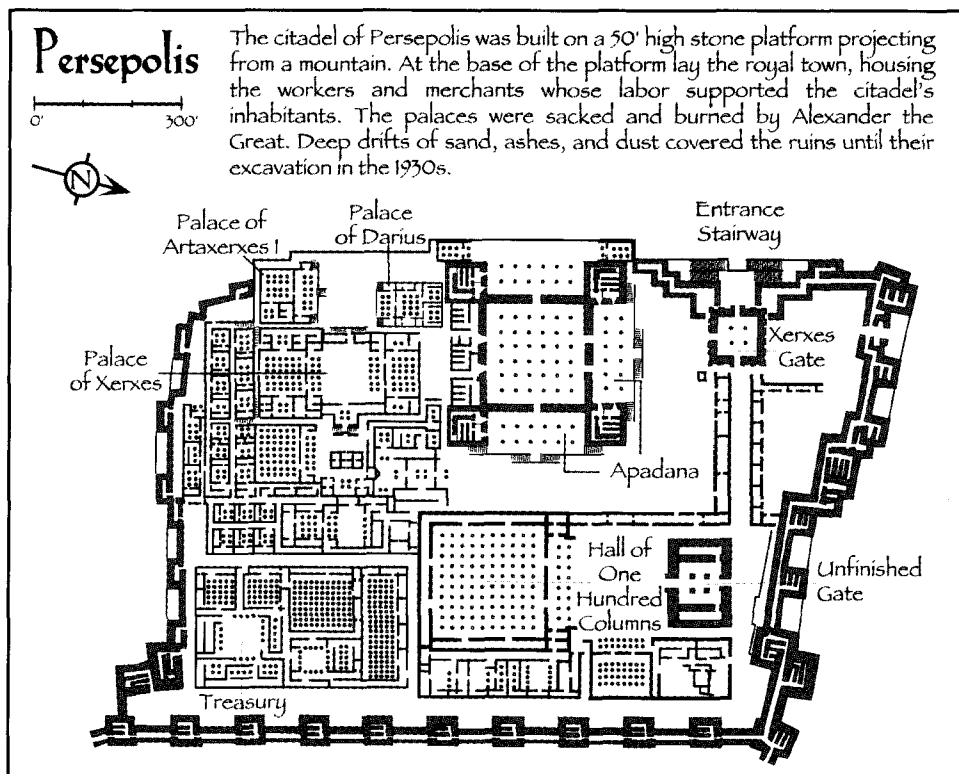
It must have seemed strange to the subjects of the King of Kings. Once a year, they were required to bring tribute from all across the empire to – where? A low hill, 300 miles from the capital at Susa, lacking even a natural water supply. It would have been madness to complain, but the whole business must have seemed insanely inconvenient.

Perhaps that was the point. Who but the greatest ruler in the world could command such a thing? Or perhaps the reason was simple security; the remote palace held the royal treasury, safely distant from robbers and rebels. Or perhaps the King of Kings enjoyed having a summer palace in the cool shade of these remote mountains. As he reclined there in springtime, his people came and bowed before him.

What did the tribute-bearers see? A huge platform, 1,500 feet by 900 feet, that had been created by cutting, filling, and leveling the solid rock. This rose 50 feet above the surrounding plain, and was surrounded by a brick wall. The main approach, at the northwest, was a broad stairway, 22 feet wide and with risers shallow enough for horses and other animals to be led up. The side-walls of the terraces and staircases were decorated with carvings showing the tribute procession itself.

History of Persepolis

The Achaemenids, founders of the Persian Empire, emerged from obscurity in the sixth century B.C. to dominate the Middle East. The first emperor was Koresh (Cyrus) the Great, who conquered most of the territory that the empire was to hold for three centuries; subsequently, Darius I, also called the Great, secured the borders, built roads, set up an efficient administration, and gained the support of his



subjects by a tolerant policy that included helping the Jews rebuild their Temple (p. 70). He launched many military campaigns, some successful, some – such as that against Greece – not. He also built a palace from which to rule the empire, which is usually called by its Greek name Persepolis – “City of the Persians.” It took 60 years to complete, covering the reigns of two more kings after Darius – Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I.

The buildings combined architectural styles from all over the empire. Assyrian stone bulls guarded doorways with Egyptian lintels, while sculpted figures showed a distinctly Greek touch.

Two buildings dominated Persepolis. The *Apadana* (audience-hall) of Darius I, on the western side, was 250 feet square, raised on a ten-foot-high terrace of its own, with 20-foot-thick walls and 36 columns inside, each 65 feet high. The “Hall of a Hundred Columns” to the east, which was started by Xerxes and finished by Artaxerxes, was 225 feet square, with double walls on three sides and the stated 100 columns within, although these were only half as high as those of the *Apadana*. The columns in these halls were topped with five-foot capitals in the form of animal heads, and supported roof-beams of Lebanese cedar.

Behind the two great buildings, Xerxes added more royal quarters, including a smaller palace and the treasury and storeroom where the gifts of the empire were kept and recorded. Another building was once thought to have been a harem, but is now believed to have been another treasure-store. While most of the buildings in the palace complex had several large, ceremonial doorways, the treasury had just one.

Alexander the Great invaded the Persian empire and defeated the last Achaemenid emperor, Darius III. In 330 B.C. he reached Persepolis. He plundered and sacked the royal treasures before burning the palace, possibly in a drunken binge. Alexander and his generals were supposedly encouraged in their vandalism by an Athenian courtesan named Thais, but the destruction may have been the calculated, sober act of a conqueror proving his power.

Persepolis was so remote that there was little incentive to rebuild. Wind-blown sand covered the ruins until archaeologists studied them in the 1930s.

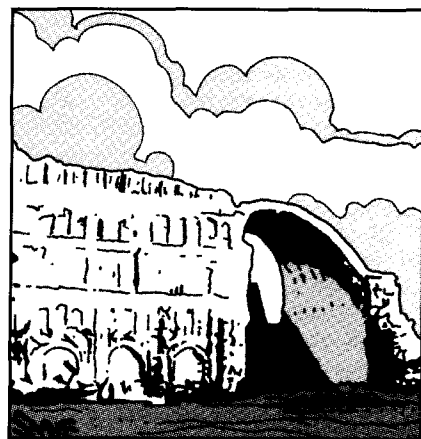
Ctesiphon

The pre-Muslim Sassanid dynasty of Iran (Persia), arch-rival of Imperial Rome, had its capital at Ctesiphon, on the river Tigris, and the remains of the city stand to this day as one of the great archaeological sites of the Middle East. It lies about 20 miles southeast of Baghdad.

The city was established in the age of the previous rulers of Persia, the Parthians, who also used it as a capital; it had briefly been captured by the Roman emperor Trajan in 113 A.D. It rose to glory in 226 A.D. when the Sassanid King of Kings, Ardashir I, overthrew the Parthians. He re-established Ctesiphon as his capital, and it ruled the Persian Empire until the Muslim Arabs conquered and plundered it in 637 A.D. Even then, it was to remain inhabited until at least the 13th century.

The city is situated across the river from the even older city of Seleucia, and the location is a natural political center for Mesopotamia; a few decades after the Arab conquests, the new Abbasid dynasty built *their* capital, Baghdad (see p. 72), not far away. They considered quarrying the ruins of Ctesiphon for building materials, but the caliph Mansur’s treasurer, Khalid ibn Barmaki, said that this would not be cost-effective. The caliph accused him of bias, because he was a Persian, but Khalid showed Mansur detailed calculations that proved his point, and Ctesiphon survived.

Ctesiphon’s buildings are mostly constructed of mud-brick, the classic material of ancient Mesopotamia. The most impressive sight in the city is the remains of the great vaulted royal hall, the “Taq-Kisra”; Sassanid architecture made much use of domes and vaults. Some sources say that this was built in the fourth century, but it has also been credited to the great sixth-century King Khosru I. It has a screening wall 112 feet high, and a barrel vault (the “Arch of Ctesiphon”) 120 feet high with a span of 83 feet. The brickwork is up to 24 feet thick at ground level. As an engineering achievement, it matches anything built by the Romans.



The Temple

One of the central elements of Jewish faith is the Temple of Jerusalem. Festivals recall events in its history, and the last remnant of the building is one of the most-visited sites in the modern city.

In fact, there were two Temples. The first was built by the tenth-century-B.C. king, Solomon, son of David. Solomon's wealth, obtained from control of trade, was legendary (see *King Solomon's Mines*, p. 80), but even so, his building program stretched it. As well as a great palace, he built a relatively small but beautiful temple, of cedar-wood and stone, about 33 feet wide by 100 feet long, with an additional porch and side-buildings. In its courtyards were an altar for burnt offerings and a great bronze water-tank. Within was the secret Holy of Holies, which held the Ark of the Covenant.

The temple survived until 588 B.C. By that time, the Jews were discontented subjects of Babylon. One rebellion succeeded – temporarily. When the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II captured Jerusalem, he retaliated by destroying the city and taking the Jewish leaders into exile.

In 539 B.C. the Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon. Many Jews returned home, and built a Second Temple. This was a vast task, but they completed it by 516 B.C.

Israel was restored, but not independent, and continued to rebel against many foreign rulers. One such was the Seleucid (Syrian) king, Antiochus IV, who made Judaism illegal in 168 B.C. and placed an altar to Zeus in the temple. The result was the “Maccabean” revolt, which successfully obtained independence. Judas Maccabee rededicated the Temple in 165 B.C. – an event still commemorated in the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

In 47 B.C. Israel became a client of Rome, with a fair degree of autonomy, and King Herod the Great was able to restore the decaying Temple. However, later Roman control was less sympathetic, and in 66 A.D. another revolt flared up. By 70 A.D. Jerusalem had fallen to the Roman general (later emperor) Vespasian, and the Temple was destroyed. Another revolt, 60 years later, led the Romans to bar Jerusalem to the Jews, who were scattered across the empire. The priesthood was wiped out; from then on, Jewish religious leaders were rabbis – teachers, not sacrificing priests.

However, the Jews continue to remember the Temple. Today, many of them pay devout visits to what is believed to be the last remnant of the Second Temple – the Western (Wailing) Wall, a towering construction of massive stone slabs.

Jerusalem

The city of Jerusalem is an important religious site, sacred to three faiths. For millennia, it has been a subject of conflict. Today, it is a living, working city, with a particularly complex political situation.

The site of Jerusalem has been inhabited since prehistoric times, but the city was founded during the second millennium B.C. by a Canaanite people called the “Jebusites.” It sits on high ground near the Dead Sea, and the Jebusites made it into a well-fortified citadel.

Around 1000 B.C., King David conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. (The Bible is unclear as to exactly how David took the city – various translations credit his success to the use of a “gutter,” “water-shaft,” or “grappling-iron.”) The royal palace was built there, and the Ark of the Covenant was installed in the temple (see sidebar).

Jewish and Roman History

The only real break in Jewish occupation of Jerusalem was the Babylonian Exile of the sixth century B.C. after which they more or less had to re-found Jerusalem. Being fewer in number, the returned population built a rather smaller city than their predecessors, and did not rebuild the walls for nearly a century. However, Jerusalem grew again. This was where Jesus Christ brought his preaching, where he faced the Jewish priesthood and the Roman authorities, and where he was crucified – and so the city became as sacred to Christians as to the Jews.

Eventually, however, recurrent Jewish revolts provoked the Romans into banning them from their own capital, which was rebuilt and named Aelia Capitolina. When the Roman Empire subsequently converted to Christianity, they venerated Jerusalem. But the place became a battleground during the early sixth century, when it was captured and sacked by the Persians.

The Muslim City

In 637 A.D. Jerusalem was captured by the expanding empire of Islam, which also regarded it as holy because Muslims believed that the prophet Mohammed was carried from there by an angel on a visit to Heaven. Islam marked its triumph by building the Dome of the Rock (see sidebar, p. 70).

Eventually, Christian Europe began the Crusades to recover the holy places from Islamic control. From 1099 to 1187 A.D. the city was the capital of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, but it ultimately returned to the hands of Muslims such as the Ottoman Turks. Although it was still a destination for pilgrims, its importance declined; the land around it became known as Palestine. Some Jews returned to their ancestral lands, leading to the “Zionist” movement, which called for the creation of a new Jewish homeland in Israel.

Modern Israel

The British captured Jerusalem from the Turks during the First World War, and ruled this area under League of Nations authority until 1948, when the modern state of Israel came into being. At that time, Jerusalem was split between Israel (the modern western half) and Jordan (the eastern areas, including the

walled Old City). In 1967, Israel captured the rest of Jerusalem, and declared it reunited – despite opposition from other countries and non-Jewish inhabitants of the city. Once again, Jerusalem was disputed territory.

The Israelis declared the reunified Jerusalem their capital, but this was not recognized internationally, and the city's many Palestinian inhabitants often joined in anti-Israeli actions such as the *Intifada*. Recently, the peace treaty between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization has allowed the Palestinians some measure of self-rule in many areas – but Jerusalem remains heavily dominated by Israel.

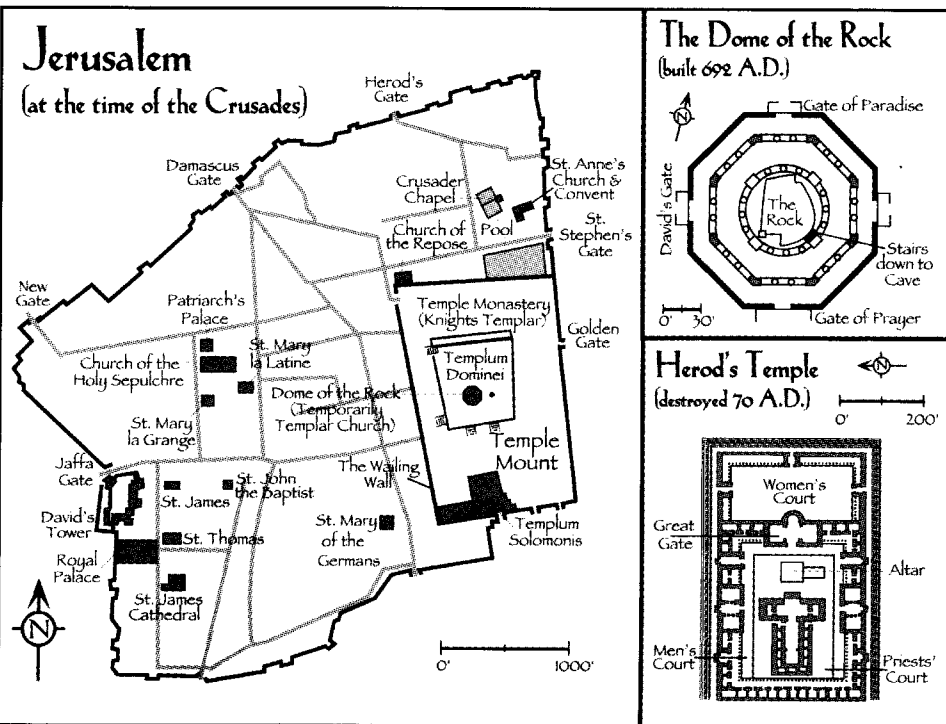
The Plan of the City

Like most ancient cities still in occupation, Jerusalem has expanded far beyond its original site. The “Old City” remains distinct – its 16th-century Turkish wall encloses Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Armenian quarters, and many of the holy sites. The Old City retains a medieval atmosphere, with narrow, winding streets, often stepped or enclosed.

Jerusalem was built on a pair of ridges. The western ridge is known as Mount Zion, which implies that it was the original center of Jerusalem, but in fact, archaeologists now think that the original city was built on the eastern ridge, called Ophel, which was more defensible and had better water supplies (linked to the “Virgin’s Fountain” at the foot of the hill).

Outside the Old City lies a modern city of 425,000 people. Local regulations attempt to prevent the building of overpowering skyscrapers, but some tall blocks have been built. The city has a number of parks and open spaces, some with ancient associations (such as the Mount of Olives). There are also a number of major museums and memorials to events including the Holocaust.

Adventure Seed: A time-traveling organization wants to establish a safe house in Jerusalem. This must survive for several centuries of turbulent history, and attract no attention from any authorities throughout that period. It must also avoid the notice of devout, superstitious, or confused locals and pilgrims. The PCs are required to attend to this.



The Sacred Sites

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher

Around 325 A.D., Saint Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine (the first Christian emperor of Rome) came to Jerusalem. Stories credit her with founding the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, discovering the True Cross, and founding the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on the site of Christ's burial.

The site of her building remains one of the oldest Christian places of pilgrimage, and a church still occupies it. It has been rebuilt and remodeled repeatedly, but some part of the original, simple domed structure remains, combined with parts of another church of the same period.

The Dome of the Rock

When the armies of Caliph Umar captured Jerusalem, they built a shrine over a rocky outcrop high on the ridge of Ophel, which they believed was the place from whence Mohammed had been transported to Heaven. Other traditions say that this is the spot where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son, or that it is the altar-place of Solomon's temple; the hill is known as the Temple Mount. This area is known to Muslims as al-Haram ash-Sharif, “the most noble of holy places”; the shrine, the Dome of the Rock, may be the most beautiful building in Jerusalem.

Its design is unusual for a Muslim building, resembling some old Byzantine churches more than most mosques. It is an octagonal building, surrounding a ring or drum shaped core, topped by a gilded dome. The walls are covered with mosaics, mostly blue and green in color.

Al-Haram ash-Sharif also encloses the al-Aqsa mosque, itself one of Islam's holiest places, and other shrines, as well as an Islamic museum.

In 1911, Moslems were enraged by the discovery that an Englishman (Captain Montague Parker) had bribed authorities to allow him to excavate the floor of a cave beneath the rock of the Dome itself in search of the legendary treasure of King Solomon's Temple. Parker and his men barely escaped with their lives.

Other Sites

The Wailing Wall (where Jews lament the loss of Jerusalem) was part of the second Temple (see sidebar, p. 70); it forms the outside of one side of al-Haram ash-Sharif. The Via Dolorosa, along which Christ carried his cross, winds through the Old City. There are a multitude of other churches, cathedrals, mosques and synagogues, many of them ancient and venerated. These days, the Old City also has a multitude of shops, bazaars and tourist traps – it always was a trading city.

The Hajj

Islam has five "pillars," and the fifth of these is the *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Every adult Muslim who can afford to is required to make this journey at least once. The *Hajj* is made during the first ten days of the last month of the Muslim calendar. As this is a lunar calendar, it may fall at any time in the solar year.

As they approach Mecca, pilgrims change into seamless white robes symbolizing purity. They refrain from shedding blood and from cutting their hair or nails. On arrival, they perform complex rites, including walking around various sacred sites (often seven times each) and sacrificing an animal in honor of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.

Someone who has made this pilgrimage is entitled to the title *Hajji*, and may mark this by wearing an orange turban. In ancient times, when travel was hard and expensive, this gave a lot of standing in Muslim communities (at least +1 Status, in *GURPS* terms). The trip could also be dangerous. Despite its sacred nature, Bedouin bandits were attacking *Hajj* travelers within a few years of Mohammed's death; most pilgrims chose to travel in large groups. Caliphs could exhibit their power and piety by organizing and leading great caravans to Mecca, and the favored wife of Caliph Haroun al-Rashid made herself popular by sponsoring improvements to the route from Baghdad. Danger to the pilgrimage, as when early European venturers attacked passenger ships in the Red Sea and threatened to assault Mecca, horrified Islam.

Baghdad's Later History

In 1258 A.D. the Mongol hordes invaded Islam's heartland. They captured Baghdad, sacked it, and butchered the last Abbasid caliph. The rebuilt city was destroyed by Tamerlane (see p. 44) in 1401, and fell under alternate Persian and Ottoman Turkish control over the years.

After the British captured Baghdad from the Turks during the First World War, Iraq became an independent kingdom (later transformed, by violent revolution, into an autocratic republic), with Baghdad as its capital.

Virtually nothing remains of the city of Haroun al-Rashid. There are the few old buildings, mostly dating from after the era of Abbasid rule, and something of the atmosphere of a medieval Muslim city may survive in the bazaars, but most of the city of the Arabian Nights is now buried under concrete.

Mecca

In the seventh century A.D., Islam adopted as its chief holy place a desert city that was already a center of religion and culture. Mecca, which was first mentioned in writings of the second century A.D., lies in a dry valley in Arabia; it was a stop on the ancient caravan routes up from the Yemen, a place of trade and festivals, and the site of a shrine.

Mecca served the thousands of Islamic pilgrims that visited every year. It was too remote to serve as the capital of any subsequent Muslim empire, but remained largely independent (although the region never produced enough food, and had to import grain from Egypt). It acknowledged the nominal sovereignty of Damascus, Baghdad, Mameluke Egypt and then the Ottomans; under the last, it was governed by the "Grand Sharif," a descendant of Mohammed. Rebels such as the early Saudis would sometimes storm into the holy places, execute a few theological rivals, then be driven out. Today, Mecca lies in Saudi Arabia.

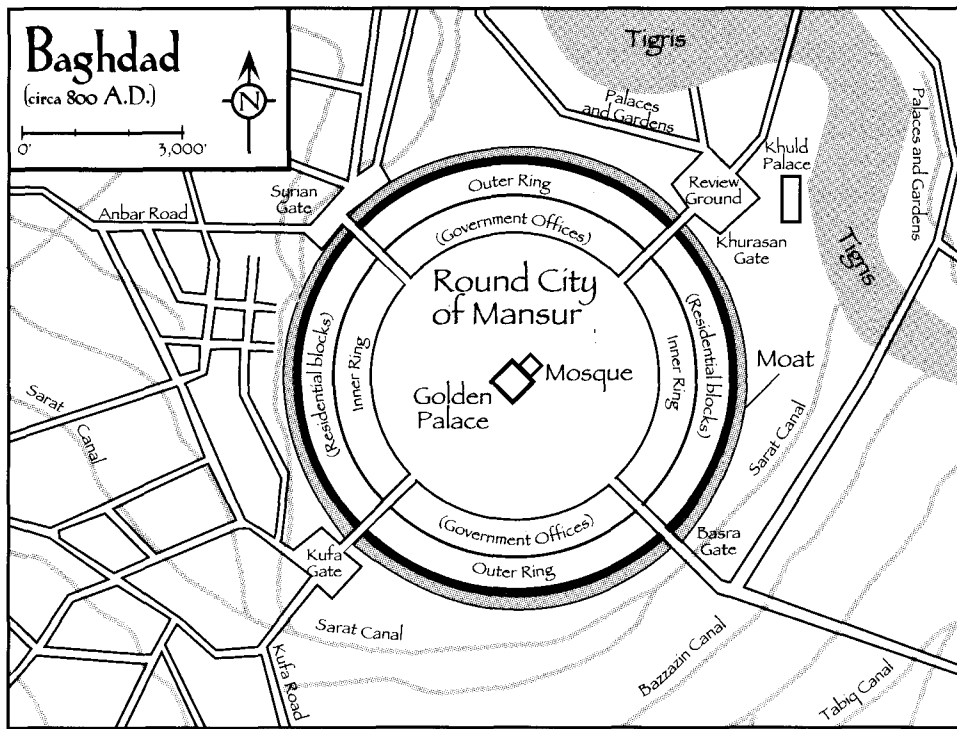
Mountains – including the one on which Mohammed had his first visions – dominate the scenery around Mecca. The town centers around the vast al-Haram mosque, which mostly dates to the 16th century. In its central courtyard is the Kaaba, an ancient, cube-shaped structure of dark gray blocks that Muslims say was built by Abraham; in the southeast corner of the Kaaba is the Black Stone, said to have been given to Abraham by the archangel Gabriel. (Some speculate that it is a meteorite.) The mosque also encloses the sacred well of Zamzam. Only Muslims are permitted to enter the city, although in the past, a few daring (and tactless) non-Muslim explorers, including the famous Victorian Sir Richard Burton, have slipped into the city in disguise.

Mecca has no airport or rail links of its own; travelers come in via Medina, 250 miles away (itself a major Muslim shrine – the site of Mohammed's tomb), or the port of Jiddah, and are carried the rest of the way by road. In former centuries, the trip was much harder. Today, in the month of pilgrimage, the population of what is by most standards a moderate-size city (something over half a million) is swollen by one or two million people.

Baghdad

Early in its history, Islam fell into dispute over rights of succession. Out of this struggle, by luck and skill, the Abbasid dynasty emerged triumphant, seizing the caliphate. Although outlying Islamic domains were already starting to break away, the Abbasids were nominal and actual rulers of most of Islam, and their era is seen by many Arabs as a "golden age," when rulers such as Haroun al-Rashid were victorious in war and magnificent in peace.

Their predecessors had ruled from Damascus, in Syria, but the new dynasty's power base lay further east, so the Abbasid caliph Mansur moved his capital. The region's greatest city at the time was Kufa, but the Kufans were notoriously treacherous. In 762 A.D. Mansur picked a new site, lying in the narrow plain between the Tigris and Euphrates, 30 miles from the ruins of Ctesiphon (see sidebar, p. 69). The rivers were wide and deep enough here for



Mosques

Muslim prayers *may* be said anywhere, but a mosque is preferred, and may provide other facilities, such as schooling. They are generally run by the community. Early Muslim cities often had several small mosques, and one large one for the Friday prayers.

Layout details vary, but standard features are a large chamber (or courtyard), a raised pulpit (*minbar*) for sermons, and a heavily ornamented wall niche (*mihrab*) marking the direction of Mecca. The most minimal mosques consist of an open space and one wall with a *mihrab*. In the mosque used by a ruler, he might have a screened-off area; he is expected to pray alongside his subjects, but the risk of assassination can justify a barrier. The Ottoman Turks made a dome – which allows air circulation in hot weather – a standard feature after they had captured Constantinople, with its domed Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia (see sidebar, p. 98).

Anyone entering a mosque is required to remove his shoes. Muslim prayer involves prostration on the ground, so clean floors are more comfortable. The worshiper should also be clean for symbolic reasons; washing is usually required before prayer. Many larger mosques have an outer court with a washing “fountain,” and any modern mosque will be designed with a washing-room.

Prayers are said at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall in Sunni lands (thrice daily among Shiites), with an extended noon session – with sermons and public announcements – on Friday. At each time, the *muezzin* stands at the door of a small mosque, or on the minaret of a larger one, and faces east, west, north and south; in each direction, he declaims (in Arabic):

Allah is most great. I testify there is no God but Allah. I testify that Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah. Come to prayer. Come to salvation. Allah is most great. There is no God but Allah.

Modern mosques may give the *muezzin* a loudspeaker, or replace him with a recording.

Any adult male who can reach a mosque should do so; others pray where they are. (Travelers carry prayer-rugs.) Women don't have to use the mosque, although sometimes they *may*; in early mosques, there might be a gallery, shielded by a screen, where the women of the ruler's harem could pray without distracting the men. Modern mosques often have a general women's section, again partitioned off.

Prayers are led by the *imam*, who stands in the *mihrab*; each prayer involves a movement from a standing position to prostrate.

small and medium-sized craft to reach the city; larger, ocean-going ships would dock at Basra, downriver on the Persian Gulf.

The walls were finished by 766 A.D. and in 770, the city received its official name of Dar al Salaam, or “Abode of Peace.” But the name never stuck. Throughout its history, Mansur's city has been referred to by the name of the ancient village that stood on the site – Baghdad.

The Abbasid caliphs were patrons of the arts and sciences, and the city held astronomical observatories, universities and institutions where foreign writings were translated into Arabic. It played host to some of the most brilliant Muslim scientists and philosophers.

By the reign of Haroun al-Rashid, from 786 to 809 A.D., Baghdad was a vast and beautiful metropolis, “The Bride of the World”; it was a “city of marble,” of fountains and of gardens. Three bridges spanned the Tigris. Canals and waterways were crossed by 150 more bridges. At Baghdad's center was the walled “Round City,” with its royal palaces and government offices.

At the heart of the “Round City” was the caliph's fortified palace, along with the “Friday” or “cathedral” mosque; that was ringed by army barracks, beyond which was civilian housing – and the bazaars were outside the defenses altogether. Mansur built a palace for his eldest son, Mehedi, in the district of Rusafa on the east bank, and stationed a military garrison there – just in case the units guarding the main area should ever become rebellious. There was also an additional palace for the caliph – the luxurious Khuld Palace, by the river.

The main walls were pierced by four gates, named for the roads they controlled – those to Syria, Khurasan, Kufa and Basra. Only one gate survives; along with a 12th-century Abbasid palace and the 13th-century college of al-Mustansiriyah, it has been converted into a museum.

In Haroun's time, the city expanded across to the eastern bank of the Tigris as more people migrated there from all over the empire. Quarters sprang up for the major ethnic groups, such as Greeks and Armenians, along with areas for the tolerated non-Muslim religions – Christians, Jews and Magians (Zoroastrians). The center of the city eventually shifted eastwards, and the modern city lies largely on the east bank. However, it still controls the river crossing – and it still has a multitude of ancient bazaars.

The Assassins

The Assassins were members of a breakaway Muslim sect, the Isma'ilis. This branch of Shiite Islam held that there had only been seven "imams," rightful leaders of Islam (other Shiites say 12), and taught initiates to find hidden meanings in the Koran. A secret society, it built up a network of converts pledged to overthrow the Sunni Muslim caliphate. It eventually helped create the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt. When the Fatimids drifted away from "pure" Isma'ilism, a Persian group, adherents of a deposed Fatimid named Nizar, broke away in 1094 under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabah.

Hasan was a brilliant organizer and a ruthless fanatic. Being few in number, the Nizaris employed subtlety, subversion and secret missionaries. Opposed by the Seljuk sultans, Hasan also mastered assassination. Nizaris were sent out from their mountain strongholds, to kill and to die.

Alamut is a good example of an Assassin stronghold. They had half a dozen such castles in Persia, plus lesser fortresses and villages; indeed, Alamut and its like were supported by whole multi-village farming regions. The cult also built power-bases in the mountains of Syria, where they became entangled with the Crusades.

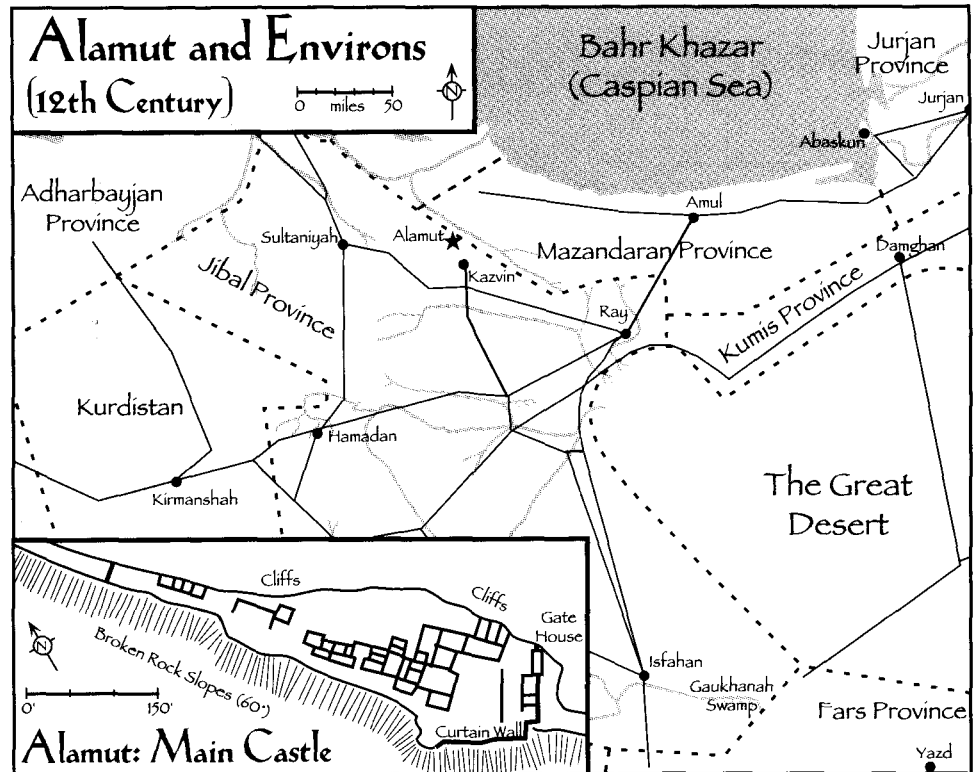
This taste for mountains was no accident. The Muslim world mostly consisted of cities which dominated their surroundings. Only in rugged highlands could small, quasi-feudal units develop, and this was where a heretic cult could grow unmolested; in the cities, Nizaris had to remain secret.

Assassination

The Assassin way of murder was simple. One or more junior converts, *fidai's*, disguised as, say, grooms or messengers, would approach the target, whip out daggers and strike. If they could get close enough, they could usually kill before any guards could react. Victims ranged from sultans and kings to local lords and Sunni preachers. Hasan's first and greatest victim was Nizam al-Mulk, the brilliant Persian vizier to the Seljuk sultan, who was hunting Isma'ilis in general and Hasan in particular.

This suicidal fanaticism led to stories such as Marco Polo's account of a garden "paradise," where drugged converts were taken, and then told that they would return when they died on a mission. Tales of drug use were widespread; the word Assassin comes from *Hashishin*, "hashish-taker" (although this is a general term in the Middle East for a dangerous hooligan).

Continued on next page . . .



Alamut

"Alamut" means "The Eagle's Nest." It is an apt name for a castle set high in remote mountains of Turkey. This fortress, now in ruins, was once the headquarters of one of the most fanatical and terrifying sects in history – the Assassins.

The Assassins and Before

The castle of Alamut predated the Assassins. According to stories which have been traced back to their founder, Hasan-i Sabah himself, he decided, around 1090 A.D., to send a missionary to a remote village and castle in Daylam, a region just south of the Caspian Sea that was a hotbed of Shiite sects. The missionary secretly converted a number of the garrison, and the sect became more open in its actions. The local lord tried to counter them, pretending to join the cult and then ejecting them from the castle, but the Nizaris continued to work in the nearby villages, and eventually talked their way back in. Then, Hasan himself slipped into the castle under an assumed name, and soon had so much support among its inhabitants that he was able to turn the old lord out – although he said that he arranged for one of his wealthy converts to pay a fair price for the place!

And so it was that Hasan gained a safe headquarters. (This tale of a determined and fanatical bunch of cultists gaining control of a community by sheer persistence might seem painfully familiar today.) The Nizaris had a base from which an entire army could not easily eject them, and they set to work to spread their doctrines – and eventually to unleash terror and murder against anyone they disliked.

The Castle

Alamut is in the Alborz Mountains, northwest of Tehran. The castle sits on the side of a rocky ridge, dominating a valley, about 6,000 feet above sea level, with mountains twice that high looming on the horizon. Low clouds sometimes swirl around the site. It can only be approached by a narrow track along the side of a 45° slope; this path twists upwards at a sharp angle as it enters the fortified site.

The castle itself consisted of a strong “shell” wall around a village, with dwellings, mosques and underground store-rooms. Irrigation channels were cut into the slopes above, feeding underground cisterns, ensuring a reasonably reliable water supply. The castle also controlled a chain of villages and outlying fortresses, making any attacking army’s task even harder. It might be taken as a model base for any low-tech group with an extreme need for security.

The plan shows the layout of Alamut today. Unfortunately, not much remains standing, and what there is may date from later than the time of the Assassins. Still, the limited space on the site means that the basic plan must have remained fairly constant.

With 45 to 60° slopes of loose scree on most sides, the only approach to the castle is up a twisting track, flanked by the fortified gate-house. Inside is the village. There is also said to have been a pleasant, well-watered garden – a “taste of Paradise.” More buildings were strung out along the slope, ensuring the Assassins’ control of the mountainside.

The Assassins at Alamut

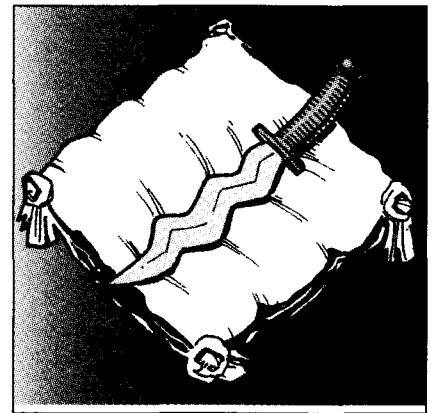
Hasan ruled Alamut from 1090 to 1124 A.D. His seven successors held it for more than a century after that. The first was Buzurg’umid, one of Hasan’s lieutenants and his chosen heir, who effectively set up a hereditary dynasty.

Hasan’s successors continued using Hasan’s techniques, with some success (that is, they murdered many important enemies), but the Assassins became increasingly disunited. Buzurg’umid’s grandson, Hasan II, declared himself caliph, announced that the end of the world was coming, and terminated all religious laws. Some (quieter) related ideas had always been part of the cult’s secret doctrines; Hasan II made them public. It took the sect far away from mainstream Islam.

The Fall of the Fortress

In 1256, a Mongol army invaded Persia, and on the way, set out to remove the decaying but still serious threat of the Assassins. Their forces included conventional Muslims who thoroughly approved, and so they laid siege to Alamut. They combined expert Chinese engineering with vast numbers of excellent soldiers. For days, siege engines battered at the castle walls, while crossbowmen picked off any defenders who showed themselves. Eventually, the defenses were weakened to the point that a direct assault succeeded. The Eagle’s Nest fell to overwhelming force.

Around the same time, the Mameluke rulers of Egypt destroyed the Assassin communities in Syria. All that was left were a number of converts and refugees, scattered through Persia and India. However, they preserved the faith; the Isma’ilis survive to this day, as a peaceful branch of Shiite Islam, under the leadership of the Aga Khan.



The Assassins (Continued)

Assassination (Continued)

Other stories mention Assassins leaping off cliffs to illustrate their loyalty to visitors, or enemies of the Assassins waking in the morning in well-guarded palaces to find a dagger lying on their pillow – a clear hint of what *might* happen to them.

Most such tales are probably myths. But the Assassins were dedicated ascetics who believed in the complete authority of their leader. Doubtless they expected to go to Paradise when they died on a mission, but their castles were places of Spartan simplicity; the idea of drug use seems unlikely, and they needed few flashy demonstrations of their dedication.

Later History

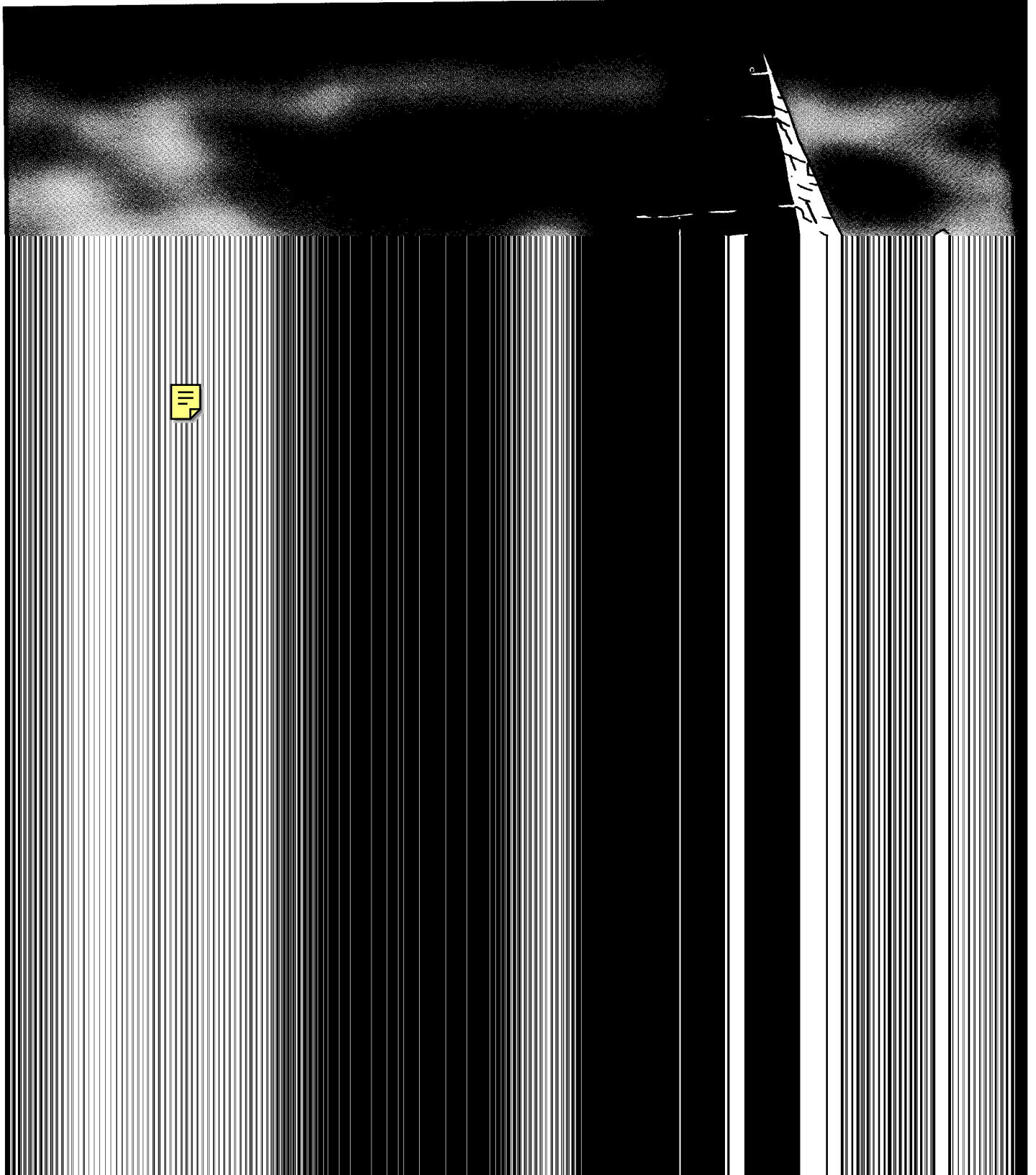
The site of Alamut was too strong to be completely ignored in later centuries. An earthquake in 1485 destroyed much of the remaining structure, but it was rebuilt to serve as a royal prison a century or two after that. It was remote enough to hold annoying royal relatives out of contact with the court.

But then it decayed again. By the 19th century, the first European visitors in centuries had trouble identifying it. Today, it is a remote ruin, where visitors must use their imaginations and knowledge of history to recognize the power that once dwelt there.

Alamut sits in a remote area of modern Iran – not an easy place to reach, even disregarding the political situation. Visitors need rugged vehicles – preferably with four-wheel drive – and the nerve to negotiate hairpin bends and dirt tracks. The last stage of the journey, from the nearest village, involves several hours of hard climbing on foot.

At least the ruins of Alamut are still visible. In this region, earthquakes have wiped out many buildings and even entire ancient cities over the centuries, and conquerors often preferred to destroy castles utterly once they were taken. Many of the Assassin castles are completely gone.

7 ♦ DARKEST AFRICA



They are the remotest nation, the most just of men; the favorites of the gods. The lofty inhabitants of Olympus journey to them, and take part in their feasts; their sacrifices are the most agreeable of all that mortals can offer them.

– Homer, writing of Nubia

Nubia (Kush)

Meroë, capital of the land of Kush, flourished from the sixth century B.C. to the third century A.D. To the Mediterranean world, it was known as a land ruled only by queens called Candace (this was probably a title; it most likely meant Queen or Queen Mother). There were certainly several ruling queens, and other reigns where king and queen ruled jointly – the Lion Temple at Naqa shows King Netekamani and Queen Amanitare both wielding swords over defeated enemies. Women seem to have held a higher status than in many other early civilizations, perhaps thanks to the African elements in the culture.

Meroë, like Egypt to its north, grew up along the banks of the Nile. It was conquered by Egypt about 2000 B.C. and thoroughly Egyptianized; in return, the Egyptian 22-25th dynasties were Kushite (“Ethiopian”). From this time, Kush was independent, ruled first from Napata, and then, after the Egyptians burned Napata, from Meroë. A later run-in with Rome was settled on terms favorable to Meroë, despite official Roman accounts of crushing victories.

Meroë was a rich iron-working center – the city is still surrounded by slag-heaps – and a center of trade between India and the African interior. There was also some trade with the Mediterranean. Meroë finally fell to the Axumite army in the early fourth century A.D.

Meroë covers a large area on the east bank of the Nile. To the east are temples and cemeteries on a plain overlooked by a range of low, sandstone hills, about two miles out of the city, on which stand the burial places of the rulers and their families. The city is surrounded by a wall. One notable feature is the Royal Bath, a brick tank which was probably a swimming pool.

There are three non-royal cemeteries, dating to the first century B.C., the first to second centuries A.D., and later. These graves are known as cave-graves: a hole is dug vertically, then sideways underground to form an artificial cave in which the deceased is placed, along with plentiful grave-goods, and then filled in.

There are several “royal” cemeteries, distinguished by the presence of small pyramids modeled after those of Egypt. The pyramids are badly decayed. Commoners were buried here, as well as the royalty of Meroë.

Meroitic pyramids are small, and more steep-sided than Egyptian ones. They were built of rubble faced with sandstone blocks (later versions were simpler and built of rough brick); on the east side was a chapel, often with inscriptions and pictures. The actual burial was dug into the rock beneath the pyramid, with an entrance to the east of the pyramid which was then filled in and concealed. Each burial contained several chambers (usually three for kings and two for queens) to allow space for grave-goods.

Egyptian gods were worshiped in Meroë, as well as local deities including the lion god Apedemek and an elephant god (name unknown). The African elephant was domesticated at Meroë, which was the most likely source of the elephants used by Hannibal in his attempt to cross the Alps to attack Rome.



Rescuing Archaeological Treasures

In 1960, work began on the Aswan High Dam, designed to provide water and security to the growing population of Egypt – at the expense of Nubia (Sudan). Archaeologists from around the world poured into the area and set about rescuing what they could. They were given five years – during which time they discovered just how rich a treasure-trove forgotten Nubia was.

Threatened with inundation were such ancient monuments as the colossal rock-cut statues of Abu Simbel commissioned by Ramses II to impress the Nubians with Egyptian might. Also at risk was the temple complex of Philae, a tiny island in the Nile that was host to a great temple complex resplendent with colonnaded courts, pylons, obelisks, altars, and stone lions carved from pink granite. Both these sites were moved to higher ground – feats of engineering that captured the media’s attention. In Philae’s case, the temple complex was dismantled stone by stone and rebuilt on another, taller island a quarter of a mile away.

But countless undiscovered sites and treasures were lost beneath the artificial lake. As tragic as this loss may have been, the loss to the Nubians themselves was far greater – they lost their ancestral lands and their livelihoods to the new lake.

Carthage

Carthage was founded by the Phoenicians, traditionally in 814 B.C., but probably somewhat later than that; its name means "New Town" in Phoenician. Much of its revenue came from silver mines in north Africa and Spain.

It was a rival of Rome for domination of the Mediterranean, a rivalry which ended decisively when Carthage was burned in 146 B.C. According to legend, the Romans sowed the fields with salt to prevent them being used ever again. A later Roman settlement on the site became prosperous enough to be ranked with Alexandria and Antioch; the site is close to that of modern Tunis.

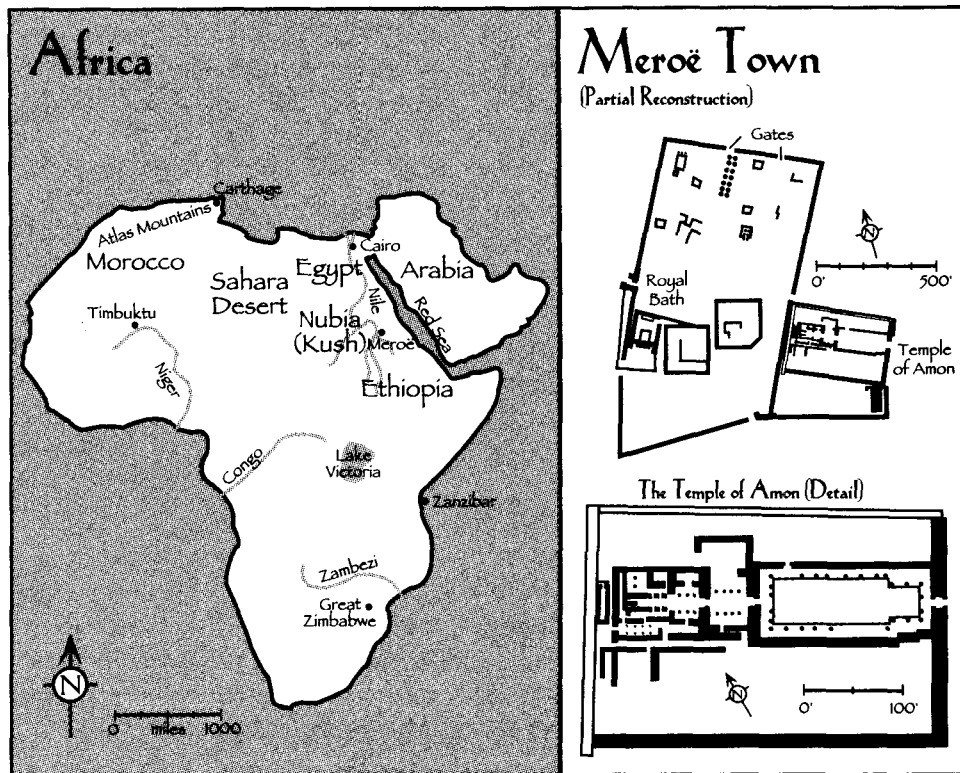
At 265 B.C. the Carthaginian empire extended 600 miles to the west and 700 miles to the east along the north African coast, and included Sardinia, Sicily, Corsica, the Balearics and the south coast of Spain.

Carthage is best remembered for Hannibal's crossing of the Alps with elephants to attack Rome. It was long a mystery where he got his elephants. It now appears that they were domesticated African elephants from Meroë.



Adventure Seed: Hannibal's Elephants

In 220 B.C., the PCs are hired to defend – or attack – a convoy of 40 elephants traveling up the Nile, past the Pyramids, and along the coast to Carthage. From the defenders' point of view, the elephants are amazingly big, and vulnerable to injuries, lack of water and food, and exhaustion. They move rather slowly, covering a scant 15 miles per day – mostly because they need to spend more than 12 hours each day foraging. From the attackers' point of view, the elephants are almost invulnerable to long-range missiles, and very dangerous to attack from close range. As for the possibility of taking them by boat, the GM should bear in mind the havoc that a frightened elephant could cause to a small river boat.



Adjacent to the city wall is the temple of Amon. It is mainly built of brick, with fired brick facings and columns of sandstone. An outer, columned hall has a small stone shrine with the names of Netekamani and Amanitare engraved on it, and, to the west, a stone dais with scenes of bound and kneeling prisoners. Beyond this hall is a series of halls leading to the sanctuary, which has an altar decorated with religious scenes.

The sun temple, some distance from the town, is surrounded with red brick walls. A ramp led to a colonnaded platform enclosing the sanctuary. The floor and walls of the sanctuary are covered with blue tiles. The outside wall of the platform is decorated with reliefs, now barely legible.

Other temples at Meroë included those to Isis and to the lion-god.

Great Zimbabwe

When Karl Gottlieb Mauch first discovered the massive, stone-built ruins of Zimbabwe, in 1867, he speculated that it was the site of King Solomon's mines (see p. 80) or the palace of the Queen of Sheba. Other Europeans thought it was built by the Phoenicians or the Arabs. In fact, Europeans credited nearly everyone except the people who actually built it – the locals. While this was in part due to an understandable puzzlement – African buildings are usually of wood and earth – it was mostly due to racism (the same racism that credited Egyptians with the civilization of Meroë). But Great Zimbabwe is only one of about 150 similar ruins in southwestern Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Zimbabwe was founded in the eighth century A.D.; it was at its height around 1300-1450 A.D. The Zimbabwean civilization was based upon cattle, but was also rich in gold. The rich imported luxuries such as fine cloth, china and ornaments. Zimbabwe may also have been the center of a slave trade to Arabia.

The Hill Fortress, or acropolis, is the oldest part of the ruins. The acropolis incorporates natural rocks into its walls. Narrow stairways wide enough for only a single attacker to approach lead to a labyrinthine series of enclosures and terraces. On the south side, under a large rock, is a cave with unusual acoustics. Anyone speaking in a normal voice in the cave can be clearly heard in the Great Enclosure a quarter of a mile away.

The Great Enclosure has an oval outer wall 33 feet high and 10 feet thick, covering an area of 300 feet by 210 feet. Built of granite cut into bricks, the enclosure took an estimated 18,000 hours of labor to complete. There are only three narrow entrances to the Enclosure. Inside, there is an incomplete inner wall, at the southern end of which is a solid conical tower. This has no doors, windows or stairs, and its function is a mystery. Suggestions include a signaling post or an astronomical observatory.

It might also have been the symbolic residence of a deity, whose voice (actually emanating from that cave under the acropolis) could be heard across the enclosure. This seems plausible when one considers the folklore of the BaLemba, who were descended from the builders of Zimbabwe. In their ancient northern homeland, they lived in a hilltop town ruled by King Mwali. He was a god-king, whom it would have been death to see. People heard him speak to his high priest in a tremendous voice that reverberated in a terrifying manner. After his death, civil war led the people to abandon the town and migrate south.

Within the Great Enclosure there were circular houses of typical African construction, and also audience platforms. Between the Great Enclosure and acropolis are the Valley Ruins, a labyrinth of walls, mainly corrals for cattle.

There were other, similar, sites. In the 11th-12th century, a Bantu state developed in the Limpopo Valley; like Zimbabwe, it had walls, indicating organization of labor, and it obtained gold and copper from settlements about 100 miles away. It disappeared by about 1200 A.D. and was replaced by Manekweni in south-western Mozambique, which was prominent in the 12th to 13th centuries, before the rise of Great Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe, too, came to an abrupt end, probably due to overpopulation and scarcity of resources such as firewood and game. It was succeeded by the Torwa state with its capital at Khami, which was also built in stone, and which lasted until the 17th century.

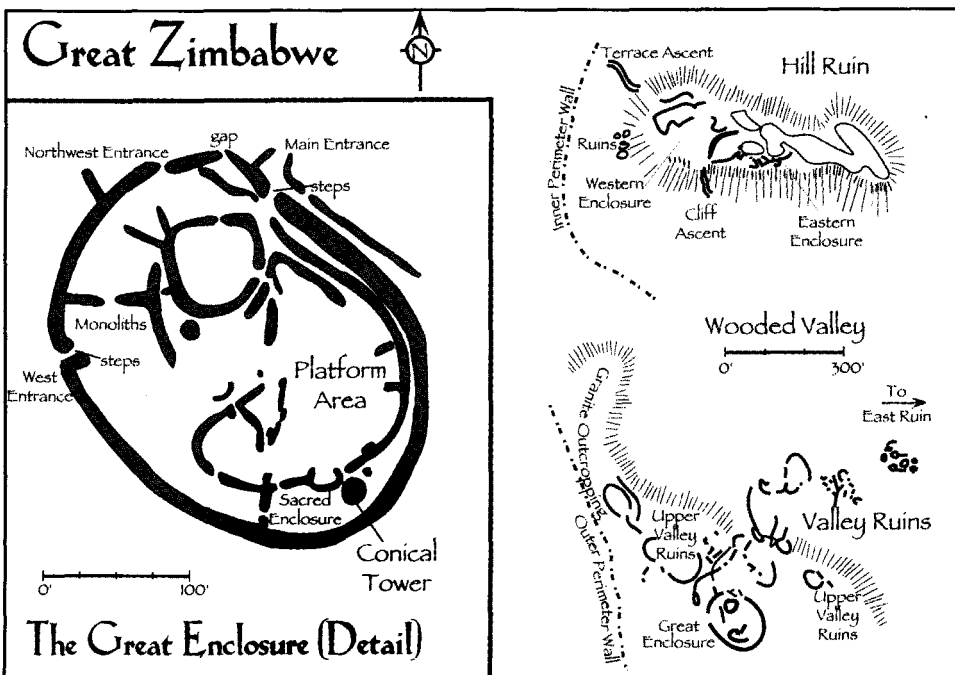


Ancient African Cultures

The Kushite Empire (see *Meroë*, p. 77) was succeeded in its position of trader to the north and east by Axum. The Axumite fleet dominated the Red Sea both militarily and commercially. The Christian rulers of Axum came into conflict with the rising power of Islam; in 702 A.D., the Axumite fleet was destroyed. The city itself survived as the capital of a reduced kingdom until the beginning of the tenth century, after which Ethiopia became the regional power. Meanwhile, Muslim trading cities were established and flourished down the east coast of Africa, producing a thriving African-Arabic culture.

In the west of Africa, the trade routes were trans-Saharan (sea-based trade was prevented by the lack of natural harbors). About two-thirds of the world's gold came from west Africa. Slaves were also traded north in exchange for salt and luxuries. In the eighth to 11th centuries, Ghana was the most important kingdom in the area; it was succeeded by the even more magnificent Mali. In 1324, the king of Mali, going on pilgrimage to Mecca, took so much gold that he depressed the currency as he passed through Egypt. While Europe was being ravaged by the Black Death and the Hundred Years War, the west African states were flourishing. Famous universities were established at Timbuktu (see p. 51) and Jenne.

Mali in its turn was succeeded by Songhai in the 15th-16th centuries. Its main cities were Gao and Timbuktu. To the east, in what is now northern Nigeria, the Hausa states were prosperous, but never became a unified kingdom. These states on the edge of the Sahara traded with the kingdoms on the forest edges, which actually produced the gold. By 1500 A.D. the forest kingdoms of Oyo, Benin and Akan began to emerge.



Lost Treasures

Expeditions in search of lost treasures are very much a part of roleplaying games, whether "realistic" archaeological expeditions or fantastic trips to the heart of a mysterious continent in search of precious metals, rare substances and bizarre or beautiful creatures.

One famous lost hoard is that of King Solomon's Temple. According to legend, the treasures were hidden in 586 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem. Solomon's treasure included lyres and harps made from rare, fragrant wood; 200 shields; 1,400 chariots of gold; spices; a throne carved from a single piece of ivory and overlaid with gold; precious stones; and much more.

The Kingdom of Prester John

During the Middle Ages, a legend grew of a Christian kingdom beyond Persia, ruled by a good and wise man who was both king and priest – Prester John.

Rome first heard of the Kingdom of Prester John in 1145 when a Syrian prelate, Bishop Hugh of Jabala, brought the tale of a Christian monarch to Pope Eugenius III. Prester John, according to Hugh, belonged to the Nestorian Church and had been victorious against the Muslims. (Historically, a Mongol named Gur Khan had recently been victorious over the Turkish Army in Persia. The assumption that this king was Christian may have been a case of "the enemy of my enemies is my friend." But the Nestorians, at least, were real – scattered communities of Christians from Syria to China. There was a Nestorian community in Samarkand, for instance.)

The legend grew in the telling. Prester John was a descendant of the Magi; he used an emerald scepter; he rode flying dragons; he lived in a crystal palace; he wore robes of salamander wool.

In 1221, a new rumor started – the grandson of Prester John, a king named David, was sweeping through Muslim lands on his way to Europe. This was actually Genghis Khan, however.

When European explorers eliminated India and Asia as possible locations for a great Christian kingdom, the search shifted to Africa. Prince Henry the Navigator's captains searched for the Christian Kingdom as they circumnavigated Africa; Vasco da Gama reported that Prester John resided not far from Mozambique.

In reality, Ethiopia (once Abyssinia), east of the Sudan (Kush), has been Christian since the fourth century A.D. Cut off from other Christian churches by the rise of Islam, the Ethiopian Church developed its own rites. The Abyssinian royal title *zan* may very well have been incorrectly rendered as John.



"King Solomon's Mines"

According to the Bible, King Solomon presided over the Golden Age of ancient Israel. He was fantastically rich and powerful, receiving tributes from far and wide. Every three years his merchant fleet "came home, bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes and monkeys" (or, in some interpretations, peacocks). Much of his gold apparently came from Ophir, although whether that was a nation, a city, or a mine remains unclear.

This story was the basis of the legend of King Solomon's Mines, from which his wealth came. Sir Henry Rider Haggard set his novel in an indeterminate part of central-southern Africa, filled with gold and ferocious natives. Serious attempts to find a plausible real site for the mines have had varying success.

Portuguese traders in the 16th century, and Europeans in the 19th, identified the ruins of Great Zimbabwe (see p. 78) as the site of King Solomon's Mines but the ruins are far too young.

In 1932, an American mining engineer named Karl Twitchell inspected the Mahd adh Dhahab ("cradle of gold") mine in Saudi Arabia, and concluded that it had indeed been a rich gold mine and possibly the site of Ophir. A U.S. geological survey team in 1976 agreed with Twitchell's findings, especially as Mahd adh Dhahab is near a 4,000-year-old trade route.

Another possibility are the ancient copper mines in the Timna valley near the Dead Sea. The largest mining enterprise in the ancient world, the Timna mines covered 60 square kilometers, with over 5,000 tunnels and shafts. The mines are known locally as "King Solomon's Mines." Two massive red sandstone pillars, called "Solomon's Pillars," stand at the entrance to the valley. Unfortunately, those mines were abandoned 200 years before Solomon was born.

Cave and Rock Paintings

Cave art is found mainly in western Europe, particularly France and Spain, although finds from the Urals show that it may have been more widespread. The earliest paintings may be simple stencil outlines of hands, made by blowing paint through a reed onto the wall. Earliest graffiti perhaps, or part of a ritual, perhaps to symbolize unity with a deity of hunting? The art of the hunt, portraits of mammoths, bison, horses and wild cattle, comes later. One feature of the art is twisted perspective; the animals are portrayed in profile, but their horns are shown in front (or three-quarters) view.

Along with the animal art are dots, chevrons, curves, zigzags and other geometric shapes. Were these symbolic hunting paraphernalia? Symbols of male and female principles? Or shamanic visions? A rare kind of image is the human-animal hybrid. These are usually interpreted as magicians in ritual dress, but could come from visions.

In other parts of the world, similar types of art are found, some even older than the cave art of Europe, although less well preserved. When Europeans arrived, the San people of the Kalahari had living traditions of painting hunting scenes, as did the Australian aborigines (see p. 104 and sidebar, p. 105).

Tassili

Not so very long ago, most of the Sahara was not desert, but grassland. The people who lived there produced rock art, which has been found all over the Tassili, Tibesti, Hoggar and other massifs. The paintings and engravings are dated to 6000-1000 B.C.; the earliest show hunting scenes, but domesticated animals, especially cattle, soon appear. The desiccation of the Sahara around 3000-2000 B.C. led people to migrate southward or east into the Nile valley, and the Negro peoples eventually spread across most of Africa south of the Sahara, taking their pastoral lifestyle with them.

The Tassili pictures' survival was helped by the drier climate. The pictures are magnificent. Three styles of art are present: the "archaic" consists of dark outlines of people (often masked) and animals, filled in with broad sweeps of color; geometric and abstract symbols are dotted throughout. The "naturalistic" has detailed pictures of animals and people, including herding scenes. The "cubist" has dark abstract shapes separated by light areas.

The main claim to fame of the Tassili pictures is the way in which people in ceremonial costumes and wearing masks, men wearing skullcaps decorated with feathers, and women carrying baskets on their heads have been interpreted as astronauts wearing spacesuits with radio antennae by von Däniken and others.

Cave Art as Magic

Games using shamanic magic (see *GURPS Ice Age* or *GURPS Religion*) could incorporate magical cave art; a sacred, painted cave might give bonuses (from +1 to +5 or even more) to dice rolls to enter a Trance state (see p. R118) or to spell-casting – but *only when dealing with spirits associated with the painted images*. The creation of such a cave would be a major exercise in enchantment magic, requiring **Artist skill** at 18 or better, several shamanic spells, and months of work.

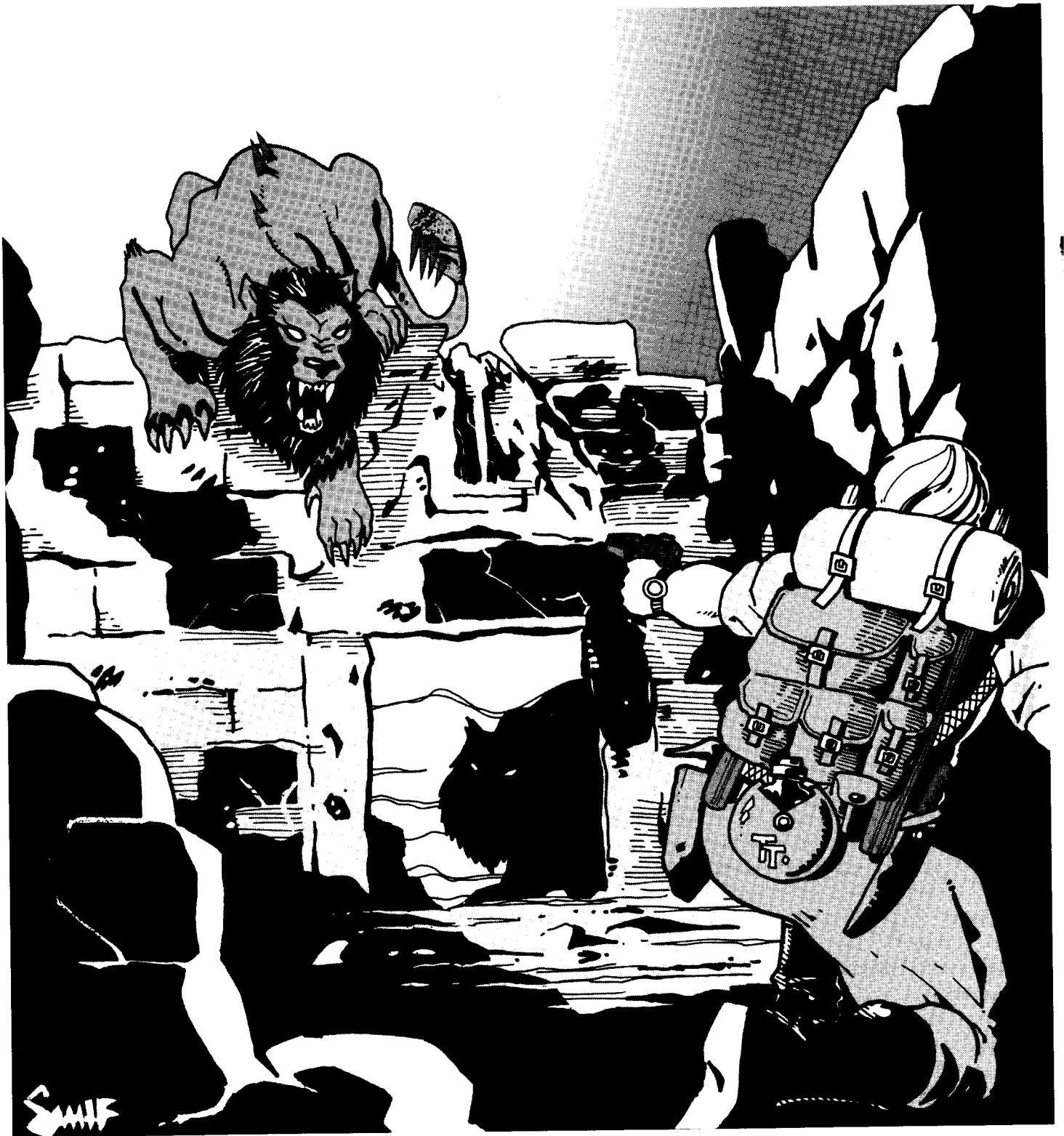
Some great inventions – sewing needles, harpoons and fishing nets, as well as the beginnings of art and personal adornment, music and magic – date from the Paleolithic period. Life was short then: the average life expectancy was about 30 years, and many died in childhood. Clan elders were important in transmitting culture and history to the young.

Despite the heroic hunting scenes of the cave paintings, most food was probably gathered by the women, as it is in modern-day hunter-gatherer societies. People lived in small, shifting bands of 20-30 adults, which were part of larger clans of over a hundred, which would keep in touch with occasional gatherings, possibly at the decorated caves. Relations with other clans were more tense, although warfare and its mass slaughter did not arise until the development of farming.

The rituals preserved in cave art were probably at least partly to ensure success in hunting, and abundance of game. The fact that hunting rituals were apparently performed in inconvenient nooks at the back of the cave, as far from the hunting grounds as possible, is fascinating. They may have seen the inner places of the caves as the womb of an earth mother; or they may have wanted for privacy for their rituals; or the reasons may be entirely different.



8 THE MEDITERRANEAN



SMIF

Troy: The Legend

*Close to the walls advancing o'er the fields
Beneath one roof of well-compacted shields,
March bending on the Greeks' embodied powers,
Far-stretching in the shade of Trojan towers.
Great Hector singly staid; chain'd down by Fate,
There fix'd he stood before the Scaean gate;
Still his bold arms determined to employ,
The guardian still of long-defended Troy.*

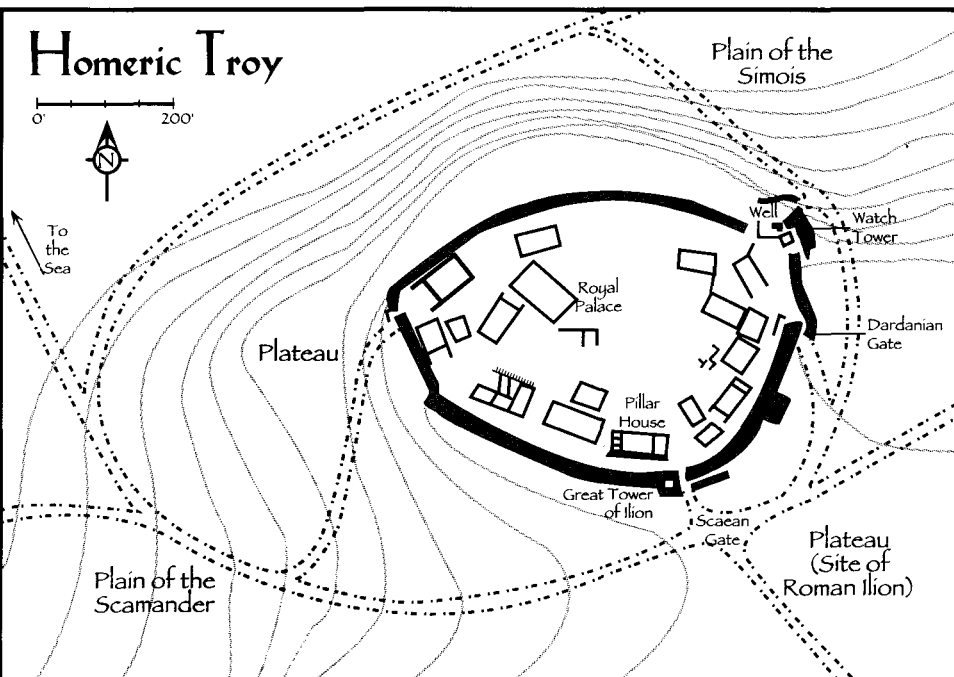
– Homer, *The Iliad*, Book XXII

Troy

Troy was never really lost: local tradition pinpointed the site for centuries after the city fell, and even in the 19th century, scholars suggested that the mound of *Hisarlik* was the legendary Troy, before Heinrich Schliemann (see sidebar, p. 84) confirmed it by excavating, and publicizing his finds.

There was a city on the site for some 3,000 years, well into Roman times; the site was strategically important, and the odd sacking did not destroy it entirely. In the end, the city was abandoned not because of conquest, but because its harbor silted up.

In the course of his excavations, Schliemann identified seven levels corresponding to seven towns he labeled Troy I (the oldest) through Troy VII (of Greco-Roman times). He thought Troy III was the Troy of Homer's *Iliad*. Later archaeologists identified nine or more levels, and believed that Troy VI was the most likely candidate for being *the* Troy. Schliemann's Troy III was re-classified as Troy II. This is the level at which Schliemann discovered "Priam's Treasure" (see sidebar, p. 84). Troy II (like Troy I before it) was destroyed by fire – circa 2300 B.C., according to later dating, 1,000 years before Homer's Troy.



According to the *Iliad*, Paris, prince of Troy, abducted Helen, queen of Sparta. Her husband Menelaos, and his brother, Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, led an army of Greeks against Troy. After ten years, the Greeks had failed to take Troy by force, and resorted to a ruse – pretending to abandon the siege, they left a giant wooden horse in their camp. The Trojans assumed that this was a statue of the Greeks' god, and took it into their city in triumph. That night, the Greeks sneaked out of the wooden horse, opened the city gate, and took the city, slaughtering the men, enslaving the women, and toppling the city walls.

Homer's *Iliad*, the story of the Trojan war, was written down between the eighth and fifth centuries B.C., while the actual date of the war was about 1250 B.C. In Classical times, it was assumed that the events were historical. Later scholars assumed that they were mythical. Modern archaeology has shown that the truth was somewhere between the two.

The raid on Troy became famous as the last great action of the Mycenaeans; the Mycenaean civilization itself was wiped out within a hundred years.

Was the war caused by the abduction of Helen by Paris? Possibly. The Mycenaean period (see p. 84) was one in which warlords maintained their grip on power, and obtained slaves and wealth, by frequent raids upon their neighbors. Stealing women was common (whether she went willingly or not was irrelevant to the Mycenaeans).

The wooden horse? The story as told is improbable. According to legend, after building the horse and hiding a small band of men within its belly, the Greeks slipped away. One man stayed behind to surrender to the Trojans. He told them that Athena had told the Greeks to build the horse as an offering to her, and that if the Trojans brought it within the walls, it would protect the city. But the horse was too big – the Trojans had to dismantle part of their wall to bring the horse within. That night, while the Trojans lay drunk from revelry, the hidden men emerged and opened the gate to the returning Greek army. But if the wall were dismantled, why the need to open the gate? The wooden horse may instead be a garbled memory of a siege engine.

Still, a surprising number of the details appear to have been correct. Figure-eight shields and helmets made of boar's tusks described by Homer have been found in Mycenaean cities. Modern archaeology has confirmed many events described by Homer. There was even the discovery in 1984 of a Mycenaean burial mound some five miles southwest of Hisarlik, similar to the burial of Achilles as described by Homer.

Heinrich Schliemann and the Missing Gold of Troy

The “discoverer” of Troy and of Mycenae (see main text), Heinrich Schliemann was the most famous archaeologist of the 19th century. Although he was not just a treasure-hunter – Schliemann at least attempted scientific exploration of the site – he was so intent on proving that Hisarlik was the site of Homer’s Troy that he destroyed several layers of archaeologically significant strata while cutting a deep trench through the hillside.

Schliemann was self-educated, a millionaire businessman used to shady dealings. He sank much of his personal wealth into his excavations at Troy and elsewhere, but he was not above fraud and deception. He smuggled gold jewelry out of Turkey despite an agreement with the authorities. He claimed that he dug the treasure out of the wall of Priam’s Palace, and that he and his wife smuggled it away in her shawl, having dismissed the workmen on a ruse. (This story is probably a fabrication; Schliemann loved publicity.)

The treasure trove included a large copper cauldron, a copper shield, gold and silver drinking cups, daggers, spearheads and vases. There was gold jewelry, including an elaborate diadem and a necklace. In all, there were nearly 9,000 small pieces of gold, mostly rings and buttons.

Schliemann christened his smuggled loot “the jewels of Helen,” and photographed his wife wearing the best of the jewelry. It was publicity like this that caught the public imagination and persuaded the world that Hisarlik really was the site of Troy.

Schliemann displayed the treasure at his home in Athens. Eventually, the collection became the prized possession of Berlin’s State Museum for Pre- and Early History. During World War II, the collection was apparently divided and removed to various “safe” places, some of which fell victim to bombs. (A large collection of Trojan pottery stored in crates in a Prussian castle fell victim to an ancient peasant custom – that of breaking cheap pottery in a drunken stupor in honor of an upcoming wedding.)

It has been suggested that the jewels of “Priam’s Treasure” were fake. Whatever the case, they disappeared in Berlin in 1945. The Soviet government denied having taken them. In 1990, a Russian archaeologist reported that some of the collection had been seen in Moscow in the 1960s. The discovery of shipping vouchers and receipts corroborates this story, although the current whereabouts of Priam’s Treasure remains a mystery.

Troy VI, now generally accepted as *the* Troy, was a city with Mycenaean-style architecture; its rulers may well have been Mycenaean conquerors. After it was destroyed, about 1260 B.C., it was replaced by Troy VII, an impoverished place in which earlier stately mansions were replaced by hovels. This city was burned and abandoned around 1180 B.C. Still, the site was reoccupied yet again, and much of the mound which had built up on the site was leveled when Troy IX, the Roman city, was built.

The actual site is rather small: it is a fortified palace rather than a proper city, and most people probably lived outside the walls. Today, the site is visited by many tourists. Schliemann’s activities removed nearly half the mound; later digs added to the mess. The sea, which in Trojan times formed a bay near the city, has long receded, and the only real reminder of ancient heroes is the wind: Homer constantly refers to “windy Troy.”

Mycenae

“I have gazed upon the face of Agamemnon,” wrote Heinrich Schliemann, with characteristic hyperbole.

He hadn’t. The golden death mask he found in his second triumphant excavation, of shaft graves at Mycenae, dates to four centuries before the Trojan War. The king’s name is unknown. He lived in the early days of Mycenaean civilization: Agamemnon and his elaborate palace, as well as the palaces of Pylos and Tiryns, date from the final days before Mycenaean culture gave way to the Dark Age that followed.

Along with the death mask, Schliemann uncovered a hoard of golden objects far more impressive – in both quantity and quality – than the “Priam’s Treasure” discovery of some three years before.

Mycenaean civilization was two things:

It was heroic. There was a caste of warrior overlords whose hobbies were raiding each other for portable valuables, including gold, cattle, slaves and women. (The greatest praise a Mycenaean lord could have was to be titled “sacker of cities.”)

It was intensely bureaucratic. Inscriptions found amid the fire-destroyed ruins of the palace at Pylos consist of endless censuses of people, animals, harvests and grain allocations (two pints of wheat a day for a free man, half this for a woman or a slave, and a quarter for a child – this served as payment as well as subsistence; important people got more). This bureaucracy was a relatively late innovation; it coincided with an orgy of palace-, tomb- and wall-building.

The origins of the Mycenaean civilization are uncertain; they may have conquered ancient Greece with the aid of horses, giving rise to the legend of the centaur. They spoke an early form of Greek, but used a phonetic writing based on that of the Minoans. The new conquerors set themselves up with hilltop forts. Numerous kings ruled their rival kingdoms from palaces or citadels. When they died, these kings were buried – with golden ornaments and weapons – in shaft graves 15-25 feet deep, often sunk into soft rock.



The Classical Greeks

Most early civilizations grew up along rivers, with a centralized authority to maintain irrigation works. In Greece, however, small fertile plains are separated by mountains, which led to the development of city-states and a concentration on seafaring. In the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., Greek merchants founded colonies throughout the Black Sea and western Mediterranean. These colonies got into trouble with Persia, which led to the great invasion of 490 B.C.

The fierce independence of the Greek states led to vulnerability: they could rarely agree to unite in the face of outside threats. It also led to a wide range of political and social experiments. The one common theme of Greek civilization is perhaps an emphasis on communal rather than individual glory. The great monuments of Greece are temples and theaters rather than palaces.

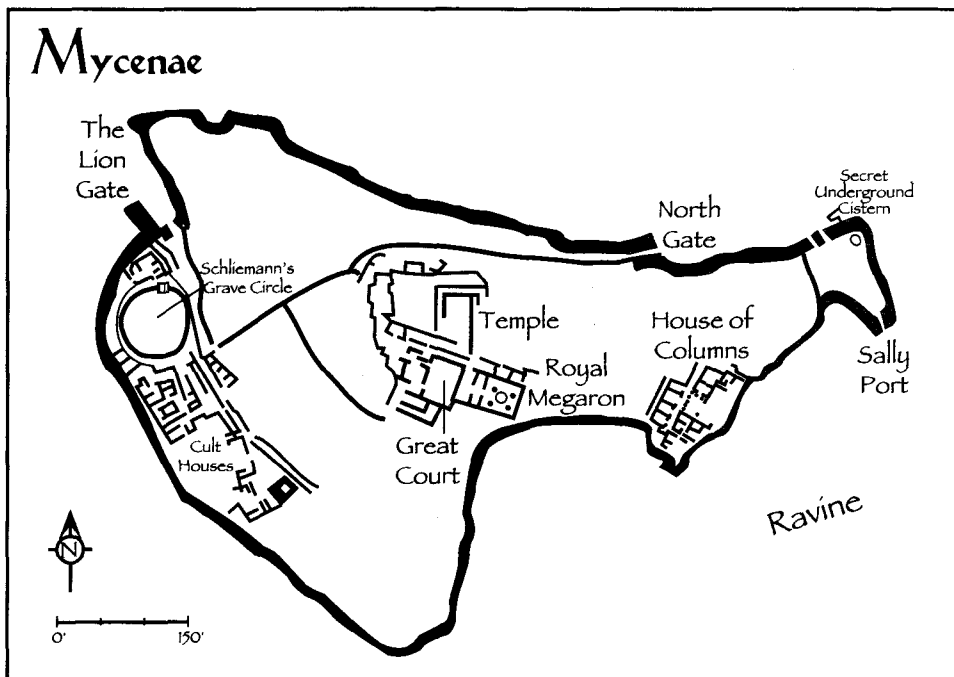
Athens was the first democracy, which to Athenians meant full participation in government by all free adult males of certain tribes (a small minority of the population). This democracy was interspersed with periods of dictatorship and terror. Still, the expectation that all citizens should be competent to debate foreign policy, and to fulfill any public office, was unique.

Athens is now the capital of modern Greece. Its best-known monument is the Parthenon – the ancient temple to Athena, which has survived remarkably well, considering that it once blew up when a defending army was using it as an arsenal.

Athens' greatest rival, Sparta, was a militaristic, regimented society. Males and females alike were expected to be hardy – weak babies were left on hillsides to die. All young men undertook military service, during which homosexuality was not merely condoned but expected.

Sparta's slaves frequently rebelled; vicious cycles of repression and rebellion led to an ever-increasing austerity and discipline. Unusually, the city was unwalled ("Sparta is defended by *men*, not stones"). Sparta is no longer an inhabited city; the site, in southern Greece, is rather remote, but tourists can visit the ruins.

The Greeks were united by language and religion. The Olympic Games (established 766 B.C.) and the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi were symbols of this common culture. The Delphi Oracle, a priestess, would inhale the fumes of burning bay leaves until she felt divine inspiration. Her pronouncements were often ambiguous – asked whether Croesus should attack Persia, she replied that if he did, he would destroy a great empire. In the end, the empire Croesus destroyed was his own.



In the late 15th century B.C., the Mycenaeans abandoned their shaft graves in favor of beehive-shaped *tholos* tombs built above ground. These tombs were looted once the city of Mycenae fell. Mounds of earth covered the completed tombs; the larger ones had walled pathways leading to their entrance.

The largest of these tombs is the "Treasury of Atreus," which had a larger span than any vault built for the next thousand years. The lintel stone above the main door weighs over 100 tons; the main chamber is nearly 50 feet in diameter and 45 feet high. It was decorated with plaques of carved green and red stone and gilt bronze rosettes; the last were looted, but the others survived until Lord Elgin – famous for taking marble statues from Athens – removed them in 1802.

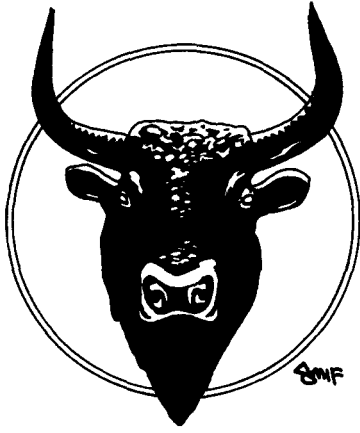
Mycenae's city walls were first built in the 14th century B.C. The final form of the walls, the finest *tholos* tombs, and the magnificent lion gate were built in the mid-13th century B.C. The population of the city of Mycenae at its height was probably less than 30,000.

The Mycenaean kingdoms all fell within the space of a century, around 1200 B.C. The traditional explanation is that the invasions of the Dorian Greeks caused this, as they were armed with plentiful iron instead of rarer bronze. However, it appears that any immigration by the Dorians was into the power vacuum caused by the fall of the Mycenaean kingdoms.

Mycenae itself appears to have withstood one siege before being brought down by a second. The initial instability may have been caused by the so-called "Sea Peoples" who caused havoc in the Hittite Empire in Turkey and in Egypt at about this time (although the "Sea Peoples" were an amorphous bunch, and included Mycenaean pirates). If Mycenaean Greece depended on food imports, instability would equally have led to chaos if food supplies were interrupted.

Game Masters may invent more sinister explanations for Mycenae's fall. It may have been some long-term revenge of the Minoans – see p. 86 – or a result of meddling too closely in Minoan secrets captured with Knossos. Or another power group may have had long-term plans to destroy early centers of civilization: first inciting the Mycenaeans to destroy the Minoans, and then destroying the Mycenaeans in turn when they began to benefit from Minoan culture.

In any case, Mycenae and her sister-kingdoms fell, and Greek culture dissolved into a Dark Age for centuries. Even the art of writing was lost. The Mycenaean "golden age" was remembered only in poetry.



Not Just Bull?

According to legend, Minos, king of Crete, had a half-bull stepson, thanks to some irregular goings-on, and decided to house it in a labyrinth in the palace basement (built by Daedalus and Icarus, the first hang-gliders). Any other husband, on being presented with a son that had a bull's head, might have wondered about its parentage; fortunately for Minos's wife, Minos was the son of Europa and the god Zeus in the form of a bull, so it all made a sort of sense.

This bull-headed man required a diet of human flesh. Minos obtained it by demanding a sacrifice every eight years of seven youths and seven maidens from Athens. Theseus, son of the king of Athens, decided that the heroic thing to do would be to go as one of the 14, kill the minotaur, and release Greece from Crete's yoke.

In the legend, this worked, although Theseus (as a typical hero) required Ariadne, one of Minos's daughters, to show him how to escape from the labyrinth, by tying a thread to the exit.

Exactly why Ariadne was prepared to help a complete stranger kill her own brother, even if he was half bull, is not explained, but kings' daughters in Greek myths were forever betraying their families for nice-looking strangers, and it never did them any good in the end. Theseus, after swearing to love Ariadne forever, sailed off and left her on the island of Naxos.

Anyway, this absurd tale couldn't possibly be true. Except . . .

Crete really did have a civilization superior to that of Greece, in Minoan times, and it did exert influence (probably commercial rather than military) on the mainland. And the palace at Knossos has distinctly maze-like features. There is no evidence for a historical minotaur, or that the Minoans sacrificed youths and maidens, their own or anyone else's, but the story may be based on some memory of the Minoans, so you never know . . .

Knossos

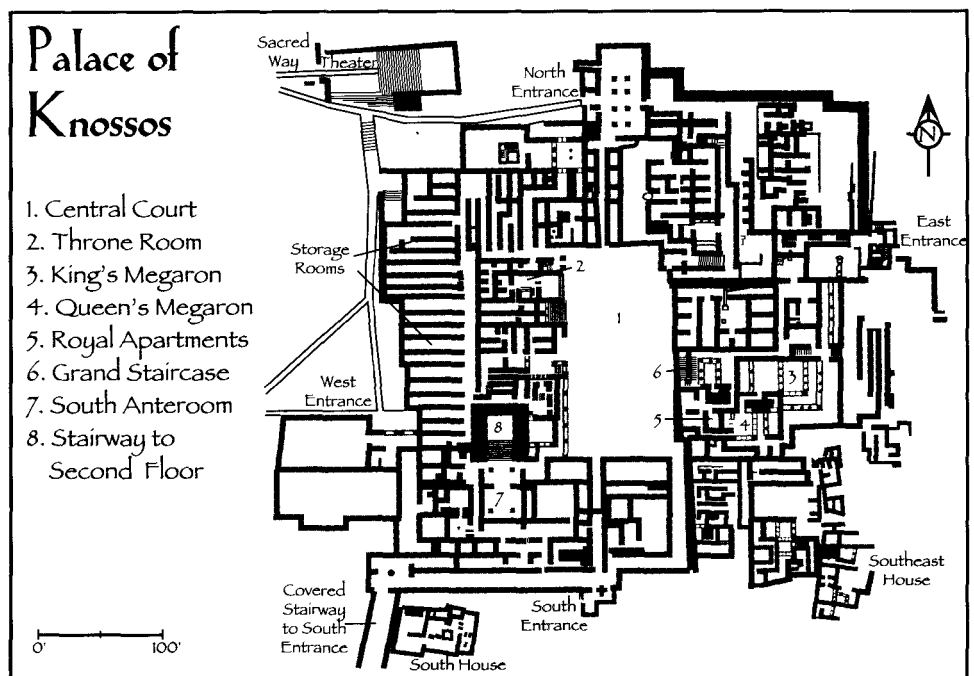
Heinrich Schliemann missed his third great opportunity by counting olive trees. The discoverer of Troy and Mycenae was on the verge of completing negotiations for the site of Knossos, when he discovered that there were only 600 olive trees on the site. The farmer had assured him that there were 2,000 trees. In a rage, he withdrew from the deal.

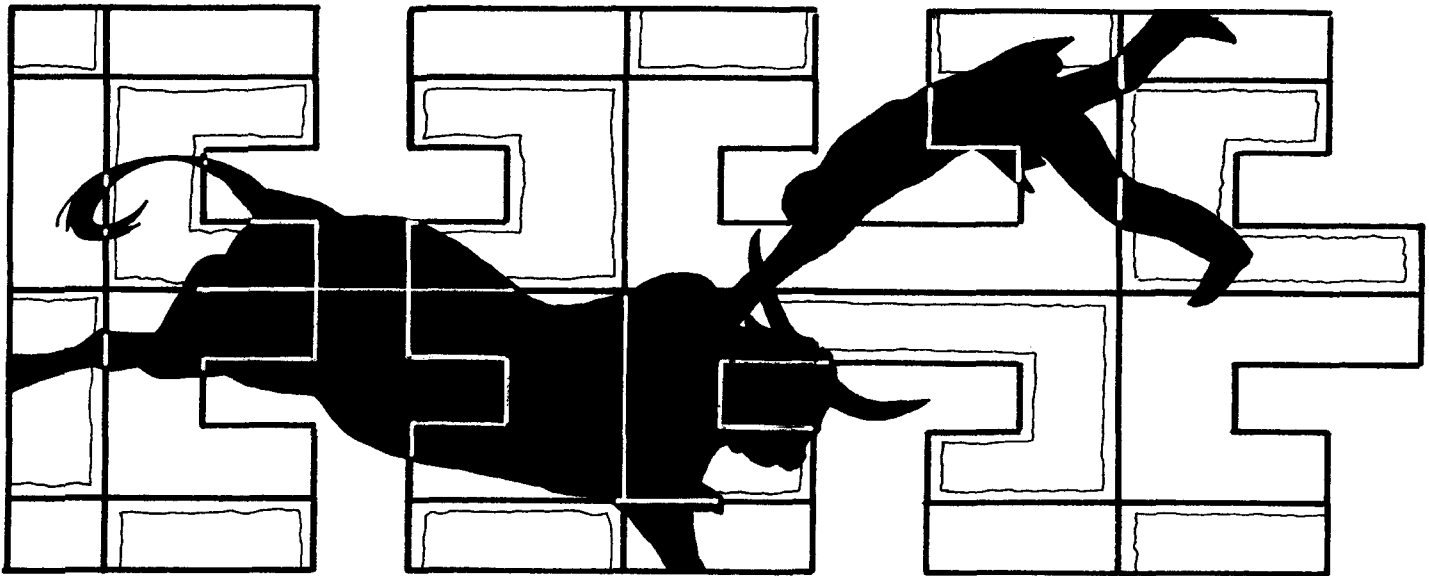
It was left to a Briton, Arthur Evans, to conduct an excavation in 1900, and to christen the culture which he found "Minoan." In excavating Knossos, Evans reassembled it on the site physically, "restoring" frescoes and structures. Although his restorations give the visitor a clearer impression of the place than a pure archaeological dig would have, this was a controversial action which interfered with the archaeological evidence.

The Minoan civilization dominated the Aegean culturally and by trade, rather than by force of arms. The Minoans likely had a powerful fleet to suppress the era's endemic piracy, but we know nothing of it, other than a Greek legend that King Minos was the first to organize a navy. There are no portraits of mighty leaders trampling their foes and putting foreign cities to the sword. (Of course – especially if the Minoan civilization was the original of Atlantis, see p. 9 – the Minoan defenses may have been much more high-tech, or magical, or psionic, than a mere sailing navy.)

Cretean cities were unfortified, a luxury few could afford before the modern era. Despite being arranged around a number of autonomous cities with no strong central ruler, the Minoans apparently didn't engage in petty squabbles between cities. Their society, although hierarchical, was easygoing and wealthy enough that internal revolts were not a problem.

Although the legendary ruler of Knossos was King Minos, we are by no means sure that actual Minoan rulers were either kings or men. The rulership may have been religious rather than a monarchy, and assumptions that the ruler





was a “priest-king” are no more than a guess. There is tantalizingly vague evidence that it might have been a “priestess-queen” – Minoan women had a higher status than women in other cultures of the time.

Minoan civilization remains an enigma, despite its ample remains and nearly a century’s worth of archaeological interest, partly because its writing – “Linear A” – remains undeciphered.

Minoan culture was obsessed with the beauty of nature: pottery and wall-paintings abound in fish, dolphins, monkeys, birds and other animals. People were portrayed at celebrations and relaxing. Backgrounds are highly stylized, as are the people: men are conventionally shown with brown skin, women with white. The religious ritual of bull-dancing was a popular art theme.

The major religious symbol of the Minoans was the double-headed axe (*labrys*). The axe was originally used in sacrifices, but by the heyday of the Minoan civilization was used to decorate shrines, and as jewelry.

The exact dates of Minoan civilization are still debated, but the palace-building period started around 2000 B.C. About 1700 B.C. the palaces were destroyed, possibly by an earthquake, possibly by the eruption of Santorini. The Minoans recovered, and rebuilt their palaces. Minoan civilization was destroyed about 1450 B.C. (see p. 10). The Mycenaean-dominated palace at Knossos was destroyed around 1380 B.C.

Knossos was the grandest of the Minoan cities. The palace covered 4.3 acres, while the city occupied 185 acres and housed a population of 40,000. As well as a religious and political center, the palace was used for industry, with workshops for stone-carvers, weavers and potters, equipment for processing olive oil and wine, and storage for vast amounts of wine, olive oil and wheat.

The palace was a maze of rooms around several courtyards, the central one of which was probably used for religious purposes. The west wing, between the central and west court, had rooms used for religious purposes (including the so-called “throne room”) on the ground floor; tablet-archives, a treasury for the shrines containing stone vessels, and state reception rooms on the upper floor; and storage rooms.. The east wing – at least four stories – contained the living quarters; it had toilets with running water and bathrooms. An aqueduct brought water from the mountains, and drains took waste away.

The northeast part seems to have been industrial, while the bulldancing (see sidebar) probably took place to the northwest of the palace, where buildings could have served as grandstands.

Bull-Leaping

Judging by frescoes uncovered by archaeologists, the Minoans of Crete favored a dangerous sport – bull-leaping. Young athletes, male and female, formed teams of three; one to somersault over the charging bull’s back, one to help lift, and one to catch the somersaulter. The sport may have had some religious significance – but solving this mystery will have to await the deciphering of “Linear A,” the written Minoan language.

Bulldancing Skill

Bulldancing is a Physical/Hard skill, defaulting to Acrobatics-5, but PCs using simple Acrobatics successfully could probably survive with honor; Animal Handling and the Animal Empathy advantage could help, as it is easier to somersault over a calm bull, while some forms of Dancing skill could be used to make it look good. The “lifter” and the “catcher” can probably get by with reasonable ST and a few DX rolls, although the other skills would help them, too. Bulls gore for 1d+1 impaling damage (halved if they can’t get a clear run-up; also, the Minoans might blunt the horns of “practice” bulls), and trample for 1d+1 crushing damage (usually halved as they run over the target).

Human Sacrifices

In 1980, controversy erupted over some findings by Greek archaeologists Efi and Jannis Sakellarakis. In excavating a sacred site in northern Crete, they discovered evidence of a human sacrifice – an 18-year-old youth trussed and slain like a bull on an altar. It was apparently done to ward off an impending earthquake – three other Minoans perished during the rite as stones from the roof tumbled upon them.

Mediterranean "Brochs"

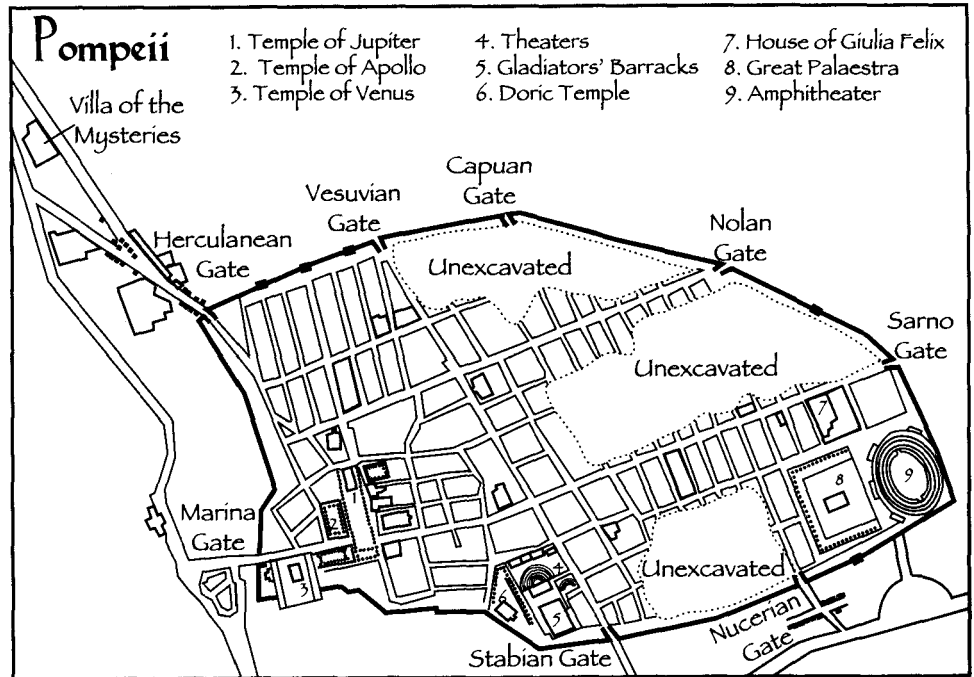
Both Sardinia and the Balearics boast structures with a superficial resemblance to brochs (prehistoric round stone towers – see p. 91). In Sardinia, there remain about 7,000 *nuraghi*, drystone towers. The earliest versions are fairly small; later ones are conical and up to 33 feet tall, while the addition of extra towers extended still later *nuraghi* into proper fortresses.

Less well known, but roughly contemporary with the *nuraghi*, are the *talayots* of the Balearics. They are towers 13-16 feet tall. Little is known of their functions, which probably varied, but some have a central stone pillar within the tower which leaves little room for people, and suggests some form of ritual use. Some *talayots* might have been used for exposure of the dead before burial.

The *navetas* are stone structures that resemble upturned boats. They were used to bury the dead. *Taulas*, of which 21 survive (only seven are complete) are more mysterious. A *taula* is a slender standing stone, up to 13 feet tall, crowned by a similar block balanced on top to form a T-shape. Many of the surviving examples are within D-shaped stone enclosures.

The Builders

The temptation to see a link between superficially similar designs is almost overwhelming. The Old and New World pyramids were long thought to be evidence for contact between Egypt and America. Similarly, standing stones and megalithic structures are found all over the world. In *Illuminated* campaigns, GMs are free to assume a causal, and probably sinister, connection between brochs in Scotland and *nuraghi* in Sardinia or between standing stones in France and in Borneo. Diffusion of advanced ideas from Atlantis in prehistory? Conspiracy of the space aliens? Why not?



Pompeii

The eruption of Vesuvius on August 10, 79 A.D., was unexpected and savage. The volcano's crater collapsed, and a black column of ashes shot into the sky. A hail of pumice stones fell on the quietly prosperous city of Pompeii, smashing roofs, and burying the city under a blanket of pumice 12 feet deep.

When the hail ceased, the survivors tried to escape to the shores of the bay, only to be caught by a second fall of ash – fine, suffocating ash like quicksand, which trapped and encased them, making another layer 6-9 feet thick. Today, archaeologists can make casts of the people caught in this way, as the ash has preserved the details of their bodies and even their clothing. Pompeii was so utterly destroyed that even its name was forgotten, and the peasants who came back to farm called the site simply "the city." (Archaeological finds suggest that there might have been sufficient warning rumbles for many to leave the city before the disaster, leaving only the reckless and those with nowhere to go.)

Pompeii was rediscovered in 1748, and excavations have continued ever since. The earlier diggings were more pillaging than archaeology. The private residences, providing the most important information, have mainly been excavated in the 20th century.

Pompeii had a wealth of public buildings, many of them donations from the rich of the city. There were two public baths, with a third in the process of being built, a magnificent forum, temples, two theaters, and an amphitheater in which gladiatorial and animal combats took place. This Roman-style entertainment stood alongside the *palaestra*, a Greek-style sports field where the young men of the city took part in athletic events, showing Pompeii's history as a Greek colony, as well as an Italian town.

The population was about 20,000, of which about 8,000 were slaves. Rich soil covered the slopes of Vesuvius; farming was good, and food cheap. Exports of wine, woolen products and garum (a Roman sauce of fermented fish) allowed a substantial wealthy class.

The Tarxien Temple Complex

On Malta, an ancient people founded an independent stone-shaping tradition, initially of underground tombs. From 3500 B.C. on, they began to build above-ground versions of these tombs. They were used for religious rites, including animal sacrifice, and divination (probably by prophetic dreams) as well as fertility ceremonies. The temples served communities of 1,000-2,000 people, who competed to have the finest and best. The temples were decorated with a particularly soft limestone which flint tools could work into gorgeous, finely detailed decorations. They were also plastered and painted. Sadly, this artistic heritage died out when Malta was overrun by Bronze-Age people, who used the old temples to store urns containing the ashes of their dead.

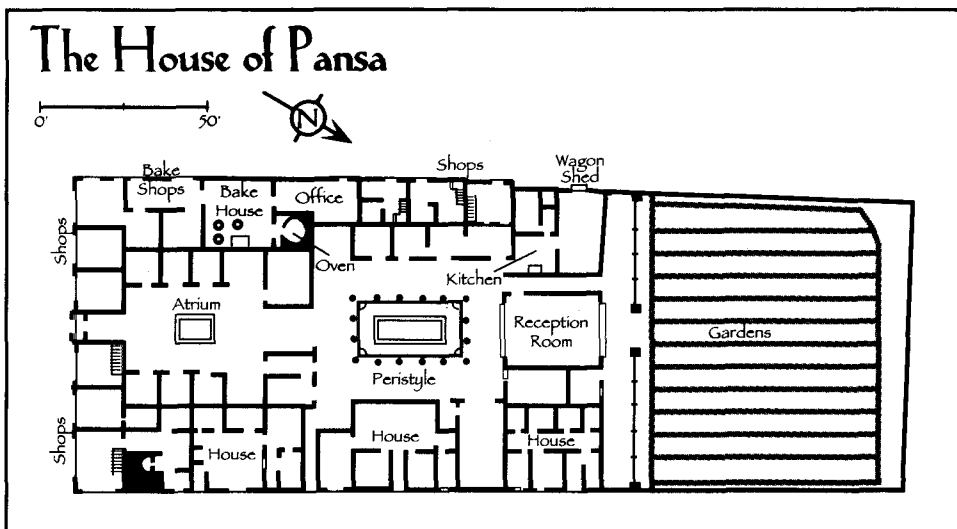
The Tarxien complex – it consists of four similar temples, of which three survive – was one of the last to be built, and one of the finest. The forecourt of the southern temple is dominated by the deity of the place: a goddess who originally stood eight feet high. All that remains is part of her skirts and feet. Statues of her from elsewhere on Malta show her to be fat and pregnant, her left arm draped protectively across her belly and her right pointing to the ground. She was a fertility deity of people and crops. Opposite the goddess is an altar, in a drawer of which a flint knife was found, along with a goat's horn.

In the adjacent central temple the central passageway has three pairs of side-chambers, and slabs of rock decorated with spirals which served as screens for two of these remain. The sides of the temples were corbelled, that is, they narrowed as they went upwards, and the roof was of beams and thatch.

Prophetic Dreams as Game Devices

In games, prophetic dreams, whether drug-induced or caused by some more mystical factor, are one way for a GM to allow PCs or NPCs a hint of possible future events without being too specific. Dreams are often symbolic and obscure, and may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Interpreting them may be treated as a Mental/Hard skill, defaulting to Occultism-3 or Theology-4.

Dream-divination may be dangerous, especially for the unwary – what happens if you die in a dream? Note also that *GURPS Voodoo* has rules for ritualistic dream-magic.

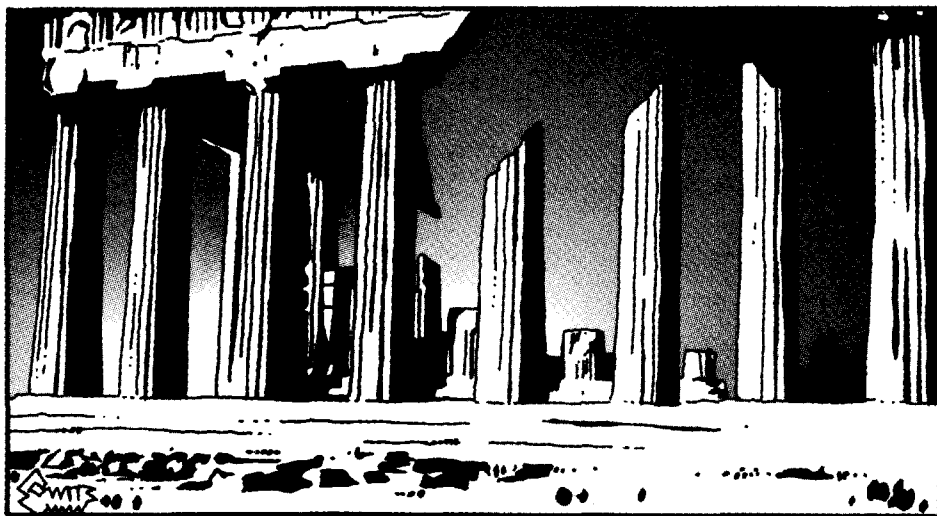


Giulia Felix was a wealthy citizen; when her house was damaged by an earthquake in 62 A.D. she converted part to baths (the public baths had also been damaged), and let out parts as shops to finance restoration work. The so-called “villa of the mysteries” was a 90-room mansion decorated with symbolic representations of the life of Semele and Dionysus and the initiation of their priestess.

The house of Pansa is a typical mansion which, like Giulia Felix's house, occupied an entire city block. Toward the front was a Roman-style *atrium* (open area into which the rooms looked), and further back, for more private use, a Greek-style *peristyle* (another open area, with columns), again reflecting Pompeii's mixed past. Around the mansion are other houses and shops.

Outside the city, lining the roads, are the magnificent tombs of Pompeii's prosperous families; amongst these, vendors' booths were set up, preventing the graves from making the approach to the city gloomy.

Adventure Seed: Time-travel agencies need agents. The best agents are those who will not be missed, from where missing persons would be presumed dead, with no thought given to the lack of a body. As a result, Pompeii is a good source, provided the recruiters time it correctly. Too soon, and neighbors will notice a missing person. Too late, and the recruiters will be lost. Other game uses for a city like Pompeii might be for the PCs to be involved in the discovery; or for them to be among the crowds seeking to escape from the devastation.



9 THE BRITISH ISLES



*Stay, yet look back with me unto the Tower.
Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes
Whom envy hath immured within your walls!*
– William Shakespeare, "Richard III," Act 4, Scene 1



Loch Ness

Loch Ness is the home of the world's most famous monster. The first known reference occurs in the biography of the fifth-century saint, Columba – the saint drove off a ravening water-monster in the River Ness. Further references to the monster are sparse until the 20th century.

The modern Nessie saga began on April 1, 1934, with a photograph taken by Colonel Robert Wilson, a reputable Harley Street gynecologist, while on holiday in Scotland. This photograph brought the mysterious loch international fame. Any number of people have since claimed to have seen something strange in the loch, and a fair number of fuzzy and indistinct photographs have been taken. Despite intensive efforts by the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau, and 24-hour watches on likely monster-sites for much of the summer over 30 years, there has been no definitive proof.

So is there a Loch Ness monster? Proponents still say yes.

Loch Ness is on an ancient geological fault. It's long (just over 24 miles) and thin (less than a mile wide) and 750 feet deep. The sides of the loch are extremely steep. The much-eroded mountains of central Scotland surround the loch. A third of the way along the loch is the ruined castle Urquhart, and Urquhart Bay is one of the favored places for spotting Nessie.

Proponents claim that the loch supports a colony of the creatures, and that their size is closer to 20 feet long than the 60-100 feet that witnesses describe (it is difficult to estimate size in the absence of a scale, and people tend to exaggerate).

So what might the monster be? Several things are clear.

It is unlikely that Nessie is an air-breather. Sightings are too uncommon, and there is nowhere on the Loch that a monster could surface to breathe unobserved. Despite legends of caves in the side of the loch, none have been found. The theory that Nessie is a plesiosaur is therefore impossible, since plesiosaurs were air-breathers.

This leaves a fish or an invertebrate. Although squid can reach giant size, they would be unable to survive in a fresh-water lake. If Nessie exists, it is most likely a giant fish. The most obvious candidate for a giant freshwater fish would be a sturgeon. In the Volga River and the Black and Caspian seas, they can reach 28 feet long. The British record is a mere 9' 2", and weighed 388 lbs.

GMs who like the idea of a surviving plesiosaur, a relative of the dinosaurs, living in Loch Ness are of course welcome to make it so. Or perhaps the loch is a gateway to another reality (see *Ley Lines*, p. 25). Or perhaps Nessie is the result of magic performed by the notorious Aleister Crowley. The famous mystic lived at Boleskine House, near the village of Foyers on the eastern bank of the loch, from about 1905 to 1914 – some time after forming his A.:A.: magical order (*Argentum Astrum*, or "Silver Star"). Crowley was apparently unaware of the existence of the Loch Ness monster. Perhaps he managed a successful summoning, and the very fact frightened him into unprecedented silence.

Other Sites

Newgrange

This Irish tomb was constructed about 3200 B.C. of massive slabs (often carved with spirals and other symbols), covered with a cairn. Upright slabs define a fore-court, the site of religious rituals which may have extended into the tomb itself.

Although it is a fine example of a *passage grave*, Newgrange's main feature of interest is its astronomical alignment. Above the entrance is a narrow aperture. At the winter solstice, the rising sun's rays struck the aperture and traveled the length of the tomb, to illuminate the bones of the dead at the far end – an outstanding demonstration of ritual astronomy. The aperture was normally kept closed by stones, which were pushed aside at the right time, presumably by a priest.

Brochs

From a distance, a *broch* looks like an ancient power-station cooling tower, partly fallen down due to centuries of neglect. Brochs are mainly found in the west and north of Scotland, with a few in central and southern Scotland. They were built between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. Some remained occupied until 200 A.D. or later. The reason why they were developed has been debated: they suggest that the populace felt a need for protection. Possibly social tensions increased as a result of migrations.

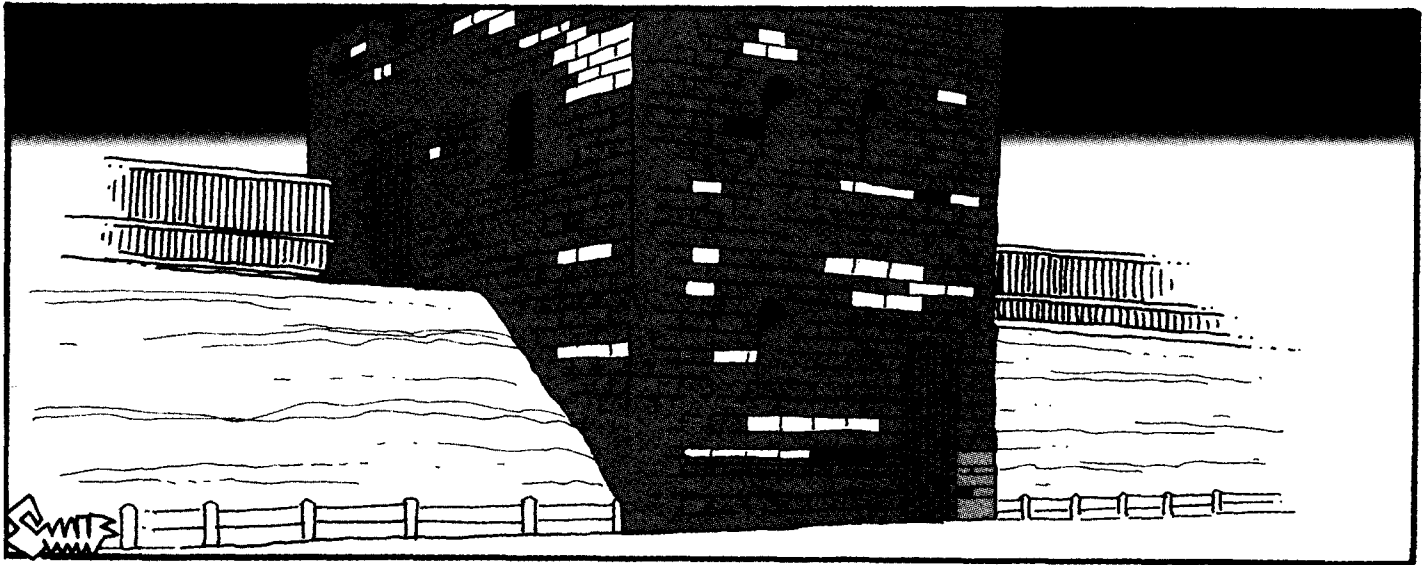
Drystone-built, brochs were circular, high and windowless. The walls were about 15 feet thick at the base, around an open central area 30-40 feet across. The doorway itself, only 2.5 feet across and 5.25 feet high, was small, to slow any attacker coming through.

Cells – storage or living quarters – are built into the walls. Above the base, the walls are hollow, an inner and outer layer connected by horizontal slabs; these spaces may have been used for storage. Between the inner and outer walls, steps lead to the top of the broch, to allow defenders to look out, and possibly to scatter missiles upon enemies.

The interior space of the broch may have been completely or partly roofed. Other buildings, such as workshops, stood outside the broch. Artifacts found at brochs indicate that they housed communities of dozens to hundreds, suggesting that most people lived outside the broch.

Few warlike remains have been found in brochs. Yet if there was no need for them, why go to the effort of building them? The chances are that brochs were simply extremely effective, and raiders left them alone.

Similar structures are found along the Mediterranean (see p. 88).



Antonine's Wall

Like Hadrian, Antonine decided to create a permanent frontier, the Antonine Wall. This was built of earth on a foundation of clay and cobbles, with a breastwork of wattles. It has survived less well than Hadrian's. Like Hadrian's Wall, it had forts, mile-castles and turrets, and it was about ten feet high. It ran for 36 miles between the rivers Forth and Clyde.

Originally, it was planned to have six forts (about every eight miles), but a further 20 forts were soon added, making it the most intensively guarded frontier in the Roman world. The forts were of timber and turf, with wooden buildings, with the sole exception of the bath house, which was built of stone.

Like other Roman occupations of Scotland, this frontier became impractical to maintain when troops were withdrawn from Britain to aid the rest of the Empire.

Other Walls

Walls were not a common form of frontier, even for the Romans, since they take a great deal more effort to build, and require more skilled maintenance than other barriers. One of the most effective defenses is the ditch and bank (dyke), used in prehistory (especially in the Celtic world where raiders were likely to be in chariots) as well as in historical times. Offa's Dyke, traversing 70 miles along the boundary between England and Wales, marked an agreed frontier between the English king, Offa, and the Welsh.

The Romans' usual form of frontier, where they felt the need for active defenses, was the *limes*, military roads running along the frontier, linking forts and fortified towns. Some had earthworks alongside the roads. *Limes* were built in Germany, Syria, Africa and in Dacia. Hadrian's Wall itself runs alongside an older *limes*, now known as the Stanegate.

Hadrian's Wall

Even today, fallen into low ruins and with parts of it built over, Hadrian's Wall is an impressive sight. It runs 73 miles from the river Tyne to the Solway Firth, dividing Britain in two.

Built by Roman Legions, the Wall marked the limit of the Roman Empire from about 122 A.D. until the Romans left the province in 410 A.D. The Wall was not meant to withstand mass attack; there were too few soldiers stationed at the forts to patrol its length. It was mainly meant to regulate comings and goings, to collect taxes, and to restrict the native hobby of raiding.

The Wall began as a border-marker about 122 A.D. It included small fortifications (60 feet square inside, with gates to north and south) every mile, and turrets every third of a mile, presumably to house lookouts.

In the original plan, only the eastern part of the Wall was built of stone; in the west, the turrets were stone, but the mile-castles and wall were of earth. The foundations were ten feet wide, although the Wall was often narrower. The Wall crosses three rivers – the Romans bridged them – and was originally 12 feet high.

The plan changed to include 16 forts, which were completed – although the Wall itself was not – by the time of Hadrian's death in 138 A.D. This phase of building produced the *vallum*, a steep, deep ditch running up to half a mile from the south of the Wall. With the south side protected from the not-entirely-trusted local Britons by the *vallum*, the Wall became a springboard for further operations to the north. Although the mile-castles incorporated gates to either side of the Wall, the only places where the *vallum* had crossings was at the forts, where gates guarded passage through the Wall.

Hadrian's successor, Antonius Pius (Antonine), retook the parts of southern Scotland abandoned 50 years before. Hadrian's Wall continued to control the main routes north at Corbridge and Carlisle. The mile-castles, however, had their gates removed, allowing unrestricted access through the Wall. The turrets were abandoned. In some areas, the *vallum* was filled and levelled.

Antonine's frontier was abandoned after 15 years. Hadrian's Wall became the frontier once more. The mile-castles had their gates replaced; the Wall was repaired, and building resumed. Some turrets were dismantled. Around this

time, the earth wall was replaced by stone. A military road was built between the Wall and the vallum; however, the vallum itself was not reinstated.

In the early third century, the Wall was well maintained, and modifications continued. The river bridges were replaced by bigger ones: the Wall had become a permanent frontier. The soldiers' barracks gave way to individual huts, reflecting more married soldiers, and fewer soldiers in total. By 300 A.D. the Picts began to raid; conflicts continued until the Roman withdrawal in 410 A.D.

Occupation of the Wall continued for a while – in some cases for centuries. Many of the soldiers may have preferred to remain in Britain, and their homes were on the Wall. In later centuries, the Wall was used as a source of building stone. Even so, much survives.



Camelot

The Celts of the 12th century A.D. (and later) told tales of the heroic Arthur, who would return some day to reclaim Britain from the English. Places where people have supposedly encountered the sleeping Arthur and his knights include the forest of Dean, Craig-y-Ddinas in Mid Glamorgan, Alderley Edge in Cheshire, Richmond in Yorkshire, and the Eildon Hills in the Scottish Borders. At least another 150 sites are named after Arthur. (There are four hills called Arthur's Seat!)

So where was Camelot? Although claimed by Carlisle and Caerleon in Wales, the best candidate is South Cadbury, not far from Glastonbury.

South Cadbury is an Iron-Age hill-fort which was refortified at the end of the Roman period. The hill rises to a plateau which is about level with the top of Glastonbury Tor – a steep walk up from the four rings of earthworks. The inner ring was refortified with a stone and timber rampart with a gate-house in the southwest. A large timber building was built on the plateau.

Why do archaeologists think that this is Camelot? South Cadbury is a fortification of the right period, with what might be a palace rather than a settlement, and a relatively short period of occupancy. If it was not Camelot and home of Arthur, then it was probably the headquarters of another leader of the same time. It may not be the “real” Camelot, but it is the nearest thing, and even archaeologists are not immune to romance.

Hill-Forts

Hill-forts are practical defensive systems from the first millennium B.C. There are usually one to three rings of banks and ditches, originally topped by wooden walls. The entrance was often angled to the left, to force attackers to expose their unshielded side to the defending slingers and archers. Some hill-forts had religious structures such as shafts, ceremonial entrances to the underworld, into which offerings were made. A typical hill-fort might have been built by a population of 1,000 in perhaps four months' solid labor.

Hill-forts vary in size from less than a quarter of an acre to over 200 acres, although most were 3-30 acres. Over time, many smaller hill-forts were abandoned, leaving a few, very large hill-forts. One such was Maiden Castle in Dorset, besieged and conquered by the Romans about 45 A.D. Even today, this fort would provide a formidable defense, as it stands 83 feet from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the surviving ramparts.

Glastonbury

Glastonbury has enough mystical associations for a dozen lesser sites. Originally, the Tor (hill) rose out of a lake or swamp, now drained. Neolithic people lived nearby on artificial islands. The Tor is surrounded by ridges, which are variously explained as fortifications, medieval farming traces, or a Neolithic ritual maze. The Tor was also a “fairy hill,” inside which a fairy king lived, at least until an early saint scattered holy water, thereby banishing king and palace. Atop the Tor are the remains of St. Michael's Chapel.

According to legend, Glastonbury's church was founded by Joseph of Arimathea, who planted a thorn bush that bloomed around Christmas. The original was chopped down by a Puritan, but one of its descendants is still there. The Holy Grail is also associated with Glastonbury. The final version of the legend has Joseph bringing the Grail and founding the church at the same time.

And late in the 12th century A.D., as the Normans were expanding into Celtic areas, the abbey of Glastonbury had a disastrous fire. The monks needed money urgently. At the urging of King Henry II, they began excavations, and in 1190 announced that they had found the burial place of King Arthur. They probably *had* found an ancient burial, to which they added a cross with an inscription declaring that this was the grave of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, in the Isle of Avalon.

The Glastonbury Zodiac

In 1929, Mrs Katherine Maltwood, preparing a diagram of the Glastonbury area to illustrate one of the Arthurian romances, noticed that the River Cary formed the shape of the belly of a lion. Examining her map, she picked out the rest of the beast, and then the other figures of the zodiac. (Some accounts of this revelation have her receiving a mystic vision while overlooking the Glastonbury area from a hill.) Since this time, about 20 other zodiacs have been “found” in Britain. The zodiacs are made of miscellaneous features, including contour lines, parts of hedges and rivers.

Adventure Seed: The zodiac could be of extreme interest to mystics, or latter-day members of the group that created it. It might even be that a modern secret group manipulated field boundaries to bring the zodiac into being, and that it is not yet complete – though what might happen once it is, is up to the GM.

Perhaps the terrain hides an ancient maze, meant to be walked during rituals, but fallen into disuse and largely destroyed. If it were large, like the Glastonbury Zodiac, the land could be given over to a variety of mundane uses, and the PCs could have great difficulty finding excuses for their actions.

The Tower's Ghosts

*With her head tucked underneath her arm
She walks the Bloody Tower!
With her head tucked underneath her arm
At the midnight hour*

– R.P. Western and Bert Lee, “With Her Head Tucked Underneath Her Arm”

It may not be a coincidence that sightings of ghosts at the Tower of London come after it had ceased to be a residence: a deserted building is much more conducive to ghosts than an inhabited one. Ghosts have been reported even by people not noted for their excess imagination, including troops stationed at the tower.

The most famous ghost, and the most frequently seen, is the second wife of Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, who was beheaded in the Tower on charges of adultery (although her real crime was failing to produce a son). Despite the song, she does not carry her head underneath her arm, but usually appears with it in its usual place. Sometimes she wears a bonnet with nothing inside.

Catherine Howard, Henry’s fifth wife, also executed, has been seen walking the battlements. Jane Grey, who reigned as queen for nine days, has also been seen near the place of her execution.

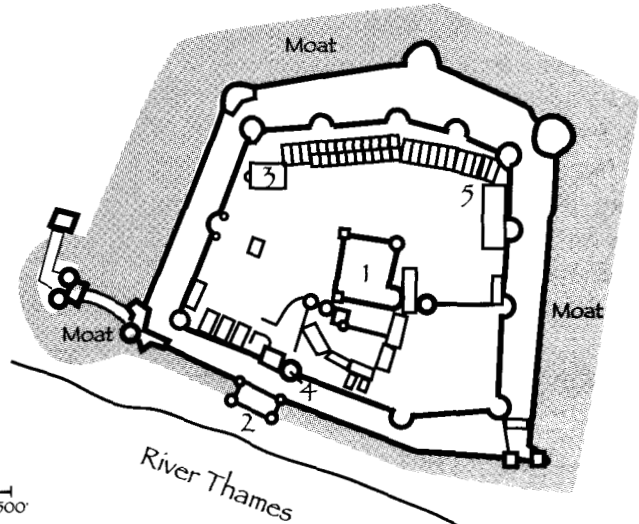
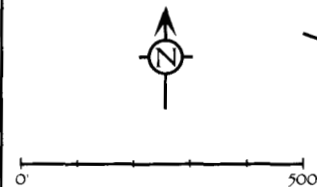
Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, reportedly re-enacts her execution on the anniversary. In 1542, she was dragged screaming and struggling to the block; the executioner had to chase her around the scaffold, missing three times before severing her head. Sir Walter Raleigh and the two Princes of the Tower have also been reported, while other ghosts, such as a monk in a brown habit, are anonymous.

Ghosts are not reported in the White Tower, the oldest part of the complex. At the time the White Tower was built, a cat was walled into the foundations, and this superstitious defense against malevolent spirits appears to have worked. Or perhaps the half-life of ghosts has come into play (see sidebar, p. 21).



The Tower of London (circa 1600 A.d.)

1. The White Tower
2. Traitor’s Gate
3. St. Peter’s Church
4. The Bloody Tower
5. Barracks



The Tower of London

Even before the Tower of London was built, the site was a place of mystery. The British (or rather Welsh) king, Bran, had invaded Ireland unsuccessfully, and begged his remaining companions to bury his head at the White Hill (later Tower Hill), with his face toward France, to preserve the land against invasion. This gruesome task was made easier by his disembodied head being excellent company, conversing and joking as in life. He protected the land until King Arthur removed him.

The name Bran means “raven,” suggesting an origin for the belief that if the ravens ever leave the Tower, the kingdom will face disaster. The ravens are carefully looked after to prevent their leaving. (A mystical, or merely eccentric, NPC villain might decide to kidnap these ravens to trigger this prophecy.)

The Tower itself was first raised by William the Conqueror to control the unruly citizens of London; now known as the White Tower, it is one of the finest and largest Norman keeps in Europe, completed after William’s death. Over the centuries, the Tower was the home to monarchs and their families, and housed the Royal Mint, as well as a prison and place of execution. It was enlarged by successive monarchs until the Tower itself was surrounded by two walls and a moat (now dry).

By the Traitor’s Gate (the gate to the river Thames through which prisoners could be brought surreptitiously) is the Bloody Tower, so called since an Earl of Northumberland committed suicide there. This is the tower in which the child-princes – Edward V and the Duke of York – were murdered in 1483.

Today, the Tower houses the Crown Jewels, as it has for centuries; the daring Colonel Blood made a nearly-successful attempt to steal them in the reign of Charles II. Mysteriously, Blood was rewarded by the king with the return of his lands in Ireland. Some have suggested that Blood was on a secret mission for the king, the nature of which has never been explained.



Ruined Abbeys

The reason there are so many ruined abbeys in England is that they were destroyed in just four years by a monarch who was strapped for cash. In 1536, Henry VIII presented a bill before Parliament to suppress the smallest abbeys. This led to a rebellion known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, which was put down. A number of abbots who had supported the pilgrimage were executed for treason, and their monasteries confiscated. The abbot of Furness, whose monks had expressed support for the pilgrimage, found himself in a tricky situation, which he resolved by voluntarily handing over the abbey to the Crown. By 1540, virtually all the monasteries had been “voluntarily” handed over, although a few recalcitrant abbots had to be executed to encourage the rest.

Most of the property gained was sold within a few years to finance a war against Scotland, leaving the crown little better off for the plunder of a thousand years of piety. After the Dissolution, some abbeys were converted into parish churches, some into private dwellings for the new landowners, some were plundered for building stone, and some were simply left to decay. A few suffered further in the 18th and 19th centuries, when their owners hired workers to make the ruins more “romantic” (and ruined).

The vast majority of the abbeys had been founded from the tenth century on, and although there are subtle differences between the different orders, the overall layouts remained similar. The church was the largest and most impressive building. It formed one side of the *cloister*, a walled garden surrounded by covered walkways. The monks had dormitories or cells, depending on the order; a refectory; and a communal sitting room, often the only room allowed a fire in winter. An infirmary, with an herb garden attached, might form part of the cloister. Outside was the inner court, sometimes enclosed by a wall, with granaries, bakeries and brew-houses. Outside this was an outer court, often with agricultural buildings. The whole was surrounded by another wall.

Abbeys also had fish-ponds, and water supplies for washing and sanitation far in advance of their contemporaries. Three interesting abbeys are Whitby, Holy Island and Rievaulx.

The village of Whitby nestles in a cove, surrounded on three sides by steep hills, and with cliffs to north and south. The abbey is situated above the cliff at the south side, behind the church. Whitby was the place where Dracula landed in Bram Stoker’s novel; Lucy Westenra sleepwalked up the 199 steps from the village to the churchyard to meet the vampire.

Holy Island (Lindisfarne) is famous for being one of the first places raided by the Vikings, in 793 A.D. The Priory was re-established in 1082, and its ruins there today are in sturdy Romanesque style. The church is dark red sandstone, the other buildings grey.

Rievaulx Abbey, surrounded by lush green Yorkshire countryside, was founded in the 12th century, and parts of the church and other buildings, in Gothic style, are from the mid-12th century. Unlike Whitby Abbey, it is complete enough to trace where the buildings were.

A number of ruined abbeys became the homes, in the 18th century, of “mystical” groups such as the Hellfire Club (which met at Medmenham Abbey, near London). These gave idle rich men a chance to hold orgies with a few blasphemous trappings, but some of their magical experimentation might have been successful, and the consequences remain for unwary PCs to discover . . .

The Working Medieval Abbey

The medieval abbey was not just a place of worship, but also one of the industrial giants of its day. Various buildings, especially the church, were continually being rebuilt or expanded. Visitors came and went, including beggars looking for charity. The monks went about their daily business with church services several times a day; they also labored, copied and illuminated manuscripts, and taught the novices. Some monasteries (and especially nunneries) acted as boarding schools for the children of the well-to-do.

Monasteries bustled with farming and industrial activities. Rievaulx Abbey, with most of its agricultural buildings in farms outside the abbey, nonetheless had a swine-house, stables, guest-houses and six tenanted properties, as well as 50 acres of pasture and orchards. Its inner court housed three mills (an iron-mill with water-powered hammers, a cloth-fulfilling mill and a corn mill), a tannery, houses for the tanner, plumber and smith, and other properties.

Adventure Seed: For God, King and Glory

It is the Tudor Age, and the heroes are approached by the abbot of a small, poor abbey that does much good work. The abbot tells of how King Henry VIII has threatened to close down the abbey, and he asks the PCs to come with him to Court to present his plea.

Henry is in a towering rage (his rages were infamous). He needs money, and nothing and nobody is going to get in his way, least of all priests and pestilential knaves. The abbot offers a solution to His Majesty – one that requires the abbey to remain unharmed.

A while ago, a German traveler returned from the New World, telling of a land of gold. The monks have drawn a map from his detailed descriptions. All that is needed is a band of stout, loyal subjects prepared to journey to the end of the world, deal with the Spanish, the natives, the disease, the terrain and the fabulous monsters, and find this source of infinite wealth before other expeditions, then return to the king. “And by God’s grace and His most infinite wisdom, we have such a band here, ready, willing and able to seek out El Dorado.” (See sidebar, p. 109 for information on El Dorado.)

The king is delighted. If the PCs succeed, he will cheerfully knight them. If they fail, he’ll show no mercy. As his jester said, “You can expect a sword tap; either on the shoulder or on the neck.”

10 ✦ EUROPE



The Alhambra . . . a dream petrified by the wand of a magician.
– Alexandre Dumas

The Alhambra

The emirate of Granada, the last remnant of Muslim power left in Spain after 1234 A.D., created the fortress palace known as the Alhambra (“the red”).

The palace and fortifications sit atop a ridge that dominates the city of Granada; the defensive walls entirely surround the peak. Work on it began in the 13th century, but the most impressive parts were built in the 14th. From the outside, the Alhambra appears as a jumble of rather unremarkable reddish blocks and walls. It is the interior design that makes the Alhambra famous.

Like most Muslim buildings, the Alhambra is built around courtyards, with halls and chambers leading off them. The Court of the Myrtle Trees (Alberca) is 138 by 74 feet, with a long fishpond in the middle, banked with myrtles; the Court of the Lions is 115 by 66 feet, and is intricately decorated, with a fountain surrounded by stone lions which spout water. Both courts were surrounded with cool, shaded arcades, richly decorated with colored tiles, and planted with flowers and shrubs – the Muslim paradise of a shaded garden with flowing water.

The enclosed rooms were decorated with colored tiles and intricate painted plaster moldings in geometric patterns. This use of plaster was unusual in Islamic art; the material allows especially fine work, but is also fragile. Some of the openings have the typically Spanish-Muslim “horseshoe” shape. One important room is the Hall of the Ambassadors (royal audience-chamber), which is relatively small but with a 60-foot ceiling.

After the conquest of Granada by Christians, the Alhambra fell into disuse, but never, fortunately, disintegrated. The Spanish king, Charles V, built himself a palace adjacent to it, but left most of it intact. Today, much of its original beauty has been restored, and it is open to tourists.



Muslim Spain

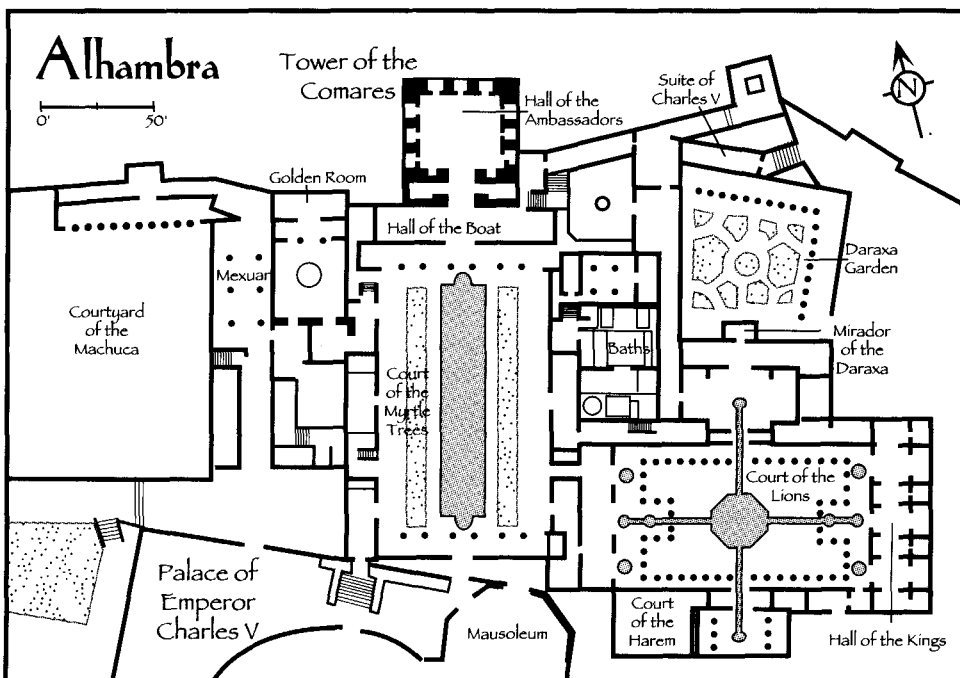
In a mere 80 years, the armies of the new Islamic faith swept across huge segments of the old Roman and Persian empires.

In 711 A.D., a group of 300 Arabs led 12,000 Berber tribesmen across the Mediterranean from North Africa to Spain. The Spanish king, Roderick, was killed during the crucial battle, when some of his relatives abandoned him. The next year, several thousand more Arabs and Syrians arrived to join the conquest, which was completed rapidly.

But Christians dreamed of reconquering the country. In the ninth century, aided by crusaders from all over Europe, they began to push the “Moors” back. (“El Cid” was an 11th-century Spanish mercenary who recaptured Valencia.)

Even so, tenth-century Muslim Cordoba was the greatest city in Europe apart from Constantinople. Its many schools and universities preserved knowledge lost elsewhere in Europe, including writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. The Great Mosque of Cordoba, with its 450 marble columns, is the other great building that survives of Muslim Spain’s creations – albeit now converted into a cathedral.

The advance of the Christian “Reconquista” created an independent Portugal and the Spanish kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. Muslim rulers turned for help to fanatic Muslim sects from North Africa, who proceeded to take charge: the Almoravids in the 11th century and the Almohads in the 12th. The latter were driven out in the 13th century, which left only the small Emirate of Granada. This survived until 1492, when Castile and Aragon, newly united by a royal marriage, crushed it.



Hagia Sophia

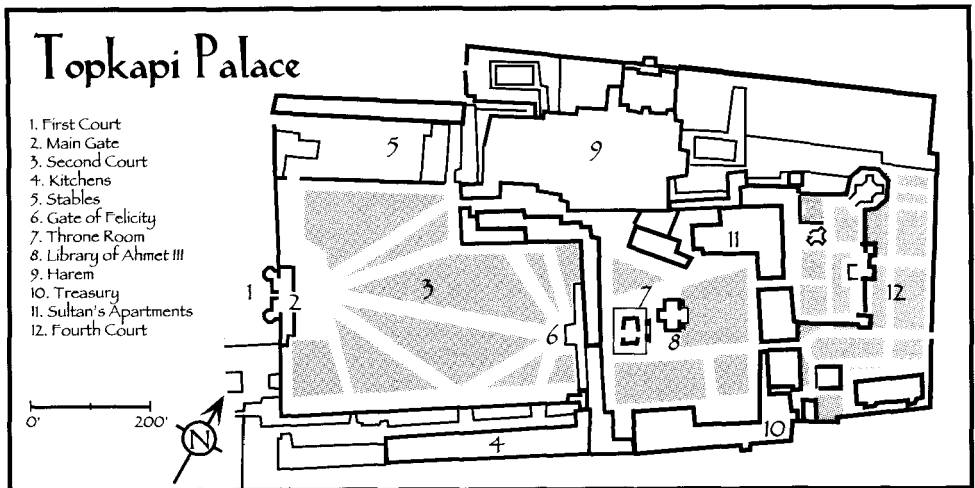
The Byzantine emperor Justinian's reign, 527-565 A.D., was the golden age of early Byzantine art. His greatest achievement was the construction of the Hagia Sophia, "Church of the Holy Wisdom," also known as the Cathedral of St. Sophia. This was raised in a mere five years, from 532 to 537 – an impressive achievement, considering that its dome rises 185 feet above its floor, and its many technical innovations. (It resolved the problem of how to place a round dome on a rectangular base safely and attractively.) The Hagia Sophia has been modified occasionally, and repaired after earthquake damage over the years, but it is still essentially the same building today.

Its plan measures about 220 by 250 feet. The design, which rises in a series of stages, is imposing but a little drab externally; Byzantine church architecture is much more concerned with *interiors*. The internal view of Hagia Sophia gives the sense of a vast, intricate space, flooded with light from windows at its base and embellished with mosaics, marble, and glass.

The Hagia Sophia was an inspiration for Muslim mosque architects, who apparently felt morally obligated to create a bigger dome. (It took them many years.) When the Turks conquered Constantinople, renaming it Istanbul, they converted the church into a mosque. This mainly meant adding four tall minarets – towers from which the faithful could be called to prayer – to the corners. They also covered much of the interior decoration, especially where it violated the Muslim ban on representational art.

In this century, the new, secular Turkish state has transformed the Hagia Sophia into a museum, its original grandeur restored and now on display. It is one of Istanbul's great tourist attractions.

Istanbul has several other great mosques, including the impressive 16th-century "Mosque of Suleiman."



The Topkapi Palace, Istanbul

The Topkapi Palace was the symbol of a powerful dynasty – the Ottoman Turks – and the center of government for a world-class empire. By 1453, the Ottomans were dominant in the Middle East. They captured Constantinople. Renamed Istanbul, the city became the Ottoman capital. As their empire expanded, the rulers built themselves a palace complex to reflect their power.

Originally, the Topkapi was primarily an administrative center. The *divan*, the governing body of the empire, met there, and the Sultan held receptions. In the 16th century, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent moved his household there, and his grandson Murad III was responsible for many of the buildings surviving today. These are a mixture of grand reception halls, government offices, and more intimate domestic quarters.

The Ottoman Sultans used the Topkapi for generations. In the 19th century, Sultan Abdul Mejid I found it antiquated and confining, and decided to create a more modern, European-style home on the shores of the Bosphorus north of the Golden Horn. This was the Dolmabache, a huge and garish building, drenched with gilt decorations, with a throne room 150 feet long holding the world's largest mirrors, and a ballroom with a four-ton chandelier.

The Layout

At its height, the Topkapi housed some 5,000 people. The complex lay in parkland surrounded by a wall three miles long. The public could freely enter the outermost court, which held a bakery and a wood-store; fuel was carried to the harem by a special unit of halberdiers, who wore wigs designed to stop them sneaking sidelong glances at the women. This outer court was notorious as the place where the Janissaries, the royal guards, met whenever they decided to rebel against some royal decision.

Entry to the Second Court was more restricted. The *divan* met here four times a week. A relatively small block held the meeting-rooms, counting-house and record offices, which looked out over a garden of fruit trees; across the court were many kitchens and the cooks' quarters.

The Third Court was the sultan's personal domain, dominated as it was by the Throne Room; the royal library and harem mosque were also here. Other reception rooms in this court were later converted for use as a treasury.

The Fourth Court held a number of buildings, including the ornate and beautiful Baghdad Kiosk and the infamous “Cage” (see sidebar).

The harem, being an addition to the original plan, was attached to the left (north) side of this series of courtyards. It included some 300 rooms, mostly built around small courtyards to admit cool air and some light. Most of these rooms were small and plain, but the chambers used by the Queen Mother and the Sultan and his favorites were decorated with painted tiles and exquisite silks, and included marbled baths and massage rooms.

Life in the Palace

Ottoman court life was formal and grandiose. There were dozens of officials, including a Chief Gardener (who was also the Chief Executioner), in charge of a thousand under-gardeners. There were laws governing the costumes an individual could wear; green robes for ministers, white for experts on religious law, red for chamberlains, and blue for sheikhs. Many officials carried or wore marks of position: the Chief Cook had a pointed cap and a giant spoon, while the Chief Armorer carried the sultan’s sword in a velvet case. When the sultan rode to the mosque, his close escort wore hats with huge sprays of feathers, to shield him from the stares of bystanders.

The Chief Eunuch, or Kislara Aga (“Master of the Girls”), a black slave, wore a cylindrical hat two feet tall, and long silk robes. As the only official link between the harem and the outside world, he was powerful, wealthy, and often corrupt. The Queen Mother was another powerful figure. By tradition, her son had to pay her frequent, lengthy courtesies, and she ruled the current group of slave-concubines.

The Topkapi was more than a private palace. The sultan would consult with his *divan* there, or watch their deliberations from a hidden chamber. There was also a school for future officials – very useful to a great empire.

In 1923, war and a revolution transformed the last, disintegrating remnants of the Ottoman Empire into the modern nation-state of Turkey. Today, the Topkapi is Turkey’s chief museum of the Ottoman Empire. It holds some of the most fabulous treasures and spectacular Middle Eastern artworks in the world.

The Harem and the Cage

The idea of the harem originated in ancient Persia, and was adopted by the Muslim Arabs when they conquered that land. For jealous husbands who were soldiers or traveling merchants, the idea of keeping their womenfolk safely locked up at home had a lot of appeal. The word *harem* is Arabic, meaning “it is forbidden,” and that is what the harem was; a closed part of the home, where only the husband, children and guards could enter.

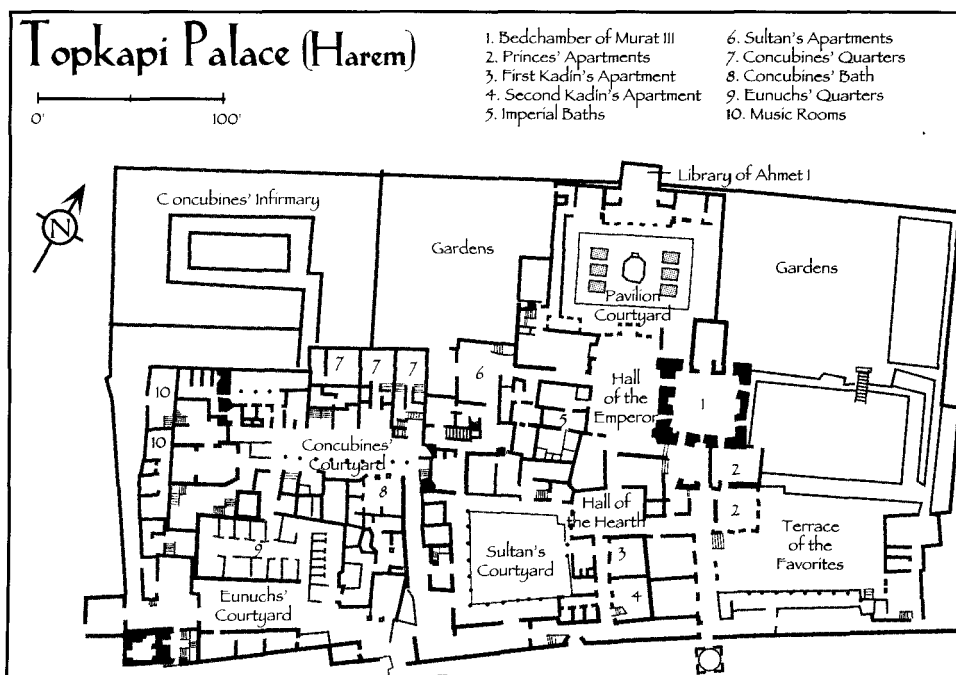
Islamic laws allow a man up to four wives, although conditions are strict enough to discourage more than one. In early times, those conditions permitted many more concubines, for those who could afford them. (Islam prohibits human castration, so eunuch harem guards were imported.)

After one early Ottoman ruler’s wife was captured and humiliated by an enemy, the dynasty founded a tradition of keeping *only* slave-concubines – hundreds of them. A few sultans became so enamored of particular women that they formally married them, but this was considered outrageous.

A slave who gave her master a son and heir was promoted to a privileged place, but after a number of sons (usually four), a court abortionist would sometimes be employed to prevent more. Ottoman princes would often fight viciously for the throne on the death of their father, and this endangered the empire.

Indeed, the dread of succession wars was such that one sultan passed a law permitting his successors to murder their brothers on attaining the throne – and some sultans did so. Living sultans took to keeping their sons or brothers in a luxurious prison within the palace – the *Kafes*, or “Cage.” Not surprisingly, princes who had spent decades in a building with no ground-floor windows, in the company of deaf-mutes and sterile concubines, sometimes emerged weak-minded or insane.

This paranoid situation was typical of the Ottoman emperors’ harem, where girls slept ten to a room and might never catch the sultan’s eye, concubines of a deceased sultan were banished to the “Palace of Tears” to live and die without even that hope, and the present and future queen mothers would sit and scheme to defend their sons, who were their sole sources of vast power. Visitors can still see the warren of cramped corridors and rooms, and the luxurious apartments of the lucky few, but it is hard to imagine the atmosphere that once ruled there.



The Catacombs

Rome is dotted with ancient remains (see p. IR25 for a map of the ancient city), but possibly its most mysterious and atmospheric ancient remains are the *Catacombs*. Roman law stated that all burials had to be outside the city walls. The roads outside the city were soon lined with tombs, and eventually the problem of space was solved by going underground. The catacombs consist of miles of passageways, with niches in tiers five or six deep for the remains of ordinary people, and rooms for important people. The walls of some of these rooms are covered with frescoes, and are shrines for pilgrims. Others have examples of early graffiti, including early Christian iconography, and a soldier's complaint – "Lucius didn't want to be here."

The Catacomb of Saint Sebastian contains the arrow-riddled body of the saint, and is also believed to contain the bodies of Saints Peter and Paul. At the entrance to this catacomb (which has been excavated for five miles) is a *triclinium*, a building which was used by mourners for taking refreshment.

The Catacomb of Saint Callisto includes the tombs of six third-century popes, and was believed to have been a hiding place for the Red Brigade terrorist organization after they kidnapped the Italian prime minister in 1978.

It is possible to visit the catacombs, but only on a guided tour. Tales of tourists wandering off and never being seen again may be more than fiction . . .

Coins in the Fountains

By the standards of the Eternal City, the famous *Trevi Fountain* is a very recent addition. According to legend, a girl showed a group of thirsty Roman legionnaires a hidden spring there. The site became the terminus of the *Aqua Virgo*, built in 19 B.C. The first fountain at the site was built by Pope Nicholas V in 1453, who paid for it with a tax on wine, causing satirists to say "Jesus turned water into wine; the Pope turns wine into water."

The modern fountain was completed in 1762. It shows Neptune, flanked by two tritons and their seahorses. There is a tradition that throwing a coin (over the left shoulder) into the fountain ensures that you will return to Rome.

This is a venerable tradition. Ancient Romans threw coins into fountains to appease the gods. This was adopted by Christians, who threw coins on to the tomb of St. Peter. Huge sums of money are raked out weekly, and in theory, it goes to charity. Politicians being as they are, there have been several scandals concerning the coins from the fountains.

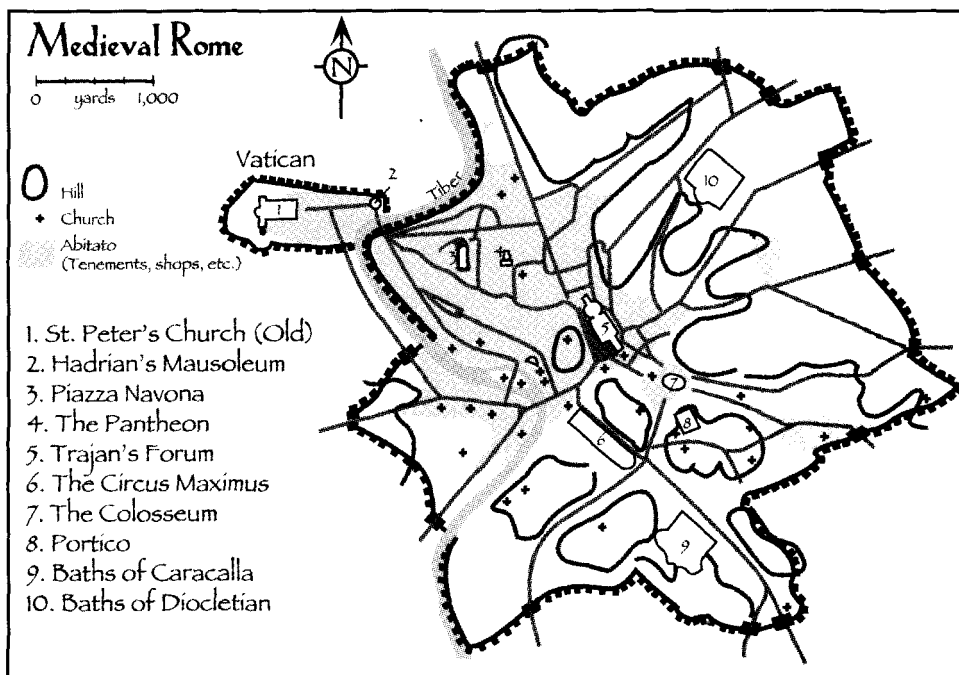
Rome

Although the city had been the capital of a great empire 1,500 years before (see *GURPS Imperial Rome*), the layout of *modern* Rome began in the Renaissance. Many of the great names in art – Michelangelo, Raphael and da Vinci – were lured to Rome by the patronage of the popes, establishing Rome as the cultural center of the world. Here the Sistine Chapel was built, with its famous ceiling painting by Michelangelo.

The Vatican

The Vatican has most of the facilities of a modern country, including a railway station, a heliport, a radio station, and an observatory. The Vatican's army (the 53-man "Swiss Guard") is recruited from the four Catholic cantons of Switzerland. Their uniforms are the red, yellow and blue of the Medici Popes. The official language of the Vatican is Latin. Hundreds of years of patronage of the arts has given it some of the finest art museums and the finest religious library in the world, as well as, it is rumored, libraries of a more esoteric, forbidden nature. (Some of the "open" collections are probably accessible to any scholar with a plausible story, and a Catholic priest in good standing could doubtless get into most.)

St. Peter's Square, in the Vatican, was designed and built in 1656 by Bernini. It is shaped as a large oval, surrounded by a walkway with a forest of columns supporting a roof. In the center of the square is an obelisk, erected in 1586 using 150 horses and 47 winches. The Church of St. Peter itself was begun in 1506, and consecrated in 1626. The greatest architects of the time contributed to its design – Bramante, Giocondo, Raphael, Michelangelo, della Porta, Bernini and others. Bernini was solely responsible for the internal decoration. The end result was the most important church in Roman Catholic Christendom.

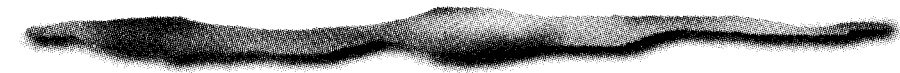


11. AUSTRALASIA & OCEANIA



During the three weeks we lived among the statues, we saw them in sunshine, by moonlight, and on stormy nights. Each time we felt the same shock, the same uneasiness, as on the first day . . .

– Alfred Métraux, member of 1934 French expedition to Easter Island



Easter Island

Europeans first made landfall on this small Pacific island – 1,200 miles from the closest habitable land – on Easter Sunday, 1722. At that time, there were some 5,000 people living there. There were two ethnic groups: the Hanau Eepe (“long ears”), who stretched their earlobes with large, ornamental wooden plugs; and the Hanau Momoko (“short ears”), who had darker skin. Captain Roggeveen and his men found a mixed reception when they landed. Some of the natives welcomed them enthusiastically; others threw stones. The sailors panicked and opened fire, leaving a dozen dead.

By the time Captain James Cook arrived on March 11, 1774, there were only 700 people living on the island. Many of the stone giants that Roggeveen had marveled at had since been toppled. Overpopulation had led to famine; scarce resources had led to brutal civil war. Captain Cook found a shattered people living among their vast, weird statues.

Other visitors came to the island, but were met with increasing hostility – not surprising, since most visitors were slavers. In 1862, slavers carried off most of the adults to labor in Peru. Ordered returned by the Peruvian government, the 15 surviving slaves brought smallpox back to the island. By 1877, there were only 111 natives left on Easter Island. The population slowly recovered.

Easter Island was first colonized in the fifth century A.D. (the colonization of the Pacific by canoe is one of the wonders of human achievement.) The volcanic soil was fertile, and the colonists brought yams, sweet potatoes, bananas, chickens and a species of edible rat. The people developed their own form of writing, unrelated to other scripts, which they engraved on “talking boards” (*rongorongo* – wooden boards, most of which were later used for firewood or destroyed by missionaries). But their most conspicuous monuments were the statues (*moai*), of which over 600 survive.

The Statues

There are two groups of statues present on Easter Island. The classical *moai*, with topknots of red tuff, were raised upon giant stone platforms (*ahus*), which had open courtyards on the landward side. Each clan had an *ahu*, which was used to expose corpses; the skeletons were then interred within the *ahu* (mostly in the landward ramp), and a feast held for the dead. A typical *ahu* would have up to a dozen statues in a row, facing inland. Most of the *moai* were 10-20 feet high. The largest ever erected on an *ahu* was about 32 feet tall, and weighed 82 tons (with an additional 11 tons for the topknot).

Another group of statues (nearly 300 of them), their bottoms peg-like rather than flat, stood on the slopes of the volcano **Rano Raraku**. (These statues may simply be unfinished versions of those found on the *ahus*. They lack the distinctive eyes – final touches, perhaps, that were added at the *ahu* with the topknot.)

The Kon-Tiki

Daring sea voyages in ancient ships seems a popular way of proving theories of contact between ancient cultures. Was North America discovered by a Welsh monk of the Dark Ages? Sail across the North Atlantic in a coracle. Ancient Egyptian and American pyramids look similar? Cross the southern Atlantic in a papyrus ship. Groenlendinga Saga and Eirik’s Saga record that the Vikings discovered Newfoundland? Sail there in a replica longship. (Actually, the Norse discovery of Newfoundland has been verified by more normal – although less daring – archaeological means.)

Such re-enactments ignore the fact that the modern re-enactors know where they’re going, and that just because a voyage is possible doesn’t mean that it happened. Still, it’s good for publicity.

In 1947, Norse adventurer Thor Heyerdahl crossed from South America to the Pacific islands east of Tahiti in a raft called the Kon-Tiki. He wrote a book offering his voyage (and other evidence) as proof that Easter Island had been colonized by natives from Peru (who in turn had been “enlightened” by ancient Norse visitors). Scientists pointed out evidence Heyerdahl had ignored – evidence that disproved his theories – but the public eagerly bought and read more of Heyerdahl’s books.

The Pacific was actually colonized from Asia, a fact confirmed by modern DNA analysis of populations. Which is not to say that Pacific travelers could not have reached South America, or even (though less likely) vice versa.

Easter Island’s Mana

Melanesians and Polynesians used a term, *mana*, meaning “power,” to refer to an ancient supernatural force that was the source of life and death. The people of Easter Island, who were of course Polynesians (despite some claims to the contrary) believed their statues were rich with *mana*.

Early in the 16th century, a new cult – of a bird deity – grew up on the island. One ceremony associated with this was an annual race to obtain the first egg laid by the sooty terns on an island offshore. The chief whose servant obtained the first egg became a ritual figure for a year, charged with *mana*, living apart, fed by servants, and unable to touch anyone. This was deemed an honor.

Adventure Seed: In Search of Mana

Fantasy-game PCs learn of a way to obtain a substantial personal reserve of magical energy, which they may either desire for themselves, or to aid them in some noble quest. All they have to do is sail to some fantastically remote islands, then win a series of simple but peculiar athletic contests, and they will function for one year as though in an area of mana one level higher (in *GURPS* terms) than everyone else.

The contests involve some pretty rough tactics, but no doubt PCs will be able to handle this. However, the PCs may not realize, before they win, that the victors become rather dangerous figures; for one thing, anyone *touching* them suffers a -3 penalty on all rolls until such time as they suffer some disabling, horribly painful, or socially ruinous effect from the curse – which “burns off” the effect. And for another, any supernatural entity for miles around will notice the “mana-charged” being, and either back off or start acting very oddly. And the charge cannot be disposed of. Real, old-fashioned, traditional magic of this kind is a two-edged war-club.

The Venice of the Pacific

The island of Ponapé, in the Carolines of the south Pacific, is the site of the ruins of Nan Matol, the “Venice of the Pacific.” The ruins occupy scores of small islands in a southwestern bay – many of which were artificially built. On these islands are walls, up to 30 feet high, which during high tide appear to float on the waters of the bay.

The builders of Nan Matol used a type of dark blue basalt that naturally formed into hexagonal columns. These columns, each weighing from five to ten tons, were dragged from Ponapé’s quarries and stacked on top of one another like logs. The stonework, although crude, remains impressive even today – the ruins cover some 11 square miles.

Nan Matol was first built in the 12th century, and remained in use as a religious and cultural center until the 1600s. At its peak, the city housed perhaps 1,000 people. The king, or *saudeleur*, enjoyed an enormous residential complex complete with bathing pools and its own temple to Nan Zapue, the thunder god.

Europeans first thought Spanish pirates had built Nan Matol. Others suggested that it was a lost relic of Lemuria, or the capital of a forgotten Pacific empire.

The statues were carved from volcanic rock softened with water. It would have taken 12 men about a year to produce a medium-sized statue, working full time. (The largest statue, which remains unfinished in a quarry, was about 68 feet high.) The statues were carved on their backs; the front was finished and polished before the statue was released from the rock, and erected temporarily for the back to be finished. They were then transported to the *ahu* – precisely how remains a mystery. Legends say the stones “walked” to their destinations, or that “the great magician used to move them with the words of his mouth.” Modern scientists theorize that they were lashed to wooden sledges and dragged over the rough terrain. Or perhaps they really *did* “walk” – hauled upright with ropes and levers and stones piled beneath their heads, they may have then been laboriously rocked back and forth, much as modern-day movers handle refrigerators.

The Easter Island statues are not unique in the Pacific: there are related stone statues in the Marquesas and Astrals.



Ayer's Rock

The first European to set eyes on Ayer’s Rock in central Australia was Ernest Giles in 1872, but the honor of “discovering” it went to William Gosse in 1873, who climbed it and named it after an Australian politician. (It already had a name, of course – *Uluru*, which roughly translates as “The Water-Hole At The Top Of The Mountain Of The Hare Wallaby.”)

Ayer’s Rock is a monolith, a single rock of orange-red sandstone rising over 1,000 feet above the surrounding desert. It has a circumference of about 5½ miles. According to legend, it was created by two small boys out of mud. (Western geologists say that the sandstone formed in shallow seas 600 million years ago, and that the monolith has been standing clear of the plain for at least a million years.)

In 1985, after a 10-year political and legal battle, the Ayer’s Rock National Park (now Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park) was handed back to the Anangu aboriginal people, on condition that it remain available as a national park. Among the Anangu’s restrictions on visitors are that commercial filming in the park must have written permission, and only certain angles are to be filmed.

Ayer’s Rock contains many caves, some with paintings, all of which are sacred. Some are exclusive to men, others to women. Initiates retouch the cave paintings each year before the wet season, ensuring that the power of the Dreamtime does not diminish. At the summit is a sacred water-hole.

Three areas (*Pulari*, a women’s cave, *Warayuki*, a men’s cave, and *Tjukatjapi*, a mixed cave) are off-limits to tourists. New-Agers in Australia are convinced that the Aborigines are on to something esoteric – eternal life and supernatural healing abilities are among the rumors – and frequently ask to attend Aborigine ceremonies. The Aborigines refuse.

At the base of Ayer’s Rock is an Anangu sign which requests people not to climb the mountain, as Anangu belief is that only initiates of the hare-wallaby (*Mala*) tribe are entitled to do so. Despite this, many tourists do climb. About a third give up; on average, one climber dies each year.

Fifteen miles to the east of Uluru is a similar formation, originally larger, but now broken up by erosion, called Kata Tjuta. It, too, has great religious significance to the Anangu, and it, too, is a tourist attraction.

The Dreamtime

In the Dreamtime, the earth is still malleable – the formation of the earth and the creation of all life takes place at this time. The Dreamtime is not the past, present, or future, but another time, where there is “no division between Time and Eternity.”

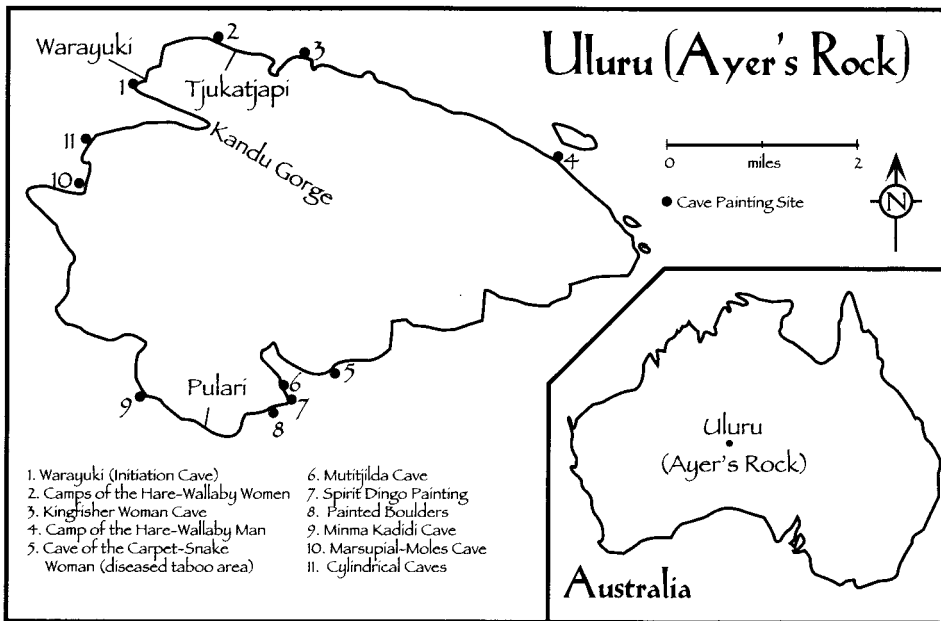
During the Dreamtime, human-animal heroes, such as the hare-wallaby people, carried out journeys and quests. These people also contained the essence of the animal or plant in question. They were, essentially, both fully human and fully hare-wallaby (or whatever).

These ancestors found and made water-holes and created the landscape. Ayer’s Rock was the home of the Pitjantjatjara (Hare-Wallaby People) and the Yankuntjatjara (Carpet Snake People), who fought two great battles before uniting to defeat the Venomous Snake People. The stain on one side of Ayer’s Rock is the blood of the Venomous Snake People.

The Dreamtime links the people closely with the land – an Aborigine can point to a rock and say, “That is my grandfather.” Since the Dreamtime is outside of time, it is quite possible for a rock to be a living person, or a dead one, or both.

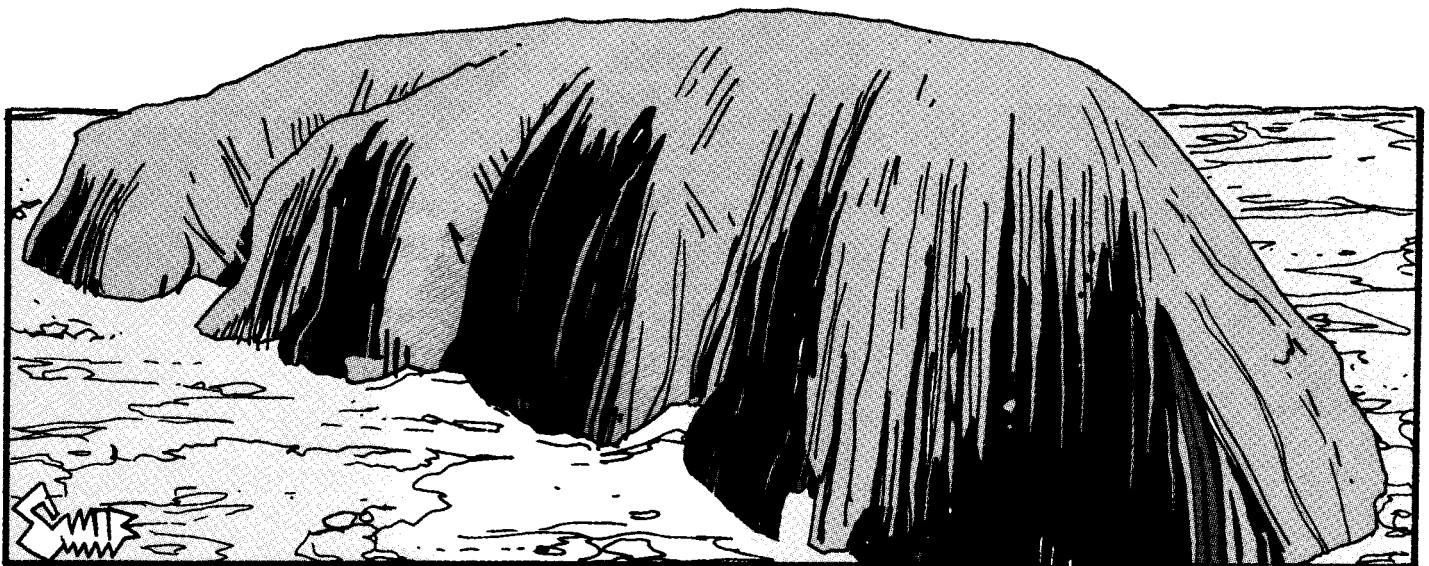
Life is interlinked with the Dreamtime; actions in one affects the other. To do an evil action will hurt your ancestors, and their evil actions will hurt you.

Stories and songs are very important to the Aborigines. The stories are often accompanied by symbols drawn in the sand, on a cave wall, or on a person. Some of the stories and drawings are serious ritual matters (some solely for men, some solely for women and some solely for children). Some are related to teaching important information about the desert. Some are campfire stories. And some are visual/word puns or doodles.



Uluru and Kata Tjuta are key intersections along numerous *dreaming trails* (or *songlines*, as some Europeans call them), trails along which the Dreamtime heroes passed. For a hunter-gatherer people, the dreaming trails were a map in song and religious ritual of the places they passed; although some, such as the dreaming trail of bees, are more of a manual of instructions. (In some magical campaigns, the dreaming trails might be the Australian equivalent of ley lines – see p. 25. Unlike ley lines, the dreaming trails are not straight.)

Adventure Seed: Modern-day PCs with reputations as investigators are asked by a group of Aborigines to look into a certain shady character, who seems to be taking a peculiar interest in Ayer’s Rock. In fact, this individual is a successful con-woman who has decided to hit the big time by creating a new religion, with herself as its chief figure. She’s building up a detailed and bizarre background story involving snippets of Aborigine and other mythology, “Green” ideology, and good old-fashioned mumbo-jumbo. She’s put quite a lot of time and money into this, and she could turn ruthless if her plans are threatened. This adventure should build up to a showdown in the outback; in “weird” games, it could also involve authentic supernatural forces.



12 ❖ THE NEW WORLD



*"I'm afraid the spacemen would have gotten stuck."
— Maria Reich, on Nazca*

The Plains of Nazca

The trans-American highway was built across the Nazca lines without anyone realizing that they were there; from the ground, without knowing what to expect, they simply look like ruts on the desert surface. It was only in 1927 that the immense patterns (covering some 200 square miles) in the Nazca desert, in southern Peru, were recognized from the air. The patterns were originally formed by removing surface rubble to reveal the yellow earth underneath. They have survived because they are in one of the driest spots on earth, and have not become overgrown.

The lines consist of figures of animals ranging in size from 80 to 900 feet long, spirals, triangles and, perhaps most intriguing, some 1,300 straight lines which run for miles, through tough vegetation and dry gullies, with an almost incredible precision (some deviate by less than 0.2%). Many are over five miles long; one is 40 miles in length. The figures and lines overlaid one another in a way that suggests they were not organized to any central plan.

The creators of these drawings, the Nazca Indians, flourished from 200 B.C. to 600 A.D. in a fertile valley to the north of the desert. Their pottery shows figures similar to the designs; their graves and settlements lie near the drawings.

In 1941, Paul and Rose Kosok were admiring the Nazca drawings when they noticed that one long single line pointed directly to the setting sun. It was June 22, the winter solstice in the southern hemisphere. Perhaps the drawings formed a giant astronomical observatory. But Kosok couldn't remain long to study the mystery. That was left for a German-born acquaintance, Maria Reich, whose discussions with Kosok kindled a life-long interest in the Nazca lines.

A mathematician, Reich began studying the lines in 1945. She solved the mysteries of *how* the lines were drawn, but the *why* was more elusive. She concluded that the drawings demonstrate the mathematical and astronomical interests of the Nazcan Indians, but computer analysis has revealed no systematic astronomical orientations to the drawings. Some of them may have been astronomically aligned, but most were not.

Despite their complexity, the technique used to create the figures was simple. Preliminary drawings about 6 feet square (some of which survive) were created first, and used as a sort of pattern for the much larger, final versions. The most likely means of doing this was by measuring the distance between various parts of the figure, and then pacing them out on the ground, inserting poles, and stringing rope between them to ensure straight lines. Curves could be produced by attaching a rope to a pole at the center of the circle. Most (but not all) of the figures were drawn with a single line. It has been theorized that they were ritual mazes, but it is possible that the single line is caused by the methods used to create the figures.

Most of the animals represented are local: a spider, a lizard (nearly 600 feet long), and 18 birds, including a hummingbird and condor. There are two non-local oddities: a monkey with a spiral tail, and an 80-foot killer whale. There's also an owl-man in an odd pose that may contain a hidden significance.

The Space Gods

The incomparable Erich von Däniken brought Nazca to international attention when he claimed that the foot of the condor was actually an aircraft runway. This fantasy has been debunked on various grounds: that interstellar spaceships would hardly need a runway, and that even if they did, they would be foolish to construct one without landing lights, and on soft ground, in which their craft would, as mathematician and archaeologist Maria Reich put it, "have gotten stuck."

The fact that the figures are best seen from above led to an intriguing experiment in 1975, when a hot-air balloon, constructed with materials known to have been available to the Nazcans, took two aeronauts to a height of 300 feet.

So did priests view the figures from the air on ceremonial occasions? The experiment would have been no more indicative than the Kon-Tiki voyage (see sidebar, p. 103), except that it is known that huge fire-pits were constructed at the end of the straight lines, and no better theory has been put forward for their presence. Some figures on Nazcan pottery have also been interpreted as balloons.

That said, other experiments have shown that a full-size reproduction of the condor figure could be recognized from the ground. The Nazca lines may have been intended to be visible to gods in the sky without any of the Nazcans themselves being able to view them from that vantage point.

Figures of crowned men, visible from the ground, are carved on the sides of nearby hills. These were created by the forebears of the Nazcan Indians about 1000 B.C., and used the same techniques; experience with these figures may have assured the Nazcans that their figures would be visible to the gods in the sky, even without being able to see them for themselves.

And there the mystery must remain until further evidence comes to light.





The Incas

The Incas were originally one of the small city states in what is now Peru. By 1438, they were supreme in their locality. In less than a century, they conquered an empire 200 miles wide and 2,000 miles north to south. (To the east they were thwarted by the Amazon jungle.)

The Incas never developed the wheel or writing, although they did have a form of accounting using knotted strings. According to Inca legend, their founder was Manco Capac, who emerged from a cave with his followers and wives. He had been instructed by the Sun God to establish a capital at the spot where a golden rod could be plunged into the ground until it disappeared (i.e., where the soil was deep enough for agriculture), which he did at Cuzco.

In 1437, Yupanqui, a son of the Emperor Viracocha, conquered a neighboring mountain city-state. Yupanqui returned, killed his father and brothers, and appointed a new class of administrators known as Incas-By-Privilege, chosen from the commoners. Then he attacked other neighboring states. Expanding the empire became a hobby for each succeeding Inca, as was linking all the empire to Cuzco by road. Since there was no wheeled transport, messages were carried by runners, and goods carried by llamas or people.

The Incas were good engineers. They improved land through irrigation, straightening rivers and draining marshes. They grew a wide range of foods: maize, beans and cotton on the coast, potatoes and quinoa in the highlands, and the narcotic coca in the tropical forest.

In 1532, when the empire was at the height of its power, the Spanish came. Within ten years they had virtually destroyed Inca civilization.

Machu Picchu

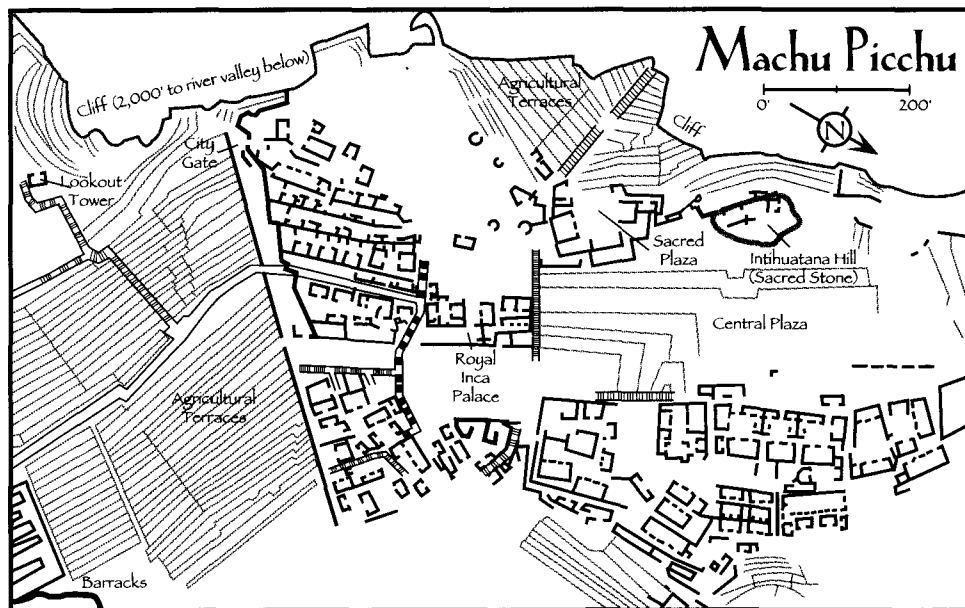
In 1911, Hiram Bingham of Yale University was searching in the Peruvian Andes for Inca ruins, when a peasant offered to show him what he called Machu Picchu, or "Old Peak." After traveling through dense jungle and across fragile rope bridges, Bingham came to a superbly-preserved Inca city on the crest of the Andes, 9,000 feet above sea level.

Machu Picchu covers 100 acres. Steep slopes protect it on three sides; it is only open to the south, where the main road entered. A dry moat and wall with a single strong gate protected this southern side. The ruins have all the features of a typical Inca city: a defensive wall, a water system supplying numerous baths and fountains, terraced hillsides to enable intensive farming of crops, and a central plaza flanked by the Royal Palace and the Sun Temple. The walls of the farming terraces were 15 feet high, with 10 feet appearing above the next terrace. Topsoil carried up the mountain and laid on a gravel base formed the fields. A narrow conduit brought water into the city, crossing the moat in a stone aqueduct, piercing the wall, and flowing past the Temple through a series of baths and fountains.

On the west side of the city is a sacred stone, the *Intihuatana* (Hitching Post of the Sun), a small, flattened pyramid topped by a sundial. Each winter solstice, the Sun God was symbolically tethered to the stone to ensure his return the following summer.

To the south of the central plaza was the Royal Palace, built for the use of the Sapata Inca (Emperor, or "the only Inca") should he visit the city. The Sacred Plaza had two temples and a priests' house. One of the temples, the Temple of Three Windows, seems to have been a combination of astronomical observatory and sacrificial room. Next to the Sacred Plaza was the *Acclahuasi* (House of the Chosen Women), for women who had been selected to be sacrificial victims in the event of a disaster, and as a harem for the Inca should he visit.

The stonework of the city is of very high quality, and uses no mortar. It is so well fitted that it is not possible to insert a penknife blade between the joints. It



has been suggested that the work was done by extraterrestrials using lasers, or that the Inca priests used occult powers to raise, shape and fit the stone blocks from the mountains. Actually, the blocks were roughly hewn, moved into position, and worked to shape by grinding an upper stone against the lower, using a lot of water, gravity, friction and patience.

The city was abandoned by the Incas well before the Spanish arrived – no one knows quite why. Warfare between rival Inca tribes was common and bloody, often ending in annihilation of whole communities, although if this is the case the victors didn't claim the city. Perhaps a disease killed everyone, or caused the inhabitants to flee and never return. Or perhaps a sacred *ajlla*, Virgin Priestess of the Sun God, had broken her vow of chastity. The Spanish claimed that the Incas punished this by killing the guilty parties, their relatives, neighbors, inhabitants of the same city and all the livestock (although they may have been exaggerating).

But there remains one great mystery to Machu Picchu. What happened to the gold? All the Inca cities looted by the Spanish had large amounts of gold, and there is nothing to suggest that Machu Picchu was different from the rest. There are no signs of the gold having been taken away. However, Hiram Bingham never found any gold there.

One recent theory proposes that Machu Picchu may have been an agricultural research center. Certainly the Incas used a wide variety of foodstuffs, but if Machu Picchu was used for research, its isolated situation suggests that the research was on something *a lot more dangerous* than mere vegetables.



Teotihuacán

When the Spanish conquered the Aztec Empire, they described its capital, Tenochtitlán, in such vivid terms that it was believed to be the greatest city of pre-Columbian America. However, only 25 miles away was the site of an even greater city. Teotihuacán (called "The Place Where Men Became Gods" by the Aztecs, who thought this ancient, holy ruin had been built by a race of giants). This great city rose in the first century B.C., and fell around 750 A.D. At the height of its power, it was larger than Imperial Rome. The Aztecs later worshipped at its monuments.

There was a settlement on the site from the first century B.C. The city began to grow rapidly from 100 A.D. It was in a strategically strong position, dominating the best route between the Valley of Mexico and the Valley of Puebla, in a rich plain, watered by permanent springs; and it had major deposits of obsidian, the principal local material for cutting tools and weapons.

At its peak, Teotihuacán covered nine square miles, and had a population of about 100,000. The city was laid out in a grid pattern. Even the river was channeled to conform with the pattern. Most people lived in buildings 180 feet square and only one story high. Each of these buildings consisted of a series of rooms, patios and passageways surrounded by a wall to provide privacy within a crowded city. The buildings were home to 25-100 people, self-contained units with their own drainage system, obsidian working facilities, and potteries.

There were four main structures in Teotihuacán: the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the Great Compound, the Pyramid of the Sun, and the Pyramid of the Moon. These were linked by the Street of the Dead (from the Aztec name; it is not known what the Teotihuacans called it).

El Dorado

When Cortez, conqueror of the Aztecs, arrived back in Spain in the early 16th century, he brought with him gold and tales of fabulous wealth. This set off a number of treasure-seekers.

In 1529, a German, Dalfinger, went into Venezuela with 180 men, and found a village where the local Indians had an abundance of gold. It was traded, they said, from a tribe further into the interior. So rich was this tribe that their leader was painted gold, *El Hombre Dorado*. In 1530, the handful of survivors from this expedition returned to their starting point, stricken with fever, but bringing with them the tale of El Dorado. Dalfinger set off again in 1533, but he and his expedition were never seen again. In 1535, another German, Hohermuth, left with 409 men. Three years later, and with fewer than 100 survivors, he returned with no gold.

The next attempt, led by Queseda, was more successful. He set off with 800 men in April 1536. By March 1537, only 200 were still alive, but they were close to their goal. Queseda methodically captured villages and tortured the inhabitants to reveal the source of their gold. In June, he was down to 50 men, but they were only 10 miles from the village of Hunsa by Lake Guatavita, which an Indian revealed was "the place of all gold." Queseda captured the village, and found gold in great quantities. There was even a real *El Hombre Dorado* – the Indian tribe had a coronation ceremony in which their new king was anointed with tree sap, and then covered in gold dust. He walked into Lake Guatavita until the gold dust washed off.

But Queseda believed he had yet to find Ma-Noa, the capital of El Dorado, which had become in his mind a country. He mounted two more expeditions, both fruitless. Queseda described Ma-Noa as being "on an island in a great salt lake. In the middle of the island stands a temple to the sun. Around the building are statues of gold, representing giants. There are also trees made of gold."

In 1580, Antonio de Sepulveda went to Lake Guatavita and, hearing that the Indians regularly threw gold objects into the lake as offerings to their gods, decided to drain it. Using the forced labor of 8,000 Indians, he cut a great notch in its rim, reducing the water level by 60 feet and finding some gold. Then the cut collapsed, killing many Indians and a European. He stopped work and returned home.

Lake Guatavita is a circular lake in a volcanic crater, its shape marred only by Sepulveda's notch. It lies in the heart of Colombia, and even today, an expedition would be fraught with difficulties.

Central American Cultures

The Mayas

The heartland of Mayan civilization was the semi-tropical rain forest of Guatemala. They built their first temples around 200 B.C. By 300 A.D. the temples were rich, and their influence grew alongside that of the rival city of Teotihuacán. From 600 A.D. on, Teotihuacán's influence waned, and 600-900 A.D. was the climax of Mayan civilization. In the tenth century A.D., the civilization collapsed dramatically. Many causes have been suggested; the most probable is a combination of agricultural failure, external raids and internal dissent.

The Toltecs

The Toltecs, a coalition of nations, appeared just after 900 A.D. They established their capital at Tula in north Mexico in 968 A.D. The Aztecs regarded the Toltec period as a golden age, and credited the Toltecs with great wealth and artistry. Stone columns carved in various forms – warriors, feathered serpents, jaguars – supported the roof of Tula's main temple. The Toltecs also made multi-ton stone heads.

Rivalry between the followers of Quetzalcoatl (the Feathered Serpent) and of Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror, patron deity of warriors and sorcerers) led to a coup in which Quetzalcoatl was ousted. (According to one legend, Quetzalcoatl sailed eastward on a raft of serpents, vowing to return.) The Toltec state was later destroyed by waves of barbarian tribes.

The Aztecs

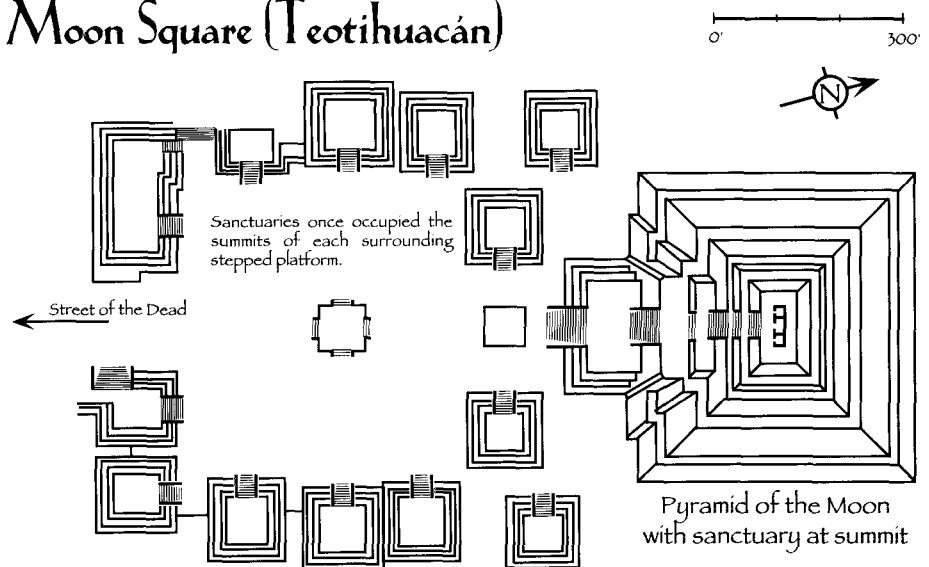
After Tula was destroyed, barbarians overran the valley of Mexico. One barbarian tribe was the Aztecs (they called themselves the Mexica). They arrived in the 13th century, only to find the land already taken. For a while, they existed as mercenaries until, in 1345, they were allowed to settle on a muddy island in Lake Texcoco, which they called Tenochtitlán (see pp. AZ20-27).

In 1428, with the help of the cities of Texcoco and Tlacopán, the Aztecs won their independence. These three allied cities were the strongest military power in the area; in less than a century they had subjugated all the others.

The Aztec period was one of rapid population growth, with resulting pressure on food resources. This led to constant warfare and human sacrifices (an estimated 50,000 victims each year). The Aztec superpower grew so large it couldn't feed its own population, and the city became dependent upon tributes of food.

In 1519, when Cortez landed on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, the Aztec Empire was at the height of its power and still expanding. Two years later, its power was broken, and Tenochtitlán lay in ruins.

Moon Square (Teotihuacán)



The Pyramid of the Sun was the first major structure to be built, in about 100 A.D., and the largest. Each side was 750 feet long and 230 feet high. Beneath the pyramid is a natural cavern that was used as a sacred center. It differs from the pyramids of Egypt (see Chapter 3) in having a temple on the summit rather than a tomb within. Unusually for Central American monuments, the Pyramid of the Sun was built all at once, rather than enlarged by stages. It consists of five great sloped sections surrounded by platforms. The interior is a mixture of mud and rubble, covered by cut stone. The stairway leading to the top is divided into sections, separated by flat platforms. In 1746, an Italian, Lorenzo Boturini, made a map of the pyramid, but it was not excavated until 1908 by Leopoldo Batres. Unfortunately, Batres used dynamite to remove obstructions.

The similar (but smaller) Pyramid of the Moon was built soon after the Pyramid of the Sun. The base is 475 feet square, and the pyramid is 140 feet high. Built on higher ground, the temple at the top is at the same height as the temple on the Pyramid of the Sun. Beside the temple was a stone statue of Chalchiuhtlicue, the Goddess of Water, now on display in Mexico City.

In front of the Pyramid of the Moon is a plaza containing 12 large stepped platforms surrounding a lower platform, which was used for sacrifices of criminals. Beside the plaza was an area set aside for obsidian workers associated with the temple.

The Temple of Quetzalcoatl (which doubled as the city's administrative center) was begun around 200 A.D. The western facade is all that now remains. The temple was a six-tiered stepped pyramid, with an enormous central stairway. The facade is decorated with two alternating motifs: the great feathered serpent, Quetzalcoatl, and a very stylized representation of the rain god Tlaloc. At the top of the structure was a thick layer of shells, beneath which were jade counters and human skulls. Experts differ on whether these came from human sacrifices, burial of temple workers, or displays of captives and criminals.

The final monument was the Great Compound. This central marketplace was over 2,000 feet square. The buildings overlooking the compound, larger and richer than normal, may have belonged to city leaders and wealthy merchants.

Once historians portrayed the Teotihuacán period as one of idyllic peacefulness. Unfortunately, the evidence is overwhelmingly against this: warfare, human sacrifice and extreme variations in wealth were typical. Social inequality led to growing tensions within the city. When the agricultural base was eroded by overuse, the city was attacked and destroyed by barbarian raiders.

A Real Life "Dungeon"

Tikal

The Mayas were a rural people who built religious centers separate from their villages. These ceremonial sites were seemingly undefended – this, and their detailed knowledge of astronomy, led early researchers to idealize the Mayas as a peaceful theocracy. Actually, the Mayas were constantly at war with each other and their neighbors, seeking tribute and captives for sacrifice. The cities were well defended by wooden palisades and obstacles of thorn bushes, which did not survive in the rain forests after the cities were abandoned.

But the Mayas developed an advanced script, skill in wall painting and architecture, and mathematics – they are one of only three civilizations to have discovered the number zero. They calculated the orbit of Venus relative to Earth to within two hours. They are also believed to have calculated the orbits of Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, but the codices detailing these were destroyed, along with many others, on July 12, 1562 A.D., in a public burning ordered by Spanish priests. The codices, made from the bark of the wild fig tree, were strips of paper about eight inches wide and several yards long, folded back to back to form pages. Only three authentic codices survive; they deal with the astronomy of Venus, prophecies, and rituals associated with the calendar. (A game-world rumor of a fourth Mayan codex could lead to an expedition to obscure Mayan ruins deep in the Guatemalan rain forest. GMs may wish to assume that the Mayas' advanced knowledge came from an outside source, whether alien or Illuminated.)

About 900 A.D. the Maya civilization declined, and many of their ceremonial cities were abandoned. One such was Tikal, a city containing five pyramids which, unusually, both covered important graves *and* had temples at the summit. The city also had sweat baths, temples, palaces and ball courts. The ball games, and the consequent sacrifice of the losers by decapitation, were used for divination. The pyramids were painted bright red, and decorated with hieroglyphs and sculptures. The sarcophagi at the center of these pyramids have detailed carvings on their lids, one of which Erich von Däniken claimed represents an astronaut in a space capsule.

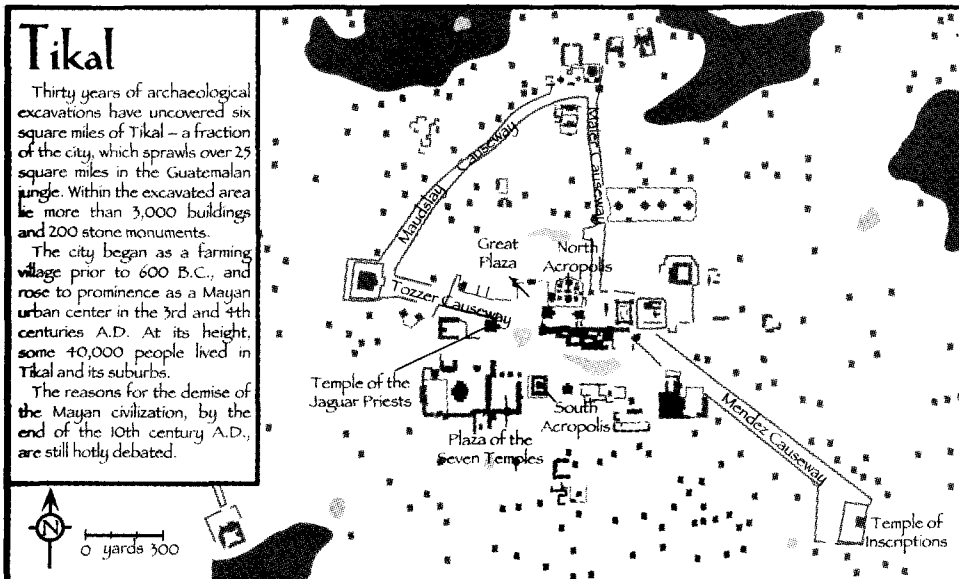
Edward Thompson was investigating Mayan ruins at Chichén Itzá when he discovered a square shaft descending 12 feet into the core of the pyramid. On the floor of the shaft were artifacts, and four graves on top of each other. The floor of the last grave was on a level with the base of the pyramid. Then he noticed that the stone floor tiles continued. He lifted one, and discovered a series of steps leading to another crypt. This room was empty except for some jade beads and a square stone resting against one wall. When he attempted to move the slab, it gave way, revealing a hole in the floor. He lowered a lantern, and estimated the depth of the shaft at 50 feet. He assembled a block and tackle, cleared the debris and had himself lowered into the pit. At the bottom was a mixture of debris and valuable treasures of jade and pearl.

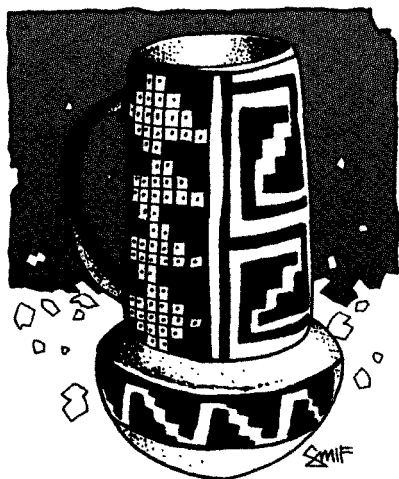
Thompson theorized that this was a Sacred Well, into which women belonging to great Mayan lords were thrown with instructions to ask the gods for special favors. Thompson persuaded his backers to provide him with deep-sea diving equipment and two Greek sponge divers for an archaeological expedition in the Yucatán desert.

After dredging the well, and gathering copper and gold treasures, along with human bones and skulls, Indians assisting Thompson explained that the well was haunted by demons and gods. Despite this warning, Thompson and the two divers went down to explore.

The exploration of the underground stream at the base of the well, impenetrably dark from algae in the water, and with stone blocks occasionally tumbling, was hazardous in the extreme. Nonetheless, they continued to make several dives a day for seven weeks. They found human and animal remains and valuable artifacts, including three sacrificial knives and a stone flagpole shaped like a crouching jaguar. Thompson finished his exploration in 1911.

In 1960, the *National Geographic* and an underwater sports club resumed explorations. After two deaths, a helicopter crash, and a financial scandal in the club, the exploration was abandoned. In 1967, a firm specializing in locating sunken treasure in the Caribbean was called in, and, after numerous setbacks and three more deaths, they were able to use chemicals to clear the water of algae, and investigate more thoroughly. They found many treasures, along with thousands of human skeletons.





Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde

Chaco Cultural Park covers 53 square miles. It includes 13 major Anasazi ruins and 300 smaller sites from the pre-cliff-dwelling period. The buildings were in strong defensive sites, built alongside watercourses, and could house a total of 5,000 people.

The most impressive site is Pueblo Bonito, a single multi-story building with 37 kivas and 800 rooms, which housed 1,200 people. Its back is to a cliff face. The upper levels were terraced. The lower levels had no entrances – ladders provided access from the upper terraces.

The most famous of the Anasazi cliff dwellings, built between 1050 and 1300 A.D., are at Mesa Verde, Colorado. High in the walls of interconnecting canyons perch numerous villages. The largest, the four-story Cliff Palace, had 200 rooms and 23 kivas. Inaccessible, inconvenient, without access to water, and some distance from agricultural land, these dwellings were at least easily defended.

Anasazi Towns

The Anasazi lived where New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Arizona now meet. At first, they dwelt under rock overhangs or in deep circular holes dug into the ground and covered by brushwood and adobe. They entered these holes by a ladder through a hole in the roof. The Anasazi were expert basket weavers, hunted small game such as rabbits and gophers using throwing sticks, and gathered wild plants and nuts, supplemented by growing maize and pumpkins.

Around 700 A.D. they began building stone surface houses. As the Anasazi grew in number, agriculture became more important. They built stone “Great Houses,” with many rooms forming one building. Their old-fashioned circular dwelling holes were incorporated in the houses as *kivas*, one for each clan in the village. There was a small hole (*sipapu*) in the floor of the *kiva*. (According to legend, the clan had climbed into this world from another through the *sipapu* – which might suggest an otherworldly connection for the Anasazi, or possibly that they came from inside a Hollow Earth.) The *kiva* was used by the men for rituals, and as a social club. Around 1000 A.D., the Anasazi began to build their villages (*pueblo* in Spanish) high up on cliff faces. The buildings had rooms that were all much the same size, which suggests a fairly egalitarian society.

Buildings constructed on cliff ledges were several stories tall. There were no doors or windows into ground floor rooms; the only entrance was through a hole in the roof. Examples of Anasazi “Great Houses” are found at Chaco Canyon, and of Anasazi cliff-dwellings at Mesa Verde (see sidebar).

In about 1250 A.D., a severe drought – and possibly the encroachment of Apaches – forced the Anasazi out of their settlements. They moved 150 miles to the Rio Grande, but their new buildings were far less impressive.

Eventually, the Spanish came. They called the descendants of the Anasazi “Pueblos,” and ruled them brutally. Eventually, in 1680, the peaceful Pueblos, with no skill in war, and who hunted nothing larger than deer, rose in revolt. Aided by the Navajo and the Apache, they drove the Spanish out. For 12 years, the Spanish were unable to retake the lost territory. This was the longest and most successful Indian uprising against an established white culture.

The abandoned Anasazi sites have collected their fair share of ghost stories and tales of lost treasure over the years.



Mound-Builder Cultures

"In entering the ancient avenue for the first time, the visitor does not fail to experience a sensation of awe, such as he might feel in passing the portals of an Egyptian temple." So wrote a newspaper editor in 1848, referring to the mounds and embankments erected by a vanished people in Newark, Ohio.

The Eastern United States were once home to three native groups of Mound Builders – so called because of the earthen monuments they erected. Americans of the 19th century attributed these mounds to a superior prehistoric race, now vanished – or to ancient Vikings, Greeks, Persians, or a Lost Tribe of Israel.

The Adena

The Adena people flourished from 500 B.C. to 100 A.D. in southern Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Village-dwelling hunters, the Adena people built mounds representing animals, as well as thousands of burial mounds (many now destroyed by treasure-hunters). The name Adena was inspired by the name of an estate near Chillicothe, Ohio, the site of one Adena mound. We do not know what these mound builders called themselves.

The Hopewells

The Hopewell culture was apparently inspired by the Adena. They mixed cultivation of maize and squash with hunting and gathering. The culture flourished from 200 B.C. to 400 A.D. in southern Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Pennsylvania and New York. They built larger and more elaborate mounds than the Adena. After about 400 A.D., the culture gradually disappeared, apparently as the people became less involved with farming, and more with hunting and gathering. Before this, however, trade routes were well developed; copper from Lake Superior (used to make armor), sharks' teeth and shells from the Gulf of Mexico, grizzly-bear teeth from the Rockies, obsidian from Yellowstone, and strings of freshwater pearls have all been found in Hopewell mounds. Most of their dead were exposed until reduced to skeletons, and then cremated in mortuary areas; an elite were buried intact in the same mortuaries, surrounded by grave-goods.

Both the Hopewell and the Adena practiced cranial deformation, giving children high, sloping foreheads by strapping them to boards in the early months of life.

The Mississippians

A third mound-building culture was the Mississippian, which seems to have been strongly influenced by Central American cultures. Their mounds were equivalent to Aztec and Maya pyramids, with temples on the top. The culture thrived from 700 to 1400 A.D. Its main city was Cahokia, across the Mississippi from St. Louis. There, a population of 10,000 lived amidst a huge complex of flat-topped mounds, dominated by Monks Mound, a pyramid 1,000 feet by 700 feet and at least 100 feet tall. Outlying villages each had their own temple mound as well. By the time the Europeans arrived in the 16th century, the culture had all but vanished.



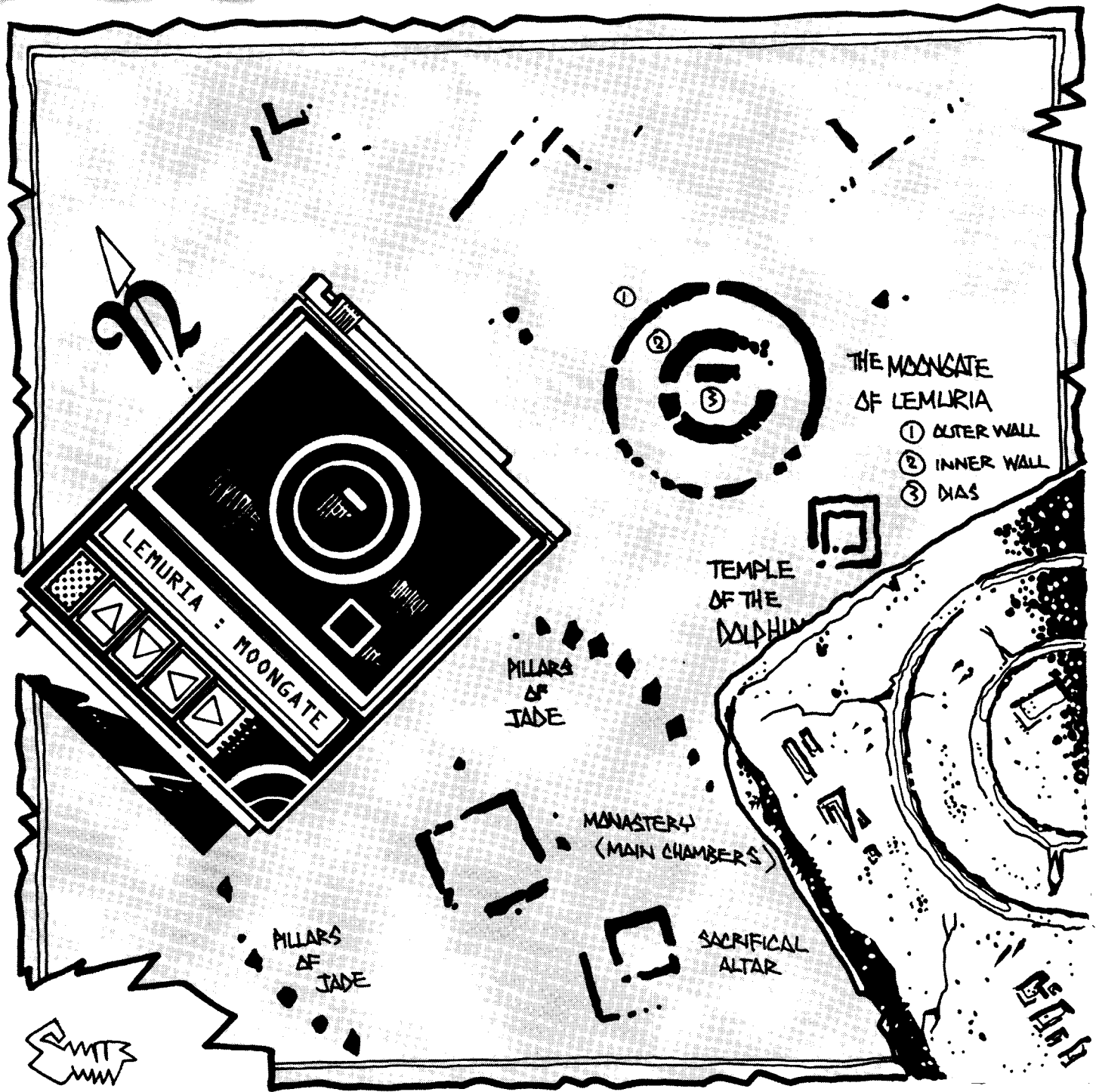
Serpent Mounds

The finest and best-known native-built mound in North America is the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio, produced by the Adena people in the first century B.C. It is 1330 feet long, and 3 feet high; the serpent is swallowing an egg. It may have been a fertility symbol. It was first outlined in stones, and then built up from clay brought up from the river below.

Apart from the Great Serpent Mound, there are an unknown number of other mounds in the form of animals: snakes, eagles, foxes, bears, etc. Many of the mounds were destroyed by European settlers or their agriculture. A great many Amerindian groups built earth mounds of various sorts: as well as the well-known ritual mounds, there are burial mounds and what appear to be defensive fortifications. Three cultures, however, are particularly associated with mounds; see main text.

Of course, although the vast majority of mounds may have a fairly mundane explanation – ritual or burial – where better to hide a mound of real significance than among mundane ones? Provided treasure-hunters and archaeologists can be kept at bay, of course. Perhaps this explains some of the legends of bad luck associated with the disturbance of ancient mounds?

13. USING MYSTERIOUS SITES



*Or haunt the gloom of crumbling pylons vast
In temples that enshrine the shadowy past.
— Clark Ashton Smith, "Revenant"*

Used effectively, "special" sites add color, depth and complexity to a campaign. However, a collection of fun tourist spots is not automatically useful in a game; in fact, some GMs go too far, treating the campaign as a sight-seeing tour, with the PCs as gawking, passive tourists.



In the Real World

The places described in this book can be used in any game campaign set on "real world" Earth. Even if the GM assumes that there is nothing *really* weird or mysterious about them, they make great scenery.

Historical Campaigns

Most of the settings covered in this book are structures of considerable age, and fit neatly into historical campaigns. Some excellent scenarios could be worked up around the actual building of many of them. In other cases, the sites had a significance and cultural importance in historical periods that they have lost today – making them *more* effective in historical games. For example:

Throughout History – The Pyramids: Games set in Ancient Egypt could involve the planning and construction of the Pyramids or other royal tombs (Chapter 3). But they lasted beyond that age; tomb-robbers and archaeologists could be found probing them for "lost secrets" in campaigns set in the age of Alexander the Great, Imperial Rome, the Arabian Conquests, the Crusades, the *Cliffhangers* '20s – or any time in between. ("A Nile Elation," in *GURPS Time Travel Adventures*, is an excellent variant on this idea.)

China – The Tomb of the First Emperor: As *GURPS China* suggests, the reign of Shih-Huang-Ti, the tyrannical first emperor, has great roleplaying potential. PCs might be involved in the construction of his tomb (see sidebar, p. 55), or they might find themselves exploring it sometime after he was finally buried, in search of imperial regalia or important secrets. There might still be active traps – or even *magical* defenses.

Arabian Nights – The Eagle's Nest: *GURPS Arabian Nights* includes notes on the use of the Hashishin (Assassin) cult in games. This book describes their headquarters, high in the mountains of Persia (p. 74). It would be a brave adventurer who challenged them there, but their enemies would pay well for espionage reports.

The Wild West – The Ancient Ones: For a change of pace in a *GURPS Old West* campaign, try a visit to the Anasazi ruins (p. 112). Some enemy or outlaw may be hiding there, or the PCs or their employer may want to trade with the native tribes of the region, or there may be rumors of treasure. Travelers can wander the maze of old stone dwellings, meet with folk whose ancestors lived here – and perhaps encounter some ancient Indian sorcery.

Aztecs – City of the Giants: Teotihuacán (p. 109) is discussed in *GURPS Aztecs* (pp. AZ97-98) as an ancient ruined site, ripe for exploration and treasure-hunting – for which purpose, the maps in this supplement should prove useful.

Seven Wonders

In the second century B.C., the Greek poet Antipater of Sidon praised the seven greatest man-made sights that the travelers of his world could hope to see. Historians, schoolchildren and movie-makers more than 2,000 years later are still fascinated by the idea of the "Seven Wonders of the World."

Only one of the Seven Wonders survives today. GMs running a research or "Tourist Agency" *GURPS Time Travel* campaign could consider sending a PC team on a round trip to study or admire all seven in their prime. It would be quite a journey; although by modern architectural standards, many of the seven weren't that *big*, they were masterpieces of art as well as engineering.

The list changed slightly after Antipater, who disregarded the Pharos of Alexandria in favor of the Walls of Babylon; the defenses of this city were proverbially vast and solid. Some writers also mentioned the great altar at Pergamum. However, the following are the Seven usually named:

The Pyramids

See Chapter 3. By Classical times, the Great Pyramid was already well over 2,000 years old; in addition to its scale, it had the mystique of sheer age. It is the only one of the Seven Wonders still standing today, its form as robust as it is simple.

The Mausoleum

In the fourth century B.C., the region of Caria, in the south-west of modern Turkey, was a flourishing independent province, having broken away from the Persian Empire. Halicarnassus was its capital, and between 376 and 353 B.C., its king was Mausolus. When he died, his widow Artemisia commissioned a magnificent marble tomb, decorated by some of the greatest sculptors of the age.

This original Mausoleum was a temple-like building on a raised marble base; its roof was a stepped pyramid topped with a sculpture of a chariot. It later fell to ruin; the Knights of St. John, who built a castle near Halicarnassus in the 15th century, quarried it for stone. Archaeologists of the 19th century, visiting the remote coastal town now called Bodrum, found fragments of superb marble sculpture in the fortress walls, and more when they began to dig. Today, much of what survives of the Mausoleum's decorations is in the British Museum, London.

Continued on next page . . .

Seven Wonders (Continued)

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

Around 600 B.C., Babylon (see p. 66) was ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar II. The story is that Nebuchadnezzar took a Median wife, who became homesick for her green mountain homeland. So the king gave her a consolation; a man-made mountain, irrigated by fountains and covered in lush greenery. These terraced gardens ("hanging" is a mistranslation) were still around in Greek times, but eventually, the city and all its buildings fell as other empires rose.

This site, too, has become a subject for archaeological guesswork, although the ruins, in modern Iraq, are unmistakable. The foundations of a building that may have been the Hanging Gardens were identified early in this century.

The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus

Ephesus was a port city on the western coast of what is now Turkey, in an area that was culturally and traditionally part of the Greek world. It was once noted as a center of the worship of Artemis.

Ephesus' first temple to Artemis was erected around 560 B.C. This was about 380 feet by 180 feet, with an unroofed interior holding a statue of the goddess. This has been lost, but Roman copies survive; the statue was a strange, primitive, mummy-like figure. The temple, considered the finest piece of architecture of its day, was burned down in a rebellion in 356 B.C. It was then rebuilt with a raised base; this was the building that was rated as a Wonder. It was eventually destroyed by invading Goths in 262 or 263 A.D.

Stories in the New Testament mention the Ephesians' dedication to "Diana." The city also saw some of the great councils of the early Christian church. Subsequently, the harbor silted up, and the city was abandoned. Today, it is an archaeological site; fragments of sculpture from the temple are in the British Museum.

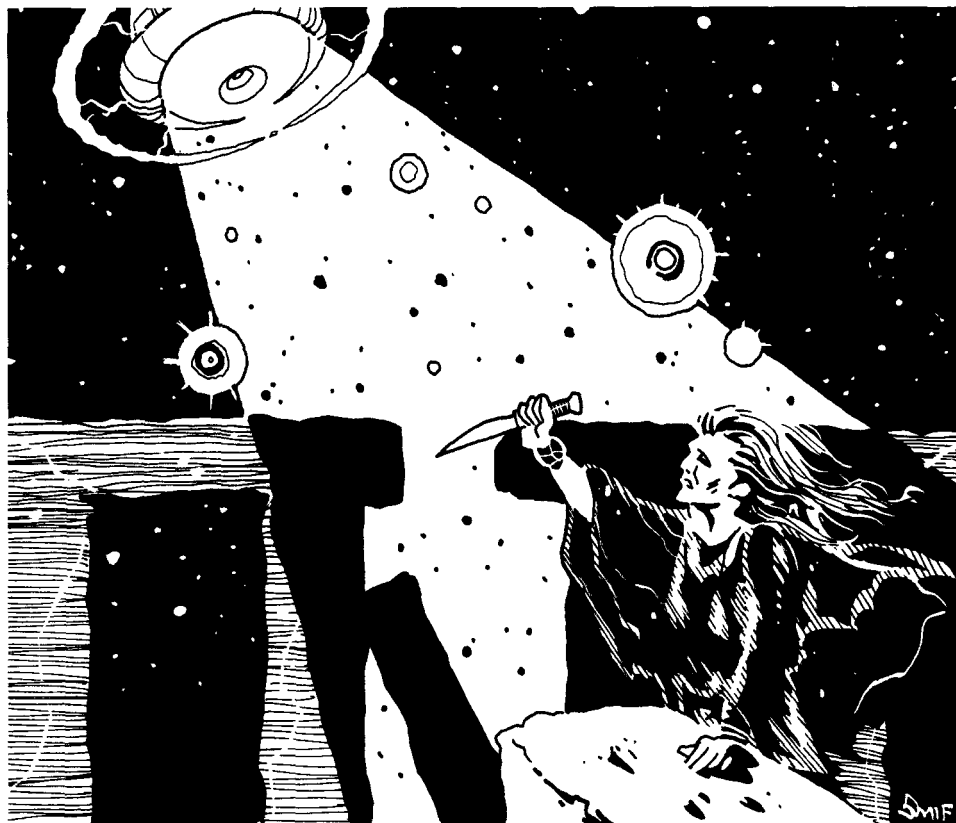
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Many Times – Cities: In most periods, there are important cities where wandering adventurers are bound to wind up, sooner or later, and this supplement covers many of them. GMs using *GURPS China* should read chapter 4 on Desert Cities on the Silk Road, as well as p. 53 on the Forbidden City, and p. 58 on Angkor Wat if the PCs venture into the jungle nations of the south. GMs working from *GURPS Imperial Rome* might consider a Silk Road adventure (see sidebar, p. IR69). Carthage (sidebar, p. 78) was Republican Rome's deadly rival, Jerusalem (p. 70) lay within the Empire, Babylon (p. 66) and Persepolis (p. 68) were just beyond its eastern border (usually), and Pompeii (p. 88) was, of course, a Roman city. And then there's Hadrian's Wall (p. 92).

"Illuminated" History

"Illuminated history" stories are set in the historic past, but with the same sort of assumptions that the "Illuminati" conspiracy theory brings to the present. Such tales explain known events by reference to "conspiratorial" ideas. The simplest examples are novels which mix historical figures with magic, while keeping the magic low-key enough to explain its absence from the history books.

A more complex approach works supernatural powers or non-human beings into the pattern of recorded history, while using them to put a new twist on its odder features. An obvious example of this are SF stories of aliens coming to Earth and providing the engineering skills and equipment needed to build Stonehenge or the Pyramids. Other instances include "Lovecraftian" horror stories in which human beings are little more than cattle, manipulated by powerful, uncaring races from out of time or space, and complex epics in which bizarre life-forms provide the basis for legends of vampires and trolls, while influencing human society for their own benefit. Such campaigns should be *full* of visits to ancient and mysterious sites.



Time Travel

Another story idea that might be called Illuminated History of a sort is the SF plot-type in which time-travelers play an active role in historical events, but without changing anything that gets into the history books – perhaps because their interventions and conflicts are *already* part of history. See *GURPS Time Travel* for more on this sort of thing, including the “Observer Effect,” which makes the idea into a law of nature. “Mystery Places” make great scenery in such games. If the available time travel methods are tied to specific geographical locations, this could explain how some places gained weird reputations. After all, if strangers are continually emerging from a given spot, it’s going to be noticed. Perhaps Stonehenge is a place where a series of time expeditions to the Neolithic era “landed!”

Alternatively, time-traveling groups could exploit the power of rumor as cover; who’s going to believe anyone who starts talking about strange lights and sounds up at the town’s “haunted house”? Of course, the travelers might find out the hard way *why* a spot has a weird reputation – but that’s *their* problem.

It is also possible to run time travel campaigns in which PCs *can* change history, although this is a lot harder to GM. If such campaigns involve conflict, the ensuing “change wars” can get strange and vicious. With the world changing radically as the PCs move through it, major landmarks that predate the earliest changes could be very important references, and make reliable places to meet in the event of unexpected trouble.

Modern-Day Campaigns

“Realistic” modern-day (and near-future) games can use sites from this book as colorful scenery, and some are still politically important.

Espionage and Crime-Fighting

A lot of James Bond movies throw in a scene at the Pyramids, or run a gunfight around a picturesque ruin, to keep the audience aware that events are moving around a lot – and to borrow a hint of grandeur or mystery. Then there’s the sort of world-conquering villain who likes to build a secret base under such a site. Places like the Tower of London and the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul have another important use; these days, they function as museums, holding large collections of priceless jewels and relics. They tend to be very well protected, but to some fictional criminals that makes them all the more tempting.

Nor are some of the sites in this supplement unoccupied or unimportant today. Consider the plot possibilities of Jerusalem (p. 70), Mecca (p. 72), Baghdad (p. 72), and the Kremlin (p. 101).

Horror

Most horror campaigns include elements of the weirdly supernatural, played for maximum atmosphere – and good locations are essential for that. Ancient prisons such as the Tower of London have seen their share of executions and tragedy; not surprisingly, they usually come with ghost legends.

Campaigns with weirder and wilder themes can move in the direction of “Secret History.” H.P. Lovecraft wrote of “Irem of the Pillars” (p. 46), and expeditions investigating Atlantis-style lost continents can encounter a *lot* more than they bargain for.

Seven Wonders (Continued)

The Statue of Zeus at Olympia

The ancient Greeks considered Phidias to be their greatest sculptor; we must take their word for it, as none of his own work is known for certain to have survived. He was in charge of public building in Athens in its age of glory, and supervised the construction of the Parthenon. But his greatest work was the statue of Zeus, which he created for the city of Olympia.

This seated figure was about 30-40 feet high, holding a scepter with an eagle in its left hand and a figure of Nike (goddess of victory) in its right. A blue-black stone basin filled with oil placed in front of it was thought to protect it from the damaging effect of the local damp air. The statue was surrounded by viewing galleries for ancient tourists.

Today, we think of Greek statues as smooth, unblemished marble, but at the time, most were painted “realistically.” The statue of Zeus was made of ivory (for the flesh) and gold (for the draperies), while the throne it sat on was not only sculpted and painted with scenes from mythology, but also inlaid with ebony, glass and gemstone.

Olympia survived until the fourth century A.D. Its shrines were deserted as the Roman Empire abandoned paganism, and the statue was destroyed some time in the fifth century.

The Colossus of Rhodes

In 305-4 B.C., the capital of the island of Rhodes withstood a prolonged siege. When the danger was past, the citizens showed their gratitude to their patron, Helios the sun-god, by constructing a great statue. This structure of bronze plates supported by an iron frame was over 100 feet tall, and it became known as the Colossus.

Medieval and later illustrations (and the Rhodes tourist industry) depict it standing astride the harbor mouth, but modern engineers say that this would have been impossible; more likely, it stood to one side. One early drawing shows the figure shading its eyes with one hand as it gazes out at ships approaching the port. It collapsed in a great earthquake around 225 B.C., before Antipater wrote about it. Even fallen, it amazed visitors. Its remains survived until 653 A.D., when Arab conquerors dismantled it into 900 camel-loads of scrap bronze.

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Seven Wonders (Continued)

The Pharos of Alexandria

Thanks to the campaigns of Alexander the Great, there were many cities named Alexandria, but the name is most often used in reference to the great port city on the coast of Egypt (with its famous library – see p. 32).

The main harbor was shielded by a breakwater, nearly a mile long, which ran from the shore to the island of Pharos. The city needed lights to guide and warn approaching ships, and also a naval look-out point. Ptolemy I, Alexander's successor in Egypt, planned a great tower on Pharos, some 400-450 feet tall, and his successor, Ptolemy II, completed the project around 280 B.C.

The building is shown in ancient illustrations as a multi-tiered, many-windowed structure, constructed of (or faced with) gleaming white stone. The base was a platform, walled to protect it from the sea, with water storage tanks. On this was built a square tower, which in turn supported an octagonal upper section, topped with a cylindrical lantern. The beacon-fire generated smoke by day and light by night. The story is that the light was focused by mirrors designed by the great mathematician Archimedes, and could be seen 30 miles away. Early writings mention glass and "transparent stone" – but the invention of useful lenses was centuries away, so curved metal mirrors are more likely. A dedication carved on the lowest level mentioned "Sostratus of Cnidus," who may have been the architect, or perhaps a courtier who paid for the building.

Alexandria has been continuously occupied since that era – something that is usually bad for ancient ruins. The lighthouse disappeared in the late Middle Ages. A 15th-century fort now stands on the site.

GURPS Voodoo: The Shadow War describes a modern-day horror/supernatural campaign in which "Consecrated Ground" with a long mystical history enhances spell-casting power. For example, Stonehenge gives +5 to all ritual rolls in the *Voodoo* system, and other sites in this book would doubtless do likewise. However, there are some problems involved in using such power; how the Lodges make use of Stonehenge, when it is in sight of a road, heavily visited by tourists, and usually watched by security guards, is an interesting question. Most likely, the Lodges only use it in extreme emergencies, when they can use their influence and powers to have it cleared of bystanders. Most of the time, they probably stick to lesser, remote or unknown stone circles, which grant a still-useful +3 or +4. *Voodoo* GMs may also wish to look at various mosques, shrines and abbeys mentioned in this book.

Supers

A good superhero campaign will often use ideas appropriate to espionage, crime-fighting and horror campaigns, plus more of its own, mix them together and play them at full blast. *Anything* that makes a site interesting could be worked into such a campaign, from jewel theft to mystical energy tapped from ley lines. *Supers* played with a lot of mystical and weird elements can come to resemble "Secret Power" campaigns.

The Settings as the Campaign Theme

Campaigns can be built around the realistic treatment of mystery places. How about an investigation of the legends and reality of the Atlantis myth (Chapter 1)? It could mean travel across continents, fending off treasure hunters (the PCs, of course, being honorable archaeologists!) and mistrustful locals who suspect the expedition of some kind of espionage, and all the practical problems of marine archaeology. For thoughtful players with a taste for background research, such a campaign could be interesting in itself; alternatively, horror investigators could pursue knowledge that they need to defeat some great evil which is rising to threaten the world again.

In Invented Worlds

Many of the sites mentioned in this book may be adapted to invented worlds, including fantasy and science-fiction campaign settings.

Yrth

The world of Yrth, in *GURPS Fantasy*, includes Bilit Island, which has cities resembling those of Central America. Yrth's Moslem lands have Geb'al-Din, their counterpart to Mecca (p. 72), and their own version of Alamut (p. 74) – referred to in *GURPS Fantasy* as al-Amut. There are also cities, fortresses, palaces and abbeys.

It would be possible to transfer some of the ancient and exotic sites to Yrth. The elves, its oldest inhabitants, never went in for cities – but wouldn't it be curious if their pantheistic religion occasionally called for the creation of stone circles identical to Stonehenge (p. 24)? Certainly, if ley lines (p. 25) have power,



the elves would tap their counterparts on Yrth. The Zimbabwe ruins (p. 78) could be adapted as the site of an old Dark Elf center of power.

Suppose that an expedition into the Great Desert or the Djinn Lands came across pyramids, as vast and imposing as their counterparts on Earth – and as ancient? These hardly look like the handiwork of Yrth’s native races, yet they would predate the Banestorm by millennia! Either something like that great failed spell must have been tried before, or the elves or dwarves (or, whisper it, orcs) must have lost cultures of their own, or something even more bizarre is involved – and in any case, a lot of powerful beings might prefer that the PCs not live long enough to find out the truth.

The Mad Lands

The land described in *GURPS Fantasy II* does not feature a lot of large buildings or ritual sites. With their insane and lethal gods, terror of ritual, and sturdy low-tech lifestyle, Madlanders are not the sorts to build monuments or temples. However, landscape features like Ayer’s Rock (p. 104) may attain some importance, if only as god-ridden places to be avoided, and the soulless may be responsible for almost anything – aside from marking the entrances to their cities with stone circles or whatever.

The wider world in which the Mad Lands are set includes many possible settings for interesting features; most obviously, Savarginia, land of strange cities, high magic, and whimsical creative forces, could incorporate *anything*.

SF Games

Space colonies and alien home-worlds can borrow from historical sites. Take *GURPS Space Atlas 4*, for example. The primitive overlords of Monolith, in the Phoenix Sector, could match anything from Knossos (p. 86) to the Tower of London (p. 94). The arrogant aristocrats of the Phoenix Domain might well want showy palaces resembling Versailles, especially on the art-obsessed world of Tara. Meanwhile, in the Saga Sector, the Theocracy on Covenant has quite consciously built cathedrals on the Gothic pattern.

Occultism Skill Specialty: Occult Geography

In campaigns where buildings or locations may have mystical significance, the GM may permit characters to study the principles involved. This body of knowledge is an *Optional Specialization* of Occultism (see p. B43, sidebar, and p. B61). As questions relating to the topic may be highly specific, attracting penalties of -5 to the roll, characters will usually *have* to specialize to achieve much.

“Occult Geography” gives knowledge, not only of locations with some kind of mystical significance, but also of the relations between them, and the principles which make a site special – in reality if these things work in the campaign, in the minds of occultists if not. If mana levels vary from place to place, this skill gives a *very* good idea of the underlying principles. A successful roll will tell whether a particular location has any kind of special mystical significance, and what sort of occult events or beings might be found there. Alternatively, given a map and some idea of what mystical sites or mana fluctuations exist in the area it covers, someone with this skill can plot out the relationships between them, and identify other places of interest.

If the gods of a campaign world have certain known domiciles (see p. R28), this skill includes some knowledge of their locations, although Theology (p. B62) may give more.

In campaigns with Chinese-style magic, this skill is called *feng shui*. The idea is highly regarded by Chinese of mystical inclinations; in such a setting, wise architects will always request the advice of an expert as to the most auspicious design for a new building. (Modern real estate agents selling to Chinese customers can find a favorable report from a *feng shui* master to be a useful selling point for a house. “Good feng shui” may also mean that a building is more physically attractive.) *GURPS China* has more on this, including the alternative or additional possibility of treating *feng shui* expertise as a form of Divination spell.

“Places of Power”

One common idea in fantasy is that of “Places of Power” – sites that enhance mystical activity. Such sites may be natural, mana being unevenly distributed geographically. Or they may be the result of conscious action – as with, say, a temple dedicated to a god whose priests are powerful there. Such locations can make for interesting plot twists.

The simplest way to handle them is as areas of higher mana than the norm. See p. B147 (sidebar), or p. M6 (sidebar); GMs using *GURPS Religion* should also see its rules on Sanctity (pp. R102-103). If a high-mana area is small and sharply bounded, wizards will be very keen to find it; if more than one wizard knows of it, they may fight. This can be because a mage fears that over-use could drain away the mana, because spellcasters get in each other’s way, or just because wizards are a jealous, irritable, selfish lot who don’t trust each other an inch. In such campaigns, a mage who says, “This is my place of power” is talking about property rights, not metaphysics.

Ownership of a small, defensible, higher-mana area can be a good “Unusual Background” for a wizard, if the GM chooses to permit it. The cost would be at least 25 points, possibly a lot more. The GM should also require that the PC have enough starting wealth to cover the financial cost of land ownership, which should be high for a known place of power; *secret* sites should have an even higher point cost. GMs should also realize that this advantage may make a PC wizard static and unwilling to go adventuring.

Alternatively, some locations may be “magical” in more complex ways. For example, sanctity can aid one set of priests while disabling another. Another example is Chinese *feng shui* (see sidebar, p. 119). Such things can be part of the campaign “scenery” in several senses; it is up to the GM to keep things balanced.

If power fluctuations “by area” work for everyone, then characters who understand the principles involved – say, through the Occultism (Occult Geography) skill (see sidebar, p. 119) – still gain an advantage, but that’s a fair bonus to a knowledgeable character. Places of power that favor *specific* characters must be reflected on character sheets. (If a witch gets a bonus to spellcasting whenever she’s standing on a hilltop, she’s more powerful than one who doesn’t.)

Pursuit of Power

“Pursuit of Power” is a mini-campaign that uses a number of places and themes from this book. The campaign is set in the real world, with supernatural forces assumed to be present and real. Any date from the late Bronze Age to the present or near future is possible, but the period chosen will have a significant effect on the “flavor” and practical aspects of the game.

Very Early period games may be difficult. Before the rise of the Roman and Han Chinese empires, the idea of traveling the length of Eurasia would seem absurd. The PCs would have to be incredibly tough, bold and imaginative.

Slightly later *Pre-Medieval* campaigns – based on, say, *GURPS Imperial Rome* – would be more reasonable. By then the Silk Road existed, as did the great Roman and Han communications systems. The adventure would still take years, with the PCs venturing far beyond their “known world.”

By the *Middle Ages*, educated folk had some idea of the extent of the Eurasian land-mass, and even European peasants *might* have heard of China – as a fabulously distant and strange place. In some periods, powers such as the Mongol Empire made the Silk Road relatively safe. This adventure could be part of a *GURPS Middle Ages* or *GURPS Arabian Nights* campaign.

After the Renaissance, European horizons widened, and other empires were interested in foreign travel and trade. *Swashbuckler*-era campaigns could link this scenario with bold trade-pioneer activities.

By the *Victorian* era, the shapes of the world’s land-masses were well known, and navigation was becoming reliable – although there were still a lot of blank spaces on the maps. The journeys involved in this scenario might take one year rather than many.

In an *early-20th-century Cliffhangers* campaign, foreign travel, though commonplace, is still far from risk-free. With the advent of air travel, “Pursuit of Power” becomes more of a long adventure than a campaign.

In *Modern* games (including most *Supers* and near-future campaigns), travel between key events can be quick and easy – but there is still a fair amount of hassle involved in travel to *really* out-of-the-way places.

With a bit of tweaking, this adventure is compatible with the *GURPS Voodoo* campaign background. The Neo-Atlanteans would be a small Lodge (or faction within the Lodges, especially the Enlightened), using ancient ideas to power their rituals. The Set cultists would be a small Dark Lodge, sharing the Crowley Society’s taste for Egyptian mythology (and the Ophites’ reverence for snakes), and possibly serving a Devourer whom the Egyptians knew as Set.

Background (GM Only)

This adventure involves the supernatural, and assumes that a powerful and complex society really did exist in Atlantis (see Chapter 1). GMs wishing a slightly more “realistic” campaign can assume that the Santorini Hypothesis (p. 9) is correct, and Minoan Crete (p. 86) was Atlantis – and that its people included a number of exceptionally powerful magicians.

Atlantean sorcerers foresaw the downfall of their society. They traveled the world, studying available sources of mystical power, bending them to their wills to provide an energy source in the event of disaster. This was the source of the complex web of ley lines in Europe, and many other oddities.



Location-Linked Magery

This advantage should only be available if the GM wants the campaign to include “Places of Power.” There are several variations on the basic idea, and a GM might decide to permit or prohibit each of them separately. GMs can also impose further requirements if desired; for example, Magery linked to a cult’s shrines may only be available to characters with appropriate Clerical Investment.

A character may buy levels of Magery (see p. B21 or p. M103-104) that are limited to use in specific locations. Optionally, the GM may permit a mage to take levels of Limited Magery beyond 3 – making for a character who is deadly on home ground, feeble elsewhere. Perhaps the most interesting option is a character with one level of “all purpose” magery, plus two (or more) that are Location-Linked; in other words, a spell-caster who is far from useless when wandering afield, but who becomes all-powerful on “home turf.” This is a good approach for a villain, who can be beaten fairly easily when he attacks the PCs, but who is very difficult to wipe out for good and all, as he can retreat to a stronghold with massive defenses. GMs should remember, however, that if many mages are like this, they are going to be a conservative, defensive, stay-at-home bunch.

Costs are as follows:

Magery only effective in a fairly common category of area – for example, in woodlands, within 10 yards of a large body of water such as a river, lake or sea, or within the same distance from *flowing* water such as a river or stream, or in a place where much human blood has been shed (a battlefield or the site of a gruesome murder): 10 points for the first level, 6 points/level for levels 2 and 3, 10 points/level thereafter (if permitted).

Magery only effective in a narrow category of locations, or in *one* unique but fairly extensive and useful site – for example, within sight of the salt sea, while waist-deep in flowing water, while at least a mile up in the mountains, in a shrine consecrated to a specific god, or in the wizard’s carefully designed and constructed tower: 8 points for the first level, 5 points/level for levels 2 and 3, 8 points/level thereafter (if permitted).

Magery only effective in *one*, small, remote location – for example, on the peak of one mountain, in a single, remote shrine, or a ruin in the “orclands”: 6 points for the first level, 4 points/level for levels 2 and 3, 5 points/level thereafter (if permitted).

When a cult of fanatical Set-worshippers became aware of the Atlantean scheme, they worked to subvert it. The Atlanteans counter-attacked – but Atlantis was destroyed before either group could emerge victorious. All that was left of the Atlantean sorcerers’ plans were a few records and oral traditions. The Set cultists withdrew to their Egyptian hideouts.

By the adventure’s start, an amoral, loosely organized, world-wide society of would-be magicians has pieced together some details of the Atlantean scheme, and is planning to complete the system of power-sources for its own use. Unfortunately, they have been infiltrated by the cult of Set, which hasn’t changed its mind about who should actually control all this power.

Episode 1: First Hints

The adventure begins with the introduction of a scholar of exotic sites (see p. 124). This individual could be a wandering healer-magician (in early-period games), or a scholar of independent means (in most later eras).

The GM may have the scholar approach the characters for any number of reasons: hiring them as body guards, requesting their help (if they have reputations as investigators of mysteries), romantic involvement with the scholar’s beautiful daughter, or whatever. The scholar has begun to suspect that he is being watched. At the same time, he’s puzzled by many odd-seeming aspects of an interesting site he’s been investigating. He wants to share the puzzles with some shrewd people he can trust, while seeking protection in case the shadowy, non-local characters hanging around the place are hostile.

The Site may be a stone circle and burial mound, a tomb, a subsidiary building complex a few miles from the Zimbabwe ruins, or whatever. It conceals a cunningly disguised key-point in the incomplete Atlantean power-web. The scholar discovered the site when a “local geological subsidence” exposed a previously hidden entrance to some underground chambers. He doesn’t realize the “subsidence” was caused by a shift of geomantic forces, focused on this area (among others), as the powers of Atlantis awaken once more.

The Watchers are minions and hirelings of the Cult of Set, whose spies in the “neo-Atlantean” group have reported that this site may be significant. When the scholar turned up here, the Cult suspected he was a neo-Atlantean. At the GM’s option, the Cult may launch a series of attacks.

Secret Magic

If a campaign is set in what appears to be the real world, in the present or the historical past, “mysterious sites” can only be used for *really* mysterious effect if there is, in fact, more going on in the world than the majority of people realize. This brings the game into the area of “secret history” – the realm of “hidden powers.”

If there is a source of great power in the world, but it is kept secret from most of the population – who’s guarding the secret? What are *they* doing with the power? How much of what everyone thinks they know is really smoke and mirrors?

Some campaigns may handle this by saying that magic is either relatively weak, incredibly rare and difficult to gain access to, or currently quiescent (or some combination of these). In this case, PCs (or NPCs) who gain access to magic gain very special power indeed, which may strain the GM’s plots a little, but which can be very satisfying for the players. At the other end of the spectrum are “Illuminated” campaigns (so called because they are related to things like *GURPS Illuminati*, and because they shed light on the truth behind history), in which huge, all-enveloping conspiracies and power-groups work to manipulate the world (and to keep their secrets from the majority of the human race). *GURPS Vampire: The Masquerade*, *GURPS Werewolf: The Apocalypse* and *GURPS Mage: The Ascension* describe one special example of such a setting; *GURPS Voodoo: The Shadow War* has another.

In campaigns where magic is the big secret,” any or all of the standard *GURPS* magic rules, spells, etc., may be used – but not many people know it. Mysterious sites can be very useful in such campaigns because they provide a sense of mystery and strangeness – and a lot of plot opportunities. Even if the PCs don’t yet know anything of the truth behind reality, a location like Stonehenge, the Pyramids, or Ayer’s Rock, is so obviously “different” that the players should be in the right mood when the weirdness starts. And later, when PCs are trying to investigate these powers, historically “interesting” sites often provide obvious places to start looking. The “location-linked magic” discussed in this book (see sidebar, p. 121) can then become a key part of the campaign.

The Neo-Atlanteans are not involved at this stage of the adventure; they don’t need to visit every point on the power-network to activate it.

Mystical Investigation will discover little at the site. The GM might or might not let informational spells or psychic powers sense something significant about the site, but there will be few details available. Little power is flowing through the web as yet.

The Big Clue comes with the discovery of a previously-hidden chamber at the site. Within this is a curious decoration carved on the stone wall. This is actually a remarkably accurate map of much of the world – with this site, and a number of others, clearly marked with gemstones or complex symbols.

Episode 2: Skirmishes Around the Map

Although the map is authentically ancient, it *looks* like an outrageously implausible fake. There’s only one thing to do: investigate the other sites.

The locations in question should be as widespread as campaign specifics make appropriate. In an early-period game, they should be local; in a modern campaign, they can be world-wide. The map itself may be moved if necessary.

The cult of Set soon learns or guesses that the scholar and his new friends are on to something. While it may attempt to get hold of copies of the map or other data, the cult’s main tactic will be to shadow the investigators as they tour the sites marked on the map. Higher-ranking members of the cult will soon be assigned to the matter – perhaps even a priest (see sidebar, p. 36).

The neo-Atlanteans may become aware of the scholar, especially if anything about the map has been made public. They will *certainly* realize that something is happening as this phase of the adventure proceeds. Ideally, the neo-Atlanteans would like to divert anyone who may interfere with their schemes. However, their physical resources are limited, and they are not as brutal as the snake-cult. Blatant attacks are not their style. Exactly how their agents behave is up to the GM, but they should act as an enigmatic “third force” at this stage, watching, sometimes making trouble, even seeming helpful at times. If any of the “neo-Atlanteans” are caught, they will sincerely deny any involvement in events that were actually due to the Set cultists. These are likely to be hirelings or low-ranking members of the group – largely ignorant of what’s really going on.

The scholar will insist on visiting a number of the sites on the map, trying to find common features or elements. At each site, one name crops up – that of a noted traveler of the previous century, who seems to have been interested in exactly the same sites. This individual’s personal notes and diaries were never published, and these may contain some clue about his discoveries. The problem will be finding them.

In fact, this long-dead scholar was a renegade member of the Atlantean society who thought he could reactivate the ancient powers for his own use. Failing that, he wandered the world, and died in obscurity in a Tibetan lamasery.

The last thing he was *known* to have done was to set out to travel the length of the Silk Road, visiting cities and scholars on the way. There are hints that he passed some of his knowledge on to those he talked with.

As the newcomers’ interest in this traveler grows, the Atlanteans attack more directly, with high-ranking geomancers (see p. 24) personally involved.

The neo-Atlanteans would *love* to divert these tough adventurer-types into conflict with the Set worshipers, whom they now recognize as enemies. The PCs should eventually realize that they should resist any diversions from the trail of the traveler.

Episode 3: The Silk Road

In this phase, the adventurers set off along the Silk Road. On the way, they can encounter a desert merchant (p. 50) who could be a useful ally, an agent of their opponents, a red herring, or just a piece of local color. The precise route they take can vary – a detour to Alamut to search through the mystic doctrines of the Isma'ilis could be interesting.

If the campaign has a medieval setting, the GM might choose to involve one of the real-life travelers of the era. Marco Polo (sidebar, p. 42) would be an obvious choice. The adventurers might accompany him some of the way, or (in a slightly later period) could consult with him in his Italian mansion before setting out. Ibn Battuta is another possibility.

The difficulties encountered on the journey will vary with the period. A modern-day traveler would have to negotiate passage through Iran, the new Muslim states of Central Asia, parts of China that are generally closed to visitors, and so on. In the age of Kublai Khan, the Mongols enforced peace over the same area, and merchant-travelers wouldn't have to worry about anything more than minor local corruption and the boldest of bandits. At other times, the Mongol hordes would be on the rampage. In the *Cliffhanger's* 1920s, there were battles between the communist government of Russia and its "White Russian" enemies, and political uncertainty and "warlordism" in China.

The cult of Set now know that the companions know something useful, and might be unsure whether to take them prisoner and torture the truth out of them, or just to follow them and steal what they find. Similarly, the Atlanteans will consider the interlopers a nuisance and perhaps a threat, with an interest in one of their own more embarrassing renegades. Much depends on what the GM decides the two groups' effective resources are in remote areas.

Then there's the data that the heroes are actually after. This is a manuscript, written in shaky handwriting and old-fashioned language, lost in a corner of some private library. The PCs should have a least a brief chance to read it, when they eventually find it; it doesn't make a huge amount of difference to the plot of the campaign, but it may tell them something of the background.



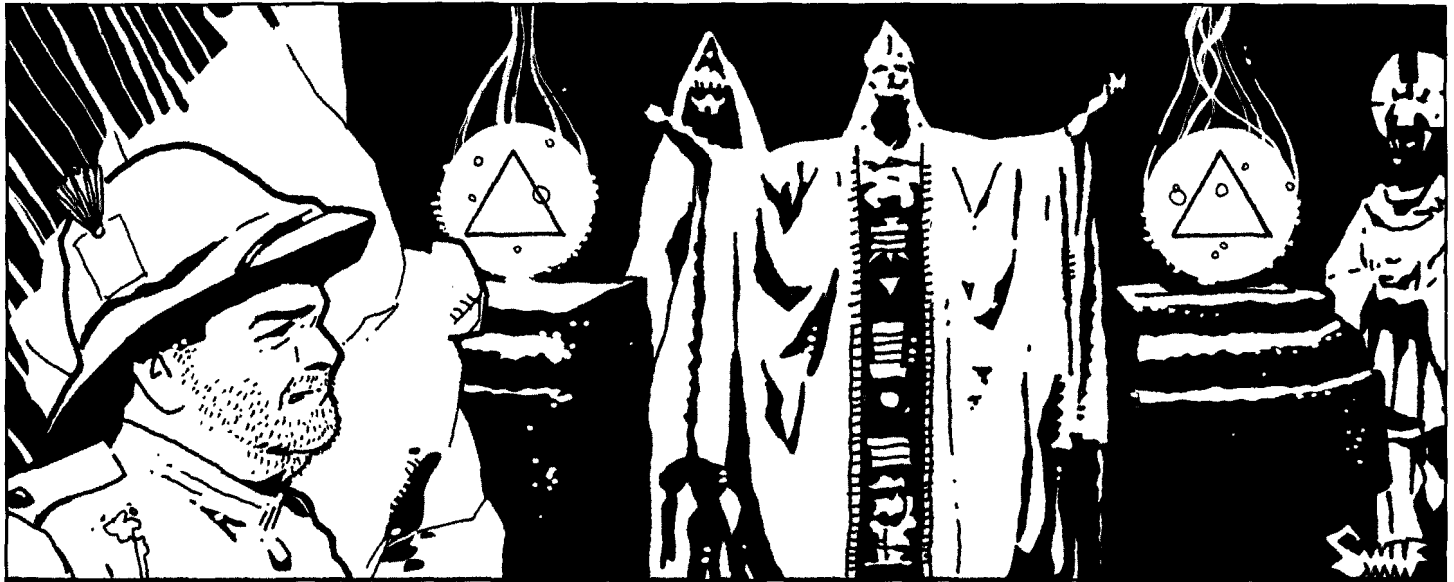
Conspiracy Theory Skill

This Mental/Very Hard skill defaults to History-4 or Occultism-4.

This is the study of the interlocking network of conspiracies that has been created by secretive forces throughout history. Someone who has studied it can answer questions about the conspiratorial view of history – i.e., the various groups thought to be behind the assassination of President Kennedy, or the French Revolution. The skill tends to involve a fair amount of knowledge of Mysterious Places, because (a) weird and important things happened there, and (b) places have a significance of their own, "beyond the understanding of conventional scholarship." It does not automatically give knowledge of how any conspiracy works today, but the possessor may be able to determine whether a strange occurrence is truly a coincidence, or the result of a conspiracy's machinations. There may be a penalty of -1 to -5, depending on circumstances (GM's option). Only a critical success will give details as to which conspiratorial group is involved, or why.

Other skills, such as Criminology or Occultism, may also be used to determine that some event or object is strange and wrong, but this one is very useful for the task. Note that it gives knowledge of what really happened in history – as opposed to the "official line," which is what a character with "ordinary" History skill thinks happened. This can be useful when studying ancient sites, as they very often show features that puzzle archaeologists who are blind to the strange truth . . .

This skill could also be available in campaigns with little or no "strangeness," where it would simply indicate an understanding (with or without belief) of an advanced and complex delusion. "Proper" historians always regard students of Secret History as cranks – with justice, here – but it may still provide occasional insights and useful ideas on subjects such as ancient architecture. After all, many temples and such were built by people with weird ideas; it may be that only another crank can comprehend the ideas involved!



Sample Character: Scholar of Exotic Sites

ST 8, DX 9, IQ 14, HT 10.
Speed 4.75, Move 4.
Dodge 4.

Advantages: Intuition; Language Talent +2; Literacy (if not universal); Reputation +2 among academics on 7-; Status +2; Comfortable Wealth.

Disadvantages: Physical disadvantages at the GM's option, plus Academic's Code of Honor (always acknowledge others' work, always defend own legitimate claims to credit, never destroy source material); Compulsive Behavior (obsessed with the study of mysterious sites); Stubbornness; Reputation -3 among *stuffy and conservative* academics on 10- ("that crank!"). Absent-Mindedness, Gullibility, etc., are not actually required.

Quirks: GM's option, but any assortment of stock crazy-scientist details will do.

Skills: Anthropology-13; Archaeology-15; Architecture-13; Astronomy-12; Climbing-10; First Aid-14; Geology-13; History-15; Navigation-12; Occultism/Occult Geography speciality-13/19; Riding (as required to get around remote sites)-10; Secret History-14 (with default from History); Teaching-13; Theology-13.

Continued on next page . . .

The cult of Set has very good reasons to want the traveler's manuscript. Their whole scheme depends on hijacking the power of the mystical web; for this, they need information. A manuscript written by a renegade from the Atlantean movement would be *perfect*. So, shortly after the PCs find it, the cultists attack in force. They will use every dirty trick in the book (sneak attacks, infiltration, impersonation, threatening innocents) to get what they want – and the cult's junior members are brainwashed fanatics who will die on command.

Episode 4: Showdown with the Snake-Cult

This episode brings our heroes to a second, climactic battle with the villains (the cult of Set). There are two possible routes to the Big Battle:

If the cultists capture the manuscript shortly after it's located, the "Atlanteans" may come forward with more information about what is at stake. In any case, the investigators should guess that anything the fanatical cult members want *this* badly should be kept out of their hands. This could lead to a chase across Central Asia as the cultists attempt to get the manuscript back to their high priests in Egypt.

If the adventurers managed to keep the manuscript out of the hands of the fanatics, they may be unsure of what to do next. Options for the GM to steer the adventure toward the climactic battle include having a captured cultist give away too much (either under interrogation, or in an excess of sneering); having the neo-Atlanteans come forward to ask for assistance; or having a careful reading of the manuscript give further clues. The cultists still pose a real threat; the only way to win is to carry the fight to them. The scholar or the neo-Atlanteans will be willing to bankroll the PCs for such an assault, though their funds are limited.

The GM can play up a sense of paranoia. It should be clear by now that the cult of Set has spies and secret members throughout the world. These can include officials in Cairo and elsewhere, and infiltrators in groups friendly to the PCs. Setting up the attack, in the face of subtle obstructions, could be tricky.

The cult of Set has a base in a hidden chamber beneath one of the Pyramids – an atmospheric setting for the big battle. GMs who like melodrama can throw in a human sacrifice as a key feature of the important ritual. The cult has lots of moderately competent guards and followers, and a number of priests (see p. 36) controlling things. The latter are not great tacticians; waves of fanatical followers overwhelm most problems without much need for subtlety. On the other hand, those fanatic followers *are* going to be a problem.

Even if the PCs appear to arrive too late to prevent the cultists executing the complex ritual that gives them power over the ley lines and Feng Shui, all need not be lost. The neo-Atlanteans have a counter-ritual prepared. This works best if a spell-casting, psionically talented, or scholarly PC is able to play a crucial role in this procedure from the place where the Set-cult was working. Alternatively, their NPC scholar ally can do this, perhaps suffering a fatal heart attack in the process (very nobly).

With the snake-cult defeated, the investigators may even feel safe. However, that is a mistake. As they stand in or near the place of the key ritual, the complex world-map design on the walls begins to glow and shimmer with arcane power, and a severe earthquake strikes. The place looks unsafe; escape seems wise. When they get outside, they learn that news is beginning to flow in from whatever sources seem appropriate to the campaign era and style (radio reports, telegraphs, telepathic communications between wizards, whatever); there's been an unprecedented series of quakes and volcanic eruptions around the world. Eventually, if the PCs don't start putting clues together, an NPC can. The mystical web, created by the Atlantean mages, is reawakening, and this may not be a good thing.

Episode 5: A Web of Power

The heroes must prevent the restoration of the power-web, tainted as it is by evil magic. This brings them into direct conflict with people who may have been their allies against Set. (Alternatively, the GM can have the neo-Atlanteans help to deactivate a power that the cult of Set has magically corrupted.)

The PCs must set up counter-rituals in various key sites around the world, and coordinate them to occur at exactly the same time. In a modern-era game, this just means using good telecommunications; in ancient times, it may mean using Astronomy skills (finding and employing a talented NPC if they lack the knowledge) to synchronize things. Of course, if anyone has mastered the Ley Communication spell (sidebar, p. 26), that would be a great help. The task can be accomplished by scattering the PCs, or by some deft diplomacy to persuade others to do the job.

The key ritual can only be performed in one spot; the site of Atlantis itself. This may mean the Minoan palace at Knossos, or a spot in the Atlantic ocean. In either case, there may be complicating factors, such as a nearby volcano (Santorini in the former case, one on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge in the latter) being affected by the geomantic power-surge, showing unexpected signs of life, and threatening to blow.

Additional fun can be had if a last remnant of the cult of Set shows up, trying to snatch victory from the ashes of defeat. But factions (or all) of the neo-Atlantean group can be quite enough trouble, as they attempt to ensure the ultimate completion of their ancient plan – no matter what the cost!

Eventually, the PCs should win through, but things should get pretty badly out of hand towards the end, with a lot of instability left in the geomantic forces. In fact, they find only one outlet – the volcano! Anyone at sea should find themselves fleeing before the tidal waves; if they are on land, they should have to run from vengeful enemies. Eventually, with a dust-cloud blocking the sun, they should find shelter as reports come in of their success.

The epilogue to the adventure comes “The Next Morning,” with the PCs sitting around watching the sunrise through the murk. Neither of the world-spanning conspiracies has won, and the stellar and geomantic alignments have changed; things should be safe for a few more centuries.

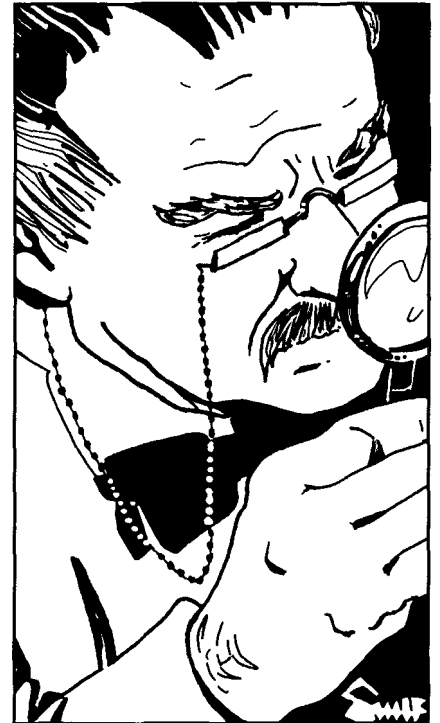
Sample Character: Scholar of Exotic Sites (Continued)

Languages: Native, plus one or two that are useful in dealing with other academics, and a little of three or four ancient or arcane tongues. For example, a modern American might have German and French for international conferences, and Latin, Classical Greek, and a smidgen of Classical Arabic and Sanskrit.

This is a “template” for a character who could appear in almost any historical period; a capable academic who has discovered something of the nature of Places of Power and the true course of history, and who now wishes to know more.

The scholar could be encountered as an advisor, a chance-met traveling companion, a rival, or a victim of dangerous forces. However, perhaps his best use is as a patron. Not being especially adept in combat, the scholar might hire adventurer PCs as guards or guides; alternatively, his research might turn up evidence of a dangerous conspiracy, and the PCs might be the only people able to act against it – and willing to listen to the scholar's warnings.

Some GMs – especially in *Cliffhangers* campaigns – may wish to add a Dependent “Beautiful Daughter, Loved One.”



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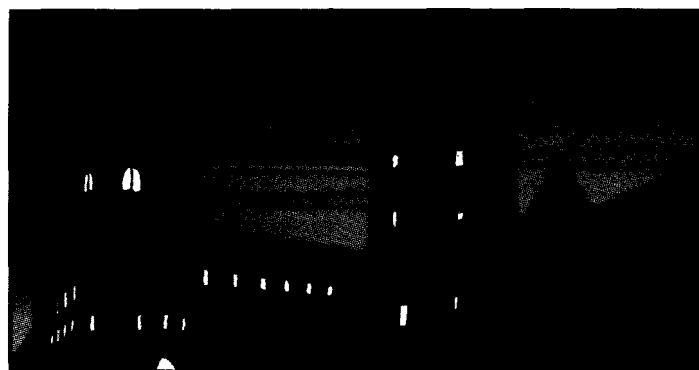
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