

G U R P S[®]

PLACES OF MYSTERY



By Phil Masters and Alison Brooks

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

LOST WORLDS. HIDDEN CITIES. HOLY GROUND.

Have you ever wanted to visit Stonehenge? With *GURPS Places of Mystery*, you can. Or uncover the mystery of the lost city of Atlantis. Travel back in time to ancient Babylon. Journey to Shangri-la and explore the Dreamtime beneath Ayers Rock. Endless adventure awaits within these pages.

This book includes:

- Complete chapters on Atlantis, the Stone Circles of Europe, the Pyramids, and Desert Cities.
- Dozens of shorter descriptions: chapters cover Asia and the Middle East (including the Forbidden City, the Taj Mahal, and Babylon); Africa and Europe (with the Zimbabwe ruins, Istanbul and Camelot); and Australasia, Oceania, and the Americas (complete with Easter Island, the Plains of Nazca, and the Anasazi enigma).



- An outline for the “Secret History” campaign, allowing PCs to wield subtle magic or lost technology in the real world, past or present.

- Rules for “Places of Power” – letting you create wizards who are deadly on their own home grounds, or mystic sites that give incredible power to all magicians.

Plus:
ley lines, the Loch Ness monster, cities underground and beneath the sea, King Solomon’s Mines, ghosts and haunted places, geomancy, space gods, ancient navigators, and the Seven Wonders of the World.

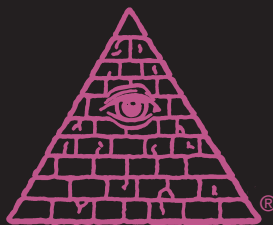
**The world is stranger than you think.
It’s time to go see the sights.**

Written by Phil Masters and Alison Brooks

Edited by Ann Dupuis

Cover by Jeff Koke

Illustrated by Dan Smith
and Shea Ryan



STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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GURPS®

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by Alison Brooks and Phil Masters

Editing and Cartography by Ann Dupuis
Cover by Jeff Koke • Illustrated by Dan Smith



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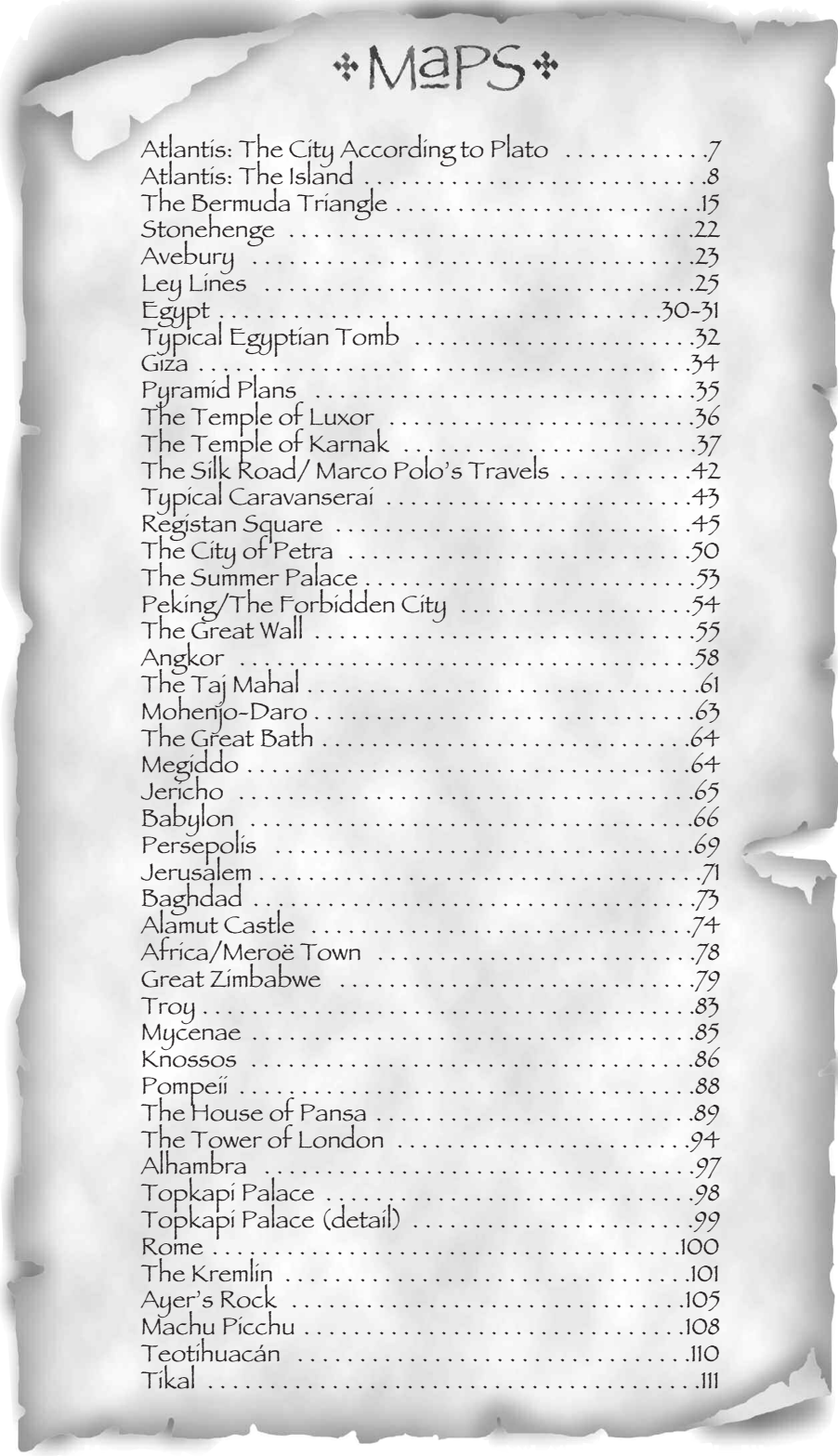
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❖ INTRODUCTION ❖

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!

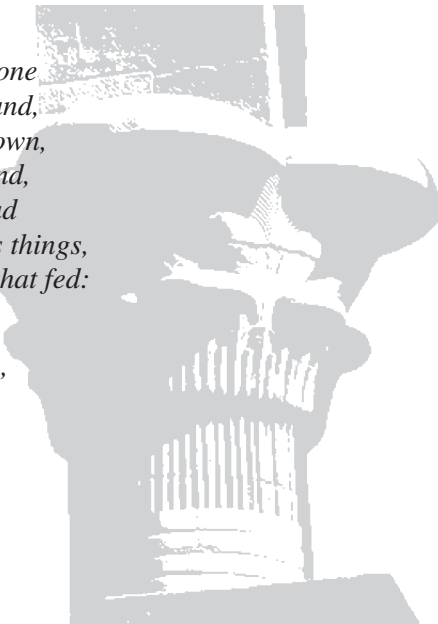
Illuminati Online. For those who have home computers, Illuminati Online supports SJ Games with discussion areas for many games, including **GURPS**. Here's where we do a lot of our playtesting! It's up 24 hours per day at 512-448-8950, at up to 28.8K baud (28.8 users should dial directly to 512-448-8988) – 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 cyberware soldiers, 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.uk, or on CompuServe at 100044,3123.

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 Hallows’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.

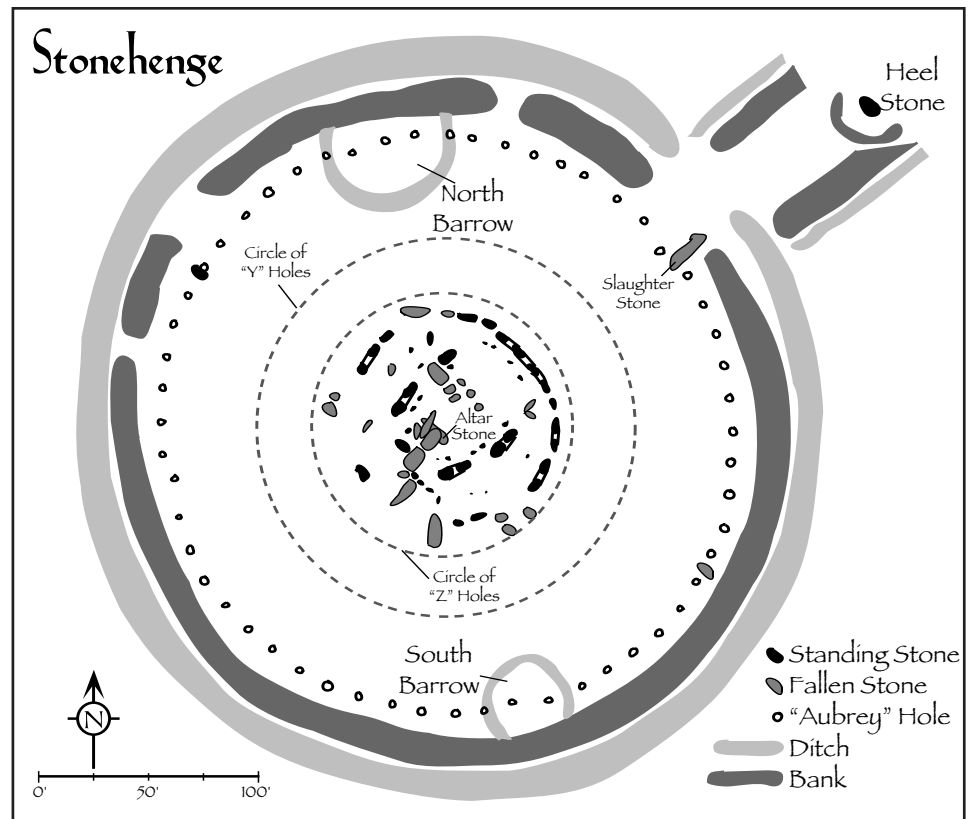
Woodhenge

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.



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 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.

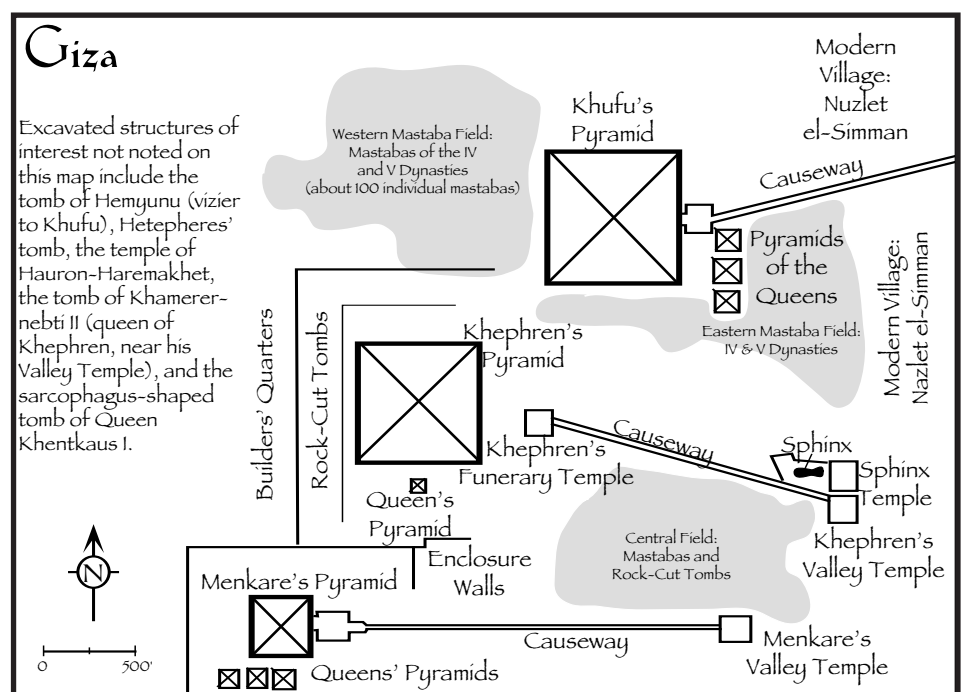
Snefru, who ordered construction of the Bent Pyramid, was apparently unsatisfied, and had yet another pyramid built. The Red Pyramid, constructed of reddish sandstone underneath the white limestone facing (now missing), is the only pyramid designed entirely with its sides at a 43.5° angle. Later pyramids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



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.

"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 overlie 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.



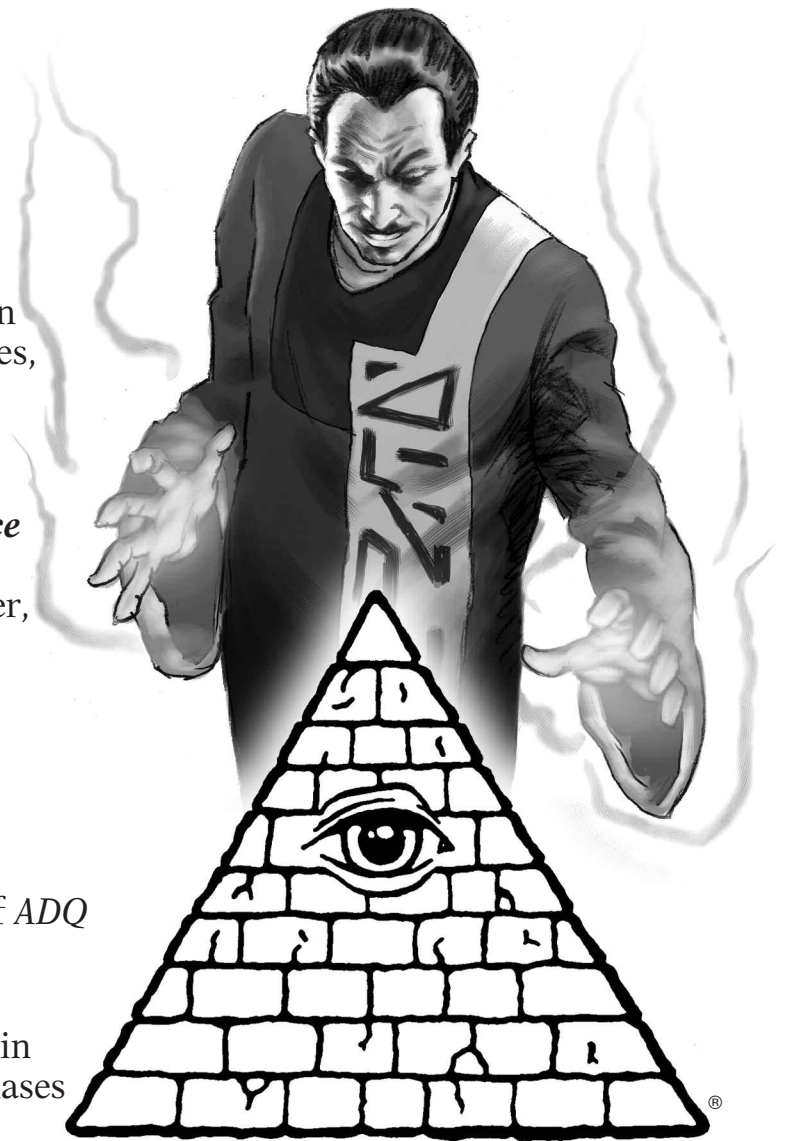
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