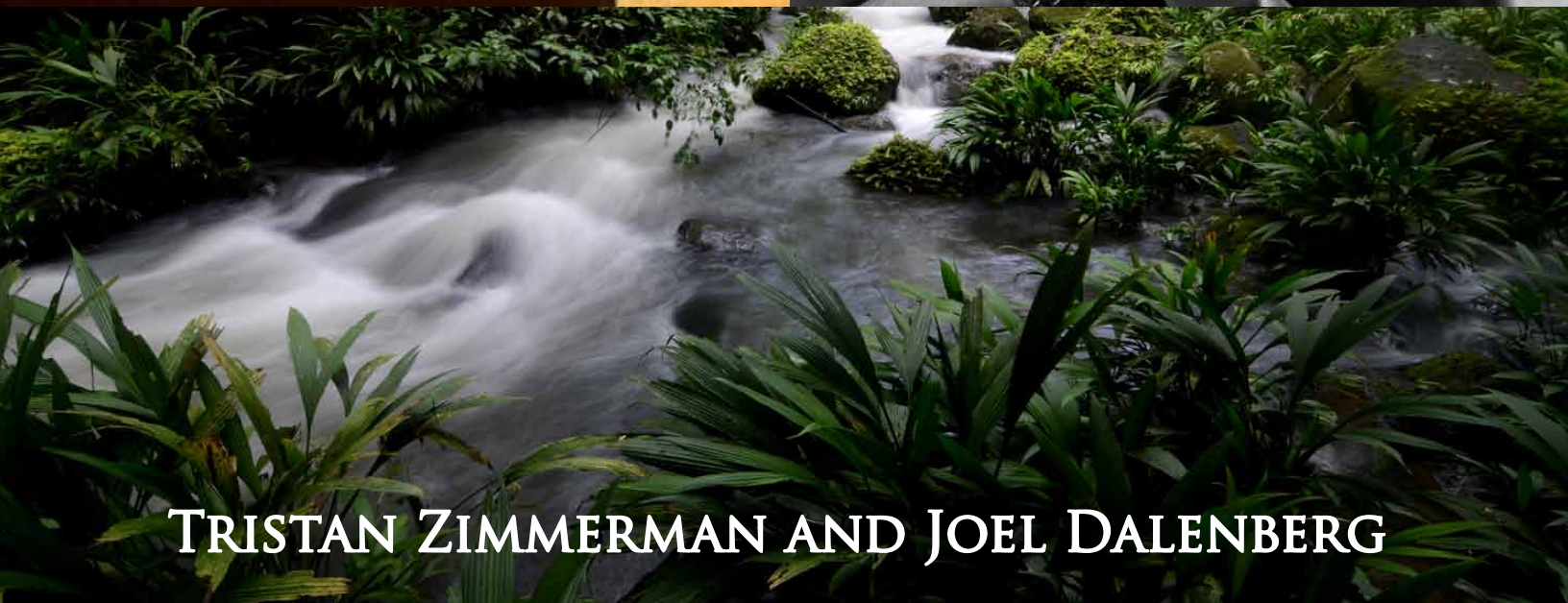
THE GM'S REAL-WORLD REFERENCE

Game-Ready People, Places, and Events



Tristan Zimmerman and Joel Dalenberg

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Landscapes

Cities, Towns, and Buildings

People

Events

Index 220

Landscapes

Arctic Ice Sheet

Frozen Nothing at the End of Nowhere

Above the Arctic Circle, there is an ocean that never sees the sky. This is the land of the Arctic ice sheet, and much of it never melts. In winter, the ice advances south to Quebec and Russia. In summer, it retreats north past mainland Canada. But the surface of the polar sea is always solid.

For the most part, the Arctic ice sheet is flat, white nothing. If the wind isn't blowing, there is no sound. If the wind is blowing, it causes snow to billow along the surface of the ice, resembling rushing water in some perverse way. In some areas, the horizon is obstructed by boulders of ice. These boulder fields are so large that to travel past them, you need to go through them; there is no going around. And, of course, there is the sun. The Arctic Circle is the point at which the sun does not set on the summer solstice, and does not rise on the winter solstice. The summer days and winter nights are long this far north. Indeed, at the northernmost permanent settlement in Canada, the sun sets in early November and does not rise again until February.

No description of the Arctic is complete without the cold – real cold, the cold that kills. But I lack the words. Instead, I will give you some choice excerpts from Jack London's short story To Build a Fire, where he tells the tale of a man dying of cold.

"He tried to pick [the match] out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither touch nor clutch. He was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet, and nose, and cheeks, out of his mind, devoting his whole soul to the matches. He watched, using the sense of vision in place of that of touch, and when he saw his fingers on each side the bunch, he closed them—that is, he willed to close them, for the wires were down, and the fingers did not obey. ... The man looked down at his hands in order to locate them, and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. It struck him as curious that one should have to use his eyes in order to find out where his hands were. ... Well, he was bound to freeze anyway, and he might as well take it decently. With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anaesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die."

Getting around on the Arctic ice sheet is tricky business. Your best bet is a dogsled, and that's no Caribbean cruise. The dogs are savage animals, not pets. The only way to keep them in line is to keep them exhausted and beat them when they fight. They are much better-adapted for Arctic life than we are, and prefer to run at night. It's colder then, so they can run faster without overheating. Sea ice is sticky, so in many places, your added weight will keep the sled from moving. When that happens, you must jump off and run or ski alongside the sled. At some points, you can use the wind to pull you: think kite surfing, but on skis. Traveling in the Arctic is exhausting work, and requires at least 5,000 calories per day.

For all that the Arctic ice sheet is desolate, it is not lifeless. The most common creatures you'll encounter will be polar bears hunting seals. However, they're not picky, and most people out on the floes carry a gun, as the bears will actively stalk and kill humans. These people above the Arctic Circle are a varied lot. Icebreakers keep the shipping lanes open. Some weather stations operate year-round with rotating crews. And, of course, there are explorers, scientists, and native peoples who voluntarily choose to travel the frozen ocean.

The Arctic ice sheet is getting smaller every year, and will likely disappear soon. While the ice expands every winter and shrinks every summer, as of this writing in 2012, the six record minimum extents of of summer ice have all occurred in the past six years. Estimates for when the Arctic Ocean will be entirely ice-free in the summer vary, but all agree it will be in the next few decades.

One of the best things the Arctic ice sheet can bring to your table is the opportunity for serious roleplay of intra-party conflict. In the almost unimaginable cold, exhaustion will take its toll. In this environment, even the best of friends will begin to bicker, argue, and hate each other over trivial things. It's human nature. To make matters better, if you're exhausted enough to lash out at your buddy because he set up the tent incorrectly, you're probably much too exhausted to actually get in a fistfight with him. Many times in games intra-party conflict devolves into physical violence, but it would be very out of character for PCs to hurt each other in this situation. So if your players are into this sort of roleplay, it could be a lot of fun if the plot took them to the far north.

Bialowieza Forest

Europe's Last Primeval Forest

The Bialowieza forest on the border of Poland and Belarus is the only wildwood in Europe that has never been cut down. Even famous forests like the Ardennes have been cleared in centuries past, and then allowed to regrow as populations shifted and industries changed. Of the great primeval forest that covered Europe thousands of years ago, only this section remains. For 10,000 years, Bialowieza has grown wild. And it shows.

The trees of Bialowieza stand like sentinels: tall, straight, and slender. 500 year-old oaks mix with stands of pine. Rich green ferns, shrubs, and mosses carpet the forest floor. There is almost as much dead wood as there is living, with logs and splintered stumps littering the forest. Some fallen trees take 40 years to rot away. The logs are painted in earth tones by fungus and lichens. Beaver dams create still lakes, where vegetation floats on the water. The forest you picture when reading a Brothers Grimm fairy tale? Crisp air, oppressive greenery, and trees that scrape the sky like a witch's fingers? That's Bialowieza.

As befits an ancient forest, Bialowieza has a rich diversity of animal life. Amid the beeches and alders you'll find elk, roe deer, boar, beavers, and wild Polish forest horses. And, of course, you'll find predators: wolf, lynx, badgers, martens, otters, and ermine. In the skies above Bialowieza, you can spy rails, storks, owls, falcons, eagles, and bats. But the real superstars of the forest are the wisents, or European bison. They are powerful animals, with immense shoulders and sloping backsides.

That Bialowieza survives is largely a matter of historical accident. The area was not densely populated in antiquity or the middle ages, and in 1541, it was declared a royal hunting reserve: personal property of the King of Poland. The few peasants living in Bialowieza became game wardens, protecting the wisents from poachers in exchange for tax exemptions. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Russian Czars who ruled Poland vacillated on formal protection for the wisents, sometimes installing peasant caretakers, sometimes removing them. At the beginning of the 20th century, the First World War saw the deaths of all of Bialowieza's wisents, as soldiers ventured into the forest to hunt them for food. But crucially, the forest was still not cut down. In 1929, wisents were reintroduced by the new Polish state. During the Second World War,

the Nazis protected Bialowieza, but never truly controlled it, as the forest was a haven for local partisans. The end of the war saw the forest's return to protected civilian status. Bizarrely, the treaty dissolving the USSR was signed in a cottage inside the forest. Currently, only 16% of Bialowieza has national park protection, but efforts are underway to extend the borders of the park.

In a fantasy campaign, the Bialowieza forest is an excellent home for fey. Perhaps the PCs will be drawn into the politics of the fair folk. Two archfey – the Lord of Summer and the Winter Queen – travel the wilds in perpetual conflict. Wherever the Lord and Queen travel, the landscape alters to fit their temperaments. They are currently passing through Bialowieza, and the local fey are none too happy about the disruption it's causing, and trick the PCs into trying to move the Lord and Queen on to new lands. The Lord of Summer (a centaur with the body of a stag and great antlers) believes that nature means "eat or be eaten" and is "red in tooth and claw." He represents the violent aspects of nature: wolves bringing down kills, trees shading out shrubs to starve them, hemorrhagic fevers, and thunderstorms. The Winter Queen (who has the body of a snake, torso of a woman, and head of an enormous mosquito) believes that nature means "die slowly." She represents parasites, strangler figs, mange, and hard winters. How the PCs try to move the Lord of Summer and the Winter Queen on to new lands is up to them, but they may try to enlist help from the local fey: the river spirit Lesna Prawna, the hag coven of Baba Yaga, a rogue satyr and his cyclops bodyguard, the ancient treant Selladore, and the ever-shifty Weasel King.

BOGS

Peat Wetland

You stand on a waterlogged patch of moss, surrounded by low grasses and shallow pools. Vegetation floats in the larger ponds. Birds wing their way through the chill fog. The soil beneath you is soft and spongy. It's a wet, brown-green mire.

The primary characteristic of bogs is that they are wetlands that accumulate peat: a special soil made of half-decomposed plants. The water in a bog is acidic, and the soil lacks oxygen. This keeps organic matter in the soil from being completely broken down. Peat is often mined by cutting big blocks of the stuff out of the soil. After drying, it can be used as fertilizer or burned to heat homes.

Above the spongy peat, most bogs have a thick carpet of moss. Many of the plants that grow there have been driven by the poor soil to trap insects. Nutrients they can't find in the dirt, they find in flesh. Sundews attract insects with stiff tentacles that secrete a sugary glue. Insects try to eat the glue, get stuck, and die of exhaustion trying to escape. The sundew then secretes digestive fluids to dissolve the insect and absorbs the juices. Pitcher plants lure prey into cup-like growths, and trap them there. The insects eventually drown and are dissolved.

European bogs are often home to the preserved corpses of tribesmen murdered or sacrificed, and then dumped in the wetland. The same conditions that form peat by preventing the breakdown of plant matter have kept these bodies mostly intact. The corpses have been stained a dark brown-black, except for their hair, which is stained orange. Their dark skin hangs loose on their bones, leathery and wrinkled. The effect looks as though someone took a dried prune and turned it the consistency of cured leather. The weight of the peat has forced these bodies into unnatural poses and broken their bones. Many have been given unique names. Tollund Man was hanged with a leather cord, then thrown into a Danish bog, shoeless and almost naked. Yde Girl was strangled with a band of fabric and abandoned. It's likely she was sacrificed because

of her deformed spine. Red Franz from Germany is a frightful sight. He's mostly skeletal; his eyes, nose, and lips have long ago rotted away, revealing his skull (as black as the rest of him), but enough skin remains to have preserved much of his wild hair, eyebrows, and beard, all stained bright orange. He was killed by slitting his throat.

The peat in bogs stores a rather astonishing amount of carbon: about twice as much as is stored in forests. Healthy bogs absorb and store carbon dioxide, but degraded bogs release it. Maintaining healthy bogs is thus an important part of combating climate change. In healthy bogs, carbon dioxide is captured by plants, converted to sugars through photosynthesis, and integrated into the structure of the plant. When the plant dies, instead of microbes breaking down these sugars and releasing the carbon dioxide, the acidic and oxygen-poor nature of bog soil ensures that microbes can't completely break down the plant, allowing some of the carbon to remain stored in the soil as peat. But with the continued degradation of bogs, the conditions that created the peat are disappearing, allowing that stored carbon dioxide to escape once again.

Bogs might be especially well-suited to fantasy, science-fiction, and superhero games. Their chill fog makes great ambiance for fantasy, and some carnivorous plants, magically altered to be enormous, could be fun traps. In a superhero game, Atlanteans and environmentalists might be fighting over the bogs. The environmentalists are trying to conserve them to fight global warming, while the Atlanteans are trying to release the trapped carbon dioxide to raise sea levels so they can claim the surface world. And a carbon dioxide factory in an alien bog would make a cool and different setting for a science fiction game. The factory obtains the gas by mining and burning the peat. Carbon dioxide is a fairly inert gas, cheap to produce, and and easily compressible to a liquid, allowing a great deal of it to be carried in a small space. Thus, you could convincingly argue that it's used in pneumatic machinery in your setting's starships.

Bryce Canyon National Park

God's Sandcastle

High in the plains of Utah, there is a region of natural amphitheaters filled with slender limestone spires, delicate arches and spectacular cliffsides. The evergreen trees and bluish-green junipers contrast with the red, yellow, purple and white limestone rock formations, often topped with a dusting of snow (the rim of the amphitheaters is 8-9,000 feet above sea level).

The desert and scrubland of the American Great Basin is full of strange and beautiful landscapes: the immense Grand Canyon, the winding slot canyons of Zion National Park, and the mesas and famous isolated rock formations like Devil's Tower. Bryce Canyon – named after a Scottish immigrant rancher who raised cattle there in the 1880s (he called it "a hell of a place to lose a cow") - certainly fits the bill. In fact, Bryce Canyon is not a true canyon at all – its unique erosion patterns aren't caused by flowing water, but by meltwater soaking into rocks and refreezing, rainstorms washing away debris, and chemical weathering (the slightly acidic rainwater slowly erodes limestone). Combined with tectonic uplift, this has produced the cliffs and bowls of Bryce Canyon.

The canyon's "hoodoos" (the rock spires) and thin rock walls result when a section of limestone is protected from erosion by a thin layer of more durable rock above it. The limestone around the spire erodes away, leaving a cone of clay around the base of it. Some have elaborately tapered

shapes, looking (from some angles) like a human or animal figure. With all this erosion, the park is far from static: the average rate of erosion in the amphitheaters is 2-4 feet every 100 years. A millennia from now, the famous features of the park will be totally different.

The same rapid erosion causes narrow "slot canyons" to develop in the cliff walls. These winding canyons are popular with hikers (and provide a nice view of the area's geology), but are dangerously vulnerable to flash floods, especially during the park's late summer "monsoon season". Eventually, the walls of these canyons will be eroded into narrow "fins" of rock, and then into hoodoos and monoliths.

The bright colors of Bryce Canyon stem from mineral impurities in the limestone base: hematite produces reds and browns, limonite produces yellows and pyrolusite produces purples. In some places, a little moss or lichen is able to grow on the rock, producing a greenish tinge. The rocks in the area are 30-50 million years old, and are fossil-bearing.

The park's remote location, clear air, dry climate, and high altitude combine to make it an excellent location for stargazing. In a reasonably dark location, you can see about 2,000 stars with the naked eye, but on a moonless night at Bryce Canyon, you can see 7,500! The exceptionally clear air makes for good views during the day too, with 200-mile visibility from the area's high points.

The dry and harsh landscape has kept the area's human population low, but Bryce Canyon has been inhabited for thousands of years. The Anasazi and Fremont cultures both lived in the area thousands of years ago, but the Paiute are the most recent native inhabitants, hunting and gathering on the plateaus and practicing some limited agriculture. They believed that the hoodoos were "Legend People" who had been turned into stone by the trickster god Coyote for some transgression. These Legend People were actually various animals that could shapeshift into people, and liked to paint their faces red (as they were when they were turned into pillars of rock). The Paiute called Bryce Canyon "red painted faces" as a reference to this.

White settlement of the area began in the 1850s with some Mormon farmers. Ebenezer Bryce, the rancher for whom the canyons are named, built an irrigation canal in the 1870s, and Bryce Canyon was increasingly developed until it became a protected area in 1923, under Warren G. Harding.

Bryce Canyon is indeed "a hell of a place to lose a cow," and having your PCs try to find a lost animal there could be a good beginning to an adventure. The area's strange landscape could be great for tactically interesting battles, and the high-quality stargazing could be useful for someone trying to pull off an occult ritual. If nothing else, the Legend People could be waking up again, for good or ill...

Children's Eternal Rainforest

A Classic Cloud Forest

The Children's Eternal Rainforest in Costa Rica is an excellent example of a cloud forest, a type of tropical rainforest found so high up mountainsides that it's at the same altitude as the clouds. The most striking thing about cloud forests is the green and the wet. The dirt, the trees, the bushes – everything is always dripping from the clouds that roll over the mountainside. And that water means every available surface is green with life.

The Children's Eternal Rainforest alternates between sloping ridges and steep, mountainous inclines. In some places, the rushing streams carve gorges running down the mountainside. Sitting in the moist brown earth on the lip of a gorge, you can see the trees on the far side in their entirety. The trees are spindly, and weighed down heavily by dangling mosses, lichens, and vines. In many places, you can't even see the color of the bark, the trees are so covered in other plants. The canopy is thick, but oppressively low, beginning a yard or two above your head, and continuing vertically for another ten or twenty yards, creating an impassable ceiling of wet greenery. Sometimes, these mountain streams will have waterfalls where the chute cascades down black rock into a deep pool. The walls around such pools are draped with mosses, ferns, and flowering vines.

Compared to a lowland rainforest, the cloud forest is quiet. Few insects can survive the cool nights in the clouds. What you hear instead is the perpetual drip of water from the leaves above. This soft white noise drowns out most other sound.

The clouds are a near-constant wonder in the Children's Eternal Rainforest. Early in the morning, you can see down the slope of the mountain to lake Arenal and the immense volcano on its edge. But later in the morning, the clouds roll in, and all you can see is featureless white. The combination of the steep slope and the clouds creates a bizarre effect. Looking out into the clouds, you can see the trees before you and some of the trees below you. But beyond that, all you can see is white void. It's as if you've reached the edge of the world, the line beyond which there is nothing – not even empty space.

While you won't find the startling diversity you'd expect further down the mountain, there is animal life here. Mountain lions hunt agoutis on the mountain slopes, and frogs share their streams with leeches the size of small bananas. Taking the place of insects as pollinators are the hummingbirds, painted in orange, red, green, and purple. As they dart from flower to flower, their wings make a distinctive noise, a deep thrumm.

The most famous of the birds in the Children's Eternal Rainforest is the resplendent quetzal, with its iridescent green-and-blue feathers. The male is renowned among birders for its two-foot-long tail feathers and bright red chest.

There's a lot to like about cloud forests in gaming. They're exotic, they're pretty, and they're probably very different from what your players and PCs are used to. Cloud forests are probably best suited to fantasy settings, where they may be home to druids and nature spirits. Any supernatural creatures in a fantasy cloud forest should probably be mysterious rather than savage, to better fit the themes these forests lend themselves to.

Cretaceous Big Cedar Ridge

Dinosaur-Era Wetland

73 million years ago, Big Cedar Ridge in Wyoming was a wetland full of dinosaurs. It was preserved when a volcanic mud flow buried the fen under several feet of wet ash. Big Cedar Ridge was frozen in time and fossilized, allowing scientists to study this time-lost wetland. The landscape they uncovered is a strange, yet somewhat familiar vista of low plants, stagnant water and enormous reptiles.

There were three main types of terrain at Big Cedar Ridge. The south end of the fen was a fern wetland. Quite different from most wetlands today, there was no grass growing here. Instead, the ground cover was a staggering variety of ferns, coming in every conceivable variation on the fern body plan. There were patches of shallow water too, on which grew floating ferns. Few flowers grew here, but one somewhat common plant resembled a buttercup. The soil was spongy and peaty, like in a modern bog (see page 8). The north end of Big Cedar Ridge was a palmetto thicket. Here, man-sized, palm-like plants with jagged spines on the stems of their fronds grew in sprawling clumps. Under and around the palmettos, there were ferns. Occasional stands of pine punctuated the scene. The third terrain type was the stream-side thicket. Growing

along a sandy creek were coppices of broadleaf shrubs. A species resembling a gooseberry bush was especially common. In all three areas, the weather was hot and muggy.

Let's be honest, though. Cool as these wetlands may have been, what we all care about most is what lived in them: dinosaurs! It is difficult to determine which species frequented Big Cedar Ridge, but what follows is an overview of five dinosaurs known to have lived in Wyoming during the late Cretaceous. Not all were exactly contemporary with the wetland of 73 million years ago (Triceratops was from about five million years later, for example), but it seems reasonable to suppose that they were contemporary with fens very much like the one preserved at Big Cedar Ridge.

• Camarasaurus was a long-necked, 50-foot sauropod. While a huge creature, it was shorter and more stout-bodied than its better-known relatives, Brachiosaurus and Diplodocus.

• Ankylosaurus was a 25-foot herbivore armored with spikes and bony plates, and armed with a club at the end of its dangerous tail. However, for all its protection, the beast was vulnerable to maneuvering. Its tail was not flexible enough to strike foes at its sides, and its belly was unarmored.

• Edmontosaurus was a 25-foot duck-billed hadrosaur that lived in herds. Paleontologists still debate whether they preferred shallow water or dry land. It probably spent most of its time on four legs, but would stand up on two legs to run.

• Triceratops was a 30-foot herbivore. Its three horns were covered in an antler-like sheath, making them even longer and stronger than they appear on the beast's fearsome skull. Its body was as big around as an elephant's and it had legs like a rhino's. It seems they lived in large herds like bison.

• Tyrannosaurus, as every schoolchild knows, was an immense carnivore. 50 feet long, with eight-inch teeth in a skull the size of a man, the beast was seven tons of apex predator. Still, as with any good predator, it was probably both lazy and cowardly, scavenging when it could, driving other predators from their kills when it had to, and hunting only when it was convenient or absolutely necessary.

Whether the PCs are time travelers or have merely entered a land that time forgot, know that if you use Big Cedar Ridge at your table, your players will kill you if they don't get a chance to fight some dinosaurs - or fight something with some dinosaurs. You can tease the players with the possibility of hunting these multi-ton reptiles by dropping clues for observant PCs. The fact that there is no grass at Big Cedar Ridge should be a strong indication that you are not in a place not of your era: there's almost nowhere on earth today you can go and not find grass. Other clues might include the unusual floating ferns or the paucity of flowering plants.

The Crooked Forest

Provincial Mystery

There is a section of forest in western Poland where 400 pine trees have grown in the shape of the letter 'J', all bent north. These trees appear to have been planted around 1930, allowed to grow normally for 7-10 years, and then pulled down to the ground. Since trees grow against the direction of gravity, their trunks curved back to vertical. And then, before the trees could be harvested, WWII struck. After the war, no one near the forest remembered why the trees had been bent. The most likely explanation is that it was an incomplete attempt to grow curved timbers for shipbuilding, but no one is entirely sure.

Beyond the bent trees, the Crooked Forest is rather unremarkable. The pines grow quite straight, their branches creating dappled patterns of shadow and sunlight on the grass and wildflowers below. Deer and boar slip quietly between the trunks. Birds chirp in the canopy. In the distance, you can hear the rumble of tractors in the adjacent farmland.

At your table, the Crooked Forest can be inserted into any woodland as a spot of local color, especially if it's in a section of forest to which the plot will cause the PCs to return. Beyond the wood-for-ships explanation, here are a few more (increasingly fantastical) possibilities for why people in your campaign world created such a forest and then forgot about it:

• The man who planted the trees intended to use them to build a round cabin. He died during the war before he could harvest them.

• It was an experiment to see whether tree trunks could be induced to produce a second set of roots if they were brought back into contact with the soil.

• According to a forgotten superstition, such a forest serves as a unicorn trap. The unicorn can enter the forest, but it cannot leave.

• A clever, albeit shortsighted, local boy tricked a band of fey into making the forest crooked. When they finished, they carried out a cruel revenge on their trickster.

• The trees grew like that with no human intervention. On moonless nights, the hut of a hag appears in the Crooked Forest. The hag's corruption has leeched into the soil and caused the nearby trees to sag.

Cueva de los Cristales

Deadly Cavern of Beautiful Crystals

Located in a Mexican silver mine, the Cueva de los Cristales is a cave of enormous selenite crystals. It's an underground wonderland, an elfin hall come to life. However, it's also incredibly dangerous. At 120 degrees Fahrenheit and 90% humidity, 20 minutes in the cave is a death sentence. With protective gear you can reliably survive for 45 minutes.

The cave itself is like being inside a geode. Protruding from the wall at every angle are white, glassy crystal beams. Some are ten yards long, so big you can't wrap your arms around them. In areas where the big crystals are absent, you walk across fields of translucent shark's teeth the size of your head. The crystals scatter the light from your flashlight throughout the cavern, giving you a diffuse light show in the dark cave. Traversing the cave is a matter of climbing over obstacles, crawling on your hands and knees along crystal balance beams, and watching every step.

The cave's beauty is matched only by its danger. The crystals, for all their size, are weak. Step in the wrong place or use the wrong handhold, and it'll snap, sending you falling onto a selenite spear. In this terrain, your comrades won't be able to pull you out of the cave before you bleed to death. Protective gear amounts to glorified icepacks with a special respirator. The body's response to the intense heat and humidity is dramatic. Your heart pounds. Your breathing becomes heavier. Sweat drips rhythmically from your fingertips. Every article of clothing is soaked like you were in a bath. Your strength ebbs, and more dangerously, so does your higher brain function. If you stay too long in the Cueva de los Cristales, you will simply fall down. Getting up will be a challenge, and your thinking will be so clouded by heatstroke that you no longer understand why you need to get up. At that point, unless someone can drag you out, you will die in there.

The Cueva de los Cristales was not always in its present form. Before the silver mine was built, the cave was filled with mineral-rich water. A nearby magma chamber kept it at the same temperature for hundreds of thousands of years. This let selenite crystals form on the rock walls, and without any environmental changes, they just kept growing bigger and bigger. When the mine is exhausted, the company will turn off the pumps that keep the cave dry, and the Cueva de los Cristales will be lost to human explorers.

The cave is kept behind a locked steel door, separated from the rest of the mine. This is to protect the crystals from the miners; wages are low here, and many supplement their income by smuggling smaller crystals out of other parts of the silver mine. Before the door was installed a miner tried to saw through one of the crystal beams and carry it off, but gave up halfway.

The Cueva de los Cristales could make a terrific location for a find-and-kill quest. Just reaching a monster in such a cave is an adventure in and of itself. Then, in the climactic combat against a creature that must be as fantastical, bizarre, and wondrous as the cave, the terrain will be as great a threat as the monster.

Alternately, the PCs may be tasked with removing one of these multi-ton crystal pillars for a collector. This would call for considerable ingenuity, not only in figuring out how to work in this hostile environment, but also how to remove the pillar without losing PCs or destroying the crystal.

We'll end this section with a brief apology. Due to a number of reasons, photos of the cave are out of our price range. But an internet image search will provide you with some really beautiful photographs.

Ethiopian Church Forests

Varied, Manmade Landscape

The African nation of Ethiopia has been Christian since the fourth century, and has a number of unique beliefs. For one, the Ethiopian Church sees itself not only as the steward of human souls, but also as the steward of nature. For this reason, while most of the forests of the northern highlands have been cleared for agriculture and pastureland, the landscape is dotted with small, round forests surrounding churches.

This means you have three very different environments in close proximity. Outside these forests, you have farmland and pastures. They're watered by annual monsoons, but during the dry season, they are brown, dusty, and hot. The forests themselves are somewhat scrubby, and lack much of the animal life you'd expect to see. Many boast a freshwater spring. And at the center of each forest is a church.

The Ethiopian church forests are seen as symbols of the Garden of Eden, intended to be cherished, not worshipped. Interestingly, the quality of a church forest is not determined by its health or diversity but rather by the number of trees: the more, the better. These trees are viewed as the "jewelry of the church", and their canopy keeps prayers close, rather than being lost to the sky.

The churches themselves are typically circular or octagonal, perhaps 50 feet wide. The church, like the landscape, consists of three concentric rings. The outermost ring is covered with mats. During services, the congregation stands barefoot here, while clouds of incense swirl around them. Men are separated from women by a screen. The middle ring is where the faithful take communion. The center of the church is the Holy of Holies, and is screened off; only the priests are permitted here. Inside the Holy of Holies is a replica of the Ark of the Covenant, and Ethiopians believe the true Ark is kept in a chapel near the northern border of the country.

The church forests are in very real danger of disappearing. Ethiopia's population continues to grow, and these people need pastureland, cropland, and firewood, all of which can come at the expense of church forests. Cattle grazing in the forests compacts the soil, preventing seeds from germinating. The churches at the hearts of these forests typically lack toilets, so priests and congregants relieve themselves in the woods. This balloons the number of dung beetles in the forests, which may have complex and subtle effects.

For a combat-heavy game, the most important feature of the Ethiopian church forests is that they offer three radically different areas in close proximity. You can run a combat each in the pasture, the forest, and the church, and have all three feature very different terrain. If you want to stick a dungeon under the church (consider having the entrance be a trapdoor under the Ark), the presence of the pasture and the forest will help integrate the contents of the dungeon into the broader cultural framework of the area.

For a more roleplay-heavy game, you could have a great adventure saving a church forest from its ecological threats. Unlike a bigger concern like "save the whales!" or "save the rainforest!", saving a single church forest is a very achievable goal for a party of PCs. Your players could have a lot of fun negotiating with the priests, church elders, and village leaders. Furthermore, there could be some interesting moral dilemmas. In times of famine, is it acceptable to graze cattle in the church forest? If the answer is yes, how many famines will it take before there is no forest left?

Eurasian Steppes
Land of the Horse Nomads

An endless sea of short grass, the steppes of Eurasia are one of the world's largest grasslands. The steppes stretch from Hungary to China, though they are broken in the middle by the Altai Mountains. They get little rain, so the grass stays short – maybe a foot and a half tall at most, with some scattered shrubs. The terrain is flat or gently rolling. The steppes are hot in summer, freezing in winter, and what few storms they get are spectacular. There is no shelter on the plains; when the rain or snow comes whipping across the steppes, the most you can do is huddle behind a low hill.

For thousands of years, the steppes have been home to horse nomads. Many of history's greatest nomadic cultures lived here: Mongols, Turks, Huns, Magyars, Avars, Cossacks, and Scythians (see also Genghis Khan on page 126). The people of the steppes have tended to be nomadic pastoralists, raising herds of livestock, and traveling to wherever the grazing is good. Many still live this way. In their heyday, the lancers and horse archers of the steppes raided (and sometimes conquered) the great empires to the south, like Persia and China. The center of the steppe nomads' way of life was their horses. They were their mounts in peace and war, their source of food and wealth, and (for many) their source of pride. Traditionally, the steppe peoples dwelled in yurts: portable, circular, wood-frame huts covered in wool felt. They were easy to disassemble and transport, though the wood had to be obtained through trade with lands beyond the steppes. The flat ground of the steppes was ideal for travel. Much of the silk road passed through the steppes, as caravans of horses, camels, and donkeys connected China, India, and Europe as far back as 200 BC.

The horse nomads were (and are) pastoralists, raising horses, sheep, and goats. Horses were the most valued animals. Smaller and sturdier than those Westerners are accustomed to, steppe horses came in a wide variety of colors and patterns. Rope was made from horsehair. Horsehide was used for leather. Their dung, when dried, was used as fuel, as there was precious little wood to burn. Some steppe tribes consumed horsemeat, though not all did. One of the greatest gifts of the horse was booze. Kumis (or airag) is an alcoholic beverage made from fermented mare's milk. Rich in vitamins, kumis was a vital part of the nomad's vegetable-poor diet. Sheep and goats were kept in mixed herds, and milked daily. Mutton was typically the meat of choice, and the sheep's rough wool was turned into yarn and felt. Some steppe peoples also raised cattle and Bactrian camels. And, of course, there were the wild animals of the steppe, like eagles, bustards, zokors (a burrowing animal resembling a hamster the size of a football), and saiga (short-horned antelopes with long, bloated noses).

The steppes have been a perpetual source of raiders and invaders of the civilized world. The steppes west of the Altai Mountains get richer and more fertile as one goes west towards Europe, while east of the Altai Mountains they get more fertile as one goes southeast towards China. Steppe peoples generally wanted to follow that gradient towards better land, so when there was a power vacuum (for whatever reason) in an adjacent, more fertile territory, they would move into it. This necessarily drew the horse nomads of the steppes into contact with China and Europe. When a nomad group moved into land adjacent to permanently settled territory, they would sometimes coexist for a time, but would typically eventually invade. They would then either conquer and settle down (like the Magyars) or be defeated (like the Huns), creating a power vacuum in the land where they once lived, inducing the tribe behind them to move forward, bringing the new tribe into contact with the civilized world. It was a slow but never-ending clash of cultures.

At your table, the steppes are likely most useful as an area for your PCs to cross, rather than being a destination in their own right. But even if they're just passing through, your PCs could get in some serious trouble with the locals if they're not careful. Alternately, a major campaign goal of the PCs could be to stop the never-ending culture clash between horse nomads and the civilized world.

The Everglades
Endless Marsh

The best description of the Everglades is that of a river of grass. 60 miles wide, 100 miles long, and only a few inches deep, most of the Everglades are a vast sheet of water seeping through marshy fields of knife-edged sawgrass. Shallower regions will dry up in winter. Deeper regions may resemble ponds or rivers. The sawgrass slashes at your shins, while the omnipresent mosquitos buzz around your ears. Wading through the marsh, or (more wisely) boating through it in a skiff, there is no shade from the hot sun. However, the river of grass is broken up by hammocks: areas a few inches higher than the marshlands. Here, you will find small forests of broad-leafed hardwood trees. Ferns lurk between the trunks, and the branches are draped with gray air plants. In hammocks where the underlying limestone is exposed, you instead get forests very much like pine flatwoods (see page 40). And, in some parts of the marsh, there are stands of cypress trees rising out of the shallows.

Much of the water of the Everglades eventually funnels into the Shark River, flowing west to the Gulf of Mexico. Salt water flows upstream into the Shark, mixing with the freshwater of the Everglades. Much of the Shark is bordered by intertwined mangrove trees. The river empties into the Ten Thousand Islands on the west coast of Florida, an almost archetypal Floridan mangrove forest (see page 28). It's a known haven for smugglers, drifters, and hermits.

Along the southern coast of the Everglades is Florida Bay, the wide expanse of shallow saltwater separating the Florida Keys from the mainland. The shoreline here is scrub, fading into the soft, muddy bottom of the Bay. On the shallow seafloor you will find seagrass beds, an underwater lawn rippling and undulating in the waves. Further out, where the seafloor becomes harder, sponges and corals grow in the warm waters.

The animals of the Everglades are adapted to the harsh climate. Alligators are everywhere, lurking in marshes and ponds. There are crocodiles too, but they're thankfully rare: they have been known to go after humans, especially children. The elusive Florida panther, a small subspecies of mountain lion, hunts the wading deer feeding in the sawgrass. Along the coast, you'll find dolphins and manatees. In summer, sea turtles crawl ashore on the few sandy beaches to lay their eggs. And everywhere you'll find birds. The most common is the white ibis, a medium-sized white bird with a long, slender, curved beak, but there are also white pelicans, bright pink roseate spoonbills, herons, egrets, and hawk-like ospreys.

In the 19th century, the Everglades were the setting for the brutal Seminole Wars. The Seminoles were an Indian confederacy of tribes that had fled south from Georgia and the Carolinas into Florida to escape American expansion. But border skirmishes proved inevitable wherever they went. The United States Government launched three wars against the Seminoles. Most of the fighting was done in the winter months, with the Seminoles launching well-planned attacks on US forces, and retreating into the Everglades when outmatched. The Americans were unwilling to campaign in the baking, disease-ridden summer, and couldn't pursue the Seminoles into the trackless Everglades, so the wars ground on for decades. Most Seminoles ultimately surrendered

and were relocated to Indian Territory (modern Oklahoma), but the Americans never succeeded in driving all the Seminoles out of the Everglades.

The river of grass can be a fun wilderness setting, especially if you play up the unpleasantness of the place. The Everglades have the distinct advantage of being a trackless waste you can put right next to civilization. Putting the Bialowieza Forest (see page 7) near a major city wouldn't make sense; the forest would have long ago been settled. Similarly, putting the Ténéré desert (see page 47) near such a city wouldn't work either, because the lands around a desert tend to be too barren to support a great city. The Everglades, though, can be drained for farmland, allowing a city like Miami to be built right on their edge.

Flevoland
Postwar Land From the Sea

There's an old saying that "God made the world, but the Dutch made the Netherlands." It may be dripping with hubris, but that doesn't make it wrong – 20% of the country's land area is below sea level, and is only maintained as land by constant drainage and effort (though admittedly, much of this land wasn't below sea level until peat harvesting or swamp drainage made it so). An underwater area is walled off by dikes, then drained continuously to produce dry land below the water table, by sluices open at low tide, windmill-driven pumps, or industrial-size pumping stations. Reeds are planted first to produce a drier and more solid soil, at which point food crops can be grown on the new land.

Arguably the most impressive effort in this history of engineering has been the 20th century Zuiderzee works, which desalinated a sea and brought into existence the twelfth province of the Netherlands and the world's largest man-made island.

In the late 19th century, the Netherlands was awash with plans to solve two problems at once. The country was densely populated and suffering from a shortage of farmland, and flooding from the inland Zuiderzee was a constant danger. If the sea could be sealed off from the rest of the ocean the danger of floods would be greatly reduced, and new land could be raised from the (now more easily drained and controlled) inland sea. Cornelis Lely, engineer and government official, advocated for the project for decades, but it took major flooding in 1916 for the Netherlands (which was neutral in the First World War) to begin operations.

Construction of a 2.5-kilometer dike as a small-scale test of the project was completed from 1920-24 – a slow pace that was thankfully improved upon by the Afsluitdijk, a 30-kilometer dike built from 1927-33, incidentally serving as a useful public works project during the Great Depression. With the Zuiderzee turned into a massive, slowly desalinating lake (now called the Ijsselmeer), construction of truly massive areas of reclaimed land could begin. The area enclosed by the first dike had been used as a test bed for the project, and was completed successfully by 1930. While not part of Flevoland proper, it would be a useful model in all respects for the future projects.

The area that constitutes Flevoland today was drained and built over decades, with the first main section, the Noordostpolder, begun in 1937 and fully drained by 1942. During WWII, this newly drained and largely unpopulated land was a useful hiding place for the Dutch Resistance. After the war, Dutch attempts to annex portions of western Germany fell flat (except for a few small areas returned in 1963) – with this expansion vetoed, the expansion into the Ijsselmeer continued.

From the '50s to the '70s, a gigantic stretch of sea floor totaling 365 square miles of land area was drained, cultivated and settled. Further construction was planned, but due to slower population growth and increases in agricultural production, the Netherlands didn't need any more farmland. In fact, much of this area has been developed for residential use and, ironically enough, "nature" preserves – with wetlands left relatively undrained as habitat for migratory birds.

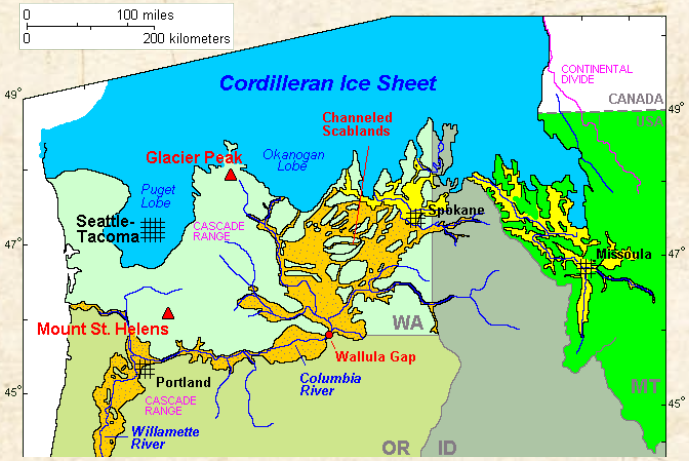
In 1986, the two areas were granted the status of a province in the Netherlands. Flevoland is the twelfth Dutch province, and the smallest in population, though nearly 400,000 people living on artificial land is nothing to sneeze at. The total land area is 548 square miles, about half that of Rhode Island. Though most of the cities and towns are recent constructions, considered bland and uninteresting by most visitors, there is some variety. The Noordostpolder was planned before automobiles were common, and is arranged to allow easy bicycle commutes between villages and the central town. The former island of Urk has a long history, a unique dialect, and a staunchly conservative Protestant population in a famously liberal nation (not that this is unique – the Dutch have a "Bible Belt" of their own).

The obvious way to include Flevoland (or a fantasy-world project like it) in your campaign is to have an undeveloped polder as a hiding place for bandits or partisans, as occurred in WWII. It's also possible that building such a thing would disturb water spirits or oceanic gods – or that a rival kingdom is sabotaging the project. And such a maintained and artificial landscape – especially one that has developed into a "wilderness" over decades – is a fascinating place to have your players travel through, even if it's not the site of grand events.

Glacial Lake Missoula

Ice Age Geological Catastrophe

It is the year 13000 BC. In the Northern Rockies (Western Montana and Northern Idaho) there lies a lake as big as Lake Erie and Lake Ontario put together, ice-cold and brilliantly greenish-blue, tinted by fine rock dust ground up by glaciers. What are today mountains are islands and shorelines, with mammoths and gigantic bison grazing on the lakeside vegetation. The weather is cold and wet, with rain in the summer and massive snowfalls in the winter. Holding all the water in place is a vast ice dam, a lobe of the Cordilleran Ice Sheet stretching south along the Rockies and damming the lake with a wall of ice 3,500 feet high.



But the dam is only ice, and it can't hold back the lake forever. As the water reaches a depth of 2000 feet, it begins to push under the glacier, and soon carves a great tunnel through the ice, flowing towards the Pacific at 30-50 miles per hour. The glacial lake empties completely within a week, with an outflow of water 60 times that of the Amazon River. Channels and massive ripples scar the land, and as the water approaches the sea, it carves the Columbia River Gorge.

Gigantic icebergs are carried out to Washington and Oregon by the current, and leave boulders in their wake when they melt - “glacial erratics” with little in common with the local geology. The rushing water carves cascades into the land, leaving waterfalls

With the water gone, the glacier begins to inch southward. Over the years, it builds up an ice dam again, and Glacial Lake Missoula begins to refill. A century or two after the flood, the lake is full, the ice dam breaks, and the whole cycle repeats itself. Between 15,000 and 13,000 years ago, this happened several times, channeling the scablands and carving the Columbia Gorge deeper. At last, the climate warms and the glaciers recede, and the Clark Fork goes back to being an ordinary river.

There's no direct evidence that any humans were there to see the lake and its floods, but it's pretty likely: Native Americans had begun populating the Americas well before 13,000 years ago, and the area around the lake was most likely dense with edible animals and plants. Some hunter-gatherers in present-day Washington were likely swept away by the floods, but any evidence was washed out to sea (far out to sea – sea levels in the Ice Age were hundreds of feet lower than those today).

The flooding created “Channeled Scablands” that provided quite a puzzle for geologists, who first intensively studied them during a time when the scientific consensus argued that landscapes were produced by gradual change, not Biblical catastrophes. Arguing that much of the Pacific Northwest was formed by great floods sounded like Creationism to the geologists of the 1920s. The controversy wasn't settled until the 1940s, when geologist Joseph Pardee published his account of the giant ripple marks he found in parts of Eastern Washington. Ripple marks 15-30 feet high, separated by 150 feet, were clear evidence that a vast amount of fast-flowing water had passed over the region; they couldn't be explained by slow processes of erosion like a canyon or channel.

Today, the study of geological history has found more of a balance between gradual and catastrophic changes. Evidence of large-scale floods and other rapid (here meaning “over centuries”) geologic changes around the world has been found and accepted. Glacial Lake Missoula is not the only glacial lake or source

of great floods in the world's history, but it is certainly a very impressive one.

Your game could use a glacial lake as simply a beautiful, yet harsh landscape – there were likely no fish in Glacial Lake Missoula, but it would be a place where animals gathered, and probably moderated the local climate a bit with its "lake effect." And it was certainly a majestic view: a vast wall of ice thousands of feet high, holding in a greenish-blue lake specked with icebergs that turns mountains into islands... a very epic-fantasy setting. And of course, then you have the disaster – there's probably no way to turn back the flood, but escaping it or warning people ahead of time (by noticing the ice wall is beginning to crack, for example) could be part of an adventure.

Great Rift Valley

Diverse, Tectonically Active Landscape

The African rift valley system is a series of regions, running from Ethiopia to Mozambique, where two tectonic plates have been pulling apart, creating valleys, mountains, and canyons. The rift is 35,000 miles long, and has been growing for 35 million years. Eventually, it will split open, and the horn of Africa will drift off into the Indian Ocean.

That the rift is young terrain is plainly evident. Volcanoes pepper its length. In places, you can find bubbling, spitting lava lakes. The highland regions are rugged, with craggy hills and deep chasms. This volcanism has produced some incredible archaeological finds: one of the earliest sets of hominid footprints was captured in volcanic ash in the rift.

But the Great Rift Valley isn't all lava pools and highlands. It also includes the rich, vibrant grasslands of the Serengeti. This is the land you've seen in countless National Geographic specials, with wondrous animal species too numerous to count. Fed by rich volcanic soil, the waving grass supports immense herds of zebra and wildebeest. Clumps of short, thorny trees break up the green-and-gold landscape, providing some shade in the shimmering heat. The rainy season is at different times in different parts of the Serengeti, so many animals follow the green grass in immense migrations of 200,000 zebra, 300,000 gazelles, and over a million wildebeest. Columns 25 miles long ford crocodile-infested rivers, gallop across lion-haunted plains, and skirt the numerous rocky outcroppings. It's a spectacular landscape.

The rift also produces some incredibly harsh wastelands. The Dankil depression was formed when the land sunk hundreds of feet feet below sea level. Winds blow above above the depression, rather than through it, leaving it literally the hottest place on earth. Temperatures drive most non-natives into hiding by 10 am. The bowl used to be full of seawater, and when it was finally cut off from the ocean the water evaporated, leaving behind a great salt pan. It's acres and acres of flat, hot, blindingly white salt. Nine months out of the year, the Dankil depression does not receive a single drop of rain. The brief rainy season is not much better, as it can leave the desert underwater. Interestingly, water is available year-round in the depression if you know where to look. The same tectonic activity that created the bowl left behind fissures that serve as aquifers. Locals have dug wells in the desert, and in other places, the water bubbles up at multi-colored hot springs.

The same rift that created wastelands also created preposterously large lakes. The African Great Lakes contain a quarter of the world's surface fresh water. The lakes are actually deep canyons formed by the rift, filled by local rivers. They harbor a staggering diversity of cichlids: brightly-colored fish, many of whom carry their young in their mouths. Locals travel the lakes in canoes, catching crateloads of freshwater sardines. The catch is spread across the beaches, turning the shoreline temporarily silver, until the stiff, dried fish are gathered back up. Not all the lakes are pleasant. In some areas, steaming basins of caustic water draw tens of thousands of flamingos. From a distance, they look like a carpet of pink.

The Great Rift Valley is as diverse culturally as it is geographically. Around the Serengeti, Masai herdsmen live a nomadic, pastoral existence, raising cattle and following the rains. The Masai way of life is vulnerable to African sleeping sickness. The disease strikes men and cattle with drowsiness during the day and insomnia at night, and may kill within six months. In the Dankil depression, the Afar people mine salt, bringing it out of the bowl on camels. The Afar men are a strange sight to Western eyes: they chisel their teeth into points. Among the spiked

acacias of northern Tanzania, many Hadza maintain a hunter-gatherer existence. They are a short, scarred, and weatherbeaten people who speak a language unlike any other. They have few long-term social ties, no religion, and little understanding of the outside world. But the rift also boasts modern, westernized cities, like Nairobi, a city of three million powered (in part) by geothermal energy.

At the gaming table, the Great Rift Valley's biggest strength is its diversity. Modeling a region on the rift is a great excuse to include a wide variety of terrain in a tight area, giving different sessions in the region very different feels. An adventure could begin in a land like the Dankil, move into a Serengeti-like savannah, continue down a long lake, and culminate atop an active volcano, all without stretching the limits of plausibility.

Heligoland

Anomaly of the North Sea

The island of Heligoland lies 29 miles off the north German coast, in the middle of the North Sea. It's quite a small place: two islands with a population of about 1100, totaling about a square mile of land area, one of which is an uninhabited sand dune. For its size, though, Heligoland holds an unusual amount of geological and geopolitical uniqueness.

The main island is a geological anomaly: a formation of red sedimentary rock from the Triassic area, quite different from the white chalk cliffs of Dover and other North Sea islands. Historically, the island was ringed by high cliffs of up to 160 feet in height, with a small low-lying area at the southwest tip used as a harbor. It is perhaps this geologic uniqueness that led Austrian Jurgen Spanuth to claim that Heligoland was a remnant of Atlantis. The island has a unique climate as well, with much more mild winters than the German mainland. This allows figs and palm trees to grow in this little corner of Northwest Europe.

Heligoland was part of Denmark for most of the Middle Ages. Its status as an important herring fishery and its strategic location led to struggles over the island in the 18th century between Denmark, Schlesweig-Holstein, and the city of Hamburg. During the Napoleonic Wars, the British captured Heligoland from the Danes and kept it for much of the 19th century.

In 1890, Germany negotiated a trade for Heligoland, swapping African territory with the British in order to obtain the island. Queen Victoria was critical of the treaty at the time, and was arguably vindicated by the First World War, in which a naval base so close to German shores could have been quite useful. During WWI, Heligoland was a German U-boat base and the site of the Battle of Heligoland Bight, the first

naval battle of the war and a major factor in the German decision to keep their fleet in port until the battle of Jutland almost 2 years later. The island was less important in WWII, though the Nazis built fortifications and a U-boat base there and it was bombed through the war by the RAF.

Near the end of WWII, Heligoland was evacuated. Its people were not allowed to return until 1952, and in the meantime, the British used the island to test bombs. In 1947, 4000 tons of surplus ammunition was used to destroy the U-boat pens and fortifications. One of the largest non-nuclear explosions humans have ever created, this "British Bang" caused part of the island's cliffs to collapse and created the "Mittelland," a new low-lying area of the island. Heligoland was considered as a possible location for atomic testing as well, but passed over in favor of Bikini Atoll.

Today, Heligoland is again the tourist destination it was in the 19th century. Cars and bicycles are banned on the island (except for an ambulance, a police car and a few electric trucks) – many locals use kick scooters to get around, not that there's very far to go. The island is still unique culturally, with many ties to Britain, but a lingering resentment of the British as well for their actions after WWII.

Heligoland can fit in your game in several ways. The mystery of the island's geology could mean something important – perhaps it really is a remnant of lost Atlantis, with secrets hidden in the rocks until they were dislodged by the explosions of '47. From the Middle Ages to 1945, the island was important politically – your PCs could be Frisian smugglers, Hanseatic captains or British spies. Last but not least, Heligoland could provide an In Bruges – style feel to a modern or cyberpunk espionage campaign, or be a near-future flashpoint between an increasingly assertive EU and a Britain with its back turned to Europe.

La Selva Biological Station

Lowland Rainforest of Costa Rica

A research station in the lowland rainforest of Costa Rica, La Selva is a fairly typical tropical rainforest. New visitors, dripping with sweat, are often first struck by the overwhelming greenery, the noises of the forest, and the preponderance of insect life.

Everything in the forest is alive – that cannot be stressed enough. You are completely surrounded by green. Every available square inch is covered with life; leaves and rocks are coated in moss, shrub-like plants grow on the trunks of the large trees, and ferns and lichens are everywhere. The most memorable trees are the great grandfathers of the forest, so big it would take a dozen men stretched fingertip to fingertip to encircle the tree. Slow-growing woody lianas as thick as your forearm drape from the branches above, and all the empty spaces are filled in with saplings and medium-sized trees of a thousand varieties.

The rainforest at La Selva is very loud. The rushing streams, bird calls, crickets, and frogs join together in a terrific cacophony, punctuated by the hoots of howler monkeys. You can't go a full minute without hearing the crashing of a fist-sized object falling through multiple layers of leaves, as branches and fruits are shaken down from the canopy by animals and the wind.

The ground and underbrush at La Selva is peculiar and variable. In some places, the red earth is firm and solid, while in others, it's a thick mud that will refuse to release your boots. The

underbrush is similarly variable. In some areas, you can glide between the trees like a ghost, while in another spot ten yards away, you'd need a machete to get through. Visibility, though, is always poor. You'll rarely be able to see anything off-trail more than thirty yards away. Often, you can't even see the top of your boot through the ferns and leafy shrubs.

It rains most every day at La Selva: a heavy, driving rain that will soak you to the bone within a minute. Once the rain stops, water will continue to cascade down from the leaves above for at least an hour.

For many researchers at La Selva, the site's greatest attraction is the animal life. The calls of howler monkeys will wake you up in the morning, and a sharp-eyed observer can spot white-faced monkeys and spider monkeys. Peccaries root through the leaf litter, while red and blue poison dart frogs hop aside. Perfectly camouflaged vipers coil at the bases of trees. Brightly-colored birds perch in the canopy. The streams are full of fish, and there are crocodiles in the river.

But the most vibrant animal life in the forest is the insects. Flies and mosquitos buzz around your face. Sweat-drinking bees tangle themselves in your hair. Enormous iridescent wasps buzz along the forest floor, searching for prey, while bright blue butterflies sail under the tree canopy. In their tiny mud-daub galleries along the undersides of stout branches, termites travel to and from their nests. And if you feel something crawling down your neck, you'd better brush it off quickly, because it might be a bullet ant: an inch-long, jet black monster with mandibles like butchers' cleavers and a sting that will leave you sobbing into you pillow for a full twenty-four hours.

While much of the color and flavor of the La Selva forest is unique to Costa Rica (for example, it does not flood like the Amazon, nor does it have ape species like in the Congo or Borneo), it can be used in almost any RPG setting, and there are countless reasons for your party to enter a rainforest based on this one. One thing that may spice up a rainforest in your game is the fact that they are actively hostile to human life. Even after the invention of antifungal creams, water purifiers, and hunting rifles, living in the rainforest is hard. That says something about the psychology of whomever your PCs encounter in the forest.

Lagrange Points

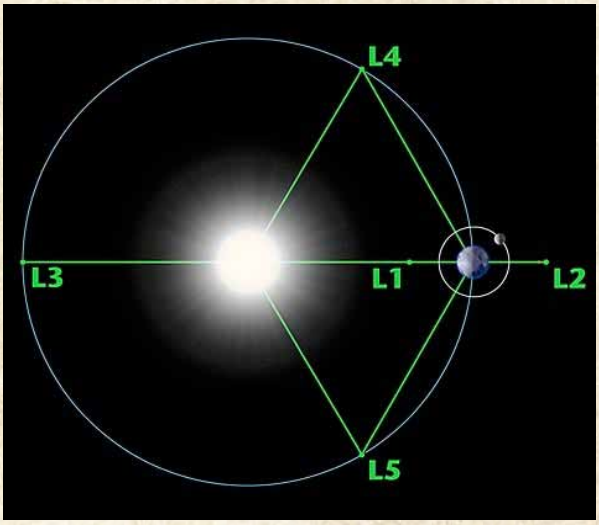
Stable Gravitational Islands of the Solar System

A Lagrange point is a place in space where the gravity between two objects balances. What that means is that a third object (say, a space ship) at a Lagrange point between two more massive objects (say, the Sun and the Earth) will be equally attracted to both objects and thus be pulled towards neither. It will instead hang there in space, stationary with respect to both of them. Lagrange points follow planets in their orbits, meaning that our space ship will be pulled along behind the Earth as it orbits the Sun, marching in lockstep through the solar system.

There are five Lagrange points for every pair of objects, numbered L1-L5. L1-L3 are rather unstable. You have to be exactly on the Lagrange point or you will begin to drift. L4 and L5, though, do not suffer from this problem. The five Lagrange points of the Earth-Sun system are good places to put space probes, because it's easy for them to communicate with us. The Earth is always in the same spot in the sky, so the probe doesn't have to adjust the direction in which it sends its transmissions.

L1 is the home of some NASA probes, because any bursts of particles from the Sun towards the Earth will pass through L1 first and hit the probe. The probe can then give the Earth about an hour's warning that these particles are coming, so we can temporarily shut down our satellites for safety.
L2 is opposite the Earth from the Sun, so is in the shadow of the planet. Objects that are sensitive to light (like telescopes) can be (and are!) suspended at L2 to see space without the glare of the Sun.

Earth's L3 is a fairly lousy Lagrange point. Venus passes quite near it on a regular basis, so nothing can stay stable at L3 for long. (This, unfortunately, means that those classic sci-fi stories of a villanous counterpart to Earth on the other side of the Sun don't hold up to scrutiny). It's



not exactly at the opposite side of our orbit from the Sun; it's actually a hair further away from the Sun than we are. Because it's on the other side of the Sun, if you want to send a message from the Earth to L3, you'd need to send it to a relay station somewhere else, to then be sent to L3, as we generally can't see that Lagrange point.

The L4 and L5 points are largely self-correcting. An object near them or one that gets nudged away from them will drift back to the Lagrange point. Asteroids that get trapped at these points are called Trojan asteroids. Earth has one such asteroid at L4, while Jupiter has several thousand Trojans at both L4 and L5.

At your table, Lagrange points may be a good place for covert affairs, especially the Lagrange points of remote bodies. For example, an object hidden at Neptune's L2 would never see the light of the Sun. If the object is dark (no lights, no heat signature), it would be effectively invisible except to radar. If the object were hidden somewhere else in the shadow of the planet, it would have to use its engines to stay in the shadow, but at the Lagrange point, the object doesn't have to announce its presence by firing up its engines. Invading ships, smugglers' drops... the possibilities are endless. Similarly, Jupiter's Trojan asteroids would make a good “free port” for smugglers and pirates. With a number of asteroids in close proximity you would have plenty of resources for constructing ships and buildings, but the Lagrange point is also very remote, making it a good hideout.

Lake Baikal

World's Deepest and Oldest Freshwater Lake

Deep in south-central Siberia near the Mongolian border lies Lake Baikal, which holds 20 percent of the world's liquid freshwater. This vast lake, about 400 miles long, 50 miles wide (about the surface area of Belgium) and over a mile deep, is thin and crescent-shaped because it is the product of a vast rift valley, where two continental plates are splitting apart. Unlike other lakes at high latitudes, the sediments of the lake bed – over 4 miles deep in some places – weren't scoured away by Ice Age glaciation. These undisturbed sediments have provided useful information about changes in climate over the last 250,000 years, but Lake Baikal is much older than that. It is at least 25 million – perhaps 50 million - years old: the world's oldest freshwater lake.

The lake is very clear and strongly oxygenated even in its lower depths, allowing for a great variety of life to thrive within, including the freshwater Baikal seal. No one knows exactly how these seals arrived at a lake thousands of miles inland, but they have adapted to the lake well, and are able to dive 900 feet down. Lake Baikal also has giant fish-eating flatworms up to 16 inches long. In total, there are 745 endemic animal species and 150 endemic plant species in Lake Baikal.

The lake has remained fairly pristine and unpolluted due to its location far from major population centers (though the Trans-Siberian Railroad does curve around its southwest corner). In the 1960s, the Soviets built a giant pulp mill on its shores – shutting down this mill was a major cause celebre of Soviet environmentalism. The mill shut down for economic reasons in 2008, but reopened in 2010 – though Vladimir Putin tooled around the lake in a minisub and pronounced the pollution negligible, environmentalists are still concerned. The Russian government also plans to build a uranium enrichment plant near the lake, and store the tailings and waste products in the area.

Lake Baikal, aside from being the site of the only naval battle in Czech history (see page 181), was the site of the Great Siberian Ice March of the counterrevolutionary Siberian White Army. Thirty thousand White Army soldiers, along with many of their families and the Tsar's gold, fled the Bolsheviks across the frozen Lake Baikal in January 1920. Aside from the Russian Civil War, the lake has seen combat between Han Dynasty China and the Xiongnu "barbarians," and between the native Buryats and Russian colonists in the 1600s.

The most obvious way to bring Lake Baikal into your game would be to have it be the home of a Loch Ness Monster analogue – perhaps one given mutant powers by the dumping of radioactive waste from the aforementioned enrichment plant. It's not as well explored or as busily traveled as the Great Lakes, it's really deep and old, and it's big enough that having a small breeding population of aquatic monsters won't strain your players' suspension of disbelief as much as putting them in Lake Champlain. Admittedly, if you're going with the "atomic mutant monster runs amok!" idea, realism is not really necessary.

Of course, if your campaign is set during the Russian Civil War, getting your players to Lake Baikal is a good idea for thematic reasons – Baikal is a sort of watery counterpart to the vast Russian steppes. And it can be useful for fantasy campaigns as well: after all, most fantasy-world maps include gigantic lakes. Why not model them on Lake Baikal, the "eye of Siberia?"

Madagascar Spiny Thickets

Harsh, Bizarre Mixture of Desert and Forest

The spiny thickets of Madagascar are hot, dry, and flat. The landscape is covered in a patchwork of dense clusters of five-yard-tall thorn-bearing plants, broken up by an occasional enormous baobab tree. Natural paths meander through the snarl of spiny branches. High above the orange soil, unusual monkey-like mammals hang from the tree trunks. Iguanas and boa constrictors bask on bloated, waxy branches.

The hot, dry environment has forced plants to develop extreme adaptations to conserve water. Many plants have enormous tubers in which to store fluids, while others use swollen trunks, branches, and leaves. The surfaces of many plants are waxy, which prevents water from evaporating through the bark. Others use hairs to shade themselves. Then there's the problem of surface area: every square inch is a place where the sun can dry out the plant. To deal with this problem, many of the local plants have leaves that grow directly from their trunks, so they don't get added surface area from branches. Others don't grow leaves at all, getting their photosynthesis form their green trunks. And thorns are omnipresent as a way to keep animals from stealing the precious water inside.

The most notable resident of this hellish landscape is the sifaka. Sifakas are lemurs – a sort of primitive primate – with very odd behavior and appearance. At first blush, you might be too distracted by their wide eyes and silky, cream-colored fur to notice, but their legs are much too long and fold up alongside their bodies like a frog's. They cling tightly to vertical tree trunks, but when they want to move to a different tree they push off with their hind legs, sending themselves flying backwards through the air. Then, they twist in midair so that they are facing their target before landing on the new trunk. It's a rapid, almost explosive form of movement. However, their legs are so highly adapted to this form of locomotion that sifakas cannot walk on the ground. Instead, they must hop sideways like a crab on a pogo stick.

Most of the spiny thickets in Madagascar have been cleared, typically for sisal production. Sisal is a large plant with tough, yard-long, sword-shaped leaves. The leaves are stripped to extract the fibers within, which can be exported to make twine. These plantations could make a fun counterpoint to the spiny thickets themselves, contrasting dangerous, untamed nature with carefully managed plantations.

Madagascar spiny thickets offer an interesting alternative to traditional forests. They let you play with many of the themes and elements you'd associate with a traditional forest, but with a harsher edge. For example, any elves or fey living in a Madagascar spiny thicket would probably be a lot less friendly than the ordinary variety.

Since going off-trail in a spiny thicket is a very bad idea, you can use this to create unique adventures. Consider a wildfire in this dry forest; the whole place will go up like kindling, but there are limited escape routes. However, if you're going to use the spiny thicket to limit your players' options, take care to avoid railroading them. If you only present one trail to your players, they're probably not going to feel like they have much control over the course of the session.

Mangrove Forest

Saltwater Swamp

Florida's west coast is lined with mangrove forests. These mangrove trees, famous for their ability to tolerate salt, grow along the shore and in the water, forming entire coastlines of dense forests and winding canals.

Mangrove forests are most memorable for their sights and smells. Light filters through the thick green canopy to fall upon the twisting, intertwined roots lifting the trees out of the water. The tree bark is rough, and if you run your thumb along the underside of a leaf, dried salt crystals will shower your palm. Decaying leaves floating in the murky water fill the air with a pungent smell somewhere between loam and week-old fish, but with the tang of salt. Walking through the mud, your feet sink in past your ankles, and your footprints release gasses that reek of rotten eggs. The caws of herons assail your ears, mixing with the buzz of the mosquitos.

The forests tend to be broken up into small islands, and the canals between them are the easiest way to travel. The tree canopy completely fills the space over the salt water, like a vaulted roof. Sometimes it soars far above you, but sometimes the branches are so low, you have to duck your head. Canoes and kayaks are the best way to travel these narrow, twisting waterways. A boat any larger would get trapped. Instead, you glide quietly through water that glitters with dappled sunlight. Travel on foot through the canals is slow. Though the water is seldom more than waist-deep, the thick mud on the bottom grabs at your feet. Oysters and barnacles growing on the tree roots slash the legs of careless waders; the cuts immediately fill with stinging salt water.

The islands themselves tend to be quite small, only a few dozen yards in diameter. They are smallest near open water, and get larger as you move towards the mainland. The largest may have clearings in their centers, but most of the islands are tangled mazes of roots and branches; almost impassable without a chainsaw. The islands are actually creations of the trees. Mangrove seedlings will sprout in shallow water, and their elevated 'prop roots' trap sand and mud around them. This expands the region of shallow water, allowing more and more mangroves to sprout there, trapping more and more sand and mud until an island is formed.

Floridian mangrove forests are incredibly rich in life. They boast three types of mangroves, each with their own salt tolerance and special coping mechanism. In the branches, you'll find crabs, herons, egrets, pelicans, and raccoons. The prop roots are coated not just with sharp oysters and barnacles, but also with sponges, sea squirts, and anemones. These roots form a dense cage that protect the young fish who hide there until they grow large enough to leave for the open ocean. At low tide, some islands have exposed mudflats,

upon which fiddler crabs scuttle and swarm. The mud in these forests is so rich with nutrients that the bacteria feeding on them have used up all the oxygen; the strange metabolisms they need to survive down there give the mud its distinctive "rotten egg" smell.

Mangrove forests often abut expensive waterfront properties. The people living in these fancy houses do not generally appreciate having their view of the water obstructed by foul-smelling swamps. So they cut them down. There's a fine of about $15,000 per tree, but if you can afford Florida waterfront property, you can afford the fine. This can be embarrassing when a hurricane hits; mangrove forests do an excellent job protecting the land behind them from flooding. These shortsighted rich folks may gain a beautiful view at the cost of losing their house.

One of these Floridian mangrove forests could be a fantastic place to run a game of cat and mouse. Lay down a map of the twining, interconnected canals, and tell your players, "You are here. You're pretty your target is in this direction, but she knows you're coming. How do you want to do this?" Canoes may be a good idea for pursuers, since they're faster, but the pursued may want to flee on foot. It offers more flexibility, and you can hide much more easily. For a real twist, have the PCs' target call for backup halfway through. Now the pursuers become the pursued, and have to sneak out of the mangrove forest without being spotted.

Masaya Volcano

Ominous Hellmouth

Less a fire-spewing monster and more a steaming cauldron, Nicaragua's Masaya Volcano has been associated with death and horror for centuries. It is an excellent site for a final confrontation with a villain.

The edge of the volcano's crater is a flat expanse of dark sand. Drifting across it are clouds of sulfuric acid, burning the throat of anyone who gets too close. The pit itself has vertical walls, and is full of white mist so thick you cannot see the other side. The walls of the pit are composed of irregular blocks of bleached white stone, with dark volcanic sand in the cracks between them, looking like a wall with cement for mortar and bones for bricks. Vultures wheel in the white mist. The overall effect is one of monochromatic horror.

The Masaya Volcano has a long history of demonic folklore. The indigenous peoples of the area believed that the volcano itself was a god, and appeased it by throwing children and virgins into the crater. They also believed that a hag deity dwelled at the bottom of the pit: an old woman with sharp fangs and breasts that reached her waist. She would advise local chiefs about upcoming eruptions, earthquakes, harvests, and wars. When the Spanish began colonizing Nicaragua, they were so convinced that the volcano was a literal entrance to hell that a priest erected a giant cross at the lip of the crater to trap the demons inside. A replica of that cross still stands on the volcano today.

Oddly, at one point, a Catholic friar became convinced that there was gold in the volcano, and organized numerous expeditions to obtain it. Armed with a cross to drive back the demons, the friar at one point descended into the pit on foot, and later lowered in a basket, to attempt to retrieve the precious metal. No gold was ever found.

The Masaya Volcano erupts periodically, though there have been no fresh lava flows in over 300 years. The gradual release of clouds of sulfuric acid is more or less constant, but every few years the volcano will belch forth great billows of soot, ash, and toxic gasses. The last truly destructive volcanic event at Masaya was 6,500 years ago, and resembled the eruption that destroyed Pompeii.

With the exception of the main crater, the volcano is actually quite beautiful. The rich, black soil supports waving fields of yellow grass on the volcano's gentle slopes. Some areas have low, scrubby trees that offer some shade against the tropical sun. Rarer are the old lava flows, where black rock is giving way to new plant life. And while there are multiple craters, only one is ominous; indeed, one crater is full of green trees. On the site you will find iguanas, flocks of parrots, and the occasional coyote.

The most obvious use for the Masaya Volcano is as the home for something evil. Maybe the crater is a portal to the Quasi-Elemental Plane of Ash. Perhaps hidden in a cave in the wall of the pit is the headquarters of the cult of undeath or the secret lair of a supervillain. Most horribly, perhaps that Spanish priest was right. Maybe the volcano really is a literal hellmouth. There are few villains whose final lairs wouldn't be improved by putting them in or around the crater of the Masaya Volcano or a similar location.

However, there are plenty of non-paranormal, site-specific adventures that can happen at the volcano. The PCs might want to help the friar mine gold in the crater, protect him from swindlers and double-dealers, or perhaps swindle him themselves. Alternately, the PCs might be made aware that another eruption like the one 6,500 years ago is imminent and have to evacuate everyone nearby.

McMurdo Dry Valleys

Iceless Antarctic Oases

The McMurdo dry valleys are an odd sight in a continent known for ice and snow. They were first described by Antarctic explorer Robert Scott. He wrote that, "[We] sat down on a small hillock of sand with a merry little stream gurgling over the pebbles at our feet. ... We commanded an extensive view both up and down the valley, and yet, except about the rugged mountain summits, there was not a vestige of ice or snow to be seen; and as we ran the comparatively warm sand through our fingers, and quenched our thirst at the stream, it seemed almost impossible that we could be within a hundred miles of the terrible conditions we had experienced on the summit."

The climate is strangely warm; in the summer it can reach over 50 degrees Fahrenheit, due to an unusual atmospheric effect. It's also astonishingly dry. One Antarctic researcher reports that since he first started coming to the site in the 1950s, he has seen only two drops of rain. In the shockingly rare times when rain actually falls, the drops almost invariably evaporate in midair, before they even reach the thirsty ground. The soil is mostly a dry permafrost. In firmer areas, it's cracked in polygonal shapes by the seasonal freezing and

thawing. It's fertile, too. If you could keep the soil warm and irrigated, you could grow crops. In some areas, there is effectively no weathering. When the first team to visit the dry valleys in 50 years was exploring, they found footprints from Scott's expedition. In other areas, the rocks are worn smooth by wind-blown sand, and carved into bizarre shapes reminiscent of abstract sculptures. Strangest of all, in the height of the Antarctic summer, running water flows in these valleys. Water drips off the mountaintop glaciers, forming creeks. The depths of the streams actually change hour by hour as the angle of the sun affects how much ice is melting on the glaciers.

The McMurdo valleys are one of the most life-rich areas of Antarctica. Algae, roundworms, rotifers, and tardigrades in the soil survive the winter by freeze-drying themselves, and then allow the summer streams to rehydrate them. When dried out, these tiny organisms are blown about by the wind, and so colonize new valleys. The creeks are alive with algae. Orange and red algae paints the streambeds. Along their edges, the algae is black. And under the rocks, it is green. During the winter, the algae becomes so dry and brittle that it crumbles at the touch. Penguins and seals sometimes walk up from the sea into the dry valleys. The seal carcasses mummify, but the penguins are torn apart by gull-like birds.

One of these seasonal creeks, called the Onyx river, is the single longest river in Antarctica: twelve miles. It doesn't even empty into the ocean, but rather into a landlocked lake. It's usually about calf-deep, but has been known to get waist-deep in extreme conditions.

Pouring from a glacier at one edge of the dry valleys, Blood Falls is usually frozen solid, a red stain on the ice. Trapped under the glacier is a pocket of prehistoric ocean, in which bacteria have managed to survive. They display a startlingly alien metabolism, using elemental iron to walk sulfur through a series of oxygenation states. When it gets warm enough to melt a hole in the pocket, the super-saline water burbles forth from under the glacier. The iron in the water gives the falls their distinctive red color.

As the water in these creeks flows downstream it accumulates salt from the soil. By the time it reaches a lake, the water is very salty indeed. Don Juan Pond (the saltiest lake in the world) has such high salinity that it stays liquid year-round. Even the deepest Antarctic winter doesn't freeze it. Many of the other lakes have algal mats at their bottoms, and some are even saturated with nitric oxide (laughing gas), secreted by bacteria.

The McMurdo dry valleys make a fantastic template for a desolate alien planet, with inhospitable terrain, bizarre biology, and potential for terraforming. What more could you ask for?

Midwestern Farmland

America's Breadbasket

Endless green fields of corn and soy, broken only by the occasional grassy cattle pasture, cover almost every square mile of the Midwest. For much of this terrain, the land is as flat as a pool table. As the harvest approaches, the crops turn brown, changing the color of the entire landscape. After the harvest, the fields are left dusty and bare, but are soon covered in patchy

snow. There isn't much wildlife out here, and what little exists is usually holed up in small patches of woods. The one exception is crop thieves like rats and raccoons.

A mature stalk of corn is about as thick as two fingers, and as tall as a man (taller the further south you go). The rows are planted far apart enough that you can walk between them, though your arms will constantly brush the abrasive leaves. Soy, on the other hand, is a short plant, no taller than your calf.

The Midwest is laid out in a grid of squares one mile on a side, perfectly calibrated to the cardinal directions. The grid lines often have roads running down them, sometimes paved, sometimes dirt or gravel. Not all the grid lines have roads, but they are almost always points where one field ends and another begins, broken perhaps by a line of trees (a useful windbreak to prevent soil from blowing away), a ditch, or a field access path. In areas where the fields are watered by a half-mile-long mechanical arm rotating about a central point, the mile-wide squares are inscribed about the mile-wide circles in which the crops grow. The corners of the squares are mowed, but generally do not produce crops. In areas with small farms (like southern Minnesota), these square miles will be further subdivided, while in areas with larger farms (like eastern South Dakota), the same family will farm multiple squares. Note that many farmers these days do not own their land, but are rather contracted employees of large corporations.

A typical Midwestern farmstead has several buildings. The family house is usually white, with clapboard siding and a peaked roof. There are usually several barns and outbuildings. Older structures are wooden, but the newer ones will likely be made of tin. They contain tractors, hay, bags of fertilizer, livestock, and all the other supplies and equipment needed to keep a farm running. Well-trained dogs guard a carefully-groomed lawn. A few trees shade the house and serve as a windbreak.

These farms are supported by small towns found at the intersections of state roads and county highways. These towns tend to all have the same amenities: a farm supply store; a church or two; an equivalent number of bars; one or two restaurants, taverns, or roadhouses; and all the usual necessities, like a grocery store, bank, cemetery, and school. In larger towns, double those numbers and replace one of the grocery stores with a Walmart. A bit outside of town, you will find a grain elevator or three. They resemble a series of great white and silver cylinders, connected by pipes that run between their tops. The populations of these towns often skew older. Many of the kids go off to big cities like Chicago to make their fortunes, rather than staying behind to work the farm.

All PCs need to come from somewhere, and in games it can sometimes be fun to go back to that somewhere for an adventure. Not much happens on the farms and in the little towns of the rural Midwest, so if something needs the attention of a party of adventurers, it will probably be on everyone's lips when the PCs roll into town. Alternately, maybe no one is talking about the adventure hook, because no one in town finds it the slightest bit unusual. Even while the PCs are helping the farmers and townspeople, have the NPCs keep their distance from them; rural communities can be very insular and unwelcoming of outsiders.

The Moon

Airless, Rocky Little World

The Moon is a harsh place to live. There is effectively no atmosphere, which gives rise to huge temperature extremes. In direct sunlight, the temperature is a blazing 225 degrees Fahrenheit, but in the shade, it's -240. There is no temperature gradient; when the sun rises, the temperature shoots up in seconds. Complicating things further, surface gravity on the Moon is only 17% of what it is on the Earth. And there is a six-second delay in all communications between the Moon and the Earth: it takes three seconds for light to reach the Moon, and three seconds to return. The Moon also has no magnetic field.

The same side of the Moon always faces the Earth. If you are on the Moon's near side, you will always be able to see the Earth, while on its far side, you never will. Admittedly, it's a little more complicated than that; the Moon wobbles slightly, so there are regions where you can watch the Earth slowly rise and set on the horizon. Though the Earth hangs mostly unmoving in the dark lunar sky, it does go through phases, just as the Moon does from Earth.

The Sun is not similarly still; the entire Moon experiences a full day/night cycle. But while a day on Earth lasts 24 hours, a lunar day takes four weeks. The sun shines like a spotlight in the black lunar sky, much brighter than on Earth. It drowns out the stars during the day, but at night, they are brilliant. The day/night cycle gets a bit trickier near the poles. There are peaks there that are always in sunlight, and craters that are always in shadow.

There are two primary types of terrain on the Moon: maria and highlands. Maria (singular: mare) are areas where ancient volcanoes covered the land in lava. They're darker in color and fairly flat. The rocky, mountainous lunar highlands are a lighter gray, and much more heavily cratered. The near and far sides of the Moon have quite different terrain. While the near side has a good mix of maria and highlands, the far side is almost entirely highlands.

In both terrain types, the surface is primarily dust. Billions of years of bombardment by micrometeorites has worn away anything solid. The top few inches are powdery, like talcum powder, but below that, the lunar surface is fairly durable. Moon dust is highly abrasive, and poses a serious threat to long-term residents. It's inevitable that you will track some into your lander or moon base as you return from a stroll. With prolonged exposure, lunar dust will wear away your clothes, gum up your machinery, and slice up your lungs as you inhale it.

A moon base might be built around mining, as astronauts excavate for air, water, and profitable commodities. Lunar rocks are rich in oxygen-containing compounds, so we might break them down chemically to provide breathable air. There's some very suggestive evidence pointing to buried deposits of water ice near the poles, though it's yet to be confirmed. And to make a moon base profitable, we might mine for Helium-3. While we have no major use for the gas today, if we ever invent practical fusion reactors, Helium-3 would make a great fuel. We barely have any of the gas on Earth, but the Moon is likely rich with the stuff. A good place for a

moon base would be on a polar peak. There, the sun never sets, providing the habitat with plenty of sunlight for energy, and it's near the potential water deposits.

At your table, the Moon makes a great stand-in for just about any lifeless rock. They're all pretty much the same; the only variables are whether the body is tidally locked to something (see below), how hot it gets in direct sunlight, and whether there's any exotic geology going on.

The phenomenon where only one side of the Moon faces the Earth is called "tidal locking," and it happens whenever a small object is in a tight orbit around a huge object. Most of the moons of Jupiter and Saturn are tidally locked: they always show the same face to the planet. It's a nice touch you can add to a life-bearing moon of a gas giant, like Yavin IV or Pandora.

Mud Volcanoes
The Pyroclastic Flow in Miniature

We discuss geysers on page 51, and volcanoes on page 29. The mud volcano is best described as a sort of midpoint between the two. Instead of lava, mud (sometimes cool, sometimes boiling hot) gushes and flows out of the ground, roiling with bubbles of methane that sometimes burst into spectacular towers of flame. Most mud volcanoes are fairly small, the size of a typical hot spring, but a few around the world are truly – and in some cases dangerously – impressive.

Mud volcanoes are usually found near oil and gas deposits (or methane hydrate formations underwater), earthquake-prone areas, or a combination thereof. Oil and gas can pressurize underground silt and clay, and earthquakes liquify these layers and produce fissures for the mud to escape through. Almost half the world's mud volcanoes are found in Azerbaijan and the neighboring Caspian Sea – site of the fabled oil wells of Baku and vast natural gas deposits.

There are two ways to define the "world's largest" mud volcano – by the height of the cone produced and by the total volume of mud released. Discounting underwater mud volcanoes, whose height is very difficult to measure but sometimes create short-lived islands in the Arabian Sea, the world's largest mud volcano is Chandargup, in southwest Pakistan. It is 300 feet high, and is a site of pilgrimage by those who believe its mud will cure skin diseases.

In terms of mud produced, the world's largest mud volcano is Lusi, in East Java, Indonesia. Likely awakened from dormancy by natural gas drilling (or possibly an earthquake) in 2006, Lusi is much more dangerous than the quietly flowing Chandargup. Its vast mud flows, 60 feet deep in places, have forced 10,000 families to evacuate, buried villages, killed 13 people, and it's not likely to stop for another couple of decades.

Mud volcanoes are not the same as the "mud pots" of Yellowstone and other geothermal areas. A mud pot is a hot spring, heated by geothermal activity, with large amounts of sediment suspended in the water. A mud volcano is not related to springs or geothermal activity, but to pressure buildup underground, usually from fossil fuel deposits. Like a hot spring, however, warm but not boiling mud volcanoes are often bathed in, with claims of healing powers.

The Indus Valley Civilization (page 75) had ongoing problems with mud volcanoes flooding their towns and cities, though this wasn't the cause of their civilization's collapse.

In your game, a mud volcano or area of them could be an interesting place for a combat – especially if the wizard's fireballs start setting off methane explosions. Alternatively, someone (PC or NPC) could try to collect the methane to produce a primitive system of gaslights or a natural gas furnace – again, probably with explosive results. And your PCs could be sent to stop an out-of-control mud volcano, though without modern drilling technology this would be an extremely difficult task.

Open Ocean

Ships on the Boundless Sea

Out of sight of land, the world is very different. In calm seas, the ocean appears as bare as an egg. You look out, and it's the biggest, flattest nothing you will ever see: an endless vista of sun and salt. Without a sense of scale, it feels almost like you're standing in a hole, with the sea rearing up over your head on all sides. It's quite intimidating. What you hear (above the sounds of the ship) is a monotonous "Thud, splash. Thud, splash. Thud, splash," as the bow of the ship plows into each successive wave. One might think that at sea you smell salt air, carried on stiff breezes, like at the beach. Actually, you don't smell much of anything; perhaps the mustiness of the ropes, or the reek of spilled diesel. What you can smell is land: if you've been at sea long enough, you can smell land before it comes over the horizon.

The ocean supports a rich, if not diverse, ecosystem. Large populations of photosynthetic plankton support huge schools of little silvery fish. These fish are preyed upon by porpoises, large fish like tuna and sharks, and by seabirds like albatrosses and frigatebirds that spend almost their entire lives out of sight of land. And mixed into the whole collection are standouts like jellyfish, sea turtles, and whales.

Life on a ship is very different from life on land. For one thing, it's generally quite monotonous if the ship is running well. For another, space is at a premium, causing rooms to be built in three dimensions. For example, your bed might double as a chest of drawers, or be above two other people's beds, or be in a six foot-deep cramped tunnel in the side of a bulkhead. Cargo vessels tend to be astonishingly international. A ship might be built in China, owned in Newcastle, registered in the Marshall Islands, captained by an Australian, and crewed by Filipinos, Romanians, and Kenyans. On most merchant ships today, the common language is English or

Tagalog (the main Filipino language), and the currency is the American dollar.

Oceangoing PCs may wind up suffering from seasickness, an overpowering, often debilitating (but completely harmless) nausea cased by the rocking of the boat. On the first day at sea, you may want your PCs to make fortitude checks. Failed checks indicate seasickness, which may be represented by making PCs lose actions or having to make will checks before moving. After every day at sea, seasick PCs can make another check to try to shake off the effects. Once the symptoms are gone, they stay gone, at least until a storm or the next voyage.

Storms may be a threat to PCs, but probably not to the ship itself. It's a rare storm that can swamp or capsize a ship (though a hurricane sank the entire 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet). What you have to worry about is your masts, unsecured cargo, and crew. In a storm, you will climb and slide down waves that threaten to swamp you. The winds will throw you around like a doll. The hull may shake like a sheet of tin rattled from the edges. But as long as the masts don't snap and no one is crushed by stray cargo, you'll probably be fine as long as you remember to hold on to something. One hand for yourself, one for the ship.

A greater danger is accidents and fire. Ships can be dangerous places to work. No matter the era, there's always things that can go wrong, from mechanical failures to dropped cargo. And if you get hurt, you're probably days or weeks away from serious medical attention. Fire is a captain's nightmare. Preindustrial sailing ships were made of wood, caulked with tar, and often carried gunpowder. Even today, most ships are powered by diesel and incorporate flammable fiberglass in their construction. To make matters worse, if a boat catches fire, there's nowhere to go and no one to call. You either turn on the pumps and desperately try to put out the blaze yourself, or you jump into a life raft and pray for rescue. And in the days before radio, rescue wasn't likely.

And, of course, there are always pirates. Any world that has maritime shipping will have pirates, from the slavers of the classical Mediterranean to the buccaneers of the seventeenth century Caribbean to the Kalashnikov-wielding raiders of Somalia and Malacca.

At your table, the open ocean is most likely to come up as the result of a sea journey from one place to another. But it's a time when the PCs are very vulnerable: they're trapped on a tiny floating scrap in a vast sea. If your PCs have made enemies who would want to see them disappear, now is the time to have these enemies act on their desires. Agents of the villains may attack during a storm, or set the ship aflame and hunt the PCs through the inferno.

The Owen Stanley Mountains

Australia's Jungle Thermophylae

Between the northern and southern coasts of Papua New Guinea is the Owen Stanley Range – not the highest mountains in the world (the tallest peak is a little over 13,000 feet) but some of the most diverse, culturally and biologically. The mountains produce a great variety of microclimates – savannah, tropical rainforest, swampland, cloud forest and alpine meadow are all just a few miles apart. At low altitude, temperatures are tropical, but they can be quite cold above 5000 feet, with snow falling on the mountaintops despite the country's proximity to the equator. When rain comes, it is often torrential, as much as 10 inches falling in a day. Rain and moss adds to the natural slickness of the area's rocks, making for treacherous slopes. The ridges of the geologically young mountain range are steep and razorbacked: unlike a normal ridgeline, walking along them is a real challenge.

The local Papuans live in small agrarian villages (New Guinea is one of a few places where agriculture was developed independently), farming the fertile plateaus in the mountains, growing sweet potatoes (introduced in the 1700s by Portuguese traders) and raising pigs.

The difficulty of traveling long distances in the mountainous landscape has caused Papua New Guinea to become the world's most linguistically diverse country, with over 800 different indigenous languages among 6.2 million people in an area the size of Spain.

What traffic passes through the Owen Stanleys primarily travels along the Kokoda Trail, an old colonial mail route accessible only on foot, with rickety bridges and stone steps carved into hillsides. Today, the Kokoda trail is a popular tourist destination for athletic-minded Australians, with most taking between 4 and 12 days to trek the 60 miles (though some are much faster: the locals often do it in 1-3 days, and the record time is 16 ½ hours). Aside from the varied landscape and beautiful vistas, tourists come for the trail's historical significance.

Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Japan attacked the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and Papua New Guinea (then an Australian colony). Initially, the Japanese planned to seize Port Moresby (the capital of Papua New Guinea and a useful port from which to launch an invasion of Australia) by sea, but the Japanese navy was defeated in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942. So the Japanese Army marched overland across the Owen Stanley Mountains and towards the Kokoda Trail.

Opposing them was only a small force – about 100 soldiers in total – of inexperienced Australian militia troops. They were told by their superiors that all they had to do to hold off the Japanese was to "go up to Kokoda and sit on the gap," but this was easier said than done. What the high command assumed was a narrow valley was, in fact, a broad gap in the mountains, which they had to hold against 500 attackers. This turned out to be impossible, but the fierce resistance the Australians gave was enough to slow the Japanese advance and convince the enemy commander that about 1200 rather than 77 defenders opposed him. However, the Australian generals at the time considered this defeat to be a sign of weakness, saying that the militia had been defeated by an inferior force.

With Kokoda captured, a full Japanese division came marching towards Port Moresby. But the initial resistance had given the Allies enough time to set up stronger defense forces, which slowly retreated down the Trail as they built up strength. Japanese troops got within 30 miles of Port Moresby – close enough to see the lights of the town from the hills above – but were stopped cold (partially due to the diversion of resources to the battle on Guadalcanal) and outflanked by US troops. After an arduous journey through the malarial swamps and slippery mountains, the American 126th Infantry Battalion built crude airfields on the other side of the Owen Stanleys, allowing for troops and supplies to be airlifted across and behind Japanese lines.

The final battles on New Guinea, in late 1942 and early 1943, were a powerful example of WWII Japan's strength on the defensive. Despite the high water table's interference with trenches, Japanese forces put up stiff resistance for

months on the northern coast of New Guinea, building concealing barriers out of razor-sharp kunai grass and coconut logs. Across the whole Papua New Guinea campaign, the Allies suffered about 8,500 casualties, with the majority from tropical diseases. Japanese losses were similar in number, but a much higher percentage of their smaller numbers. The campaign is seen by many Australians today as being on par with Gallipoli (see page 166) as a major event in the country's military history.

In your game, the Owen Stanley Mountains are a good place to send PCs simply because of their heterogeneity – one valley is a swamp, the next is savanna, and the one after that is a high semi-alpine meadow with a farming village that speaks a different language than the one two miles away. A setting of small-scale intrigue among highland Papuan villages could make for a great game, especially if it happens during a period of change in the area, such as soon after the introduction of the sweet potato. And for a more military-oriented campaign, the battles of the Kokoda Trail make for a situation where a small unit can really make a big difference.

Páramo

Tropical Mountaintop Tundra

Páramo is a unique ecosystem found atop some mountains in Latin America. Too warm for snowcap, but far too cold and windy for forest, the páramo is a lot like tundra. It's a bizarre landscape of short grasses, giant shrubs, hardy insects, and sudden weather changes.

Ascending a mountain is a lot like traveling towards the poles. The lush vegetation at the base of the mountain gives way to hardier, cold-adapted forests higher up, not unlike the forests of the North American temperate zone. A tall enough mountain may be topped with a snowcap or glaciers, which are quite similar ecologically to the Arctic or Antarctica. Páramo is the tundra analogue in this simile, and is found above the treeline but below the snowcap.

The páramo is generally rocky, cold, and greyscale. You look out on white clouds all around you, at the grey-green grass at your feet, and the black rocks that you scramble over. There's little movement, aside from the rippling in the short grass when a biting wind springs up. There is no birdsong. Most of the plants are short and strangely shaped. It's a bit like walking on an alien planet.

The weather in the páramo changes rapidly. Most páramo is so high it is literally in the clouds. A bright, sunny day can be obliterated in seconds by a cloud blowing in, enveloping everything in a thick fog. Then, just as suddenly, the cloud passes over the mountain and the fog is gone. Harsh, biting winds are the rule here, as there is no windbreak, just empty atmosphere for miles in almost every direction. Most days, the direct sunlight heats things up quite uncomfortably by the afternoon, but most nights, the temperature drops back below freezing.

To survive in this harsh environment, plants tend to be bizarrely adapted. To combat the biting wind and the harsh sunlight, they tend to grow in a tussock or rosette shape, rarely more than a few inches tall. Their leaves are small and hairy, and generally point straight up, getting their sun from the light reflected off the rocks, which is less intense. The few larger plants tend to be full of natural antifreeze.

Few large animals can survive for long in the páramo. Some species migrate up and down the mountain with the changing temperature, but for the most part, the only animals you'll see are a few slow-moving insects. Up here, warmth is a more precious resource than food, so some plants attract pollinators not with nectar, but with reflective, parabolically-shaped flowers that warm insects that land in their center.

Páramo is a nice break from the ordinary in a game. Not many people have heard of it, let alone know what it looks like, so it can be a fun way to create an atmosphere of unfamiliarity without using magic or technology. Few people live in the páramo, so it could be a good (if exquisitely uncomfortable) place for a hideout. Páramo is probably not a good setting for multiple sessions, but it can make for a great change of pace.

One place where páramo excels is in creating a sense of transition. If your PCs have to go from one place to another, and you want the two places to feel very different, it helps to have a clear threshold for the PCs to cross. Having a mountain range between the two places helps explain why they are so different, and putting páramo atop the mountains gives the PCs their threshold. They climb one side of the mountains, and look back over the lands they've traveled in their adventures thus far. Then, they climb into the páramo, maybe have an adventure there, and things are very strange and different from what they're used to. This breaks them out of the mold in which they have been thinking, and leaves them open to new ideas, settings, and experiences as they descend the other side of the mountain range.

The Phoenix Islands
Remote Coral Atolls

Tucked away inside the largest marine protected area in the Central Pacific, the Phoenix Islands are a dry tropical paradise hundreds of miles from anywhere else. Eight islands make up the group: four atolls and four low reef islands, plus two submerged coral reefs.

The Phoenix islands are piles of dead coral topped with a layer of white sand. They have sparse vegetation: mostly scrub and grass, with some light forests (though one island is properly forested). There are no ponds or streams. Some of the larger islands have groundwater, but it turns brackish in times of drought. The only terrestrial animals are lizards and land crabs, though the

islands are nesting grounds for sea turtles and immense flocks of seabirds.

There were a few Polynesian settlements on the Phoenix Islands thousands of years ago, but it doesn't seem anyone stayed for long, likely because of the unreliable fresh water and extreme isolation. The islands were discovered by Europeans in the nineteenth century, and their waters were heavily exploited by whalers. At one point, over 600 whaling ships plied the seas around the Phoenix Islands. Meanwhile, the islands were being mined for the guano built up over thousands of years by nesting birds. Some parts of the islands were knee-deep in dried bird excrement, which was sold as fertilizer. The islands played a minor role in the Second World War, and have been largely unused since.

Because of their isolation, the reefs around the Phoenix Islands are doing quite well. The islands are so remote that the first systematic study of these pristine reefs wasn't until 2000. Amid the painted corals, blue-lipped giant clams, and neon sea anemones are over 500 species of brightly-colored fish. Swimmers find themselves surrounded by schools of sword-like barracuda, hump-headed parrotfish, swirling masses of silvery jacks, and packs of handsome sharks. Interestingly, there are very few whales around the Phoenix Islands, a legacy of the nineteenth century whalers. For information on the areas between the islands, see Open Ocean on page 35.

The largest island in the group is Kanton Atoll. The atoll is a thin line bent into a diamond around a protected lagoon. At its widest point, the lagoon is about ten miles across. There is a pass on the atoll's western edge, allowing passage between the ocean and the lagoon. Kanton is lightly inhabited by government caretakers, who are heavily dependent on supply shipments. An unpaved road runs the circumference of the atoll. The island has remnants of old whaling camps, burial mounds, rusting bulldozers, a WWII-era US landing strip, and the ruins of a satellite tracking station.

In your campaign, the Phoenix Islands could be an excellent place to hide something, like a powerful artifact or secret lair. The islands are so remote, no one will ever stumble upon their secret by accident. Indeed, if the game is set before the nineteenth century, just finding the islands is going to be an adventure in and of itself.

A culture living on islands like these could be a great deal of fun, especially if they were created there. Living in such isolation, they would likely have no real concept of the outside world. This could be an interesting place to start a campaign in a setting none of your players are familiar with. As the PCs set out beyond the Phoenix Islands, the players will learn about the broader world alongside their characters.

Pine Flatwoods

Sparse, Flat Woodlands

The pine flatwoods of the American southeast offer a distinctive twist on woodlands. They are dominated by tall, slender pines, spaced dozens of yards apart. Their sparse branches offer little shade, and their bark peels off in thin sheets. The ground is completely flat, and covered either in long, wiry grass or by the fronds of the saw palmetto. These palmettos are notorious for their stems, which are edged like saw blades. Running through a clump of saw palmetto in shorts is a good way to lose blood. The sounds of pine flatwoods are typically dominated by the rushing of wind in the pines and the occasional snap of a falling limb.

The flatwoods themselves are broken up by two other ecosystems. On ground that's an inch or two lower you find scrubby prairie: no trees, but lots of palmettos. On ground that's an inch or two higher you get stands of ancient, gnarled oak trees, where Spanish moss hangs from the branches like an old man's beard.

Inside pine flatwoods, you find woodpeckers and owls, but also bears, panthers, fox, deer, hogs, and armadillo. Gopher tortoises, grey and bulky, excavate burrows that they share with giant

indigo racer snakes. Rattlesnakes may also pose a danger to the careless hiker.

Pine flatwoods are notorious for wildfires. The dry environment is very much a tinderbox. Indeed, they depend on fire. Only regular burns keep the saw palmettos in check. Without fire, the plant takes over. If fire is excluded from a pine flatwood long enough, the underbrush becomes so dense that the flames burn so hot that when a fire does start, the pine trees can no longer withstand it. Their sap boils inside them, causing the pines to explode outwards in a shower of superheated liquid and splinters.

While trapping your PCs in a pine flatwoods wildfire could be a lot of fun, there's an even better use for this landscape: as the setting for a horror game. At night, the moon casts long shadows, and the widely-spaced trees block visibility at a range of about a quarter-mile. That's short enough that you can't hope to signal for help, but far enough that if something's chasing you, you've nowhere to hide. Plus, these woodlands tend to be found in remote areas with no cell phone service.

Imagine, if you will, a Boy Scout troop. This weekend, they're making a camping trip to the fictional Kawahatchee preserve. Due to a staph outbreak, most of the troop can't go, but the four healthy boys were so excited for the trip that it will happen anyway, led by a single scoutmaster. What they don't know is that an inscrutable entity is corrupting the transients at a homeless camp in the reserve. That night, when the moon makes shadows dance across the palmettos, three insane transients will terrorize the scouts. First, the demon will drive the scouts to flight: sending the transients to collapse tents and stab some of the scouts before running away through the underbrush. As the scouts flee between the palmettos that cut like knives, strange occurrences keep happening. The water in someone's canteen turns to blood. The sound of a knife being sharpened for a turkey dinner echoes through the trees. Worse, the map no longer seems to have any relation to the actual lay of the land. Eventually, the scouts stagger into an empty old cabin and bar the door. After they catch their breath, they hear something moving in the chimney...

The Pripet Marshes

Great Swamp of the European Steppes

As any Pole will tell you, Eastern Europe has little in the way of obstacles to invading armies. Aside from the major rivers of the region and the Carpathian mountains in Hungary and Romania, most of the region makes for excellent cavalry or tank country (unless it's the mud season or well below zero). The main exception to this is the Pripet (also called Pinsk or Pripyat) marshes, a vast swamp in southern Belarus and northwest Ukraine.

The marshes, a low-lying area along the Pripyat river, cover an area of about 38,000 square miles (about the same size as Indiana or Hungary). Though some areas, mostly in the east of the marshes, have been drained for agricultural development in the past two centuries, much of the forested marsh is still undeveloped, with few roads. Its size is hard to define, due to annual floods and debatably marshy areas, but it was likely larger in the past – some WWII maps put its size at about 100,000 square miles, more the size of Oregon.

The marshes have had two main effects on the region's history. First, they've formed a massive barrier to military operations, most obviously in the world wars. In World War I, it forced the Austro-Hungarians to divide their defensive front against the Russians, resulting in the early Russian capture of Lemberg (present-day Lvov). In the Second World War, the marsh turned against the Russians – the Red Army was concentrated south of the Marshes at the start of Operation Barbarossa, and the main German attack was to the north.

However, the Russians were better able to fight back because of the second main effect of the Marshes – they're a great place for bandits, refugees or anyone who wants to escape from society. Legend has it that the first Slavs hid from wolves and bears by diving into the swamps and breathing through reeds. And in WWII, it was the center of Russian partisan activity against the Nazi occupation, and a major reason why modern-day Belarus was the site of some of the fiercest anti-Nazi resistance in occupied Europe. Much like the "Swamp Fox" of the American Revolution, they knew that forests and marshes were excellent sites for guerilla warfare.

At one point, the Nazis planned to drain the whole region to root out the resistance and open up agricultural land for German settlement, but the plan was dropped early on – not for being overambitious, but for fears it would produce a drought and dust storms. Thus, the Pripyat river remained a useful source of water for postwar Soviet development, including the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on the southeast edge of the marshes. Though the town of Pripyat sits abandoned by the plant, this is at the far edge of the Pripet Marshes, and only a small part of them is in the still-radioactive "exclusion zone."

The marshes are full of wildlife, particularly in the exclusion zone, where as in the DMZ between North and South Korea, the lack of human settlement is creating an unintentional nature preserve. Almost 200 bird species nest in the marshes, and European bison and elk reside there as well, along with wild boar and rarely seen wolves and lynx.

In your game, the Pripet Marshes (or a fantasy analogue) would be a great location for escaped slaves, deserting soldiers or marauding bandits to hide out. The people of the marshes could have developed their own unique culture, or perhaps strange creatures live there. And though it may not be a common role-playing subject, if your PCs are planning large-scale military operations in Eastern Europe, they'll have to take this big swamp into account.

ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Pleasantly Generic Mountain Range

The Rockies are an excellent inspiration for a 'standard' mountain range: soaring peaks, rich wildlife, and a little color. In your game, they may make an excellent substitute for the poorly-described mountains that plague roleplaying products.

The foothills of the Rockies are rolling plains, but as you climb out of the grasslands, you enter forests of pines, with gray-brown and cinnamon-red bark, interspersed with groves of white-barked aspen. On drier, south-facing slopes, the trees are spread out, with grasses and herbs growing in the dappled sunlight. On wetter, north-facing slopes, the trees grow more densely, and there are few shrubs on the forest floor. As you approach the tree line, the pines become shorter and twist into grotesque shapes. Many are so-called “flag trees,” with long branches on the leeward side of the trunk, but almost no growth on the windward side.

Eventually, you reach the point above which no trees can grow; it's too cold and too exposed. This is alpine tundra, and is a lot like Páramo (see page 38), albeit less exotic. The wind and the cold keep plants small, with dense hairs and long taproots. You'll also find short grasses and sedges acting as groundcover, and lichens painted on the rocks. During summer, these alpine meadows often bloom with flowers in several colors.

The Rockies boast a wide variety of animal life. Herbivores include bison, pronghorn, deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and countless rodents. Preying upon them are bears, bobcats, wolves, mountain lions, and badgers. Songbirds, hawks, and owls are omnipresent.

Among the most colorful inhabitants the Rockies have seen, the mountain men were crucial to opening up the mountains to European-American settlement. These men were mostly fur trappers. They dressed in animal hides, and generally cultivated a wild appearance. Their lives were hard, and they faced starvation, extreme winters, savage animals, and belligerent natives. Mountain men traveled in bands of about 50. In fall and spring they would hunt and trap, splitting up into groups of two or three. In

winter, they hunkered down until travel became possible. In summer, they would leave the mountains to sell their furs and attend riotous festivals and carnivals in the wilderness. As the fur trade dried up, many turned to guiding settlers through the Rockies, while others joined up with army "Indian-fighters." One of these mountain men, John Colter, was the first white man to travel through what is now Yellowstone Park (see page 51).

The Rocky Mountains are home to some of North America's richest mineral deposits. Butte, Montana, called the "richest hill on Earth", was a major source of copper for decades. Now, the open-pit mine is inactive and slowly filling with water polluted with decades of toxic mine tailings, posing a threat to the city's water supply Other smaller mining boomtowns in the Rockies include Leadville, Colorado and Virginia City, Montana.

The Rockies present an interesting strategic obstacle to invading armies. There are relatively few places in the Rockies where an army can actually cross the mountains. This makes life much easier for the defender who only has to deploy to a small number of passes in order to stop the attacker from easily crossing. Plus, attacking a pass is just plain dangerous for all sorts of reasons: you're attacking uphill, you can only deploy a fraction of your forces at a time, and the defender knows exactly where you are, leaving you vulnerable to bombing and artillery. Attackers who don't want to face this may have to march hundreds of miles out of their way to find a pass where the defender cannot easily project force.

Socotra

Desert Galapagos of the Indian Ocean

Socotra is a Yemeni archipelago of four islands, 220 miles off the coast of mainland Yemen. Its land area is 1465 square miles, about the size of Rhode Island or Cape Verde, with a population of only 50,000. It has been a base for sailors for thousands of years, from Palmyrene merchants to British steamships to Somali pirates. Treacherous seas around the island led to tales that the Socotrans could control the winds and caused shipwrecks in order to scavenge from them.

Perhaps most unique about Socotra is its flora and fauna – it is the archipelago with the third largest number of endemic species (species that only exist on Socotra) in the world, after the Galapagos and Hawaii. These species have adapted to the isolated desert environment, such as mushroom-shaped "dragon's blood trees" with upturned branches to absorb moisture from fog. In all, 700 endemic species have been found on Socotra, and the island is far from completely surveyed.

This diversity is due in part to the island's varied landscape – despite its size, it has mountains rising 5,000 feet above the sea, limestone plains with elaborate cave systems, and gleaming sandy beaches. Another cause is Socotra's 250 million years as an island detached from other landmasses. Its cornucopia of desert life led to Socotra's fame in Roman times, as a source of rare spices and plant extracts, like frankincense, myrrh and dragon's blood, the dark red sap of the eponymous tree. In fact, the name "Socotra" has two possible etymologies related to this: it is "Island of Bliss" in Sanskrit, and a combination of the words "Market" and "dripping frankincense" in Arabic.

Since Roman times, the Socotrans have been largely isolated from the world. Local legend has it that they were converted to Christianity by the Apostle Thomas, and the Socotrans were Nestorian Christians until the 17th century.

The island has its own language and 24-month calendar. The Socotrans traditionally have made a living by exporting spices, fishing, herding goats and raising dates.

Recently, Socotra has been attempting to establish an ecotourism industry to bring development without despoiling its environment. This has met with some success, especially with Italian, French and German tourists. However, Socotra's unique environment still has many problems. Climate change reduces the mist and fog that waters trees on mountain hillsides. Feral cats threaten the island's birds. And long-running overgrazing has been desertifying the island over the centuries.

Socotra can be a useful setting for many campaigns. A game set in the Classical world could involve a trade mission to the island – with or without fantastic beasts in the caves. In a fantasy campaign, Socotra is a great model for any isolated island with a unique ecology and culture. In the modern or near-future world, adventurers could be after the unique genetic resources of the island – or a villainous corporation could be planning to exterminate one of the island's species so they could have the only genetic sample.

Streams and Riparian Forests

Meandering, Serene Oases

The banks of streams are often forested, even in arid climates. Branches arc over the water, forming a roof. Fallen trees lie in the stream, their branches straining leaves from the water. Mossy logs on the bank counterpoint the rocks on the stream bed, covered in fine brown algae. The shade and the water make the air noticeably cooler here. Dragonflies buzz and songbirds chirp over the burbling of the chill stream. Whatever the terrain is like a hundred yards away, here it is verdant and peaceful.

The stream itself is home to a diversity of living things. If you search the rocks and mud on the bottom, you'll find crayfish, freshwater snails, and caddisfly larvae in their constructed cases of fragments of rock and wood. Flying predators swoop over the surface: dragonflies and bats chase mosquitos, while birds like kingfishers hunt minnows. In siltier streams, you'll find catfish and carp. Clearer waters are home to trout. On the banks and in the mud there are salamanders and turtles, and larger streams may have otters and muskrats.

The nature of a stream can change substantially over a short distance. The stream bed can morph from rocks to gravel to mud and back again in only a few dozen yards. A shallow stream, flowing fast and smooth, can suddenly bottom out into

a large, still pool, deeper than a man can wade. Or the stream could get shallower still, the water becoming more rapid and turbulent as it rushes over and around small rocks on the stream bed. The stream may course down a short waterfall or stepped cascade, or even grow deeper as other brooks join the main stream.

The woods around streams and rivers are called riparian forests, and are often quite different from the rest of the landscape. They tend to flood frequently, giving them a thick, rich soil. Typically in a riparian forest you'll find grasses, flowers, shrubs and trees, extending anywhere from a few dozen feet to several hundred yards from the bank. Songbirds perch in the trees, snakes lurk under the rocks, and rabbits and voles hide in hollow logs, while weasels hunt for rodents, seeking to ease their hunger with warm flesh and hot blood.

Riparian forests are often popular spots for children and for vagrants, for much the same reasons: they're frequently the only woods near town. As such, riparian forests are often strewn with discarded beer cans, half-built treehouses, and rain-warped porno mags.

Streams and riparian forests can make great sites for combat scenes. They are likely places for PCs to encounter monsters or enemies, as both sides may be at the stream to take a drink. These sites let you use four significantly different terrain types in one combat: deep water, shallow water, woods, and whatever the general terrain of the region is. Running on the slick rocks in the shallow water may require dexterity checks, giving agile characters an opportunity to outflank clumsy opponents. The deep water may require swim checks, while the trees and shrubs of the riparian forest may offer cover and concealment. For even more complexity, you could throw in a fallen tree or a deep pool.

TAIGA

Vast Snowy Pine Forest

A thick band of dark green ringing the Arctic tundra, the taiga (or boreal forest) consists of the trackless forests of Siberia, Scandinavia, and Canada. It's a vast wilderness roofed with a closed canopy of downward-sloping branches. The undergrowth is in places low and orderly, a carpet of mosses and ferns. In other places, it's an impassable tangle of fallen trees. Beneath the topsoil, the earth is an ashy gray-white or slightly reddish. Deep underground lies permafrost: soil that never thaws. The taiga is rich with water. Rivers, lakes, and bogs (see page 8) are common. Along the northern edge of the forest, the trees are stunted and twisted as the woods fade into tundra (see page 48). Along the taiga's southern edge, it fades gradually into broadleaf forest.

There is little diversity of life in the taiga. For greenery, you'll find some lichens and broadleaf trees, but mostly it's nothing but evergreens like pine, spruce, and Douglas fir. The few animals that live in the taiga year-round are mostly snowshoe hares, red squirrels, lemmings, voles, lynx, wolverines, ermine, and bear, though there are sometimes other animals, like moose and Siberian tigers. The taiga's long winters make it a harsh place to live; much of the forest is barely settled by humans.

Summer is brief in the taiga: one to three months of frost-free days. And even in summer, it can still drop below freezing. This far north, the days are long. Around midsummer, there can be eighteen or nineteen hours between sunrise and sunset. It can also be quite wet. Despite the rain, the taiga in summer is susceptible to wildfires. Areas recently cleared by fire tend to be home to more

of the otherwise-rare shrubs and broadleaf trees. The summer also coincides with an explosion in the populations of insect life. Accordingly, many insect-eating birds fly north to the taiga in summer to breed.

The winter, of course, is long, dark, and bitterly cold. There can be up to six months with average temperatures below freezing. On the solstice, there may be only five hours of daylight. In winter, traveling without a partner can be very dangerous (for more on the effects of cold on the human body, see Arctic Ice Sheet on page 6). During the winter, the forest is a featureless expanse of white snow and black bark. The trees don't shed their needles, of course, so their branches catch snow. Bumping one sends a tiny avalanche onto whoever is underneath. Food shortages are common during winter, and the predators get desperate. Larger animals may resort to preying on humans.

The taiga is under threat from a number of dangers. Loggers push deeper into the forest every year. But most of the threats are due to climate change. Milder winters have allowed voracious pine beetles to spread like never before, killing great swaths of forest. More worrying, the deep underground permafrost is melting, causing the ground to shift and sink. This leaves depressions and pits that turn into ponds, killing the trees that used to grow there. In other areas, the shifting soil has tipped trees off-balance, leaving "drunken forests," as the formerly-upright pines are skewed in a hundred directions.

Given the vast size of the taiga, games set there will probably involve a great deal of traveling. Travel by winter should be difficult. PCs will have to combat frostbite and exhaustion. They may have to cross frozen rivers, and be constantly wary of patches of liquid water insulated and concealed beneath the snow. Stumbling into such a pool risks hypothermia. And, of course, they may be stalked by some starving predator, perhaps a Siberian tiger. Travel by summer should be done by water, following in the footsteps of the voyageur fur traders, who canoed throughout Canada's northern wilderness. Such travel may mean shooting rapids.

Ténéré Desert

Barren, Empty Expanse of Sand Dunes

Part of the Sahara, the Ténéré is one of the larger vacant spaces on the planet: 150,000 square miles of empty desert and blowing sand dunes.

The only real geographic feature of the Ténéré is the dunes. Much of the central part of the desert is composed of unending miles of almost perfectly straight and parallel sand dunes: mile after mile after mile of scorching yellow sand. There is almost no water here; camels must be rehydrated not at oases, but at wells, sometimes hundreds of miles apart. The rarity of water in the Ténéré is proven by how few people live there: only two towns, of perhaps two thousand inhabitants each.

Beyond the two towns, the most important landmark in the Ténéré used to be a tree. Located in a stretch of almost perfectly flat desert, the Tree of Ténéré grew beside a well. It was the only tree for hundreds of miles in any direction. The Tree, a ten-foot-tall acacia, had been known for centuries until it was knocked down by a drunken truck driver. It has since been replaced with a metal pole.

Travel in the Ténéré is done by car. Though there are no roads (and there is little worth driving to), the spaces between the parallel sand dunes make decent substitutes, as they are perfectly straight and stretch for miles. If you choose to travel by camel, you will need to carry water and grass with you, for you will find nothing for your camels to eat or drink in the Ténéré. Travel is best done around dawn and dusk, when the temperature

is between the mind-killing heat of the day and the bitter cold of the night. If you must travel by day, you run a serious risk of heat stroke. You will feel the nausea, the racing heart rate, and the headache, but it will probably be one of your traveling companions who notices your flushed skin and lack of sweat.

The nomadic Tuareg people of the central Sahara do not generally live in the Ténéré, but they have a great deal of influence over the region. For centuries, the Tuareg have crossed the barren Ténéré on their camels to the tiny town of Bilma, in the middle of the desert. The Tuareg bring millet and goats from the south to trade for Bilma's dates and salt. The Tuareg then return to southern Niger to trade the valuable salt for millet, the staple of their diet. Before the arrival of the automobile, few non-Tuaregs made the trip to Bilma, and even with modern transportation, the Tuaregs still do a brisk business.

The Ténéré hasn't always been this way. Five thousand years ago, this was a lush area, with lakes and rivers drawing elephants, giraffes, and ostriches. Two separate cultures lived in the prehistoric Ténéré: one from 10,000 to 8,000 years ago, and the other from 6,500 to 4,500 years ago. Curiously, even though they were separated by 1,500 years, they both chose to bury their dead in the same place.

At your table, the Ténéré serves best as an empty space on the map. Even the Tuareg only cross it once a year, and they travel directly from well to well. In most of the Ténéré, if something were hidden beneath the sands, it would never be found. This, combined with the desert's formerly lush nature, could make the Ténéré a fantastic place to hide an Atlantis of the Sands.

Tundra

Barren, Frozen Expanse

The frozen plains of the far north, tundra is land so cold that trees can't grow. Its rolling hills and broad lowlands are painted in a variety of colors. In winter, the snow-covered landscape is white and gray, but in summer, it can grow green, brown, and even red. Tundra weather is harsh. With no trees to slow it, the wind cuts to the bone. The scarce precipitation falls as snow. The soil is equally inhospitable. The top foot or two thaws in summer, but below that the ground stays frozen solid year-round. Given this harshness, the tundra is surprisingly fragile. The short growing season and poor soil means everything moves at a slower pace. Footprints, for example, may last for years. The low vegetation is quite monotonous: sedges, grasses, mosses, and the like. There are few year-round animal species: mostly caribou, musk oxen, lemmings, wolves, and snow-white arctic foxes and polar bears. The few people who live on the tundra usually work in mines and oil fields. There isn't much else to draw humans here.

The tundra undergoes substantial seasonal changes. The winter is bitterly long and cold, with temperatures averaging around -30 F. The days are short, and the nights far too long. The one saving grace of this winter wasteland is the aurora borealis: sheets of green blazing in the onyx sky over the darkened white plains. The summer is short. The snow cover melts, leaving the ground waterlogged (see bogs on page 8). This water produces fields of wildflowers and clouds of biting flies and mosquitoes. The worst of these are the no-see-ums (more properly, biting midges), which are so small as to be effectively invisible and can pass through all but the finest mesh. Their bite is disproportionately painful,

and feels like being pinched with sharpened tweezers.

The yearly freeze and thaw creates wild terrain, like pingos, frost boils, and ice wedge polygons. Pingos are hills made almost entirely of ice, covered with a layer of soil and vegetation. They tend to be conical, and may have a small crater in the top, like a volcano. Sometimes the crater contains a pond. Frost boils are circles of hard, dried mud without vegetation. Smaller boils may be a yard in diameter and flat, while larger ones may be several yards across and have a raised border. Fields of frost boils may cover the landscape; a severely affected region looks like giant onion rings scattered across the plain. Ice wedge polygons are produced by patterns of cracks in the soil, sometimes a yard or more wide. These cracks intersect, forming polygons, sometimes dozens of yards across. From the air, the pattern looks like cracked dried mud.

At your table, tundra can serve as the end of the inhabited world. In summer, criminals may flee to the tundra to escape the law. In winter, prisoners may be sent out here to die. The unusual terrain features of the tundra could be used as cool set pieces for combats: picture a fight on the edge of a small lake atop a conical hill of ice.

WULINGYUAN CANYONS

Misty Forest of Stone

The Wulingyuan Scenic Area in Hunan Province, China is a labyrinth of sandstone peaks, dense forests, and bottomless ravines. Some 3,000 spear-like stone pillars rise out of the mists into the light. Vegetation grows green on their tops and on every ledge on their sheer faces, while rich forests and winding streams fill the gorges between the pillars. The whole landscape is a fractal: forests of green coating a monumental forest of stone.

The ocean of clouds is pierced by peaks and ridges that undulate like waves. Many of the 600-foot rock spires are straight and thin like needles, while others have unique shapes that inspire names like “Fairy Offering Flowers” and “Old Man Gathering Herbs.” A small number are even connected to each other. The “Bridge Across the Sky” is a short natural rock bridge connecting two adjacent peaks. Their interiors can be breathtaking as well: there are some 40 caves in the area, often with beautiful rock formations inside.

Wulingyuan is a very wet region. Because sandstone is porous, it absorbs some of the mist and rain. There are places where the water weeps out of the rock leaving broad, wet streaks and walls that are always dripping. Many of the gorges between the pillars and ridges contain ponds and streams, where the verdant forest runs down right to the edge of the clear water. Here, the rivers are bordered by green mountains and cliffs hundreds of feet high, from which waterfalls pour into the current. There's even a sizable lake, formed when one of the region's numerous streams was dammed.

The canyons of Wulingyuan are full of life. Mists roll in most afternoons, feeding the lush vegetation. The floors of the gorges are thick forests that buzz with crickets. The large elevation changes mean the forest changes noticeably as you climb the peaks. The canyon bottoms are evergreen broadleaf forests. As you ascend the steep slopes of the mountains, you pass through some areas of conifers. The trees clinging to narrow ledges on the rock faces are mostly pines. Atop the peaks are deciduous trees that drop their leaves in winter. During this season, the pink plum blossoms look radiant against the white snow. The forests are home to monkeys, Chinese water deer, Asiatic black bears, and clouded leopards. Yard-long giant salamanders and rare fish lurk in the ponds and streams. Human habitation in Wulingyuan is a recent phenomenon. Tourism and large-scale habitation started in the 1950s. Before then, the region was too inaccessible to be worth living in. One relic of earlier habitation is a series of steps carved into the stone by bandits hiding in the canyons during the '40s.

You should probably only use Wulingyuan at your table on special occasions. This fantastical landscape should be used in sessions you want to inspire a feeling of "otherness," like meetings with entities beyond the ken of man or visits to the domain of the gods. The bizarre and beautiful spires and gorges of Wulingyuan will help reinforce the idea that the PCs are in a situation well outside what they're used to.

The Yellow River

Mother River, China's Sorrow

Rivers are very important in economic history as great watery highways, carrying goods and irrigating crops: consider the Nile or the Vistula. But they're important in cultural history as well: think of the song of the Volga Boatmen, Huck and Jim floating down the Mississippi, or Marlowe steaming up the Congo River. The Yellow River (Huang He) in north central China is both economically and culturally important, and a source of major floods besides.

The river begins in the high mountains of Qinghai Province, near Tibet, with its source in two glacial lakes. It flows northeast to Ningxia province, a dry land of irrigated agriculture, then turns east and finally south in Inner Mongolia.

Near Xian ("Western Capital" in Chinese) it turns east again, flowing to the Bohai Sea (the large bay southeast of Beijing). As it flows through the Loess Plateau in Ningxia and Shanxi, the river is dyed a deep and muddy yellow by the silty soil. "When the Yellow River flows clear" is a Chinese idiom meaning something like "When pigs fly" - though the river was recorded as flowing clear at one point in the 1400s.

The Yellow River bears the heaviest sediment load of any river in the world, with 34 kilograms of silt per cubic meter of water as opposed to 10 for the eponymously red Colorado. The silt buildup over the years, aggravated by dams and levies for flood control and irrigation, has led to the strange situation where the river now flows high above the surrounding landscape. In the

city of Kaifeng, the river flows 33 feet above the ground!

The North China Plain that the river flows across is the origin of Chinese civilization, the equivalent of the area around the Tigris and Euphrates for Mesopotamia and the Nile in Egypt. The loess is very nutrient-rich and blows across the plains of northern China each year, producing inconvenient dust storms but also very fertile soil. This region of China has been its political center for most of the past few millenia, though southern China has often been more economically vibrant (as it is today).

But though the Yellow River is known as China's "Mother River" it's also known as "China's Sorrow" for its frequent floods and course changes. In the 2000s BC, around the time of the semi-mythical Xia dynasty, the river flowed more sharply northwards than today, almost directly towards Beijing. The legendary founder of the dynasty, Yu the Great, is mostly remembered for being a master of flood control and a tireless hydrological engineer. For most of the last two milennia, the river flowed southeast, sometimes even merging with China's other great river, the Yangtze, near Shanghai. The last major course change was a period of southward flow from 1938-1947, when Chang Kai-Shek ordered the demolition of the Huayuankou Dike in an effort to stall the Japanese advance with a flood: results were inconclusive, and at least 800,000 peasants drowned. The dikes were rebuilt after the war, and the river turned to its present course.

Today, the Yellow River is better controlled, but it is threatened by massive water use and pollution stemming from China's rapid industrialization. In the 1990s, the river often failed to reach the sea during the dry season, and large sections of it are too polluted to hold fish. Global warming is contributing to these problems as well, with a decreasing snowpack in the mountains of Tibet and Qinghai. The Chinese government is working to conserve water and control discharges of pollutants into the river, with some success. It is also considering a vast "South-North Water Transfer Project," modeled on the old Grand Canal, that would bring water from the Yangtze and other southern rivers up to the Yellow River.

The Yellow River can fit into your game in many ways: it can simply be an interesting part of the landscape, a river flowing high above the surrounding land. Your PCs could be agents of Yu the Great, fighting evil water spirits and working with other deities to control the river. Knowing the course of the river in different dynastic periods in Chinese history is useful to set the scene and build some obvious differences into a game with time travel. Lastly, you can use the story of the Huayuankou flooding to dissuade players who have become convinced that diverting a river is the solution to any problem.

Yellowstone National Park

Greatest Geyser Field on Earth

Even if it weren't for the geysers, Yellowstone would probably still be a major national park. Wild herds of bison wander the park, generally indifferent to human visitors (and you'd better hope they stay that way – bison have killed more visitors than any other animal in the park). Grizzly and black bears roam, and wolves were recently reintroduced as well. Mountain lakes and alpine meadows dot the area, and reminders of its volcanic past – like obsidian cliffs – are all around.

But there are other places in North America where bison, bears, and even wolves can be seen in the wild. Yosemite's landscapes are equally wild and picturesque, and Glacier National Park has the same stunning mountains with glaciers to boot. Yellowstone's unique jewel is what it is most famous for (the antics of a lunch-stealing cartoon bear excepted): its geysers.

Old Faithful is the most famous, but within Yellowstone's borders are over half the world's geysers. Within a couple miles of Old Faithful in the Upper Geyser Basin there are over 200 – ranging from splashing pools a few inches high to the 200-foot blasts of Grand and rarely seen Giant Geyser. Some go off nearly constantly,

while others haven't erupted for years or decades. Some are highly regular (Riverside Geyser is statistically more punctual than Old Faithful), while some are utterly unpredictable.

Related geothermal oddities abound as well: when this author was there this fall, Black Sand Pool sounded like a giant drum, with irregular thumps coming from collapsing steam bubbles deep underground. Grand Prismatic Spring's riot of color comes from a wide variety of cyanobacteria, each able to survive in progressively hotter water of a particular pH. Yellow bacteria can survive the hottest waters, and thus grow closest to the center of the spring, with orange and red species thriving as the water spreads out and cools. The unique extremophile bacteria living in these springs can have very useful properties: the enzyme necessary for DNA analysis, Taq polymerase, was discovered in the Lower Geyser Basin.

All the geothermal features of Yellowstone – quietly bubbling hot springs, blasting geysers, perpetual spouters, steaming dry fumaroles, and thickly boiling mud pots – are heated by the vast volcanic caldera under much of the park. Water very slowly seeps through rock layers and is heated and boiled by the geothermal heat – the water erupting from Old Faithful today likely fell as rain or snow 1100 years ago.

For a hot spring to erupt as a geyser two additional factors are needed. First, the “plumbing” of the system needs to be watertight. In Yellowstone, this is achieved by mineral deposits of silicaecous sinter (also called geyserite) coating the crater and underground fissures of the geyser. These slow-growing deposits are also responsible for the massive cones of geysers like White Dome Geyser and Castle Geyser. Second, the underground fissures which water flows through must have constrictions, areas where steam is trapped under rising water. This allows the buildup and release of vast amounts of underground pressure, resulting in the geyser's eruptions.

In your game, a geyser field would be a great place to stage a combat. There's a reason the geysers of Yellowstone are surrounded by boardwalks – the ground around them is treacherous, with thin crusts of sinter over boiling water in some places. Some geysers can go from an empty crater to blasts of boiling water in seconds. In the winter, animals gather in geyser basins, huddling for warmth and making great targets for predators.

A geyser field could fit in noncombat situations as well. Enterprising people could drain some water from a hot spring for bathing or cooking – though this has often led to that hot spring becoming a geyser in the past. Adding soap to a hot spring or geyser will also often make it erupt, as it lowers the surface tension of the water: a lesson learned by an early laundry proprietor in Yellowstone. And geysers could be easily tied to all sorts of spirits and magic: maybe witnessing a rare geyser's eruption is like rubbing a genie's lamp.

Cities, Towns, and Buildings

Amiens Cathedral
Ornate Gothic Church

The tallest completed cathedral in France, the Cathedral of Our Lady of Amiens is a masterpiece of Gothic church-building. The structure is shaped rather like a cross. Entry is through the "foot" of the cross. The alter is at the rounded "head," and seating is between the two. Two rows of ornate columns running the length of the church divide it into three aisles. The outer aisles are half the height of the center aisle, giving the body of the cathedral a two-tiered appearance. The walls are perforated with stained-glass windows, admitting light into the space. The soaring ceiling of the center aisle is vaulted, supported by pointed arches, resembling the wooden ribs of a ship.

The astonishingly ornate main facade of the Amiens Cathedral is on the 'foot' of the cross. It, too, is broken into three sections. The left and right sections are topped with asymmetrical towers. The left tower is taller, but the right tower has larger windows and a more slender appearance. Between the two towers, the middle section boasts an immense and intricate circular stained glass window. Below these towers and windows, there runs a horizontal band of statues of kings of Judah.

At the bottom of the facade are the three huge doors to the cathedral. Around them are statues of hundreds of saints, all individually identifiable by their clothing, hairstyles, postures, and carried objects. Above the doors are carved scenes, including one of the Day of Judgement. You can see the dead climbing from their tombs to be judged by a seated Christ, who is advised by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. Below Jesus' right hand, the saved are welcomed to heaven, but below the left, the damned are being shoved by demons into a literal hellmouth: the jaws of some enormous beast.

The cathedral was built to house a relic: the head of John the Baptist. In the Bible, John is described as a relative of Jesus who was sent to "prepare the way" for Christ and his message. John begins Jesus' ministry by recognizing him and baptizing him in the River Jordan. Later, John the Baptist was famously beheaded by King Herod. According to tradition, John's head found its way to Constantinople, and after the sacking of the city by the fourth crusade, the head of John the Baptist was brought to Amiens. There are quite a lot of heads of John the Baptist out there, most notably at Amiens, Damascus, Rome, and Munich.

At your table, the Amiens Cathedral could be a site to be defended. During the French Revolution, many cathedrals and sacred sites were badly damaged by mobs angry with perceived corruption in the Catholic church. Amiens, however, suffered little damage; your PCs could be the reason for this. You could even spice things up by inventing a prophecy about how "the stones of the cathedral will defend her in her time of need." Gargoyles coming to life to protect their cathedrals is cliché now, but a fun twist could be that the cathedral's animate defenders are actually her statues of kings and saints.

Alternately, the PCs may be out to rob the cathedral. A mad executive could be assembling a collection of heads of John the Baptist. The head in Amiens is the only one he hasn't obtained yet, so he hires the PCs to get it for him. However, the disappearances of the other heads has not gone unnoticed; the cathedral will have high security. Complicating matters, the bishop of Amiens does not believe foul play is at work. Rather, God is disposing of the false heads, proving the truth of the head in Amiens.

ANASAZI CLIFF DWELLINGS

Fortified Villages of Terrified People

In the Four Corners region of the American Southwest, the sandstone canyons, mesas and buttes hide ancient villages high above the clear streams and cottonwood trees. Structures of mud and stone huddle atop mesas and perch on ledges and in caves high up the canyon wall. The buildings are multi-level complexes, mostly storage rooms. The living areas were outdoors on roofs or in plazas, with people retreating inside only in bad weather. Most of the villages were small, housing only a few families, but some were grand, filling deep caves or broad ledges. One has a half-million gallon reservoir. Another has a five-story apartment house with 800 rooms.

The era of the cliff dwellings was quite brief, perhaps only between 1200 and 1300 AD, the tail end of the Anasazi culture. Cliff dwellings were almost unheard of before 1200, as everyone lived in conventional villages on the ground. Then, a series of bad harvests provoked a period of bloodshed. The Anasazi fled to defensible cliff dwellings, but even these strongholds weren't impenetrable. Some were clearly breached, resulting in horrific massacres. And there is very good evidence that the dead were eaten by their killers. Proteins found only in human flesh have been discovered in fossilized feces at these sites, and the bones have been processed as if by a butcher handling a cut of meat. They bear characteristic cut marks, have been broken open to get at the marrow inside, and many bear the particular sheen left on bones boiled in a clay vessel. The villages were eventually abandoned as quickly as they were built, probably when environmental conditions shifted, forcing the villagers to move elsewhere.

The fear that drove the Anasazi to live in these cliff dwellings is evident in their construction. For one thing, they couldn't grow food on the ledges and mesas that housed the villages. This meant regular trips up and down the rock face. Access to and from the villages was by tree trunks, propped up vertically against the canyon wall. The trunks were notched with stone axes to provide small handholds. Climbing up these trunks, you'd go from narrow ledge to narrow ledge until you reached the village. Many settlements seem to have been linked in alliances based on visibility. One village has a line of sight on another, which has line of sight on a third, and so forth. If one settlement is attacked, it can get word to many others who may send help. The whole affair reeks of terror, even paranoia. It's certainly not the sort of place you would choose to live unless you had no other choice.

The Anasazi seem likely to have come from numerous clans, all of whom migrated to the area from different directions. They were a short and stocky people who farmed corn, beans, and squash. Even after they had been farming for centuries, they still hunted mice and rabbits to supplement their diet. They were part of a continent-wide trading network, and had trade goods from as far afield as the Great Plains and the Gulf Coast. Even in the midst of their

bloodthirsty wars, the Anasazi still produced lovely art: crosshatched pottery and paintings of animals both real and fanciful. Their society collapsed around 1300 AD. Their descendants still live in the area: the modern Pueblo peoples. Today's Pueblo maintain oral histories about their Anasazi forefathers, and make pilgrimages to their abandoned villages.

The PCs may first hear about the Anasazi from neighboring peoples who regard the cliff dwellers with horror. If the PCs travel to the region, play up the Anasazi's diverse humanity. Some are likely bloodthirsty monsters, and some are probably utterly maddened by terror, but most are just people trying to do the best they can with the terrible hand they've been dealt. They eat the flesh of their enemies and shiver when they hear footsteps on moonless nights, but they also raise children, grow crops, and produce art.

Centuries after the collapse of Anasazi culture, PCs seeking shelter from the elements (or hiding from their enemies) may find refuge in a cliffside dwelling abandoned since its inhabitants were killed and eaten. But the bones are still there, protected from coyotes by the sheer walls, perhaps scattered a bit by vultures. And the same clues archaeologists used to uncover cannibalistic massacres will be there for the PCs to find.

Athens during the Peloponnesian War

Besieged, Fearful, Free City

During the Peloponnesian War, Athens existed in an almost perpetual state of siege. While Spartan armies controlled the land around the city, the Athenian fleet controlled the seas. And the strong walls that protected the city also stretched four miles across the countryside to the port town of Piraeus, ensuring Athens would always be able to be resupplied. This is not to say life was easy in Athens; the atmosphere was often one of fear and desperation. But even in wartime, life marches on.

For much of the war, Spartan and Spartan-allied troops ravaged the countryside around Athens in hopes of starving the Athenians or provoking them to come out and fight. In practice, it didn't really work. Destroying orchards, vineyards, and even fields of wheat is surprisingly difficult, especially when being harassed by enemy cavalry. Plus, the Athenians could import grain from allied states in the eastern Mediterranean. And the class system of Athenian warfare worked against the Spartans. The urban poor, the group that was traditionally the easiest to rile into hasty decisions, were off rowing Athenian warships, and so were not present to advocate rash attacks.

Tens of thousands of refugees lived in the city. At first, they camped out wherever they could. Some lived in the towers along the walls. Others set up shacks around the base of the Acropolis. After two years, it became clear these refugees were here to stay, and the Athenian government built semi-permanent shelters inside the Long Walls between Athens and Piraeus.

The unsanitary conditions in which these refugees lived, combined with the heat and trade ships from across the Mediterranean, were a perfect recipe for disease. The plague that terrorized Athens has never been conclusively identified. It was characterized by a bloody throat, chest pain, gangrene, and brain damage. But the most important symptom was a fever that burned so hot that men threw themselves into cisterns and reservoirs of drinking water in search of relief. No cure could be found, and the social fabric changed. If you might sicken tomorrow, what good is honor? Many men and women acted as they pleased with no thought to consequences; better to enjoy things today than to think about the future.

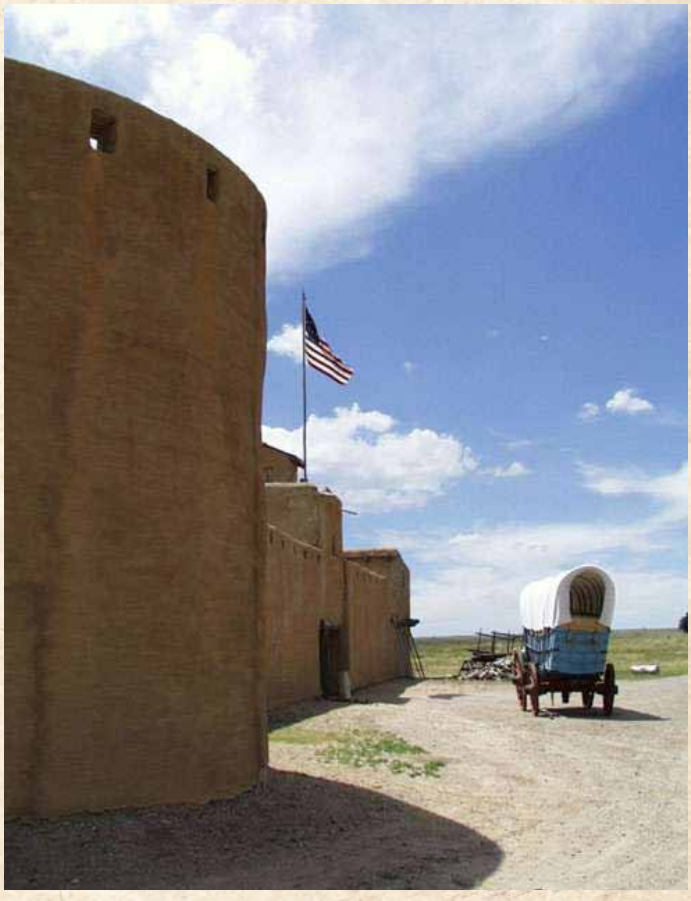
Athens had been a direct democracy for a century by this point. The central power of the government lay in the hands of the Assembly: a body of all the adult male citizens of Athens, where each man got one vote. As you might expect, the Assembly was typically divided into camps led by influential demagogues. But at one point, when the war was going badly, a group of aristocrats pulled off a coup. By bribing or killing those who opposed them, the usurpers transferred real power from the Assembly to a group of 400 wealthy men. This government was riddled with dissent and quickly replaced by an oligarchy of 5,000, consisting essentially of all reasonably successful landowners. However, the coup did not last. Within eight months, pressures from the highly democratic fleet and non-landowners saw to it that the oligarchy was dissolved and democracy restored.

At your table, Athens may serve as inspiration for any city in wartime where the inhabitants feel trapped or threatened. The city may be full of refugees, and plagued by disease and political instability. This could be part of a broader campaign arc involving some epic war, or it could simply be a backdrop against which the PCs act.

Bent's Fort
Castle of the Old West

On the western edge of the Great Plains, guarding the trade between Americans, Mexicans, and Indians, there stood an adobe citadel flying the Stars and Stripes. Within the shelter of the fort's stout walls, traders, travelers, mountain men and Indians of numerous tribes swapped goods and stories. The site was famous throughout the West: an oasis of American civilization in the vast frontier.

Bent's Fort was founded in 1833 by a trio of investors: Ceran St. Vrain and brothers William and Charles Bent. They were looking to profit off the trade between the US and Mexico along the Santa Fe Trail. They were friendly with the natives as well; William Bent took a Cheyenne wife. The fort was abandoned and destroyed after only sixteen years of use. There are numerous theories as to why. The National Park Service



(which maintains a reconstruction of the fort) is of the opinion that the fort was abandoned due to "disasters and disease." Another theory is that William Bent was so angry with the US Army for refusing to buy the fort from him for a good price that he placed kegs of gunpowder at key locations and set the structure on fire. At one point, it was believed the fort was destroyed by Indians, but that idea is generally discredited.

The fort was constructed in a square around a central courtyard. Approaching Bent's Fort, you were faced with adobe walls six feet thick, topped with holes through which men could fire rifles without revealing themselves. Two stout towers stood at opposite ends of the fort. After leaving your animals in the corral outside the walls, you passed through a gate into the central plaza, which was surrounded by a broad-walked rampart. Beneath the rampart, behind a shaded arcade, were the rooms of the fort: warehouses full of pelts and supplies, a smithy, a carpenter's shop, a kitchen, a general store, and a dining room with oak furniture and china plates. There was even an honest-to-goodness billiards room. Topping off the luxury, imported peacocks strolled the ramparts. Defensively, the fort was quite strong, though weaker on its north side. There, a second story of quarters sat atop the ramparts with no parapet on their roof, meaning there was no cover for defenders manning the north wall from atop the quarters.

To travelers, Bent's Fort was a place of refuge on the prairie. Here, they could buy supplies and livestock, repair their wagons, and even take a few days to rest. To St. Vrain and the Bent brothers, it was the heart of their expansive trading cartel. Bent's Fort especially did a roaring trade in livestock, bringing horses, cattle, mules, and sheep east to Missouri. Sometimes the herds were just passing through; sometimes the fort would buy and resell them. Generally, livestock was purchased either from Mexican ranchers or Indian raiders (who stole much of their livestock from the Mexicans).

Bent's Fort would be a terrific home base for PCs adventuring in the wilderness. It preserves the feel of being out in the wild while still giving PCs the amenities they need to keep the story flowing. If you want to shake things up, they could come down from the hills one month to discover the fort destroyed, but with no bodies inside. Investigating what happened (and where the people went) could lead them into the next chapter of your plot.

The fort works best along a trade route, but if you don't have one handy, it can easily work as a military outpost on the frontier. With the exception of the commander, make the fort's employees locals, rather than servicemen; it will preserve the feel of the fort better. You can justify this by saying that local hires work harder, have a better understanding of the land, and a better relationship with the natives. You might have some fun making the commander the only non-local in the fort. Perhaps she comes from an aristocratic background, but was always a bit of an embarrassment to high society, and so jumped at the chance to be posted to the frontier. Maybe she likes it out here, getting along with the frontiersmen far better than she ever did with nobles and socialites.

BRUGES
The Fairytale City

The Belgian city of Bruges is a medieval wonderland: a city that appears half frozen in time, and half lifted from the pages of a children's storybook. Despite being landlocked, the city is interlaced with picturesque canals. Every street is lined with beautiful, centuries-old buildings. The residential quarters resemble rows of gingerbread houses.

While Bruges had been a trading town since Roman times, the city's era of prominence was the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. At the time, there was a natural channel from the city to the sea, and Bruges capitalized on it to become the commercial heart of northwest Europe. From here, Flemish cloth (the best on the continent) was sold to the world. Belgian craftsmen rubbed shoulders with English sea captains, German merchants, and Italian bankers. The city was plagued by occasional civil unrest. At one point, the common people and craftsmen rose up against the monied elite and the King of France, siding with a rebellious Flemish count (and won!). However, when the channel to the sea silted up, Bruges' importance faded.

After its fairytale streets and canals, Bruges' most popular feature is its bell tower. The spire rises almost 300 feet above the city. Bruges' treasury and archives were housed in the first few floors of the belfry, and the top floor commands an impressive view of the city and the surrounding countryside. The 47 bells can be played with a keyboard, or by an immense clockwork mechanism including a giant cylinder covered in pegs, like the mechanism of a player piano. At the base of the belfry is the large marketplace, bordered by some of the most beautiful commercial buildings in the city. Every December there is a Christmas market. Vendors erect stalls to sell trinkets, chocolates, and mulled wine. There's even an ice skating rink.

Bruges is also notable for its cathedrals. The Church of Our Lady has been turned into a fabulous art museum, and its spire is the tallest point in the city. The most famous work in the church is Michelangelo's statue Madonna and Child. It's not the sculptor's greatest work; the subjects' "serene" expressions could just as easily be interpreted as boredom. Still, the craftsmanship of the working of the marble bears the unmistakable touch of a master's studio. The centerpiece of the cathedral is the sarcophagi of two members of the Royal House of Burgundy: Duke Charles the Bold and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, who was duchess in her own right. Their tombs are in the shape of large rectangular boxes, topped with gilded sculptures of the two Burgundians fast asleep.

But the most sacred site in Bruges is the Basilica of the Holy Blood. When the Count of Flanders returned from the Second Crusade he brought with him a vial containing the blood of Christ. The Basilica holds an annual procession on Ascension Day (after Easter) where the Holy Blood is carried through the streets accompanied by some 1,800 actors.

One way to use Bruges in your games is to have it really be a fairytale town! The fairies that built it are back, and they want their city. Alternately, the channel from the sea was the lifeblood of the town at its height. What if agents from a rival merchant seaport are trying to fill in the channel by collapsing its banks?

You might want to incorporate the Holy Blood in your game. Maybe the two nobles in the sarcophagi in the Church of Our Lady weren't depicted as asleep for purely artistic reasons, and have woken up. PCs will need to track down a scholar who can read and write a language the nobles understand. When communication is established, the duke and duchess are able to warn the PCs of a dire threat: the second coming of Christ will happen on Christmas Day, but will be incomplete. Christ cannot return entirely in the flesh, as not all his flesh ascended into heaven. The incomplete, angry Christ will manifest in Bruges, and he will seek out his blood in the Basilica. Whatever the PCs decide to do about this (fighting Christ would be both impossible and sacrilegious), consider having the climax take place in the Christmas market.

Cahokia

Great City of Pre-Columbian North America

In what is now Southern Illinois, along the banks of the Mississippi River, a great city rose and fell, disappearing entirely almost 200 years before Columbus, leaving behind only giant earthen mounds. Its population, at its peak in 1200, was not surpassed by any American city until 1800. By the time Europeans arrived, the local Native Americans – who had moved to the area after Cahokia's collapse – had no idea who had built the mounds.

Cahokia was the largest city of the Mississippian culture, a corn-growing, mound-building hierarchical society with its origins in the Mississippi river valley. Offshoots of this culture include the Cherokee, whose oral traditions remember their mound-building past, and the Seminole, who eventually ended up in Florida and fought fiercely against US encroachment.

Cahokia was built on a flood plain by the Mississippi, the "American Bottom" as geologists call it. It's flat, green, sparsely forested land, and on top of one of Cahokia's mounds, you could see for miles and miles – something that probably gave the city's rulers a real sense of dominion over the area. And it was a good area to rule: the local soil was rich and easy to plow even without draft animals, yielding large crops of corn, goosefoot, amaranth and canary grass.

For reasons unknown, Cahokia transformed from a large village of 1000 or so to a metropolis (for its time) of 15,000 around the year 1050. By 1100, the ruling class lived atop 120 mounds (the largest - Monks Mound - was 100 feet high and covered 16 acres), a vast 50-acre plaza had been smoothed out for markets and ritual games, and the city was a thriving center of trade. Mica from the Carolinas, copper from the shores of Lake Superior, seashells from the Gulf of Mexico... one could see Cahokia as an economic center, the Chicago of its day. It even exported manufactured goods – mostly stone axes and hoes – to surrounding peoples. There was a tradition

of astrology as well: Monks Mound is aligned to the sunrise on the equinox and "woodhenge" - a solar calendar made of wooden poles – lay to the west of the mound.

Like the great cities of pre-Columbian Mexico, Cahokia had its dark side. In one of its mounds – labeled by archaeologists as Mound 72 – a man is buried, surrounded by unused arrowheads and other valuable goods. And around those lie four men with their hands and heads cut off (some archaeologists think they represent the four cardinal directions) and 53 strangled young women. Admittedly, this could be the resting place of a murderous tyrant, and not typical cultural practice. There is a mass grave adjcent to the mound, and those in it were killed in battle: some anthropologists say that this shows not everyone went along with the sacrifices. However, as this is the only mound used for burials that's been properly archaeologically excavated, many researchers believe there was a tradition of human sacrifice at Cahokia.

Despite their strong position, the Cahokians had military worries. In the early 1100s, a two-mile long stockade, with guard towers every 70 feet, was built around the city center. It took around 20,000 trees to build such a structure.

Nobody is entirely sure why Cahokia disappeared. Some argue that environmental factors doomed the city. There are signs that wood became increasingly scarce as time went by, and logging led to increased erosion as well. With 15,000 people eating wild game, meat was probably growing scarce. And at the same time, the Little Ice Age began around 1250. It doomed the Greenland Norse; did it also destroy Cahokia?

Other explanations include the spread of disease: like a medieval European town, Cahokia had a negative natural growth rate because of its poor sanitation. Maybe immigrants stopped coming and the town just melted away. Military conquest by the Lenape tribe was a long-held hypothesis, but there's no clear evidence of this.

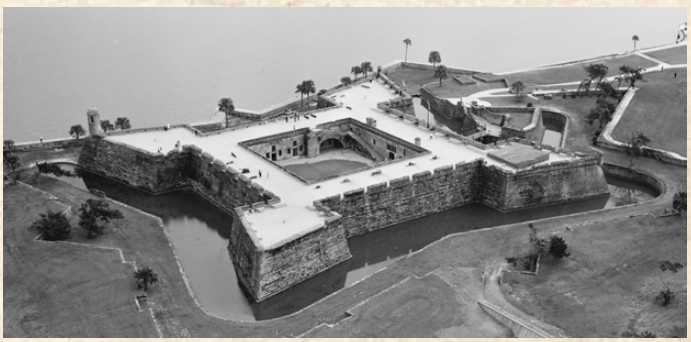
My favorite theory is that people just decided to move away: by the 1300s, bison populations from the West had reached the Mississippi, making a hunter-gatherer lifestyle more palatable. Why eat corn, pay taxes and watch your back whenever the chief dies when you can eat buffalo steak over an open fire and avoid dysentery?

In your game, Cahokia could be a trading port your PCs bring their wares (or loot) to. Or they could be captured by the fiendish Cahokians and slated for sacrifice – sort of a Midwest Apocalypto. Delving into what caused Cahokia's rise or fall could be interesting too: who or what caused the city to rise from nothing on the Illinois plains? And who or what caused it to fade into history? Most importantly, what are your players going to do about it? Lastly, there were mounds in present-day St. Louis and East St. Louis as well, but they were almost all used for building material. "Vengeful spirits" are kind of overplayed, but maybe they were destroyed to cover something up...

Castillo de San Marcos

Remote Spanish Fortress

The Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine, Florida was built to protect a remote outpost in the New World. Though the Castillo changed hands many times due to treaties, it was never taken by force.

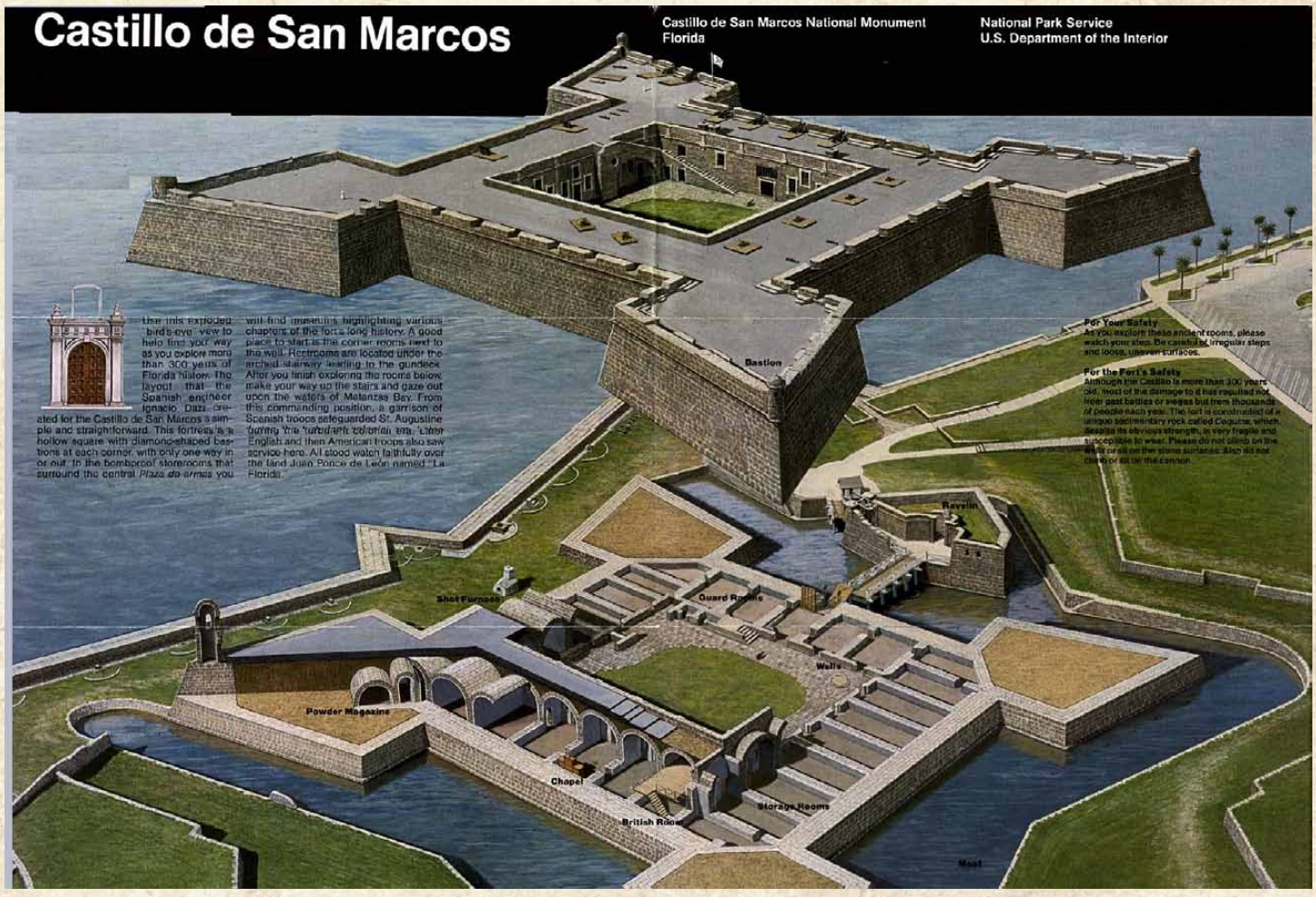


Founded in the 16th century by the Spanish, St. Augustine, Florida is the oldest continuously occupied non-native settlement in the United States. The Castillo was completed a century later in response to threats from the English. At this time, Florida was an incredibly remote part of the New World. Travel was generally conducted

only by sea, and settlements were vulnerable to pirates and raiders. Though the town was twice besieged by the English (and once burned to the ground), they could not take the Castillo. After the ownership of Spanish Florida changed to the United States, the Castillo never again saw combat, but was used several times as a prison. Today, the Castillo is the centerpiece of historic St. Augustine, and is a popular tourist destination. It has excellent interpretive signage, cannon fire demonstrations, and, of course, a gift shop.

The Castillo boasts several layers of protection. Starting at the inside, the Castillo's short, thick walls make a small target for enemy cannoneers, and each corner of the square fort is defended by a large diamond-shaped 'bastion', which eliminates blind spots. The entire outside rim of the walls, bastions and all, are crenelated to provide cover for Spanish cannoneers. The walls were then protected by a moat, which could be flooded with seawater, or could simply be used to hold the town's cattle during raids. There is only one entrance to the Castillo, and it is via a bridge over the moat. The bridge passes through a mini-fort called a ravelin, a sort of fortified island in the moat. The entrance to the ravelin is a drawbridge. The whole thing is further protected by a glacis: an artificial slope rising up towards the moat. This gives defenders on the ramparts a better angle of fire, and shelters much of the fort behind the glacis, giving enemy cannoneers a smaller target.

The stone blocks that make up the walls of the Castillo are made of a substance called coquina. To make a block of coquina, you go down to the beach and extract a cube, several feet on a side, of the compacted fragments of shell at the water's edge. You let this cube sit on the beach for years to dry. This done, the rock is solid and sharp-edged. But unlike most stone, which shatters when struck by cannon fire, coquina simply absorbs the shot, like a bb going into styrofoam. This makes the walls of the Castillo more or less impervious to ranged attack.



The Castillo is an excellent site for your PCs to hold off an enormous army. Such a battle could be easily broken up into multiple challenges. First, the town has to be evacuated into the Castillo. PCs need to make sure that the evacuees bring with them food, water, weapons, and so forth, but leave nonessential goods behind. Then, as the (preferably preposterously large) enemy army approaches, they may want to parlay. Should the parlay break down, the PCs will need to defend the ravelin for as long as possible. If the ravelin falls, PCs may be able to help by calming civilians, redirecting retreating soldiers to their next positions, or watching enemy troop movements. Then, as the final battle begins, the PCs can help the gunners by hauling gunpowder, stepping in to replace dead sergeants, and adjusting the weight of fire. Others may want to man the wall beside the musketeers. These individual obstacles might make for good skill challenges, as detailed in the fourth edition of the world's most indirectly referred-to roleplaying game.

Because the Castillo is vulnerable to being starved out, there should probably be some sort of time limit for the invading army. Perhaps the defenders' cavalry will arrive in the morning (á la Helm's Deep), or perhaps the enemy general won't be able to hold his army together through a protracted siege. The fact that the Castillo's main vulnerability is starvation is also a good reason for not choosing it as a site for your PCs to attack. Starvation is a valid tactic, but it's pretty dull at the table. Bent's Fort (detailed elsewhere in this section) might make a better choice.

Centralia, Pennsylvania

Burning Caves Under an Abandoned Town

Centralia was a town in rural Pennsylvania. Its residents were driven off in the 1980s by a fire raging in the coal mines underneath it. Today, it's a creepy grid of empty streets and smoking vents.

The town sits atop a rich coal bed, and the earth below it is honeycombed with tunnels. As mining technology shifted to strip mining, the entrances to the tunnels filled in. The city turned one of the old mines into a garbage dump, and one year, during the annual burning of the garbage in the dump, the fire spread down a side tunnel and into the broader warren. Attempts to put out the fire failed, but the heated ground meant you could grow tomatoes even in winter, and some folks didn't have to shovel their driveways. But eventually, sinkholes and the unbreathable air forced major action. The government relocated everyone they could, and demolished the town. Some families refused to leave, though, and a handful still live in Centralia.

If you drive down the cracked and patched road to Centralia today, you'll find it an eerie place. The town itself is mostly demolished, except for the homes of the few who remain. Centralia is mostly a grid of empty streets, bordered by vacant lots and driveways to nowhere. Dead trees, bleached

white, mark vents billowing smoke laden with carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and fouler stuff yet. Sometimes, there are cave-ins. As the coal burns, it creates caverns of ash, which are unable to support the weight of the earth above them. Sooner or later, the ground collapses with a roar and a burst of white smoke. Fresh oxygen rushes into the void, and in the pit, the smoldering coal bursts into flame!

A few old folks still live in Centralia. Mostly, they just liked the town too much to leave, even when it stopped being a town. They're stubborn men and women; when the postal service revoked Centralia's zip code, one old man painted the discontinued code on the unused park benches. They try to maintain a semblance of life in the town, including holding city elections, but it is fitting that one of the best maintained parts of Centralia is the cemetery. Some old-timers cling to a conspiracy theory that the reason the government relocated everyone was to get access to the coal deposits beneath the town. That the coal deposits are currently on fire does not seem to dissuade the theorists.

The fire is actually spreading down the layers of unmined coal around the town, traveling at about 75 feet per year. This is a cause for concern in the nearby towns, though it is hoped the fire will hit groundwater or bedrock before it reaches them. There's no way to tell how long the fire will last; a hill in Australia has been burning for some six thousand years.

While we associate coal with the industrial revolution, it's been a fuel source for thousands of years. A coal mine could be plausibly found in almost any campaign setting, so don't balk at using Centralia in fantasy. Centralia's current residents are an obvious adventure hook; when living in an abandoned town too dangerous for visitors one could get up to a lot of mischief. There might also be something hidden in the remains of the old town. Be careful about letting PCs go into the mines; any fresh air introduced into the tunnels will make the smoldering coal burst into flame, to say nothing of the unimaginable radiant heat.

Ciudad Del Este

Vast Bazaar of a Forgotten Country

Ciudad Del Este is the second largest city in Paraguay, with a population of approximately 320,000 people (about 700,000 in the metro area). It is located on the Parana River, near both the Brazillian and Argentine borders. It is well-known for four main reasons: the Itaipu Dam, the Igazu falls, counterfeit goods, and alleged Hezbollah activity. This strange mixture makes it a great place to set a modern-day one-shot or campaign!

The Itaipu Dam is about 9 miles north of Ciudad Del Este. It was built over 14 years, and is the second largest hydroelectric dam in the world, generating as much electricity as 21 US coal-fired power plants. It was built jointly by Brazil and Paraguay, originally with almost all the profit and electricity going to Brazil. Paraguay still uses only about 10% of the dam's output (which is 90% of the country's electricity consumption), but the Paraguayan government renegotiated a deal on revenues in 2009, allowing for a more equitable split of the profits. If the dam were ever to burst, Buenos Aires (and Ciudad Del Este) would be catastrophically flooded.

About 8 miles to the southeast of the city, on the Brazil-Argentina border, are the Iguazu Falls, a staple of waterfall scenes in action movies since Moonraker. The cascade is two miles wide and 260 feet tall, and has the second-greatest annual flow of any waterfall in the world.

Ciudad del Este, however, is itself famous as a vast clearinghouse for smuggled and counterfeit goods. The city's specialization is in knockoff electronics, but anything from AK47s to cocaine to counterfeit cigarettes to model cars can be found and even delivered home across borders for customers with the cash. Brazilians looking for good deals have been the most common customers, though tourists going to Iguazu Falls from around the world have been important too.

Why is the place such a hub for illicit enterprises? For a start, it's at the intersection of three national borders – giving it three times the smuggling opportunities of the average border town. Argentina, for example, has very high taxes on imported electronics, which makes even a legally imported iPod worth smuggling in from Paraguay.

Historically, many of the goods for sale in Ciudad del Este have come from Taiwan, due to a long-established Taiwanese population and political ties between the two countries – the city hall in Ciudad del Este, in fact, was paid for by the Taiwanese government in return for Paraguayan support in the UN.

Ciudad del Este has a large Lebanese population as well, with a wave of migration in the 1950s and another wave in the 1980s during and after the Lebanese Civil War. Despite the distance from Lebanon, Hezbollah has tried to take advantage of this population, running smuggling networks and spreading propaganda. By most accounts, Hezbollah's operations in Paraguay have been mainly for fundraising purposes, though both Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum have recently raised concerns that this poses a "direct threat to the United States."

Ciudad del Este seems almost ready-made for a modern or cyberpunk campaign, with the shops where all manner of illegal goods can be found, the giant hydroelectric dam, the classic action set-piece waterfall, and the (admittedly tenuous) connections to the War on Terror. In a fantasy campaign, it is useful as a classic example of the border town snatching its living from the tenuous grasp of the state on its frontier.

The Colossus of Rhodes

Titanic Bronze Statue

At the mouth of the main harbor of the Greek island of Rhodes there stood a statue: the mighty Colossus. The Rhodians built this great work to celebrate their victory after a year-long siege. A half-century after its construction, the statue collapsed in an earthquake.

The Colossus was a 110 foot-tall bronze statue of the titan Helios, god of the sun, standing on a 50-foot white marble pedestal overlooking the harbor. It was two-thirds the size of the Statue of Liberty. The Colossus had fingers the size of grown men, and his head was crowned with the burning rays of the sun. Beyond that, we don't know much about what he looked like; we're not even sure if he was clothed or nude. We do know that he did not stand astride the entrance of the

harbor as portrayed in the Renaissance. After the earthquake, all that was left of the statue was a pair of legs, ending at the knees, beside a heap of titanic hollow body parts.

The construction of the Colossus was precipitated by a siege. Alexander the Great conquered Rhodes in 332 BC. After his death, his empire fell apart, as his generals fought over its pieces like jackals at a carcass. Rhodes sided with the general who had seized the island's biggest trading partner, but a different general coveted Rhodes. To capture it, he sent an army larger than the entire population of the island. The besiegers had the very best siege equipment of the era. They had battering rams 60 yards long, armored like turtles to protect the thousand men it took to operate them. There were catapults that hurled 180-pound stones a quarter mile. And there was a wheeled siege tower known as "The Taker of Cities," armed with catapults and sling throwers, and armored with iron plates. The Rhodians flooded the area outside the walls of their capital to prevent siege engines from advancing, and desperately staved off the invaders for a full year until they were rescued. When the invaders retreated, they left much of their equipment behind. Accounts differ on whether it was left behind as a gift for the valiant defenders, out of disgust for the whole failed siege, or just because they were in a hurry.

The Rhodians credited their victory to Helios, their patron deity, and celebrated by building the Colossus. The statue took twelve years to build, and required 22 tons of bronze and iron. Much of the materials came from the abandoned weapons and war machines of the besiegers. Stone columns formed the central supports, with iron bars driven into them to connect with the statue's bronze "skin." Sections of the skin were cast independently, then bolted together on the structure. The upper portions of the Colossus were added by carrying them up a ramp of earth around the lower part of the statue. As to whether the Colossus was painted, polished, or otherwise treated, we're not sure. Bronze statues of the era were regularly polished and treated with pine tar pitch to achieve a beautiful light brown, like tanned skin. Would the Rhodians have been willing to undergo the staggering expense and difficulty of maintaining the Colossus in such a style? Or would they have let the sculpture tarnish to a bright green patina?

The Colossus of Rhodes was destroyed by an earthquake 56 years after it was completed, and crushed many houses when it fell. The Rhodians opted not to rebuild the statue (though they had the money), as they'd been advised against it by an oracle. The fallen Colossus remained a tourist attraction, and you could apparently see the broken internal support structure inside the hollow body parts. Almost a thousand years later, Arab conquerers salvaged the remains of the Colossus and carried off the bronze.

As to using the Colossus at your table, the obvious method is to use it as a living statue, a giant golem. What's more interesting is why. Tie the story into the major events and secrets of your campaign world. The fallen Colossus could be a delightful landmark in an ancient, abandoned city. It could even be a unique mini-dungeon, as monsters and bandits have taken up residence inside. For a real twist, Rhodes could be the setting for a Lovecraftian game in the ancient world. There was some sort of sleeping eldritch horror at the site, but the locals entombed it. People forgot the purpose of the tomb, a town sprang up around it, and the townsfolk built the Colossus with the tomb as its pedestal. Now the horror is waking up, and Lovecraftian events are happening in this Greek city.

EPHESUS

Great City on the Ancient Mediterranean

Ephesus was a Greek, and later Roman, city on the western coast of modern Turkey. A prominent seaport, it played an important role in the history of the area for several hundred years. The city was founded by Greek colonists, and remained culturally Greek through its occupations by the kingdom of Lydia and the Persian Empire. Over its centuries as a Roman city, the Greek heritage of Ephesus gradually faded away.

The city's most distinctive feature was the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the world. Here, Artemis, Greek goddess of the hunt and the moon, was depicted as a many-breasted queen. The temple was in the typical Greek style (like the Parthenon), but massive, and the the lower parts of the columns were in the form of immense statues. The temple was eventually burned down by a madman. Under torture, the arsonist confessed he had set fire to the temple because the enormity of his crime would immortalize him. The Ephesians responded by making it illegal to speak his name. Despite their efforts, the madman's plan worked; his name is still known, though I will not write it here. According to myth, Artemis did not stop the fire because she was busy attending the birth of Alexander the Great.

Ephesus also boasted a great library. The Library of Celcus had room for 12,000 scrolls, making it the third-largest such institution in the Roman Empire. The building had three stories, and was built around a central study room. The exterior facade was decorated with statues, and designed to resemble two rows of Roman temples, stacked one upon the other. The fronts of the temples were decorated with carved vegetation. On the lower tier, their entrances led into the library, while in the upper tier, they served as windows. The library's founder was interred inside, a rare honor. The library itself was gutted by fire after an earthquake.

The city also had the many wonders one would expect of an important town on the ancient Mediterranean. A stone amphitheater was used for plays and gladiatorial combat. The city's main street was lined with shops and paved with shining marble. You can still see the ruts left by the chariot wheels. A large agora (common space) served as a marketplace. And overlooking the city is an early Christian basilica, located on the traditional burial site of the Apostle John.

Ephesus is wrapped up in the history of Christianity. The biblical Letter to the Ephesians is addressed to the church in Ephesus, and according to tradition, the Virgin Mary spent her last years in the city. An excavated house has been claimed to be her home, and three popes have visited the site. A cave outside Ephesus is a holy place in Christian and Islamic tradition. There (so the story goes), seven Christian youths slept for 309 years. By order of a Roman emperor, they were walled up in the cave to die, as punishment for their faith. When they awoke, they were amazed to find that Ephesus had become a Christian city.

Today, Ephesus is an archaeological site and tourist destination. It is now several miles from the sea, as the ancient harbor has silted up. Local carpet vendors offer tourists rides to the ruins. In exchange, when the tourists are done at Ephesus, they are brought to the vendor's shop.

At your table, you might enjoy playing with the history of Ephesus. Perhaps there was a very good reason for the burning of the Temple of Artemis. An ancient evil may slumber under the city, and can only be kept asleep by the occasional burning of a great building. The PCs, then, may want to

help the madman torch the temple. A follow-up adventure, centuries in the future, may involve the burning of the Library of Celcus. Alternately, the ghost of the library's founder may still haunt the premises. He might offer the PCs forgotten lore if they will travel to the far corners of the earth to retrieve new manuscripts for his library.

Erechtheion

Beautiful and Unusual Temple

One of the most sacred sites in Athens, the Erechtheion is a comparatively small temple devoted to a number of deities. The building has all the beauty of classical Greek architecture, but where most Greek temples are monumental and heavy, the Erechtheion is graceful and delicate.

The site of the Erechtheion is a sacred one in Athenian myth, the site of a contest between two gods. Athena, goddess of wisdom and war, and Poseidon, god of the sea and of horses, both sought to be the patron deity of the fledgling city of Athens. So they held a competition to see who would be the better patron, with the Athenians as the judges. Poseidon struck a rock with his trident, and a spring gushed forth. The Athenians were impressed at first, but rejected the gift when they discovered it produced only seawater. Athena then struck a rock with her spear, and produced an olive tree. The Athenians, on realizing the thousand uses to which they could put olives, declared Athena the victor and named their city after her.

Because of the need to enclose a number of adjacent sacred sites, the Erechtheion has a very unusual plan. The main part of the building is divided into an eastern and a western half, each devoted to a different set of gods. They share the same ceiling, but the floor of the western half is ten feet lower than that of the eastern half. The entrance to the eastern half is an elegant portico. The western half can be entered through a full-sized porch coming off the building at a right angle, or through a simple door in the western wall. Underneath the building is a crypt where dwelled a sacred snake that was a symbol of the city. At one point, the site included the tomb of a mythical ancient king; altars to Poseidon, Athena, and the smith god Hephaestus; a well containing seawater, commemorating Poseidon's gift; and an olive tree, commemorating Athena's gift.

The most famous part of the Erechtheion is a balcony whose roof is supported by statues of maidens, balancing the weight on their heads. The women are dressed in clinging garments, stand in a manner that is relaxed, yet ready for action, and display serene expressions. Originally, there were six statues, but a British nobleman stole one and brought it back to Scotland. It is said that the night after she was removed, the other statues wailed for their lost sister. The sixth statue is now in the British Museum in London. It is part of an ongoing dispute between the Museum and the Greek government, which would like to see the artifact returned.

At your table, you could have some fun playing with the Erechtheion's nature as a temple to multiple gods. Perhaps Athena and Poseidon are quarreling. This has led the sacred olive tree and salt water well in the Erechtheion to quarrel as well, perhaps violently. One can't stop the gods from fighting, but the Athenians would really appreciate it if the PCs could do something about the tree and the well before they tear the temple apart. After all, the sacred snake could get hurt!

In an urban fantasy game, the PCs may be called upon to solve a crime: someone has stolen the five remaining statue-columns! The PCs have to piece together some very odd clues to realize the statues stole themselves. They're traveling to London to free their sister. What the PCs choose to do with this knowledge is up to them.

The Great Zimbabwe
Mysterious African Ruin

In the Zimbabwean savanna there stands a a mighty ruin containing the largest pre-European structure south of the Sahara. This site, called the Great Zimbabwe, remains poorly understood, and the way it has been treated is in many ways emblematic of Africa's troubled colonial past.

The Great Zimbabwe was founded in the eleventh century in a previously sparsely-inhabited site on the savanna. Its Iron Age founders quarried granite from exposed rock on the surrounding hills to construct the city's immense walls. By the fourteenth century, the Great Zimbabwe was the principal city of a major state. At least 10,000 people lived in and around the site, though perhaps only 200 or 300 lived in the largest buildings. Little is known about the builders of the Great Zimbabwe. They were probably Bantu-speaking cattle-herders, and likely profited from building their city on a gold trade route. Goods from as far as China have been found in the ruins. The city was abruptly abandoned around 1450; why remains unclear.

The ruins of the Great Zimbabwe consist mainly of walls. All of them are curved; there isn't a straight line or right angle in the whole city. A map of the flowing walls looks like someone tossed a small handful of spaghetti at a canvas. The walls were built without mortar. The stones are simply laid one on top of the other, with each tier slightly smaller than the last, so the wall slopes a bit as it rises. The craftsmanship of the builders improved over time; the best-laid stones are so perfectly fitted and dressed that the wall is as smooth as modern brick.

The ruins are divided into three main sections. The most well-known is the Great Enclosure. It is in the shape of an ellipse, with walls 35 feet high and up to 17 feet thick. Bizarrely, it also boasts a high conical tower that is completely solid. Overlooking the Great Enclosure is a sort of royal city. The most remarkable find in this area was six yard-tall columns surmounted with soapstone carvings of birds with the lips of men and human feet in place of claws. The third section, the Valley Complex, was built after the city was abandoned by people moving into the ruins. The entire city is dotted with alters for an unknown purpose.

The first European explorers to see the ruins were so impressed they concluded that such structures "could never have been built by blacks." When they discovered some wood in the site that reminded them of Phoenician cedar (it actually came from a very common local tree), they concluded this must be the city of the Biblical Queen of Sheba. When a slightly more thorough inspection turned up artifacts clearly built by Africans, they ignored the evidence. The first man to seriously excavate the ruins was not only a racist, but also an idiot. In a desire to "remove the filth and decadence of Kaffir occupation," he removed all the soil containing useful artifacts. That we know so little of the people who built the Great Zimbabwe is thus his fault. Even when good archaeology finally began demonstrating

that the site was clearly built by an indigenous people, the white-led Rhodesian government suppressed the findings. It wasn't until the rise of dictator Robert Mugabe that the truth about the the Great Zimbabwe could finally be expressed publicly.

So the Great Zimbabwe remains a mystery. The locals living in the area at the time of its discovery by Europeans had no idea who built it. While it was clearly constructed by an indigenous people, we don't know which. There are a number of tribes that claim the honor. We also don't know why the site was abandoned. One popular theory is that there simply wasn't enough food to support the city, but if that's so, why didn't it simply shrink? We just don't know.

Mysterious ruins in games tend to be both common and a lot of fun. The Great Zimbabwe has some important lessons on how to make them work. For one thing, such ruins are likely to be inhabited. That then raises the question of from whom the ruins' inhabitants are descended. Its builders? Its conquerers? Squatters? And most people's opinions on the subject will be based not in fact but in ideology. Furthermore, the Great Zimbabwe has done a good job of holding on to its secrets. There are no documents written by its builders. We have no reference to understand the iconography of the art. And there was a major event that destroyed most helpful artifacts. If you want your ruins to stay mysterious, consider doing the same.

Hadrian's Wall

Outpost at the Edge of Civilization

Bisecting Britain from east to west, Hadrian's Wall represents the northernmost extent of sustained Roman occupation. For three hundred years, the wall protected the Roman Empire from the free Britons beyond. The wall is some 74 miles long, 15 feet high, and 10 feet wide.

When Emperor Hadrian ascended to the throne, the borders of the Empire were often ill-defined or indefensible. Rather than continuing the trend of expanding the Empire, Hadrian chose to consolidate it. He went on a series of tours of the frontier in order to see and be seen. He examined for himself the situation on the border, and showed the troops manning the frontiers that their service mattered to Rome. While in Britain (of which only the southern half was Roman-occupied), Hadrian decided that conquering the rest of the island would be impractical. Instead, he ordered the legions to fall back to a more defensible border and to construct a great wall along it.

One might think the purpose of the wall was to prevent Britons from crossing the border, but this was not the case. If you wanted to, you could get over the wall. Go to a spot out of view of any forts, wait for the Roman patrol to pass by, toss a grappling hook over the wall, and climb up. The soldiers would never even know you were there. However, the wall did prevent the movement of entire armies. If you wanted to get a couple thousand men and enough supply wagons to keep them fed and armed into southern Britain, you would need to pass through one of the gates (for much of the wall, there was a gate, defended by a fort, every mile). Hadrian's Wall also sent a powerful message to the Britons, who were not a people accustomed to large-scale stonework: you cannot compete with us. The power of Rome is so great that to even think of crossing us is folly. Finally, the construction also served to keep the troops busy. Bored soldiers tend to cause trouble, so assigning them an immense building project was standard Roman procedure by this point.

The construction of the wall was an involved process. Before the wall could be built, logistics had to be worked out. It would follow ridge lines and escarpments wherever possible. Soldiers constructed a series of forts along the path of the future wall to serve as storehouses. Construction started on the east coast and moved west. Groups of 100 soldiers were assigned a section of wall to build, and the men took pride in their work.

The soldiers stationed at Hadrian's Wall probably didn't like being posted there. Britain was seen as a barbaric land, barely civilized. It was cold. It was wet. The locals were weird, and they didn't speak Latin. Nonetheless, the soldiers did their best to make life comfortable. They imported goods from throughout the Empire. They brought a bit of Roman culture to Britain, like heated bathhouses. And, of course, they settled down. Some soldiers brought their families north with them, while others married local girls. Towns sprang up around the forts, and many soldiers probably lived outside the walls. In short, they acted much like American G.I.s stationed in unfamiliar parts of the US.

At your table, if you want to treat Hadrian's wall in a fantastical, Game of Thrones-style manner, you can have it be the edge of the civilized world, beyond which lies only savagery and death. Certainly that's the way many Romans saw it. But there's a great adventure seed in portraying the wall more realistically. It is an impressive barrier, but it's not impregnable. In your game, the soldiers manning your Hadrian's Wall-analogue may be very interested in never having to fight the northerners. They may specialize in keeping the British tribes fighting each other rather than the Romans. But someone is uniting the tribes, and the Romans are getting nervous. For such a campaign, consider basing your villain on Genghis Khan (see page 126).

Hagia Sophia

Domed Cathedral of Constantinople

One of the world's most magnificent and unusual churches, the Hagia Sophia sits at the heart of Istanbul. It's big. Mind-blowingly big. Standing at the center of the cathedral and looking up is a good way to give yourself vertigo.

The Hagia Sophia is built around an immense central dome. To this day, 1,400 years after its construction, the dome is one of the largest ever built without incorporating steel. Its weight rests on a series of smaller support domes. Procopius (see page 147) claims that the dome's original construction didn't use mortar. Instead, molten lead was poured between the layers of stone. Despite the sturdy construction, the dome has had to be repaired numerous times after earthquakes; at one point it even collapsed entirely.

The interior of the cathedral is covered in gold leaf, which, combined with rows of windows, creates a splendorous display of radiant light. The floor plan is unconventional, incorporating two levels of side rooms and balconies built around the central space. The walls are decorated with mosaics of Jesus, Mary, angels, saints, and various Byzantine emperors. In a reference to Greek mythology, the marble floor features a circle representing the navel of the world.

The history of the Hagia Sophia is the history of Turkey. Before the cathedral's construction, the site held a different church. It was burned down during the Nika riots (see page 192), and emperor Justinian I hired the two greatest architects and mathematicians of the contemporary Mediterranean world to build him a replacement. The new church became the center of the Byzantine state religion. When the eastern and western branches of Christianity finally separated in the Great Schism, the excommunication of

the patriarch of the Orthodox church occurred inside the Hagia Sophia. When the Turks finally conquered Constantinople, the sultan had the cathedral converted to a mosque. The mosaics were covered up, minarets were added, and large medallions showing Arabic calligraphy were hung around the dome. One hundred and fifty years later, the Turks constructed the magnificent Blue Mosque opposite the Hagia Sophia, deliberately echoing the cathedral's architecture. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of a new secular Turkish state, the Hagia Sophia was decommissioned as a mosque and became a museum. The old mosaics were uncovered, but the Muslim iconography remains as a testament to the cathedral's varied history.

At your table, the grandeur of the Hagia Sophia may make it a good candidate for use as the temple at the center of the universe; that navel on the marble floor isn't just for show. But what's that? The temple is under attack by giant robot demons! Fortunately, the gods installed defenses around the temple: giant statues of bipedal animals that the PCs can crawl inside and pilot like mechs. So to save the universe, the PCs will have to brawl in giant golem-robots around the Hagia Sophia.

Alternately, in a historical game, the two genius architects of the Hagia Sophia may be flummoxed as to how to get their dome to stay upright. So they send the PCs to the East where mathematics is more advanced. PCs may be able to learn from the students of the by-then deceased Chinese mathematician Zu Chongzhi, who certainly had a better understanding of spheres and circles than any Byzantine mathematician.

HANGZHOU

Beautiful Cosmopolitan Capital of the Southern Song

Under the Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279), China seemed to be on the road to an industrial revolution. Coal came into widespread use for heating, and by the 1000s was in use (after conversion to coke) for iron production, 700 years before the Europeans. Population was growing quickly, fueled by the adoption of early-ripening rice. Just as in Britain in the 1700s, canal traffic and construction was booming. It was at this time that China began to export large quantities of china. And especially during the Southern Song (1127-1279) the center of this activity was the coastal city of Hangzhou, the largest city in the world from 1180 to 1315. The population may have been as high as two million, but was more likely between 500,000 and one million.

There is a Chinese saying: "Be born in Suzhou, live in Hangzhou, eat in Guangzhou, die in Liuzhou." Suzhou is famous for its well-educated citizenry, Hangzhou for its beautiful scenery, Guangzhou for its cuisine and Liuzhou for its sturdy coffins. Marco Polo described it (not too long after the Mongol conquest of 1276) as the "finest and most splendid city in the world". He was perhaps exaggerating a bit (especially when he describes the city as 100 miles wide and with 12,000 bridges), but it is clear the city was very impressive. Another well-traveled writer, Ibn Batutta of Morocco, concurs that it was the largest city in the world.

Hangzhou was (and is) a low-lying city on the Qiantang River about 100 miles southwest of Shanghai. The city was crisscrossed with canals, including the southern terminus of the immense Grand Canal, built in the 7th century to transport grain from agricultural heartlands in the south to the political center in the north. On the western edge of Hangzhou is the West Lake: surrounded by mountains and crisscrossed by willow-lined causeways, the lake has been an inspiration to poets for centuries. Despite all this water, Hangzhou – a city of mostly wooden buildings – was plagued by fire. More than 3,000 soldiers

were stationed throughout the metropolis as firefighters, with an elaborate system of watchtowers and signal lanterns to coordinate their efforts.

Hangzhou was a major port despite the fact that the Qiantang River has the world's largest tidal bore – a concentrated wave of the incoming tide up to 30 feet high Locally known as the Silver Dragon, no surfer has ever stayed upright in it for more than 11 seconds. This extreme tide necessitated the construction of the Liuhe Pagoda, a graceful 200-foot structure serving to placate the river spirits and act as a lighthouse.

As a center of trade (from the Silk Road, the Grand Canal, and seaborne traffic from Southeast Asia), Hangzhou was a very cosmopolitan city. It was a major center of Islam in China, and also a center of Chinese Jewry. Buddhists and Nestorian Christians had a presence there as well. The elite of the city formed a wide variety of social clubs, with intriguing names like the "Occult Club" and the "Refined Music Society."

Though the city was conquered by the Mongols under Kublai Khan (see page 139) in 1276, Hangzhou remained impressive – the accounts of Marco Polo and Ibn Batutta come from Hangzhou's time under the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. Though it's no longer the world's largest city, Hangzhou remains important today – the southern portion of the Grand Canal is still in operation (and no longer smells awful, after cleanup operations in the mid-2000s). It is the 6th largest city in China, and has the second highest GDP of any Chinese city (after Guangzhou).

Though it's cliché to say this, Hangzhou under the Song really was a city of contrasts. It was a city of quiet gardens and bustling markets, solemn temples and belching furnaces, flowing canals and regular fires. It was at once a tourist site, a subtropical paradise, a manufacturing hub and an agricultural clearinghouse.

Hangzhou is an excellent model for a trading city in an advanced and wealthy (and possibly decadent) fantasy empire. It's also a good place for an alternate history or fantasy-world industrial revolution to get underway. Your PCs could easily be involved in the siege of Hangzhou, either as Mongol attackers or Southern Song defenders – the Mongol-Chinese wars were some of the first with gunpowder weapons on both sides, after all. And a cosmopolitan city of a million should have enough intrigue and scheming for several campaigns, even with no enemies at the gates. If all else fails, someone should really introduce surfing to medieval China. Why not your PCs?

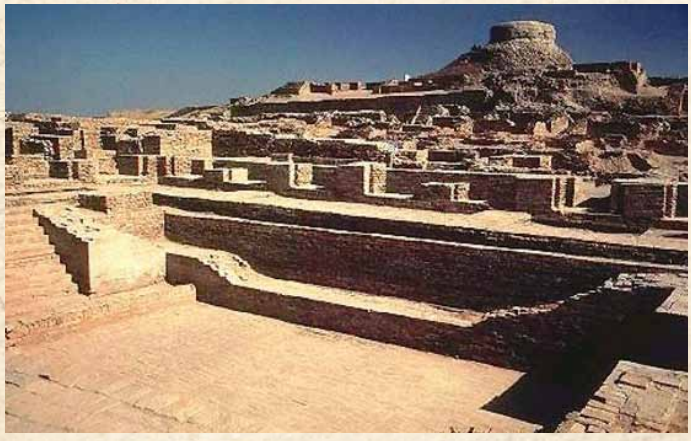
Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro

The World's First Planned Cities

The Indus Valley Civilization (mainly located in present-day Pakistan) was one of the world's first sites of large-scale urbanization, along with Egypt and Mesopotamia. In its peak centuries – between 2600 and 1900 BC – it had a population of about 5 million people, around 10% of the world population then.

The most shocking thing about this civilization to contemporaries was most likely how clean it was. Over a millennium before Rome, the cities of the Indus valley (of which the first two excavated were Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro) had flush toilets, a sewer system, and vast public baths and water cisterns. Wastewater was drained not in open gutters, but through covered drains. Every house had its own latrine – many had flush toilets – and its own small pool for bathing; indoor plumbing wasn't just for the elite.

In some ways, the planning and layout of the Indus valley cities was not surpassed until the 19th century. Streets were laid out in a grid along the cardinal directions, and all the bricks used to build the streets and buildings were of uniform sizes. This standardization was possible through very precise weights and measures – the people of the Indus Valley invented the ruler, and used hexagonal weights standardized to less than the mass of a paperclip. Along with this standardization was, at least outwardly, egalitarianism: most of the houses were equal in size, and elites were not buried in elaborate tombs. Social status seems to have been signaled mainly by jewelry and small art pieces. Some of these sculptures are quite elaborate for the time period and may have been an influence on ancient Greek statuary.



This influence is plausible because the cities had a large trade network connecting them to the rest of Eurasia. The ruins of a massive dockyard and shipping canal have been found at Lothal, on the Indian side of the Pakistani border, and there is evidence that Indus Valley trade networks extended as far as Crete – there was certainly trade with Central Asia. They may also have been the first people to use wheeled transport.

There is an Indus script, but no one today can read it, and in fact, no one is quite sure if it's a full written language at all. The only examples found are short seals and somewhat longer signs, with the longest only 17 characters long. With such short passages and no bilingual inscription found, deciphering the script has been impossible.

Interestingly, none of the art found has depictions of warfare – the ruling class doesn't seem to have achieved their position by military power, but by wealth or religious authority. There's some inconclusive evidence of warfare in the area, but for whatever reason, it wasn't considered a valid subject of art.

For a long time, it was thought that invading Aryan tribes from the northwest destroyed the Indus Valley Civilization – an analog to the fall of Rome to Germanic "barbarians." But recent archeology has found evidence that many elements of the Vedic Aryan culture developed in cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, and no conclusive evidence of an invasion has been found.

Many historians now doubt whether such an invasion happened, and argue that if it did, it was merely the final straw for a civilization already

weakened by other factors. Changes in climate may have made the rivers more prone to flooding, and the major river used by the civilization – the Sarasvati – dried up entirely as tectonic shifts changed patterns of drainage.

In your game, the great cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro could be seen in a variety of ways – they could be an egalitarian utopia, ordinary cities with an odd penchant for cleanliness, staunchly bourgeois merchant republics, or a soulless conformist hive (ancient aliens are pretty overplayed, but maybe the place is run by time-traveling Communists out to steal a march on capitalism). A fun comic relief character could be a Harappan merchant or diplomat stationed in Sumer (or a fantasy analogue) and incessantly complaining that the Sumerians have no idea how to run a city!

Harlech Castle

Iconic Medieval Fortress

Perched on a rocky promontory overlooking the Welsh seacoast, Harlech Castle's formidable defenses have made it an important site in British history. Because the castle can be resupplied from the sea, it has several times been besieged for years without surrendering.

Harlech Castle is remarkably well-fortified. Though it is a touch small, especially when compared against the enormous Caernarfon Castle, 30 miles to the north, it is well-guarded by its high walls and towers. Harlech Castle boasts two concentric rings of walls. The outer walls are protected by a deep, broad ditch. This prevented siege equipment like battering rams and siege towers from being rolled up to the wall. The space between the outer and inner walls was kept clear, and would serve to trap any soldiers who made it over the outer wall. Finally, there was the gatehouse, a monstrous three-story building. The entrance to the castle through the gatehouse was protected by three portcullises and two gates, requiring attackers to batter through them one set at a time, while simultaneously being fired upon through murder holes and arrow slits both from above and to the sides.

But Harlech Castle's greatest advantage was its geographic location. The castle is on a rocky

promontory, whose western face used to run down to the sea (the water has since receded). The western half of the rock was itself walled off to prevent besiegers from completely encircling the castle. The "Water Gate" in this western wall allowed access to the sea beyond. This meant that the castle could be continuously resupplied by water even during a siege. Unless besiegers were willing to anchor a warship off the coast of Harlech, the castle was very difficult to starve out.

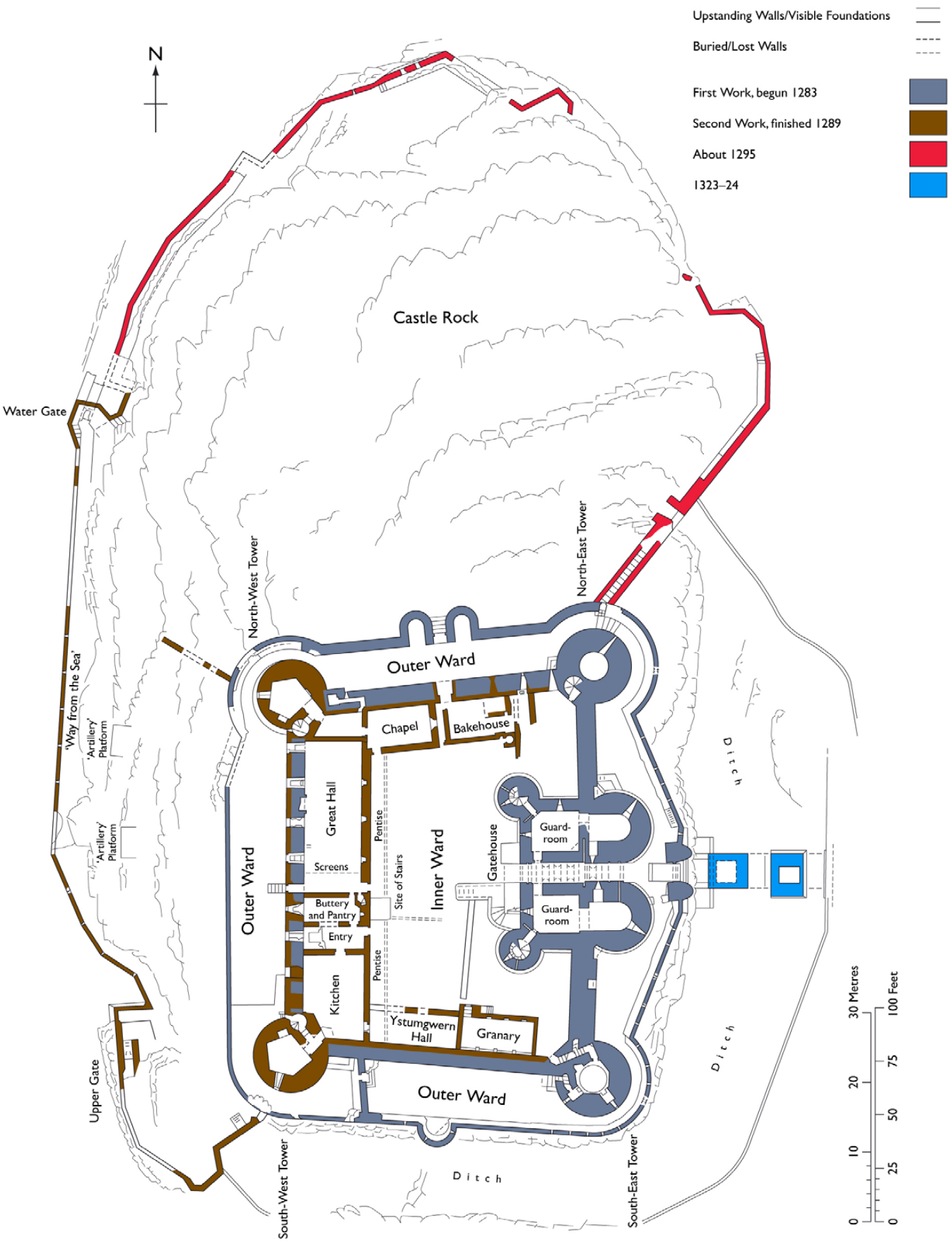
Harlech Castle has a tradition of holding out under impossible conditions. It was constructed by an English king as part of a spurt of castle-building intended to demonstrate (and guarantee) English dominion over Wales. Over a hundred years later, in the early 15th century, it was besieged for several years by a Welsh rebel, and only fell when the rebel's French allies cut off resupply by sea. During the Wars of the Roses, Harlech Castle was besieged for seven years, surrendering only after it was the last Lancastrian stronghold remaining. This was the longest siege in the history of the British Isles, and was the inspiration for the Welsh song "Men of Harlech," perhaps best known outside of Britain for its role in the film Zulu. Similarly, in the English Civil War, Harlech was the last Royalist stronghold to surrender.

Today, the reasonably intact ruins of Harlech Castle are a tourist destination. The sea receded centuries ago, so the west face of the promontory no longer runs down to salt water, but rather to pleasant houses and streets. The killing fields east of the gatehouse are occupied by gift shops and restaurants. The blood-soaked ground where young men died screaming has been bricked over to make a parking lot.

There are countless ways to use Harlech Castle at your table. In a fantasy campaign, anywhere you need a castle, strongly consider using Harlech. After all, it's a fortress that can't be simply starved out. If the site you need is inland, replace the ocean with a river or large lake so you can keep the Water Gate. If the PCs are besieging the castle, their task could be to come up with some clever trick to take the fortress. If they are the besieged, consider having them be in charge of safeguarding the Water Gate.

Harlech Castle is also useful in its ruined, pre-modern state. It would make an excellent hideout for bandits, and an even better one for grain smugglers. It was common in the Middle Ages for the price of grain to be fixed by law. Such smugglers would then be buying grain from local peasants for higher prices than would be legal, and then shipping the grain to large cities where the price of grain is higher still. A ruined castle with access to the sea would provide a discreet place to store and ship grain under the cover of darkness. A local duke friendly to the PCs could offer them the castle, if only they would prevent it from serving as a haven for criminals.

The modern Harlech Castle would make a terrific location to explore the theme of the violent meeting the mundane. It's a common theme in films: the climax or plot is driven by the violent world of criminals and thugs (and PCs) spilling over into the mundane, everyday world. The castle's violent past and the contrast with its current nature as a tourist attraction would mix well with such a plot. The PCs could be doing (or trying to stop) some shady business at Harlech Castle while simultaneously trying to prevent the tourists on holiday from noticing anything is amiss. The fun will really start when things inevitably go wrong.


Upstanding Walls/Visible Foundations
Buried/Lost Walls
First Work, begun 1283
Second Work, finished 1289
About 1295
1323–24
N
Castle Rock
Water Gate
'Way from the Sea'
'Artillery' Platform
'Artillery' Platform
North-West Tower
North-East Tower
Outer Ward
Chapel
Bakehouse
Great Hall
Pentise
Screens
Buttery and Pantry
Entry
Site of Stairs
Inner Ward
Gatehouse
Guard-room
Guard-room
Outer Ward
Kitchen
Pentise
Ystumgwern Hall
Granary
Outer Ward
Ditch
Ditch
Ditch
Upper Gate
South-West Tower
South-East Tower
0
10
20
30 Metres
0
25
50
75
100 Feet

ISTANBUL
Great City on the East/West Divide

The largest city in Turkey, Istanbul straddles the border between Europe and Asia, both geographically and culturally. It is a global metropolis that should feel familiar to any resident of one of the great cities of the West. At the same time, it is distinctly non-Western, with its minarets and bazaars.

Istanbul has a long and ancient history. The first known city on the site was the Greek colony of Byzantium, founded in 657 BC. Byzantium played a minor role in local politics, but in 330 AD, the Roman emperor Constantine renamed the city Constantinople, and declared it the new capital of the Empire. On Constantine's orders, the city was rebuilt on a grander scale. For centuries, Constantinople continued serving as capital, even as the Eastern Roman Empire slowly morphed into the Byzantine Empire. The city (and much of the Empire) was still Greek-speaking, and it was one of the largest cities in Europe through Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. In 1203, Constantinople was sacked by the Latin-cultured Fourth Crusade, but the city was retaken by Greek speakers in 1261. The last vestiges of the Byzantine Empire were wiped out by the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, after 400 years of intermittent warfare with the Byzantines. Constantinople prospered under the Ottoman Turks, and lost its Christian, Greek-speaking character, adopting the language and religion of its new rulers. During this time, the name of the city gradually changed from Constantinople to Istanbul. After the dissolving of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the modern Turkish state in the 1920's, the capital moved to Ankara, but Istanbul remains Turkey's largest city.

Much of the city's success has been due to its geography. Istanbul straddles the Bosporus: the only water route between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The western bank of the Bosporus lies in Europe, the eastern in Asia. The European half of the city is further split by the Golden Horn, a scimitar-shaped inlet thrusting in towards the heart of the city. Ancient Constantinople was built south of the Golden horn; the city has since grown far beyond those constraints. Istanbul's climate is warm and humid but temperate; the city often sees snow. Parts of Istanbul are also sometimes plagued by thick fogs.

The city is remarkable for the religious diversity it has seen through the centuries. Today,

the relationship between Turkey and Islam is analogous to that between America and Christianity. Most residents of Istanbul are Muslims, but the Turkish government is secular, and freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution. However, in practice, Islam has a favored status. The greatest temple in Istanbul is unquestionably the Hagia Sophia (see page 72). Built as a Christian cathedral, the mammoth church was converted to a mosque after the Turkish conquest. Today, it is a museum. Across the street from the Hagia Sophia is the Blue Mosque, a marvel of monumental, yet understated architecture, all elegant domes and graceful minarets. Istanbul is also home to the Church of St. George, the seat of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the "first among equals" of Eastern Orthodox bishops. And everywhere throughout Istanbul you will find small mosques, each with at least one minaret, from which recordings of the call to prayer are broadcast on loudspeakers.

Istanbul is Turkey's economic powerhouse. Its business district boasts skyscrapers up to 850 feet tall and a stock exchange. The city is home

to 30 billionaires, with a combined net worth of $50 billion. The Bosporus is one of the busiest shipping lanes on earth, and Istanbul can be a good place to charter an out-of-work freighter.

The city is also a major tourist destination. Some chase the religious sites, while others visit the city's more uniquely Turkish locales. The Grand Bazaar is one of the world's oldest covered markets. Most tourists are after tchotchkes and knickknacks, but if you know whom to talk to, there is little that can't be bought at the Grand Bazaar – for the right price. The great palace of the Ottoman sultans has been converted to a museum, full of bejeweled artifacts and holy relics. Some of the city's Byzantine-era underground cisterns have been opened up to tourists, offering a cool respite from the Mediterranean heat. And following the tourists are all manner of predators, from legitimate – albeit dishonest – rug merchants to pickpockets and the occasional mugger.

What's really great about Istanbul in a gaming context is that it's familiar, yet different. A player's knowledge about cities from, say, growing up in Brooklyn would absolutely carry over to Istanbul. But at the same time, it's very different from what Westerners are used to. The next time you need a modern city in your game, don't use New York or Chicago as a template again. There's a reason James Bond has never been to Chicago, but has been to Istanbul three times. It's simply more interesting. If nothing else, you have almost three thousand years of history to play with. Go wild.

Kennedy Space Center Launch Complex 39

Colossal Rocket Facility

This is where history was made: the site of assembly and liftoff for America's Saturn V and Space Shuttle rockets. The launch complex is centered around the Vehicle Assembly Building and two launchpads, and is buffered from the ocean by a mangrove forest (see page 28). Since the end of the Space Shuttle program, Launch Complex 39 is not in current use. It is, however, being refitted for the upcoming Space Launch System, the next generation of American manned spaceflight, expected in 2017.

As with all things involving manned space travel, to call the Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB) immense seems somehow inadequate. It is the fourth-largest building in the world by volume: some 500 feet tall, with eight acres of floor space. It was originally built to provide a space to assemble the colossal Saturn V rockets that took men to the moon. The VAB later served the same role for the Space Shuttle, as the Shuttle was attached to its enormous fuel tanks. The space is so large that it has its own weather; on humid days, clouds form near the ceiling.

When the Shuttle was assembled, it would be transferred onto the "crawler-transporter." This vehicle is 40 yards long, almost equally as wide, and weighs some three thousand tons. It

resembles a flat-topped oil derrick with tank treads instead of stilts. When the crawler was built to transport Saturn V rockets, it was the largest tracked vehicle in the world. When fully-loaded, this baby roars down the racetrack at one mile per hour. It's super-fuel efficient, too, getting about 150 gallons of gas per mile. Despite the crawler's complexity, it requires only one driver. Though there are no more Space Shuttles for the crawler to carry, NASA is not getting rid of it. Instead, the crawler is getting a modern refit so it will be able to carry rockets for decades to come.

The crawler's destination is one of the two launchpads. The most obvious feature of each pad is the fixed service structure, a metal scaffolding that permits access to the rocket via a metal arm. Two other arms help service the rocket. Attached to the fixed service structure is the rotating service structure, which can move up against the Shuttle to provide access to the payload bay while the Shuttle is on the launchpad. Most payloads were installed at this point, but larger ones were installed before the Shuttle even entered the VAB. Near the pad are the spherical storage structures used to house rocket fuel: liquid oxygen on one side of the pad, liquid hydrogen on the other. Both are kept at cryogenic temperatures. Also present at the pad are great pumps and trenches. The pumps release water under the rocket during liftoff to absorb sound energy, lest it reflect back off the pad towards the rocket and damage it. The trenches similarly serve to redirect the billowing flame away from the rocket.

In case of emergency, astronauts can leap into a basket and ride down a zipline to a bunker. It could be argued the escape route is more for appearance than safety; if a vehicle were to explode on the launchpad, the arm connecting the rocket to the service structure would likely have already been pulled back to permit takeoff, trapping the astronauts inside. It takes fifteen seconds for the arm to swing back into place. The astronauts would then have to run down the arm, through the service structure, zipline down in the basket, and run into the bunker. The odds the astronauts would have enough time to do all that before the rocket explodes are... not good.

At your table, Soviet agents may be trying to sabotage an early Apollo mission launch, blowing up a Saturn V rocket full of astronauts on live TV. The PCs are tasked by the American intelligence community with stopping this. However, the PCs are forbidden from letting NASA know about the plot. The agency is notoriously cautious, and has a reputation for canceling rocket launches at the drop of a hat. But the intelligence community would sooner see astronauts die, billions of taxpayer dollars wasted, and a serious setback to the space race than admit to the public that the commies have an active presence on American soil. If the PCs don't manage to stop the plot in Complex 39, will they follow orders and let the Saturn V explode?

Kowloon Walled City

Anarchic Metropolitan Labyrinth

Until 1992, the Kowloon Walled City lay on the outskirts of Hong Kong, ruled by neither Britain nor China. With 50,000 people in 300 crammed-together interconnected high-rises, it was a fifteen-story three-dimensional lawless labyrinth. There are several cities in this book with smaller populations than Kowloon's. The Walled City was built haphazardly: building cleaved to building, house built on top of house. And all without the benefit of architects or central planners.

Kowloon existed in a legal no-man's-land. Neither Britain (which then ruled Hong Kong) nor China were willing to take responsibility for the Walled City, allowing it to exist in a lawless state. There was no administration, no police. Instead, Kowloon was ruled by the Triads – the Chinese Mafia – who extorted protection money from residents. Water and electricity were illegally piped in from the outside. In 1991, the British had become so sick of the Walled City that they paid inhabitants compensation money to leave. In 1992, Kowloon was demolished.

Approaching Kowloon, you saw the outer walls, covered in cage-like balconies and hanging

laundry. Slipping into the Walled City through a narrow gap between buildings, you effectively went underground – in both sense of the word. The 'streets' (mostly alleys and passageways) were dark, garbage-strewn tunnels. Overhead was a rat's nest of snaking electrical wires and the occasional fluorescent bulb. The walls dripped with water, in some places forming small waterfalls. Kowloon's streets formed a dirty three-dimensional maze, full of people carrying goods of varying legalities. Heroin addicts crouched in corners. Dead rats lay on the stairs. The air was hot, moist, and moldy, and the only light was electric. You couldn't know if it was day or night, or if the street you were in was on the ground or fifty feet above it. Most apartments and shops were tiny and cramped, perhaps only one room of 100-200 square feet. Grime coated everything.

Despite it all, Kowloon was a city, and in its dingy confines, 50,000 people went about their daily lives. The people living in the Walled City mostly fell into three groups. There were the poor and the desperate, who couldn't find work or housing outside Kowloon. There were the criminals and refugees, hiding from the eyes of the government. And then there were those born inside the Walled City, who knew no other life. Kowloon's grimy streets boasted numerous illegal operations: casinos, brothels, unlicensed dentists, cocaine parlors, and opium dens. But it also had plenty of tiny general stores, stacked floor-to-ceiling with toilet paper, cigarettes, canned food, soda, condiments, candy, and beer. They resembled the sorts of food-centric general stores you'll find throughout the Third World today, just squeezed into a far smaller space. You had restaurants, hairdressers, herbalists, augurs, fortune-tellers, street musicians, and more besides: all the professions of a major city.

The biggest source of Kowloon's success was not crime, but industry. Away from government health and safety regulators, Kowloon could produce goods more cheaply than anywhere else in Hong Kong. The Walled City's factories included filthy butcher's shops, flour-caked noodle factories, dirty fish processors, cramped weaving mills, and cacophonous metalworking shops. Most of these factories were only a room or two in size, often one-man operations. Work was done on antiquated machinery, replacing modern technology with cheap labor. Employees stood amid rats, mice, and roaches, and many sported obvious work-related injuries. The manufactured goods were sold in Hong Kong, either to more legitimate businesses like restaurants, or as counterfeit name-brand products passed off to unwary or unscrupulous merchants.

The Kowloon Walled City was a bizarre place where you could find almost anything. You could travel the entire length of Kowloon without ever setting foot on the ground. In one alley, there was an 18th-century cannon propped up against a wall. Another abutted to a small temple devoted to the sea goddess Mazu. The roof was a parkourist's dream. No two buildings were the same height, and the crude terraces and flat rooftops sported a jungle of wires and TV antennas.

Because of this, Kowloon makes for absolutely fantastic gaming material. It's a dungeon, a cave system, and a science fiction hive world all mixed together. Anything could happen to your PCs in the Walled City. They might get entangled in Triad business affairs, go hunting for wanted fugitives, or hide from the law. Whatever your use for Kowloon, make sure to play up the grime and filth of the city.

LILY DALE
Psychic Mecca

This tiny hamlet in rural New York is the center of the Spiritualist belief system. Here, psychics, mediums, and other Spiritualists offer their assistance to anyone willing to pay. Generally, the village's mediums pass on messages from the spirits of dead loved ones and ancestors, but other services are offered here.

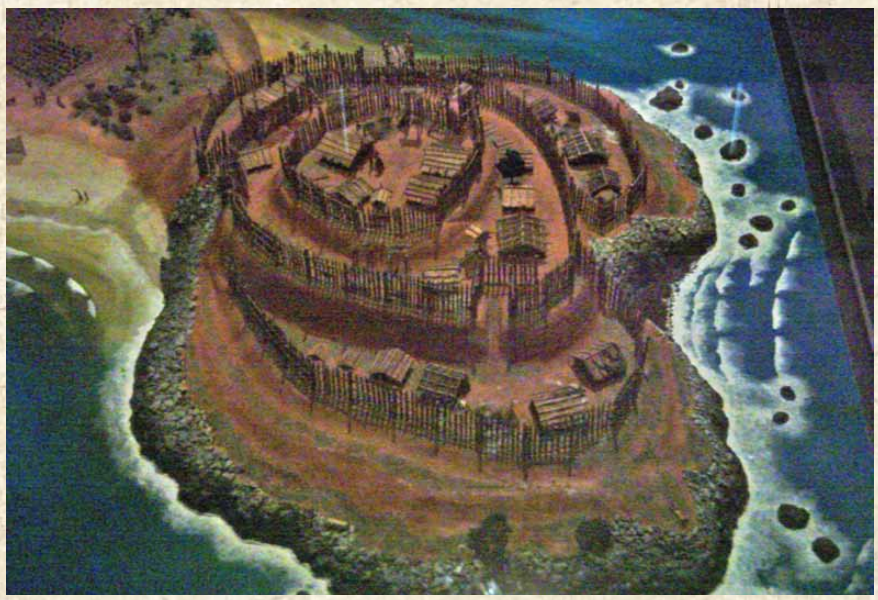
Lily Dale is a town of some 100 year-round residents located on a small lake. Only Spiritualists can live in Lily Dale. Others have to pay $10 to visit. The village is composed largely of colorful Victorian houses nestled amongst the trees. There is only one hotel, an elegant four-story structure said to be teeming with ghosts. Lily Dale's 40 registered psychics work out of their homes, and will communicate with the dead for you for $25-$100. To be allowed to work in Lily Dale, a medium must pass a series of tests designed to ensure their style matches the Lily Dale aesthetic. There are also a series of lectures available to the paying public.

The Spiritualist religion began in the 1840s with the Fox sisters, who conducted seances where ghostly rappings were heard. One later revealed the whole affair was a hoax and showed how the sisters produced these noises, but by then the movement was in full swing. Spiritualists believe that life continues after death, and that the deceased are both able and inclined to communicate with the living. Thus by their view, contact with the dead is neither miraculous nor supernatural, but a simple fact.

A number of phenomena occur in Lily Dale. Most of the village's mediums act as a voice for nearby spirits. There is nothing flashy or mystical about their craft; they just talk, conveying information about the spirit to the customer. The spirits may give helpful messages or offer insight. Usually, this is in the form of specific-sounding statements that are actually quite generally applicable, like, "you should put the uniform on," or "watch out for your heart." Another phenomenon takes place at the Inspiration Stump (pictured). Folks gather on benches in the woods in front of a concrete stump, and a local medium performs his craft, telling the gathered people things like, "I feel a spirit in this section of the audience. I'm sensing lung cancer." When someone over there invariably blurts out that their grandfather died of cancer, the medium may deliver a message from the spirit or help the person carry on a short conversation with granddad. Some Lily Dale mediums practice "spirit painting" where a spirit takes control of their arms and paints a picture using the psychic's hands, sometimes while carrying on a conversation. At the village's healing temple, mediums will run their hands up and down your body, about an inch from your skin, to heal your physical and psychological wounds.

You may have detected a certain tone of skepticism in this article. Am I trying to imply that these psychics are frauds? Absolutely not. What I am saying, though, is that the feats they accomplish are indistinguishable from those accomplished by novice stage magicians. Nor am I claiming that these people are liars; most probably believe the things they tell their customers. But if you've never tested your abilities in a rigorous, controlled fashion, it is very easy to accidentally delude yourself, even if you have only the best of intentions. Given all this, it might be wise to view the claims of the psychics of Lily Dale with a certain skepticism until someone wins the one million dollars offered by the James Randi Educational Foundation to anyone who can prove their magical powers under laboratory conditions.

At your table, PCs might visit a place like Lily Dale for any number of reasons. Perhaps they're looking to contact someone who has passed on. Perhaps they're inquisitors come to shut the place down. Maybe they're looking to see how the pros do it so they can convince the governor's husband that they're real psychics. Before you use Lily Dale, you'll need to decide whether its mediums are real, hoaxers, well-meaning charlatans, or some combination of the three.



Māori Pā
Earthwork Forts

The Māori people of New Zealand did not build castles or citadels to protect them in times of strife. Their style of defensive fortification – the Pā – consisted mainly of earthen walls and ditches, topped with stockades built along the contours of the land. While much of a town's population might live outside the Pā, when enemy tribes approached, they would retreat within the finest fortifications Stone Age technology could build.

The most important part of building a Pā was choosing the right site. Whenever possible, a tribe would build its Pā atop a cliff. The cliff protected at least one side of the fort, and restricted the avenues attackers could take. On a ridge, the builders would choose a site on a knoll. On a plain, they would find a spot along a river where a bluff overlooked the water. On the coast, a projecting promontory. Some Pā were even built on islands in lakes or swamps. If the builders could find no cliffs, they could make their own by excavating terraces on a hillside, and topping them with high palisades. This was also done along the ends of cliffs, artificially extending them. Pā with the best natural defenses often had very little artificial fortification. Because the edges of a Pā curve to take advantage of the terrain, very few were rectangular.

Once a suitable site had been found or made, the Pā's builders would strengthen it by adding ramparts and ditches. A typical example might consist of an eight-foot earthen wall fronted by a ditch five feet deep. To the attacker, such a rampart would be effectively twice the height of a man, and some such structures exceeded 30 feet in height. Shorter ramparts were topped with a stout palisade fence, while taller walls were thicker so men with long spears could stand atop them. The builders would reinforce weak spots with an additional ditch, rampart, or palisade. In some places, the palisades were topped with platforms where a man could stand to defend them. Even

the interior of a Pā was fortified, with terraces breaking it up into multiple sections. Attackers who breached the outer wall would then have to fight for every sub-division. The entrance to the Pā was often so small you would have to duck your head to pass through it, and the ramp leading up to the entrance was often parallel to the wall, so anyone trying to breach the entrance would be exposed to fire from the defenders for longer.

The Māori Pā would have been exceedingly difficult to capture without help from thirst or fire. The Māori did not use bows, though they did use a sort of whip-thrown spear. This greatly favored the defenders, who could hurl spears down from the ramparts, while the attackers (who lacked any tension or torsion weapons) had no way to construct siege engines. Thus, the Pā had no need for the complex systems of traverses, flanking angles, and bastions seen in fortifications elsewhere. The Pā's greatest weakness was water. As they were generally found on peaks, the town's water supply was usually outside the walls. Extended sieges, though uncommon, often revolved around waiting for the defenders' water supplies to run out, though sometimes Pā were taken by surprise or by sappers.

At your table, a Māori Pā might be fun as a very different sort of stronghold from what your players are used to. Interestingly, the fact that Pā are primarily earthworks has two major effects. The first is that, with some modifications, they are are fairly defensible against gunpowder weapons, unlike European castles. The second is that they're quite permanent, and remain defensible hundreds of years after being abandoned. PCs or villains looking for a base of operations may be tempted to move into a Pā that has been abandoned for centuries.

Medieval Baghdad

Colorful, Cosmopolitan Capital

The capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, beautiful Baghdad far outshone the grimy cities of Europe. The city's construction, begun in 762, was carefully planned as a circle bisected by the Tigris River. It worked; Baghdad was the jewel of the Caliphate. Residents gathered in parks and promenades surrounded by luxurious villas. Storytellers and street vendors shouted to be heard over the sounds of the mosques and bazaars as they competed for the attentions of passers-by from every foreign land. Everything was clean and swept, the plants all lush and green. At night, the streets were lit by lamps. It was a wondrous city.

The center of Baghdad was protected by two walls: an inner and an outer. The space along the outside of the inner wall was kept clear to serve as a killing field, but the inside of the outer wall was lined with buildings, as this strengthened the wall. Manning the ramparts were patrols of men on horseback. Each gate was a large building with long halls, and topped with a dome. Inside the gates were plazas where Baghdad's inhabitants would mingle and gossip.

The city was built along the Tigris. The river was lined with palaces and parks, and a network of canals spread out from the river through the city and its suburbs. The Tigris itself was full of gondolas and fleets of ships from around the world that had sailed upriver to Baghdad.

This traffic was monitored; both of the river's exits from the city were guarded by soldiers in watchtowers.

Baghdad was a city of great wealth. The caliph lived at its center in a palace with a high green dome, seen as the crown of the city. The dome was said to have been topped with a statue of a horseman who would come to life to point his lance at far corners of the empire where rebellion was plotted. The caliph's private gardens were full of fountains and sculptures, and even had a menagerie and an aviary. The palace was surrounded by a park so large it took people hours to walk its circumference. The rest of the city's wealthy maintained their own villas and palaces, often multi-story marble buildings hung with tapestries and silks. This world of riches overlapped with another side of Baghdad, one devoted to pleasure and ease: a world full of forbidden alcohol and secret cabarets, inhabited by dandies, gamblers, and licentious poets.

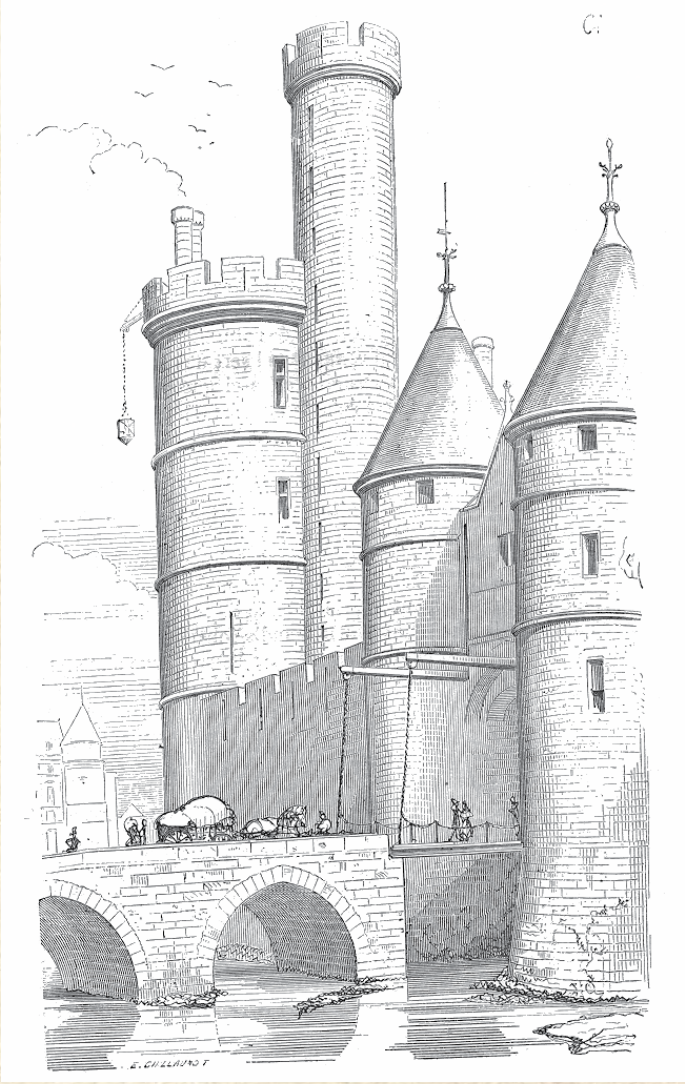
But Baghdad's wealth was spent on more than luxury, for the city was full of great works for the public good. The people were supported by aqueducts, baths, and hospitals. Astonishingly, the city even had public libraries. Baghdad was a global center of scholarship. Students came from across the world to study at its university. Here, they could learn from many great scholars, especially astronomers and physicians.

At your table, Medieval Baghdad might make an excellent imperial capital. Play up the city's cosmopolitan feel by introducing NPCs from every corner of the empire. You can convey the color of the city by making use of its diverse locations, from a secret cabaret in the shadow of the wall to a ship anchored in the Tigris.

Medieval Paris

Bustling Capital City

Surrounded by the rich farmland of the Île-de-France, Medieval Paris was divided into three main districts by the River Seine. The Right Bank (north of the Seine) contained much of the city's commercial life. The Left Bank (south side) contained its most important abbeys. And the Île de la Cité, a large island in the river, was the heart of the city's power and learning.



The Right Bank of Paris was the commercial and manufacturing center of the city. It was protected by two sets of walls: one inner, one outer. Between the two you could find the Bastille citadel, the fortified palaces of St. Pol and the Old Louvre, and the Temple of the Knights Templar. The Temple was not only the administrative chapter house of this powerful organization, but also the city's most important bank. There were plenty of landmarks within the inner walls as well. The Hôtel de Ville was city hall, where the administrators reigned. The church of Saint-Jaques-de-la-Boucherie was the

traditional starting place of the Way of St. James, a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. And there was also the covered marketplace of Les Halles and the plaza of the Place de Gréve, where day laborers waited for work.

The Left Bank was more religious than its northern counterpart. It was also smaller, and had only one wall. The city's two most important abbeys could be found here: the Benedictine abbey of Sainte-Genviéve and the Augustinian abbey of Saint-Germain-de-Prés. The Left Bank was also the heart of the city's Jewish community, as it was here that the Jews had a synagogue, ritual bath, and cemetery. In theory, they were protected, but in practice Parisian Jews were periodically attacked and persecuted. Despite this, Paris was a center of Jewish thought in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. On the west end of the Left Bank, along the Seine, there was the citadel of the Tour de Nesle, which contained one end of a chain stretching across the river. When the Seine was closed to traffic (at night and in wartime), workers in the Tour de Nesle would raise the chain, stopping the passage of boats. Finally, you had the fortification of the Petit Châlet, guarding the entrance onto one of the bridges between the Left Bank and the large island in the Seine.

The bridges to this island (the Île de la Cité) were bustling structures lined with houses and shops. The island was a hub of the University of Paris, one of the most prestigious Medieval universities. At its height, it may have had 5,000 faculty and students. Still, the most important places on the Île de la Cité were a pair of complexes on opposite ends of the island. On the western end was the Palais du Roi, the headquarters of the king and his government. On the eastern end was the Cité Cléricale, a complex of religious buildings including the palace of the bishop and the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris. There were a few other islands in the Seine, but they were primarily used as cow pastures.

The government of Medieval Paris was divided; there was no central authority. Governmental powers were primarily split between a representative of the king (the prévôt) and the bishop. However, the university, the cathedral, and the monasteries all had their own little fiefs as well. The guilds (organizations of skilled tradesmen) were also quite influential. Many had only a handful of members, but some were very large and powerful, most notably the Watermen's Guild. Matters of jurisdiction in Paris were not always clear. Students and clergy, for example, were exempt from the king's laws and answered only to the bishop.

Dealing with crime was a similarly complicated affair. There were numerous organizations of city watches and guardsmen. The king maintained one watch. The guilds were all required to donate watchmen as well. And many neighborhoods maintained their own patrols of guardsmen. These lawmen had their work cut out for them: crime was rampant in Medieval Paris. In one notable period in the fifteenth century, crime in Paris was controlled by a mob boss known as the Beggar King, who was so powerful that he maintained operations outside Paris in the provinces. At some points (such as during the Hundred Years' War) it could be downright dangerous to leave your house.

But Medieval Paris was faced with threats beyond crime. Plague was a constant danger. War, especially the Hundred Years' War, could cause huge spikes in food prices lasting months. Wolves were said to swim across the Seine to eat corpses buried in Parisian graveyards and to attack women and children. Bandits outside the city preyed on traveling merchants. And there was occasional popular unrest; more than one Medieval ruler had to put down revolts in Paris.

Mont Saint-Michel

Fortified Island Abbey and Town

Just off the coast of Normandy, a great rock juts out of the sea. Atop the rock is a medieval abbey, its church spire reaching up to heaven. The abbey of Mont Saint-Michel, devoted to the archangel Michael, is perched atop the steep, rough stone of the island, supported by four huge crypts. The abbey's cloisters are full of gardens and reading rooms. A broad earthen causeway stretches out from the mainland, meeting Mont Saint-Michel at a short, thick wall that guards the island's landward side. Behind the wall is a medieval town, cut through with steep staircases and a twisting, switchbacked street. The seaward side of the island is a rough woodland. But the most dramatic natural feature of Mont Saint-Michel is the tide. When the tide is in, the rock is an island. But when the tide recedes, it leaves several miles of slick mudflats. Before the construction of the causeway, pilgrims to the abbey would have to wait for the sea to recede, then hurry across the mud before the water returned.

The first monastery at Mont Saint-Michel was built in the 600's. It was expanded and rebuilt over the centuries. In time, a village sprang up around the abbey. In the 15th century, the French built walls and towers to defend the town. Short and thick, they are designed to withstand cannon. And in all the history of Mont Saint-Michel, the island has never been taken by an enemy army, even during the Hundred Year's War. From 1793 to 1863, the monastery was used by the atheist French revolutionary government as a prison. Its first inmates were priests too devout for the likings of the Committee of Public Safety. In those days, to bring supplies up to the abbey the jailers made prisoners march in what amounts to a giant wooden hamster wheel. The turning of the wheel worked a winch to raise goods from the base of the rock. In 1878, the causeway connecting Mont Saint-Michel to the mainland was built, which had the unintentional consequence of silting up the bay and greatly reducing the depth of the water at high tide. Mont Saint-Michel today is a tourist trap. But to be fair, the island has been touristy for a thousand years. The only difference is that today the visitors are sightseers instead of pilgrims.

What follows is an adaptation of Mont Saint-Michel for a fantasy gothic horror game.

Atop the small island of Hycemoor Rock sits a blocky cathedral. On the seaward side, a fierce

wind cuts through the tough grass of mossy heaths. On the landward side huddles a town, surrounded by a stout stone wall, and connected to the mainland by a broad causeway. When the tide is in, well-repaired fishing boats scull the gray waters, crewed by hollow-eyed men. When the tide is out, featureless mud flats stretch out to the horizon.

Hycemoor Rock was once a well-defended, prosperous fishing town, governed by a direct democracy of all the adult residents, male and female alike. The wizard Essere resided in Hycemoor Rock for many years, before offering to perform a ritual that would make all residents immortal, if only they would first declare him their lord, so that he could manage the town's resources in preparation. The assembly of residents, in their greed, ceded control to Essere. Instead of the ritual he promised, Essere used the town's resources to cast a spell extracting the souls of all the inhabitants, binding them to the wizard. But the ritual went awry, and the town, its greedy populace, and its faithless 'leader' were twisted and transformed.

In Hycemoor Rock's new state, it experiences perpetual twilight; the only means of marking time is the tide. When the tide is in, the residents go about their lives. When the tide recedes, they fall to the ground, their souls fly to the cathedral, and Essere takes control of the island. He and his minions (the bodies of drowned fishermen) are selkies: a race of seal/human shapeshifters. When the tide comes in, Essere and his selkies return to the sea, and the souls of Hycemoor's inhabitants pour out of the cathedral. The freed souls enter whatever empty bodies they can, such that no person keeps the same body from day to day; all people are finally equal. This state of affairs is maintained by the subtle influence of the Caretaker, a beautiful young redhead nymph in a black cloak who stands vigil on the causeway. Beneath the cloak, though, her body is as that of a skeleton, and bats roost in her ribcage.

NAN MADOL

Ruined Venice of the Pacific

Nan Madol is an archeological site on the island of Pohnpei in Micronesia. It is a ruined canal city jutting into the Pacific, now overgrown by jungle. It consists of a series of small (70 yards on a side) artificial stone islets separated by canals. The city as a whole is bordered on three sides by high walls, and on the fourth side by dry land.

The small islets are constructed out of basalt, a volcanic rock that naturally forms tall hexagonal pillars as it cools. The builders of Nan Madol took these multi-ton pillars and laid them horizontally upon one another in layers, using a coral reef as the foundation. Each islet is made of a "box" of basalt, which was then filled in with pieces of coral. How this was accomplished is still unclear. Once the islets were laboriously constructed, conventional buildings of wood and thatch were erected upon them, though they also built some of stone. Notably, there are no carvings and no art on the walls at Nan Madol.

If you visit Nan Madol today, you will find the stone construction to be in excellent condition. The wooden structures, of course, are long gone, and most of the islands now sport thick jungle. Tourists cruise the canals in rented boats while birds sing overhead, but locals seldom visit.

The history of Nan Madol is difficult to decipher, and is known primarily from oral legends; comparatively little archaeology has been done at the site. It seems that construction started around the 1200's, and the city was primarily a ceremonial site. From a combination of archaeology and reports from early missionaries, we know that turtles were raised in a large artificial pool on one of the islets, then cooked and fed to a sacred freshwater eel on another islet. Some of the islets contain burial mounds, from which have been excavated a number of artifacts.

According to the oral history of the local Pohnpeians, Nan Madol was built by two foreign brothers called the Saudeleurs, who constructed the city using magic, and established a dynasty that would rule Pohnpei for several centuries. The Saudeleur kings would vary in harshness and magical ability, but all demanded tributes from the native Pohnpeians, possibly to sustain their temple city of Nan Madol, which had no agriculture or source of fresh water. As the tyranny of the Saudeleur dynasty grew over the centuries, the Saudeleurs demanded more and more tribute until the people had nothing left for themselves. Eventually, the Saudeleurs dared even to defy the gods. In response, the god of thunder sent his son to destroy the Saudeleur dynasty, conquer Pohnpeia, and rule from Nan Madol. After this man's death, Nan Madol fell into disuse.

Nan Madol works well in fantasy and contemporary games, both in its current ruined state, and in its 'historical' state as the seat of the Saudeleur dynasty. PCs could be trying to uncover the long-lost building techniques used to construct the city, or even be discovering it for the first time. Nan Madol might make a terrific setup for a city-wide battle, as it is already broken up into convenient pieces (the islets). It could make a really cool setting for the entrance to a dungeon. Alternatively, the city itself could be a dungeon, with each islet serving as a separate 'room'.

Nimitz-Class Aircraft Carrier

Floating City

The United States of America has many weapons in its arsenal, but few are more intimidating than a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier. Almost a quarter-mile long, carrying some 90 planes, and protected by an entire fleet of warships, a carrier can deploy overwhelming tactical force to almost any location on earth. But a carrier is more than a weapon. It's a fort: a floating city carrying over 5,000 sailors and marines.

An aircraft carrier is little more than a giant ship with a small airstrip on top. In and of itself, it's kind of useless. But the air power it carries is overwhelming. The US cannot have airbases near every country, but there are few places that cannot be reached by carrier-based air power. For that reason, carriers have been used in almost every major US military operation since WWII. They travel in "carrier groups," protected by other ships; carriers are powerful, but have a limited ability to defend themselves against, say, submarines. The US maintains several such carrier groups.

Like most large ships, carriers are laid out in a series of stacked stories called 'decks'. The flight deck is the airstrip atop the ship. On one side of the flight deck is the island, a tall, narrow building. Inside the island, you'll find the primary flight control room, the bridge (where the captain commands the ship), and the flag bridge (where the admiral and his staff command the carrier group). Beneath the flight deck is the hanger bay, where aircraft are stored until they are needed. The hanger bay is a huge space: two thirds the length of the ship and 25 feet high. Sliding doors divide the space into four zones to contain fires, and four huge elevators shuttle planes between the hanger bay and the flight deck. The two nuclear reactors that power the ship are housed

in an armored area in the center of the carrier. They are astonishingly well cared for, and go years without needing to be refueled. To get around in the ship, you travel through a maze of identical gray passageways, squeezing past other service members, and clambering up and down short, near-vertical staircases. Even experienced sailors can get lost in unfamiliar parts of the ship.

The heart of the carrier is its air wing, which includes a variety of aircraft, from fighter jets to twin-engine helicopters to electronic warfare planes. The flight deck is too short for conventional takeoffs and landings, so the planes get some mechanical help. On takeoff, the planes are slingshotted off the deck by a piston-powered "catapult." It's a difficult maneuver, but the real trick is landing. The pilot needs to catch her plane's tailhook on one of four wires stretched across the deck, which will arrest her flight. If she comes in too high, she won't catch a wire. If she comes in too low, she'll crash into the rear of the carrier. Every pilot has to be able to accomplish this feat during a storm, alighting on a deck the size of a postage stamp pitching in the wine-dark sea.

The bowels of a carrier are a cramped maze. Enlisted personnel are squeezed into berthing compartments that hold 60 people, with bunks stacked three high. Much of the crew goes days or weeks without seeing sunlight, as their duties never take them topside. Still, though there is no privacy and barely enough room to stretch your legs, the ship carries many of the comforts of home. There are doctors, dentists, a chapel, and a barbershop, plus televisions and – most importantly – mail and telephones to keep you in touch with your family.

At your table, a carrier, or something like it, would be a fantastic home base for a military-style campaign. Since the ship can project force almost anywhere, the campaign can similarly go any direction you and your players want. Plus, the players will have access to all the resources of a floating city. Generally, it's probably a good idea not to keep track of resource depletion; that sort of accounting is one more thing for the players to deal with when they should be having fun. Just assume the ship is being regularly resupplied, and leave it at that. However, if the ship can no longer be resupplied, keeping track of resources like missiles and jet fuel can add tension.

An aircraft carrier can also be an adventure site. Perhaps the ship has been taken over by hostile elements, or faces a mutiny. Alternately, a carrier could make a great modern ghost ship. The carrier suddenly stopped responding to communication, and it looks completely abandoned on flyover. PCs called in to search the ship may discover anything from a freak radiation leak to supernatural influence. It's an old trope, but a good one.

The Pantheon

Classical Pagan Temple

One of the greatest sites in Rome, the Pantheon is a former temple and modern church. It is fronted by a traditional portico, but the bulk of the structure is a cylinder topped with a dome. The dome is still the world's largest built without steel reinforcement. At its peak there is an open skylight, which allows sunlight, rain, and snow into the Pantheon.

The massive entry portico is a series of elegant columns topped with a stately, sloping roof. Beyond the portico is the building itself. From the outside, it's entirely unremarkable: a plain gray cylinder, pockmarked with age. The interior, though, is gorgeous. The only major light source is the skylight, so even during the day, the heart of the Pantheon lies in a subdued twilight. The smooth floor is decorated with simple geometric designs. The walls of the cylinder are adorned with recessed niches, tastefully ornate columns, Christian paintings, and small shrines. Over the walls is the graceful, soaring dome, pierced at its apex by the skylight. The dome is the exact same height as the cylinder that supports it; a sphere with the same diameter as the dome would fit just perfectly inside the Pantheon.

The Pantheon's history as a Roman temple was unusual in many ways. The original structure was built in 27 BC, but it burned down and was later rebuilt. This would not be so odd, except that the emperor who rebuilt it didn't put his name on it, so the modern facade bears the same inscription as the original. It translates roughly as "Marcus Agrippa made me." While most Roman temples were devoted to a particular god or set of gods, the Pantheon was devoted to all the gods, a suitably cosmopolitan idea for a temple at the heart of an empire spanning three continents. The Pantheon's round layout is so different from the usual floor plan of a Roman temple that it's unclear how people actually went about their worship. Generally, we have a pretty good idea of where people would stand and what they would say, but this is not the case in the Pantheon.

In 608 AD, the Pantheon was given as a gift to the pope, who turned the structure into a church. This explains why it's in such good condition today: the Catholic Church looks after its property. The one exception is the Pantheon's huge bronze doors. Originally, they would have been covered in gold, but the gilding mysteriously disappeared at some point. For a few centuries, Italian greats were buried in the Pantheon, including two kings. Italian monarchist organizations still hold vigils over their royal tombs. Some see this as backwards, even immoral. But since the Pantheon is a church, and the Vatican doesn't object to the monarchists' presence, there's not much that can be done to halt the vigil.

At your table, you could play with the Pantheon's dimensions. Don't you think it's a bit odd that the

temple could perfectly contain a 140-foot sphere? Naturally, the most elegant explanation is that the Pantheon was built to serve as an eggshell to an enormous, perfectly spherical, alien egg. The skylight is there to admit the alien seed.

Or, to jump from one bizarre explanation to another, the real reason Italian monarchists hold vigil in the Pantheon is that one of the entombed kings has become a powerful guardian spirit of the monarchy. The vigil fools the spirit into thinking the royal family is still in power. If something were to happen to stop the vigils, the spirit might realize the truth and wreak dreadful vengeance upon the Republic.

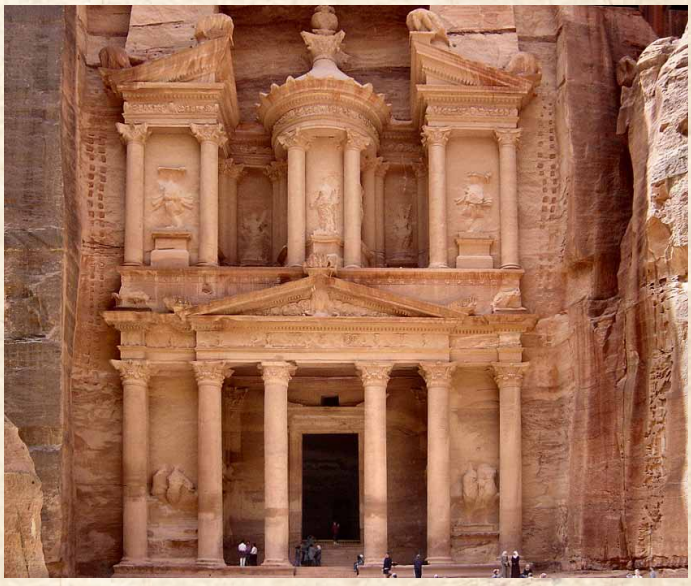
PETRA
City of the Rock-Cut Tombs

Hidden in the Jordanian desert are the ruins of "a rose-red city, half as old as time." Petra was a trading town nestled among red sandstone cliffs and canyons, and partially carved out of the rock itself. The city was founded in the third or fourth century BC by the Nabataeans, a formerly nomadic tribe of Arabian merchants. Petra was their capital city and crown jewel: the meeting point of camel caravans coming from Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Persia. The Nabataeans provided shelter, water, and guidance to caravaners passing through their desert in exchange for fees, tolls, and customs taxes. The Nabataeans were bloodlessly annexed by the Roman Empire in 106 AD. Under Roman (and later Byzantine) rule, Petra very slowly declined in importance, and was eventually abandoned. The city was briefly repopulated during the Crusades, but for the most part the Western world forgot Petra until a Swiss explorer rediscovered it in the nineteenth century.

The city is surrounded by (and in part, built out of) the red sandstone mountains, gorges, and towering cliffs that shield it on three sides. The main entrance to the city was from the east, up a winding cleft through the striated red cliffs. Its walls are carved with inscriptions, altars, and sculptures of men and camels. A few men could easily hold this narrow canyon against a far larger force. The cleft ends quite suddenly, opening up into a wider gorge, where the traveler is brought face-to-face with Petra's greatest wonder: the rock-cut tomb of the Khasneh el Faroun.

The Nabataeans buried their dead in tombs hewn out of the sides of cliffs. In Petra, they adorned them with Greek-style facades. Some 500 rock-cut tombs have survived in Petra. While their exteriors are ornate, their interiors are very simple. Carving a building out of stone is very labor-intensive, and you can't do much with the space anyway: there's no natural light. The best known tomb is the Khasneh el Faroun, directly opposite the main entrance to the city. Its 130-foot facade (pictured)belies the small square room behind. It appeared as the entrance to the Grail Temple in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. The Urn Tomb is fronted by an open terrace, a colonnaded cloister, and an elaborate facade, but it too contains only a single smooth-walled room. The Al-Dayr structure is also cut out of the rock, but on a promontory overlooking the city, accessed by a 30 minute climb up stone stairs.

But Petra was mostly a city for the living, with some 20,000 residents. Streets sprawled across the valley floor, and wound along the gullies and up the cliffs, connecting city walls, freestanding temples, garden terraces, fields of crops, and copper mines. The houses of Petra have mostly been leveled by earthquakes; indeed, nearly half the city was destroyed by a quake in 363 AD. This city in the desert was supplied with water by an



ingenious collection system. Cisterns, channels, and dams captured and conserved the seasonal rainfall. They also served to divert flash floods, and parts of the system are maintained to this day for that purpose. Petra was co-opted by its later Roman and Byzantine rulers, who left behind a colonnaded street, a theater carved into a rock hillside, Roman-style baths, and a basilica church.

Petra is full of a wide variety of adventure sites, from the rock-cut tombs to the winding cliffside streets. Don't overlook the city's water supply; the ability to divert large amounts of drinking water and possibly flood part of the city will be a golden opportunity for desperate or sociopathic PCs to conduct diversions and shenanigans. If an adventure in Petra doesn't seem to be going anywhere or you need to shake things up, consider having an earthquake strike the city. The PCs can then get involved in efforts to rescue people trapped in collapsed buildings or under fallen cliffs.

Post-WWI Vienna

Vestigial Imperial Capital

Vienna lies along the Danube River in a large basin near the Alps. The city center is to the southwest of the river, but the city has spread to the opposite bank. Major landmarks include the world's oldest still-operating zoo (founded in 1732), two Imperial palaces and St. Stephen's cathedral. Today, it's a lovely tourist destination and a good place for diplomatic conferences. But after the First World War, it was a real mess.

For centuries, the Austrian Empire had bestrode Central Europe like a colossus. Composers, scientists and bureaucrats had flocked to Vienna, swelling what was once a riverside village to a glittering imperial capital, the fourth-largest city in Europe. The city had grown especially rapidly in the 19th century, as industry and government had grown: a capital of two million citizens for an empire of 50 million. And in 1914, who could predict that Austria (now Austria-Hungary) would collapse in less than five years? Sure, the Hungarians had gotten dualism and there were nationalist complaints, but A.E.I.O.U. (Austriae est imperare orbi universo, Austria is destined to rule the whole world), right?

In 1918, the empire collapsed, and the Versailles Treaty left Austria a republic of seven million people, with a capital city containing over a quarter of its population. Trade was stymied by new national borders, the centuries-old Habsburg monarchy was gone, and little Austria was now landlocked – quite the problem for Admiral Von Trapp! The situation particularly grated for Austrians because a lot of them believed there was a simple answer – now that the non-Germanic parts of the Austrian Empire were gone, why not just merge the country with Germany? Unfortunately for them, the Entente (Allies) were having none of that: they weren't going to let Germany come out of the Great War larger than it was at the start. So part of the Treaty of Versailles specifically forbade any union between Austria and Germany – Hitler forced the Anschluss through in 1938 anyway, but for two decades (and again after 1955) Austria was independent.

Along with economic problems, the post-WWI period saw political unrest. In Hungary, there was a short-lived Communist revolution under Bela Kun. It didn't last past 1919 (and Hungary ended up a dictatorship under Admiral Miklos Horthy, who had to find something to do now that his country was landlocked), but it led to panic (or hope) that the Revolution would come west. Communist agitators were infiltrating Austria from Hungary, and it's likely a lot of them ended up in Vienna because of its strongly left-wing politics. At the same time, both Communists and anti-Communists were going to Hungary to fight.

Vienna was also important at this time for the many historical figures who lived there: it was still a major cultural center of Europe, still the city of economists Joseph Schumpeter and Friedrich Hayek, physicist Wolfgang Pauli, actress and inventor Hedy Lamarr (see page 131), psychologist Sigmund Freud and philosopher Karl Popper, to mention a few. Most of these people were just beginning their careers, and the experiences of the period probably influenced them: Schumpeter's theory of "creative destruction" may stem from his wild profits and losses on his investment schemes.

By the 1930s, Austria was frozen into a clerico-fascist dictatorship, which had two main goals: keeping the socialists/social democrats down and keeping the Germans/Italians out. But immediately after the war and in the 1920s, Vienna (or a vestigial imperial capital like it) could be a neat place to set a game. It's a city that's lost its purpose in a country that's lost its ideology, and so all sorts of new and dangerous ideas for your PCs to fight for or against will be afoot.

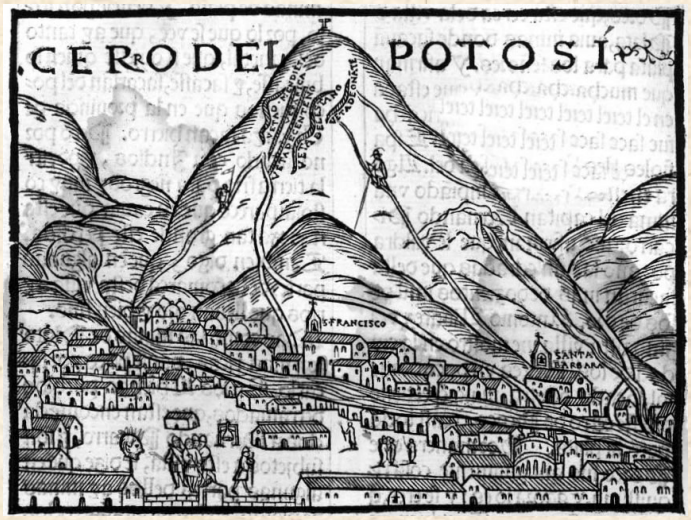
Potosí

The Original "Richest Hill on Earth"

In Southern Bolivia, over 13,000 feet above the sea, cold winds whip through the streets and plazas. Men in opulent costume scheme and duel in taverns and gambling houses. Here, 150,000 people toil and plot, drawing silver out of the Cerro de Potosí, or Cerro Rico – the rich mountain, a vast silver lode. The hills are alive day and night with flickering furnaces – until the furnaces are replaced by workers mixing mercury and ground ore with their bare feet, like a diabolical winery. This is Potosí, the mint of the Habsburgs, its name synonomous with wealth around the world.

The Inca Empire (see page 199) had mining operations for silver and gold all through present-day Peru and Bolivia, but they did not mine Potosí. There is a story that in the 1460s some Inca tried to set up mining operations, but were told by a voice from the heavens that the mountain "was meant for other masters." Voice or not, the mountain remained unexploited until after the Spanish conquest. In 1545, a Quechua man was traveling through the area, and lit a campfire on the mountain. The ore body he was sitting on was so rich that molten silver began to trickle out from under the fire – or so the story goes. And the mining began.

In the early days, some Indians were able to do quite well for themselves, because local methods of smelting were most efficient: small clay furnaces, fueled by grass or llama dung, built on the windswept hillsides and using the wind as a natural bellows. There were thousands of the little furnaces around the city, little flickering lights in the cold Altiplano night.



But the small furnaces were a bottleneck in production, and in the 1570s Francisco de Toledo developed the patio process as an alternative. This required a large industrial plant: watermills to grind the ore, slaves turning wheels at the mint, mercury imports from a mine in nearby Huancavelica, and armies of workers to trod the powdered ore and mercury together into a silver-mercury amalgam. To remove the mercury, the amalgam was heated, filling the area with toxic vapors (and probably causing plenty of cases of mercury-driven insanity).

All this required massive amounts of labor. Fortunately for Toledo, the Incas had a system of corvée labor called the mita, and the Spanish had simply taken control after the conquest. They

used the mita to force the natives to work in the cold and high-altitude mines: at its peak, Potosí drew mitayos from an area of 200,000 square miles! They died in great numbers: hundreds of thousands, or even millions over the centuries. To be fair, many of the workers in Potosí were free labor – the mitayos were a particularly exploited minority.

At its peak, Potosí was a strange combination of wild west boom town and Baroque metropolis. Luxury items from around the world were imported, and the town attracted all sorts of adventurers and schemers, including up to 800 professional gamblers at any one time. Marriage was uncommon, largely because the high altitude made childbirth extremely dangerous: Potosí was, however, a great market for prostitution, with some particularly successful ladies of the night living in the grand style of Versailles courtesans. It was a violent place as well, as macho metal magnates swaggered around like they owned the place (mostly because they did), fighting regular duels and brawls.

In its heyday, Potosí was a major factor in the world economy. Over 45,000 metric tons of silver were mined there under Spanish rule, and the take from Potosí was 25 percent of the Spanish crown's revenue during peak years. The silver of Bolivia stimulated inflation in Spain, paid for Hapsburg mercenaries during the Thirty Years' War, and facilitated large-scale purchases of luxury goods from China – which is where most of the Potosí silver eventually ended up. Some say the $ symbol comes from the mint mark of Potosí – the letters PTSI superimposed together.

Potosí is an excellent model for a mining boomtown taken to extreme levels, especially in the early days when small-scale producers had a better chance to compete. Whether they're in the city or not, the intrigue and plots of rival miners could certainly involve your PCs – or they could try to instigate a slave revolt, either to weaken the Spanish or for altruistic reasons. And of course, the yearly shipments of silver out of the city, as they travel down to the Chilean coast by pack mule, would be a ridiculously large haul if you could pull off the heist...

The Roman Catacombs

Real-World Megadungeon

There are over a hundred miles of ancient tunnels beneath the streets of Rome, forming some 60 burial complexes. Home to popes, saints, martyrs, and ordinary worshippers alike, the Roman catacombs represent something between an ancient cemetery and a Gygaxian dungeon crawl. While Rome's pagans cremated their dead, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the dead were buried. That requires space, and plots of land were very expensive in first-century Rome. Instead, the city's Jews took to digging tunnels in which to inter their dead. A hundred years later, the city's new Christian community adopted the practice. As the number of Christians grew, so did the catacombs.

St. Jerome wrote of his explorations of the catacombs, "Often I would find myself entering those crypts, dug deep in in the earth, with their walls on either side lined with the bodies of the dead, where everything was so dark that it almost seemed as though the Psalmist's words were fulfilled, 'Let them go down quick into Hell.' ... We would

proceed slowly, one step at a time, completely enveloped in darkness." At a time when there were fresh corpses in the catacombs, it would have been more unpleasant still. The tunnels would have reeked of rot and death, and some of the burial shrouds might have leaked, letting putrified liquid from the bodies of the faithful run slowly down the rough walls. Today, some areas of certain complexes are lit. Most are not. And some have only occasional lighting that serves to mark the direction of the tunnels, seemingly illuminating nothing; a small pool of light in the smothering darkness.

The nature of the catacombs varies. The areas where the wealthy were buried are often grand affairs. They boast large rooms, full of recessed niches, arches, urns, and square sarcophagi. The walls and ceilings are covered in white plaster, and painted with frescoes. In other areas, the catacombs are just narrow tunnels. The walls are rough and unworked. Recessed biers were carved into the vertical rockface, stacked three or four high, like steps in a ladder. The ceilings are flat and unvaulted. The floors are covered in dirt.

The wealthy sections of the catacombs are heavily decorated with mosaics and sculptures, but the most notable art is the frescoes: murals painted on fresh plaster. Some of the paintings are of Old Testament scenes symbolic of salvation through faith, like Jonah emerging from the whale's belly, Noah escaping the flood, and Daniel surviving the lions' den. Others are of New Testament stories of miracles like healings and resurrections. Especially common is the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd. Some tombs are decorated with a tool or symbol indicating the former profession of the corpse. And there is a great deal of ancient graffiti, mostly prayers and religious invocations.

The layouts of many of the catacombs are vast and confusing. Maps of the tunnels look like a box of toothpicks spilled out on a table, all short interconnecting passages arranged in no particular pattern. Many of the catacombs have multiple levels; the deepest extend 65 feet below ground. In some places where the ceilings are high, tunnels on different levels will cross, with simple bridges spanning the gaps. The catacombs tend to be larger around the tombs of saints, as people asked to be buried near these holy figures.

When running games set in the Roman catacombs (or catacombs like them), make sure you use the wealthy tunnels as well as the poor ones; it adds variety. Also consider using notable works of art as landmarks. If you want to mix it up, you can play with the old myth of Christians meeting in the catacombs to worship. Add chapels, dormitories, kitchens, and the like to your maps. And if you fill the tunnels with undead, make sure to be original about it. Crypts full of zombies have been done to death, if you'll pardon the pun.

Rome in the Sixth Century

Empty Shell of the Eternal City

In the glory days of the Roman Empire, Rome saw itself as the greatest city in the world. A million inhabitants, countless monuments, and endless entertainment, all paid for by the booty of conquest on three continents. But over the centuries, the torch of greatness passed from the western half of the empire to the eastern, and Constantinople supplanted Rome. The Eastern Roman Empire (also called the Byzantine Empire) would rule for centuries to come, but the city of Rome crumbled into irrelevance. By the end of the sixth century, the walls of Rome enclosed an immense ruin, with small villages scattered throughout.

What could reduce the jewel of the West to such a state? Time, of course, but beyond that, the wars of Justinian I, a great Byzantine emperor. For a century now, Italy had been ruled by the germanic Ostrogoths, who deposed the last emperor in Rome. Theodoric the Ostrogoth, king of Italy starting in 497, was a friend of the Byzantines. He grew up in Constantinople, and considered himself thoroughly Roman. Indeed, the Byzantines even granted him the title of 'patrician' to legitimize Theodoric's rule. But

after Theodoric's death, Justinian conceived of reconquering the Western Roman Empire so that Europe could be united once again. In the process of the reconquest of Italy (which ultimately failed), Rome was ruined.

The Byzantine army invading Italy consisted of 7,500 soldiers. The Ostrogoths had 100,000. In 535, the Byzantines captured their first major city, and in 536, they marched to Rome at the request of the pope. In 537-38, the Ostrogoths besieged Rome, but ultimately failed to take the city. At one point, the Byzantine defenders were reduced to hurling at their attackers fragments of statues of gods and heroes taken from the mausoleum of one of the old emperors. After the siege, the Byzantines left the city to pursue the Ostrogoths, but in 546, the Ostrogoths captured Rome, burned the gates, and carried off many of the citizens. Even worse, they destroyed the aqueducts bringing water to the city. The Byzantines eventually defeated the Ostrogoths, and proceeded to complete the job of destroying Italy by installing oppressive governors and tax collectors. Without the Ostrogoths to defend the peninsula, most of Italy fell when a different barbarian tribe invaded in 569.

The endless wars ruined Rome. At its height, it was a city of one million. By the end of the sixth century, it held only twenty thousand, divided among a number of villages in the ruins. Without aqueducts, most of the districts lacked a water supply, and were abandoned. Lower-lying areas became marshes. And make no mistake, most of the buildings were still there. Forty thousand apartment buildings, in various states of wreckage and disrepair. The Eternal City, ruined and empty. Nonetheless, it was still a city; it was still Rome. The pope ruled from his palace. The Roman Senate met to pass decrees, though they had little power. But most of the people were living in villages inside the city walls, pockets of life on the bones of the ancient metropolis. There is a legend (untrue, but very telling) that for a time there wasn't a single living soul in Rome.

One of the main draws of the fourth edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game has been its 'points of light' setting. The idea is that outposts of civilization are rare, and exist in a vast and dangerous world: candles in an immense darkness. Sixth-century Rome is a rare opportunity to use a 'points of light' aesthetic in an urban setting. The ruins between the villages may be very dangerous. Bandits may lurk under the old aqueducts, and there may be monsters in the marshes. An implied feature of 'points of light' settings is the former existence of great empires, who seeded the wilds with villages and civilization. It could be a great touch in such a setting for the PCs to venture to the capital of one of these empires, only to discover that it, like the countryside, consists of tiny outposts in the darkness.

The Ruins of Troy

A Layer Cake of Treasure-Filled Cities

Homer's Illiad describes the Trojan War as a ten-year battle, where a united Greece besieged the great city of Troy, and heroes fought heroes on the plains around the city. For centuries, people thought Troy was only a myth until a German amateur archaeologist claimed to have found its ruins. The site, with its broad walls, palaces, and fortified citadel, certainly looked like Troy and contained great treasure. Whether it is actually Homer's Troy remains a matter of dispute.

The ruins of Troy form what's called a "tell": a hill made of ruins. Cities tend to be destroyed every few centuries, generally due to war or natural disaster. But a destroyed city is often rebuilt, usually atop the ruins of its previous incarnation. Over time, this cycle of destruction and construction creates a hill made of ruins, topped with a layer of dirt. Even modern cities do this; every so often, a construction project digging a new foundation will uncover the ruins of a building from decades or centuries prior.

The ruins of Troy were discovered by a man named Heinrich Schliemann. He was a man with a knack for languages, a strong force of personality, and a very fine top hat. While people of Schliemann's day believed Troy was a myth, the ancients thought it was a real place, and Schliemann was determined to find it, or at the very least find a site he could claim was Troy. He knew that Troy lay to the east of Greece, and that it was quite wealthy, implying the city had a very good location. So he looked near Istanbul (see page 79), one of the best sites in the world for a city. In 1870, he found a very large tell that contained walls like those described by Homer. He announced to the world that he had found Troy. Whether he was right is still uncertain. Due to a paucity of evidence, it's very hard to date the Trojan War (if it ever happened), and it's thus hard to line up the dates of the war with radioisotope dating of the various cities that make up the ruins. But whether or not Schliemann was right, archaeologists still call his tell "Troy."

While excavating at Troy, Schliemann announced he had discovered the treasure of the Trojan king Priam. He smuggled Priam's treasure out of Turkey to Germany, dodging police trying to enforce the law against bringing antiquities out of the country. Schliemann claimed his wife smuggled the treasure out in her dress. Priam's treasure didn't hold up well to scientific scrutiny; the artifacts were of a wide variety of ages and styles, suggesting that Schliemann had combined many independent finds into one hoard. Priam's treasure sat in a museum in Berlin until the Soviets captured the city in 1945, when it mysteriously disappeared. The treasure reappeared in 1993 in a museum in Moscow. The Germans tried to get their treasure back, but the Russians claimed it as war reparations. The Turks also tried to claim it, pointing out the artifacts had been illegally smuggled out of Turkey in the first place. The Greeks also tried to lay a claim, pointing out that Troy was probably culturally Greek.

At your table, a tell would make a terrific site for a dungeon if the tell contains rooms and tunnels that never collapsed or filled in. As the basements of one palace interconnect with the hallways of an earlier one, it would create a multi-level dungeon complex that actually has a halfway decent reason to exist. Admittedly, real archaeological sites don't settle this way, but we won't tell the archaeologists if you don't.

Or you could use the site while it's being excavated by Schliemann. Perhaps he wants the PCs' help smuggling Priam's treasure out of the country. Or maybe Schliemann uncovered something he really shouldn't have, digging too

greedily and too deep. Who knows what he may have awakened in the darkness?

You could even base a spy thriller around Priam's treasure. In your game, it turns out the treasure in Moscow is a fake. This comes to light at the same time that reports start filtering in of an estate auction in Argentina of an expatriate Nazi's surprisingly gold-rich collection of artifacts. Since legal means have been getting them nowhere, the great museums of Germany, Turkey, Greece, and Russia hire agents to get the real treasure, no matter the cost. The adventure leads the PCs on a wild caper that will take them around the globe, as the agents of the various nations keep stealing the treasure from one another en route.

Shenzhen

Exemplary Chinese Industrial Boomtown

The area of Shenzhen, immediately north of Hong Kong, has been inhabited for thousands of years from the Neolithic period on. It had some temporary importance as a salt-manufacturing area in the Han Dynasty, as a trade port in the Southern Song dynasty, and as the final redoubt of the last Song emperor fleeing the Mongols (see page 139). But in 1979, the city of Shenzhen was but a collection of small farming and fishing villages, with a population of 30,000 – 300,000 (sources differ). Today, the city has an estimated population of 14 million, and the highest per capita GDP in China. Most of this growth occurred before 2000, when Shenzhen already boasted a population of 10 million. It's the fifth most densely populated city in the world, and has the largest import-export volume of any city in China.

The climate is subtropical and humid, with a monsoon season in summer. It was once in a hilly region, but the land has been flattened to make development easier. The population is extremely skewed towards people of working age, and is overwhelmingly composed of recent immigrants, many from north China: Shenzhen is the only city in Guangdong Province where the main language spoken is Mandarin.

Shenzhen began growing as an industrial city, and is still a major industrial center, producing higher-end industrial goods like architectural glass and televisions; the (in)famous Taiwanese company Foxconn has a manufacturing center there as well. But Shenzhen is also a financial hub, with a major stock exchange and banking companies. It has "gone to seed" to an extent since 2000: population growth and the rate of business start-ups have both slowed considerably over the last decade.

Many of the people in Shenzhen are not legal residents: China still has a Mao-era "hukou" (internal passport) system intended to prevent

rural populations from migrating en masse to the cities, and millions of Shenzhen's people work there in technical violation of their rural status. This is partially the reason for the very high working-age population in Shenzhen: children aren't admitted into urban schools without the proper hukou, so many children stay behind in farming villages with their grandparents while their parents find work in the cities. Traditionally, migrant workers go home for the Chinese New Year, resulting in one of the largest travel rushes in the world – many local migrants even go home on the weekends.

The hukou system has also enhanced the growth of Shenzhen's "urban villages", a form of urbanization fairly unique to China. Essentially, an urban village is an area still classified as rural (and thus allowing migration), but that becomes highly urbanized due to the demand for labor in the area: the old farmers become slumlords, and a less extreme version of the Kowloon Walled City (see page 81) usually results. Some 50% of Shenzhen's population lives in these urban villages, which cover only about 10% of the city's area. Though they're often overcrowded and shoddily built, some have managed to preserve a local character and are vibrant and even pleasant, if crowded, places to live.

How did Shenzhen grow so quickly? The answer is twofold: first, Shenzhen is right next to Hong Kong, meaning that even during the Mao era it was far more connected to the outside world than the rest of China. During the economic liberalization under Deng Xiaoping, it was a natural place for Hong Kongers to invest. And as a port city, it had easy access to the outside world.

Second and more importantly, Shenzhen was the first of China's Special Economic Zones: areas where the government was willing to experiment with capitalism and economic laissez-faire policies, as "laboratories of reform". The Shenzhen SEZ was established in 1979, just as Deng's economic reforms were beginning. Many of the other early Special Economic Zones were also established in the Pearl River Delta, creating an economic powerhouse in the traditionally mercantile region of Guangdong Province.

The bustling chaos of Shenzhen in the '90s, when allegedly a skyscraper went up every day and a boulevard every three days, would be a great place to set a game of corporate espionage or crimefighting: a real-life version of cyberpunk. Shenzhen is the extreme example of modern coastal China: a wealthy city, but one with vast gaps between rich and poor, where much of the population is either professionals with PhDs or quasi-illegal migrant workers.

Tikal
City in the Jungle

At its height, Tikal was a sprawling Mayan city of over 60,000 inhabitants in the rainforests of the Yucatan. It was highly involved in Mayan politics, as fiefs and city-states formed and broke alliances, made war on each other, and jockeyed for position. Though Tikal has been abandoned for centuries, her stone pyramids still pierce the jungle canopy.

Tikal's architecture remains the most impressive feature of the city. The largest buildings are the temples: grand stepped pyramids of gray stone. Many surround plazas, which are decorated with round-topped stones carved with the history of the city. There are also ball courts, for the famous Mesoamerican ballgame, which is linked to human sacrifice. Different parts of the city are connected by raised causeways. Residential areas are dotted with artificial grottos called chultuns. Chultuns are entered via a sort of manhole, which leads to an underground complex of two or three small rooms carved out of the bedrock. Some may have served as cisterns, but many were likely storage rooms, tightly sealed to keep out water and vermin.

Though Tikal is surrounded on all sides by tropical rainforest, much of the jungle around the city was cleared to grow corn. Some of the agriculture was undoubtably slash-and-burn, but there was probably also permanent cultivation, a very labor-intensive process in poor tropical soils. Lacking nearby rivers, Tikal obtained drinking water from cisterns that collected the seasonal rainfall.

The history of Tikal is one of bloodshed. The site may have been inhabited as early as 600 BC, but it did not become a great city until 250 AD. The early history of Tikal was likely dominated by the distant city of Teotihuacán, in the highlands of Mexico. In 378, a lord from Teotihuacán named Fire is Born arrived in Tikal and slew the king. Fire is Born seems to have been representing a man in Teotihuacán named Spearthrower Owl, about whom little is known. In the mid-500's, Tikal lost a war against an alliance of two city states and produced almost no new construction for a century. It finally rebounded by winning a war in 672 against an upstart city that had been calling itself "New Tikal." In 695, Tikal finally crushed its enemies and remained locally powerful until the entire Mayan civilization suddenly and mysteriously collapsed around the year 900.

Tikal existed in an ambiguous state for the next thousand years. It was never truly lost. Locals always knew about the ruins; it's hard to overlook an entire city, and there may even have been some settlements inside the city. But despite it all, the jungle inexorably reclaimed the land it had lost, and when conquistador Hernán Cortés passed mere miles from Tikal, he made no mention of the site in his logs. The ruins were officially discovered by the scientific community in 1848. Today, if you visit Tikal, you can stand atop the temples and see over the rainforest canopy, a rolling sea of green broken only by the tops of the pyramids.

Tikal makes excellent game material, both in its inhabited and ruined states. A game set in a Tikal-like city could focus on the mysterious forces of Fire is Born and Spearthrower Owl. Are they men? Gods? Fire is Born says he comes from a distant land called Teotihuacán. Where is it, and what do they want with Tikal? PCs might want to run an insurgency to throw out the occupiers, launching attacks from the chultuns throughout the city. A game could also be set in the ruins of Tikal. Perhaps the descendants of the people who built the city still live there, but in houses built in the boughs of the great rainforest trees that grow in the old plazas and streets of the city. These people might be launching raids on nearby villages, and the PCs have to put a stop to it. But the ruins of Tikal are full of traps, snares, and patrols, and whatever force caused the city to collapse may still lurk among the pyramids and causeways.

URUK
The City of Gilgamesh

One of the world's first cities, high-walled Uruk was for centuries the largest settlement in Mesopotamia. Built on the banks of the Euphrates river about 150 miles south of modern Baghdad, Uruk was blessed with fertile soil, abundant water, and plentiful game. By 2700 BC Uruk held some 50,000 people protected by six miles of walls.

The walls were one of many architectural marvels in Uruk. The best-excavated part of the city is the temple complex of Inanna, goddess of love, sex, and war. It consists of several halls, the walls of which contain a number of narrow rooms. The temple complex was destroyed and rebuilt numerous times, suggesting the city was conquered repeatedly. More impressive still is the sanctuary of Anu, the sky-god and king of the gods. The deity's White Temple was built upon

an artificial flat-topped mound, forming a simple two-story ziggurat. The whitewashed temple was designed to be used by a few priests, not throngs of worshippers. It was believed that Anu would descend from the heavens to appear before the priests in a small room atop the ziggurat. And, of course, there were the famous walls of Uruk, built (according to legend) by the great hero-king Gilgamesh. There were two concentric rings of walls, the inner one boasting semi-circular towers.

Most of Uruk was built of mudbrick, a cheap construction material. Usually, it's made by shoving mud into a mold, then laying the bricks out in the sun to dry. Mudbrick is a very low-quality material, and requires yearly maintenance. However, without timber, stone, or firewood (to make ceramics), it was the only thing available in much of Mesopotamia.

Uruk was also noteworthy for its art. Some buildings had mosaics of geometrical designs made from painted clay cones embedded in walls and pillars. The statues and bas-relief carvings of Uruk often featured bizarre and unnatural animals and monsters, like grotesque lion-human hybrids and lions with necks like snakes. One of the best-preserved pieces of art from Uruk is the so-called Warka Mask. Carved of white marble, the mask depicts a dour-faced woman, possibly the goddess Inanna or one of her priestesses.

Games set in Uruk may benefit from the poor quality of mudbrick construction. PCs may be sent on expeditions for better building materials. They might set out on a trading mission to the cedar forests of Lebanon, or boldly explore up the Euphrates river to search for limestone quarries near its headwaters. If nothing else, players may take advantage of the fact that they can break down almost any wall in the city with a stone sledgehammer.

Other adventures in Uruk may center around the city's art. Perhaps the Warka Mask is magical. Anyone who wears it gains the powers of the goddess Inanna, but also her petty, selfish, and capricious mentality. A minor priestess of the goddess put the mask on without realizing its power, and now she's terrorizing the city! Alternately, perhaps the monsters and strange animals depicted in Uruk's art are real. Much as suburban housing subdivisions are named for whatever the developers had to destroy to build them (Deer Run, The Meadows, Fox Ridge Estates, etc.), these pieces of art commemorate the animals the founders of Uruk had to drive off to build the city. PCs who venture beyond the fields of Uruk might encounter these monsters. And they may bear a grudge against the men who displaced them.

VENICE, CALIFORNIA

From Tobacco Magnate's Dream to Beatnik Hangout and Beyond

Abbot Kinney, late 19th century tobacco millionaire, was not content to simply sit on his fortune – like many of the era's "robber barons", he always had a new scheme in mind. On a world tour in 1880, he discovered that the climate of Southern California was excellent for his asthma, and decided to stay. In California, he tried to help the Native Americans of the state gain reservation rights, and opened a forestry station to study the newly introduced eucalyptus trees. But his dream was to build an "ideal city which would be partly for study, partly for recreation, and partly for health."

In 1904, Kinney astonished his business partner by, after winning a coin toss for first choice of property, picking the swampy half of the land they were splitting. He put the water to use by draining the swamp with a network of canals and developing the town of Ocean Beach in the marsh. The main streets of the town were lined with Venetian-style architecture, with high-arched bridges over the canals. Gondolas and gondoliers were brought in from Italy to ferry tourists and locals around.

Ocean Beach became a major tourist destination, mostly through people from Santa Monica and Los Angeles arriving on the "Pacific Electric Railway" - after 1911, the largest electric railway (streetcar) system in the world. (You may know of this L.A. streetcar system from the alleged conspiracy by GM to run it out of business in the '30s, and thus stimulate demand for cars and buses, but that's a story for another time.)

Kinney originally planned for the town of Ocean Beach to be a center of academic lectures and cultural progress, similar to the Chataqua societies in New York. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The tourists were more interested in Ocean Beach/Venice's (the name was changed in 1911, with Kinney increasingly nicknamed "the Doge of Venice") beautiful beach and amusement park attractions, and the lecture halls were losing money. So Venice became "the Coney Island of the Pacific," with freak shows, roller coasters, stunt aviators, and of course, the canals.

In 1920, Venice faced three separate crises: Kinney's death, Prohibition, and a fire that destroyed the town's amusement pier. Though the pier was quickly rebuilt and tourism was still going strong, the finances of the town were spiraling out of control. With Kinney dead, the separate business districts of Venice were fighting for the upper hand. In 1925, the city of Los Angeles annexed Venice, and party time was over.

Over three-quarters of the canals were paved over in 1929, due to the (probably justified) concerns of the Los Angeles Health Department about the mostly stagnant water, and the growing "car culture" of the area. Oil was struck that same year, providing needed income, but also driving residents and tourists away. By the 1950s, the amusement piers were gone and Venice was a run-down shell of its former self, the "slum by the sea." The cheap housing available led to Venice becoming a major site of Beat Generation/"beatnik" culture, as well as being a refuge for poor European immigrants. The Gas House and Venice West Cafe were important hangouts of the counterculture, bringing a touch of radicalism to bourgeois L.A.

From 1992-93, the remaining canals in Venice were renovated, and are again navigable and clean today. With the oil industry gone and some of the original charm of the area (and the beach) still there, Venice has gentrified, with houses on the canals commanding millions of dollars. Today its population is just over 40,000, and it has been, of course, completely engulfed by Los Angeles. It may have never attained Kinney's dream, but Venice, Los Angeles has seen quite a few changes in its 107 years.

In your game, Venice in its prime is a fascinating bit of local color to add to a game set in Southern California – Coney Island, but with canals and streetcars. Political intrigue – between pro and anti-annexation factions in Venice, or rival business districts – could be interesting as well. During its decline, Venice makes a suitably grim setting for a "film noir" game – a rococo dream of the Gilded Age gone to seed, the canals filled in and the stench of oil omnipresent. And who knows? Maybe with gas prices and sea levels rising, the streets will be dug up and the canals of Venice will return to their full glory, someday in the future...

YASUKUNI SHRINE
Controversial Shinto Temple

Yasukuni Shrine was established in 1869 by the newly-restored Japanese imperial government. From the beginning, the shrine was intended to honor Japan's war dead. Among the 2.5 million people honored at Yasukuni are those dead in civil wars, the first and second Sino-Japanese Wars, the Russo-Japanese War, World War I, World War II, and those who committed suicide in shame at the end of World War II. All the dead honored at Yasukuni are considered equals, regardless of rank or social standing. The Japanese imperial family has maintained ties with Yasukuni and participates in twice-yearly rituals at the shrine, though no emperor has visited Yasukuni since 1978. Japan's Prime Ministers have made regular visits, though it is often questionable whether these are in a public or private capacity.

Yasukuni is a Shinto shrine, with close ties to State Shinto (see page 198). Shintoism is based around the worship of deities called "kami." The most powerful kami resemble Western polytheistic gods, but any spirit or object that elicits awe could be considered kami and have certain power. Emperors, ancient heroes, and certain ancestors are typically worshipped as kami. What is key here is that at Yasukuni, Japan's war dead are not simply memorialized, they are worshipped as kami. The shrine's English-language website refers to the 2.5 million dead honored at Yasukuni as "divinities." And this is where the controversy begins.

Every single dead Japanese soldier is worshipped as kami at Yasukuni. This includes war criminals. Indeed, fourteen convicted Class A war criminals are honored at the shrine. These are people who were proven to have plotted and fomented aggressive wars of conquest. Furthermore, most of the war dead at Yasukuni were involved in what were unquestionably unprovoked wars of aggression. Many were involved in horrific atrocities; the Rape of Nanjing in 1937 is still a byword for callous butchery. The shrine itself has become a haven for Japanese ultra-nationalist historical revisionists. At the stalls and shops outside Yasukuni, you can purchase books claiming the Japanese atrocities of WWII never happened. Given all this, it is understandable that visits by Japanese lawmakers to Yasukuni absolutely infuriate China and Korea.

The entrance to Yasukuni is dominated by a great torii, the traditional Japanese gate made of two pillars supporting two crossbars. After passing through the main gate, you are confronted by a small orchard of cherry trees, which leads to the main shrine, where hang rows of yellow lanterns. Around the main shrine are teahouses, a sumo ring, and a carefully manicured strolling garden. The area is decorated with statues honoring war widows, horses, dogs, and carrier pigeons. Also on-site is a controversial museum which depicts Japan's actions in WWII as heroic and noble, and neglects to mention any atrocities.

In a political game, Yasukuni Shrine could be a very interesting major player. The shrine would have a great deal of legitimacy, and so may have a fair bit of influence. In a high fantasy or urban fantasy game, the kami of Yasukuni could be at war with each other. The kami of honorable Japanese soldiers are trying to throw the kami of those soldiers who committed atrocities out of the shrine. The dishonorable kami are resisting, and as the priests are trying to maintain the unity of the shrine, this unfortunately puts them on the side of the dishonorable kami.

People

Abelard

Besotted and Unorthodox Monk

Peter Abelard (always referred to by his last name), was a twelfth century scholar and monk. The handsome and rich-voiced Abelard is best remembered today for a passionate and tragic love affair. His writings were extremely controversial in his time, but have proven influential.

The firstborn son of a minor noble, Abelard was supposed to join the medieval warrior aristocracy, but rejected the life of a fighter for that of a scholar. He left home to seek education at the feet of the greatest teachers of the region, ultimately winding up in Paris. He then decided to study theology and learn from the greatest theologian of the era, Anselm of Laon. However, Abelard's arrogance and disrespect for authority did not mesh well with Anselm's authoritarian teaching methods. Indeed, Abelard would later describe Anselm as having "a miraculous flow of words, but they were contemptible in meaning and quite void of reason. When he kindled a fire, he filled his house with smoke and illuminated it not at all." After Abelard publicly mocked Anselm by effectively claiming to be his equal, Anselm kicked Abelard out, and he returned to Paris.

In Paris, Abelard gained an impressive reputation as a teacher, and was hired by a man named Fulbert to teach his niece, Heloise. Heloise was a beautiful woman and staggeringly well-educated. Abelard and Heloise fell in love, and he crafted a plan to be with her. By telling lies and paying rent, Abelard was able to move into the house of Fulbert and Heloise. Abelard and Heloise proceeded to carry out a passionate love affair under her uncle's nose for several months. Eventually, Fulbert came to his senses and separated the two, but by that point, Heloise was already pregnant. After the birth of their son, Astrolabe (named for the scientific instrument), Abelard and Heloise were married. After a few more misadventures (which only served to enrage Heloise's family further), while Abelard was sleeping in a supposedly-secret room, Fulbert and some friends broke in and castrated him.

Following the loss of his manhood, Abelard became a monk, and Heloise a nun. It didn't go well for Abelard. His irreverent attitude caused him to be banished from his first monastery (his jokes about the monastery's patron saint probably didn't help). He continued writing, teaching, and making enemies. By the influence of his foes, Abelard was summoned before a special papal court. He was not formally condemned, but one of his books was declared too unorthodox, and Abelard was ordered to burn it. He fled to an uninhabited region of France, but pupils continued to flock to him, seeking to learn from the great scholar. Eventually, he was permitted to return to monastic life, but the other monks didn't much care for him, and at one point attempted to poison him. He spent the rest of his life in various monasteries, fighting off his theological rivals and attracting great numbers of pupils. While Abelard's unorthodoxy kept his influence from being publicly acknowledged, his students wound up being quite powerful,

including three popes and several kings. He is buried in Paris beside his wife Heloise.

Abelard's most influential theological ideas were in the fields of ethics and reasoning. He denied there is any objective way to determine what is and is not a sinful act. What matters is the intention behind the act. It is the intent to knowingly violate a moral law that is the act of sin, not the violation itself. He also advocated the use of reason to uncover divine truths, rather than relying on contemplation and divine revelation. In the process, he inadvertently skirted very close to certain ideas that had been considered heresy for centuries: ideas like "God the Son is distinct from God the Father," and "Christ's human and divine natures were separate." These may sound like trivial arguments, but they are considered huge errors in conventional Christian theology.

An astonishingly colorful character, Abelard would make a terrific NPC. He would likely do well in any monastery, library, or university in your game. If the PCs get to know him, they may get caught up in his controversial life, and be forced to pick sides. Do they support Abelard? Fulbert? Traditional theology? The enemies and friends they make in such a circumstance will probably be influential people, and may help or hound them for the rest of the campaign.

Alcibiades
Brilliant, Beautiful Traitor

One of the greatest generals, statesmen, and turncoats of classical Greece, Alcibiades is defined by his genius, his ambition, and his need to put himself first. He was a famously attractive man, perhaps enhanced by his only major physical imperfection: a pronounced lisp. His beauty went far to help in his ability to fit in and make allies no matter where he went. Alcibiades' character can be summed up well by the following anecdote. Once, as a youth, he was wrestling with another boy. Fearing he would lose, Alcibiades bit his opponent. The other wrestler objected to this flagrant cheating and told him, "Alcibiades, you bite like a woman." "No," Alcibiades replied, "like a lion."

Alcibiades came from a famous lineage. He was born into the most powerful of the wealthy Athenian families. His foster father was the great statesman Pericles. His mentor was the legendary philosopher Socrates. His mother was Dinomache, who isn't otherwise famous, but her name means "In battle, terrible to behold," and thus deserves a mention.

As a rich young man, Alcibiades made his name as a cavalryman in the Peloponnesian war. He was wounded at the battle of Potidaea, but given an award of valor for his heroism. When he wasn't fighting, he was drinking and arguing with Socrates, having wild parties and sexual escapades, and leveraging his aristocratic background for personal power in the Assembly.

His influence was at its highest point when he convinced the Athenian Assembly to send a fleet to conquer Sicily. Alcibiades was appointed to be one of the three generals leading the expedition (see also Lamachus on page 140), but just before the fleet left Athens, someone defaced a number of small statues of the god Hermes. Some blamed this on foreign agents, but the consensus was that Alcibiades and his friends had done it in a drunken revel. Before Alcibiades could clear his name, he had to leave with the fleet. Shortly

thereafter, a ship was dispatched to arrest him and bring him back to Athens. Alcibiades managed to flee, and the Assembly sentenced him to death in absentia.

Alcibiades then turned traitor, defecting to Sparta. There, he gave his people's sworn enemies vital intelligence about events in Athens. More damningly, he urged the Spartans into a very effective military strategy they would use for the rest of the war. During his time in Sparta, Alcibiades lived like a Spartan, cutting his hair close, eating coarse foods, and bathing in cold water. However, Alcibiades made an enemy of one of the Spartan kings by sleeping with the king's wife. When the king tried to have him killed, Alcibiades fled to Persia.

Among the Persians, Alcibiades made himself even more Persian than they were. He charmed one of the great satraps with his wit and guile, and became his chief advisor. Alcibiades gave the satrap good counsel. The Persians had long hoped to rule Greece, and were supporting the Spartans in the war, in the hope of picking the winning side. Alcibiades urged the Persians instead to cut back on their aid to Sparta so that the two great powers of Greece would weaken themselves fighting each other. Once they were exhausted, the Persians could conquer them both.

While this was happening, Alcibiades was plotting his next betrayal and his return to Athens. Using clever politics and certain proxies, he wormed his way back into the good graces of the Athenians. He left Persia, and led the Athenian fleet to an important naval victory, only to be arrested by his former Persian allies for aiding their enemies (the Athenians). Alcibiades escaped, and led the Athenians in another series of military victories. Eventually, his political enemies managed to turn the Athenians against him once more, and Alcibiades fled.

Having now made enemies in every major nation in the Aegean, Alcibiades hired some mercenaries and carved out a little kingdom for himself in Thrace. When it became clear the Spartans would win the Peloponnesian war (and probably come after Alcibiades next), he fled back to Persia, where he still had some friends. Shortly thereafter, he was killed, possibly by assassins sent by Sparta.

Alcibiades may make a delightful major player in the international politics of your game world. Depending on how far along in his life your Alcibiades is, he may have already switched sides a number of times. Remember that before Alcibiades betrays his current masters, he will have already ensured he has a warm welcome awaiting him somewhere else. He also doesn't switch sides just for the fun of it; he always has something to gain. You'll have to make it clear why these various nations tolerate him: he's beautiful, he's charming, and he's a military and political genius. Your Alcibiades should probably have friends (and enemies!) in every court, an impressive war record, and be as charming to the PCs as you can manage.

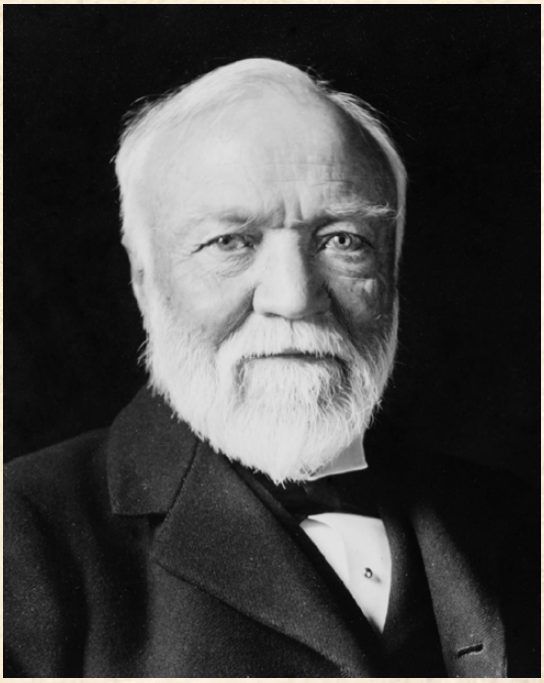
Andrew Carnegie

Steel Magnate and Philanthropist

The life of Andrew Carnegie is an archetypal American rags-to-riches story. Carnegie immigrated to the United States as a poor, barely educated child, and through hard work, natural talent, and a bit of luck managed to become the wealthiest man in the world.

Andrew Carnegie was born in 1835 in a cottage in Scotland. He received little formal education. The Industrial Revolution put his father, a handloom weaver, out of work. So the family emigrated to America when Carnegie was twelve. At thirteen, he went to work in a factory, operating a steam engine in a dark cellar with the full knowledge that if he made some error, he risked blowing apart the whole building. A year later, he found work in a telegraph office. From there, the young Carnegie was able to capitalize on his attention to detail and skill at his job to obtain a post as personal assistant to a railroad executive.

The great change in Carnegie's life came when the railroad executive recommended the young man make a particular investment. Carnegie's mother had to mortgage her new house, but the family raised the money, and soon turned a profit. This was the turning point – going from making money by labor to using money to make more money. Carnegie continued working for the railroad company, and was soon drawn into the logistics of transporting Union forces in the American Civil War. With the exception of a stress-induced mental breakdown in 1862, he performed admirably. With the end of the Civil War, Carnegie resigned from the railroad company to focus on his investments and business holdings.



In 1873, at age 38, Carnegie started work on a new steel mill that would come to dominate the manufacture of steel in America. He expanded his steel empire by controlling iron mines, iron smelting processes, and transport systems. He ensured the loyalty of his underlings by not paying them a salary, but rather giving them small shares of the company, so their pay was to some extent dependent on their effort. When an elderly Carnegie finally sold the company, his share was two hundred fifty million dollars (some six billion dollars in today's money), making him the richest man in the world.

What is key to understand is that Carnegie did not earn all this money for its own sake. Rather, he believed that once you have ensured your security and comfort, you have an obligation to use your wealth to help others. Carnegie lived in luxury, true, but he also performed astounding acts of charity. He built and equipped 2,800 free public libraries around the world. He built the International Court of Justice at the Hague. He established foundations for science, education, music, and art in both America and Europe. By his death in 1919 at age 83, Carnegie had probably spent three hundred fifty million dollars on charity – more than he made from selling his entire steel empire.

For all that Andrew Carnegie was a hero to many, he had one huge black mark against him: he hated organized labor. In 1892, workers at the Homestead Steel Mill in Pennsylvania, organized by the most powerful trade union of the day, went on strike for more reasonable production quotas. Strikers took over the town, preventing strikebreakers (workers who fill jobs vacated by strikers, nullifying the effect of the strike) from

entering the plant. The plant manager hired three hundred armed guards to fight the strikers. When the guards arrived, they were met by a crowd of ten thousand, many of them armed. A firefight ensued. Nine strikers and seven guards were killed, and many of the rest of the guards were wounded. The militia was called in to restore the peace, allowing the plant manager to hire strikebreakers. A few months later, the Homestead strike was over. Through some clever legal mechanisms, the Carnegie Steel Company effectively destroyed the union, then took advantage of its absence to lower wages.

An NPC based on Andrew Carnegie could be fun in an industrial revolution or steampunk game. Given his extreme philanthropic bent, your players will probably take a liking to your Carnegie NPC. It doesn't hurt that everyone likes having a friend with bottomless pockets. If you want to shake up this relationship, consider having the PCs embroiled in an incident like the Homestead strike, where Carnegie is very arguably the bad guy.

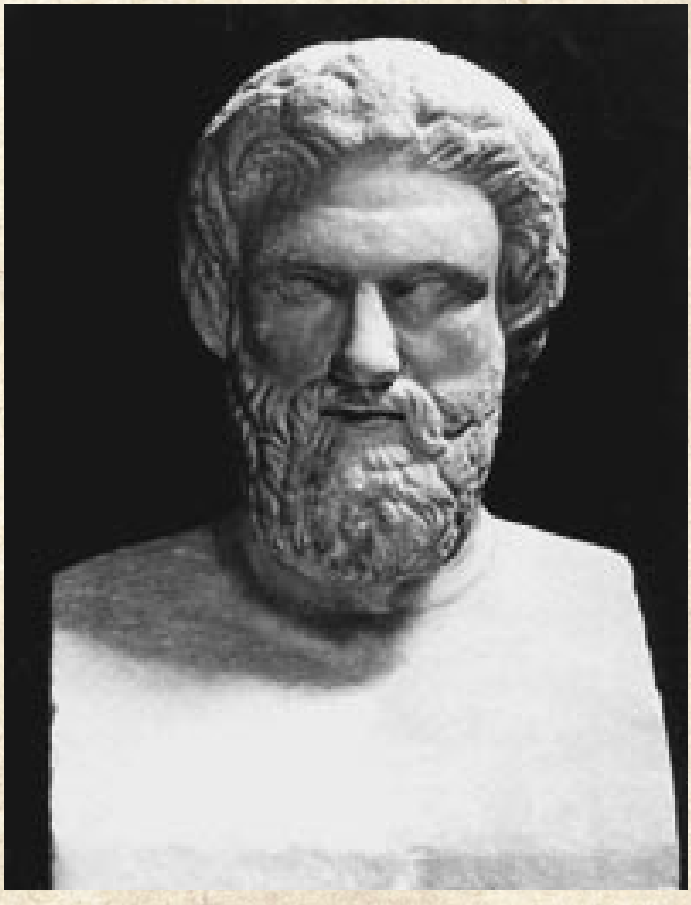
ARISTOPHANES

Crude, Biting Satirist

The undisputed master of so-called "Old Comedy," Aristophanes was a comedic playwright in Athens during the Peloponnesian War. His plays are famous for being politically charged, hilarious, and very lewd.

Politically and socially, Aristophanes was extraordinarily conservative, almost reactionary. He loathed the new empire Athens had created. He viciously attacked many of the demagogues that had caused the then-ongoing war with Sparta. He pilloried the war mercilessly, not because he was opposed to war in general (far from it!), but because unlike previous Athenian wars, he did not see this one as just or noble. He despised innovations in religious practices, and mocked contemporary drama.

Aristophanes' humor was universally accessible. His plots are ridiculous and absurd (more on this in a bit). The plays are full to bursting with groan-inducing puns, and better still, the plays are obscene. They're full of dick jokes, fart jokes,



and sex jokes, particularly about men buggering each other. He was also viciously personal in his attacks, calling out individual Athenians (many of whom were probably sitting in the audience) on their flaws, from greed to cowardice.

In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, an elderly Athenian man tries to learn rhetoric so he can argue well enough in court to cheat his creditors. He enrolls in a "Thinkery," where the philosopher Socrates teaches him outrageously untrue things while taking his money. However, the old man doesn't retain any knowledge, and flunks out. He then enrolls his son in the school, who learns how to convincingly argue even the most untrue and unethical of positions. After he graduates, he successfully argues that sons have an inalienable right to beat up their fathers, and his father burns down the Thinkery.

One of Aristophanes' anti-war plays, *Lysistrata* begins with the women of Greece coming together to agree to withhold sex until their men end the war. The women of Athens barricade themselves in the Acropolis (Athens' central fortress). The city's menfolk come by numerous times, begging for sex, but the women persevere. Eventually, an emissary arrives from Sparta. The men of Athens and Sparta, sporting enormous erections, conduct peace talks. That accomplished, everyone goes to the Acropolis for "celebrations."

You may find it fun for your PCs to join a production of one of Aristophanes' plays, working as actors and crew. Perhaps they need to protect or spy on the great comedian or one of the actors. Maybe being in the cast is the only way they can get close enough to the play's wealthy patron to assassinate him. Maybe they just need the money. You can shake things up a bit by having your players LARP an excerpt from the play. Those playing actors memorize their lines. Those without speaking roles can construct props or draw backdrops. I know it sounds cheesy, but my players have loved these sorts of diversions. As a script, here's an incomplete excerpt from Clouds, from a translation by William Arrowsmith:

STREPSIADES, *an old man, and a STUDENT of Socrates enter the Thinkery.*
STREPSIADES: Great Heracles, what kind of zoo is this?
STUDENT: What's so strange about it? What do you take them for?
STREPSIADES: Spartan prisoners from Pylos. But why are they all staring at the ground?
STUDENT: They're engaged in geological research: a survey of the earth's strata.
STREPSIADES: *Pointing to other students who are bent completely double.* Hey, and look there; what are those fellows doing bent over like that?
STUDENT: Those are graduate students doing research on Hades.
STREPSIADES: On Hades? Then why are their asses scanning the skies?
STUDENT: Taking a minor in Astronomy.
To the students. Quick, inside with you. Hurry, before the Master catches you.
STREPSIADES: No, wait. Let them stay a little longer. I want to speak to them on a 'private' matter.
Pointing to surveying instruments. And what are those?
STUDENT: They're for geometry.
STREPSIADES: Geometry? And what's that good for?
STUDENT: Surveying, of course.
STREPSIADES: Surveying what? Lots?
STUDENT: No. The whole world.
STREPSIADES: What a clever gadget! And as patriotic as it is useful.
STUDENT: *Pointing to a map.* Now, then, over here we have a map of the entire world. You see there? That's Athens.
STREPSIADES: That, Athens? Don't be ridiculous. Why, I can't see even a single lawcourt in session.
STUDENT: And you see this island squeezed along the coast? That's Euboia.
STREPSIADES: I know that place well enough. Pericles squeezed it dry. But where's Sparta?
STUDENT: Sparta? Right over here.
STREPSIADES: That's MUCH TOO CLOSE! You'd be well advised to move it further away.
STUDENT: But that's utterly impossible.
STREPSIADES: You'll be sorry if you didn't, by god.

Augustine of Hippo

Unhappy Sinner and Saint

A very complex man and one of the most influential theologians in human history, Augustine of Hippo was born in Algeria, then a peaceful backwater of the Roman Empire. His mother was a Christian, but his father was a pagan. His parents were wealthy enough to hope for their son to be educated, but too poor to pay for it. With the help of a family friend, the young Augustine traveled to a nearby university town, and then to Carthage. There, he became a great fan of the works of Cicero, fancied himself a philosopher, and set himself up as a teacher.

He also fell in with a Persian religion called Manichaeism. The Manichees taught that God and the Devil were of equal power. God was perfectly good and created all things of spirit, while the Devil was utterly evil and created all things made of matter. Humans, then, were good spirits locked inside evil bodies, and not to blame for their wicked actions, as the Devil made them sinful. Augustine was torn. On the one hand, it's an appealing theology for a young man who wants to live the high life without feeling guilty. On the other hand, it's a really simplistic philosophy with about as much depth as a tea kettle. Eventually, Augustine rejected Manichaeism, but his experiences informed his later verbal crusades against heretics.

Augustine was unhappy. Manichaeism provided no meaning in life. Cicero's writings were interesting, but the author was skeptical of cosmic truths. And Christianity, his mother's religion, wasn't academically rigorous enough for Augustine. The one bright spot was his relationship with his concubine, a young woman he met in Carthage and lived with for over ten years. He even took her with him when he moved to Italy, to take on a post as the emperor's personal rhetorician. But to raise his status, Augustine eventually had to abandon her to marry a highborn woman. His heart yearned for higher meaning, but he couldn't find it.

And then he met Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. Ambrose presented Christianity in a whole new way: not in the inelegant preaching of backwoods Algerian priests, but in the intellectual rhetoric of Rome. Augustine's conversion was slow and awkward. Though he deeply wanted to believe, he had difficulty renouncing his hedonistic lifestyle. This is best summed up by his quote, "Please God, grant me chastity and continence, but not yet." Eventually, Augustine was baptized, and he retired to Africa to live a life of Christian solitude. But the the locals would have none of it. A congregation in a nearby town all but forced him to become priest. Augustine felt he

was grossly inadequate for the position, but the people would not be denied having a brilliant rhetorician as their pastor. He mastered the Christian texts, and four years later became bishop of the town of Hippo.

Augustine became Christianity's bulldog. He viciously attacked Christian and pseudo-Christian heresies in his writings, which were extraordinarily influential. Manichaeism was his first target. In one memorable incident, he challenged the chief Manichee to a debate which ended with the Manichee admitting defeat and converting to Christianity. In fact, Augustine was so successful at destroying these heresies that little remains of them: Augustine's writings are our only major source for their teachings.

At your table, Augustine could be a great ally in PCs' attempts to fight cults, or a powerful enemy if the PCs are fighting a corrupt church. Augustine was a very hands-on bishop, constantly ministering to his flock. Thus, it's reasonable for PCs to encounter him a great deal as he conducts his rounds throughout the region. Remember that he was the emperor's personal rhetorician for a few years: Augustine was probably one of the greatest public speakers alive at the time. Play him as one hell of a preacher. If you're not much of a public speaker yourself, focus on the response of the crowd: enraptured faces, tears, and shouts of praise. If you want to endear Augustine to your players, let the PCs see the man behind the public persona, with all his unhappiness and feelings of inadequacy.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Tireless Warrior for Democracy in Burma

Aung San Suu Kyi is an inspiration in the international battle for freedom from tyranny. She is the winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, and is leading Burma in a slow, painful transition from rule by a brutal military junta to democracy.

Born of a Burmese hero and educated abroad, Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma to lead a protest movement against the government, and founded a political party devoted to democracy and nonviolent resistance. The government was (and for the most part, still is) led by a military junta whose crimes and atrocities are legendary. In an attempt to mollify international criticisms, the junta held free parliamentary elections. After Suu Kyi's party won over 80% of the seats, the military ignored the results and resumed shooting protestors.

The junta, unwilling to torture and execute Suu Kyi, kept her under house arrest for many years. Neighbors reported hearing her playing the piano early in her incarceration, but she later had to sell it to buy food. During periods when the military could be convinced to release her, she would hold meetings throughout the country where tens of thousands would show up to see her preach for peace, democracy, and nonviolent resistance. At one point, the junta tried to use patsies to assassinate her, but the attack failed.

Faced with mounting international sanctions, the military junta released Suu Kyi and permitted free elections under a new constitution that guaranteed half the seats in parliament would be controlled by military officers. Elections in 2008 and 2010 were generally considered fraudulent. But in 2012, the party of Aung San Suu Kyi was permitted to run, and won almost all of the available seats. Suu Kyi herself, now in her sixties, won the election to represent her township. It is not clear why the military junta is making these (and other) moves towards democracy, but it's definitely a step in the right direction.

Suu Kyi's family life is deeply tragic. Her father led Burma to independence, but was killed before he could see his dream realized. One of her brothers drowned when he was young. The other moved to the United States, where he seems to be serving as a pawn of the junta. While studying at Oxford, she married an Englishman, and later gave birth to two children. However, when she returned to Burma, they did not follow her, and the Burmese government would often not even let them visit. Even as her husband was dying of cancer, the junta would not let him enter the country to see his wife, though they offered to let her travel to England. Few believed the junta would allow her to return to Burma, so she stayed for the sake of the movement. When her husband died, she had not seen him in four years.

Aung San Suu Kyi could make a great addition to a game you feel is insufficiently morally charged. For example, if your PCs are all hardcore mercenaries, have them hired to rescue Suu Kyi from a prison where she is about to be executed, and smuggle her out of the country. While she will no doubt be grateful for the rescue, the PCs may find it difficult to complete the terms of their contract when she refuses to leave Burma (or your Burma-analogue). This will force the PCs to decide whether to do the moral thing or the greedy and cowardly thing. Do they knock Suu Kyi on the head and smuggle her out of the country against her will? Do they leave her behind and flee Burma? Or do they stay with her and help her in her nonviolent goals?

Baron Ungern-Sternberg

20th Century Schizoid Khan

Baron Sternberg was born in Austria in 1885, to a Baltic German father and a German mother. He grew up in Estonia on his stepfather's estate, among the Germanic nobility of the Imperial Russian borderland. By all accounts, he was a belligerent child and teenager, giving his schoolmates and his teachers much grief at boarding school and a naval academy. At age 19, he volunteered for the army and went off to Siberia to fight in the Russo-Japanese War, but he saw little fighting as the war was nearly over by the time he arrived at the front.

After the war, Ungern enrolled in a cavalry school, and graduated to a Cossack regiment on the Manchurian frontier. He had begun to read widely in Buddhist and occult literature, and to form his strong commitment to absolute monarchy (largely sparked by his shock at the Revolution of 1905, in which angry Estonian peasants had burned his childhood home). In the trackless steppes of Siberia, he drank and philosophized with Cossacks and Mongols, until he was forced to resign his commission as punishment for his drunken dueling. He served in another Siberian regiment until 1913, when he entered the reserves and traveled through Mongolia, fascinated by the militant strain of Buddhism practiced there and the struggles between Chinese settlers and the restive native Mongolians.

Then came the First World War, where Ungern served in the cavalry on the Eastern Front. Like Hitler, he loved the madness of the war convulsing Europe. He led charges, survived suicidal attacks, and showed no fear. "To refuse war means to refuse an epic life," he said later. But Russia was losing the war: the empire and monarchy Ungern loved so much was falling apart. When the Bolshevik Revolution completely overthrew the established order, Ungern went back to his old regiment in Siberia to work with his wartime friend and Cossack ataman Grigori Semenov. Forming a loose alliance with Japanese

expeditionary forces and the Czech Legion (see page 181), Semenov was able to control a large section of Siberia.

Ungern-Sternberg lived with his men in the garrison town of Duaria, growing mad with power (or perhaps he was mad already). He plundered travelers, flogged bureaucrats at the slightest provocation, and allegedly fed prisoners to a tame pack of wolves. At the same time, he required all his officers learn Mongolian and continued with his eccentric philosophy, spending his evenings staring at a deck of cards and pondering the significance of the ace of hearts. In 1919, he married a Manchurian princess to strengthen ties with warlord Zhang Zuolin.

In fall 1920, Ungern put his mad scheme into operation, deserting Semenov and leading his men into Mongolia. He was initially repulsed by the Chinese at Urga (today Ulan Bator, the capital) and wandered the country through a brutal winter. Mongolians and even a few Tibetians rallied (or were drafted) to the cause of the new Khan and God of War, for the liberation of the Bogd Khan (a Mongolian equivalent to the Dalai Lama, though he was a cruel and dissipated old man) and the end of Chinese domination. In February, his replenished forces stormed Urga, attacking through a sacred forest. The Bloody Baron's troops brutally sacked the city, with special ferocity against the Chinese, European merchants and Jews.

As Ungern solidified his rule, suspected Bolsheviks were also killed en masse – and Ungern thought he could mystically sense who was a Communist and who wasn't. He would walk down lines of prisoners, pointing out a few seemingly at random and ordering them killed while sparing the rest. Some were called Bolsheviks simply so Ungern could confiscate their goods to fund his new government.

This interbellum Kurtz had his own version of the "Russian harlequin" devotee – an eccentric Pole named Ferdinand Ossendowski, who codified much of Ungern's rambling "ideology" and generally sang his praises. But events were turning against the Baron – the Reds were winning the Russian Civil War, and no longer wanted Ungern's mad little reactionary dictatorship on their border. Ungern abandoned Urga, threw his looted treasures in a river (no one knows exactly where) and fought a pointless battle against the Reds. He tried to escape to Tibet, but was betrayed by his much-abused men, given a show trial by the Bolsheviks, and executed. Thus ended the life of Baron Ungern-Sternberg: a brutal madman who inadvertently safeguarded Mongolian independence (though admittedly only as a Soviet puppet state until recently). In parts of Mongolia, he was worshipped as a sort of patron saint as recently as the 1970s.

Baron Ungern-Sternberg is a great example of how war and chaos can lead people who would never succeed in peacetime to positions of power. You could have him show up as an obnoxious drunk early in a campaign, then have him return as a power-mad warlord years later. In a supernatural game, you can play up those elements of Ungern's story – maybe he really can detect Communism by sight, or bullets curve around him in battle.

Caravaggio

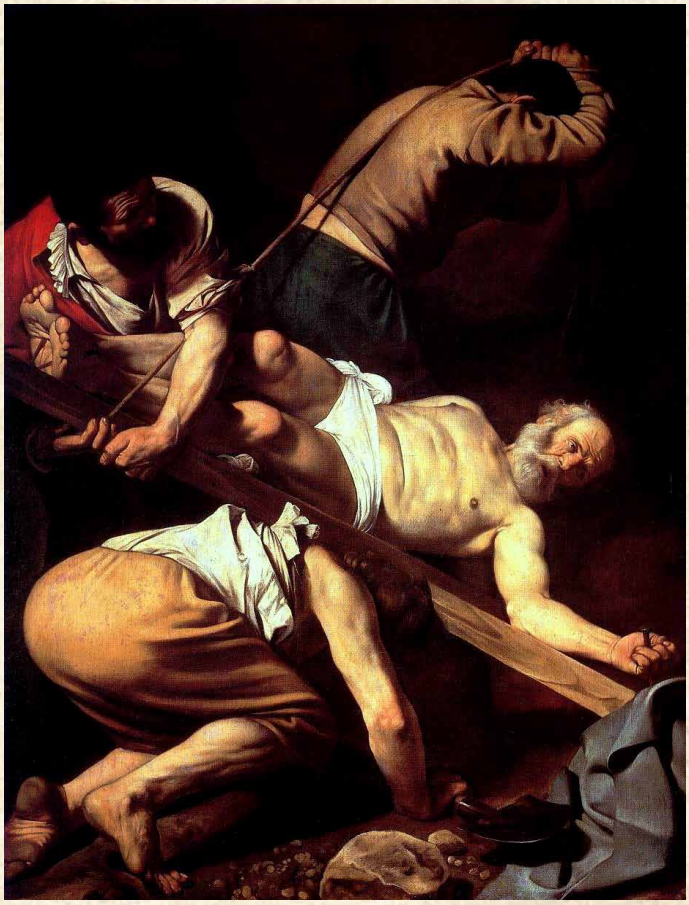
Brilliant Painter and Murderous Thug

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (no relation to the other Michelangelo, and universally known as Caravaggio) was a brilliant Italian renaissance painter whose unparalleled skill with a brush was tempered only by his aptitude for making enemies and getting into deadly brawls. After a short lifetime producing some of the most beautiful and stirring religious art in the Western tradition, he died abruptly under mysterious circumstances.

Caravaggio's art was revolutionary, and was designed to make religion personable and accessible. While painting had been progressing towards greater realism for centuries, Caravaggio was the first painter with the skill and the inclination to paint human beings as they truly appeared: not as idealized beauties, but as wrinkled, scarred, or snub-nosed, with faces expressing real human emotion. Yet his lighting was dramatic, almost theatrical, with bright spotlights, deep shadows, and black backgrounds. Seeing one of Caravaggio's paintings can be a shocking experience, where you genuinely feel the extreme emotions of the people portrayed within.

These features of Caravaggio's work were greatly desired by his patrons in the Catholic Church. These were the days of the Protestant Reformation, and the Church was desperate to avoid losing more followers. The paintings of Caravaggio, then, were intended to awe and educate the Catholic masses, and keep them from joining the Protestants; they were the books of the illiterate.

Carravagio's life was full of controversy. Some saw the heightened realism of his paintings as vulgar and sacrilegious. He scandalized Rome by having prostitutes pose as models for his paintings of the Virgin Mary. Even his manner of painting (directly from life, without sketches) was untraditional and suspect. Most importantly,



he loved street brawls, and seemed to be quite good at them. Caravaggio was repeatedly run out of cities for injuring or killing the wrong person in one of these fights.

At one point, he traveled to Malta to seek the patronage of the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta. He enjoyed considerable success on the island, even being inducted into the knighthood, until he was arrested for brawling with seven other knights, one of whom was severely injured. Imprisoned for a month, he managed to escape from prison, climb down the walls of the fortress, and flee Malta. For this, he was expelled from the knighthood and earned the enmity of his former patron, the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta.

Towards the end of his short life, Caravaggio's brilliance and violence became even more pronounced. Even as he produced some of his greatest masterpieces, he took to sleeping armed. He died under mysterious circumstances at age 38; historians are still unsure whether he was murdered by one of his many, many enemies.

Caravaggio works well to mix "types" of games. In a high-intrigue court game, he would be well-placed to introduce a violent element. Similarly, in a city-based hack 'n slash, the presence of Caravaggio would add connections to the city's upper crust. But in almost any city-based game, the addition of a character like Caravaggio will spice things up. Don't forget that while he has many powerful enemies, he also has many powerful friends. That may add whole new levels of complexity to how your PCs handle this mad genius.

Charlemagne
Powerful and Enlightened King

Charlemagne (Carolus Magnus in Latin), was one of the most powerful kings to ever rule in Europe. Under his reign, the kingdom of Frankia (which would later become France, Germany, and the Low Countries) expanded until it included almost all of western Europe. He also established a means of ruling this kingdom, created a temporary cultural renaissance, and was crowned by the pope as the first western Emperor of the Romans in 300 years.

Under Charlemagne, Frankia expanded far beyond its traditional boundaries. He conquered northern Italy to protect the pope from his enemies. In response to raiding and counter-raiding between the pagans outside Frankia and the Christians within it, Charlemagne conquered much of modern Germany and Austria. He even expanded his kingdom over the Pyrenees into modern Spain. The list of tribes and peoples defeated by Charlemagne serves as a veritable "who's who" of the early medieval world, Christian and pagan alike.

When the pope was driven from Rome by threats of violence, Charlemagne intervened and returned him to the city. In response, during Christmas mass, the pope crowned Charlemagne "Emperor of the Romans." This came as a great surprise to Charlemagne, who had no idea of the pope's intentions. The crowning also caused a stir in the Byzantine empire in modern-day Turkey, which was an actual continuation of the Roman Empire, and thus ruled by an actual Roman Emperor, who objected to someone else using his title.

Under Charlemagne, Frankia was divided into a series of counties, ruled by counts. Counts owed their allegiance directly to the king, and tended to be chosen for their efficiency and loyalty. What is key is that these positions were not hereditary. Upon the death of a count, Charlemagne would select a new one, rather than the late count's son ascending to power.

Charlemagne's rule also brought about a temporary cultural renaissance. The king ordered the creation of a number of schools to teach reading and writing to future scholars. He commanded the copying of a number of important

classical documents, which otherwise would likely have been lost. And under Charlemagne's patronage, scholars developed a new script (sort of like a font, but with handwriting), which standardized writing through much of Europe. His reign also ushered in new styles of art and architecture, and spread the musical styles of Rome to Frankia. Though Charlemagne was never educated, and was probably illiterate, he valued learning highly, and would have books read to him during his meals.

The king was very close to his children, and very generous and loyal to his friends. While he forbade his daughters to marry (likely so they could not father legitimate children who might attempt to usurp power from his sons), he did not prevent them from living with their lovers out of wedlock. This surprising liberality may be explained by the fact that Charlemagne himself was likely born out of wedlock two years before his parents married.

The character of the powerful, enlightened king is a popular one in games. When next you want to use such an archetype, why not use Charlemagne instead? His cultural and scholarly efforts will likely make him very sympathetic to your players, who might then be willing to fight in his wars of expansion. His system of government also offers serious rewards for politically ambitious characters, since they can aspire to be appointed count. PCs may also be drawn into political intrigue created by Charlemagne's unmarried daughters, or by Byzantine anger over his title of emperor.

Furthermore, Charlemagne was declared by the pope to be the continuation of the old Roman Empire. If there is some aspect of the history of your campaign world that is going to be important to your plot later on, by making your Charlemagne-analogue the heir to that part of your world's history, you'll help make that history more immediate and memorable to your players.

Confucius

Itinerant Political-Religious Philosopher

During the decline of the Zhou Dynasty in the 600s BC, China splintered into hundreds of squabbling feudal states, resulting in intermittent warfare until Emperor Qin reunified the area in 221 BC. The chaos of this Warring States period stimulated philosophical thought: Daoism, Legalism, Confucianism, and many smaller schools of Chinese thought all trace their origin to this time. It was a big time for philosophy and religion worldwide: Buddhism was getting its start in India and Socrates was irritating and enlightening the citizens of Athens as Jeremiah prophesied doom for Israel and Judah.

Confucius was born in the small state of Lu to a poor family in 551 BC. He became first the stableman and then an advisor to the duke of Lu. But he made enemies with the powerful Chi clan, and was forced to flee to the state of Chi (no connection to the clan) when the duke was deposed. He avoided politics, edited others' works and taught his theories of etiquette to new pupils. But about 15 years later, fate smiled on Master Kung: the old duke of Lu got back into power and invited Confucius back into government, where he soon became acting prime minister. He worked to standardize titles, music and ritual, and won three cities back from Chi through sheer chutzpah – he argued that the duke of Chi had played improper music at a diplomatic meeting and that this insult deserved compensation.

But the Lu court was too decadent for Confucius (or he fell out of favor again – stories differ), and he soon moved on as a sort of wandering scholar and freelance politician. He wrote philosophy and historical accounts, traveled from court to court, and at times endured great hardship. In his old age, he retired in Lu to finish his writing – particularly the encyclopedic Spring and Autumn Annals, the court chronicle of Lu.

Confucius's philosophy was fundamentally conservative and communitarian, though it can of course be interpreted to serve all sorts of ideological purposes. He believed strongly in the importance of correct ritual and tradition, but taught that the ritual was only useful if done in good faith. He taught a version of the ubiquitous Golden Rule: "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others."

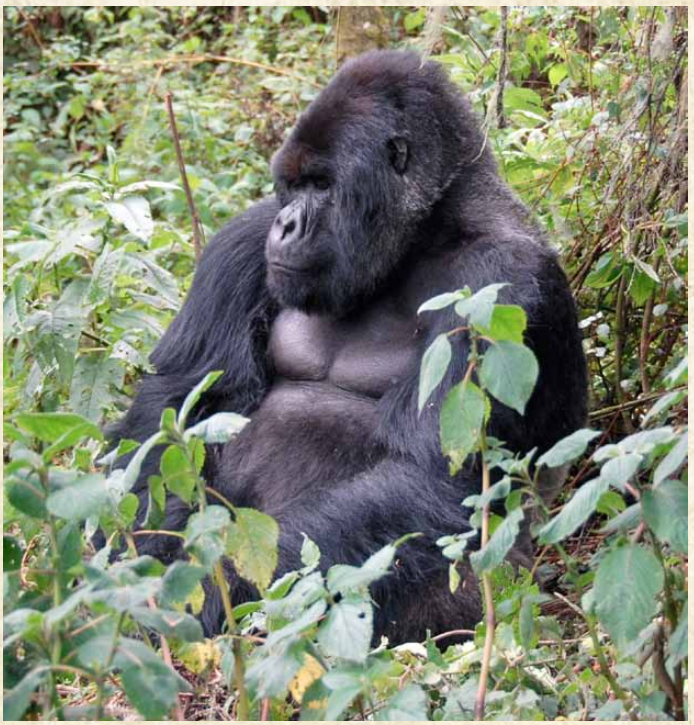
A major theme of Confucius's teachings was compassion and respect: one must be self-deprecating and unpretentious, as well as showing devotion and respect to one's social superiors and compassion and virtuous example to one's social inferiors. This extends to the ruler, who should not rule by harsh, Legalistic (a rival philosophy) law codes but by virtuous example and moral suasion. While some have characterized Confucianism as atheistic, Confucius believed in spirits and the general concept of "Heaven", representing both the divine and natural forces.

Confucianism became a major philosophical tradition in China due to the diligence of his pupils, his copious writing and editing of classics of Chinese literature and philosophy, and a little bit of luck (or the will of Heaven, if you're so inclined). Two centuries after Confucius, the Qin Dynasty rose to power and tried to enforce extreme Legalism by burning all the history and philosophy books in China. The dynasty fell fairly quickly, and the new Han Dynasty tried to recover the lost knowledge: they didn't find much, but they found most of Confucius's works hidden in the walls of an old scholar's house. The Han officially endorsed Confucianism, and the rest is history.

If your PCs are government officials, Confucius could come to them looking for a job. If they're ordinary travelers, he could try to recruit them as pupils. Regardless, he'd certainly be interesting to talk to. And he's a good example of the people the 600s-400s BC produced worldwide: imagine getting all those philosophers and prophets in a room together!

Dian Fossey
Crazed Gorilla Researcher

One of the oddest scientists of recent times, Dian Fossey was the world's foremost expert on mountain gorillas. An America, she lived in the rainforests of Rwanda for eighteen years. Fossey was renowned not only for her groundbreaking research, but also for trying to protect her gorillas from poachers by making the locals fear her. She tried to pass herself off as a powerful witch, and even tortured suspected poachers. This likely led to her murder in 1985.



Fossey lived like a hermit in the mountains of Rwanda (very much like the Children's Eternal Rainforest on page 10), patiently observing her gorillas, letting them get used to her, and recording their behavior. At first, there were some misadventures with aggressive gorillas. But Fossey learned how to interact with the apes on their level. By imitating them – grooming, grunting, munching on leaves, and beating her chest – she habituated the gorillas to her presence. After a leave of absence to get her Ph.D, Fossey returned to her research with a small tribe of student researchers in tow. Reading her writings, it's very clear Fossey thought of her gorillas as being full people, like her. This was a troubling turn; a scientist who comes to love her subjects too dearly will start making mistakes, like when she refused to believe her gorillas were capable of killing each others' infants. Despite this major issue, Fossey's work on mountain gorillas was groundbreaking, and she has probably contributed more to our knowledge of the species than any other researcher.

But Fossey's gorillas were under attack by poachers. They would kill a gorilla, harvest its hands, feet, and head to sell to Westerners, and leave its blood-stained, mutilated body lying "limp in the brush like a bloody sack." So Fossey made war on the poachers, hiring locals to serve on anti-poaching patrols. These guards would kill the poachers' dogs and destroy their traps. She even fought with the government, as she believed corrupt officials were turning a blind eye to the hunters.

Burying so many of her "gorilla friends" broke something in Fossey, and much of her behavior could only be described as fanatical or mad. She tried to convince the locals that she was a witch, so they would fear and obey her. At one point, she even ordered that a suspected poacher's house be burned to the ground (she was later convinced to call it off). The most infamous incident occurred just after Fossey's favorite gorilla was killed. Some of her people found a man in the forest with blood on his shirt. The blood could have come from any sort of animal, but Fossey didn't care. She ordered him bound, stripped, pistol-whipped, and rubbed on the testicles with stinging nettles. That done, she got him high on Valium. After the poor man came to, she told him she had stolen his mind, but given it back. The next time he crossed her, she would keep it.

Fossey was murdered at the age of 53. The killer cut a hole in the side of her hut one night, entered, and before she could load her handgun, hacked her to death with a machete. The murderer has never been identified, but is generally thought to have been a poacher. There is, however, considerable dispute on that point. For all we know, it could have been someone hired by a corrupt government official. Another argument

is that the killer must have been someone close to her. To have cut through the side of the hut, the rationale goes, the killer had to be familiar with the layout of its interior, implying they may have been an angry student or friend.

Your PCs are not likely to wind up on the same side as the mad gorilla woman of the mountains. To what degree they wind up opposing her (if at all) could be a fun question to roleplay out. You may consider having gorillas in your world be fully intelligent, but very early in their cultural development and lacking the anatomy required for spoken language. Dian Fossey, in such a circumstance, would have probably picked up on their using some sort of simple language based on subtle gestures. No one will believe her, for one because it sounds crazy, but also because no one wants to have to think about the implications.

DIOCLETIAN
Autocratic Savior of the Roman Empire

Diocletian arose out of a fifty-year period of chaos in the Roman Empire. For the first time in its history, the Empire was beset simultaneously by external invasion from the Persians and Germanic barbarians and by internal instability from various self-proclaimed emperors warring amongst themselves. Over those fifty years, there were between twenty and twenty-five Roman emperors, almost all killed by assassination, Persians, Germans, or angry mobs. The crisis was ended by a claimant named Diocletian, who, over fourteen years, managed to drive back the Persians, expel the barbarians, and secure his rule at home.

Diocletian's main goal was to prevent such a period of turmoil from ever happening again, and instituted numerous reforms towards this end. One thing that was clear to him was that the Empire was simply too large for any one man to rule. So he split the Empire in two, installed an ally on the throne in the western half, and claimed the eastern half for himself. He was also the first emperor to rule in an openly autocratic fashion, without even pretending to be a representative of the people.

Left over from the previous fifty years of chaos was a tremendous economic catastrophe. The currency had become so debased that by the time of Diocletian, things had regressed to a barter system. Indeed, the Roman government no longer accepted its own currency as payment for taxes. To solve this problem, Diocletian, in a typically direct and autocratic way, did not jiggle tax rates or provide subtle incentives. Instead, he just threatened to kill people. He issued an Edict of Maximum Prices saying that, on penalty of death, one can charge no more than the given amount for the listed items. Diocletian also made certain professions hereditary. The Empire needed bakers, for example, so if your father was a baker, you must be a baker.

Bizarrely, most of Diocletian's reforms were failures, but they saved the Empire anyway. After Diocletian's death, the western half of the Empire conquered the eastern half. The Edict of Maximum Prices resulted in a huge black market. And Rome lacked the police force necessary to keep people from fleeing hereditary jobs they didn't like. But Diocletian's reforms were not complete failures. After the major civil war following his reign, Rome had no more such wars. Soon after, the Empire split and remained split. The economy was far from fixed, but it was repaired enough that people resumed using Roman currency. Most historians agree that while Diocletian's reforms were hardly roaring successes, they saved the Empire.

After 21 years as emperor, Diocletian retired, and returned to his homeland to grow cabbages. He lived out the rest of his life in a heavily-fortified palace. As civil war brewed, Diocletian's successor urged him to retake his title, but Diocletian declined. This does not mean Diocletian was not politically active; he stayed involved in current affairs until his death, but he never again wielded direct power. It is said that as the civil war intensified Diocletian drank poison for fear of coming to a worse end.

Somewhat lost in all this is who Diocletian was as a person. For the most part, we don't know. The first forty years of his life are largely a mystery, though he does seem to have been quite low-born. Some even accused him of being the son of former slaves. Unlike many Roman emperors, he seems to have been doing what he did for the sake of the Empire, not for his own sake. Splitting the Empire and later abdicating clearly says to me that this is not a man who acted out of a desire for power or wealth. Diocletian, it is safe to say, was an able leader who did the best he could with the terrible hand he was dealt, and somehow managed to save the Empire from self-destruction.

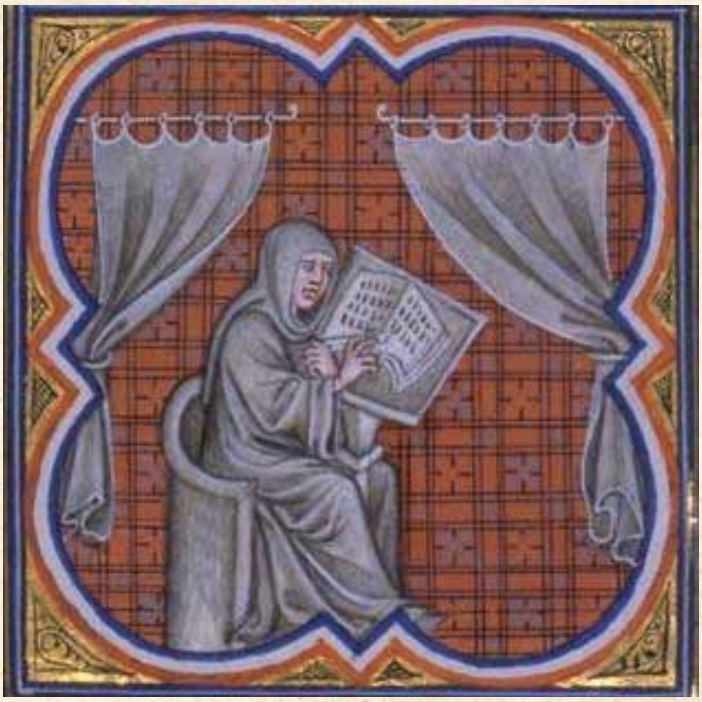
Diocletian is probably best used at your table in his role as a retiree. While he probably wouldn't work as having been the head of any sort of representative government, Diocletian would work well as the predecessor to a current autocratic head of state, whether he be an emperor, a king, or the governor of a sector of space. Even though he's busy growing his cabbages, your Diocletian is probably still politically active and needs agents, even if there is no civil war brewing. He may offer the PCs a job engaging in politics on his behalf, or he may just pay them for interesting bits of news they bring back from the far corners of the Empire.

Einhard

Humble, Loving Scholar

Einhard was humble little man, a scholar in the medieval court of King Charlemagne of Frankia (detailed elsewhere in this book). He is most notable for his biography of Charlemagne, his close and equal relationship with his wife, and his small stature.

The scholar Einhard was born into a Germanic family of noble status, and would have been expected to learn riding, swordfighting, and all the other martial skills of a warrior aristocrat. However, Einhard was a tiny man with a lamentable physique. Probably because of this, he was instead sent to be educated at a highly-regarded monastery, and then sent by the abbot to court.



There, Einhard became a friend and confidant of Charlemagne and his children. The king made good use of Einhard's intellect, having him oversee the construction of the palace and cathedral in the capital city. Charlemagne also used Einhard as a diplomat, sending him to negotiate the release of certain notable military hostages, and sending him to Rome to get papal approval for one of the king's more important administrative decisions. Einhard, in return, regarded the king as a foster father, and felt deeply indebted to him. After Charlemagne's death, Einhard undertook a biography of the king so that Charlemagne could have the eulogy Einhard felt he deserved.

In order to publish this biography, Einhard had to overcome his deep-seated humility. He writes in the piece's preface that only his love of Charlemagne convinced him to write, because otherwise, he never would have published. Indeed, Einhard never actually gives his name in the work. We only know who wrote it because of a foreword added after his death. It is worth noting that his modesty seems genuine. He does not deny that there is no better man than him to write the text, and his humility is apparent in some of his other writings. Indeed, had anyone else attempted to write a biography of Charlemagne, Einhard might not have ever completed his.

At the age of 45, Einhard married a noblewoman by the name of Emma. He may well have been marrying above his station; indeed, it's possible he didn't even have had the resources to give his wife a proper dowry. Emma was, by all accounts, a noble and honest woman, and theirs was a deep love, strengthened by their decades together. Unusual for the time, Einhard seems to have treated Emma entirely as his equal in managing their estates.

We included Einhard because his is not the sort of story about which one usually hears. He was a man of neither violence nor power. Rather, he did good work quietly and humbly between the pages of history.

Scribes, scholars, and scientists are common NPCs in most games. Einhard would do marvelously in such a role. In your game, he may need rescuing from a political situation in which he's gotten in over his head, or his egalitarian relationship with his wife Emma may have earned him someone's enmity. But he probably works best as a source of information and behind-the-scenes assistant. If the PCs need a particular piece of esoteric knowledge – be it historical, scientific, or political – consider having their source be based on Einhard, especially if this NPC is one you hope the PCs will befriend.

Enrique of Malacca

First to Circumnavigate the World?

Many people know that Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese sea captain working for the Spanish crown, was the first to lead an expedition around the world. Of course, Magellan didn't make it back to Spain – he died in the Philippines after getting involved in local politics. In fact, only 18 members of the original crew of 232 made it back to Cadiz on the ship Victoria (some others straggled back after hitching rides on trade ships, being ransomed from Portuguese captivity, etc...). So the first person to circumnavigate the world would be one of those 18 – it's usually listed as the captain of the Victoria, the Basque Juan Sebastian Elcano (after all, he was probably the first one to step off the boat).

However, Enrique of Malacca may have made it around the world over a year before anyone else (though Elcano still has the honor of being the first around the world on a single voyage). His true name has unfortunately been lost to history. The name "Enrique" was given to him because he was captured by the Portuguese on the feastday of St. Henry (July 13), during their siege of Malacca in 1511. Malacca, today part of Malaysia, was a major trading port in Southeast Asia – the equivalent of Venice then or Singapore now, and a great prize for the Portuguese trade empire.

Magellan brought Enrique back to Portugal as a slave, and brought him on his world-circumnavigating voyage as an interpreter – Enrique could speak Malay, a major trade language in Southeast Asia at the time. It was a long and dangerous voyage – so dangerous that no one attempted to circumnavigate the world after Magellan until Francis Drake, more than 50 years later. The crew suffered through storms as they navigated the twisting straits of Magellan (between Tierra Del Fuego and the South American mainland), and starved as they crossed the vast Pacific. Eventually, they arrived in the Phillipines, where Enrique could speak the language and was greeted warmly by the locals.

With lines of communication open, Magellan was able to convert the Rajah of Cebu, Humabon, to Christianity, and was convinced by the Rajah to attack his rival on the neighboring island of Macatan. Essentially, Magellan was trying to do what his contemporaries Cortes and Pizarro did so successfully in the Americas. Unfortunately for him, he lacked Cortes' native allies and Pizarro's luck, and the Filipinos weren't in the midst of a massive epidemic. Magellan and 48 of his crew went down in defeat, and the captain was killed.

Magellan's will stated that Enrique was to be freed upon his death. However, the remaining captains refused to free him. Some claim that at this point, Enrique conspired with the Rajah, who coveted the Spaniards' weapons and needed to appease his Macatan rivals by betraying the expedition. Rajah Humabon held a "banquet" for some of the remaining soldiers, as well as Enrique, on the first of May. Most if not all of them were poisoned and killed, but some sources claim that Enrique survived – either because he was in on the plan or because the Rajah thought he could be useful.

Nothing is known of Enrique's life after May 1, 1521. As such, his claim as the first to circumnavigate the world is a subject of some debate. As he was greeted warmly in the Phillipines, some historians claim he was a native of Cebu (or perhaps Mazaua, where Magellan also stopped), who was captured by slave traders and taken to Malacca before being captured by Magellan. Thus, he returned to his homeland after traveling around the world. Others argue that this is romantic fantasy: Magellan named

Enrique as a Malaccan, and there is evidence that he only spoke Malay and not any specifically Filipino languages. There is a possibility he was a native of Sumatra, in which case he would not have circumnavigated the world, unless he returned home after 1521 (which is eminently possible, and if he did so in under 16 months he'd still be the first to go around the world).

In your game, though, there's no reason why Enrique couldn't have been the first to circumnavigate the world. His story is a reminder that the Age of Exploration didn't just consist of Europeans going out and discovering things, that it was a shakeup of the whole world-system instigated by Europe but involving nearly the whole human race. Enrique, or a figure like him, could be an interesting NPC or provide a good backstory for a PC – if going around the world was his first adventure, the next adventure had better be something amazing.

Genghis Khan
Father of All Mongols

Genghis Khan (born Temuchin) was a Mongol warlord and one of mankind's most successful leaders. From atop his horse, he united the warring tribes of the East Asian steppe, conquered lands beyond counting, put cities to the torch, and set in motion the creation of the largest overland empire in human history. He was an astonishingly complex figure, and cannot easily be said to be a monster or a saint.

Temuchin's father was a chieftain. His mother was abducted from a neighboring tribe. Life was hard on the steppe, and raids for women and horses were common. When Temuchin's father was killed, his family was cast out of the tribe. They nearly starved. During this time, Temuchin quarreled with and killed his brother. Gradually, Temuchin's station grew and he married his childhood sweetheart, Börte (or as close to one as could exist on the steppe). But Börte was kidnapped by yet another tribe, and Temuchin had to rescue her, with the help of several friends.

By this point, Temuchin had quite a reputation among the steppe peoples. Though we think of the Mongols today as a unified nation, at the time, they were divided among numerous tribes and confederations. When Temuchin set about unifying these peoples, it is possible he did not realize the full extent of what he was doing; he may have just been trying to earn a better life for his mother, his siblings, and Börte. But he gradually grew his power base, first by offering himself as an ally of a major player, and then by conquering weaker tribes. Most importantly, upon conquering a tribe, he did not massacre the men and claim the women, but rather invited the tribe to join him. Soon, tribes began allying themselves with him without coercion. It took Temuchin twenty years, but he unified the steppe, and his name was replaced with the title by which men remember him today: Great Khan. Genghis Khan.

Historians have various theories as to why Genghis Khan turned his gaze outward from the steppe. My favorite is that he saw it as necessary to keep his confederacy united. Life on the steppe required a culture of nomadic, horse-riding hunters and herders, but there was precious little good browse for horses and goats. This necessarily led to violence, as tribes fought over grazing land and young men fought over wives and horses. To keep his Mongols from turning on each other, Genghis Khan had to release them on someone else. So he launched a series of wars that wound up claiming enough pastures and wives to last the Mongols an eternity. By Genghis Khan's death, the empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean west to the Caspian Sea, north to Russia and south to Afghanistan. The empire continued expanding under the rule of his son until it covered most of Eurasia.

Genghis Khan's methods were horrifying. At one point during the unification of Mongolia, he was concerned that one of the tribes might engage in revenge killings. So he marched every male member of the tribe past a wagon. If they were taller than the axle, they were beheaded. Any survivors would be too young to remember the massacre and take revenge. He waged entire wars purely for reconnaissance. He burned cities to the ground to make a point about the futility of resistance. According to one source, after a Persian governor executed a group of Mongolian emissaries, the Great Khan had the man's eyes and ears filled with molten silver. At the same time, he is famous for instituting religious toleration throughout his empire, and his loyalty to his wife and family is beyond question. Genghis Khan is still hailed by the people of Mongolia as their national hero for lifting them out of petty obscurity, even if it was at the cost of much of the rest of the world.

You could run an entire campaign where the PCs ride with the Great Khan across the known world, forging the largest empire your world has ever seen. You might want to tone down the atrocities a bit, though; most players would probably see them as unforgivable. Alternately, you could model a campaign on Genghis Khan's unification of the Mongols. It could be a superb mixture of politics, combat, and pitched battles.

Alternately, you can make Genghis Khan the antagonist. If the orcs, gnolls, and hobgoblins in the wilds beyond civilization were all united under one ruler, they would be a dangerous force. A monstrous humanoid seeking to do just that could be a terrific villain. Furthermore, you could make things more interesting by humanizing these creatures. Perhaps their savagery is due to much the same pressures suffered by the steppe peoples: not enough pastureland, and no way to settle down.

Götz von Berlichingen

Knight Caught Out of Time

The sixteenth century Germanic knight Götz von Berlichingen was an an anachronism in his own day. Wielding a prosthetic hand centuries ahead of its time, he embodied a psychology and skill set that became increasingly obsolete over the course of his lifetime. He was a nobleman, a bandit, a rebel commander, and a living weapon.

Von Berlichingen lived for battle. As a young man, he squired for one of his kinsmen, learning the ways of the knight. He first rode off to war at age 19, and in his first battle saw the effects of gunpowder. He saw an arquebus (a precursor to the musket) shoot clean through one man and hit the man behind him. The man in front lived; the man behind did not. Von Berlichingen even got to fill a church with gunpowder and set it on fire. In a battle later in his life, von Berlichingen distinguished himself by an act of great heroism. The enemy was trying to pull their wagons together to form a temporary fortification – a powerful tactic. Despite cannon smoke so thick they could not see the enemy, von Berlichingen's heavy cavalry charged the wagon fort without support from their allies. The fort was nearly complete when von Berlichingen, acting on his own initiative, charged one of the wagons, spearing its teamster, and breaking the fort. The event for which he is best remembered in Germany today was his response to a demand

for surrender, roughly translated as "Kiss my ass!" Over the course of his life, von Berlichingen fought Turks, Swiss, Germans, French, and more besides.

But there wasn't always a war going on. For a man like von Berlichingen, whose only skill set was dealing death, this meant he had to find something to do. During these times, von Berlichingen turned bandit, robbing merchants and kidnapping noblemen for ransom. As punishment, he was twice placed under imperial ban, where he was declared legally dead and owning no possessions, meaning anyone was allowed to rob or kill him. Both times, von Berlichingen managed to get himself back into the good graces of the empire.

The knight also commanded a section of rebels during the failed Peasants' War of 1524-1526. His troops were responsible for a number of atrocities. After the rebellion was put down, he justified his actions to the government by claiming the peasants forced him into their service by threatening his wife and children, and that any atrocities were done against his orders. Von Berlichingen was imprisoned for five and a half years, plus sixteen years under house arrest.

In 1504, von Berlichingen lost his right hand in battle. Ordinarily, this would have been something of a career-ending injury for a knight. Instead, he got a prosthetic hand made of iron. But this wasn't just any prosthetic; the iron hand of Götz von Berlichingen was centuries ahead of its time. It offered control fine and deft enough to hold a quill pen or a playing card. But it also provided a strong enough grip to swing a sword or heft a lance. And, if he had to, von Berlichingen could use it to deliver one hell of a punch. As to the genius who built the hand, we haven't the slightest idea who he was.

As a knight, von Berlichingen's primary purpose – both as a soldier and as a human being – was to ride into battle dressed in heavy armor, carrying weapons designed to break through someone else's heavy armor, and try to kill people exactly like him. Only knights had the equipment and training necessary to kill other knights. But gunpowder was rendering that conception of knighthood obsolete. Men with arquebuses could now kill knights; if you no longer needed a knight to kill a knight, what purpose did knights serve? Don't get me wrong; in the right circumstances, knights were still very useful as shock troops against unprepared infantry. But their primary utility was disappearing. And don't forget, knighthood was more than a profession. It was an entire way of life. And if knights were becoming obsolete, did that mean that von Berlichingen as a person was himself becoming obsolete?

Götz von Berlichingen could make an interesting recurring NPC. His psychology, based on the need for and the rightness of violence, is antiquated, and not likely to line up with that of the PCs (though knowing some PCs…). This means that every time they meet von Berlichingen, he may have a different relationship with them. The first time, he may be an ally of the PCs, as he leads a peasant rebellion. The next time, he may be their enemy, as he preys upon traveling merchants. And this idea of an obsolete warrior with obsolete psychology is not restricted to pseudo-Medieval settings. In science fiction, Götz might be a special forces soldier in a world where drones, missiles, and robots have rendered his job unnecessary. In a western, he might be a mountain man lost in the settled west.

HAKA MIKKELSON
Norwegian Strongman

Haka (or Haagen) Mikkelson (the last name is a Scandinavian patronymic, meaning "son of Michael") was born in 1803, near the arctic coastal town of Mo i Rana in present-day Norway. He was a fisherman, and owned a water-driven sawmill. He married twice and had eight children, six of whom survived to adulthood. The most important thing to know about Haka, however, is that he was extremely strong.

Some of the stories about Haka are old familial legends of dubious veracity, but two were written down in the church parish's history book. They may be exaggerated, but at least Haka's contemporaries believed them. First off, he could carry two giant salt barrels (presumably for salting fish) in a yoke across his shoulders. More impressively, he once got in an argument with another burly fisherman named Susamel, over who was stronger. Susamel challenged him to prove his strength, so Haka tossed him over a large boat in the harbor, and would have gotten him in the water on the other side but Susamel's coat caught on the boat's oar fitting. Haka did this in his middle age, and claimed that he would've gotten Susamel clean over the boat if he'd been, say, 24.

From other stories told of Haka, he played pretty well to type. At one point, he was on a cart hauling ale with some other men who lamented that if they had cups, they could drink from the kegs of ale. Haka simply pulled the lid off the keg, lifted it and took a drink, saying that if the other men had the strength, they could do likewise. Another day, he was attacked by six men (perhaps the guys from the cart who he didn't share the booze with?) who tried to strangle him with his woolen scarf. Haka tossed them all to the ground, one by one.

Despite his sawmill, Haka (and Norway in general) was very poor when he was a young man. In a famine when he was young, he had to eat boiled tree bark and was too weak from hunger to climb mountains. Norway was very poor until at least the early 20th century (and grew wealthy only with North Sea oil development in the 1970s), which partially explains why several of his children emigrated to the United States. One of them, Mikkel, is my distant ancestor: he changed his name from Haaginson to Strandjord, thinking (for some reason) that this would be easier for Americans to spell.

Norway saw some political changes over Haka's life, though they probably didn't affect him much. When he was born, Norway was part

of the kingdom of Denmark. But Denmark aligned with France in the Napoleonic Wars, and Sweden fought against them (interestingly, under the leadership of the traitorous French Marshal Bernadotte). At the Congress of Vienna, Norway was awarded to Sweden, and was slowly granted increasing autonomy until May 16, 1905 – Norwegian independence day. Haka died in 1880, though, and didn't live to see it.

Haka could be useful as a fun minor character – either brawling with your PCs, helping them move something heavy, or just as a local legend. He's also useful if your GM says your character with maxed-out strength who fights, takes wagers, and works hard is too stereotypical – clearly, you're drawing from (semi) historical example.

HATSHEPSUT
Accomplished Female Pharaoh

Hatshepsut was one of only three women in the 3,000 year history of ancient Egypt to rule as pharaoh in her own right. Hatshepsut's husband and half-brother, Pharaoh Tuthmose II, died early, and the crown passed to her nephew, the child Tuthmose III. As was customary, Hatshepsut became regent, to rule until Tuthmose III came of age. Before that could happen, Hatshepsut seized power, and declared herself pharaoh: divine god-king of Egypt. Unlike most usurpers, Hatshepsut allowed Tuthmose III great power, and he succeeded her upon her death. Her reign is generally recognized to have been peaceful and prosperous.

One of Hatshepsut's greatest accomplishments was a trading expedition to the fabled land of Punt on the Red Sea, with which there had been no Egyptian contact for five hundred years. This was a risky task. The expedition would have to travel by sea, but the Egyptians were notoriously awful shipwrights and sailors. Shipwreck would have been a very real fear. Furthermore, many of the people between Egypt and Punt were unfriendly to Egyptian visitors. Not all expeditions to lands beyond Egypt returned. Despite these dangers, Hatshepsut sent five ships of thirty rowers each. And it worked! They returned with ivory, ebony, fragrant wood, incense, leopard skins, baboons, and living myrrh trees: all marvels of the exotic lands beyond Egypt.

Hatshepsut's reign was characterized by a series of building projects. At the sacred temple complex of Karnak, she remodeled one building, added another, and erected two obelisks – at the time, the tallest in the world. She built a number of other temples throughout the country, but her greatest accomplishment was her mortuary complex. While pyramids had fallen out of vogue almost a thousand years earlier, the burial site of the pharaoh remained a massive affair, and was still constructed during his lifetime. Hatshepsut's tomb was centered around a long, graceful ramp, and consisted of a series of elegant colonnades. The myrrh trees from her expedition to Punt were planted in the rear courtyard. Hatshepsut's burial complex is truly one of the marvels of ancient architecture.

After her death, much of Hatshepsut's iconography was carved out of her monuments and temples, leaving conspicuous Hatshepsut-shaped holes in the artwork. Traditionally, this is blamed on her successor, Tuthmose III. He was angry at her, so the story goes, for keeping him from his rightful place as pharaoh, so he tried to erase her from history. However, that doesn't necessarily line up with certain other facts. For one, whoever tried to remove all mention of Hatsepsut's name didn't do a very good job of it. Just to name one site, the censorship at Hatshepsut's mortuary complex was very incomplete. It's hard to imagine such an important site could have been overlooked. Tuthmose III was a very strong pharaoh; if he wanted his aunt's memory obliterated, he would have been able to do it. Furthermore, Tuthmose III commanded the armies during Hatshepsut's reign. If he was so resentful of her power, he (as the rightful pharaoh) could certainly have deposed her then and there. So who tried to write her out of history? We have theories, but we may never know.

Hatshepsut might make for a fun queen at your table. PCs could serve on her voyage to Punt, which may turn out to be far more fantastical than they had anticipated. They could track down saboteurs who are trying to disrupt her building programs. PCs could even be caught up in a conspiracy against Hatshepsut that culminates in an attempt to erase her from history.

Hedy Lamarr

Beautiful Actress and Inventor

Austrian-born Hedy Lamarr was a Hollywooda movie star, a sex symbol, and an inventor. She is best remembered for her stunning face, but she also created a signal-hopping technique that is the basis for a great deal of modern communications.

As is common in show business, "Lamarr" was not her given name. She was born Hedwig Kiesler in 1914. She first made her name as a sex symbol at age 19 when she appeared in the Austrian movie Ecstasy. She appeared fully nude, and a close-up shot of her face during orgasm caused quite the scandal. At about the same time, she married an Austrian arms manufacturer, and became a socialite in Vienna, entertaining notables including Hitler and Mussolini. In 1937, she fled both fascism and her marriage, emigrating to the US, and taking a new name: Hedy Lamarr.

She became one of the greatest female leads of the '40s, starring opposite many of the big names in the business. Her biggest hit was the 1949 Samson and Delilah. Lamarr was a sex symbol: a

smoldering, dark-haired temptress with an exotic accent. During WWII, American soldiers abroad voted her their most desired pinup model. She was important to the war effort in other ways as well, at one point raising seven million dollars in a single night selling war bonds. Despite the attention, Lamarr thought little of show business, once quipping, "Any girl can be glamorous. All she has to do is stand still and look stupid."

And stupid she was not. Possibly as an escape from the Hollywood life she did not enjoy, Lamarr was also an inventor. Her most important invention was a radio-controlled torpedo, which could be guided by a plane flying overhead. Such torpedos existed, but their radio control was easy to jam. But Lamarr, working with a friend, figured out a way around this problem. They made the torpedo and its controller switch radio frequencies constantly, always staying in contact, but never on the same band for long. This made the radio signals more or less impossible to jam. Unfortunately, top Navy brass didn't like the system, and it was shelved. But others built on her work, and today frequency-hopping is used in GPS, cell phones, and Wi-Fi.

Hedy Lamarr is exactly the sort of NPC your PCs will want to befriend. Knowing a beautiful movie star opens doors. Play up her show business sex appeal, and let the PCs underestimate her as being just another Hollywood nitwit. Your Hedy Lamarr would probably be more than willing to use other people's low expectations of her intelligence to her advantage. But she might also be involved in top-secret research, perhaps of a type the PCs are dependent on. If your game is in a genre that doesn't have film stars, she might play a role as a socialite or courtesan living a double life as an inventor or wizard.

HERODOTUS
The Father of History

The first man ever to write a history book, Herodotus of Halicarnassus is one of the few men who can claim to have invented an entire field of scholarship. His globe-trotting adventures brought him a wealth of information, some true, some less so. His sometimes-fanciful stories also earned him the title "The Father of Lies."

Herodotus was born in the fifth century BC in a Greek colony on what is now the western coast of Turkey. He was probably part of a wealthy aristocratic family, and may have fought as a heavily-armored hoplite infantryman. Herodotus was very widely traveled. He likely spent several years in Athens, and judging by the details in his writings, he voyaged as far afield as Babylon, North Africa, Sicily, Egypt, and the Crimea. He may even have helped found a Greek colony in southern Italy.

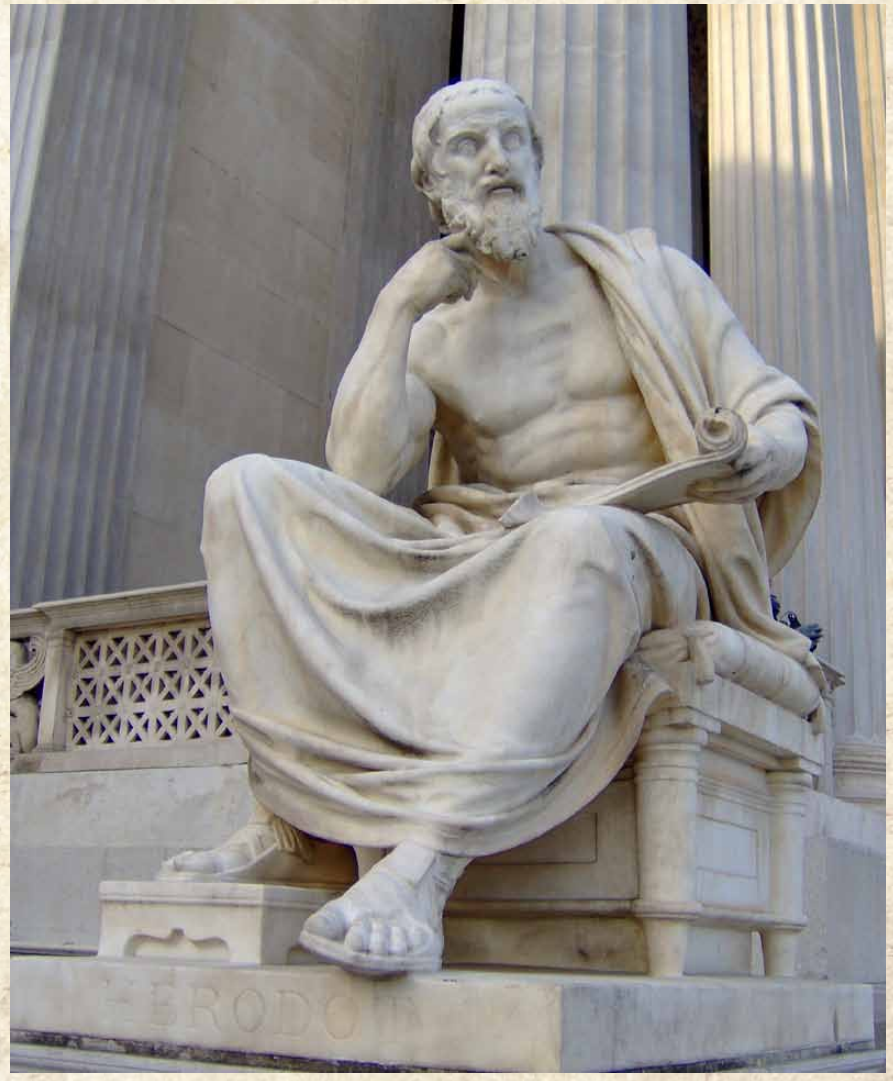
Herodotus' great work is his book The Histories. Its stated purpose is to record the events of the past so they will not be forgotten, and to explore the causes of the tensions between Greeks and non-Greeks, culminating in the two failed invasions of Greece by the Persian empire. In the process, Herodotus takes some long detours, recording the histories, geographies, cultures, and stories of many areas of the Mediterranean world and beyond. His research technique seems to have been to travel to a region and ask the people there what they knew about the area and the lands beyond. The oldest material in The Histories tends to predate the book by a bit more than a century. With such events, Herodotus' sources could tell him, "My grandfather was an eyewitness, and when I was growing up, he used to tell us that..."

This technique was thorough, but it left many opportunities for error. For one, Herodotus had to work through translators, who may have sometimes garbled the message. For another, the people Herodotus was interviewing did not always know the full truth about what

they were saying. Thus, The Histories is full of contradictory, questionable, and downright untrue stories. Herodotus was well aware of this, and endeavored to simply report what he was told, who told it to him, and which version of the story he found most plausible. The reader is invited to make up her own mind about what is true.

This means The Histories contains a delightful mixture of solid historical fact and wild fantasy. Herodotus' writings on the Persian invasions are thorough, interesting, and absolutely invaluable. His stories of early Athenian history are unmatched in their color and attention to detail. But while Herodotus' list of the animals of Egypt includes the crocodile, it also includes the phoenix, as the two would have seemed equally fantastical to a Greek. This unfamiliarity with the non-Greek-speaking world leads to the inclusion of some particularly tall tales. Most famous, perhaps, is that of the furry ants bigger than foxes dwelling north of India, which dig up gold while excavating their nests.

Herodotus may make for a terrific quest-giver at your table. The PCs may bump into him in Athens (or some equivalent city), and get to talking with him. Once he finds out what direction they're planning on heading, out come the adventure hooks. "You know, I haven't been that way yet, but I've heard there used to be a great empire there. If you were to visit its long-abandoned capital, poke around a bit, and tell me what you found, I might be able to compensate you for your trouble." Alternately, Herodotus may have already visited that region. "You know, last time I was in that neck of the woods, they were being plagued by thieves with rings of invisibility. You might want to see if that's still a problem." Whether or not the historian's stories are true is up to you to decide.



Hilde Mangold
Genius Scientist and Technician

Hilde Mangold (née Proescholdt) was a German embryologist who did groundbreaking research in the 1920s. She was generally considered a likable person with well-rounded interests and truly impressive skills working under the microscope. While still at university, she attended a lecture by noted biologist Hans Spemann. Mangold found his work so fascinating that she followed him for her graduate work.

Mangold's work pioneered a novel technique for studying the development of animal embryos. If you want to know what role a particular part of the embryo plays in its development, you can mess with that piece in some way. Remove it. Transplant it somewhere else. Stick a second one right next to the first. If the embryo does not die under the knife, the resulting aberration will offer great insight into the role of the piece in question. The technique was very popular for decades, and was often used on chicken and amphibian embryos, but has since fallen out of favor with the development of more precise and subtle molecular tools. By knowing what microscopic chunk of flesh to transplant where, you can duplicate, remove, or move just about any body part. But be warned before trying any mad science: it seldom works out well. The resulting embryo rarely survives to birth or hatching, and its deformities are almost invariably crippling. You can't just add a pair of limb buds and get a fully-functional second set of arms: there are always complications.

Mangold worked with newt embryos, and her surgeries required incredible technical skill. Using glass needles, she had to slice apart a microscopic newt embryo, then glue it back together in a different combination. This required careful, deft work, and only Mangold had the skill necessary to pull it off. The resulting embryos were allowed to develop in their natural habitat: pond water. But because pond water is not sterile, the wounds of the modified embryos kept getting infected. So Mangold had to repeat this delicate process hundreds of times to get a mere six embryos to a point where they were mature enough to examine. What she found was astounding: a particular spot on the embryo was organizing the tissues around it into a structure that would become the head and back of the newt.

Against Mangold's protestations, Hans Spemann (the head scientist in her lab) had himself listed as an author when her groundbreaking research was published, essentially taking partial credit for her work. Shortly thereafter, Mangold was killed in a freak kitchen explosion. Spemann would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Medicine for Mangold's work. Because Nobel Prizes are not awarded posthumously, Mangold got no credit.

At your table, Mangold's research could be inspiration for a mad scientist NPC. If you're willing to stretch the boundaries of real science, a sufficiently gifted villainous embryologist could produce monsters with all manner of anatomical modifications. It's outside the possibilities of real biology (at least using Mangold's technique), but certainly close enough to the real thing to excite scientifically-minded players, who tend to appreciate and enjoy adventures based on real science.

Alternately, you could paint Mangold's death as the result of a conspiracy. Hilde Mangold was not the only female genius biologist technician to die early. Other notable examples include Rosalind Franklin (who "photographed" the crystalline structure of DNA) and Rosa Beddington (who

did vital work with stem cells). This is the sort of coincidence you'd expect to find in a sufficiently large data set, but what if it's not a coincidence? What if all three were spirited away by a conspiracy of time-traveling matriarchal scientists who needed biologist technicians?

Hildegard of Bingen

Medieval Mystic

Twelfth century theologian and prophetess Hildegard of Bingen, the Sybil of the Rhine, was the tenth child born to a noble family. It was customary for a tenth child to be tithed, so Hildegard was dedicated at birth to the Church. Beginning at age three, she started having visions of luminous objects and future events, but she hid this fact. At age eight, Hildegard was sent to an anchoress to be educated. Anchorites were people who chose a life of extreme monasticism. They were bricked up inside small rooms adjacent to churches, with little holes for food to be brought in and waste to be brought out. This anchoress' cell also had a small door through which children could be brought to be educated. She eventually joined the clergy, and later became an abbess. At age 42, she saw a vision of God that revealed to her the meanings of certain religious texts and commanded her to write down the contents of her visions. Still she hesitated to act because of feelings of inadequacy, until the pope himself encouraged her to follow God's commands and write.

The most colorful of Hildegard's visions are recorded in her book Know the Ways of the Lord. In it, she writes of seeing God on a holy mountain with mankind at its base. She tells of the fall and redemption of man, and of the end of the world. The entire treatise is punctuated with exhortations to respect and obey God. Among the more bizarre of her writings is the Unknown Language, a list of over 900 words in a made-up tongue, complete with a novel 23-character alphabet and Latin and German definitions. It's worth noting that Hildegard's descriptions of her visions match many of the clinical effects of intense migraines. Both begin with precursors, move into hallucinations of lights and patterns accompanied by feelings of familiarity and certitude, shift into nausea, pain, paralysis, and/or blindness, before culminating in a period of euphoria.

These visions led to important theological developments. One example that remains influential in Catholicism to this day is that of the importance of the study of nature. Since all nature is of God, by understanding the world, you may gain a deeper understanding of its creator. She also argued that music is important to proper worship. Her visions revealed to her that before the Fall, Adam joined the angels

in singing praises to God, and that musical instruments were invented for the purpose of praise. She didn't just espouse these theologies; she acted on them, writing music and texts about the natural world. Finally, Hildegard was ahead of her time by several centuries in her views on heresy. She strongly opposed heretics and those preaching doctrine contrary to the teachings of the Church, but she urged mercy towards them. Heretics, she said, were still made in the image of God, like all humans, and thus should not be executed.

Hildegard of Bingen was influential in an age when few women were given credibility on matters of consequence. By the humility that almost kept her from writing down her visions, she convinced others that her writings were divinely inspired. She advised bishops, popes, and kings, and held correspondence with people of all walks of life. In 2012, she was named a Doctor of the Church, one of 35 Catholic teachers whose contributions to doctrine and theology are particularly great.

At your table, Hildegard of Bingen might make for a terrific mystic or priest NPC. The Unknown Language is particularly intriguing. Perhaps her other visions were simply to get people interested enough in her that her mysterious dictionary wouldn't be forgotten. That language may turn out to be the tongue of an unknown tribe, race, or species: perhaps one that's arrived from parts unknown bent on conquest.

Ignatius of Loyola

Military Man and Agent of the Pope

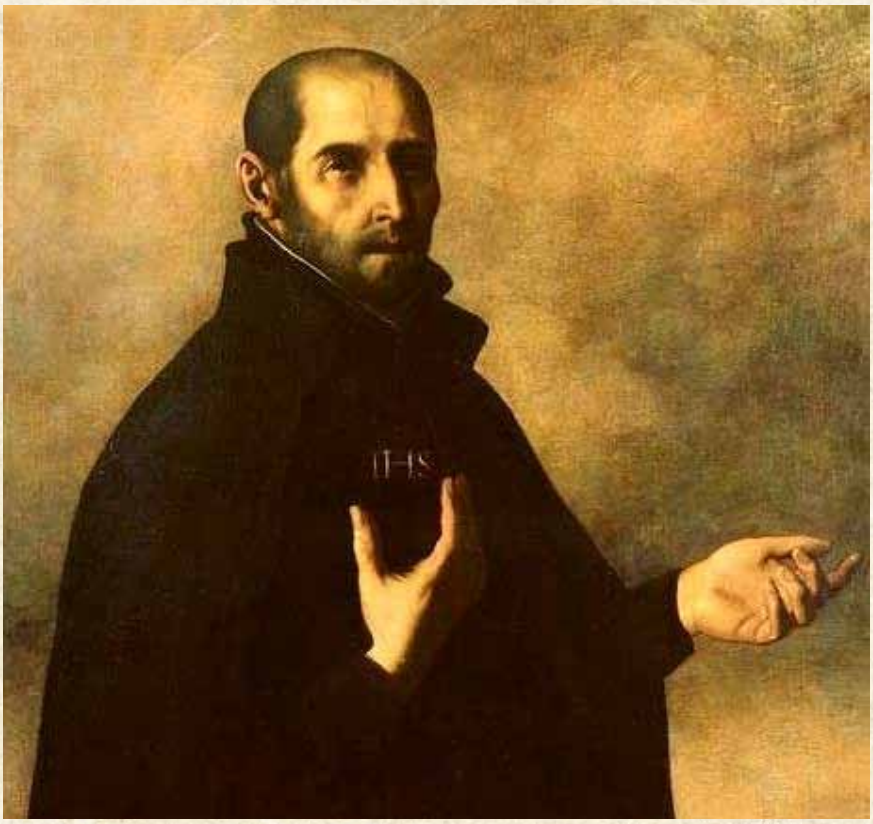
The founder of the Jesuit Order, Ignatius of Loyola was a sixteenth-century knight and man of the cloth. He was born to a noble Basque family, and fought for Spain in several wars. He went on to establish one of the Catholic Church's most important religious orders.

Ignatius spent his early youth at court, involved in all sorts of exciting debauchery, but he soon became a knight. He loved the culture of knighthood: not just the fighting and killing, but also the cult of chivalry, with all the books, songs, and stories about chivalric ideals. While fighting the French at age 30, a cannonball tore open his leg and broke it terribly. The treatment he received succeeded at not killing him, but was otherwise fairly incompetent. At one point, a length of bone protruding from Ignatius' leg had to be sawed off. The injury effectively ended his career as a knight, but the warrior's ideals of obedience and discipline stayed with him for the rest of his life.

While Ignatius was recuperating, he found himself with a lot of time on his hands. With no chivalric literature to be found, he turned to reading Catholic texts, especially those about the lives of saints. He admired the courage and heroism depicted in these stories of martyrs and miracle workers, and through the saints' warrior-like virtues he came to be a devout Catholic. He especially admired the founders of religious orders that went out into the world to minister to the people and combat wickedness. Ignatius began to have visions. He made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and developed an appreciation for the world outside of Spain. Ignatius decided to become a priest, and while training for the office, was detained for a time by the Spanish Inquisition for his unconventional thoughts about the Catholic Church.

Eventually, Ignatius came to Paris. Here, he and a few friends founded the Jesuit Order. Their official name was the Societas Jesu (the Society

of Jesus), but Ignatius originally referred to them as the "Company of Jesus," for in those days military companies were named for their commanding officer. Members of Ignatius' small order preached to the faithful, but also worked in hospitals, established orphanages, and founded a house for former prostitutes; they were doing the difficult acts of mercy. The Jesuits were highly educated, not just in theology, but also in math and science. And they regularly incorporated schooling into their charity work, like housing street urchins and educating them.



Ignatius demanded complete obedience from his Jesuits. He once wrote, quite literally, that if something looks white, but the Church says it is black, you should also say it is black. Beyond the usual vows of religious orders, the Jesuits swore (and still swear) a special vow to obey the will of the pope in all things. As Jesuits were exempt from the authority of local bishops, they deferred only to their superiors in the order and to the pope himself. Because of this, they frequently served as special agents of the papacy. During the counter-reformation, Jesuits fought Protestantism, and they evangelized in non-Christian nations and regions like Goa, Japan, and the Americas.

At your table, you can probably insert priests or clerics based on the Jesuits just about anywhere, either doing charity work or evangelizing to the heathens. Whether the PCs wind up working for or against this organized, disciplined network of clergy, there will be someone like Ignatius of Loyola commanding them. Even if you choose not to include the Jesuit Order, Ignatius himself still would work well as a priest or holy man. His history as a knight might make him appealing or familiar to martial PCs. He may show up in the PCs' town, trying to found an orphanage. Once the PCs take to trusting him, Ignatius may try to enlist their help in some more adventurous acts of mercy.

José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia

First Dictator of Paraguay; Mad Genius

Though they often consider it a cardinal virtue, most dictatorships really aren't very efficient. Nazi Germany was a squabbling mass of rival departments, kept that way intentionally by Hitler to prevent a coup. The Soviet Union never really figured out how to make a planned economy work. And the trains ran on time in Fascist Italy mostly because the previous government had reformed the system.

But under Dr. Francia, Paraguay maintained its splendid isolation from the rest of Latin America and the world. Paraguay in the early 19th century was a land ruled by a dictator who read Voltaire, Rosseau and Robespierre, personally surveyed the streets of Asuncion and returned much of his salary to the public treasury.

Francia was born in 1766 to a Paraguayan mother and a Brazillian father in a town near Asuncion, Paraguay's capital. He earned a doctorate of theology at the University of Cordoba, a Franciscan university in Argentina, and became

involved in the politics of the colony in the early 1800s. By 1809, he was the council head of Asuncion, the highest position a criollo (a white person born in the colonies and not in Spain) could aspire to.

But only two years later, Paraguay declared independence from Spain (the Spanish, facing problems in more lucrative and accessible colonies, largely ignored this) and Dr. Francia was part of the ruling junta. After a falling-out with the other members and some deft political maneuvering (he first compromised with a power-sharing agreement with the junta, then used his support among the masses to defeat them), he established himself as "el Supremo," near-absolute dictator of Paraguay, by 1814. He maintained this position until his death in 1840.

Francia, upon gaining power, had two main enemies: the criollo elites and the powerful Catholic Church in Paraguay. He struck against the first (a numerically small elite in a largely Guarani and mestizo population) by mandating racial intermarriage: someone of Spanish descent could not marry another ethnic Spaniard. Francia seemed to be anti-marriage in general, in fact: he placed high taxes on marriages, had several illegitimate children, and declared prostitution "a noble profession" whose members should wear gold combs in their hair (a mockery of a popular style among wealthy creoles at the time).

Francia was virulently anti-clerical, perhaps because of his admiration for the Jacobins. During his reign, he broke the power of the Church in Paraguay by becoming its local head, seizing church lands, and disbanding the Inquisition and the monasteries. A nation that in the 1600s had been ruled by the Jesuits now had a church subservient to El Supremo.

Like many dictators, Dr. Francia decided that isolating Paraguay from the outside world would be the best way to preserve the country. Heavy tariffs were placed on all imports except books and military supplies, and trade was only allowed through a single border town. The main export was maté– a kind of tea popular in South America, exported as a state monopoly and the source of most of the government's finances. The difference between Paraguay and, say, North Korea was that Paraguay was fairly prosperous by all accounts: agricultural and local industry were growing (to the extent that Paraguay was one of the early industrializing countries in Latin America, until the Triple Alliance War (see page 213) intervened), and the average citizen was happy with the regime. And the country was hardly completely isolated: foreigners were allowed to visit (but if Francia found them interesting and worth keeping around, he would sometimes imprison them for years as his "guests"), books were imported (including those of the dictator's critics, which he put in the public library) and some level of trade and diplomacy was carried out.

In his later years, Francia became a more frightening and less comic-opera figure. He grew paranoid about conspiracies against his rule, especially after a real plot was uncovered in 1820. His secret police, known as the "hairy feet" for their stealth, infiltrated all levels of Paraguayan society. Flogging was abolished, but all executions were carried out in view of Francia's window, by bayonet in order to save bullets. When he walked down the street, all pedestrians had to throw themselves to the ground so that they couldn't attack him, and no one was allowed to approach him within six paces. When he died in 1840, he first burned all his papers and then lay down to accept death, even attacking his doctor with his sabre to avoid treatment.

Your PCs could certainly end up "guests" of Dr. Francia or an analogue, and have to escape. Or they could be involved in smuggling items or prisoners in or out of the country. Francia can provide a moral dilemma as well: he's a mad dictator, but he really is building up the country while much of the rest of Latin America is in chaos. Would it be right to overthrow him?

KUBLAI KHAN

Conqueror of China, Consolidator of Empire

Genghis Khan (see page 126) organized the Mongol tribes into a terrifyingly effective fighting force, and led them out to conquer the great cities of Central Asia and Northern China. His descendants stormed the Abbasid Caliphate and Russia, only stopping in Poland in 1241 because the khans had to go back to Mongolia to elect a new leader.

By the election of Kublai Khan, the fifth leader of the Mongol Khanate, in 1259, the Mongols looked to have reached the limits of expansion. Pushing further into Europe might be possible, but it was a long, long way from the center of Mongol power. The Egyptians defeated Mongol troops in the Negev (though only after most of the horde had gone home for the election), and were almost as far away as Western Europe besides. India was a possible target, but it was across treacherous deserts and mountains. This left only the Song Dynasty in southern China, which had been Kublai's intended target before he became Great Khan.

Kublai Khan decided to focus the resources of the Mongol Empire on storming China south of the Yangtze river. This would be a difficult task – the Song Dynasty had vast trading cities like Hangzhou (see page 73), gunpowder weapons, and giant cannon-armed paddle-wheel ships guarding its major rivers. It had a population of 70 million people, and a nascent industrial base. By the time of Kublai's ascension, the Mongols had gunpowder weapons as well, and had learned much about siegecraft, but the fight against the Song remained a stalemate.

Kublai used the Mongols' advantage of being able to draw knowledge from around their continent-spanning empire. He brought in Persian engineers to build gigantic

counterweight trebuchets (unknown in China at the time), and captured the city of Xiangyang in an epic three-year siege from 1268 to 1271. With a foothold across the Yangtze, the Mongol armies spread out across Song China quickly, and the last Song resistance was defeated in a massive naval battle around Guangzhou in 1279.

As he conquered China, Kublai Khan was also trying to appear more Chinese to his foreign subjects. He moved the Mongol capital from Karakorum to Beijing, built his famous "pleasure-dome" at Xanadu (today Dolon Nor, in Inner Mongolia), and declared himself emperor of the new Yuan Dynasty. This was very unpopular with the traditionalist Mongols in Central Asia, and may have contributed to the eventual division of Mongol lands, as the Ilkhanate (in present-day Persia) and the Khanate of the Golden Horde (in Central Asia, Russia and the Caucasus) went their separate ways in the 1300s. But it cemented Mongol rule over China, which so impressed Marco Polo when he visited the region in the 1280s.

Further campaigns of conquest were largely unsuccessful – though the Mongols forced Burma and Vietnam to pay tribute (and introduced a taste for beef in North Vietnam), two invasions of Japan and one of the island of Java failed miserably. Much of Eurasia entered a "Pax Mongoliaca" (though in Central Asia it was more because no one was left alive to fight), and trade and cultural diffusion flourished. China began to recover from the Mongol conquests, with its conquerors having long since decided that taxation was more lucrative than massacre.

The Khan himself was in many ways still a typical barbarian warlord: celebrating with elaborate hunts and massive feasts, prone to drunkenness and gluttony, and generally allowing his subordinates to run the empire without too much interference. Though the government did little to meddle with trade or daily life, it was not supported by the Chinese people – foreign occupations rarely are. The Yuan Dynasty raised hackles by abolishing civil service examinations, setting up Mongols as a ruling class, installing other Central Asian peoples as the main administrators, and privileging Buddhism (especially Tibetan Buddhism) over other local religions. The Black Death proved to be the end of Mongol rule in China, as the Ming Dynasty took power in a peasant revolt.

In your game, the siege of Xiangyang could be a spectacular set-piece battle, with plots and counter-plots whichever side your PCs are on. Or your campaign could be based on the travels of Marco Polo, and include a meeting (perhaps a hunt?) with the Great Khan. Alternatively, your PCs could be traditionalist Mongols revolting against rule from Beijing on the steppes of Mongolia.

LAMACHUS

Fearless, Working-Class General

Lamachus, son of Xenophanes, was an Athenian general in the 5th century BC, most notable for his service in the Peloponnesian War. In a time when generals were publicly elected and typically wealthy, Lamachus was in many ways a professional soldier, dependent on his general's salary to pay for basic needs.

Lamachus' military prowess was highly regarded in Athens. The contemporary playwright Aristophanes unironically compares Lamachus to the mythic heroes Teucer and Patroclus. The Roman biographer Plutarch, presumably drawing on older sources, describes him as a stout-hearted soldier, fearless in battle. Indeed, his skills as a warrior are proven by his surviving at least twenty-one years of more or less constant warfare, fighting on the front lines beside his men. His long career also speaks highly of his skills as a commander; the Athenian assembly had a habit of executing or exiling officers that displeased them. During all that time, he only had one recorded military failure, and that was due to natural disaster.

Lamachus was also very poor. When he submitted his expense reports after a campaign (turns out those are as old as time), he would often claim expenses for his clothes and shoes. This poverty tended to reduce his prestige and authority: a dangerous state for a general, as we shall see.

Lamachus first appears in the historical record as a commander in the Black Sea. Lamachus was given thirteen ships and a land force with which to depose the king of the city-state of Sinope. He was successful in his mission, and the reins of power were handed over to the Sinopian people. It's worth noting that the Athenians did not do this out of the goodness of their hearts: once the Sinopians were freed, they passed important pro-Athenian legislation.

Lamachus' most notable military campaign was the doomed Athenian expedition to the mighty city-state of Syracuse, in Sicily. The Athenian assembly elected three co-generals to head the mission: Lamachus, the deceitful Alcibiades, and the ever-cautious Nikias. Lamachus urged an immediate attack on Syracuse, before the city could muster its defenses. In hindsight, this was absolutely the right decision, but Alcibiades and Nikias rejected the plan. Therefore, Lamachus sided with Alcibiades' idea to gather allies before assaulting Syracuse. Ultimately, the expedition failed to find many allies, but this gave plenty of time for the Syracusans to heavily reinforce their city. During this time, co-general Alcibiades was arrested for impiety, leaving Lamachus and Nikias in command of the expedition. Because Nikias was an aristocrat, Lamachus deferred to his decisions, effectively handing command of the force over to Nikias.

Lamachus died as he lived: a warrior and a general. He was leading an attack on a Syracusan fortification that was still under construction. The battle began with spears, but devolved into a melee, as men hacked at each other with short swords, polearms forgotten. The Syracusan forces broke, and the Athenians pursued, but lost formation. Lamachus found himself cut off from the bulk of his men when the famed Syracusan cavalry arrived. The Syracusan commander called Lamachus to single combat, and the Athenian accepted. The Syracusan was fresh and rested, and armed with a short spear. Lamachus was tired and armed only with a sword, his spear dropped by the wall. When they closed, the Syracusan dealt Lamachus a deathblow. Lamachus, ignoring the wound, stepped inside the Syracusan's guard and returned it. They both died on a hill overlooking Syracuse.

Lamachus can be used as a military officer in virtually any setting, but works especially well in societies that have clear social distinctions between the rich and the poor.

Most of Lamachus' life can be easily adapted to your game. Most RPGs have a use for competent, fearless military officers. Lamachus' deposing of the king of Sinope could be made into any sort of imperialistic military expedition, from replacing the ruler of a sovereign state to putting down a rebellion in a vassal state so as to allow a friendly faction to regain control.

It could be especially fun to have your PCs meet your Lamachus during his siege of a Syracuse-equivalent. The story of Lamachus at Syracuse is particularly compelling, but works because he was not the only general. As shared commands are not common, consider replacing his co-generals Alcibiades and Nikias with a political officer, a royal emissary, a priest, or even an abstract concept like "the will of the people."

LEONIDAS
Smack-Talking Warrior King

King Leonidas of Sparta, best known as the protagonist of the movie 300, was a hero of the second Persian war and a stone-cold badass. Though he died at the battle of Thermopylae, he left behind a legacy of astonishing courage and sacrifice.

Sparta was a strange city, even by the standards of classical Greece. It was ruled by two kings of theoretically equal authority. The tiny upper class of citizens were supported by an enormous underclass of helots, whose condition combined the worst aspects of slavery and serfdom. With the helots performing the duties a society actually needed to function, the male citizens were freed up to focus entirely on warfare. These men, called Spartiates, spent their entire lives becoming the best soldiers in Greece. The system was self-sustaining. The helots were disgusted with their lives, and were constantly rebelling. The Spartiates, then, were constantly putting down helot revolts. This forced the Spartiates to become even better soldiers, which only put more pressure on the helots. The training for Spartiates was incredibly brutal, and the 'final exam' was for each young teen to stalk and kill a helot.

Leonidas was never supposed to be king. Though he was the son of one of the two kings, and thus a descendant of Heracles, he had two older brothers. But both died without heirs, and Leonidas ascended to the throne. When word reached the Greeks that Xerxes, Shah of the Persian Empire and King of Kings, was marching on them with an enormous army, Leonidas was made general of the infantry of the united Greeks. While the Athenian-led fleet kept Persian ships away from Greece, Leonidas was charged with stopping the enemy army at a place called Thermopylae. At the battle were not only the famous 300 Spartiates, but also some 5,400 more soldiers from across Greece. And though the Greeks lost at Thermopylae (due to the actions of a traitorous local), the example of Leonidas and his men fighting to the death for their state and way of life has come down through the ages as a moral lesson.

Given the over-the-top nature of the movie 300, one might expect its tough-guy one-liners to be a modern invention. In fact, if anything, they were toned down. Here are some of Leonidas' best (rephrased to keep the punch of the original text):

"Eat your breakfast as if tonight you will dine in Hell."

On being told he was taking too few men to Thermopylae: "Too many for this job."

On being asked if the Spartans planned anything other than just stopping the Persians: "Mostly that, but expecting to die for the Greeks."

On being told, "They are near to us": "Then we are also near to them."

On being told the Persians were so numerous their arrows would blot out the sun: "Good. We will fight in the shade." (also attributed to Dieneces)

And (my personal favorite), on being told by the Persians, "Hand over your weapons": "Come and get them."

At your table, a smack-talking warrior king could make a really great ally – or even opponent. Sometimes, it can be fun to have your players go up against an enemy they genuinely like and look forward to encountering. However, you could take a completely different tack on Leonidas. There's an inherent contradiction wrapped up in his sacrifice at Thermopylae. He laid down his own life (and those of his men) for the freedom of Greece. Yet the vast majority of people in his own city were not free. The Spartan system of helots went far, far beyond the ordinary Greek acceptance of slavery and misogyny. Exploring Leonidas' complicated relationship with freedom might be really fun.

Mannerheim
Marshal of Finland

Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim was born in 1867 to a Swedish-speaking aristocratic family in (then Russian) Finland. He entered the Russian Army as a cavalry officer in 1889, and soon became part of the elite Chevalier Guard regiment, due to his imposing six-foot one-and-one-half inch height. He first saw combat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, and was promoted to colonel for his bravery at the siege of Mukden (Shenyang).

From 1906 to 1908, Mannerheim served as an undercover agent of the Tsar across Asia. He rode from St. Petersburg to Beijing reporting on conditions in Central Asia, Tibet, and China. Russia and Britain were struggling for control of central Asia in "the Great Game," and the Russian government wanted to know more about conditions in Xinjiang, to see if an invasion would be possible. In Tibet, Mannerheim gave his pistol to the Dalai Lama as a symbol of Russian support for resistance against Chinese and/or British control of the mountainous land.

Mannerheim fought in the First World War as a cavalry officer and was promoted to lieutenant general. Kerensky's government didn't trust his loyalty, however, and Mannerheim retired in Finland at the end of 1917. He probably thought his military career was over, but even at the age of 50 it was just beginning.

In January 1918, Mannerheim assumed command of the nascent Finnish government's armed forces. Finland was facing a miniature version of the Russian Civil War (see page 200) as anti-Communist and Communist forces fought for control. The war was brief – lasting about four months – but left a legacy of political division and mistrust between the left and right in Finland. Mannerheim himself was concerned by the government's alignment towards Germany, and resigned soon after the peace. He was involved in politics briefly after the war, but distrusted and disliked the democratic process. To his credit, he refused to act as dictator when the far right asked him to in 1929. In the 1930s, he advocated modernizing the military and

forming an alliance with Sweden, but was largely unsuccessful.

In 1939 the Soviet Union, having made a deal with Germany to carve up Eastern Europe, demanded portions of Finland ostensibly to protect Leningrad from invasion. The Finns stubbornly refused, and the Winter War began, with Mannerheim back in command. The Soviets expected to march to Helsinki in two weeks, and even brought along a motorized brass band for the victory parade. But even for Russians, it's no joke to fight in Finland in the winter. The "Mannerheim Line" of defenses in the south held out against superior numbers. Finnish ski troops skated along the snowfields while attacking Soviets slogged through them. Simo Hayha, known as the White Death, became the world's greatest sniper. And Mannerheim held the country together. In the end, the Finns were defeated by sheer weight of numbers – but the Soviets gave up on plans they'd entertained at the start of the war to set up a puppet government, and settled for fairly minor territorial demands.

When the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Finland declared a "continuation war" to reclaim its lost territories. Mannerheim now had a delicate role to play: how could he stay a German ally without becoming a German puppet? He refused to take command of German troops in Finland, and secretly negotiated with the Western Allies, agreeing in 1941 not to attack the Murmansk railway that was essential for Allied lend-lease to the Soviets. He and the Finnish government in general also refused to persecute Finland's small Jewish population, though eight Jewish foreign nationals were handed over to the Nazis.

By 1943, it was clear that the Nazis were going to lose the war, and Mannerheim faced a dilemma: if Finland left the war too soon, Germany would retaliate. But if Finland stayed in the war too long, the Soviets would overrun it. In mid-1944, Mannerheim was elected President of Finland by an extraordinary session of Parliament, and began officially negotiating with the Soviets. The peace terms were harsh – giving the world the term "Finlandization" to describe a great power forcing a minor power to remain neutral by threat of overwhelming force – but allowed Finland to keep its independence, unlike the rest of Eastern Europe. After the war, there was some talk of including Mannerheim in war crimes trials of Axis leaders, but nothing came of it (largely because Stalin deeply respected Finland's Marshal). He died in 1951, and was named "The Greatest Finn of All Time" by a recent Finnish poll.

Mannerheim's iron will and leadership make him an excellent template for a successful general in any time period. His many resignations and returns to service could give him the air of a grizzled police captain, too old for his job but getting pulled back into it by his sense of duty. Alternatively, your PCs could meet middle-aged Mannerheim undercover in China and work to help or hinder his mission.

GEORGE PATTON
Relentless Tank Commander

General George S. Patton was one of the most important American generals of the Second World War. He was generally considered to be an able general, a relentless fighter, and a man both blunt and coarse.

During the campaign against Mexican bandit Pancho Villa, then-Lieutenant Patton led the US's first attack involving armored vehicles. After racing to a bandit hideout, Patton leapt from his vehicle with a six-shooter, followed by his men. Charged by three rifle-wielding bandits on horseback, the Americans fought back, killing all three. Patton hit each of the bandits during the fight, and killed the horse out from under one. The corpses of the bandits were tied to the hoods of the American's armored cars and driven back to the local army headquarters to confirm their identities.

In the First World War, then-Captain Patton was at first an adjutant to General Pershing, but was unhappy with his job, and sought out a position with the then-novel tanks, becoming the first American officially assigned to tank duty. The

ambitious Patton noted, "If [tanks] are a success, I may have the chance I have always been looking for." His demanding, foul-mouthed nature made him a number of enemies in the new tank corps; Patton once wrote (jokingly) to his wife, "I expect some of them would like to poison me." He saw action in France, and was both promoted to colonel and decorated for extreme gallantry and risk of life.

In the Second World War, Patton's forces advanced farther, captured more enemy prisoners, and liberated more territory in less time than any other army in human history. He insisted upon constant advances, with the goal of not surrendering the initiative to the enemy. One soldier recounted, "Patton had a theory that the Germans didn't shoot as well on the run. That's why he never wanted to stop." The General argued, "Whenever you slow anything down, you waste human lives." Patton regularly misinterpreted orders so that he could take more ground more quickly.

Patton's service in World War Two was not without controversy. He is alleged to have covered up the massacre of Italian prisoners of war. And in one particularly notorious incident in an evacuation hospital, he struck two soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress. At the time, the disorder was little-understood and not popularly accepted; Patton believed the men were malingering and ordered them sent back to the front. He later apologized.

Perhaps the best-known moment in Patton's life is the speech he gave before the Normandy invasion (paraphrased in the George C. Scott movie, Patton), and we would be remiss not to give you a quote. Here's a choice excerpt: "I don't want to get any messages saying, 'I am holding my position.' We are not holding a goddamn thing. Let the Germans do that. We are advancing constantly and we are not interested in holding on to anything, except the enemy's balls. We are going to twist his balls and kick the living shit out of him all of the time. Our basic plan of operation is to advance and to keep on advancing regardless of whether we have to go over, under, or through the enemy. We are going to go through him like crap through a goose; like shit through a tin horn!"

General Patton was paralyzed in an automobile accident shortly after the end of World War Two. He died of his injuries twelve days later. He was buried in the same graveyard as the men he commanded.

In your games, Patton is an excellent choice for an NPC general. He's hardly a shining white knight, which your players may appreciate, but he probably fits better on the protagonist's side of the war. His brash and coarse personality will make him a memorable character, and his distinctive strategy of constant advance will make him a memorable commander. Note that a Patton-analogue NPC would probably fare disastrously in any war involving diplomacy or winning the hearts and minds of foreign civilians.

Paul the Apostle

Enormously Influential Preacher

Paul, sometimes called the Father of the Church, was an extraordinarily important figure in the early history of Christianity. He was an itinerant preacher who never met Jesus, but he founded Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean. His letters are the earliest Christian documents to have survived, and the story of his ministry is the earliest surviving account of the beginnings of organized Christianity.

Paul (born Saul of Tarsus) was not always a Christian. Though a Jew, he was a Roman citizen: a mark of status in the Roman Empire. Saul was a great persecutor of Christians. He imprisoned and aided in the executions of many Christian martyrs, including the very first one. However, while on the road to Damascus, Saul saw a vision of blinding light, and heard a voice that identified itself as Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" After this event, Saul converted and changed his name. His new focus was to spread Christianity throughout the eastern Mediterranean, founding Christian communities as he went.

We mostly know about these communities from the letters Paul sometimes wrote to them years later. If he received word that one of the groups he founded was straying from proper teachings, he would write them a letter advising them on what to do. This advice has been hugely influential in shaping what we would think of as conventional Christian morality. Many of the letters contain advice like "stop sleeping with your stepmother," or "stop thinking you're better than everyone just because you can speak in tongues." It's worth noting that some of the Biblical letters of Paul are, according to scholars, almost certainly not by Paul himself, but rather by others writing under his name after his death. This suggests he was so well-regarded in his day that people trying to say something important would adopt his name as a pseudonym.

Paul was a Jew, but he primarily preached to gentiles (non-Jews). This preference alienated many Christians, who felt one had to be a Jew in order to be a Christian. All the earliest Christians were Jews, including Jesus: they were circumcised and followed the laws of the Torah. But the insistence of many Christians that only Jews could be baptized was really hurting their evangelism efforts. Few gentiles wanted to adopt Jewish dietary restrictions, and as for circumcision, forget about it. But Paul strongly advocated letting gentiles be baptized without their first converting to Judaism. The question was eventually settled at a council where all the big names in the early Church gathered in Jerusalem to settle the matter. They ruled in favor of Paul.

Like most in the early Church, Paul operated under the assumption that the Second Coming of Christ – and thus the end of the world – would happen very soon, probably in Paul's lifetime.

This may help explain why the communities Paul founded kept having so many problems; if the apocalypse is around the corner, there's not much point in establishing institutions to resolve matters of doctrine and proper action. This apocalyptic belief is also reflected in the Gospels. Consider Matthew 16:28: "Verily I say unto you, there will be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." The verse has since been reinterpreted as a reference to eternal life through salvation, rather than the impending apocalypse.

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem after he angered the locals by entering the Temple. The locals felt Paul was a heretic against Judaism and had no place at the holy site. They beat him with chains, and were going to kill him, but some Roman soldiers intervened, and Paul was arrested instead. While he sat in prison, some 40 people plotted to kill him, but the guard was notified and Paul was saved. He appealed his case to Rome, as was his right as a citizen. We don't know much about what happened to him after that, but Christian tradition states he was beheaded outside Rome for refusing to renounce his faith.

At your table, Paul would make an excellent wandering preacher. Play him as a troublemaker. He's traveling around, upsetting the established order, and warning people about an impending apocalypse. Importantly, while your Paul may aggravate the authorities to the point where they try to make him disappear, he doesn't do anything actually harmful. Heroic PCs may even want to spring the imprisoned Paul from jail.

PROCOPIUS
Bitter Court Historian

Last of the great ancient historians, Procopius is our best source for events in the Byzantine empire under the reign of Justinian I, including the Nika Riots (see page 192) and the reconquest of Italy (see page 97). His 'day job', as it were, was as an advisor to one of Justinian's greatest generals. Despite his great achievements as a historian, Procopius nursed a secret resentment of his imperial masters. He eventually expressed his anger by writing a scandalous tell-all book, The Secret History.

Procopius' greatest work was his Wars of Justinian. They cover the emperor's campaigns against the Persians, the barbarian Vandals in north Africa, and the Ostrogoths in Italy. Procopius had clearly read the great historians, geographers, orators, and poets, and mixed this knowledge with his own personal experience as an observer of Byzantine wars and politics. His writing style deliberately mirrored the styles of classical Greek authors of 900 years before.

This was very different from his Buildings of Justinian. The tone here is wearying in its effusive praise of Justinian's wisdom and ability. The work is believed to have been written at the behest of the emperor or to stave off suspicions of disloyalty. Though it's not clear whether Procopius wrote the Buildings of Justinian before or after the Secret History, the fact that a scholar of Procopius' caliber had to write this tripe goes far to explain the bitterness that drove him to write The Secret History.

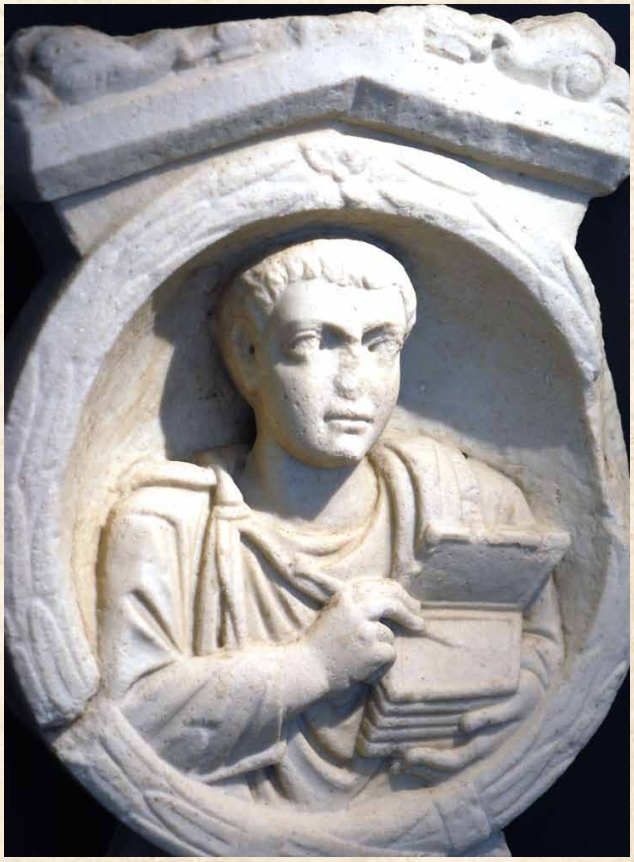
The Secret History purports to be a tell-all of the secrets of the Byzantine court. Procopius had it published posthumously. Had it been distributed during his lifetime, he likely would have been exiled or worse. In it, Procopius tells wild stories about Justinian and Empress Theodora (see page 156). How much you choose to believe is up to you, but much of the book is known to be cribbed from other authors discussing other people, and some claims are physically impossible.

Just for fun, what follows are some chapter titles from the book. "Justice for Sale." "How Justinian Killed a Trillion People." "Other Incidents Revealing Him as a Liar and a Hypocrite." And, most amusingly, "Proving that Justinian and Theodora Were Actually Fiends in Human Form."

The Secret History includes the claim that Justinian and Theodora were not humans, "but veritable demons, and what the poets call vampires; who laid their heads together to see how they could most easily and quickly destroy the race and deeds of men." Procopius offered as support that Justinian's mother claimed he was fathered by an incubus, that he kept odd hours, never remained seated for long, and did not eat meals conventionally. A monk once refused to enter Justinian's palace, claiming "he saw the King of the Devils sitting on the throne in the palace." One man saw Justinian's head vanish "while the rest of his body seemed to ebb and flow." Another saw Justinian's face change "into a shapeless mass of flesh, with neither eyebrows nor eyes in their proper places."

Unsurprisingly, the most famous sections of The Secret History are the (frankly pornographic) descriptions of Empress Theodora. "Often, she would go picnicking with ten young men or more, in the flower of their strength and virility, and dallied with them all, the whole night through. When they wearied of the sport, she would approach their servants, perhaps thirty in number, and fight a duel with each of these; and even thus found no allayment of her craving. ... And though she flung wide three gates to the ambassadors of Cupid, she lamented that nature had not similarly unlocked the straits of her bosom, that she might there have contrived a further welcome to his emissaries." Just to make it clear, that last bit means, simply, "Three holes were not enough."

If your PCs need dirt on the king, his bitter court historian could be a fantastic source. It could be even more fun if the PCs need to sift through Procopius' claims to distinguish useful pieces of blackmail from fanciful lies. You could even throw in a twist where some of the obvious lies turn out to be true! Theodora may be quite content with only three holes, but Justinian really is a shape-changing vampire and King of the Devils!



Robert Robinson

Quintessential Fish out of Water in the Soviet Union

Robert Robinson was born in Jamaica in 1907. He moved with his parents to Cuba shortly after his birth, and his father abandoned the family when he was six years old. Robinson studied toolmaking as a teenager in Cuba, and came to the United States to find work in 1923. Initially going to Harlem, New York City, he was unable to find work as an engineer. So he, like many others, traveled to Detroit to find work at the Ford Motor Company.

Though Ford refused to hire him as a toolmaker because of his race, he was able to start as a floor sweeper and get into Ford's technical school, and thus become Ford's first black toolmaker. Though his supervisors and fellow workers continually tried to undermine him, refusing him on-the-job training and sabotaging his machine after hours, he was able to thrive at Ford until 1930.

In the spring of 1930, Soviet factory managers came to Ford looking for volunteers to come to Russia and teach toolmaking and other skilled industrial jobs there. With the Soviets offering good pay and the US entering the Great Depression, Robinson left for the Soviet Union in summer 1930.

At first, the job seemed like a dream come true. There was no segregation in Russia, no matter how much this annoyed some of the other Americans with Robinson. Though the country's poverty was obvious – most grocery stores had only black bread and jars of mustard (which were for some reason omnipresent) for sale – the engineers were well taken care of and were certainly not shown the horrors of the agricultural collectivization campaign.

Robinson worked two years in a tractor factory in Stalingrad (today Volgograd, once Tsaritsyn). With his pay, he was able to bring his mother to New York from Cuba, and was able to visit her in 1933. But then came a shock: in 1934, Robinson was elected a member of the Moscow Soviet by his

factory. The State Department was outraged, and demanded he return to America immediately – where it would be nigh-impossible for him to get a job, having been declared a "coal-black protege of Joseph Stalin" by Time.

A few weeks later, Robinson was given a medal by the Soviet government for inventing a time-saving device for his factory. Now there were speeches attacking him in Congress, and Robinson was sure he couldn't go home, even if it meant the revocation of his citizenship. The die was cast – he became a Soviet citizen and entered engineering school.

In the late 1930s, the Great Purge began in the Soviet Union. The majority of the foreigners who Robinson knew were arrested and were never seen again. Robinson was interrogated by the NKVD, but escaped arrest with only his old labor contracts taken. By July 1941, out of 362 foreigners working in the ball bearing factory in 1932, only 2 were left.

In WWII, Robinson escaped being drafted because of his poor eyesight (and probably because he was doing useful industrial work). He suffered great privations in the war, especially because he still was not a member of the Communist Party. After the war, he annually applied for an exit visa and was turned down every year.

In the late 1940s, he was recruited to act in a propaganda film about racism in the American South. Robinson tried to explain the massive distortions of the film, but he was largely ignored. Robinson generally found racism in Russia to worsen from the '30s to the '60s, as the internationalist attitudes of the early '30s hardened into Russian nationalism – made worse by the fact that no one would admit the existence of any prejudice.

Eventually, Robinson found a way out. Through contacts among African students in Moscow, he befriended the Ugandan ambassador to the USSR. In 1974, Robinson finally arrived in Uganda, and was personally welcomed by dictator Idi Amin.

Robinson taught at a technical college in Kampala for several years, but still had trouble returning to the United States – especially since Amin wanted to keep him in Uganda. With help from an American diplomat whom he'd met in Moscow in the 1950s, Robinson was finally able to return to the US in 1980, and regain his citizenship in 1986. He had spent 44 years in the Soviet Union, and had a nearly unique life in many ways.

In your game, Robert Robinson could be an interesting NPC if some of the action happens in the USSR – or, in the 1980s, he could be a useful source of information for US spies planning to infiltrate Russia. The fact that he went to the Soviet Union for economic, not political reasons, along with many others, is also an interesting historical tidbit for games in the '20s and '30s.

SHAKA ZULU

Innovative, Bloodthirsty Conqueror

Shaka, known in the West as Shaka Zulu, was a South African chieftain and military commander in the early 19th century. He cut a mighty figure: six foot three and heavily muscled, with white oxtails hanging from his wrists and ankles and a kilt of fur straps. Shaka was intelligent, friendly, and capable of great generosity. But he was also power-hungry and had little respect for human life.

For a man of such greatness, Shaka had an inauspicious childhood. At the time of his birth in 1787, the Zulus were an obscure tribe of 1,500. Nine months earlier, his father, the chief, dallied with a girl from another tribe. When he heard the girl was pregnant, he dismissed it, saying she was suffering from parasites (in Zulu, iShaka). When the child was born, the Zulu chief was requested to come get his iShaka. The moniker stuck; Shaka's own name was an insult. At age six, Shaka and his mother were expelled from the village. They spent ten miserable years without a stable home. When they finally found a village, it was that of Dingiswayo, chief of the Metetwa tribe. The sixteen year-old Shaka quickly became the head herd boy, and once even killed a leopard single-handedly to defend the tribe's cattle.

Dingiswayo organized his youths into age-based military cohorts. When Shaka was called up at 21, he found the traditional style of warfare not to his liking. The two sides would stand opposite one another and hurl spears back and forth, while protecting themselves with large cowhide shields. The battle would continue until one side fled. While on campaign, Shaka developed a new tactic based on a new weapon: the iKlwa, a spear-sword hybrid with a two-foot handle and a one-foot blade. Spurning the throwing spear, Shaka would charge the enemy formation, sowing death in close combat. With Shaka as their champion, Dingiswayo's armies subdued many neighboring tribes.

As a reward for his loyal service, Dingiswayo gave Shaka ten cattle and command of 100 warriors. With these men, Shaka designed a new battle strategy: the buffalo formation. The "head" (main body) was supported on either side by the "horns" (flanking forces), and from behind by the "loins" (reserves). With this strategy, Shaka's men performed so well that Dingiswayo made Shaka head of his entire age cohort. Shaka's subsequent victories earned him prestige and wealth, which he shared with his men.

After the death of Shaka's father in 1816, Dingiswayo ordered Shaka to become the new chief of the Zulu tribe. With the convenient death of Shaka's brother, Shaka ascended to the throne, though he was still a vassal of Dingiswayo. In a taste of events to come, Shaka had those Zulus who had wronged him or his mother executed. As king, Shaka reorganized Zulu society on a war footing. He trained the young men in his novel weapon, tactics, and strategy. He had leave from Dingiswayo to wage war in his own name, and brought many neighboring tribes under his control, increasing the size of his armies. Shaka soon introduced another new idea to the region: total war. Tribes who agreed to follow Shaka

were spared. Those who resisted were completely annihilated.

Dingiswayo died in 1818, and Shaka took control of the entire Metetwa confederacy. Shaka obliterated the tribe that killed Dingiswayo, and spent the next ten years growing his kingdom. At the time of his death, Shaka ruled 250,000 people and commanded 50,000 disciplined warriors. Shaka ruled through terror, making good use of torture and mass executions. He killed any warrior suspected of weakness. He expelled all rainmakers, claiming their power for himself. For fear of creating a competitor, Shaka fathered no sons. Any concubine of his found to be pregnant was executed. After the death of his mother, he massacred thousands of people so that his subjects would mourn alongside him. The destruction Shaka created rippled outwards as tribes on the borders of his kingdom fled, displacing other groups and causing territorial wars. Shaka was finally assassinated in 1828. The Zulu kingdom survived Shaka's death, before being ultimately subjugated by the British in 1879.

In your game, Shaka may make an excellent nemesis for one of the PCs. Perhaps they were teenage rivals in your equivalent of Dingiswayo's village, and when the PC left to see the world, Shaka stayed behind to forge an empire. The party periodically bumps into the warlord, and every time they do, he's grown more powerful, and the PC's native culture more militarized. The first time the PCs meet Shaka, he's a great warrior with a new weapon and tactic. The second time, he's a general with a new strategy. The third, he's a chieftain. The fourth, a king. And every time the PCs see him, he has grown more clearly evil or insane.

Shoko Asahara

Mass-Murdering Cult Leader

Shoko Asahara is the founder and head of the cult Aum Shinrikyo, probably the best-known of the Japanese new religions (see page 191). Aum is infamous for carrying out a deadly terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995. Asahara is almost blind, but very charismatic. He has a bushy beard and long, flowing hair. He's short and chunky, almost cuddly. Before his arrest, people described him as affable, always smiling, and a good listener.

Asahara was born Chizuo Matsumoto on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu. He attended a school for the blind, but when he couldn't get into a university, he began working as an acupuncturist. He married a year later. At the time, Asahara was dabbling in astrology, yoga, Taoism, and Buddhism. He started a yoga training school, which over the course of five years evolved into the cult of Aum Shinrikyo. At first, he refused payment for his teachings, as he believed only those who had attained enlightenment should receive offerings. At age 32, he made a pilgrimage to the Himalayas and changed his name to Shoko Ashara. Under his direction, the cult started making money in computers, and secretly spending that money manufacturing narcotics, conducting chemical experiments, and buying Russian military helicopters for use in gas attacks. At about this time, Asahara was popular on TV variety shows. On one show, when asked by a teen how he washed his long hair, Asahara replied, "I use shampoos made for babies," to the delight of the audience.

The attack on the Tokyo subway was not Aum Shinrikyo's first horrifying act. They had repeatedly tried to buy and manufacture chemical weapons, and even went so far as to try to obtain a nuclear weapon. Asahara ordered the murders of an anti-Aum lawyer and his family and some backsliding cultists. In 1994, Aum murdered seven people in a botched attempt to kill a judge. And in 1995, Aum cultists boarded rush-hour Tokyo subway cars carrying plastic bags full of liquid nerve agent. They pierced the

bags with the tips of their umbrellas, allowing the neurotoxin to evaporate as lethal Sarin nerve gas. The attackers escaped, leaving thirteen dead and 6,300 wounded. Two months after the attack, Shoko Asahara was captured by police while meditating in a secret room full of cash. While Asahara's lawyers tried an insanity plea, psychiatric examinations determined Asahara was fit to stand trial. He was sentenced to death by hanging, though the sentence has yet to be carried out.

Aum Shinrikyo's beliefs are a mixture of Hindu, Buddhist, and Judeo-Christian teachings, combined with an unhealthy obsession with Armageddon. The word 'aum' is a sacred sound in Hinduism and Buddhism, while 'shinrikyo' means 'supreme truth.' Cultists were taught that Asahara is both Jesus and the reincarnation of Shiva, Hindu god of destruction and transformation. Asahara, it was said, can teach levitation and telepathy, and cultists could pay to drink his bathwater and blood. Asahara preached that Armageddon was coming in the form of nuclear wars launched by shadowy powers, but that he would save his followers. At its height, just before the subway attack, Aum Shinrikyo probably had 10,000 members. This was not Charles Manson's cult of rejects and failures: Asahara's cultists were some of the brightest young minds of Japan. Many were well-educated and wealthy. Most were just looking for something to believe in, some family they could join and feel accepted. And in Aum, they found it. The cult lives on today as two separate groups: Aleph (named for the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet), and the Circle of Rainbow Light.

It's unclear why exactly Asahara ordered the attack on the Tokyo subway. His cult's previous murders had always been to protect Aum. There is some suggestion he thought the subway attack would distract police attention from Aum, but that would be a very stupid motivation. It's also possible Asahara was trying to paralyze the Japanese government, and prove to the world's shadowy powers that Aum was ready for World War Three.

Shoko Asahara is useful as a villain because he is very human, yet completely disgusting and repulsive. Deeply evil villains are common enough, but rarely portrayed as relatable. Typically, they are psychologically demonic and inhuman, like the villain in a slasher film. And while it's common these days for villains to be portrayed as just as psychologically three-dimensional as you or I, these characters are typically only deeply flawed, rather than truly monstrous. Shoko Asahara, however, combines both features. His affable, cuddly nature humanizes him, but he's also a mass-murdering psychopath who purchased attack helicopters and manufactured nerve gas. If you use him at your table, consider playing up his media presence so the players can become familiar with him before he starts murdering people.

Silvio Berlusconi

Corrupt, Sexually-Motivated Politician

The longest-serving Prime Minster of Italy since World War Two, Silvio Berlusconi is also one of the richest men in the country. His business empire includes advertising, insurance, food, and construction, but he's best known for his media holdings, including Italy's three biggest private TV stations, a daily newspaper, and the country's largest publishing house. During his administration, his political appointees also controlled the three public TV channels. This was very handy for the Prime Minister, as he could effectively control the way he was portrayed in the media.

Berlusconi founded his own political party in 1993, and became Prime Minster the very next year. His first administration lasted less than a year, but by 2001 he had returned to power. As of this writing, Berlusconi has dominated Italian politics for nigh on 20 years. In 2008, he signed a controversial "friendship treaty" with Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. It promised Libya five billion dollars over 20 years as an apology for Italy's former colonial rule of Libya. Quite a lot of the attention of his administration was devoted to passing laws protecting him from numerous criminal charges, like a law that shortens the statute of limitations on fraud cases, and one granting senior government ministers temporary immunity from prosecution. He has a tendency to blame these criminal charges (and quite a lot of his political shortcomings) on shadowy communist enemies. This is quite ironic, considering his personal friendship with former KGB agent and President of Russia Vladimir Putin. In 2011, Berlusconi resigned as Prime Minister, after losing parliamentary elections due to the public's disgust over his handling of the Italian debt crisis.

As Prime Minister, Berlusconi has been involved in a staggering number of sex scandals. An escort was recorded saying she and other women were paid to attend "bunga bunga parties" at his house. We encourage you to use your own imagination as to what that means. Berlusconi has repeatedly put models and strippers in governmental positions of power for which they are wildly unqualified, allegedly in exchange for sexual favors. He has used his political power to try to keep his mistresses out of jail. His second wife divorced him after he was caught at the birthday party of an eighteen year-old aspiring model. Berlusconi's response to these charges is simply to deny that he has ever paid for sex.

Somehow, Berlusconi has managed to be involved in even more trials than he has sex scandals. In 2009, he estimated that he has made 2,500 court appearances in 106 trials over 20 years – a figure that would put him in court one day in three. Some of the more notable charges have been tax fraud, false bookkeeping, corruption, embezzlement, trying to bribe a judge, and paying for sex with an underage girl and covering it up. In his most recent case, Berlusconi is accused of paying inflated sums to buy rights to American films, and skimming money off the top to use as a slush fund. As of this writing, he has been found

guilty of tax fraud in the case, and sentenced to four years in jail, a ten million Euro fine, and a three-year ban on holding public office. The prison sentence was quickly reduced to one year. It's unclear whether Berlusconi will ever see the inside of a jail cell; the appeals process will take years. On one of his TV stations, Berlusconi claimed the judgement was politically motivated.

Berlusconi would make a terrifically fun politician in most games. We're talking about a man who, when faced with legal difficulties, decided the right course of action was to be elected prime minister and pass laws to protect himself. He doesn't even try to hide the fact that he's trading sex for political favors. Berlusconi is practically a caricature of himself. In interactions with the PCs, he may hit on any remotely attractive female character. PCs may find him easy to manipulate with bribes and sex, but you should probably also portray him as a shrewd businessman and negotiator.

Soong Meiling (Madame Chiang Kai-Shek)

Grand Dame of Nationalist China

The Soong family had risen quickly from humble roots in late 19th century China: Soong Meiling's grandfather was a peasant, but her father went to the US, became a Methodist minister, and made a fortune printing Bibles back in China. He married into one of the most influential families in China at the time and became part of the Shanghai elite.

Meiling was sent to Georgia to get a Western education, starting at the age of 10. She attended Wellesley College in Massachusetts, where she was glamorously exotic as a Chinese woman with a southern belle's accent. In 1917, she returned to Shanghai and worked with the YWCA in China, as well as a commission on child labor; people found her charming but too Americanized.

There's a Mao-era saying that of the three daughters of Charlie Soong, "one loved power, one loved money, and one loved China." The eldest, Ailing, married H.H. Kung, the Nationalist Chinese finance minister and the richest man in China. The middle child, Qingling, married Sun Yat-Sen, the founder of the Republic of China who tried to keep the peace between Nationalists and Communists – she joined the communist party later in life, so was said by them to have loved China. And Meiling, the youngest daughter, married Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek.

She met Chiang at a party in 1922: he was already married (to his second wife) but by 1926, she'd convinced him to divorce his wife, gradually convert to Christianity, and marry her in a dazzling ceremony in Shanghai. Following Western custom, she took the name "Madame Chiang" upon their marriage and became a major figure in Nationalist Chinese politics. This was largely because she spoke fluent English while her husband spoke none: she was important as a diplomat and interpreter when dealing with

Britain and the United States. In 1937, she and her husband were Time Magazine's joint "Person of the Year" (It helped that the Chiangs were friends of the publisher Henry Luce, a staunch supporter of Nationalist China).

The marriage was more a partnership for power than a marriage for love: the Chiangs had no children, and allegedly never had sex. There are rumors that Madame Chiang had an affair with 1940 Republican presidential candidate Wendell Wilkie, and speculated idly about ruling the world at his side.

During WWII, Madame Chiang became very important to China's diplomatic effort: the Allies were reluctant to consider weak, divided China as a great power, but she was able to charm Churchill and Roosevelt into changing their positions. The "Flying Tigers," a volunteer corps of American pilots fighting the Japanese in China, were her brainchild. In 1943, she became the second woman and the first Chinese person to address a joint session of Congress. She didn't charm everyone, though: an aide of Churchill complained that she mixed "sex and politics," and Eleanor Roosevelt was shocked by her authoritarian views. Eleanor asked Madame Chiang what she'd do about a coal miners' strike, and she silently ran a finger across her throat.

At the end of the war, China was devastated but acknowledged as one of the war-winning major powers: Nationalist China was given a seat on the UN Security Council it held until 1971. But by 1949, the Chiangs and their government had to flee to Taiwan to escape the communist revolution, where they stayed until Chiang died in 1975. His son by his first wife, Chiang Ching-Kuo, took over the island and didn't approve of Madame Chiang – she retired to New York City, where she lived in opulent style with an army of bodyguards.

Madame Chiang even outlived Chiang Ching-Kuo, who died in 1988. She was 90 years old and suffering from breast cancer, but she still made a play to take over Taiwan. By this point, though, the native Taiwanese had tired of rule by a clique of exiles, and Lee Teng-Hui outmaneuvered her. Madame Chiang Kai-Shek died in 2003 at the age of 105.

Soong Meiling was many things: a ruthless power-broker, an embezzler of government funds, an independent woman, and a charming southern belle. But she was never boring. She would most easily fit into a game set during the Sino-Japanese War (and especially during WWII) but could be an interesting NPC at any stage of life.

Theodora I

Heretic, Burlesque Dancer, and Powerful Empress

The life of Theodora I, a sixth-century empress of the Byzantine Empire, is a rags-to-riches story of love, religion, and mercilessness. She was a former burlesque dancer, a heretic, and by all appearances the intellectual equal of her husband, Emperor Justinian I. Take everything described here with a grain of salt. We have no writings about Theodora from before her death, and all the earliest texts about her are strongly biased (see Procopius on page 147).

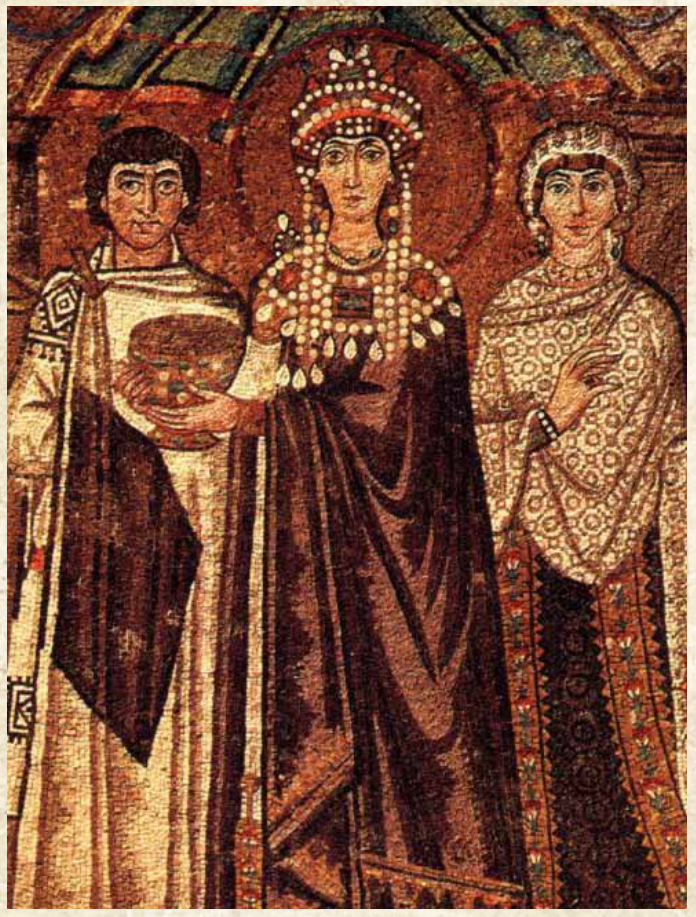
Theodora's father was a bear trainer, but he died when she was young, leaving the family destitute. They found charity at the hands of the Blues, a political party and sports club (see the Nika Riots on page 192). When she was old enough, Theodora started working in burlesque, first as an attendant to her older sister, then as a dancer in her own right. Her most famous act was a retelling of the myth of Leda and the Swan (where Zeus, disguised as a swan, had sex with a princess). Theodora would strip down as far as the law allowed, barley was sprinkled on her groin, and several geese were released onstage to eat the barley. She had a reputation for having a voracious sexual appetite; it is certain she already had a bastard daughter before she met Justinian. Eventually, Theodora met the emperor, they fell in love, and he changed the law so a noble could marry a former burlesque dancer. They were married when Theodora was in her mid-20s.

Early in Justinian's reign, Constantinople underwent the Nika Riots. For a few days, the city was in open revolt, and much of it was on fire. The emperor and his advisors were panicking, debating whether to fight or to flee. Theodora demanded they stay and fight, and calling upon the color purple as a symbol for royalty, spoke as follows:

"Once you have been an emperor, you cannot endure being a fugitive. May I never be separated from this purple, and may I never see the day people do not address me as 'mistress.' If you wish to save yourself, O Emperor, it can be done. But after you have done so, you may wish you had exchanged safety for death. Purple makes an excellent burial shroud."

Justinian, bolstered by his wife's advice, stayed in the city. The riots ended when the emperor massacred some 30,000-35,000 rioters, cementing his power over the city.

Though Theodora was not born a noble, she took to court life like a swan to water. She loved ceremony, and made sure everyone paid her the respect due an empress. She was also a power player. One courtier, named John the Cappadocian, regularly failed to show her the proper respect. So she set up a sting, having an agent suggest to John that Justinian's chief general was ready to rebel, and was looking for co-conspirators. John agreed to join the conspiracy, and was exiled. Still, Theodora never forgot her roots, and was a friend to the poor and the desperate. She shut down the brothels of Constantinople, and moved the prostitutes to a convent where they could support themselves. She fought corruption among public officials. And Justinian passed many laws in favor of women's rights, in which we may see the hand of Theodora.



At the time, the Byzantine Empire was riven by a theological split that, to outsiders, seems academic and unimportant. One group (the Chalcedonians) believed that Christ was both fully human and fully divine simultaneously. The opposing Monophysites believed that Christ had only one nature, and was either fully divine or a blend of human and divine. The Chalcedonians were more powerful, and persecuted the Monophysites. Justinian was a Chalcedonian, but Theodora was a devout Monophysite. Though they were on opposite sides of the theological divide splitting the Empire, it doesn't seem to have affected their marriage, and Justinian never doubted Theodora's loyalty. Theodora protected Monophysite bishops when she could, and very nearly succeeded at brokering a peace between the two sides. She even sheltered Monophysites under her husband's nose; after her death, a prominent exiled Monophysite theologian was found living quietly in Theodora's section of the palace.

At your table, Theodora may be an ear at court that is willing to listen to the PCs, even if they are just peasants (or burlesque dancers). Her Monophysitism may have left her with a soft spot for heretics and outcasts. But also portray her as a serious power player. The fact that a woman seen as a heretic whore was politically untouchable proves her power. PCs may get involved in the sting that trapped John the Cappadocian. Alternately, PCs working against her may try to use her bastard daughter as a pawn in their schemes. How badly this ends is up to you.

Tomyris

Proud, Honorable Queen

Tomyris was a sixth-century BC queen of the Massegetai, a Scythian people on the border of the Persian Empire. She ascended to the throne upon the death of her husband. The Massegetai were a horse people (see the Eurasian Steppe on page 15), basing their livelihoods on their herds of livestock. They worshiped the sun by sacrificing horses to it. When a Massegetai grew old, his tribe would sacrifice him and eat his flesh. This was felt to be the best way to die. In war, the Massegetai wielded bows, lances, and battle-axes, and rode horses armored in brass.

The Emperor of Persia at this time was a man named Cyrus, one of the greatest empire-builders in human history. Cyrus wanted to add the lands of the Massegetai to his empire. To accomplish this, he tried to marry Tomyris, but she would have none of it. So he invaded. Tomyris sent him a message urging him to go home and leave the Massegetai to rule their own lands in peace. But since she knew Cyrus would ignore this advice, she offered to let his army enter her lands so they could make war in an honorable manner. One battle would decide the fate of the Massegetai. Cyrus was not so honorable. He advanced into Massegetai territory, set up a camp, and laid out a grand feast. He then retreated, leaving behind only a small force of his worst troops. A third of the Massegetai army, led by Tomyris' son, slaughtered this ineffective rear guard, and sat down to enjoy the feast. After the Massegetai soldiers were well and truly drunk, Cyrus returned and defeated them, capturing Tomyris' son.

Tomyris was furious. She had offered Cyrus a chance to settle their dispute honestly, and he had betrayed her. Now she had lost a third of her army to Cyrus' duplicity, and worse yet, her son. She sent Cyrus another message, commanding him to release her son and leave her lands, else, "bloodthirsty as you are, I will give you your fill of blood." Cyrus ignored her threat. So Tomyris descended upon his army, and, after a prolonged battle, wiped it out. Cyrus himself was killed. Tomyris ordered her soldiers to search the dead for his body. When they found it, she beheaded it, then shoved the head in a wineskin full of gore. She had made good on her threat; the Persian king finally had his fill of blood.

At your table, Tomyris would make a terrific warrior queen of most any culture. Play her as honorable and fierce. She should also be very protective of her family and completely unafraid to use violence to solve her problems, as long as it's morally acceptable to do so. Clever PCs may figure out her main flaw: she's too trusting. If the PCs are involved in a push into territory generally seen as unsettled or uncivilized, Tomyris would be an excellent obstacle: a powerful leader who is arguably more "civilized" than the people trying to conquer her. For PCs who refuse to play by the rules of the societies they find themselves in, consider throwing them up against an NPC like Tomyris, who isn't going to take any of their crap. If the PCs don't want to play nice, she will end them. It's good for PC actions to have consequences, even when the consequences are negative.

Tycho Brahe

Eccentric Renaissance Astronomer

Tycho Brahe was born in 1546, the eldest son of a noble Dutch family. His father and childless uncle had an agreement: if Tycho was born a boy, his uncle could raise him. After Tycho's birth, his father changed his mind, so his uncle, of course, kidnapped the baby. While a teenager studying law, Tycho saw a partial eclipse of the sun, which astronomers had correctly predicted. He was so struck by the beauty of the prediction that he became obsessed with astronomy. After the mathematical models of of contemporary astronomers failed to accurately predict the close passage of Saturn near Jupiter, Tycho decided to devote himself to the most accurate observations of the heavens possible. This greatly displeased his family, who wanted him to continue studying law.

His first great discovery was that the stars, which had been thought to be permanent and unchanging, could in fact change. A star had gone nova, creating the appearance of a new, bright star in the night sky. By careful measurements, Tycho proved that this new star was actually in the heavens, and not an atmospheric phenomenon between the Earth and the Moon.

To further his research, the King of Denmark gave Tycho an island in the Baltic Sea, and bankrolled the creation of an observatory with a full staff of of assistants, observers, and mathematicians. As this was before the invention of the telescope, Tycho's hyper-accurate observations required the construction of giant tools, like a sextant with arms five and a half feet long, calibrated down to the sixtieth of a degree. The observatory had instruments that filled entire rooms, an alchemist's furnace, and even a prison. The complex was set up so that four people could take measurements simultaneously, so that one man's error wouldn't muddy the data. It paid off; Tycho's observations were ten times as precise as those of any predecessor or contemporary.

But Tycho's scientific accomplishments aren't all he's remembered for. The astronomer is still infamous for his hard-partying lifestyle. As a teenager, he once got into an argument with another student over who was the better mathematician. As is right and proper, this led to a duel in which part of Tycho's nose was cut off. He replaced it with an insert made of gold and silver. Distinguished visitors from throughout Europe visited Tycho's observatory, and the astronomer made them welcome by throwing wild feasts. He brought to his parties a dwarf named Jepp, whom Tycho believed had second sight. Another memorable participant was Tycho's pet elk, who died after getting quite drunk and falling down a flight of stairs.

At your table, Tycho Brahe would be an interesting change from the ascetic scholars that populate most games. His unusual life should affect the way he interacts with the PCs. For example, your Tycho may urge the PCs to solve their problems by kidnapping infants,

dueling over mathematics, or asking advice from psychic dwarves. As the historical Tycho's fame made him a very influential man, such an NPC could make a delightful mover and shaker in court intrigue, and the PCs may want to court his favor. Alternately, he may be involved in eldritch mysteries with cosmic horrors beyond the void of the heavens. During the day, he's all excellent science and riotous parties, but when the sun goes down and the astronomy begins, he undertakes a sinister communion with stellar abominations.

W.D. Fard

Enigmatic Divine Emissary

With a man as mysterious as Fard, it pays to start with definitions. W.D. Fard (also called Master Fard Muhammad, Wallace Fard, Wallace Dodd Ford, and dozens of variations on the theme) was the founder of the Nation of Islam. The organization is an African-American pseudo-Muslim religious group best known today for producing radical activist Malcolm X. Fard first appears in the historical record in 1930, and disappeared two and a half years later.

Fard was a light-skinned man with dark eyes who arrived in Detroit in 1930. He sold silk on the streets while simultaneously converting people to his unusual brand of Islam. Fard taught that 6,000 years ago a black scientist named Yakub created the white race. Whites are devils and inherently inferior to other races, which causes their depraved immorality. Christianity, according to Fard, was a religion of slavery, and African-Americans had to prepare for an inevitable race war. He also claimed to have been born in the Muslim holy city of Mecca. His light skin was part of God's plan: it let Fard mingle easily with whites. He claimed to have came to the US to liberate African Americans, who were trapped between slavery and freedom, and bring them to salvation.

Within two years, Fard had amassed a mosque of his own. But one of his followers, inspired by Fard's writings, killed a man in what appeared to be a ritual human sacrifice. The killer was declared legally insane, and while the police had nothing with which they could charge Fard, they made it very clear that neither Fard nor his mosque were welcome in Detroit any longer. Under pressure, Fard agreed to disband his group and leave Detroit. The group immediately reformed under a new name, and Fard tried to sneak back into the city. The police caught him and kicked him back out. No one ever heard from W.D. Fard again. He vanished just as suddenly as he appeared.

As to who Fard was, there are a lot of theories. Fard's group, the Nation of Islam, maintains that his true name is Master Fard Muhammad, and that he was exactly what he claimed to be: an Arab from Mecca. They also hold that Fard was Allah Himself: also the Messiah, the Christ, and the Mahdi. The Nation of Islam claims that other theories on Fard's identity are based on deliberate misinformation spread by the FBI in an attempt to undermine them.

There are countless other theories. Some say he was really Hawaiian-born Wallace Dodd Ford, a Californian criminal. Or maybe he was Wali Dodd Fard, born in New Zealand to a British mother and an Indian father, worked as a restauranteur, gambler, and bootlegger, and died in Chicago in 1971. Unless his father was British and his mother was Polynesian, and he served time in San Quentin on drug charges. He was a black Jamaican son of a Syrian Muslim. He was a Palestinian, a Pakistani, or an Afghan. Every guess bears some resemblance to other ones, but there doesn't seem to be any firm consensus on whom W.D. Fard really was.

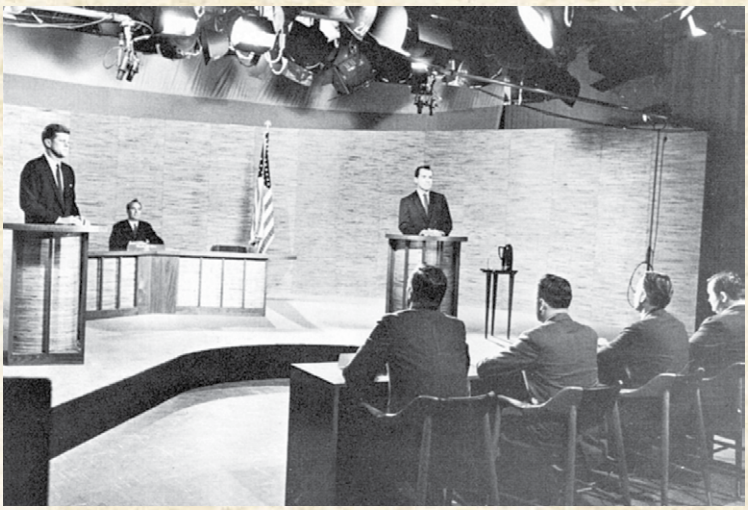
At your table, Fard's mysterious past works to your advantage. Provide multiple interpretations on his history. He doesn't even have to be a religious figure; he could be a crime boss, a politician, a diplomat, or a peasant hero. You can play Fard as a distant figure, about whom everyone has a different story. Or he could be someone the PCs interact with regularly, but all the stories he tells contradict each other. He may even use a different name every time. If you do this, there should be a reason why Fard is inconsistent. He could be a pathological liar, a supernatural being for whom truth has more to do with feelings than facts, a masterful power player who doesn't want to give his enemies any useful information, or just a massive troll.

Events

The 1960 US Presidential Election

The Political Machine Enters the Modern Age

If it wasn't for the 22nd Amendment, Eisenhower probably could have been president until he died or retired. But Congress had decided that one four-term president was enough, and so the 1960 election had no incumbent. The Republicans chose the next-best thing: the sitting vice president, Richard Nixon. Nixon had plenty of political and foreign policy experience, though he was not without scandal: his "Checkers" speech may have defused allegations of corruption at the time, but his checkered past as a Red-baiting congressman could still cause problems.



Opposing Nixon was, of course, Senator John F. Kennedy. It's rare for a sitting senator to win the presidency (only three people in US history have managed it: Harding, Kennedy and Obama) but Kennedy was no ordinary senator. From a prominent Irish-American political family in Boston, Kennedy was an inspiring speaker and a very young presidential candidate – a clear contrast to the grandfatherly Eisenhower and the always-curmudgeonly Nixon. There was some concern over whether the country would elect a Catholic president, though as the campaign wore on this turned out to be a fairly minor issue.

Of course, before the campaign could really begin, both men had to win their parties' nominations. For Nixon this was little trouble, but the Democratic party was (as usual) far less unified. The main division in the party was between northern Democrats (generally urban, pro-union and including the majority of African-Americans in the North) and southern Democrats (generally rural, anti-union and opposed to civil rights). In order to balance the ticket, Kennedy picked Lyndon Johnson, a freshman senator from Texas, as his running mate. Johnson would go on to sign the Voting Rights Act and launch the War on Poverty, but at the time, northern liberals and union officials were worried about the selection. Only last-minute politicking by brother Robert Kennedy kept the coalition together well enough for John to win on the first ballot.

Contrary to modern perception, Kennedy ran as a war hawk, alarming voters with talk of a "missile gap" with the Soviet Union. This wasn't true – at the time, the US had a far greater ability to launch a nuclear strike at the Soviet Union than vice versa – but the information Nixon would need to disprove this was classified. Still, with the election mostly focused on foreign policy issues (the economy was good, and both candidates were moderate-to-liberal on the civil rights issue, though Kennedy was endorsed by Martin Luther King late in the election), Nixon was ahead in the polls. Until the first debate, that is.

Nobody today mentions what Nixon and Kennedy actually debated about (if you're interested, the main focus was the disputed islands of Quemoy and Matsu, between Taiwan and mainland China), but everyone remembers that this was the moment when television became important in American politics. Nixon was recovering from an infection, refused to wear makeup, and had comically large jowls. Kennedy was in good health, understood how to prepare for television, and was youthful and handsome. A majority of radio listeners said Nixon had won the debate, but a majority of TV viewers said Kennedy had won – and 88 percent of American households had a television. Nixon performed better in later debates, but the damage was done: the people wanted an inspirational president.

In the end, the election was one of the closest in US history: Kennedy got only about 100,000 more votes than Nixon. This translated to a larger win in the Electoral College, but controversy has dogged the result ever since: Kennedy had the support of the big-city political machines, and there was almost certainly voter fraud in Chicago (though whether it actually changed the result is much less clear). And on the Republican side, we're talking about Nixon: I'm pretty sure he had his own "dirty tricks".

The 1960 election is a bridge between old and new: it's the last election where the big-city party machines played a major role, and the first where television did. As it happened during one of the most tense periods of the Cold War, it's certainly possible that a foreign power (or powers) would try to influence the result. And it's a good starting point for alternate history: would Nixon have gone to China in the early 1960s instead of the early 1970s? How would he have handled the Cuban Missile Crisis?

The Antonine Plague

Scourge of the Roman Empire

From 166-189 AD, a plague (most likely smallpox) struck the Roman Empire. The Antonine plague probably killed about a quarter of the population and had far-reaching effects.

The Antonine plague began in the east, in the Persian Empire. The disease was first observed in Roman legionnaires attacking the Persian city of Seleucia. According to legend, the plague arose when a soldier accidentally cut open a golden casket in a temple of Apollo, releasing a pestilential vapor. With the war's end the soldiers returned home, bringing smallpox with them and infecting every province through which they passed. When the disease became epidemic in an area, many locals would flee, carrying the plague to new regions. The thoroughness of the Roman transportation network of roads and ships saw to it the plague spread across the entire Empire, carried by soldiers, civilians, and merchants alike.

The social and economic impacts of the Antonine plague were severe. With a quarter of the Empire's inhabitants dead, the epidemic may have kicked off the gradual depopulation that plagued (if you'll pardon the pun) the later Roman Empire. Effects in the countryside were so severe that following the plague the emperor ordered that any agrarian land in Italy not being farmed should be given to new owners. The plague was probably even worse in cities, where transmission was easier. Indeed, the previously common construction of new public buildings was curtailed for decades during and following the Antonine plague. The army was hit especially hard, as the close quarters and regular travel of military service promote disease. Complicating matters, the plague also reduced the army's pool of recruits. The Antonine plague may have even contributed to the spread of Christianity, as the crisis caused people to abandon old faiths.

For the first 12-14 days after contracting smallpox, a person will display no symptoms, nor will she be capable of infecting others. This is followed by the sudden onset of fever, malaise, and headache. Two to three days later, these symptoms subside, and a rash of pustules appears on the face, hands, and forearms, gradually spreading to the torso. After a week or two, the pustules scab over, leaving behind permanent and distinctive pockmarks. The disease is notoriously contagious, and fatality rates are typically around 30%, though some strains have been much more deadly.

Smallpox was completely exterminated in the wild in the 1970's, after a prolonged international effort of monitoring and vaccinations. The United States and Russia have both retained small stocks of the virus for research purposes. Smallpox is the only human disease to ever be completely eradicated, though the livestock disease rinderpest has also been exterminated, the Guinea worm (a human parasite) is only a few years out from extinction, and polio is restricted to a few small areas.

At your table, you can add the Antonine plague as a complication to the PCs' goals. If you feel the PCs are having too easy a time of it, or your setting is simply becoming predictable, consider throwing in some plague. Are the PCs on a routine journey to Aldeberan IV? Won't they be surprised to find the planet is suffering from the Antonine plague! With the military hamstrung, the economy crashing, a quarter of major NPCs dead, and a heretical faith on the rise, the PCs' routine mission will suddenly become a lot more complicated – to say nothing of the measures they will need to take to stay safe

The Arrival of Ant Defenders

Invasion by Ferocious Symbiotic Insects

In many tropical forests, plants have evolved a relationship with ants where the ants defend the plants against herbivores and competitors in exchange for food and housing. These so-called 'ant-plants' do not begin their lives defended by ants; instead, they must reach a certain size before they are colonized. If the sizes of the ants and the plants are scaled up, the arrival of these chitinous defenders could be a bizarre and memorable challenge for your players.

The arrival of the ant defenders almost always starts with a single queen. After leaving the colony in which she was hatched, she finds a small ant-plant, not even a foot tall, and lays a few eggs. Until the eggs hatch, she does all the work of the colony herself. Once her first children pupate and become adults, the queen settles down for a long life of egg-laying. The host plant will often wind up growing into a full-sized tree, while the colony may spread out across a dozen trees, and have tens of thousands of ants.

The relationship between ant-plants and their ant defenders is based on the exchange of goods and services. The plant usually provides food for the ant, typically in the form of sugary nectar produced from special glands. Some also provide solid food, in the form of protein-rich globes of vegetable matter that grow on stems or leaf tips. Many ant-plants provide housing for their ant defenders: structures in which ants can raise larvae. These may be hollow stems, or swollen areas the ants can excavate to make nests.

In return, the ant defenders swarm and sting herbivores that try to eat the plant. Beetles, caterpillars, and the like are stung to death or ripped apart, and then flung to the forest floor. To deal with larger herbivores, like monkeys or giraffes, the ant defenders climb onto the animals and sting them furiously until the herbivore quickly finds someplace else to be. Some ants even go so far as to cut down any plants that touch or grow near their host. This reduces the ant-plant's competition for nutrients and sunlight, and cuts down on the number of attack routes invading ant colonies can use. If no other plants touch the host plant, the only way to attack the colony is up the trunk, which can be easily guarded.

Not all ants participate in this exchange of protection for food. Some are cheaters! These ants will drink the nectar, eat the food bodies, and live in the provided housing without defending the host plant. There are a number of evolutionary strategies that ant-plants use to cope with cheaters, but suffice to say that cheating ant species and 'honest' ant species exist in a perpetual state of warfare.

This has the potential to be a fun change of pace at your table, but you'll need to scale the ants up. Half-inch-long ants won't get your players' attention, but half-yard-long ones certainly will. The PCs could be hired by an outpost on a planet that was recently colonized. The outpost has been relying on harvests from the forest; one of the more common trees continually produces seedless fruit regardless of season. But, when the trees reached a certain size, colonies of highly aggressive giant arthropods colonized them: it turns out the 'fruits' were actually food bodies. Now the outpost is under siege by these ant-analogues and needs the PCs' help! Clever PCs might try introducing a colony of giant cheater ants, and helping the cheaters in their war against the 'honest' ants. This way, the colonists can share the food bodies with non-aggressive ants,

rather than fighting over food with the defenders. Aggressive PCs might try a commando raid to kill the queen. If all else fails, the PCs could douse the forest with herbicide and kill the food source of both the ants and the outpost. On the other hand, in a superhero game, a strain of giant ants may have escaped from the lab of a mad scientist and have taken over the peach orchards of Georgia.

The Battle of Gallipoli

Hellish, Pointless WWI Slaughter

It was 1915, and the western front of the first world war was a stalemate. Soldiers shot at each other from trenches separated by desolate no-man's-lands of mines and barbed wire. Neither side was making any progress. Simultaneously, the Ottoman Turks (part of the German-led Central Powers) were pressing the Russians hard in the Caucasus. Plainly, something needed to change. So the British high command decided to seize the waterway connecting the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. This would likely lead to Turkey being knocked out of the war. The British decided the first ground to be taken would be the Gallipoli peninsula, which forms much of the western coast of the Dardanelles strait.

The plan was to force the Turks to vacate their forts in Gallipoli by shelling them to rubble. Then, minesweeper ships could enter the strait of the Dardanelles, clear it of mines, and the invasion could progress. Some 70 British and French ships gathered off the coast of Gallipoli, and shelling began. It didn't work. The Turks withdrew from their forts on the coast, but continued to return fire with their artillery on the heights further inland. British battleships tried forcing their way through the strait, but were repulsed by Turkish mines and artillery. After a month of this, it was clear Gallipoli could not simply be shelled into oblivion. Ground troops would have to be brought in.

When 52,000 Allied troops landed in Gallipoli, the Turks were ready for them. The British, Australian, New Zealander, and French soldiers faced strong machine gun fire and artillery bombardment. While they managed to establish two beachheads, they made no further progress. The Turks, led by the future founder of the modern Turkish state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, destroyed all Allied attempts to push deeper into Gallipoli. Something like a third of the Allied forces suffered casualties. Eventually, a third beachhead was established, but it got nowhere as well. The whole affair ground down into another months-long bloody stalemate, with the Allies in trenches near the sea and the Turks on the heights.

When you read descriptions of Gallipoli, the word you see most often is "hell." The soldiers lay in the short scrub with no water while the hot Mediterranean sun blazed down on them. Survivors spoke of bayonet charges ending only in slaughter, of friends caught between the lines, huddling behind whatever cover they could find, and dying with terrible groans when the bullets found them anyway. The artillery was the real killer, transforming the Turkish coast into a "mad world of blood, death, and fire." Most chilling were Atatürk's words to his own men: "I do not order you to attack, I order you to die. In the time which passes until we die, other troops and commanders can come forward and take our places."

Despite continual reinforcements, the battle of Gallipoli went nowhere for both sides. Eventually, British senior staff visited the peninsula to see the battle for themselves. The decision was immediate: evacuate. Between the Turks and the Allies, over the course of the eight-month battle, almost a million men fought at Gallipoli. Half went home wounded or didn't go home at all. Ultimately, the Gallipoli campaign accomplished nothing.

PCs at Gallipoli may find their greatest difficulty is simply surviving. NPCs who fought there might tend towards either PTSD or being incredibly hardy: "If I survived that, I can survive anything." For a dramatic or tragic game, consider something based on the movie Saving Private Ryan, but set at Gallipoli. The PCs, for whatever reason, have to find some Colonial or Turkish soldier and get him off the front lines. If you want to be particularly cruel to your players, have the soldier killed by a stray shell mere minutes before the PCs find him. Then they hear a bayonet charge is about to start. Whether the PCs sneak off like cowards or join the suicidal advance is up to them. What's key for this sort of game is that there are no good choices.

The Battle of Karánsebes

War as Drunken Farce (If It Ever Happened)

No plan survives contact with the enemy, but in the Austro-Turkish War (1788 – 1792), the Austrian plan didn't even survive contact with its own army. The two vast multiethnic empires had been fighting back and forth across the Balkans for centuries, with the Ottomans twice reaching – but being halted at – the gates of Vienna. Now the Austrians under emperor Joseph II had an alliance with the Russian Empire under Catherine the Great, and they were looking to gain some ground in the long struggle.

The fight against the Ottomans was a great victory for Russia, but things were far more inconclusive for Austria: in fact, at one point, the Austrian army defeated itself. The army was marching south to fight the Turks, and camped near the town of Karánsebes, in present-day western Romania. A group of hussars (light cavalry) rode south and came across some Romani (Gypsies), who offered to sell them liquor. The hussars bought all the schnapps they had on hand, and settled down for an evening of drunken revelry.

As they drank, some infantry came across the river and asked the cavalrymen to share the booze. Being true to stereotype, they haughtily refused, and even began building a makeshift fortification around their barrels of schnapps. The soldiers began to argue and horse around, and at some point, one of them fired a shot. Soon the argument turned into a skirmish, and someone in the infantry tried to defuse things (or at least scare the cavalry off) by shouting that the Turks were coming. The main army heard the shouting and the gunfire and fell into a panic.

In the darkness, with an army speaking multiple languages, the Austrian camp thoroughly defeated itself, as groups of soldiers mistook each other for an Ottoman attack. Carthorses panicked at

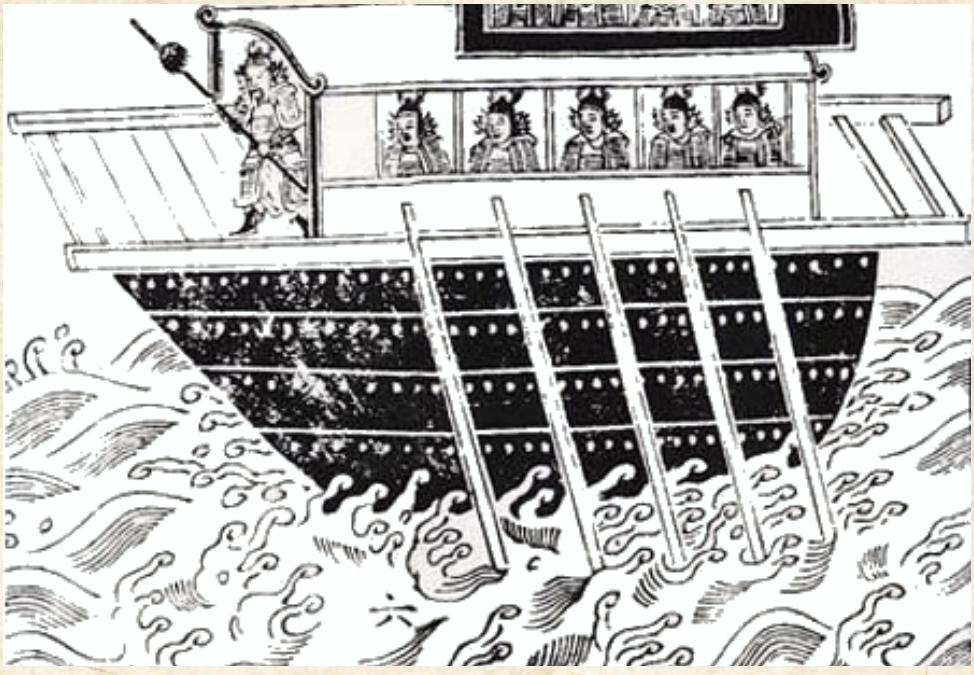
the noise and stampeded, and an artillery officer thought this was a cavalry charge and opened fire. Emperor Joseph II tried to keep control of the army, but was thrown from his horse into a creek. The German-speaking officers shouted "Halte! Halte!" at the crazed conscripts, but the majority of the army didn't speak German and heard this as shouts of "Allah! Allah!" from the (imaginary) attacking enemy. The night of chaos caused about 10,000 casualties and the Austrian army fled north.

Two days later, the Turks actually arrived, finding some dead and wounded Austrians left behind but no sign of the main army, and captured Karánsebes without a fight. The story of this self-inflicted defeat was a perfect example of the tragicomedy of war and the failings of the rickety Austrian state (for further evidence, see the story of the Czech Legion on page 181), and makes lists of "the world's most spectacular military failures" to this day.

The problem, however, is that it's debatable whether the "Battle" of Karánsebes happened at all. Contemporary sources don't mention it – the sources drawn on come from the mid-19th century, decades after the event. And parts of the story don't add up – would cavalrymen on the march really buy liquor from Romani rather than "requisitioning" it? Would people with at least a vague familiarity with German really mistake "Halte!" for "Allah!?"

It's most likely that the story of the battle was an urban legend that later got into the history books, a story passed around by Viennese who were against the war. The Austro-Turkish war wasn't popular in Austria – it was seen as a grab for glory by Joseph II and a war more in service of the Russian ally than Austria itself. The expense of the war led to higher food prices and to the failure of several opera companies in Vienna, and caused problems for Mozart's career. So the political class, patrons of the arts, and Johann Q. Publik all had reasons to complain, and they may have done so by spreading a story of spectacular failure at Karánsebes. The historians of the time weren't taken in, but some writing 50 years later were.

In your game, you could use Karánsebes as either a real battle or a legend. As an actual event, it's probably most useful for a PC, or an NPC who thinks like one: why not stop the enemy army by getting their forward scouts drunk, waiting for a fight, then whipping up a panic by magical or other means (it's unlikely the Evil Horde will be quite incompetent enough to destroy themselves in an argument over schnapps). As a story, it could be useful as a way to show the unpopularity of a ruler or a war – or the PCs could spread such a rumor to help bring down an already unpopular regime.



The Battle of Red Cliffs

Sneaky, Decisive Naval Battle

In 208 AD, the three major political factions of late Han Dynasty China came together to fight the Battle of Red Cliffs. It was a naval battle where the two weaker forces came together to drive back a much stronger one through cunning and guile. Though drawing any sort of hard line is always problematic, this battle in many ways marked the transition from the era of the Han Dynasty to the Three Kingdoms period.

The stronger of the two sides was led by the powerful warlord Cao Cao, who was arguably the last ruler of the nearly-defunct Han Dynasty. After Cao Cao had established his control over northern China, his gaze turned south. In an attempt to reunify the empire, he conquered the enemy state of Shu. Cao Cao drove Shu's armies still further south, where they came near the territory of a third state, Wu. Shu and Wu knew they were both much weaker than Cao Cao, so they formed an alliance. If it helps, you can think of Cao Cao's force as an imperial army, while Shu and Wu formed a sort of Rebellious Alliance.

So the two armies came to be encamped on opposite sides of the great Yangtze river. Cao Cao's enormous army was on the northern bank, with the small unified army of Shu and Wu on the southern. The northern army, though large, was unfamiliar with maritime warfare, and much of the army was crippled with seasickness. The generals of Shu and Wu knew they would never be able to defeat Cao Cao's army in open battle. So they decided to use subterfuge.

Two of Wu's chief generals were ordered to pretend to change sides. The first crossed the river to announce to Cao Cao that he would be bringing his ships across the river to join Cao Cao's fleet. The second recommended to Cao Cao that the imperial ships be chained together. This would minimize their rocking motions, allowing Cao Cao's landlubber warriors to fight as if they were on solid ground. Cao Cao accepted both of these false defections, and did as the generals recommended.

So Cao Cao's fleet was chained together, forming a solid mass of wood. And there, sailing across the Yangtze, came the defecting ships, as promised. But rather than being full of turncoat soldiers, they were laden with kindling and fish oil. And when the order came, the allied soldiers lit their ships on fire, and escaped on rafts. A brisk southeasterly wind drove the fire ships into Cao Cao's fleet, and the Yangtze turned into a Biblical lake of fire, burning tens of thousands of men alive. The flames spread onto the northern

shore, destroying much of Cao Cao's army. The allied forces of Shu and Wu crossed the river, and routed the larger enemy army, driving it back into Cao Cao's territory. The state of Shu was liberated, and a new China emerged.

The Battle of Red Cliffs effectively ended the era of the Han Dynasty, bringing about the Three Kingdoms period. In it, the states of Shu, Wu, and Wei (which grew out of Cao Cao's kingdom) were rough equals, with China split between the three. In modern China, the battle is seen as an underdog story, with the weaker side beating the stronger through pluck and wit.

This incident is great not only because it's a crazy gambit of the sort many players love, but also because it has roles for the whole party. If the PCs are part of the forces of Shu and Wu (or their analogue in your game), the general commander may instruct two PCs to pretend to defect, one to sail the fire ships, and the rest to ready the army for the attack. Then the whole party gets to participate in the attack on the northern shore. The defectors can try to destroy the enemy from within, the organizers can lead the main assault, and the fire ship captain can lead his rafts of sailors around the conflagration to attack from the rear. Win, lose, or draw, this battle should have major consequences for the political and military landscape of your game world.

The Berlin Airlift

Early Cold War Flashpoint

The Cold War involved worldwide battle and intrigue, but it began and ended in Germany. After World War II, the victorious Allies divided Germany into four sectors, and did the same with its capital, Berlin, even though Berlin was completely enclosed in the Soviet sector.

The British, French and American sectors of Berlin had been a thorn in the Soviet side since the end of the war, but the Berlin blockade started as a reaction to attempts to form a unified West Germany. The final straw was an agreement by the Western powers to establish a new currency for their zones. The Soviets protested at the introduction of this currency to West Berlin, and walked out of meetings regarding the governance of occupied Germany.

Just before midnight on June 23, 1948 the Soviets began blockading West Berlin, cutting power lines and refusing to allow shipments of goods through the Soviet zone of Germany by rail, road, or water transport. On June 25, they added that they would send no supplies to West Berlin either. West Berlin was extremely dependent on food and fuel shipments from the rest of Germany, and had only a little over a month's supply stockpiled. The Western Allies were faced, it seemed, with two unpalatable choices: send armed convoys across the border, risking a Third World War, or surrender the German capital to the Eastern Bloc.

But the US and Britain had advantages of their own in logistics and airpower that allowed them to take a third option. Air superiority hadn't broken the will of the Nazis, but perhaps it could win the peace by supplying a city of 2.5 million entirely by air. The Soviets would be forced to either shoot down unarmed cargo planes, becoming the clear aggressor in the eyes of the world (which with Communist control over Eastern Europe still tenuous, would be quite important), or give up the blockade.

Because of a brief Soviet blockade of the city in April, the British air force had already calculated the amount of supplies required each day to support West Berlin. The city needed about 1500 tons of food and 3500 tons of fuel each day to be properly powered, fed and heated. The airlift began on Monday, July 28, and by the second week of operations was averaging 1000 tons of supplies a day – far from enough to support the city indefinitely, but enough to show West Berlin and the world the possibility of success. One pilot began dropping little parachutes with candy and toys attached for the children of Berlin, and this soon became an official part of the operation and a major propaganda coup.

Still, particularly in the newly created USAF, the airlift was full of logistical problems. General William H. Turner, who had successfully organized air shipments "over the Hump" from India to Nationalist China during the war, was appointed commander of the whole operation on July 28. His streamlining of operations became the basis for modern aircraft control, and allowed the Berlin Airlift to meet its initial target of 4500 tons a day by the end of August, two months after its start.

The winter added new challenges, increasing Berlin's demand for coal and demanding the winterization of Berlin's airports. The French built an airport from scratch in their sector, blowing up a Soviet-run radio tower in the process. Though winter storms caused great problems – at one point the city had only a week of coal stockpiles left – the operation and the city endured through winter's cold, Soviet harassment of aircraft, and the collapse of Berlin's municipal government.

In April 1949, with operations running well, Turner decided it was time to try to set a record. In an ironic echo of Stakhanovite coal-mining achievements, the Airlift delivered almost 13,000 tons of coal in 24 hours on April 16. On May 4, 1949, the blockade was ended and life in West Berlin began to return to normal. The operation was a success, though 101 people had given their lives (mostly in air crashes) to make it so. But the idea of reunifying Germany as a neutral buffer state between the superpowers had been dealt a massive blow. NATO was established in April, and by the end of 1949, West and East Germany had emerged as separate countries.

A fantasy campaign could use an analogue of the Berlin Airlift in all sorts of interesting ways. Your PCs could pilot dragons carrying supplies into a besieged city (and try to keep them from eating the citizens) or defend a portal connecting an outpost deep in another empire's territory to the capital city. Of course, the Berlin Airlift itself is also gameable, if approached from the proper angle: the PCs could be spies working to sabotage or protect the operation, or airmen on a routine flight that suddenly becomes less routine. An alternate-history version could also be interesting, with the Soviets trying to maintain a city (a Soviet sector of Tokyo on a divided Japan?) against a Western blockade.

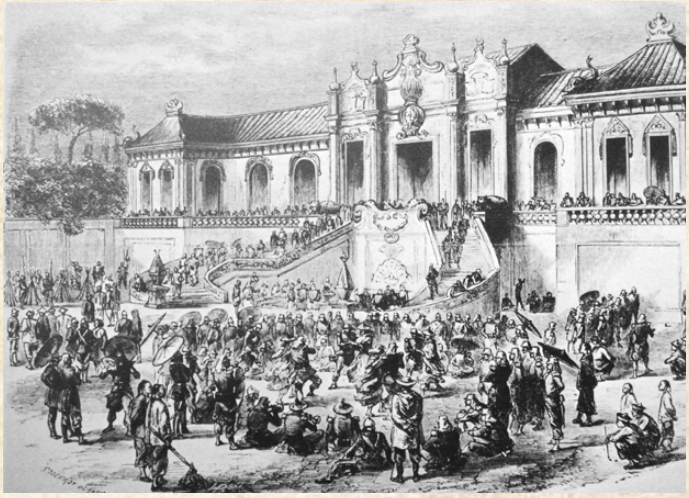
The Burning of the Summer Palace

Destruction and Looting of a Priceless Site

The Old Summer Palace in Beijing was the treasure house of Qing Dynasty China. Inside its sumptuous walls lay the collected art and scholarship of a great empire. And in 1860 a unified British and French army burned it to the ground.

This was part of the Second Opium War, fought by Western powers (especially Britain and France) against Imperial China. The war was largely over money; the West wanted China to make a number of trade concessions that would be unfavorable to the Chinese. The burning of the Summer Palace was precipitated by the Chinese capture of two dozen British, French, and Indian personnel under questionable circumstances. These prisoners were subsequently mistreated; many died under torture. The British commander of the Anglo-French forces wanted to avenge them and send a clear message to the Qing emperor, but also did not want to harm the Chinese people. The burning of the Summer Palace, the commander reasoned, would only affect the Imperial court; the peasants would not suffer.

The Summer Palace was a complex of some 200 buildings. The best known today were two Jesuit-designed European-style neo-baroque palaces. The grounds were shaped into a dreamscape of pagodas, hills, and lakes. The ponds were stocked with goldfish, and the lawns were stocked with tame deer as friendly as pets. But this was more than a palace. It was also a library and art gallery: the treasure house of China. The British adventurer Charles "Chinese" Gordon described its contents thus: "The throne and room were all lined with ebony, carved in a marvelous way. There were huge mirrors of all shapes and kinds, clocks, watches, musical boxes with puppets on them, magnificent china of every description, heaps and heaps of silks of all colors, [and] embroidery," to say nothing of the gold.



Days before the burning, the commander posted placards throughout the town giving the date of the planned fire and his justification for it. The palace was set aflame in a systematic manner, and burned for three days. But as it burned, the British and French soldiers were free to loot it. Plenty was plundered, but the army was so pressed for time, the soldiers couldn't do the job properly. They detested the flames because they knew there was immense wealth still unlooted, being destroyed by the very fires they were setting. Looking back on the event, one soldier wrote, "A pang of sorrow seizes upon you. You cannot help it, no eye will ever again gaze upon those buildings that have doubtless been the admiration of ages." But upon recalling the tortures endured by the British and French prisoners, he concluded by saying he was satisfied with the affair.

These days, the Chinese Communist Party presents the burning as being a deep blow to Chinese patriotism. They argue that, contrary to the commander's intent, it was the common people of China who suffered most, as they lost an important part of their heritage. It's a useful illustration of their dogma that before the communist revolution in 1949, China was weak and trampled on by foreign nations, but that the Party has made China strong. The story is taught to every Chinese schoolchild. The British and French have largely forgotten the burning of the Summer Palace. The Chinese have not.

At your table, the burning of the Summer Palace may present an exciting opportunity for your players. Perhaps they are near the Summer

Palace when the burning starts. Do they try to stop the atrocity? Do they flee? Or do they join in the looting? If someone in the party has an appraiser's eye for value and a coolness under fire (quite literally), they stand to make a fortune. By ignoring the gewgaws the soldiers are grabbing, and going straight for the priceless artifacts, the PCs will enrich themselves enough to live as wealthy men for the rest of their lives – or to fund some harebrained scheme.

There's also the moral question of profiting from the burning of the Summer Palace. Will the PCs see this as an act of war profiteering, making a fortune by exploiting an atrocity? Or as an act of mercy, saving priceless artifacts from the flames? If they see it as the latter, do they believe this strongly enough to donate the artifacts to a museum?

The Captain of Köpenick

The Quintessential Confidence Man

The year was 1906, and Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt was trying to be an honest citizen. He was born in Tilsit (in present-day Kaliningrad, where the peace between France and Russia was signed in 1807), the son of a shoemaker. At age 14, in 1863, he was sentenced to 14 days in prison for a petty theft and expelled from school. Though he learned the shoemaking trade, Voigt spent much of his young adult life in prison for theft and forgery, culminating in a 15-year prison sentence in 1891.

Released in 1906, Voigt lived in Wismar until his residence permit was revoked (in Germany at the time, one needed a permit to be an official resident of a city). He moved in with his sister in Berlin and worked as a court shoemaker, but his residence permit there was revoked as well, as the police didn't want former prisoners around. As an illegal resident in his own country, Voigt was unable to keep his job. But like any good PC, he had a scheme.

Dressed in a Prussian army captain's uniform (built out of bits and pieces from secondhand stores), Voigt stopped four grenadiers and a sergeant in front of a barracks and commanded them to come with him, saying he was under orders from "the highest levels of the German Cabinet". He sent the sergeant to report to his superior officers and dragooned a few more soldiers from a shooting range, then took a train to Köpenick (now a suburb of Berlin) with his erstwhile subordinates.

The "Captain of Köpenick" ordered the local police to shut down the lines of communication to Berlin, and had some of his soldiers cover the exits to the town hall. He then "arrested" the mayor and treasurer for corruption, ordering them to report to General von Moltke in Berlin for interrogation and more importantly, confiscating 4,000 marks from the city treasury (he left a

receipt, signed with the name of his former jailer). When asked on whose authority he was acting, the captain pointed to the bayonets of his soldiers and said "these are my authority". Voigt then ordered the soldiers to keep the building locked down for the next half-hour, stepped onto a train, and changed back into civilian clothes to vanish with his loot.

He was caught ten days later, but the Captain of Köpenick was already a sort of folk hero around the world by this point. He was all things to all people: to foreigners (especially the British) his story was a great example of the pitfalls of Prussian militarism. To the average German, Voigt was a man caught in a catch-22 (though the situation predates the term) who used the rigid bureaucracy against itself. And to Kaiser Wilhelm II, the story showed the respect that a German officers' uniform commanded. Because of this high-level support Voigt was pardoned after two years of his four-year sentence, and leveraged his stunt into celebrity.

After touring Germany, Austria-Hungary and Canada, writing a book and having his likeness in several wax museums, Voigt moved to Luxembourg in 1910. He worked as a shoemaker and waiter until a wealthy dowager in Berlin gave him enough money to retire. Unfortunately, hyperinflation after World War I destroyed his nest egg and he died penniless in 1922. His story remained alive, with a popular play written in 1931 by Carl Zuckmayer, and four different movie versions of the tale over the years.

At the time, people thought this was a story that could happen only in Prussia. But both experiments and con artists have shown that most people will do just about anything – from throwing their hotel refrigerator out the window to "shocking" an actor posing as a test subject – if someone in real or properly faked authority tells them to. This is how a lot of real-life computer hacking works, in fact: less elaborate programming and more posing as the IT crew and just unplugging the server.

The Captain of Köpenick is most likely to come up as one of your PC's zanier schemes – a scheme that may look silly on the surface, but that you as GM should maybe look at generously, as it's worked in reality. It can allow your PCs to talk their way into entertaining situations without massive resources or supernatural powers, letting a "realistic" campaign include some wacky antics. Alternatively, NPCs can use this technique to show your players that even though their characters have superpowers, they can still be fooled by a clever itinerant shoemaker.

Carolingian Devolution of Power

The Transition from Monarchy to Feudalism

The political system of the Middle Ages was not initially feudal. Feudalism developed over the history of the Carolingian dynasty, rulers of the kingdoms of West Frankia (which would become France) and East Frankia (which would become Germany). This devolution of power from strong monarchies to chaotic, feudal lordships makes for great background material in gaming.

Early in the Carolingian period, counts (the rulers of counties) were royal representatives. A count was appointed by a Carolingian ruler as a reward for his efficiency and loyalty. Each count could rule only one county, could be removed from power at any time, and could not pass his title on to his son. Upon the death of a count, the king selected a new count to take his place.

Over the course of the dynasty, Carolingian kings found themselves losing control over their counts. The Carolingians did not practice primogeniture, and instead divided their kingdoms up among their sons. The sons would typically then go to war with each other for control of the entirety of their father's kingdom. In order to assure the loyalty of their counts during these civil wars, these kings would grant their counts more and more power, like control over more than one county. As counts became more powerful, it became increasingly difficult to unseat them. If a count defied the

wishes of the king, there simply wasn't much the king could do about it. Even going to war became impossible, because so many counts had become effectively independent that the crown could no longer field an army.

As the counts gained autonomy, they seized certain royal powers for themselves. They passed their titles on to their sons. They claimed royal property as their own. They controlled the appointment of bishops and abbots, and distributed these coveted positions as rewards to loyal followers. Worse, the counts refused to pass the taxes and fines they collected along to their king. This wound up meaning that all the powers that actually affected most people's daily lives were in the hands of the counts. The kings were left largely powerless.

Things were particularly bad in the kingdom of West Frankia, where the counts soon started losing control over their officials (in East Frankia, power coalesced at the level of the duke, a step above the counts). West Frankish local officials started constructing castles. It used to be that the office of castellan (ruler of a castle) was a public office and the castle itself was royal property. If you tried to build a castle of your own or seize a royal castle for yourself, some agent of the king would come and burn your castle to the ground. As castle building improved, counts found they could not exercise the same control over the castellans that the kings used to. Unlike old wooden motte-and-bailey castles, you cannot easily dislodge an uppity castellan from a stone keep. And so castles began popping up like mushrooms. Counts had to be very much on the ball to stop their construction, and for the most part, they failed.

These castellans were then safely protected from the wrath of their counts behind stout walls. And all those powers the counts usurped from the kings? The castellans usurped them from the counts. For all those within 15 miles of a castle the count may as well not have existed. Another side effect of this feudalization was the explosion in the number of knights, as the castellans needed loyal soldiers to impose their authority upon the locals. Mostly that consisted of breaking the kneecaps of uppity peasants and beating up their farm animals (true story!).

You can include devolution of power of the sort seen in Carolingian Europe in any setting with a feudal system. It's a great way to add some richness to your worldbuilding. PCs could be working for a count who is trying to increase his independence from the king, or for a king who is trying to restore royal power.

This is also a big ol' bone you can throw to the type of player who believes that the secrets of the plot can be uncovered by focusing on tiny setting details. I once held up a game for two hours by trying to figure out from where a random fruit merchant was importing his wares (and I maintain that if the GM had let me figure that out, I would have uncovered half his secrets right there!). If you've got a player who keeps picking at random campaign details, let him see that devolution of power is going on behind the scenes of your campaign world, and you'll have given him all the special attention he needs for the next several sessions.

The "Discovery" of Florida

Great Explorers Follow Slavers' Routes

Any Floridian schoolchild can tell you who discovered Florida: Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León. However, there were certain irregularities about the expedition that may indicate Spaniards had visited Florida before Ponce de León. Note that this is a relatively young theory, first put forward (to the best of my knowledge) by historian Michael Gannon in 1996.

Juan Ponce de León was in the New World almost from the start. A soldier, he was part of Columbus' second voyage in 1493, and led the conquest of Puerto Rico in 1506-1507. While serving as governor of Puerto Rico, Ponce de León heard rumors of a land north of Cuba. In 1513, he sailed northwards with three ships in search of undiscovered country.

Where could such rumors have come from if Ponce de León was the first Spaniard to set eyes on this land? To be sure, it is possible the rumors sprang from nothing. Stories of lands like Hy-Brasil managed to circulate for centuries even though the islands they were describing did not exist and should have been easy to find. But there is another possibility: slavers. Slavery was legal in the New World, and it would not be surprising if slavers were bolder than the Spanish authorities in seeking out new lands to plunder. If such slaving expeditions were occurring, Ponce de León would have been wise to bring a slaver along as a navigator.

The expedition sailed north from Puerto Rico, landing on the east coast of Florida without incident, where Ponce de León named the land 'La Florida', because the discovery fell during the easter season of Pascua Florida. Wanting to scout the southern shore of what they thought was an island, the expedition sailed south, where they encountered the Gulf Stream, one of the strongest currents in the world – so strong that the ships found themselves sailing backwards. This was when the navigator had his first suspicious and counterintuitive idea: sail closer to shore to avoid the current, despite shallow waters being dangerous for the fragile boats of the period. The idea worked. The expedition continued south and west, eventually coming to the west coast of Florida. These are treacherous waters, full of reefs. But not a single ship ran aground or was lost, despite most Spanish voyages of exploration being full of navigational calamities. Either this navigator was almost supernaturally lucky or skilled, had a map of this "unexplored" territory, or he had been here before.

When the Spaniards landed in southwest Florida, they encountered a native who already spoke Spanish. In other places, the Spaniards were set upon by the local Calusa Indians, who attacked from canoes and catamarans. While it was not unheard of for Spanish explorers in the New World to be attacked upon first contact with native peoples, it was unusual. More likely, perhaps, that the Calusa had prior experience with the Spanish. A run-in with slavers would be enough to teach any culture hostility towards white-skinned foreigners in giant wooden boats. During a later attempt by Ponce de León to establish a settlement in Florida, the Calusa attacked so ceaselessly that the Spaniards were forced to abandon the town. The Calusa were

one of the few native groups to force a Spanish retreat from their lands.

There are three chief ways to involve your PCs in a "discovery"-of-Florida-like scenario. They could fill the role of Ponce de León, chasing down interesting rumors with the help of unsavory men. They could be slavers or pirates, who have made a great discovery and want to share it, but won't get their names in the history books, either because someone else will steal the glory, or because they actively don't want to go down in history as villains. Or, perhaps most interestingly, the PCs could be crew on Ponce de León's voyage, trying to piece together the facts as to what's going on behind the scenes. The clues are there for them: the shifty navigator, the increasingly too-smooth sailing, the hostile Calusa, and (as the final clue) the Spanish-speaking Indian. Once the PCs uncover the secret, will they expose the truth?

The Dutch Tulip Bubble

The Madness of Crowds Meets Capitalism

The year was 1636. The Thirty Years' War was raging across much of Europe, a religious war that was morphing into a struggle between international political dynasties. The bubonic plague stalked the streets of Dutch cities, and the long independence war against Spain dragged on, now a side theater in the Thirty Years' War. So the Dutch did the only logical thing: they speculated in tulip futures.

This isn't quite as silly as it sounds. The Low Countries had long been a wealthy part of Europe, with a powerful merchant class. And in the Dutch Revolt, the Netherlands had the advantage at sea, allowing them to keep up a brisk maritime trade. Initially, this was based on their herring fisheries in the North Sea. It grew, however, to take over much of the "carrying trade" in and around the Baltic Sea, and to include colonial ventures in what are today Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia. And the plague, as in the Black Death, gave the average person more money to spend as wages rose due to the shortage of workers.

Tulips, contrary to modern stereotype, didn't originate in the Netherlands: the flower is native to present-day Turkey, and was introduced to European gardens by the Holy Roman Empire's ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in 1554. In the 1590s, a Flemish botanist cultivated a tulip that could thrive in the colder climate of the Low Countries, and tulips began to be the common sight they are in today's Netherlands.

The flower was ideal for speculative investments for two main reasons: first, many different varieties were cultivated. The most spectacular and valuable were those with variegated, flame-like patterns on the petals – this was caused by a virus spread by aphids, which also weakened the plant and made these varieties more rare. Tulips could be grown either from seed – which would take years to grow into a flowering plant – or from bulbs, which would produce flowers in the season after planting. Most of the speculation centered on tulip bulbs, especially those that had produced flowers of rare coloration.

The surge in speculation was due to a change in the method of sale in the 1630s: previously, bulbs had been sold in the summer, after the tulip had already bloomed and died back – one could examine the flower and have some idea of what next year's flower would look like. In 1635, people began buying "bulb futures" - promising to buy bulbs by weight, without knowing the bulb's final weight or what its flower would look like, except from the seller's testimony. In 1636, a formal futures market was set up for tulips, as the "tulipomania" began to extend well beyond the nobility.

By the end of 1636, prices had risen to insane heights, with some speculators paying the cost of a decent-sized farm for a single bulb. The phenemonon was strongest among the Dutch "middle class" of successful artisans in the towns: brewers, bakers, weavers, and merchants. Many paid in kind rather than in cash, trading dozens of livestock for a tulip or two, confident that they could find someone else to buy the bulb from them for even higher prices – after all, the prices kept going up, why should they fall? No longer was anyone replanting the bulbs: the tulips now

stayed in the ground while their ownership flitted from buyer to buyer.

But in early 1637, the bubble popped. A variety of factors were responsible: falling demand in Germany due to a Swedish victory, an increased supply of bulbs, and the simple realization that when all was said and done, a tulip is just a pretty flower. The people who'd bought in at the top of the bubble were left holding the bag: many simply refused to pay when the tulips came due. The courts and Haarlem city council eventually agreed that buyers could nullify their contracts by paying a 3.5% fee to the seller: this solution pleased no one entirely, but kept the bubble's collapse from causing total economic chaos. Plenty of people lost a lot of money, but relatively few went bankrupt. The tulip went back to being a pretty flower, and the tulip mania passed into history.

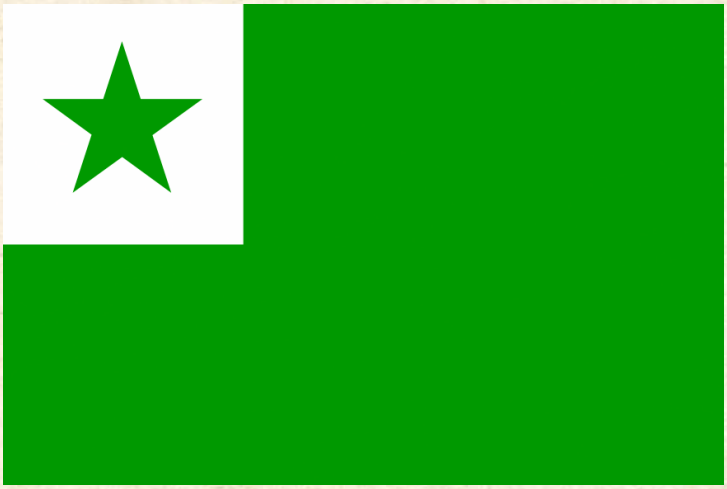
There's some debate over how irrational it all was. Many economists and journalists have used the tulip bubble as the classic example of supposedly efficient markets failing to be rational or efficient, or as an example of mob mentality applied to investment. Some economists, however, defend the free market by emphasizing the lack of long-term economic damage and pointing out subtle legal changes in late 1636 that led to a "rational" rapid decline in prices.

Tulipomania is a great piece of historical flavor to add to a campaign set in 1630s Europe. The Netherlands during this time is a great place to send PCs: a besieged nation with vast trade routes, threatened by war and plague, but planting tulips while Europe burns. Or you could add a speculative bubble to your fantasy or science fiction world to give it a tinge of the early modern world.

Esperanto

The World's Most Successful Artificial Language

Intentionally constructed languages have been around for centuries, if not milennia. These range from Enlightenment scholars attempting to build languages based on pure reason and classification, to various 19th century dreamers of a universal language, and on to "ideological languages" like Lojban and Laadan, languages created for fictional societies like Elvish and Klingon, and a host of online "conlanger" hobbyists.



Most have not been very successful, with only a few thousand adherents at most (ironically Klingon, designed intentionally to sound harsh and grating and to be difficult to speak, is one of the most popular). But Esperanto, though it has (so far!) failed in its mission to be a universal second language, has survived over a century since its introduction in 1887, and attracted up to two million current speakers (of varying fluency).

Dr. Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof was a doctor in the city of Bialystok, in what was then Russia and is now Poland. This was a diverse and multilingual city, with Poles, Jews, Germans, and Russians all speaking their own languages. Since childhood, Zamenhof believed that if the people of Bialystok all spoke the same language, they would be able to put nationalist hatreds behind them. He first attempted to construct a language as a teenager, but was unable to teach anyone but a few friends.

Zamenhof was influenced by the stir a Munich priest caused in the 1870s with the introduction of Volapük, another attempt at a universal language. Though Volapük garnered a lot of interest among German-speakers worldwide, it was found difficult to learn even by them and didn't catch on among non-Germans (probably because of the umlauts) – it was largely forgotten by 1900, though a few stubborn speakers persist to this day. Zamenhof took positive and negative lessons from this, and with the help of his Lithuanian wife, Clara Zilbernik, he published his "International Language" under the pseudonym of "Dr. Esperanto," meaning "one who hopes." The pseudonym soon became the language's name.

By the First World War, the World Esperanto Association had grown large enough to serve as a means of communication for civilians interned in enemy countries, and efforts were made after the war to promote Esperanto through the League of Nations. These efforts were stymied by France, which believed that French could be the universal language of diplomacy for many years to come.

The interwar period was not kind to Esperantists, with the Soviets reversing their pro-Esperanto position of the '20s and considering it to be a "language of spies," and the Nazis believing that it was a Jewish conspiracy (as Zamenhof was Jewish). The Cold War caused further problems, with ideological splits between non-aligned and anti-Communist Esperanto organizations. But the language survived, and even provided a way for people in authoritarian and closed regimes to communicate with the outside world (Maoist China encouraged the study of Esperanto and Albanian, for reasons too complicated to go into here).

Today, many Esperanto-speakers form a sort of worldwide society – many attend annual World Congresses, and pen pal relationships are common. Radio Warsaw has long broadcast

programs in Esperanto, along with the Vatican. Esperanto has close ties to the Baha'i faith as it also promotes a universal language as a path to world unity. However, perhaps the most practical reason to learn Esperanto is the Passporta Servo organization, a worldwide association of Esperanto-speakers who will house for free any Esperanto-speaking travelers. With the universal adoption of Esperanto an increasingly distant dream, speakers have to stick together.

Esperanto isn't a very good "language of spies," as it's pretty easy to learn. But having an Esperanto-speaking character is a bit like having a character who's a Freemason: Wherever they go, there are people who have something in common with them, and will be more likely to help them out. Also, Esperanto can be a great generic Eastern European language that not many of your players are likely to know – classic movies like Metropolis and The Great Dictator have used it that way, and so has the US Army.

The First Crusade

Long and Terrible Religious War

In 1095, the Byzantine Empire was under attack by Seljuk Turks and rapidly losing ground. It seemed even Constantinople would soon be threatened. The emperor sent a desperate message to the pope: send help! The pope called for a crusade. Anyone who answered the call to defend the Byzantine Empire and retake Jerusalem could participate in this armed pilgrimage, and all who died in the undertaking would be guaranteed entrance into heaven. The emperor was hoping for some mercenaries whose loyalty he could buy. What he got was an army of 60,000 knights, soldiers, and peasants loyal to no one but God.

The first wave of crusaders, called the People's Crusade, consisted mainly of untrained, ill-equipped peasants. On their journey through Europe towards Constantinople, they decided to get an early start on killing unbelievers, and slaughtered and looted Jewish communities as they went. When the Kingdom of Hungary, frightened by these murderous pilgrims, tried to deny them passage, the crusaders attacked Hungarian troops. Unlike the crusaders, these Hungarians were armed and trained, and in fighting back killed some 10,000 pilgrims. Those among the rabble who actually made it to the Holy Land were easily defeated by the Turks. The stupidity and violence of the People's Crusade may be partially explained by some of its leaders, who included a goose and a goat believed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit whom the crusaders followed through Europe.

The second wave of crusaders – the actual First Crusade – was led by distinguished knights. Some were great lords, but many were the younger brothers and second sons of the noble houses of Europe. Still, the bulk of the crusaders were soldiers and peasants. When they reached Constantinople, the terrified emperor (who remembered quite well the madness of the People's Crusade only months prior) refused to

lead them, and instead just ferried them across the Bosporus as quickly as possible. The sooner these madmen left his city the better. Life was hard for the crusaders. They never had many supplies, and were plagued by starvation for most of the campaign. They also had to deal with disease. Indeed, the pope's own representative, the acclaimed warrior-cleric Bishop Ademar, died in an epidemic. Many of the crusaders simply gave up and went home long before the army reached Jerusalem.

The crusaders fought in many sieges on the long road to Jerusalem, but the most memorable was the siege of Antioch. For months, they camped around the city, watching their food reserves dwindle. Many died of hunger. Finally, a traitor who commanded three towers on the city walls let the crusaders up on a rope ladder. They opened a gate and captured the city just in time to escape a Turkish relief army marching north from Mosul. The crusader besiegers had become the besieged: hardly an improvement. Eventually, a crusader had a vision that told him the Spear of Destiny (the spear that pierced Jesus' side at the crucifixion) was buried inside the city. When such a spear was found, the bolstered crusaders were able to drive off the Turks.

Two years after they left Constantinople, the Crusaders finally reached Jerusalem. The constant wars, starvation, and disease had taken their toll. The army numbered perhaps only 15,000 by that point, including 1,300 knights. The Egyptian (not Turkish) garrison in Jerusalem, by contrast, was in great shape. It had plenty of cavalry and archers, was led by a popular general, and had a relief column on the way north from Egypt. To prepare, the Egyptians expelled all Christians from the city (no doubt fearing a traitor like at Antioch), brought all livestock inside the walls, and poisoned the wells outside. The crusaders were too few to surround the city, and had little food and less water. They could not hope to starve the city out; they would have to attack. After a failed assault, the whole army just about went home, but instead, guided by a vision, walked barefoot around the city in penance. A week later, due to a series of coincidences, the Crusaders were able to scale the walls at one place, opened a gate, and rushed into the city. The subsequent massacre and looting is legendary.

At your table, you can construct a military campaign like the First Crusade as a series of semi-discrete events. You know where the PCs and their army start, you know where they're going, and you know what route they will have to take so as not to leave unconquered enemy cities behind them. They will have to reach (among others) Constantinople, Nicaea, Antioch, and Jerusalem in that order. Since you know where your PCs will go, you can craft complicated plots months in advance without explicitly railroading your players. This is not to say the PCs' actions won't have consequences. If the PCs lose 80 percent of their troops at Antioch, that will certainly affect the situation when they reach Jerusalem.

The Flight of the Czech Legion

The Modern Anabasis

On the Eastern Front in the First World War, two great multinational empires clashed: Russia, known by many as "the prison house of nations" and Austria-Hungary, a ramshackle dual monarchy whose lands today are divided among 12 countries. The Russians hoped to use Pan-Slavic ideology (which had much cachet in Eastern Europe at the time) to motivate defections from the Austrian camp. Ethnic Czechs in Russia were organized into a Czech Company in late 1914.

During the early battles of the frontiers, many Czechs (and some Slovaks) simply surrendered and deserted to the Russian side. For a humorous look at why morale was so low, I recommend The Good Soldier Schweik, by Jaroslav Hasek (who fought with the Legion, though he eventually sided with the Bolsheviks). The Czech Company became a regiment, a brigade and finally a corps of around 65,000 men (mostly Czechs and a few Slovaks) by 1917.

Unfortunately for the Czechs, the Russians were losing the war. Though they fought bravely under the Tsar and Alexander Kerensky, the mid-1917 "Kerensky Offensive" was a massive failure, and after the October Revolution, the Russian war effort against the Central Powers essentially fell apart. The Czechs wanted to fight on, with the hope that the Allies would recognize Czechoslovakia as an independent state after the war. They couldn't go west to get to the Western Front – so they agreed to go east to Vladivostok on the Pacific coast, from which French and British ships would take them to Europe.

The Germans, who made peace with Russia in March 1918, didn't like this at all. They pressured the Bolsheviks to arrest and imprison the Czechs, threatening to resume the war. Also, the Czechs were getting involved in local politics and agitating against Bolshevik rule among the peasantry. In May 1918, tentative moves to disarm the Legion resulted in a full-scale "Revolt of the Legions," with the Czechs taking over the Trans-Siberian Railroad from the Urals to Lake Baikal. In the early days of the Russian Revolution they formed one of the most organized and powerful forces in the country, and were able to capture local stockpiles of arms, ammunition and rail stock (including fearsome and iconic armored trains) as they traveled east.

Working with local White (counterrevolutionary) forces, the Legion pushed towards Vladivostok. Forward elements reached the Siberian port on June 29th. But the Franco-British plans had changed: the Legion now looked to be a useful ally against the Reds in the Russian Civil War, and the Czechs would have to keep fighting.

On the 14th of July, the Legion won the only naval battle in Czech history. Lake Baikal had six Red gunboats on it which were able to shell the Trans-Siberian Railway. The Czechs built makeshift rafts, strapped artillery to them, and sank three of the gunboats: they then made amphibious landings and took the Red ground troops by surprise.

The Czech capture of Yekaterinburg on July 18th likely led to the execution of the Czar and his family, as the Bolsheviks feared they were coming to rescue the Czar (though the Czechs had no such plans). At this point, however, the Czech Legion's dominance began to unravel. The Reds were getting more organized and numerous, and began to push the Czechs back, from the Volga to the Urals. Especially after the Treaty of Versailles – which provided for an independent Czechoslovakia – was signed, the rank-and-file in the Legion began to wonder what they were fighting for.

The Czechs began to have trouble with their erstwhile allies: they were disgusted by the brutality of the Cossack General Semenov in particular. They had also acquired eight train cars full of gold bullion – the Czar's gold, captured in Omsk. A plan began to form.

In January 1920, the Legion switched sides (again) and made a deal with the Bolsheviks – they could see the writing on the wall. In

exchange for free passage out of Russia, they gave the Reds the Czar's gold (or at least most of it...) and handed over Admiral Kolchak, a major Siberian White leader. They then hired ships and traveled back home, with the last few leaving in September 1920.

They may have taken a train car of gold with them: when the Legion got home, they built and funded a very successful bank. Some say this was merely their back pay plus the profits of various enterprises (bakeries and the like) in Russia. But it's quite possible that they only gave the Bolsheviks seven cars of gold, and this makes a much better story.

I have actually run a campaign based on the story of the Czech Legion, starting from the conscription in Austria-Hungary and finishing with the evacuation from Vladivostok. I can highly recommend this: alternatively, an NPC in a game set between the wars could be a Legion veteran, and would certainly have interesting stories to tell.

Fort Fizzle

A Successful Failure

The Nez Perce (or Niimiipuu) Indians, were given a large area of land in Oregon by treaty in the 1850s, but forced onto a much smaller reservation in the 1870s. In 1877, about 750 attempted to flee first to the Crow Nation in Eastern Montana and later to Canada (likely inspired by Sitting Bull's flight to Canada the previous year). They were forced to surrender by the US Army just 50 miles from the Canadian border (this is where Chief Joseph made his "I will fight no more forever" speech). It was an 1,100-mile journey filled with battle and tragedy, but in the mountains of Western Montana, there was a moment of comedy and maybe even hope.

With US troops unable to catch up with the Nez Perce band, troops from Fort Missoula (built in the 1860s at the request of local merchants, who claimed there was a threat from hostile Indians, but mostly wanted to be able to sell supplies to a fort) were called out to stop them. The Army recruited local civilian volunteers, and told them a force of Indians was on the warpath towards Missoula. The 35 regular army troops and 50 volunteers marched south, to Lolo Pass.

Taking to heart the experience of the Civil War, the soldiers knew the value of a good trench (or even a mediocre trench), and so built a log barricade and a small trench, along with some foxholes, on July 25. Of course, this works a lot better in a flat area where you have enough troops to make an actual trench line. One volunteer was very proud of the foxhole he'd dug, until he climbed up the hillside and realized he could see (and shoot) right to the bottom of it!

On July 26, the Nez Perce arrived and sent emissaries to negotiate under a flag of truce. They told the defenders that they had no desire to do harm to the settlers of the area, and would peacefully pass through. Captain Charles Rawn said he'd only be willing to accept this if the Nez Perce disarmed, which they were unwilling to do. During the impasse, Montana Governor Benjamin

Potts and more soldiers and volunteers showed up, bringing the total number of defenders to 216. Rawn told them to expect a fight, though Chief Joseph recalled him promising free passage in a meeting on the 27th.

The volunteers, hearing and believing that their homes were under no threat, decided they weren't going to fight the Army's battle and headed home, leaving about 100 regular troops in the narrow valley. The next day, the Nez Perce simply marched around them, along the opposite hillside to the north. The warriors among them taunted the soldiers from the ridge line (which Rawn had earlier claimed "a goat could not pass" - though looking at the ridge today, it seems quite easily traversable) and a few shots were fired, but there were no casualties.

The Nez Perce ran into some of the volunteers on their way through the valley, and friendly greetings were exchanged. The plan to stop the Nez Perce had, well, fizzled, and so the little log barricade was dubbed "Fort Fizzle." The logs of the fort were used by homesteaders in the early 20th century, but a reconstruction was built in the 1960s. It is rather unimpressive.

The sign at the Fort Fizzle Historic Site claims it was "a successful failure" - and in a way, it really was. Nobody died on either side, and the citizens of the area were later credited for their wisdom in avoiding a fight by the Montana governor, who also praised the Nez Perce for their audacity. It's a little spot of humor in the tragedy of the Indian Wars.

Fort Fizzle also says something about adapting warfare to different conditions. A trench was a powerful weapon in flat terrain, but was much less useful when it could be fired upon from high ground – and even less useful when your force is small enough that the enemy can simply walk around the next mountain over. A situation based on Fort Fizzle can thus be both tactically and narratively interesting.

Galveston Hurricane

Horrific Natural Disaster

The most deadly natural disaster ever to strike the United States, the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 killed an estimated 6,000-10,000 people in a city of 40,000. Flood waters fifteen feet deep and winds of 140 miles per hour left the city almost completely destroyed.

The real killer in a hurricane is not the wind, but the water. The hurricane drives a great mass of salt water before it (the "storm surge"), effectively raising the sea level. By the time the most intense part of the storm makes landfall, that land is typically underwater.

Before the storm, Galveston was complacent. It was the third largest port in the nation; street for street, the city had more millionaires than any other American town. What could harm Galveston? Hurricanes had hit the city before, flooding some of the streets, but that was all. There was some talk of building a seawall for protection, but the man in charge of the local Weather Bureau publicly stated that the passes between the barrier islands surrounding Galveston were so shallow that no serious storm surge could make it through. As far as residents were concerned, that settled the question. They were safe.

Before satellites, there was little that could be done to predict the path of a hurricane. Typically, some monster storm would slam into a seacoast without warning; no one even knew it was out there, let alone where it was heading. By the early 20th century, some progress had been made on this problem. When ships in the Caribbean encountered storms, they would telegraph Washington when they reached port, but the information was usually outdated. So while Galveston was dimly aware that there was some sort of storm in the Gulf of Mexico, and it was probably heading north, the city had little more warning than that. On the day when the storm hit, men left their homes to go to work, unconcerned by the rain and dark clouds.

The killing started a few hours later. The roof of a building tore off, and the second floor collapsed on the cafe below, killing five. Men struggling home through the neck-deep seawater drowned when they tired. As the water rose and rose, some took axes to their floorboards, hoping that by evening out the water pressure, they could save their homes from being swept away. It didn't work. Houses rose from their foundations and capsized like top-heavy boats, trapping those inside beneath the raging water. The meteorologist who predicted no hurricane could harm Galveston leapt from a second-story window with his family just before his house rolled over. They clung to wreckage for hours. At one point, a man tried to shove the children aside to claim a spot on the makeshift raft, and had to be fended off with a knife. Above the howling wind, some could hear cannonfire from a nearby fort: the soldiers were calling for help. And all the while, roof shingles flew through the air like knives.

A team was dispatched from Houston to survey the damage. When the train tracks to Galveston were blocked by debris, the team continued by boat. Their voyage was punctuated by quiet thuds from the hull striking floating corpses. Men. Women. Children. They were everywhere, bruised and broken by the waves. Much of the town was almost completely leveled, a vista of uninterrupted wooden debris. Corpses hung

from tree branches. Survivors called for help from inside the taller piles of rubble. Driven by fear of disease, residents piled corpses on a barge and dumped them in the Gulf of Mexico. Many washed back ashore. From then on, bodies were burned in great piles. The city was under martial law. Soldiers were ordered to shoot looters on the spot. The residents were all reported to be in a daze. Said one, "You will hear people talk without emotion of the loss of those nearest them. We are in that condition that we cannot feel."

We usually end by saying, "It might be fun to..." In this case, "fun" is the wrong word. A better choice might be "dramatic" – or even "traumatic." PCs might take boats into the floodwaters to pluck the drowning from their deaths, or rescue children from houses that are about to roll over. After the storm, PCs might be interested in helping dispose of the bodies. If the corpses aren't dealt with, the number who died in the storm will pale beside the number who die of disease. It's ugly, awful work that few residents will want to do. They may need the PCs to lead them. If the storm strikes at the beginning of a campaign, encouraging the PCs to help in the rebuilding could be a very effective way to get them emotionally invested in the city, if it's going to play a major role in the rest of the campaign.

Hydraulic Computing

The Information Age's Road Not Taken

In 1949, Bill Phillps, New Zealand economist and tinkerer, presented a strange machine at the London School of Economics. It was a computer simulating the economy of the UK, called the MONIAC in allusion to the recently built ENIAC. But instead of electricity, water flowed through the computer in a series of tubes, reservoirs and sluices that represented the whole economic life of Britain: after changing conditions such as tax and interest rates, one could wait for the system to reach equilibrium and get predictions for statistics such as personal income and inflation by looking at the levels in different reservoirs. The machine (built from surplus bomber parts and other assorted scrap) was a rousing success, with 19 copies being built around the world.

Strangely enough, using water for computation had its roots well before electronic computation. If we disregard the elaborate fountains of the world's palaces, the first "hydraulic computer" was built by Irving Fisher (American neoclassical economist and inventor of the Rolodex) in 1892. This was much simpler than Phillips' machine: it was a water tank full of half-flooded cisterns, all raised and lowered by a complex network of levers. By changing settings on the walls of the tank, the user could explore various economic scenarios, varying levels of income and resources. The model was a distillation of the orthodox economics of the time, with its easily attained stability and mechanistic simplicity (the Phillips machine was more Keynesian, with a focus of aggregate demand and supply).

But computing with fluids wasn't just used for economic modeling. In 1936, the world's first computer that could solve partial differential equations was built by Soviet professor Vladimir Lukyanov – it was used to model the cooling of concrete in large construction projects. The vast device took up three rooms, and data output was painstakingly tallied by charting the water level in a series of tubes (Ted Stevens was right!) and deriving an equation for the curve. But it did what no other device could at the time, and its construction was followed by a surge of interest in hydraulic computing (and analog computing in general) in the Soviet Union. The Soviets bet on analog computing, while the West focused on digital – and in the late 1970s, digital overtook analog, and a strong field of Soviet science became largely a historical footnote.

There was a lot of interest in digital fluidic computing in the West in the late 1960s: using air or water pumped through oddly shaped chambers to create mechanical versions of logic gates. At the time, they were competitive with electronic systems in size, and much more durable and reliable. Though advances in electronic miniaturization have largely passed fluidics by, it is still used in some automatic transmissions and airplane guidance systems. It is being used in some prototype aircraft for thrust vectoring, allowing them to steer without flaps.

A hydraulic computer – ideally one hewn out of solid rock, with strange hissing and gurgling noises and condensation dripping from every surface – would be a great addition to a dwarven mine. A sentient planet could have a vast, continent-spanning geyser field as a hydraulic brain (and be sure not to ask it a question when you're standing on the cerebral cortex!). In a world where electricity, or at least electronic computing, doesn't work, fluidics might be the best option (water-filled tubes instead of vacuum tubes?). Or you could simply use this other branch of computing – in a Soviet factory or a boosterish newspaper article – as a way to highlight some of the weirdness of the mid-20th century.

Brazilian Integralism

"Fascism" with Brazilian Characteristics

In the period after the First World War, the subtler critiques of the 19th century classical liberal ascendancy – the conservatives, the social democrats – were augmented by rising new movements that rejected democracy, laissez-faire economics and the established order far more vehemently. On the left, Communism was suddenly a major force in world politics, having taken over the old Russian Empire (see page 200). Meanwhile, the old reactionary movements on the far-right were largely replaced and co-opted by fascism.

Though most will agree that fascism was on the right of the political spectrum, classifying it is somewhat tricky – as you would expect from an ideology that explicitly promotes "gut feelings" over logic and reason. But to put it simply, fascism is virulently ethnic-nationalist and expansionist, promotes the state (ruled by a single strong leader) over the individual or class, and advocates an economy dominated by large corporations working hand-in-glove with the state (and possibly state-controlled labor unions).

So it seems odd that in Brazil, there was a "fascist" movement – with the marching thugs in monochrome shirts (in this case green) and pompous propaganda you'd expect – that took as its slogan "Union of all races and all peoples". The Integralists, members of the Acao Integralista Brasileira, would accompany their fascist-style "Roman salute" with a shout of "Anaue!" meaning "you are my brother!" and took as their symbol a Greek letter sigma. This is of course the mathematical symbol for integration, and symbolized the Integralist's desire to combine all social forces in service of Brazil.

In basic terms, integralism kept the militant anti-modernism of fascism, but removed the racism and most of the desire to expand, while adding a more localist point of view. The party's founder, Plinio Salgado, was very influenced by nineteenth-century Catholic philosophy, and declared that Integralism was a movement in support of spiritualism as opposed to the "materialism" of both laissez-faire capitalism and Marxist socialism. The nation was to be a heterogenous community, united in diversity by shared Catholic values of devotion to God and to one's fellow man. (At least in theory – authoritarian radicals tend to be less humane than their rhetoric would imply once they get into power).

The Integralists had some success in Brazil in the 1930s, as they worked with dictator Getulio Vargas against Communist opposition. They had over a million party members at their peak, concentrated among the Navy, Italian immigrants, and the lower middle class. But once Vargas consolidated his power in the late 1930s, the Integralists were suppressed, with Salgado exiled to Portugal until 1945. Salgado did gain a seat in the Brazilian Congress in 1958, and lent his support to a military coup in 1964, but the movement was dead for all intents and purposes.

It makes sense that a nonracist fascism would arise in Brazil, as the country has long prided itself on its "racial democracy" and "lusotropicalism." Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese, who were the most willing to intermarry and the least racist of the European colonizing powers, or so goes the argument. Brazil has never had formal racial segregation and is a proudly multiracial country. This ignores that it was one of the last countries to abolish slavery and still has much informal discrimination, but national claims to exceptionalism are rarely entirely honest.

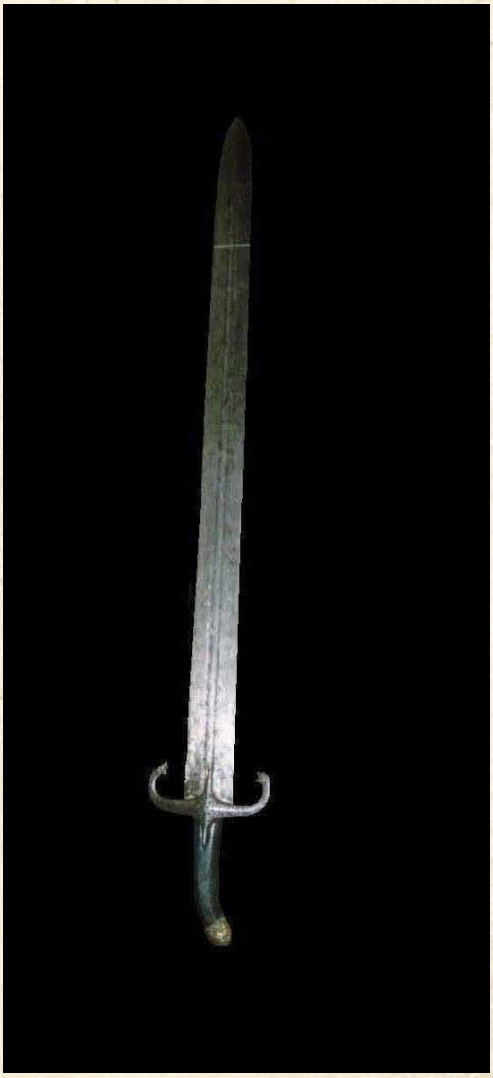
In your game, Integralism, or a movement like it, is useful as a sort of real-life version of the "multicultural nebulously villainous organization" beloved of comic books and action movies. They're a multiracial fascist party, waving blue flags with integrals on them and saluting each other with "You are my brother!" while plotting to rule Brazil (and then the world?) with an iron fist. An Integralist-type party could be an interesting sort of "right-wing Communism" for an alternate-history game - an "Integralist Internationale" actually makes some sense and could be a plausibly dangerous opposition to capitalism or socialism worldwide.

Islam After Muhammad

The Chaotic Birth of an Empire

When the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), founder of Islam, died in 632, it was a great blow to the religion. The whole community was built around the Prophet. It was Muhammad who had received infallible teachings (the Quran) from the angel Gabriel. It was Muhammad who had converted and organized the tribes and city-states of Arabia into one community. Without the Prophet, what would happen to Islam?

The first matter was who would be the head the Muslim community. Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, managed to beat out the other contender, Ali (Muhammad's son-in-law), possibly using violence to do so. Thus, Abu Bakr became the first caliph. Before he could do anything else, Abu Bakr had to cement his rule and the unity of Islam. Many Arabic tribes were returning to their old religions, claiming they had sworn allegiance to Muhammad, not to Islam itself. Caliph Abu Bakr crushed these rebels, forcibly bringing the tribes back to Islam.



During the wars against the apostate tribesmen, Umar (the man who would succeed Abu Bakr as caliph) noted that many of the men who had memorized the Quran were dying in battle. At the time, the Quran existed primarily as an oral tradition; many among the faithful had memorized the Prophet's teachings, but the book itself existed as scattered chapters written down independently. The deaths of these men concerned Umar, and he urged Abu Bakr to collect the Quran in writing. The caliph sent a scribe to examine the scattered chapters and create transcripts of the memorized verses of the faithful. This process of canonization was completed some two decades later.

During this time, Muslim Arab armies rode north. Boiling up from Arabia in a rapid series of decisive campaigns, they conquered the majority of the Middle East and North Africa. These conquests drove the Byzantine Empire back into modern Turkey, and brought about the complete conquest of the Persian Empire.

But all was not right at home. The third caliph, Uthman, was assassinated in 656. And his successor, Ali (Abu Bakr's only competition to become first caliph), refused to harshly punish Uthman's assassins. Ali had been very close to the Prophet, and married Muhammad's favorite daughter. Many said that Muhammad favored Ali to be the first caliph. But others (especially Uthman's kinsmen) said that Ali's refusal to punish Uthman's assassins made him unfit to be caliph. What followed was Islam's first civil war, as supporters and kinsmen of the dead Uthman raised armies to fight Ali. Some of Ali's supporters turned on both groups, forming a sort of rogue third faction. After five years of war, Ali was killed. His son succeeded him, but was defeated and beheaded in 680. The successors of Uthman established a new Caliphate that would rule until 750. The split continues to this day. Those who supported Ali were the forerunners of modern

Shi'ite Muslims, while those who opposed him were the forerunners of modern Sunnis.

While you can use Islam after the death of Muhammad as the inspiration for some excellent worldbuilding, it's also a useful way deal with the consequences of the PCs' unexpected actions. When your PCs inevitably kill your Chosen One or the king who just forged a new nation, what happens next? Consider using what happened to Islam after the death of the Prophet as a template.

Another really cool thing you can do in your games (and this seems as good a place to mention it as any) is to use the Quran as background music. The Quran is written in verse: it's poetry. Because of this, one of the traditional ways to recite the Quran is to sing it. To the ears of most westerners, a sung Quran sounds beautiful, but very strange. As background music, it can do a great job creating an alien atmosphere. For this purpose, I recommend the website Quran Explorer (quranexplorer.com/quran), set to reciter Mishari-Rashid, no translation, and the option "Auto Play Next Surah" enabled. However, you have to know your players. If any of them speak Arabic or have an emotional attachment to the Quran, this music will be at best distracting and at worst insulting.

LYSENKOISM

Ideological Soviet Genetics

The rise of Lysenkoism was an asinine change in Soviet scientific policy. A communist alternative to real genetics, Lysenkoism was a state-mandated march backwards in biological understanding. It was predicated on the ideas of one Trofim Lysenko, who argued that Marxist principles must apply not only to politics but also to nature and agriculture.

Lysenko made the 'obvious' step of looking at biology from a communist perspective. Capitalism teaches that competition is essential for a productive human society. If this is wrong in politics, Lysenko argued, it must be wrong in nature. Evolution by natural selection, then, is just capitalist propaganda claiming that the changes we observe in organisms over time are due to their competition for scarce resources. In Lysenkoist dogma, organisms cooperate for the greater good, like proper communists. There are no such things as 'genes'; rather, every part of the body contributes to heredity, just as every communist worker contributes to the Soviet system.

The only way to have these absurd ideas make any sense at all is to regress to a primitive Lamarckian idea of genetics where the changes an organism picks up over its lifetime are passed on to its offspring: in essence saying that bodybuilders should have heavily-muscled babies. And Lysenko ran with it. He claimed that seeds should be planted in clusters so that inferior plants will sacrifice themselves to help the most vigorous ones. He also claimed that by manipulating the environment, he could turn crops from one species to another in only one generation. Most importantly, Lysenko advocated a process called 'vernalisation,' where you could change the planting season of crops by soaking and chilling or heating their seeds for the right length of time.

As the Soviet government supported Lysenko, he never had to offer any evidence for his impossible

claims. Geneticists who dared to point out that natural selection and Mendelian genetics are supported by enormous mountains of irrefutable evidence were either fired, sent to the gulags, or killed. Only by writing sad little letters confessing to have come around to Comrade Lysenko's view of biology could geneticists continue working in their fields. The effects of this scientific purge on Soviet agriculture have been difficult to determine.

At your table, Lysenkoism may be more than just a bad idea; it may be a villainous plot! Capitalizing on a recent famine, enemy agents may be spreading incorrect ideas about agriculture. It would make sense that farmers would be more likely to listen to novel ideas after a disastrous harvest, and Lysenkoism sure sounds appealing. Farmers will likely want to believe it's true, and the narrative of plants working together may be very intriguing to some. With the help of Lysenkoism, so these enemy agents think, perhaps there will be a few more years of disastrous harvests that will really cripple the country. It could be especially dangerous if the local governor has been converted, and made Lysenkoism state policy. PCs might have to de-convert the governor, try to undo the damage that has been done, solve the mystery of what the goals of the Lysenkoists are, and stop them from causing any more damage. If your players particularly enjoy political conflicts, consider having Lysenkoism be a deeply-entrenched idea among the rulers, requiring lots of political maneuvering to overthrow.

New Religions in Japan

Birth of Diverse, Unusual Religious Beliefs

Most Japanese consider any religion other than the three mainstream religions of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity to be fundamentally different, and have a special word for them: shinshukyo, which is usually translated as "New Religion," but might be more accurately translated as "New Sect-Doctrine." These shinshukyo originate from the 19th century onwards, with some of them founded only in the past few years.

Shinshukyo are typically products or descendants of the three mainstream religions of Japan, but they always differ from those religions in marked ways. They are, by definition, not just new ideas or sects within the older tradition. The 19th century shinshukyo tended to be rural folk religions, but the more modern ones are typically urban in origin. Shinshukyo tend to address fears and anxieties that the three mainstream religions do not. Their most common appeal is that of a close-knit community in the middle of a scary, anonymous metropolis. In addition, many also claim healing miracles. Many Japanese are suspicious of shinshukyo, not least because one, Aum Shinrikyo, killed thirteen people in a terrorist attack in Tokyo.

Let's have a look at three shinshukyo that might be fun in your game.

Buddhist-derived Sokka Gakkai is one of the largest shinshukyo, and claims twelve million members. The sect teaches that the world is in a degenerate age where attaining enlightenment is much more difficult. Calamities, wars, and general misery are the product of people not following true Buddhist practices. However, there is hope. The spirit of the cosmic life-force pervades all humans, and enables us to become Buddhas in this life. Sometimes, the life-force manifests itself as a human to show that Buddhahood is attainable, and to show us how to get there. Furthermore, if all people converted to Sokka Gakkai, wars and calamities would cease, and we could all live together in a prosperous and harmonious world. Sokka Gakkai has a very active proselytizing program, and ordinary members work as peacemakers throughout the globe. The Church even has its own political party.

Judeo-Christian-derived Sukyo Mahikari claims that the God of every religion is actually an invisible "pure light," which is a manifestation of the one true God. Because of this pantheistic view of the pure light, Sukyo Mahikari claims to be compatible with all religions. The pure light has healing and protective properties, and the faithful can radiate it from the palms of their hands. Illnesses are the result of possession by toxic spirits, and family members are frequently possessed by dead loved ones.

Bankeitaishiso Chiesonkyo is an enigmatic and poorly-understood shinshukyo. Adherents prefer not to allow their holy books to fall into the hands of unbelievers. They believe in a spirit world, value prayer quite highly, and are very heavy on ritual. Indeed, about the only detail known about this religion is that they have a ritual for purifying your wristwatch every morning and evening.

At your table, it might be fun to introduce a previously unheard-of shinshukyo in your game world. There are three general ways to present this. First, this new religion could be a decadent, corrupting influence. The PCs could be working for a mainstream church or government, trying to combat these dangerous new beliefs. Alternately, the shinshukyo could be an explosion of freedom against corrupt traditional religions. This could be a great underdog story. Finally, you could present the shinshukyo as morally grey. It may be that both sides are flawed, and the PCs need to navigate these religious and political waters carefully.

NIKA RIOTS

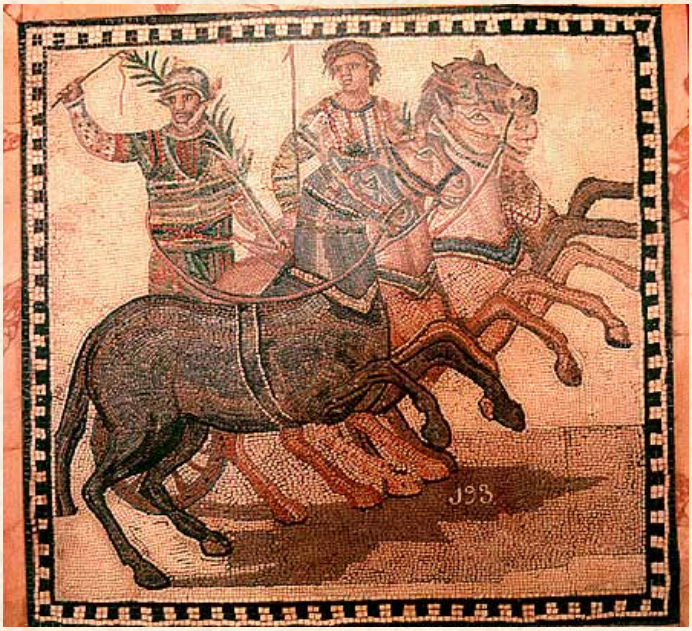
Fiery Uprising in the Ancient World

A tragic event orchestrated by political and athletic organizations, the Nika riots raged for a week in Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire. The bloody crackdown that ended the riots cemented the authority of emperor Justinian I, but cost the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Before we can discuss the riots, we first have to delve into Byzantine chariot racing. Imagine if the American political parties each fielded a football team. Given how deeply ingrained sports are in Western culture, people would care passionately about the success of these teams. Now imagine if the games were most people's only opportunity to voice their political concerns, and you begin to have an idea of how seriously the people of Constantinople took chariot racing. There were two main teams: the Blues and the Greens. Each team fielded chariots and charioteers, but also had official stances on Byzantine politics and theology. The emperor always attended the chariot races at the Hippodrome, so the crowd could make its opinions clear to him by chanting slogans. There was no other reliable way for the rabble to speak to the emperor. As with many sporting and political events there were sometimes minor riots after races, but with the exception of the occasional team-ordered murder, the system generally worked.

The Nika riots began with a botched execution. A number of Blues and Greens had been arrested for murder and hanged, but a Blue and a Green

survived and fled to a church, where they claimed sanctuary. During that day's races, the crowd chanted at emperor Justinian for him to show mercy. The emperor did not respond. Then the crowd began chanting, "Long live the merciful Blues and Greens!" After the races, the two factions put aside their differences, adopted the chant "Nika!" ("Conquer!"), and demanded that the two prisoners be released. When this was denied, the mob set fire to several buildings, including the Hippodrome.



The violence only grew worse in the days to come. Bowing to the new demands of the mob, Justinian fired three unpopular ministers, but this failed to quiet the insurrection. The mob proclaimed another man emperor, but he had fled to avoid being caught up in the violence. The fires spread, destroying half the city, including its main church. Intense fighting raged between the rioters and the emperor's hired foreign soldiers. Another man was proclaimed emperor, and Justinian considered flight.

Instead, he was convinced to stay behind and fight. There are two stories about how the violence was ultimately crushed. Both begin with the rioters gathering in the burned-out Hippodrome to crown their new emperor. Under one version of the story, Justinian sent troops commanded by his three favorite generals to encircle the Hippodrome. They crept up through the ruins and half-burned buildings, and, before the mob realized it, seized all the exits, and slaughtered the mostly-unarmed men inside, killing some 30,000-35,000 people. According to another version, Justinian first sent one of his generals, a eunuch, into the Hippodrome with a sack full of cash to parlay with the men in charge of the Blues. He offered the money to the Blues, reminded them that Justinian had always supported them, and that the new emperor they were proclaiming was an unabashed Green. The Blues then chanted that Justinian was the rightful emperor, and left the Hippodrome. The stunned Greens were then trapped inside the stadium when Imperial troops charged in to slaughter them to a man.

By putting down the Nika riots, Justinian made himself the absolute ruler of Constantinople. From this position of power, he attempted to reconquer what used to be the Western Roman Empire from the barbarians, and likely would have succeeded had it not been for outbreaks of plague. Emperor Justinian I was the last man to attempt to reunify the Roman Empire.

The Nika riots might make an excellent tool to shake up complacent players. They've killed the dragon, driven back the Huns on the Danube frontier, and established a colony on Aldebaran III. So now they return to the capital city, expecting gold and laurels, only to have the Nika riots break out the very next day. The PCs then have to decide what to do. Support the emperor? Throw in their lot with the mob? Flee the city? If you do this, it's an opportunity to let the PCs have a major impact on the campaign world. Note that if you want to keep the Blues and the Greens as the main agitators, you should probably introduce them several sessions before the riots happen.

The Oneida Community

Village of Bible Communists

Rising out of the Second Great Awakening, the Oneida Community was a small American Christian religious group. The organization was founded by a man named John Humphrey Noyes, who believed he was God's agent on earth. In 1848, to escape religious persecution, Noyes and his 45 followers established a communist village on a small plot of land in Oneida, New York.

Here, the Oneida Community taught its unusual theologies (more on them in a moment) and practiced communism. They built a communal dwelling house, a farm, and a sawmill. To provide income, these "Bible Communists" (their term) set up some minor craft industries, the most profitable being steel game traps and silverware. People shared their personal possessions, studied science and scripture, and worked for the common good. Committees and communal departments organized almost all facets of life, and women were given equal standing with men. In 1869, the group began a system of spiritual eugenics, or "stirpiculture" as they called it. Community members were requested to breed with partners selected for their spiritual qualities. The children were largely raised communally. At its height in 1878, the group had 306 members.

But it was the group's theology and not its economics that raised eyebrows. John Noyes preached that the Second Coming of Christ happened in the year 70, during the sack of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. This meant the Oneida Community could bring about the millennial kingdom themselves. Under Noyes' direction, the community practiced something called complex marriage. Every man was married to every woman, and vice-versa. No community member could have exclusive attachment to any other, as that would be selfish and ungodly. Any two caught being exclusive would be forbidden from seeing each other for a time. Under the doctrine of male continence, men were forbidden from ejaculating, even during intercourse. This kept the community's birth rate fairly low, even before the stirpiculture program began. To usher converts and young people into complex marriage, older community members would choose virgins to train in the sexual practices of the community. The women acting in these roles were usually postmenopausal so they needed not worry about unwanted pregnancy until the young men fully learned male continence. Male elders effectively got to pick whichever female virgins they desired.

In 1876, Noyes tried to hand rulership of the community over to his son, an agnostic. The man ran things in a dictatorial fashion, and was opposed by the community. By the time Noyes returned to try to fix things, it was too late: factions had formed in the previously-united community. In 1879, Noyes slipped across the Canadian border to escape statutory rape charges, and sent a message saying the community was to abandon complex marriage. Many members immediately married. People weren't quite sure how to live now that the central social tie of the community was dissolved, so they reassembled as a joint stock company. The company continued the business aspects of the community, if not the social and religious ones. It exists to this day as the successful tableware company Oneida.

The Oneida Community may serve in your campaign as allies, enemies, or neutrals. What's fun is that, while they were quite cultish, they were still fairly harmless (with the exception of the practice of ascending fellowship). However you wind up using the community, they should always weird your players out a little bit.

The Polynesian Seafaring Tradition

Thousand-Mile Voyages in a Canoe

Two thousand years ago, while Roman ships were never leaving sight of land outside the Mediterranean, the Polynesians had settled almost the entire Pacific Ocean. They were the greatest navigators and explorers the human race has ever produced, mastering the angry Pacific in fragile crafts built with Stone Age technology.

Polynesian expeditions were dependent on experts. Before the voyage began, an astrologer-priest would scan the skies for portents and signs. While there was a fair bit of unscientific ceremony involved, the priest was also doing solid meteorology. When he decreed the signs auspicious, the ship launched and the navigator took command. He did little physical work during the voyage, but was expected to be awake some 22 hours each day, noting every tiny variation in the wind and waves. He had no compass, chart, or sextant. Instead, he used cues to determine direction. At night, he could use the North Star or Southern Cross to find true north, and observe which stars were directly overhead to determine the ship's latitude. At sunrise and sunset, he could orient by the sun.

But near noon and when it was cloudy, he could not use the sky. Instead, he used the waves. In the open ocean (see page 35), waves move on predictable headings. The swells are driven by the prevailing trade winds, and local wind shifts do little to change them. So whenever he could, the navigator memorized the orientation of the sky relative to the swells. Sometimes he couldn't even use that. At night, under heavy clouds, it would be so dark that the navigator could not see the swells. In those cases, he relied on a subtle awareness of the rocking of the boat to guide him.

What's key to realize, though, is that while the navigator could know the ship's direction and sometimes its latitude, he had no way of knowing the ship's longitude. (The problem of finding a ship's longitude wasn't solved by anyone until the 1700s, but that's another story.) In other words, he knew where his vessel was going, but not where it was. This meant it was impossible for the navigator to guide the ship directly to its destination. Instead, he would arrive near the destination and start searching for islands. To a man on a tiny ship, a low coral atoll (see the Phoenix Islands on page 39) was effectively invisible. So the navigator would infer the nearness of an island by subtle changes in the waves, the behavior of sea creatures, and the presence of certain bird species. Once the craft found an island, the crew would ask a local where they were, and from there easily find their way to their destination.

Polynesian canoes varied widely, with different styles appropriate for different regions. The 'average' canoe was a catamaran: two, long, narrow dugout hulls of equal size supporting a central platform. The ship was perhaps 60 feet long, and had two masts: one in the aft, one a bit forward of center. There was a tiny hut in the center of the platform to allow the crew to sleep out of the weather. The sailboat lacked a fixed rudder, instead using a large steering oar. The whole ship was held together with rope lashings. There were a number of sail designs, all of which look quite different from the sails we tend to picture. They tended to be triangular, and pointed outwards. Many canoes had stylized bow and stern pieces, often in the form of birds or bird-men.

Traveling hundreds or thousands of miles by canoe is an unpleasant process. For a start, it's rough psychologically. By the second week of the voyage, you're bored out of your skull. There's no place for you to be alone. You're shoved in with crates full of pigs and chickens. And you're on meager rations the whole way. If you're on duty (and at least half the crew always is), you're exposed to the elements, be they burning sun or lashing rain. And storms are very dangerous for men in a canoe. If the sails are not furled, the wind may snap the mast. Even with that dealt with, the ship may capsize or break apart as the lashings are jostled. You may be washed overboard by a wave. It's a bad way to die.

If your PCs are part of the Polynesian seafaring tradition, they can go anywhere. You could even run a campaign based on this: a sort of Stone Age Star Trek, where every session takes the PCs to a new island. The psychological effects of Polynesian sea travel are also a great roleplaying opportunity. How do PCs interactions change when they're trapped together on a tiny boat in the middle of the Pacific for weeks on end?

The Red Corner, Montana

Bastion of Communism on the 1920s Great Plains

The "red states" and "blue states" of today are not set in stone. Still, it's a bit of a shock to find that one of the most successful Communist movements in America was in Sheridan County, Montana – the "red corner" of the state, bordering Canada and North Dakota.

The area was late to be homesteaded, with the railroads attempting to bring in farmers in large numbers only in the early 1900s. Most of the immigrants to the area were Scandinavians, who were used to a harsh climate like that of Northeast Montana – and, importantly, often acquainted with socialism and left-wing politics due to the large Social Democratic parties in Scandinavia at the time.

Communism in Sheridan County started with relatively typical agrarian discontent. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were not a great time for the smallholding American farmer, despite the recent seizure and homesteading of so much Western land. This was partly due to competition on the world market, but the average farmer had more local concerns as well. The railroads had a monopoly on transporting crops to market, the silo operators charged high fees to store grain, and deflation (caused by a growing economy under a gold standard) made farmers' debts harder to pay.

At first, farmer anger manifested as a "Nonpartisan League," which worked through the primary systems of both political parties to support populist pro-farmer candidates without the need to challenge the two-party system. This entryism (working within a political organization to turn it towards one's own ends) was most successful in North Dakota, where the Nonpartisan League essentially took over state government in the '20s and '30s. But in Sheridan County, Charles Taylor had an entryist scheme of his own – he was a secret member of the Communist Party,

USA (CPUSA), and was working to turn the Farmer-Labor Party (a Montana affiliate of the Nonpartisans) into a Communist front party.

Taylor's newspaper – the Producers News – attacked the established parties as the parties of the small-town merchants skimming profits off the noble farmer's grain. Many of the farmers in the region saw local small businesses, not the big capitalists, as their main foe, the middleman between the producer and consumer who took the profits. By 1924, the paper was openly Communist, running articles from the Daily Worker. In 1926, the Farmer-Laborers won all but two elected offices in Sheridan County.

This victory masked the fierce political fighting that was going on. Pro and Anti-Taylor newspapers fought back and forth, accusing the other side of corruption and bootlegging operations – and most of these accusations were probably true. The Daniels County Leader office was burned down in 1926, allegedly by Farmer-Labor supporters – and the sheriff basically looked the other way.

The late 1920s were the high point of the movement: by the end of the decade, numerous problems had developed. Taylor had fallen out with the CPUSA, as he was a Trotskyist. Erik Bert, a Communist from New York, took over the Producers News in 1931, and started focusing the paper on national issues instead of local concerns. Further corruption and crime scandals shook the Farmer-Labor officials in the county.

But even in 1932, the movement was still fairly strong, with 25 percent of county votes going to the Communist candidate for Governor of Montana. Two events struck the death knell for the "Red Corner". First, the funeral of Janis Salisbury, a Young Pioneer (member of a Communist youth organization) in March 1932 shocked the community with its atheism. Erik Bert and not a minister said the closing words, and the funeral was held in the Farmer-Labor meeting hall, with red flags draping the windows.

As the 1930s went on, Communist policy began to diverge from what the farmers wanted. The CPUSA opposed the New Deal as useless, petty reform: most Sheridan County residents supported the New Deal. The Producers News ran articles praising collective farming in the Soviet Union: the farmers didn't want to collectivize. By the late 1930s, Communism was dead in Sheridan County. As the Cold War began, the county residents began to see their radical history as an embarrassment: though it remained an old joke in parts of Montana until the 1980s, the people of Sheridan basically decided to forget that their Communist period ever happened. Since the fall of the Cold War, the history has become more openly discussed.

The rise and fall of Communism in Sheridan County could be a good model for a localized radical movement in your game. Alternatively, a game set in northeast Montana in the '20s could be great fun, in a part of the "Roaring Twenties" your players likely know little about. Bootlegging, Communism, newspaper wars... all it needs are some good PCs.

The Rise and Fall of State Shinto

Nationalist Changes in Religious Tradition

Shintoism is an animist, polytheistic, Japanese religion based around the worship of deities called "kami." The most powerful kami resemble humans, and have great power over the world, much like the Greek, Norse, and Egyptian gods. However, any spirt or object that elicits awe could be considered kami. Examples of lesser kami include mountains, waterfalls, fey spirits, powerful animals, ancient heroes, and certain ancestors. Such minor kami vary in their power and ability to perform miracles, but all are immortal. Even when the animal dies or the mountain erodes away, the kami-essence remains, and the kami may still be an object of worship centuries later. Some evil kami must be appeased lest they curse you, while others are benevolent and may give humans their blessing. Many are neutral. Kami are probably best known outside of Japan for their role in the film Princess Mononoke, where the word is translated as "gods."

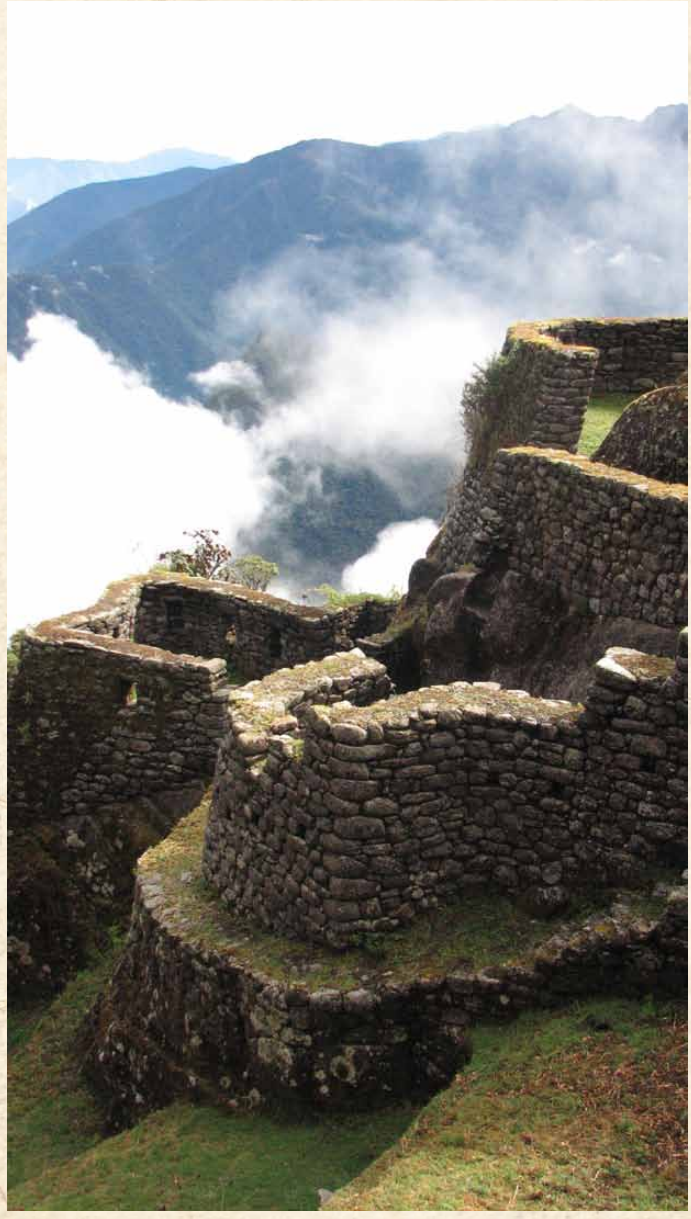
When Buddhism arrived in Japan, Buddhist and Shinto beliefs began to merge. Shinto kami and Buddhist deities (buddhas and bodhisattvas) were often seen as different manifestations of the same thing. In the art of the period, it's often very difficult to tell whether the deity depicted is Shinto or Buddhist. In many cases, the question is academic; the artist would not have made the distinction.

When imperial rule was restored in Japan in the nineteenth century, the emperors tried to use religion to build national unity. The government took the diverse folk beliefs of Shintoism, unified and codified them, and made them official. This religion is today called '"State Shinto." An important step in its creation was to separate Shinto and Buddhist beliefs. Shintoism was praised as uniquely Japanese, while Buddhism was demonized as a foreign influence, even though the fusion of Shintoism and Buddhism was also unique to Japan. The government closed many Buddhist temples, had Buddhist art in Shinto shrines destroyed, and forbade the use of Buddhist terminology in reference to kami.

The next step was to instruct people in the doctrines of State Shinto. For example, the emperor himself is a kami, and he is descended from the very powerful kami of the sun. As such, the emperor deserves all the veneration and obedience due a divine being. This set in motion an imperial cult of the state, wherein it is right, spiritually and morally, to value the welfare of Japan above your own life. The people were also taught that the Japanese were inherently superior to all other races, and were fated to rule the world.

State Shinto was a powerful motivator for Japanese aggression in the second world war, and was formally abolished during the American occupation afterwards. State Shinto beliefs are often blamed for Japan's expansionist, militaristic, and atrocity-prone behavior before and during the war. During the American occupation, many aspects of State Shinto were banned, and control of the religion was taken from the government and returned to the priests. Today, while most Japanese folks see Buddhism and Shintoism as vaguely distinct, things have mostly reverted to a pre-State Shinto situation.

The rise of State Shinto probably works best as something the PCs are trying to stop. Most fantasy games have a polytheistic tradition. What if someone in the state is twisting the pantheon to serve his own ends? He might be trying to get rid of the worship of certain gods by dismissing them as foreign, while unifying and altering the worship of the other gods in order to glorify the state. Once worshippers are indoctrinated in the new religious system, this antagonist starts preaching xenophobia and pushing for war.



The Rise of the Inca Empire

Sudden, Multifaceted Conquest

Around 1400, the Incas exploded onto the international stage. They had been a significant local power for a few centuries, but nothing seemed to predict their meteoric rise. In a century, they had forged an empire 2,400 miles long, covering 300,000 square miles, and containing some six to twelve million people.

The Incas had spent their centuries as a local power wisely, slowly building up their strength. Then two leaders came to power: a man named Pachacuti and his son Tupac Inca Yupanqui. These men arose from a culture that didn't allow the eldest son to merely inherit power. Instead, all eligible leaders fought over the inheritance. While this wasn't the best way to run an empire, it meant that the men in power were competent and ruthless. Pachacuti and Tupac Inca expanded their empire through a combination of strategies. Diplomacy was the first tactic: bringing people into the empire through marriage or alliance. If that failed, they would threaten to invade, which would sometimes bring reluctant neighbors to heel. Only if those two tactics failed would they actually attack. It was a very "carrot-and-stick" sort of strategy. "One way or another," the message was, "you'll be joining our empire. Do you want to profit by this or be destroyed?" And there wasn't any stopping the Inca expansion. Centuries of conflict in the Andes meant there weren't any nearby societies bigger than 50,000 people. Once the Incas had conquered a few groups, no one else provided a credible threat.

The Inca were able to legitimize their rule by tapping into local traditions of leadership. For most Andean peoples at the time, a local ruler owed his people protection from their enemies. In exchange, the people offered him their loyalty and labor. When the Incas acquired new territory, they were often able to fit that paradigm. Admittedly, the Inca emperor was far more powerful than any local chief, but it was functionally the same system. Furthermore, the

Incas tried to pass themselves off as benefactors rather than conquerors, showering local populations with gifts.

But the Incas were doing a lot more than just acting like local chiefs. They built 25,000 miles of roads, allowing troops and communication to flow swiftly from one end of the empire to the other. They resettled entire populations, moving millions of people into more fertile regions and breaking up troublemaking groups. The effects of these changes were mixed. On the one hand, there was a lot less war under Inca rule. And people were able to move into lower elevations, where crop yields were better. But most people objected to being resettled. And under the Incan corvée tax system (called mita, and kept under the Spanish), everyone owed two or three months of labor each year to the state, working on things like roads, fortresses, canals, and crop terraces. Given how common rebellions were, it seems people generally preferred self-rule to Inca control.

At your table, while the PCs could be involved in the Inca expansion, it also makes a terrific backdrop for unrelated stories. While the PCs are adventuring, the Inca Empire is being forged and consolidated around them. On the road, they pass peasants laboring under corvée. They receive gifts from the Inca government. The local lord with whom they've been cultivating a relationship suddenly reports to Inca authorities. Several prominent NPCs bear grudges against the empire for resettling them or their families. This radical social shift can permeate an adventure and give it a unique flavor without the adventure actually being about the Inca conquest.

The Russian Civil War

Interbellum Chaos

The First World War scarred every nation that took part, but arguably none worse than Russia. Though the empire had been industrializing rapidly in the decades just before 1914, it was still a giant with feet of clay, a squabbling mass of rising nationalisms with a nervous autocrat trying to hold his throne. By 1917, the Russian Army was falling back in disarray on all fronts, and just about everyone agreed that Czar Nicholas II had to go. The czar abdicated on March 15 (March 2nd by the Julian Calendar, which Russia was still using), and was replaced by liberal aristocrat Georgi Lvov.

The Germans, meanwhile, had smuggled Bolshevik Vladimir Lenin from Switzerland into Russia on a sealed train, hoping to force Russia's collapse. In April, Lenin arrived in the capital Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and began to organize demonstrations and unrest. Mass protests erupted in July, and the government attempted to compromise by replacing Lvov with Alexander Kerensky, a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (actually agrarian democratic-socialists). The government was an uneasy coalition of the Duma (the old Czarist parliament) and the Petrograd Soviet (meaning "workers' council"). But Kerensky continued the war, and the Bolsheviks rose up in November (October by the old calendar) promising "Peace, Land and Bread!" The Russian Civil War had begun.

The Russian Civil War is usually portrayed as a conflict between the Reds (revolutionaries) and the Whites (the old regime). But this is too simplistic: while the Bolsheviks were a fairly unified faction (with occasional infighting, as when Trotsky brutally crushed the Kronstadt sailors' revolt), the Whites were a disorganized coalition of contradictory ideologies, from democratic socialists to liberal reformers to absolute monarchists to power-hungry warlords. And to get a full picture of the war, we need to add in three more colors: Blue, Green and Black.


Under Bolshevik rule until February 1918
Maximum advance of the anti-Bolshevik forces
LATVIA Emerging countries
Cities gained by Bolsheviks by coup.
Under Bolshevik rule Summer 1918
Arkhangel'sk
MILLER
Perm
Yekaterinburg
KOLCHAK
FINLAND (6 XII 1917)
Vyatka
Vologda
Helsinki
Petersburg
Kazan
Ufa
ESTONIA (24 II 1918)
YUDENICH
Pskov
Symbirsk
LATVIA (18 XI 1917)
Moscow
Penza
Orenburg
Samara
Baltic
LITHUANIA (16 II 1918)
Smolensk
Kaluga
ANTONOV
DUTOV
Voronezh
Saratov
Minsk
POLAND (11 XI 1918)
Tsaritsyn
Warsaw
Kiev
Kharkov
Astrakhan
PETLURA
DENIKIN
Rostov
MAKHNO
Yekaterinoslav
Caspian Sea
Chisiniau
VRANGEL
DENIKIN
Yekaterinodar
Odessa
Baku
Simferopol
GEORGIA (26 V 1918)
AZERBAIJAN (1 VII 1918)
Black Sea
ARMENIA (28 V 1918)

Most of the world's major powers intervened in the Russian Civil War, mostly in order to "strangle the monster (the Soviet Union) in its cradle," in the words of Churchill. Intervening forces were usually called the "Blue Army," and while most aligned with the Whites, some (particularly the Japanese in Manchuria and Siberia, the Turks in the Caucasus, and the Czech Legion (see page 181)) were out for nationalistic goals. But the intervening powers were exhausted from WWI, and not willing to commit large enough forces to turn the tide: Almost all troops were withdrawn by 1919. The intervention in Russia was the only time that US soldiers have fought Russians directly.

The term "Green Army" has two separate definitions: first, it refers to nationalist uprisings, of which there were many. Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states successfully gained their independence, while uprisings failed in the Ukraine, Central Asia, Siberia and the Caucasus. In general, the nationalists fought against both Red and White, though Finland and Poland were staunchly anti-Communist, and the Reds were able to co-opt some nationalist movements by promising (and granting) regional autonomy. Peasant revolters against the requisitions and oppression of both sides were also called Greens: most were crushed fairly quickly as they had only a local base of support.

The "Black Army" of anarchist Nestor Makhno was not so easily dealt with. Makhno's band of anarchist peasants were the terror of the Whites in Ukraine for some time, and a reluctant ally to the Reds – until the Reds betrayed them in 1920. Makhno fled to Paris, and depending on what you read, he was anything from the Russian Civil War's Robin Hood to its Pol Pot. Another figure more clearly villainous but just as much "on his own side" was Baron Ungern-Sternberg in Mongolia (see page 115).

In the end, the Reds won the Russian Civil War (excepting the losses of Poland, Finland and the Baltics), largely because the enemy coalition was geographically and politically disconnected. A centralized and ideologically unitary power block won against a loose coalition that was never able to rally the masses to its cause, because it was never able to repudiate the failures of the czar. The last remnants of the White forces (excepting the exiles in Paris and China) surrendered in 1922, in Siberia.

The Russian Civil War can fit into your game in all sorts of ways: as a story of the brutal tragedy of civil war (Hoover earned some of his fame helping to feed the millions starving during the war), or as a comic-opera romp of bad accents and stolen zeppelins, or even just as backstory. It's full of dramatic events for your PCs to be involved in, some of which are detailed in other chapters. And it's a great example of how confusing an ideological civil war can end up being.

The Scopes "Monkey Trial"

Media Circus, Trial of the Century, and War of Ideas

In 1925, the Tennessee town of Dayton – and the whole United States – watched a struggle between science and religion play out in a county courthouse. John Scopes bravely stood up for his right to teach evolution against a recent state law, and the case was argued back and forth between blustering fundamentalist Bryan and bad-boy secularist Darrow. Scopes lost, but the trial was a victory for Science and Reason in the end.

At least, that's the story as Hollywood tells it. The real story of the Scopes Trial is the same in broad strokes, but with more small-town shenanigans.

William Jennings Bryan had been involved in quite a few causes in his life: the fiery prairie populist had advocated for the free coinage of silver, prohibition, and against US entry into WWI, while running for President three times on the Democratic ticket. He saw himself as the tribune of rural America, defending its interests in a rapidly urbanizing and industrializing nation. In the 1920s, Bryan began to campaign against the teaching of evolution. It's unclear why he did this: sardonic writer H.L. Mencken claimed it was a cynical move to recapture old glory by becoming a sort of "Fundamentalist Pope," but he may have been motivated by genuine faith, or even a concern that Darwin's ideas were being used by many politicians to justify Social Darwinism, class stratification, and eugenics.

In 1925, Tennessee banned the teaching of evolution in its schools, and 14 other states had similar legislation pending. The ACLU was looking for people to challenge the law, and this attracted the attention of George Rappalyea, a liberal Methodist who had recently moved in from New York. He disagreed with the law on principle, but just as importantly believed that having a trial in Dayton, a town of about 1800, would bring tourism and media attention to the area. With this second argument, he convinced city officials that the law should be challenged: now all they needed was a lawbreaker.

This wasn't too hard, since the Tennessee biology textbook from before the law discussed the theory of evolution, and this hadn't been changed: any teacher who didn't skip part of the textbook was breaking the law. This included football coach and substitute biology teacher John Scopes, who was (after agreeing to be put on trial and incriminating himself) ceremonially "arrested" so the trial could begin. Initially, Rappalyea wanted to get H.G. Wells to lead the defense, but Wells refused, saying he had never heard of Dayton. In the end, both sides had celebrities arguing for them: the prosecution had Bryan and the defense had Clarence Darrow (essentially the Johnny Cochrane of his day) and Dudley Malone, politician and international divorce lawyer.

The trial was a media circus: trained monkeys doing tricks on the courthouse lawn, reporters pouring in from across the country, preachers

holding revival meetings, and of course, novelty songs. The first live radio broadcast from a trial was set up, and 1,000 people packed the county courthouse. Most of the nation's newspapers assumed that a victory for the prosecution was certain, and published articles ranting against the rise of fundamentalism. But the trial didn't live up to the boosters' hopes: few tourists came from outside the local area, and little money was spent in town. The trial was a successful publicity stunt, but publicity didn't translate into business.

The prosecution did indeed win the case (fining Scopes $100, or about a month's salary), but the defense had the best lines. Murphy gave what was generally considered the best speech of the trial (earning applause even from many of the anti-evolutionists in the audience, and Darrow grabbed headlines by calling Bryan to testify as a biblical expert. Bryan acquitted himself poorly on the stand, and Darrow moved successfully for the jury to render a verdict without hearing his closing statement.

The jury came back with a guilty verdict in nine minutes, though the case was overturned on a technicality by the Tennessee Supreme Court, and Scopes never had to pay his fine. Bryan died just five days after the trial ended – some said the browbeating Darrow had given him killed him. On the national level, the case was arguably a victory for the defense, as only two of the 13 states still considering anti-evolution legislation (Arkansas and Mississippi) actually passed laws banning the teaching of evolution. The last of these laws was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1968.

The Scopes Monkey Trial is a great example of an early 20th century "media circus," as mass communication allows the whole nation to follow along with a trial. Your PCs could be in Dayton to report on the case, to investigate a crime that happened while everyone was distracted by the trial, or to sell souvenirs. Or an analogue to the trial could happen in a fantasy world (maybe with a religious belief in evolution against scientific evidence that the world came into existence a few thousand years ago).

The Search for Prester John

Global Quest For a Mythic King

Prester John was a mythic figure in the Christian folklore of the Middle Ages. He was believed to be the ruler of a Christian kingdom somewhere in central Asia, full of wonders and riches.

The lands of Prester John were seen as rich and exotic. Prester John himself was so wealthy that his furniture was made entirely of precious stones, and his armies numbered one and a half million men. Chief among his possessions was said to be a mirror, into which the good king could gaze and watch events as they unfolded anywhere in the world. In Prester John's kingdom were hills of gold, a sea of gravel and sand, a region where no light ever touches, and the entrance to the Garden of Eden itself. Dwelling in this kingdom were not only exotic animals like camels, tigers, gryphons, and the phoenix, but also horned men, satyrs, pygmies, giants, and cyclopses. The head of the church of this kingdom did not follow in the tradition of the apostle Peter, as do the popes in Rome, but rather in the tradition of the apostle Thomas.

The tales of Prester John may have been based on actual Christian communities. Ethiopia, for example, has been Christian since the fourth century. Parts of southern India have had sizable Christian populations since the ministry of Doubting Thomas in the first century. Both were largely cut off from the rest of Christendom, and their religious traditions developed quite independently from those of European Christians

The search for the kingdom of Prester John was of some importance in the Middle Ages, and his lands or people were reported to have been discovered numerous times. At one point, it was believed that a large army from Prester John's kingdom was marching on the Muslim world from the east. In truth, such an army existed. But it was composed not of Christians, but of tens of thousands of Mongol horsemen under

the command of Ghenghis Khan! A hundred years later, Marco Polo reported that Prester John ruled from a city in the steppes of Asia. And in later centuries, it became popular to place Prester John in Ethiopia, which certainly had the advantage of being a real place inhabited by real Christians. This sometimes caused confusion for Ethiopian dignitaries visiting Europe, who did not understand why Europeans insisted upon referring to their emperor by a title he did not use. The search for Prester John continued into the 15th century as the king of Portugal funded expeditions to India and Ethiopia to search for the mythical lord.

If the PCs are explorers, a legend based on Prester John could be a great way to motivate them to keep going over the next hill. If you take this route, it's up to you to decide just how real Prester John is. If you decide he's only a legend, though, it might be a good idea to base the legend around a kernel of in-game truth, like how in the real world, there really were other Christian communities beyond Europe. You'll also need to decide in what way Prester John's people are like the PCs. They may share a religion, or be of the same race, or be descended from a splinter group of the people who founded the PCs' nation.

On the other hand, maybe the PCs are not searching for Prester John, but are responding to those explorers. A new alien race (or monstrous race, or foreign culture) may land on the PCs' homeworld, asking for directions to the planet of an alien Prester John. Such aliens may not take kindly to being told no such planet exists; the PCs may have to fight them off or simply spin a plausible lie. The introduction of these aliens may make the plot go off in a new direction, or just serve as a pleasant side quest.

The Siege of Plataea

Hilariously Incompetent Siege

It is said that tragedy plus time equals comedy. I don't know if this is true, but the siege of Plataea is certainly supporting evidence. In the classical Greek world, wars were typically decided in an afternoon; armies from two neighboring cities would fight on a plain somewhere until one side broke. Then all the survivors would go home to their families and crops. That worked well enough until the Peloponnesian war, when Greek armies started besieging cities. Lacking experience, they weren't very good at it. This is evident in the siege of Plataea.

The Plataeans were famed for their bravery in the Greek wars against Persia. Indeed, it was outside the walled city-state of Plataea that the Persian invaders were finally thrown back, never to return. The Spartan general at this battle declared the town sacred ground, and decreed that no city should be allowed to conquer it. But Plataea was a long-time ally of Athens, and when Sparta and Athens went to war with each other, Plataea was caught in the middle. So it was that a large army of Spartans and their allies marched upon Plataea, in defiance of their city's oath. The Plataeans sent the bulk of their population to safety in Athens and prepared for a siege.

This is when the serious stuff ended. The Spartans spent two months building a great earthen ramp up against the wall. The idea was once the ramp was completed, Spartan forces could march up the ramp, and then be over the wall and inside the city. The Plataeans responded by just building that section of wall higher with timber additions. For every foot the ramp grew taller, the wall grew by the same amount.

But that wasn't good enough for the Plataeans, so they removed part of that section of wall at ground level. There, the wall abutted to the ramp, and the Plataeans could pull earth out from the center of the ramp, forcing the Spartans to add more. Eventually, the Spartans figured this out and started using a different consistency of clay for the area next to the wall, so the Plataeans couldn't do this any more. Undeterred, the Plataeans dug a tunnel under their own wall to the underside of the far side of the ramp so they could pull dirt out of the ramp on that side.

Then, for good measure, the Plataeans created a new, crescent-shaped wall inside the town, abutting to the outer wall, so that the portion of the town near the ramp was walled off. This way, even if the Spartans managed to make it over the outer wall, they would have to then build another ramp to make it over the inner wall.

The Spartans tried other methods to get into the town. They sent battering rams against different parts of the wall, but the Plataeans dropped things on the rams and broke them. The Spartans tried setting a fire outside the wall, hoping the wind would blow the fire into the town, but a thunderstorm put it out.

Eventually, the Spartans conceded they were very bad at siegecraft, though we have no record of them using the phrase "series of hilarious misadventures." So they made the only choice they had remaining, and constructed a new set of walls encircling the town, trapping the Plataeans inside. At this point, the comedy stopped. The

Plataeans held out as long as they could, but no help arrived from Athens. Eventually, the starving Plataeans surrendered. The Spartans executed them, and razed the city to the ground.

The siege of Plataea is excellent material for a comedy game. The PCs might be pursuing some sort of humorous objective inside the town even while it's being besieged, and the events of the siege provide a funny backdrop to the PCs' actions. On a more serious note, it's also illustrative of how a culture with little experience in siege or counter-siege warfare might go about trying it. If in your game barbarian nomads are trying to breach the walls of some great city, this is one way they might do it.

The Siege of Tyre

Battle of Out-Of-The-Box Thinking

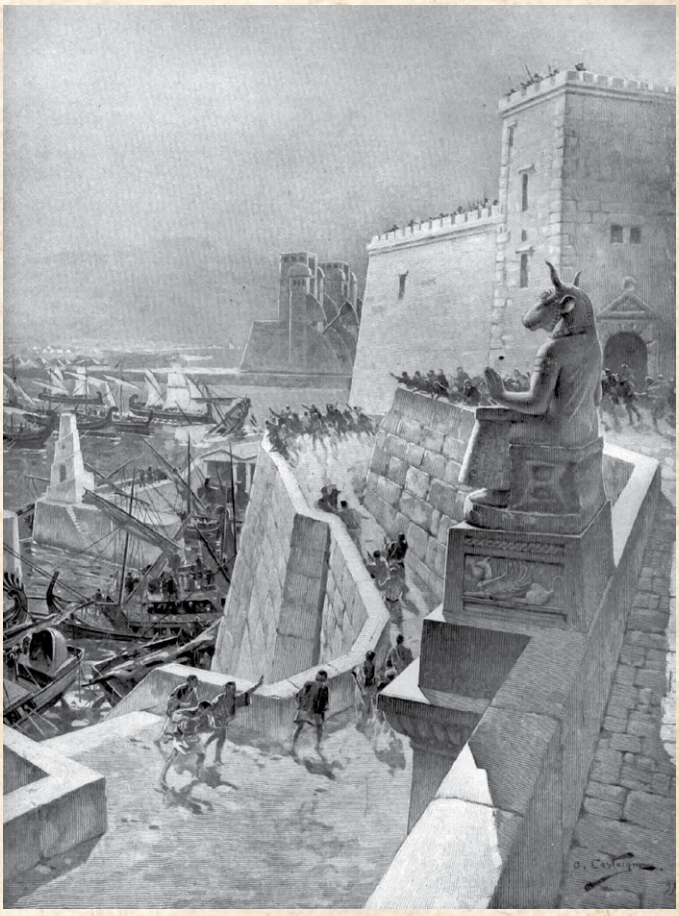
As Alexander the Great's Greek army marched on the Persian Empire, one of its most challenging obstacles was the city of Tyre. The city was built on an island a half-mile offshore, and its walls ran all along the coast of the island so there was no place to establish a beachhead. The Greeks needed to conquer Tyre. If they left the city unclaimed, and marched on after other enemies, the Tyrians might send ships against Greece while Alexander's armies were far away. To take the city, the Greeks engaged in a number of risky and experimental gambits, while the Tyrians replied in kind. This contrasts dramatically against the siege of Plataea only a hundred years earlier.

Tyre's greatest defense was its nature as an island. So, naturally, Alexander's first experiment was intended to make Tyre not an island. He ordered the construction of a half-mile-long causeway from the beach all the way out to the city walls. When the end of the causeway got into deep water, the Tyrians counterattacked by firing arrows from their walls, and sending their ships out to attack the laborers. Alexander countered this by building a pair of enormous siege towers at the end of the causeway. These siege towers provided cover against arrows from the wall, and the great ballistas and catapults mounted atop the towers kept the skirmishing warships at bay.

Realizing they were being outmaneuvered, the Tyrians devised their own gambit. They took one of their ships, loaded it up with flammable materials, and hung cauldrons of oil and pitch from the masts. Then, they lit the ship on fire, and rammed it into the towers. The structures caught fire, and when the ship's masts snapped from the heat, the pitch and oil fell onto the fire and made it burn all the hotter. With the Greek's catapults destroyed, the Tyrians sailed out of their harbor, fired upon any men who tried to douse the flames, and unmade much of the causeway.

Unfortunately for the Tyrians, their control over the sea disappeared soon thereafter. A number of vessels of the Persian fleet, upon hearing that their home cities were now under Greek control, defected and joined Alexander. The Tyrian fleet was now outnumbered, but they scuttled ships to blockade their own harbor so the Greeks couldn't land troops. The Tyrians also hurled great boulders into the sea around the island so Greek ships couldn't approach the walls.

Alexander took this opportunity to engage in even wilder experimentation. He had catapults, ballistas, and other siege weapons loaded onto ships so that they could bombard the walls of Tyre. He had cranes installed on other ships so they could remove the boulders now littering the ocean floor. The Tyrians retaliated by cutting the anchor lines of these bizarre crane ships, so Alexander had them replaced with chains, and the boulders were removed without further incident. Eventually, Tyre found itself faced with a repaired causeway, no real defenses, and a fleet of ships carrying siege weapons.



The final gambit was a multi-pronged assault on the island city. The bombardment had breached Tyre's walls in one place. While the siege ships battered the city, Alexander himself led the landing party. Simultaneously, the defected Persian ships forced their way into the harbors of Tyre and landed troops. Once Greek soldiers had landed on Tyrian soil, it was all over. There was nothing left but to clean up.

The unorthodox nature of the siege of Tyre makes it well-suited for role-playing games. You really can picture the Tyrian or Greek commanders meeting around a table, and someone saying, "Guys, I have no idea if this will work, but I had this wild idea..." How often have your own players said that exact thing? So it could be a lot of fun to have your PCs act as the commanders of either the Greeks or the Tyrians, and come up with the wild gambits that will win the battle. While they're coming up with their own ideas, you can use against them the actual gambits attempted by the other side.

Twelfth Street Riot

Detroit's Most Destructive Race Riot

In July of 1967, the black community in Detroit exploded. Decades of misery and feelings of hopelessness resulted in one of the most infamous race riots in American history. What is important from a gaming perspective is not only the events of the riot, but also its causes, and how you can incorporate this into your games.

The riot began when police arrested some eighty people at an unlicensed bar in a black neighborhood. This provoked locals, and it wasn't long before the looting started. Police returned to the scene, locals pushed back, and the riot was underway. Over the next five days, over a thousand people would be injured, 43 killed, and thousands of buildings looted or burned. Careless arsonists set fire to entire city blocks, sometimes including their own homes. A black security guard was shot dead by police

while trying to protect a market from looters. And young people danced amid the flames.

Units of both the Michigan National Guard and the Army Airborne were brought in to put down the riots. They deployed machine guns and armored vehicles. Some locals fought back, sniping from rooftops. But for the most part, people did not want to provoke the soldiers. Regular patrols marched through the streets, enforcing a nighttime curfew. In an attempt to build rapport with the locals, troops collected garbage and tried to find people who had disappeared in the chaos. Residents responded gratefully by providing soup and sandwiches for the soldiers. Two days after troops were deployed, the riot was over.

The causes of the riot were multifaceted. The most significant gameable factors were probably police discrimination, unemployment, lack of housing, and the temperature.

Residents reported police brutality as the number one problem they faced in the period leading up to the riot. While Detroit had a huge black population, the police force was overwhelmingly white. Elite four-man police squads would cruise through black neighborhoods, harassing youths. They would arrest those without proper identification, manhandle people, and steal. Small wonder that blacks felt oppressed.

At this time, Detroit was deindustrializing and outsourcing jobs. Downsizing was done by seniority: last hired, first fired. Blacks weren't hired until the labor shortages brought on by WWII, and so were the first to go. Youths found the jobs their fathers had started in at the motor companies no longer existed. This contributed to feelings of hopelessness, that blacks had no economic future in Detroit.

As housing was still segregated (in practice, if not in theory), few homes or apartments were available to blacks. And if demand is high while supply is low, prices skyrocket; it's simple math. This led to cramped housing, as more and more families started squeezing into the same tiny apartments.

To make matters worse, it was late July; the weather was hot. And riots are strongly correlated with temperature. Heat makes irritable. They leave their stifling apartments to gather on balconies and sidewalks, and they swap stories with their neighbors about how unhappy they are with their lives. And if someone comes tearing down the street shouting about the latest injustice, they'll find hundreds of pairs of ears ready to listen. Ready to act.

At this point, all the riot needed was a spark.

At your table, you can use these four factors: police brutality, economic hopelessness, terrible housing, and hot weather. What if someone is deliberately trying to manufacture these conditions, trying to provoke a riot? Maybe he wants to unseat the mayor, and a riot would be the perfect time to do it. Maybe he wants to start a revolution. Maybe he just likes chaos. If he has power in the city government, he can see to it that the more racist cops are assigned to black neighborhoods. He could drive some local businesses into bankruptcy. He could shake down landlords to force them to raise rents. If he succeeds at all these things, it's probably just a matter of waiting for summer, and then striking a match.

The Two Suez Canals

Building Rivers in the Desert

The modern Suez Canal stretches from the tip of the Red Sea north to the Mediterranean. It covers over 100 miles, with no locks or sluices. As traveling through the canal is much faster than rounding the horn of Africa, it is one of the busiest waterways in the world. However, the modern Suez Canal is not the first. In prior millennia, there was another.

The first (ambiguously successful) attempts to link the Mediterranean and the Red Sea seem to have been made around 1500 BC and 600 BC. The task was finally completed by the Persians around 500 BC. This Persian canal went north from the tip of the Red Sea, then west to the Nile. Ships could then travel down the Nile to the Mediterranean. The canal regularly silted up, rendering it useless. As a result, the first Suez Canal had to be routinely re-excavated, essentially creating it anew every few centuries. By the end of the Middle Ages, all knowledge of this ancient canal had been lost.

The idea of constructing a Suez Canal was first seriously pursued in modern times by an expatriate French adventurer by the name of Count Ferdinand de Lesseps. He could convince no one of the wisdom of this ambitious project until in 1854 a friend of his, Muhammad Sa'id Pasha, became Viceroy of Egypt. While traveling with Sa'id, de Lesseps waited until the pasha was in a good mood, and then proposed his idea. Miraculously, the good pasha agreed! The next step was to test the reports of an earlier surveying expedition that found a 30 foot difference in elevation between the Red and Mediterranean Seas. The findings were overturned, and de Lesseps planned out a 90 mile route, following a series of lakes that shaved 30 miles off construction.

The great nations of Europe offered no money to help the project; indeed, the Parliament of Great Britain was actively hostile to the idea. So de Lesseps founded a company and raised millions to fund construction. His friend the pasha supplied him with thousands of forced laborers. Unfortunately, the pasha died in 1863, and his nephew and successor Isma'il Pasha was much less enthusiastic about the canal project. He cut off the labor supply. But de Lesseps was no fool; by this point, his momentum had gained

him significant political power in Europe, and he was able to convince the Emperor of France to pressure Isma'il Pasha into renewing the flow of forced labor. Finally, in 1869 the waters of the Red and Mediterranean Seas mingled where once was dry land, and the canal was finished.

The canal has played an important role in the history of the region ever since. It has been expanded, and was bought by Britain in 1875. Even after the British invaded Egypt, and withdrew 50 years later, they retained control of the canal. In 1956, the Egyptian government seized the Suez, triggering a brief war with Britain, France, and Israel. The canal was later closed from 1967 to 1975 due to hostilities between Egypt and Israel. The Egyptians scuttled ships at both ends of the canal to prevent its use, trapping fourteen ships inside the Suez for eight years. Blowing sand accumulated on the ships, changing their color and earning them the nickname "The Yellow Fleet." The ships remained crewed through the full eight years, with crews rotating out every three months to maintain the vessels. The trapped sailors moored in the largest lake along the canal, and developed an isolated multicultural society. Today, 50 ships and almost a million tons of goods pass through the canal daily.

At your table, an abandoned canal like the ancient Suez could be a terrific mystery. Perhaps the PCs are traveling someplace they think no man has gone before, only to cross the remains of a great canal. Who built it, and what happened to them? You don't necessarily have to answer this question; it's sufficient simply to pose it.

Alternately, the Suez Canal could be a fun adventure site, especially during its construction or Yellow Fleet periods. The PCs may be asked to prove the two ends of the canal are the same height, to help de Lesseps find funding, or to help him exert pressure on the new Pasha. Alternately, they may be persuaded to help the workers, who are being made to labor against their will, thousands dying in the process. And a tiny intercultural floating city of trapped sailors just screams "adventure."

The Voyages of Zheng He

Enormous Fleet Conducts Diplomacy and Trade

In the early fifteenth century, the Ming Emperor of China wanted to conduct diplomatic relations with states far to the west. To achieve this goal, he built an enormous fleet and appointed as admiral a Muslim eunuch named Zheng He. The admiral was not a noble. Rather, he was captured as a child by imperial forces, castrated, and forced into service at court. There, he proved himself to be loyal, brilliant, and an excellent leader of men, and he served the emperor well. From 1405 to 1433, Zheng He led his enormous fleet on seven expeditions to Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, and the east coast of Africa. After Zheng He's final voyage, his political enemies had his ships burned, and most of the records of his voyages destroyed.

Zheng He's fleet was immense. His largest ships stretched the limits of what is possible with wood; some sources claimed they were 450 feet long. This is doubtful. Even at only 350 feet, wooden ships flex in open water, and leak at the seams. Plutarch reported on a 420-foot vessel from the third century BC, but it was so unseaworthy it was almost never moved, and "differed little from a stationary edifice on land." However large Zheng He's ships really were, the fleet was effectively an armed floating city, supported by hundreds of smaller ships and carrying tens of thousands of sailors, soldiers, envoys, and merchants. The ships were specialized, like water tankers or ships built specifically for carrying horses. As enormous as it was, the fleet would have taken up several square miles.

The main purpose of the fleet was diplomatic. It was certainly an impressive display of imperial Chinese power. Showing up with an enormous fleet sends a clear message: our nation is not to be trifled with. Dozens of foreign states conducted diplomatic relations with China through the voyages of Zheng He. The admiral also used force to protect Chinese interests abroad; the fleet carried with it a small army for

just such a purpose. While many of these states were half a world away from China, they were all in contact with one another through trade, and there was definitely something to be gained from maintaining relations. Whether it was worth the enormous expense, however, is questionable.

Each time the fleet stopped in a new nation, the diplomats and merchants got to work. The diplomats met with local leaders to hammer out matters of consequence and exchange gifts, an important demonstration of respect between nations. The fleet would take on locals who were to serve as ambassadors to China, and return former ambassadors picked up on previous voyages, who had typically spent several years in China. The merchants who traveled with the fleet took advantage of these stops to trade with the locals, often exchanging Chinese silk and porcelain for local luxuries.

At your table, the voyages of Zheng He offer a great way to introduce the PCs to new cultures. They may be hanging out in a port town, enjoying some hard-earned downtime after their adventures. Suddenly, the biggest fleet they've ever imagined comes to call. PCs may have an opportunity to join the fleet, offering to be exhibited to the emperor as curiosities from abroad. Even if the PCs decide against it, there's sure to be adventure when thousands of foreign sailors and soldiers descend on the town, eager for shore leave. Alternately, the PCs could get involved in such a fleet as soldiers, envoys, or commanders. In a "tour of the realms" campaign, such postings could be a great way to get them out to see the world. To give such an adventure structure, the PCs could be searching for the emperor's political rival, who is known to have fled to foreign lands. In an alternate history campaign, you could have Zheng He bump into European explorers on the high seas; Zheng He's last voyage ended only 65 years before the first European ships reached India.

The War of the Triple Alliance

Paraguay's Apocalypse

In the 1860s, Paraguay was a power on the rise. The Lopez dictators, father Carlos and son Francisco Solano, had moved away from Dr. Francia's policy of isolation (see page 137) and were pursuing a policy of industrialization and foreign trade, though largely for military purposes. The country, unlike its neighbors Brazil and Argentina, had a powerful central government and a common national identity. It was known as "the Prussia of South America" and the dictator, Francisco Solano Lopez, was looking to gain more secure access to the Atlantic Ocean and to capture disputed territory from Argentina and Brazil.

It began with a civil war in Uruguay: the Blancos (the party of agricultural landowners) had been thrown out of government by a Colorado (the party of urban merchants and industrialists) coup, and Paraguay had historically supported the Blancos. When Brazil intervened on the side of the Colorados, Lopez declared war on Brazil (in December 1864).

For most of the 19th century, anyone fighting Brazil could count on the support of Argentina. But in 1864, this wasn't the case: the Argentines refused to allow Paraguayan armies to pass through their territory, which would be the shortest route to relieve the Blancos and invade parts of Brazil that weren't trackless jungle. So Lopez decided to invade the disputed province of Corrientes and declare war on Argentina in March 1865. This wasn't as insane as it sounds: Argentina was a very decentralized and unstable country in those days, and the Paraguayans hoped to incite separatist revolts in northern Argentina. Also, even Argentina and Brazil together couldn't match Paraguay's numbers: their armies totaled only 38,000 at this point, while Paraguay had 60-100,000 under arms.

But Paraguay was now in a position similar to Nazi Germany invading the USSR or Japan attacking Pearl Harbor: it was fighting a temporarily weak, but much larger enemy. Unless it could win quickly, it was doomed. And again like Germany (or for a more contemporary example, the Confederate States), Paraguay was navally outclassed. Normally, this wouldn't matter much to a landlocked country, but a main means of transport in the region was the Parana River, as important as the Mississippi to regional commerce and troop transport.

During the first six months of the war, Paraguayan forces charged down the riverbanks, dreaming of a resounding victory that would give their country sea access. But after the Brazillian navy defeated theirs at the battle of Riachuelo, the supply lines were cut and the Paraguayans had to retreat to their borders.

At the junction of the Paraguay and Parana rivers was the Paraguayan fortress of Humaita, "the Sevastopol of Latin America". At this fortress and others like it, the Paraguayans held out for years. They joined the army en masse. They melted down church bells to cast cannons. Disease and the Paraguayan summer heat devastated both sides. But the war was now one of attrition, and Paraguay was being ground slowly down.

Its people resisted fanatically, some fearing that the Brazilians would enslave them if they won. Civilian guerrilla resistance led to reprisals from the Alliance, and the war ground on until 1870, when Lopez and his ragtag troops made their final stand. The allies had originally planned to annex Paraguay, but the resistance they'd seen made them decide to set up a puppet state instead (as well as claiming disputed territories: a large part of Paraguay is still Paraguayan today only because of the intervention of US president Rutherford B. Hayes). When all was done, Paraguay's nascent industry was in ruins and somewhere between one and two thirds of its pre-war population was dead. There were so few men left that polygamy was legalized by the new government. The only good result of the war was that it fast-tracked the abolition of slavery in Brazil – many slaves had fought for Brazil, and proved their right to equal treatment (and the dangers of holding them in bondage) to the general public.

The Triple Alliance War was, like the American Civil War, one of the first examples of trench warfare and late nineteenth century grinding wars of attrition, trends which would culminate in World War I. Unlike the US Civil War, though, it is largely forgotten outside of South America. It could be interesting as backstory – or your PCs could be Paraguayan nationalists running modern weapons back in time to save Paraguay!

The War of the Worlds Broadcast

Radio Drama Creates Panic

In 1938, on the night before Halloween, a then-little-known man named Orson Welles broadcast his radio version of the classic science fiction story The War of the Worlds, about an attack on Earth by men from Mars. Due to the realistic nature of the program, many believed it was real, causing widespread panic. The program was later imitated in Ecuador and Buffalo, New York, with similar results.

The program began with the title, credits, and a dramatic narration. Its style then shifted into a series of fictional news bulletins interrupting what seemed to be an ordinary musical broadcast. The program took great pains to maintain verisimilitude, while simultaneously using believable ambient noises to create tension. It's a chilling story of crashed meteors, monstrous creatures, chemical warfare, and machines like towers striding over the countryside. Before the thirty five minute mark, a listener's only clues that this might not be an actual news broadcast were the better-than-average speaking voices of the people interviewed, and that parts of the story seemed to move faster than real time. If I were a listener in 1938 and not paying close attention, there are certainly places in the broadcast where I would turn with wide eyes to the person beside me and ask, "Is this real?"

An estimated one million people believed the story. There are two main reasons for this. First, most of the listeners missed the opening monologue. They were all listening to a much more popular show, but when it played a dull song, these listeners started 'channel surfing', and stumbled across what seemed to be a breaking news story about a mysterious meteor. But more importantly, the makers of the War of the Worlds broadcast were very, very good at their jobs. Breaking news bulletins interrupting regularly-scheduled programs are cliché now, but they had only become routine a month earlier, with legendary newsman Edward R. Murrow's broadcasts from tense Europe. The program also did an exceptionally good job mirroring the style of the news broadcasts of the day, especially that of the Hindenburg disaster, only a year earlier.

While many people stayed in their homes, some rushed into the street, clutching wet handkerchiefs over their mouths to stave off the poison gas. People trying to flee the city caused traffic jams. The Trenton police department received 2,000 calls about men from Mars, and the New York Times received 875, many from people asking whether they would be safer on their roofs or in their cellars.

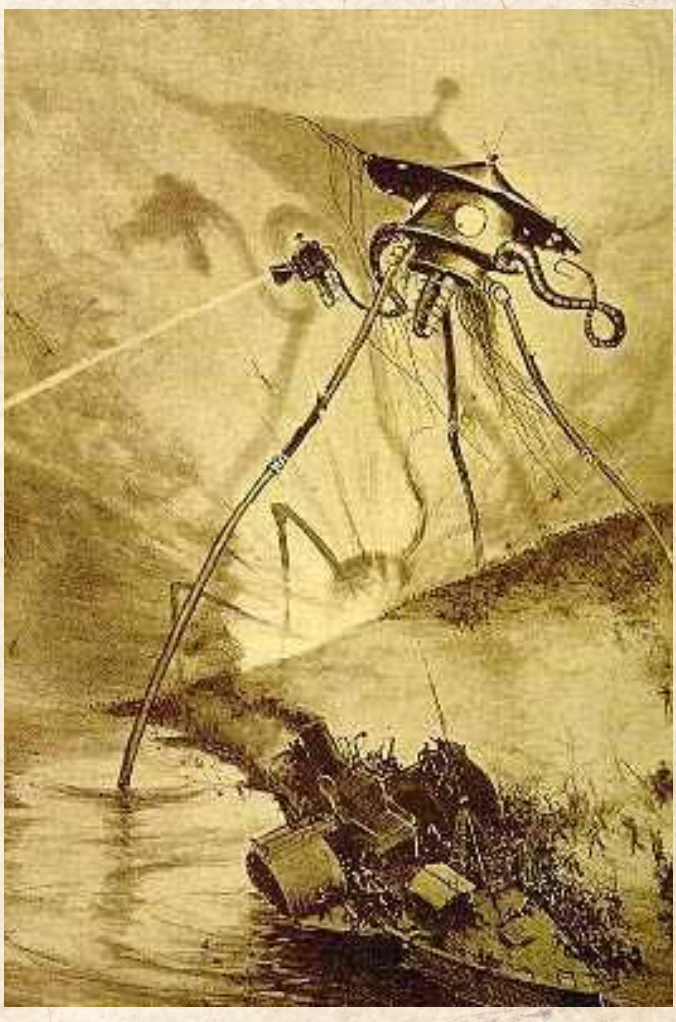
After thirty five minutes (two thirds of the way through the broadcast), the announcer came back on to give the name of the show and the program being presented. The fifteen minutes that followed were an obviously fictional post-apocalyptic story following one man's life for several weeks after the invasion. It then ended with Orson Welles announcing the whole thing was just a Halloween prank.

Events were repeated in 1949 in Quito, Ecuador. The head of the only major radio station in the city of 250,000 wanted to do his own version of Welles' War of the Worlds broadcast. It seems this version may have been legitimately intended to fool people. The program began with a musical show by one of the most popular bands in the city, probably with the intent of drawing as many listeners as possible. When the music started being interrupted by news bulletins about strange events outside of town, the station interviewed actors impersonating local government officials. It was believable, and people bought it. With the station broadcasting reports that Quito was under attack by Martians, people panicked. The military was deployed to fight off the alien invaders. People ran into the streets, but had nowhere to go. The radio said there was a spaceship to the south, but a black cloud of poison gas to the north. People ran to churches to confess their sins before they died, and there are stories of priests absolving whole crowds at once.

When the broadcast ended with the announcement that it was all a joke, people did not find it very funny. They stormed the radio station and set it on fire. Six people died. There was no emergency services to help them; the police were off looking for Martians. The mastermind of the hoax lost his nephew and girlfriend to the flames, and fled the country.

The whole stunt was tried again in Buffalo in 1968. This broadcast used the same methods, albeit updated for the times. Once again, people bought it. The Canadian military deployed along the border to repel alien invaders, and the Buffalo police department received 4,000 phone calls.

A War of the Worlds-style broadcast might be a really fun stunt to have your PCs pull. Maybe they need cover for a big jewel heist. Maybe they need to incapacitate an enemy city so the real invasion can roll in unopposed. Or maybe they just want to spread chaos.



WOODSTOCK

Four Days of Peace, Music, and Chaos

It was 1969: the high point of the decade for hippies, flower children, freaks, and freethinkers. And they all descended on a dairy farm in rural New York for one of the world's biggest music festivals. Woodstock's promoters intended merely to raise some money to found a recording studio and rock 'n' roll retreat. Instead, they created the very symbol of the counterculture movement of the 1960's.

The chaos of the lead-up to Woodstock in some ways foreshadowed the events of the festival itself. The promoters, despite their inexperience, managed to land a number of very popular rock 'n' roll bands. But the two towns in the area where Woodstock was planned refused to allow the festival. Woodstock was saved at the last minute when the promoters managed to rent 600 acres from a dairy farmer. They anticipated seeing 50,000 attendees. That number was eventually bumped up to 200,000, and organizers scrambled to find more food, water, and toilets. Worse yet, at the last minute, the off-duty cops the organizers were planning to use as security were banned from showing up. The festival's ticket booths and gates didn't get finished before people started arriving. Some 60,000 music lovers simply walked through gaps in the fence, gathering in front of the empty stage. There was no way to force them to pay, so the event was declared free to the public. This pulled in even more attendees – 500,000 in all. The local highways became parking lots; people just parked their cars on the road and walked the rest of the way. The area was so congested, the bands had to be brought in by helicopter.

And then the music started: a half-million people rocking out to some of the best music the 1960's had to offer. The highlights of the first day were the renowned folk artists Arlo Guthrie and Joan Baez. The second day featured incredible rock 'n' roll late into the night: Santana, the Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Janis Joplin, and Sly and the Family Stone. The day was capped by The Who, playing a 24 song set that started at 3am. Sunday was more rock 'n' roll, with Jefferson Airplane; Joe Cocker; The Band; Blood, Sweat, and Tears; and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. The acts were interrupted at one point by a rainstorm that caused the electrified stage to spark to such a degree that the bands wouldn't play. But the people didn't care; they just sat in the rain and sang. Attendees started leaving on day three, and only a couple ten thousand people remained to see the highlight of the whole festival on day

four. In the third-to-last song of Woodstock, Jimi Hendrix rocked out an improvised electric guitar cover of the American national anthem so killer people are still talking about it today.

The society that developed at Woodstock was about what you'd expect: a hodgepodge of incredible altruism and unity, and near-total chaos. There was no housing for a half-million people. Everyone slept on the ground. There were 30-minute lines for drinking water. Hour-long lines for a toilet. Much of the food and drink was spiked with LSD. But when you look at pictures of Woodstock, you see people just lying on one another. These men and women – kids, really – were complete strangers the day before, but in these pictures, you can see them acting like family. There were surprisingly few violent incidents. Some locals provided charity when it became clear the festival organizers didn't have enough food or water for everyone. And the attendees looked after each other, offering food, water, flowers, and drugs to passers-by. It was a messy, ugly, muddy, chaotic mess. And it was also a spark of beauty where a half-million hippies saw they were part of something larger than themselves.

Like the show, the aftermath was mixed. The fields of the dairy farm were completely trashed. The promoters almost went bankrupt. They were a million dollars in debt, and were faced with 70 lawsuits. But it was the greatest party anyone had ever seen. And to this day, no festival has surpassed Woodstock in the American consciousness.

An event like Woodstock could be a memorable setting for a whole range of games, from spy thrillers to political dramas (though admittedly not dungeon crawls). When using the festival, try not to romanticize or demonize it. Yes, it was four days of peace and love, but ultimately it was just a concert; no lasting political or social change came out of Woodstock. And yes, it was a gathering of druggies and malcontents, but ultimately nothing terrible happened. Treating Woodstock honestly is more interesting, and makes for better gaming.

The Zanj Rebellion

Slave Revolt in Ninth Century Iraq

In Europe's Dark Ages, the Abbasid Caliphate, stretching from Tunisia to the Persian frontier and from Central Asia to Yemen, was arguably the most powerful nation in the world. It ruled just about the entire Islamic world (excepting a rump state of the old Umayyad dynasty in Spain) and controlled the major trade routes between Europe, Asia and Africa.

As the wealth of the Abbasids grew, so did demand for luxury commodities such as sugar (in fact, the word "sugar" is an Arabic loan-word). Sugarcane has long been grown on large-scale plantations, and in the pre-modern world, that almost always meant slave labor. Islam, like Christianity, was conflicted in its views towards slavery. Ideally under Islamic law, a slave would be treated more like a serf than with the utter brutality of chattel slavery in the American South and the Caribbean. And Muslims were not supposed to enslave fellow Muslims. In theory, the only legal source of slaves was as captives in a war, but this was widely ignored.

The marshes and flatlands of Southern Iraq thus became a center of plantation agriculture, with slaves imported from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and especially East Africa to drain the swamps and clear away salinated topsoil. It was backbreaking labor, and the legal protections of slaves were increasingly ignored in the drive for higher production and profit. Many of the local "Marsh Arabs" had their own grievances, and the territory was a great place for guerrilla warfare. All that was needed was a spark.

In the late 860s, the spark came in the form of Ali Bin Muhammad, a Persian who claimed magical powers, preached equality for all, and had previously led a revolt on Bahrain. In 868, he led the Zanj, Bantu peoples from East Africa,

in a well-organized slave uprising. The managers and owners were murdered in their sleep, and the Zanj seized control of the region. The Abbasids sent in the army, but were defeated by guerrilla tactics and desertion in the ranks. The Zanj revolt began to organize into an independent state, minting coins and bringing non-Zanj slaves, the local peasantry and Bedouin tribes into the revolt – these by the end outnumbered the eponymous Zanj. The rebellion grew to involve about 500,000 people at its peak, far more than the slave revolt of Spartacus and comparable in size to the Haitian Revolution.

The rebels trained and hired engineers to build fortresses among the marshes, and built canals and moats as further defensive obstacles. They even had a small navy, primarily of captured river-going ships. In 871, they took the region's main city of Basra and burned it to the ground. A new capital was built called Moktara, meaning "the elect city". For a time, they were helped by a revolt in Persia. But after this revolt was crushed (and elements of it betrayed the Zanj state and sided with the Abbasids) in the late 870s, the tide turned against them.

The rebellion was at this point hampered by internal divisions. Some of the rebels wanted to build a more egalitarian society, while others wanted to bring back slavery so long as they didn't have to be the slaves. Ethnic and religious divisions started to become more and more important in people's minds. In 881, the Abbasids sent a large army and crushed the revolt in a two-year campaign, capturing Moktara and beheading Ali. One of the world's largest slave revolts was over.

Interestingly, it wasn't a total defeat for the rebels. Many of them avoided re-enslavement, and some Zanj units were incorporated into the Abbasid army. Plantation slavery in Iraq disappeared, and African writers in the Muslim world used the victories of the Zanj as an argument for racial equality.

In your game, modeling a slave revolt on the Zanj Rebellion could make it more plausibly successful than one modeled on Spartacus' revolt. The rebellion is a great example of guerilla warfare in late antiquity, with innovative tactics and various schemes – a great environment for PCs. Alternatively, Black Nationalists or antislavery activists in the present could go back in time to aid the revolt with modern weapons.

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