

Elven Tower Cartography



Snacks for the GM's Mind

Adventure Resources and Ideas
One-shot Suggestions
Game Design Tips



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163 The Desert of Lost Time

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The Desert of Lost Time

About this Resource

This resource features the description of a kingdom-sized area called "The Desert of Lost Time". It includes adventure ideas that are appropriate for any level of play. It is supposed to work as a sandbox engine for many adventures. Due to the geography, it is relatively easy to implement in any other setting. It can replace any continental stretch or it can even be a big island continent by itself.

This resource is system-less, it does not provide any pointers to rules or mechanics from any game. Instead, it provides sandbox ideas and adventure seeds for a desert adventure.

The DM is free to change or modify any or all the information found here. NPC names and settlement names are the first the DM should consider changing to accommodate any homebrew world lore.

Background Lore

The Desert of Lost Time remains relevant only because of Nefer-Ra. The great coastal city is the only inhabited settlement that survived the cataclysmic even one-hundred years ago. Scores of scholars and students of history have tried to decipher what exactly happened that destroyed half the continent. No hard facts have ever been unearthed that shed light on what happened. In recent years there have been some developments, however. Doctor Phillip Damerio, the headmaster of Nefer University, has pushed the exploration of ruins in the desert, and the retrieval of ancient artifacts. He is particularly interested in anything with scripture on it. Stone tablets, old scrolls, hand drawings of hieroglyphs, and any kind of craftsmanship from the ruined cities he buys for fair prices.

Nefer-Ra is a great city near the eastern sea. It is surrounded by a manmade wall and a natural wall. The settlement is surrounded by hills that protect

the city from the dry winds and sandstorms in the desert. Some scholars theorize that it was that natural barrier that protected Nefer-Ra from the cataclysm.

While the desert is dangerous, many people traverse it every year. The Sand Road crosses the desert from north to south and connects the two continents separated by the desert. Anyone can circumvent the desert by sea and reach Nefer-Ra or any of the neighboring countries, but it is more expensive. Many merchants, traders, and travelers have no other choice but to brave the treacherous desert. People seldom cross the desert alone. Instead, they travel in caravan to provide each other a little protection and resources. It is not uncommon to hear news of a lost caravan, it happens once or twice a year. The desert is unpredictable, even the natives are prone to misread the signs and suffer a sandstorm unprepared.

There is a ray of light in the middle of the desert. In between of two mountain ranges, there is a spot of land that managed to hold on to its moisture and greenery. A true oasis in the middle of miles and miles of sand. The place is called Hidden Palm. Hidden Palm is more a permanent encampment than a town. There are a few buildings put there by merchants almost fifty years ago. They are not in great shape, the mark of continuous sand erosion is clear. They won't last many years more without maintenance. There are usually a few tents and camps of travelers and traders. People rest here for days or weeks before resuming the dangerous journey south or north. Sometimes the whole population of Palm Tree is just waiting for more people to join them before resuming the trips through the desert. There is one permanent resident in Palm Tree for the past ten years or so. Her name is Derrah. She is a middle-aged woman who almost died when her caravan was attacked by sand tigers. Only she and another man survived and made it sagely to Hidden Palm. The man eventually left, but Derrah decided to stay and help travelers when possible. She took one of the permanent buildings for herself. She manages a little farm next to the pond. She often hires passing-by travelers for the farm work. She sells the produce to travelers.

The Cataclysm

While scholars agree and disagree on their theories of what happened to the country, the peasantry tells a tale about it. The story has passed down through oral tradition for at least six generations. The land was known as “The Great Kingdom of Naera”. The capital, Naera, used to be 175 miles north of Nefer-Ra approximately. Legend has it that the old king was a portentous man, too full of himself having grown with everything and everyone at his disposal. In a public speech, he declared that his blood was sacred. He wanted to be viewed as a god. The peasantry would have to bow to him and never look at him directly, he was too pure a being to be regarded by the lowly townsfolk. A church was erected in his name and people were commanded

to pray to him. With time people began believing the king’s claims and revered him honestly. They prayed for his pardon and mercy.

Then one day an angelic creature presented itself before the old king. The angel asked the king why he claimed a godly place when he did not deserve it. The power of the great city’s prayers for the human king seeded unrest in the celestial courts. A man would not rise as a god. The gods would see to that.

The old king said he was a god. He could already feel the power of his subjects’ prayers running through his veins. The king then dismissed the angel, calling him puny and weak. The Great Kingdom of Naera would become the center of the world under his care. The gods did not take it kindly and decided it was time to put an end to the human-god. It was the god of life and verdant



growth who volunteered to do the deed. The god descended from the skies and set foot in the place known as Hidden Palm nowadays. He looked around and shed a tear of shame for what he was about to do. He inhaled. Hours later he was still inhaling. He sucked all the moisture and life from the surrounding area, ravaging the land. When he finished, little was left of the great kingdom. Forests withered, ponds dried, plants died. The god of life looked down at his feet and saw that only the place where he was standing still was green. He left it untouched and left for the skies once more. After this, all settlements except Nefer-Ra were destroyed. And all places except Hidden Palm became dry dead lands. So the legend says.

Sandbox Adventures

The Desert of Lost time is adequate to have sandbox-style quests and adventures. Before it became a desert it was dotted with settlements and castles. Now they are buried under the desert sands. Sandstorms and wind change the landscape constantly, unearthing ruins and covering others. Treasure hunting is a popular activity in Nefer-Ra; many patrons are willing to pay for relics or fund expeditions in search of a particular object of value.

Naera

The old capital is nothing but ruins. The city is so big that the sand dunes never fully cover it. The roads to it are long gone, the easiest way to reach Naera is by following the coastline. Otherwise, the trip through the desert is very hazardous. The city is dangerous, spirits of old settlers often return as disturbed spirits that seek a revenge they will never get. Naera Castle is a place of interest for treasure hunters, no one has come back alive from it. People in Nefer-Ra would pay incalculable amounts of gold for relics such as the royal crown and scepter.

Clearwater Tower

Clearwater Tower is a small fort 100 miles north of Nefer-Ra approximately. Due to its proximity to the capital, it has had a semi-permanent garrison. The fort has been stormed and taken by wild natives and desert orcs a few times in recent history. It's been noted that the garrison in Clearwater Tower's seasonal report was never received in Nefer-Ra.

Ruins of Cathelette

South of Hidden Palm, following the Sand Road, the ruins of Cathelette are often visible. It used to be a mining town, their main export silver, and coal. The mines are clogged with sand and no one has tried to restart the mining operation, especially since transporting any goods would be rather problematic. Someone spread a rumor in Hidden Palm about the presence of dark elves in Cathelette. If the rumor were to be proven, it would mean one of the mines connected with the Underdark and the drow used it to reach the surface.

The Desert's Thorn

Before the cataclysm, this walled town was named "The Desert's Rose". It was the largest settlement in the great kingdom after Naera. However, things are different now. Most of the city is ruined and under tons of sand, but the hold and its wall are still above the sand level. A group of bandits took the place a few years ago. Now they rob caravans and take prisoners back to their lair. These bandits are one of the reasons the Sand Road is so dangerous as of late and why travelers prefer to assemble big groups or pay mercenary escorts.

Fannerdlin

The underground halls of Fannerdlin, a grand dwarven city, did not survive the ire of the gods. Despite being underground almost completely, the city crumbled on itself. The few survivors escaped deeper into the earth to the Underdark dwarven cities. Dwarves are long-lived, there are still some survivors of the event. They do not have any information of value since their perspective of the cataclysm is limited to their experience underground. The main doors to Fannerdlin survive to this day. The place is in ruins and now plagued with Underdark critters. Many treasure hunters have successfully plundered the dwarven city a few times. The city is so big that there is no end to the treasures discovered there. No one has found a safe route to the royal keep yet, however