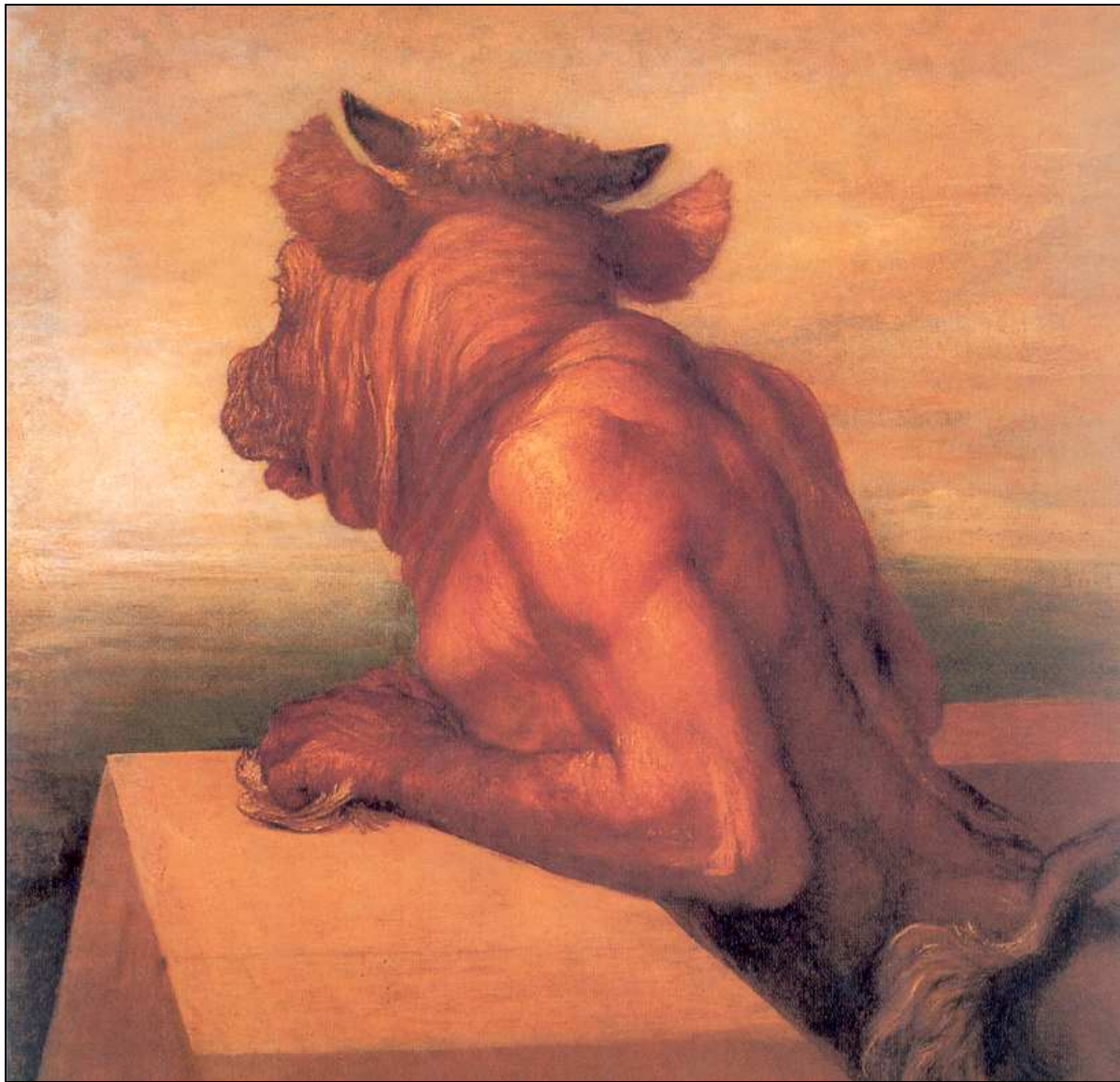


Issue 7

February 2010

MINOTAUR

The Official, Irregular Webzine of the **Mazes & Minotaurs** Revival



Celebrating Three Years of Free M&M Coverage

LONG LIVE THE MINOTAUR !

Two Scenarios, New Creatures & Mythic Items, Official Background Material, Rule Variants, Inspiration for Maze Masters and more !



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MINOTAUR n°7

A Word from the Editor Biggest Issue Ever

Greetings, heroic readers, and welcome to the seventh issue of the **Minotaur** – which is also our biggest issue so far, with 80 pages of *Mazes & Minotaurs* goodness !

That's right, folks : *eighty* pages of *free* M&M stuff !

When our friend Andrew Pearce, who wrote the monumental Desert Kingdom Gazetteer we published in issue 5, told me he felt like writing some stuff about **Midia**, the pseudo-Carthage of Mythika, I *knew* we would be going over our usual page count of 48 or so. And here we are, with this mega-sized, very special issue of the *Minotaur*.

In addition to Andrew's **Mythika Gazetteer** on Midia (which also comes with a bonus article presenting five scenario synopses set in the exotic south), this issue also brings you two complete adventures - the third and final part of our **Secret of Zerzura** Desert Kingdom epic and **The Green Minotaur**.

And speaking of **Minotaurs**, our iconic monster seems to be this issue's guest of honor, rearing its ugly head in no less than four of our regular columns : **Mythic Bestiary**, **Pandora's Box**, **Maze Master's Lore** and even poor old Luke G. Reynard's **A Twist in the Maze**.

The **Griffin Archives** and **Muse's Corner** columns manage to escape the Minotaur-mania, with a Maze Mastering advice article on Divine Intervention and a quick look at two inspirational comic books.

Rounding up this already hefty issue is the first instalment of a new three-part column, the **Almanac of Mythika**, written by the erudite and ubiquitous Andrew Pearce, who tells you everything you could possibly want to know about the calendars of Mythika.

A few paragraphs ago, I mentioned that this issue was not only mega-sized but "very special" as well... Why "very special", you ask ? Because our little webzine is celebrating its third year of existence – that's right, three whole years of free M&M stuff !

This issue is dedicated to all the people who have supported *Mazes & Minotaurs* since its first appearance on the web. Shield wall, comrades !

LONG LIVE THE MINOTAUR !

Olivier Legrand (2010)

PS : I *did* mention the Play Nymph, didn't I ?

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MISTER MINOTAUR !



Regimental Roster

Armchair General : Olivier Legrand.

Field Commander : Andrew Pearce.

Unsung Hero : Igor A. Rivendell.

Irregular Unit : Luke G. Reynard.

Battlefield Artists : Emmanuel Roudier, George F. Watts (cover), Pahko, Willy Pogany, V.A. Poirson and various anonymous illustrators.

Ordnance Survey Maps : Tim Hartin & Andrew Pearce

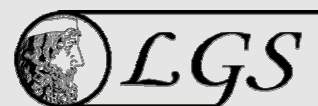
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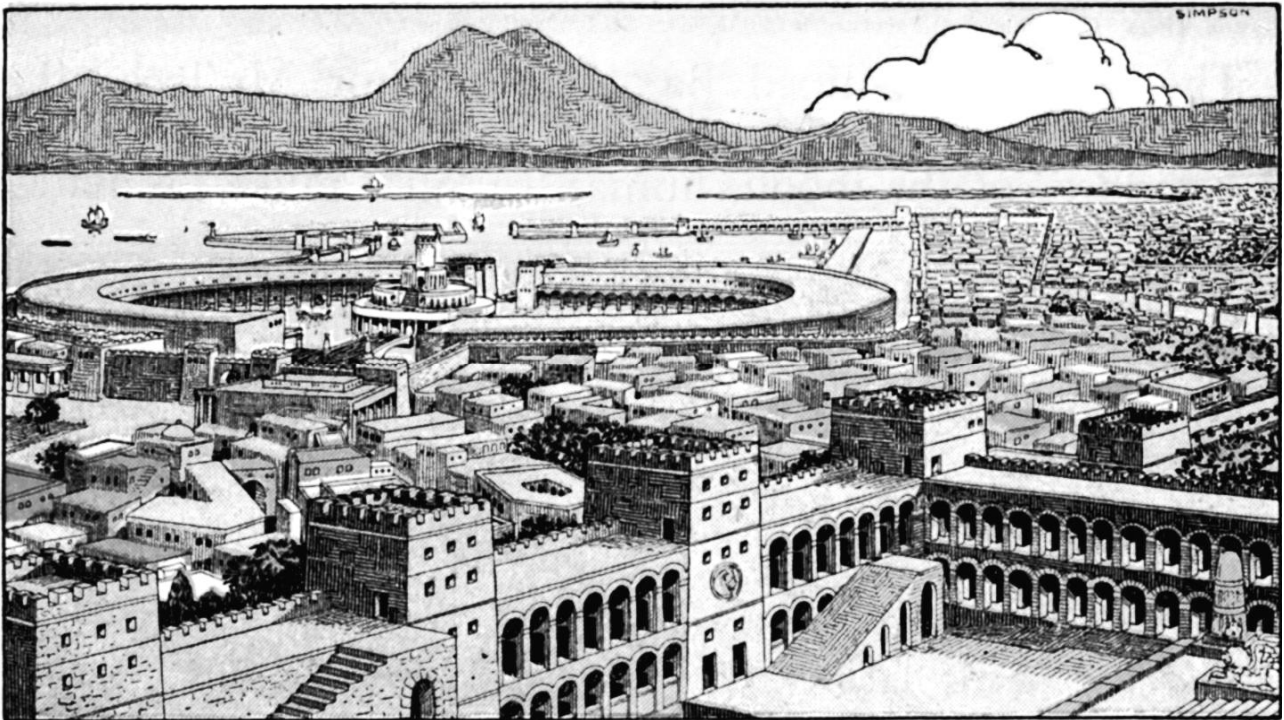


MYTHIKA GAZETTEER

MIDIA

LAND OF SOUTHERN PROMISE

Written by Camilco of Solus; translated by **Andrew Pearce**



*The southern shore of the Middle Sea is dominated by the nation of **Midia** and its capital **Solus**, a centre of trade with a cosmopolitan population of merchants, sailors and thieves.*

***Maze Masters Guide**, p 8*

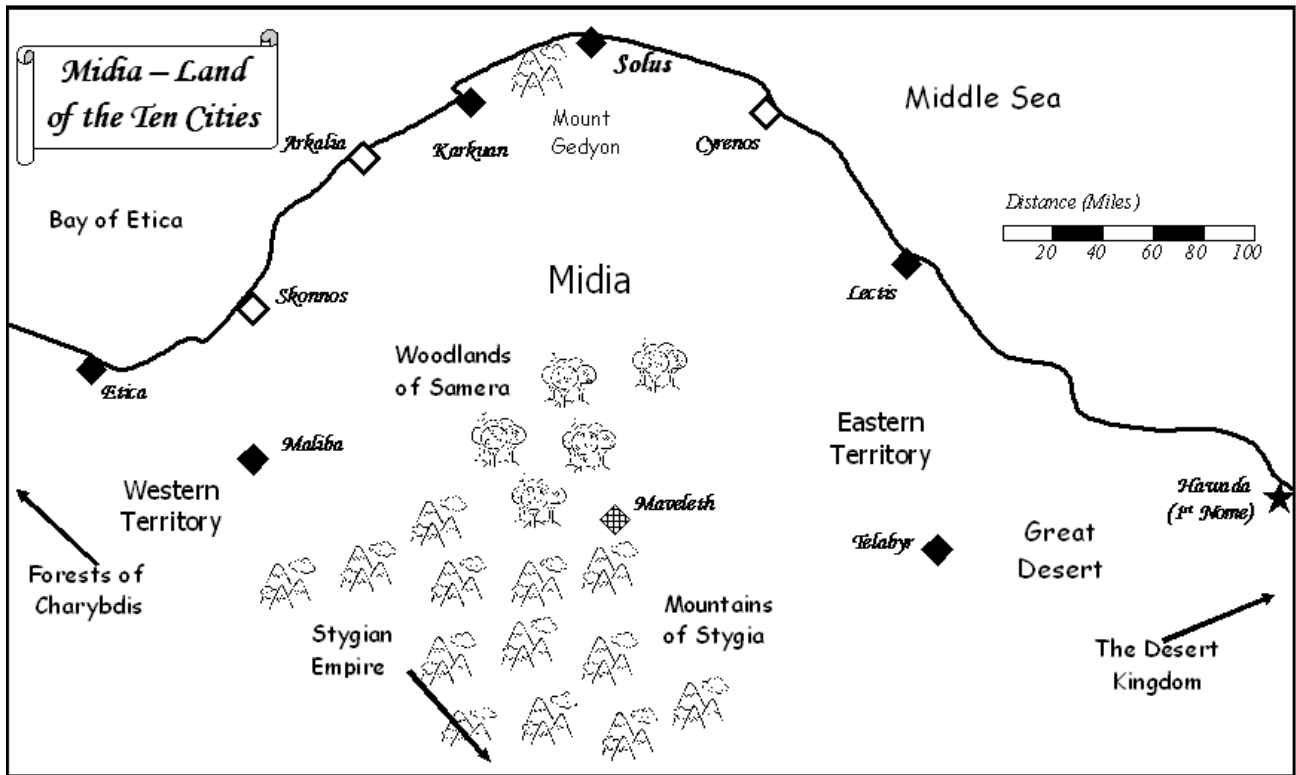
Introduction

Midia – the ‘Land of the South’ as most Mineans know it – is home to one of the great civilisations of Mythika. Yes, as a Midian myself, I know you’d expect me to say that. Nevertheless, it’s true.

Unlike some nations – the inscrutable Khetim of the Desert Kingdom, the dour Warlords of Umbria, the proud Sea Princes of Tritonis – Midia has always been an open and enlightened society, seeking to learn from other civilisations, and in turn to share what it has learned with others. That we have been subjected to more unwarranted invasions than any other nation is the price we have repeatedly had to pay for that openness. Yet such is the resilience, and the forgiving nature, of the Midian people that these harsh lessons

from our history have in no way lessened our love of learning, our spirit of adventure, and our boundless zest for new, enriching experiences.

There are, of course, many misconceptions about my homeland that I hope to address in this dissertation. Some have accused Midians of being ‘a dissolute and licentious people, lacking any sense of moral compass’, to quote from the scurrilous *Midia Exposed!* (to which my good friend and mentor Anagnosis briefly refers in his kind foreword to my humble offering). I am not aware that Cleonthides of Argos has ever visited my homeland, so perhaps it will come as no surprise that I will make only one further reference to his lurid, rambling and error-riddled essay – when I come to examine the persistent myth that we Midians indulge in child-sacrifice. I will give careful attention to refuting this heinous blood-libel later in my dissertation.



Some Words of Recommendation

I was delighted to be invited to pen some words of recommendation for this work by a young but promising Midian scholar, Camilco of Solus. Based on his recent guest lecture on Midian culture and history at the Akademia of Thena (that I was very happy to co-sponsor alongside Anaximander of Cresos), Camilco's thesis provides an absorbing introduction for anyone interested in his fascinating yet often misunderstood homeland. Too many in the Three Cities are content to dismiss Midia simply as 'the Land of the South', or, worse, 'the Land of Baby-killers'. Midia deserves to be better known than that, and young Camilco has given us a worthy dissertation – certainly far superior to the ridiculous and sensationalist monograph "Midia Exposed!" published by that third-rate hack Cleonthisdes of Argos last year. I most assuredly commend Camilco's masterful essay to your attention.

Anagnosis of Thena

Let me conclude my introductory remarks with this warm invitation. If you doubt anything you read in the words that follow – come to Midia, and you will see the truth about my people for yourselves!

The Land of the Ten Cities

Geography

Midia is a surprisingly fertile land, given its southerly location – and certainly compared with the Desert Kingdom and the Land of the Sun. Of course, it receives nothing like the quantities of rain that water lands further to the west around the Middle Sea – such as Charybdis or Umbria – or even the Land of the

Three Cities to the north. Nevertheless, it receives sufficient rain for the growing of olives, citrus fruits, nuts, dates, grapes and above all wheat in abundance. Only in the south-east corner do the rains become so intermittent as to make agriculture difficult, as the scrub-lands of Midia gradually give way to the harsh wastelands of the Great Desert.

Midia is bounded to the west by the lush jungles of Charybdis; to the south by the forbidding mountains of the Stygian Empire; and to the east by the hot sands of the Desert Kingdom. However, Midia's longest and most important frontier is to the north – the vast waters of the Middle Sea. The nation of Midia was founded six centuries ago by mariners and merchants from the Land of the Sun, and, more than any other nation – with the possible exception of the Tritonians – Midia's whole history and culture has revolved around its relationship with the sea.

In the centre of Midia lies the wild and little-explored **Woodland of Samera**, the remnants of what was once a much wider forested expanse. The abode of many dangerous beasts, it is also rumoured that various dark cults operate from hidden sanctuaries within this uninviting woodland.

Although there are many villages and hamlets scattered across Midia, and particularly along its lengthy coast, a high proportion of the population lives in one or other of the ten cities of Midia. Such is the importance of these cities that in recent years, a new name for Midia has increasingly entered the public consciousness: **the Land of the Decapolis** – literally 'Ten Cities' in Minean. However, only six of them are properly considered as Midian cities in the strictest sense. Three of them are actually Minean colonies, whilst the last is a curious and rather troublesome settlement of uncertain origin nestled in the northernmost foothills of the Stygian mountains.



Midia, the land of exotic wonders and cosmopolitan cities

Let us look at each of the Ten Cities in turn:

Solus the Magnificent

Easily the largest, and most important, of the Ten Cities is the capital city **Solus the Magnificent** – the great seaport that was founded, according to tradition, by **Queen Dido Elishat** in the first century of the Age of Magic (42 AM is the date usually given, although this has become the subject of bitter scholarly debate in recent years). Solus (a contraction of the older **Salomus**, meaning ‘Abode of peace’ in the Midian tongue) is arguably the most cosmopolitan city in the known world – with the possible exception of Kandaria. Less than half of the population of Solus are Midian by birth – and although Midians remain the largest community within the capital, there are also significant numbers of Charybdians, Khettim, Mineans and Tritonians living within the city, as well as large numbers of **Khetsdami** (‘Half-bloods’ in Midian), individuals of mixed racial heritage.

The Harbour of Solus

The Harbour of Solus is actually two harbours: the **Outer Harbour**, which houses the merchant fleet, and the **Inner Harbour**, where the military fleet is berthed when not at sea. The Inner Harbour has room for two hundred ships, whilst the Outer Harbour can accommodate more than three hundred vessels. In the midst of the Outer Harbour, on a small islet, stands the great **Statue of Dido Triumphant**, built by Queen Dido Hayilet at the beginning of the Age of Heroes – and accounted by some as one of the Wonders of Mythika.

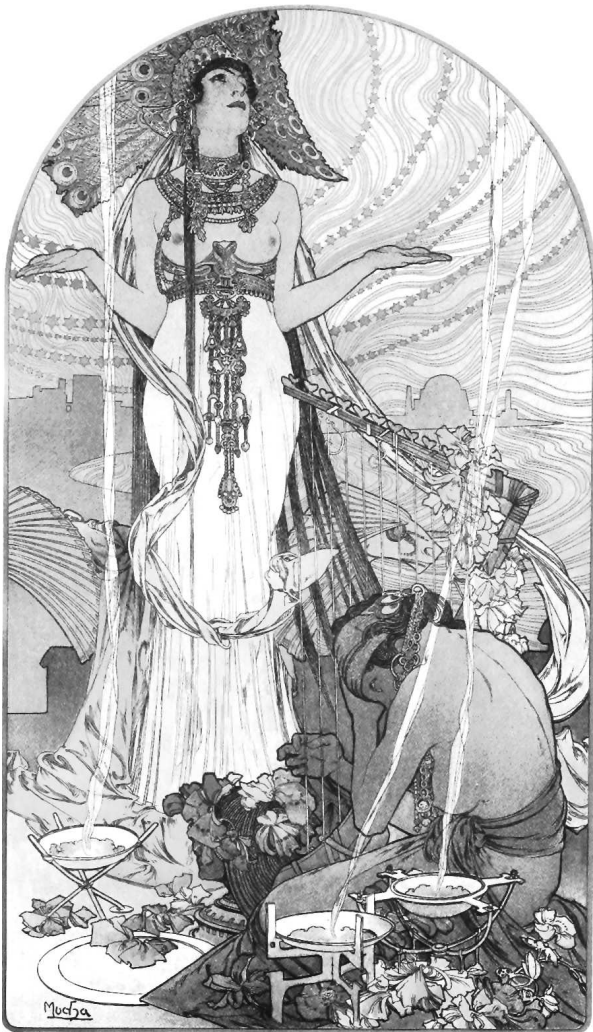
The Khetsdami

The status of **Khetsdami** – or ‘Half-bloods’ – has been one of the most vexed issues of recent times in Midia. Midians have always been very welcoming and hospitable towards other races living in their land – but that same generosity of spirit has not always been extended towards the offspring of ‘mixed marriages’.

Although generous safeguards in law have been provided for those belonging to other cultures, the increasing numbers of those of mixed heritage – and their uncertain status – was one that could no longer be ignored by the beginning of the fourth century of the current age.

The present queen of Midia, Dido Yophet, following the example of her mother before her, has been most vocal in highlighting the plight of the Khetsdami – whose economic circumstances have generally been far inferior to those of any other group within Midian society.

A decade ago, the Khetsdami were finally permitted to consider themselves truly Midian, with all the rights that entails (including representation within the Senate). Whilst many ‘pure-blood’ Midians have welcomed this move (which, at a stroke, has ensured that the ‘Midians’ are once again a ‘majority’ within their own land), others have been less happy, feeling that the Midian blood-line is being diluted, and that the queen is betraying the ‘ancient traditions’ of her people. Much of this opposition has come from the powerful noble class, and especially the highly-influential House Barca.



The Queens of Midia have haunted many a man's dreams

Solus itself is divided into several districts, or quarters.

The *maritime quarter* – around the harbour – is the oldest part of the city, and the hub of trade and commerce. It contains many open-air markets, as well as the specialist shops of countless different types of artisan and merchant. There are many fine buildings in this district, not least the **Harbour-master's Tower**, one of the very few buildings to have survived intact from the Golden Age of Midia. Regrettably, this district is also home to many criminal bands, including the **Blue Monkeys** – one of the most notorious and ruthless gangs of thieves and cutthroats in all Midia – and their deadly rivals, the **Brothers of the Red Hand**.

Adjacent to the maritime quarter stands the *middle quarter* – a largely respectable, primarily residential district that also contains the renowned **Library of Solus**, and the **House of Eshmun** – a tranquil place of physical and spiritual healing dedicated to the Midian god of the healing arts.

Beyond the middle quarter, on a hillside overlooking the rest of the city, stands the *royal quarter*, also known as the **byrsa** (lit. 'high place') where the nobles of Solus have their residences. This district is also where the **Palace of Dido** is located, as well as the **Senate-House** and the **Great Temple of Solus**.

A Note on Dating

Traditionally court records and other historical documents in Midia have been dated according to the Midian Calendar, which begins with Year 1 according to the **Age of Solus (AS)**. However, the Minean system first devised by Demosthenes of Pylene is now increasingly used (years AM for the Age of Magic, and AH for the Age of Heroes), and I will follow this convention in my essay.

Finally, beyond the city walls is the *outer quarter*, home to most of the Khetsdami and other poorer elements within the city. Towering above the city, to the west, is **Mount Gedyon** – which, despite its nearness to the coast, is actually one of the highest mountains in Midia. High on the slopes of Mount Gedyon is the **Precipice of Milcetpal** (literally 'Queen's Leap'), from which the first Queen, Dido Elishat, met her defiant end. Mount Gedyon was once extensively mined for its silver, but the seams were exhausted several centuries ago.

Solus is centrally located along the Midian coast, and therefore well-situated as the administrative and trading centre of the Midian nation. The Middle Sea is relatively narrow at this point, giving Solus a commanding and advantageous position as a port of call for trading vessels, whether travelling between west and east, or north and south. The great wealth of Solus – reflected in its fine marble buildings, its imposing temples and its impressive harbour, the largest in the known world – is built almost entirely upon its profitable position at the crossroads of many trade routes across the Middle Sea.

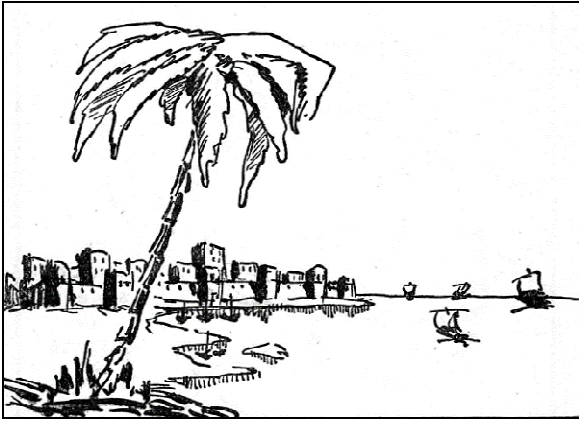
Etica, the Eternal Rival

Second largest and most westerly city of Midia, located in the great **Bay of Etica** two hundred and fifty miles to the south-west of Solus, **Etica** has a long history of rivalry with its more illustrious sister-city.

In part this stems from Etica's claim to have been founded by an Edonite merchant-fleet 15 years before Solus, led by a resourceful trader named **Etobel** (after whom the city was named).

As a result, Etica has always resented, and resisted, Solus' claim to be paramount Midian city. Several times in its history, Etica has rebelled against the queens of Solus, and has even sided with invading forces, such as during the Tritonian occupation (as a result, Etica still has the largest Tritonian community in Midia, making up almost a third of the city's population today). Some of the more wrathful citizens of Solus have called for Etica's destruction because of this persistent disloyalty, but more temperate counsels have always prevailed – so far.

Etica's harbour is nothing like as large as Solus', but maritime trade is nevertheless important to the city's economy. Etica is capital of the **Western Territory** – that part of Midia which borders the jungles of Charybdis. Its proximity to Charbydis has allowed Etica to largely monopolise the trade in Midia of the durable hardwoods felled from the great forests of the south.



Karkuan, the City of Fishermen

Karkuan, City of Fishermen

Situated forty miles to the west of Solus, **Karkuan** (the name is of unknown meaning, and is perhaps Charybdean in origin) is one of the smallest and least important of the Midian cities. Founded in about 85 AM by Queen Dido Amella, its greatest claim to fame is the special smoking technique first developed in Karkuan and applied to the fish landed in its harbour, making Karkuan smoked fish greatly desired delicacies throughout Midia. Despite its relative unimportance, Karkuan has been the site of two famous battles in Midian history.

Maliba, City of Tents

Situated two hundred and thirty miles to the south-west of Solus, and about fifty miles inland, **Maliba** was founded by Queen Dido Amella in 73 AM whilst in exile from her brother King Utipan the Usurper. Maliba served as the rallying point for the resistance to Utipan that ultimately led to his downfall.

The spiritual home of the Midians, Maliba literally means 'City of Tents', so-called because of the lack of any permanent residential structures. The bee-hive shaped **Royal Tombs** of the Queens of Midia are the only permanent structures in the City: even the **Tabernacle of the Gods** – the most sacred place of worship in Midia – is a tent. Few non-Midians choose to live in Maliba, although there is no formal prohibition on their presence (except within the Tabernacle).

Lectis, the White City

Situated a hundred and fifty miles to the south-east of Solus, the port of **Lectis** – the third city of Midia in terms of size and importance – was founded by Queen Dido Elishat in about 65 AM during the first wave of Midian expansion. Only slightly smaller than Etica, Lectis (lit. 'White Abode' in Midian, so called from the creamy colour of the local sandstones from which most of the city's buildings are made) has always been staunchly loyal to the Midian monarchy.

It is famous for the quality of its raisin wine, and also for the fine dyeing industry based in and around Lectis: Lectian cochineal is rightly renowned throughout Mythika. Lectis has sizable minorities of Mineans and Khettim living within its walls.

Telabyr, Gateway to the Desert

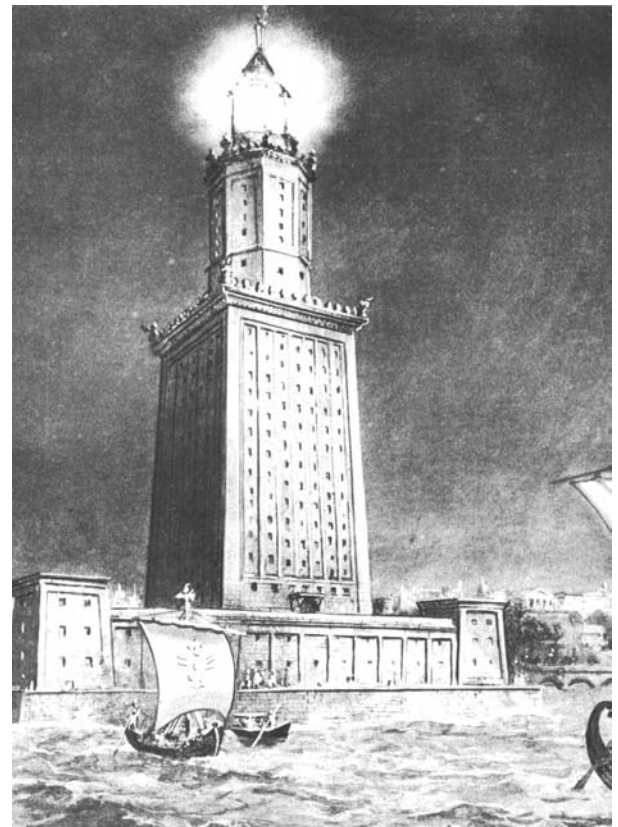
Situated two hundred and fifty miles to the south-east of Solus, and some eighty miles inland, **Telabyr** is sometimes referred to – especially by the Khettim – as the 'Gateway to Midia'. Telabyr is the principal city of the **Eastern Territory** – that part of Midia that marks the sometimes debatable land on the borders of the Desert Kingdom.

Telabyr (lit. 'High Fortress' in Midia) is a modest-sized settlement that sits upon a raised plateau above the semi-arid lands that surround it. The so-called 'camel route' that links Midia with the Desert Kingdom passes through Telabyr. Founded in about 100 AM by Queen Dido Afeat (making it the youngest of the six truly-Midian cities), Telabyr is home to the largest Khettim community in Midia today – comprising almost half of the city's population.

The Minean Cities

The cities of Arkalia, Cyrenos and Skonnos – collectively known in Midia as 'the Minean cities' – are relatively recent foundations, all of them established within the last eighty to one hundred years.

The oldest (and largest) of the Minean Cities is **Cyrenos**, founded by Argos in 242 AH towards the end of the reign of King Setamun II, the Desert King who then governed Midia. Such was the weakening power of the Desert Kingdom at that time that Setamun was powerless to prevent the Argoseans – triumphant following their recent victories in the Umbrian War – from establishing a colony on the Midian coast, halfway between Solus and Lectis.



The great lighthouse of Lectis, the White City



The city of Cyrenos, a mosaic of Minean and Midian cultures

Not to be outdone, the Thenans petitioned Setamun's successor, Queen Nofret, for permission to establish a colony in Midia. Nofret saw the trading potential for such a venture, and in 249 AH the Thenans established the colony of **Arkalia** forty miles south-west of Karkuan.

The third of the Minean Cities was **Skonnos**, which was established in 255 AH some seventy miles south-west of Arkalia. Both Heraklia and Argos had petitioned Queen Nofret for permission to establish a colony. After several years of delicate negotiation, Nofret granted the Argoseans the right to establish a second colony in Midia – much to the fury of the Heraklians. Being 'shut out' of Midian markets by the Argoseans – as the Heraklians perceived it – was one of several factors that led to the outbreak of the War of Two Cities the following year.

With the collapse of Khettim rule over Midia a few years later, and the War of Two Cities under way in earnest, the future of the three Minean colonies in Midia looked uncertain for a time. The continuing success of this venture was ultimately as much due to the canny pragmatism of their Midian neighbours as to the colonists' own survival instincts.

In 280 AH, soon after the end of the War of Two Cities, Queen Dido Hannat signed the **Concordat**, a treaty with the three Minean Cities which recognised both their right to self-governance and their status as colonies of Thena and Argos, whilst also establishing certain obligations owed to the Midian state, especially in times of war. As a result of this treaty, the three Minean Cities were each entitled to send a single representative as an observer to meetings of the Midian Council of Elders – although not with voting rights.

Maveleth, the Last City

The last of the Ten Cities of Midia is the most enigmatic. Known as **Maveleth** – which may be related to an obscure Midian word meaning 'death' – the **Last City of Midia**, as it is also sometimes known, is about two hundred miles south of Solus, nestled in the northernmost foothills of the mountains of Stygia. The exact origins of Maveleth are lost in the mists of time. It may have been founded by Midians, possibly by the Khettim, or even by the Stygians. The first certain mention of it is in a Desert Kingdom court document from about 130 AM, towards the end of the reign of Userkafre – the Khettim king who was the first outsider to subjugate Midia. By the time of the next mention, some fifteen years later during the reign of Userkafre's successor Akenre I, Maveleth had already established its reputation as a place of ill-repute.

Today, Maveleth remains a frontier-town where the rule of law is, at most, given occasional respect. Criminal gangs constantly fight with one another for dominance of the many illicit markets that thrive in the city, whilst hard-bitten mercenaries and disreputable magic-users hire out their services to the gullible and the desperate. Rulers of different cultures and temperaments – Midian, Khettim, Tritonian – have tried to 'clean up' the town on many occasions, with, at best, very limited success.

As well as a magnet for criminal activity, Maveleth serves as a mining town. Rich lodes of silver, lead and tin have been found in the nearby hills. For this reason, if for no other, most rulers are prepared to tolerate the continuing existence of this disreputable town. Maveleth is currently 'governed' – at least in name – by a legate, who is personally appointed by the queen of Midia.

However, in practice, the legate has little real authority within the city. Actual power is wielded by the various mining guilds and criminal gangs of Maveleth.

Maveleth is entitled to send a representative to the Midian Council of Elders – though, like the three Minean cities, as a non-voting observer. In practice, however, the delegate from Maveleth rarely bothers to attend.

Society & Culture

The Peoples of Midia

Culturally, Midia is the most mixed nation of its size in Mythika – indeed, only the vast Land of the Sun can boast a greater social and ethnic diversity.

Something like 40% of the population is ‘pure-blood’ Midian (i.e. both father and mother being themselves Midian). About 20% of the population is made up of ‘half-blood’ Midians (one non-Midian parent), whilst almost all of the remaining 40% is divided more or less equally between four other ethnic groups – Charybdians, Khettim, Mineans and Tritonians.

Midian Language and Literature

The **Midian language** is an offshoot of the Edonite language spoken in Kandaria and the surrounding districts. However, six hundred years of cultural separation – together with the heavy linguistic influence of other languages, Minean and Khemi (both High and Low) in particular – has resulted in Midian becoming far removed from its Edonite roots, so as to make merchants from Kandaria and Solus conversing in their native tongues virtually unintelligible to one another.

The **Midian alphabet** has its origins in the consonant-only alphabet developed in Kandaria towards the end of the Age of Myth, and still in use in the Edonite lands today. The early Midian alphabet also lacked vowel signs – making the relatively-few Midian texts that have survived from the Age of Magic hard to decipher – but during the first century of the Age of Heroes, the Midians adopted the Minean vowel letters, resulting in the modern-day Midian alphabet. This is virtually identical to that used in the Three Cities today.

Midian literature is, perhaps surprisingly, not as rich as one might suppose – certainly when compared with the Desert Kingdom or the Three Cities. In the field of literature, the Midians cannot really be regarded as innovators – although where the libraries of Solus and Lectis really excel is in the many fine manuscripts from other cultures that they contain, and the numerous translations of priceless works of antiquity from one language to another that have been made in Midia.

Midian poetry, in particular, lacks the rich cadences of Minean epic, the colourful metaphor and elaborate style of the Khettim story-tellers, or even the pithy aphorisms of the Umbrians. Midian art, architecture and music are all similarly imitative, strongly influenced by the differing techniques of the various invading peoples without producing much that is recognisably distinctive itself.



A typical Midian merchant

The only areas where Midians have made significant original contributions of their own are within the spheres of agriculture and navigation (the farming handbook of Mago of Lectis, and the ship-logs of Hanno the Navigator are particularly fine examples of Midian achievement in these fields).

Midian Classes

Within Midia, there is a clear distinction between the upper (or **noble**) class, and the lower (or **commoner**) classes. Nine of the twelve noble families are descended from the sea-captains who sailed with Queen Dido Elishat and helped her establish Solus early in the Age of Magic (though some of them later became associated with other cities as the Midians expanded their dominion during the Golden Age of Midia). The other three look back to the founders of the city of Etica as their ancestors, and proudly preserve their own historic traditions, separate from those of the rest of Midia. Most suffets (‘judges’) through Midia’s history have belonged to the noble class, as also the high priests and priestesses of the Holy Triad, and most noble families still possess enormous wealth and prestige, although this has diminished somewhat during the reigns of the current queen and her predecessor.

Most Midians (perhaps 85% of all ‘pure bloods’) belong to the commoner classes. They include the warriors, artisans, scholars, farmers and merchants, as well as the lesser priests and priestesses of the Holy Triad. Although in theory equal in status to one another, some commoner professions are held in higher regard than others. The influence of the commoner classes has grown in recent times, and at present fully a third of the Council of Elders is made up of commoners (including one of the suffets) – an unprecedented state of affairs.

The **Khetsdami** are effectively treated as a class of their own – of lesser status than the commoner classes and, until recently, denied the right to regard themselves as Mineans. Traditionally the Khetsdami carried out functions in Midian society that were regarded as rather lowly. A very large proportion of the criminal element in Midian society is drawn from the Khetsdami. Recent improvements in their rights and conditions has meant that some Khetsdami are now working within areas of the economy previously barred to them – including trade and law. However, they remain excluded from the priesthood.

Midian Names

Most male Midian names usually end in **-l**, **-n** or **-o**. Many incorporate the elements **-bel** or **-eshmun** (from the gods **Bel** or **Eshmun**). Other common elements include **ab-** ('father'); **ad-** or **bo(d)-** ('servant/slave'); **adon-** ('master'); **-hanno** ('gracious'); **-mago** ('soldier'); **mattan-** ('bold'); **-milco** ('king'); **pen-** ('face'); and **-yaton** ('priest'). Examples: **Abibel**, **Abmilco**, **Adeshmun**, **Adherbel**, **Admago**, **Admilco**, **Adoneshmun**, **Adonibel**, **Amlisco**, **Arabo**, **Barco**, **Bareshmun**, **Belhanno**, **Belyaton**, **Bodeshmun**, **Bodhanno**, **Bomilco**, **Cadeshmun**, **Camilco**, **Carthalo**, **Eshbel**, **Etobel**, **Gemilco**, **Gisgo**, **Haneshmun**, **Hanno**, **Hannobel**, **Hasdrubel**, **Himilco**, **Jacobel**, **Jeconabel**, **Jerubel**, **Mago**, **Maharbel**, **Mattan**, **Mattanibel**, **Meribel**, **Milceshmun**, **Milcobel**, **Milcyaton**, **Paltibel**, **Penebel**, **Peneshmun**, **Sacarbel**, **Zorabel**.

Female Midian names typically end in **-a**, or **-t**. Not infrequently they incorporate the element **-tanit** (from the goddess **Tanit**). Other common elements include **am-** ('mother'); **bat-** ('daughter'); **hay-** ('valiant'); **sam-** ('lady'); and **sim-** ('joy'). Examples: **Afeat**, **Amabat**, **Amella**, **Amsharya**, **Amtanit**, **Arisha**, **Bamet**, **Battanit**, **Beltanit**, **Boriya**, **Botanit**, **Dalet**, **Dorca**, **Ebenet**, **Elishat**, **Eshtanit**, **Garbet**, **Gobaya**, **Halama**, **Hannat**, **Hannina**, **Hannisca**, **Hayilet**, **Haytanit**, **Heset**, **Leica**, **Mahut**, **Maret**, **Matanit**, **Melita**, **Nahomet**, **Pentanit**, **Rahabat**, **Salamba**, **Samina**, **Sama**, **Semaut**, **Shafat**, **Simehet**, **Simtanit**, **Sophonisba** and **Yophet**.

Unusually, the female name **Dido** has a male ending **-o**; but, given the unique place of Dido in Midian history and society, this isn't perhaps so surprising.

Members of the commoner classes usually possess one name only; but members of the noble class have an additional house name, taken from the family's traditional founder. Midians generally conceive of their families as being feminine – even if succession to the headship of the house is almost always through the male line – and the house names are therefore feminised versions of the ancestral founder. This is achieved by turning masculine names ending in **-o** to **-a**, adding **-ca** to masculine names ending in **-n**, and adding **-ya** to masculine names ending in **-l**. So, for example, **Gisgo Barca** is a member of *House Barca* and a descendent of the ancestral founder **Barco**. Similarly, **Jerubel Bodeshmunca** is a member of *House Bodeshmunca* and a descendant of a founding father named **Bodeshmun**.

Female members of noble houses take their father's founder name, but exchange it for their husband's on marrying (should they marry outside a noble house – a rare and rather scandalous thing – they still lose the right to their father's founder name).

Members of the Royal House – male and female – take but a single name, though they are entitled to use the title **Sar** ('prince') or **Saret** ('princess'). As for the Queen, she always uses her birth-name as an epithet to the royal name **Dido** itself.

Many of Midia's inhabitants, of course, belonging to other peoples, have names appropriate to their native culture. Most Khetsdami have two names – given respectively by their father and mother – that reflect their mixed heritage.

Midian Characters



Midian adventurers have access to the following five character classes from the *Players Manual* : Nobles, Spearmen, Priests, Sorcerers and Thieves. Other classes (such as Barbarians or Lyrists) are restricted to *gokheri* (foreigners).

The optional Mariner class detailed in the first issue of the *Minotaur* is well-represented among Midians and the two soldier classes detailed in the *M&M Companion*, the Archer and the Cavalryman, would work well in a military-oriented Midian campaign.

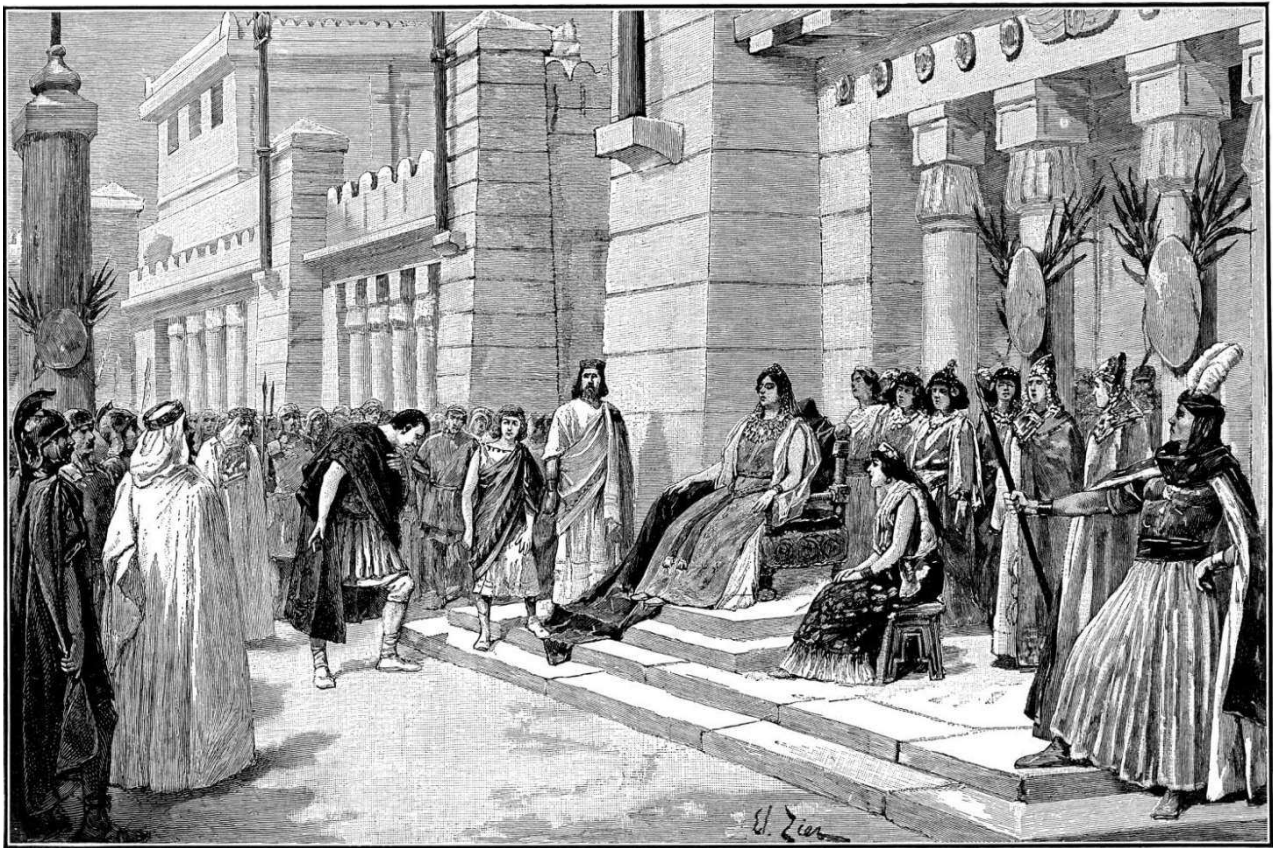
Midian adventurers have exactly the same abilities and restrictions as their Minean counterparts, with the exception of Priests, whose powers differ slightly from the Divine Prodigies described in the *Players Manual* – see p 18 for more details.

The **Gokheri** ('foreigners') are members of other races living in Midia who are, nevertheless, entitled to considerable legal protection. They are specifically limited to four races – Charybdian, Khettim, Minean, and Tritonian. Members of other human races (e.g. Amazonians, Hyperboreans, Umbrians), and non-human races (e.g. Centaurs, Nymphs) are classed as **Zori** ('aliens') and, whilst welcome in Midia, have far fewer rights.

Like most Mythikans, the Midians make considerable use of **slaves**. Given that Midia rarely engages in warfare, relatively few of these have been captured in battle. However, Midia does extensively engage in the trade of slaves with other nations. Slaves are rarely drawn from the Midian population itself – except sometimes as a punishment for moderately-serious offences (never if one is a member of a noble family). The highest proportion of Midian slaves – almost half of the total – is of Charybdian stock.

Government and Law

Although – like most Mythikan societies – Midia is mostly patriarchal in outlook, the notable exception is the **Royal House** itself where, out of love for the founding sovereign, the head of the household – and of the nation itself – is always female. The succession normally passes from mother to daughter, though on occasion other female relatives may inherit the throne.



Dido Afeat the lawgiver, third queen of Midia, sitting in judgment with the two suffets of Solus

Unlike some other nations, the Queen's power is not absolute. From the beginning, she has been assisted by two **suffets** ('judges'), appointed originally as senior magistrates for the city of Solus, but now exercising considerable power over the whole nation. One of the suffets is appointed by the Queen (and is referred to as the **Royal Suffet**), whilst the other is elected by the Senate (and is referred to as the **People's Suffet**); but they are equal in rank and authority, each serving a term of three years which can be renewed but once.

In times of war, one of the suffets will usually take to the field – either with the army or navy – whilst the other remains at home. The suffets can be members of either the noble or commoner classes, but until recently appointments from the commoner classes were fairly uncommon.

The great size of Solus, and the responsibilities that the suffets exercise on behalf of the whole nation, led to complaints from the citizens of Solus that their needs were often neglected – so Solus now also has two **deputy suffets** who are responsible for purely local judicial matters. However, the Royal and People's Suffets do still sit with the Queen as a three-person court of final appeal for certain serious cases (usually involving the trial of nobles).

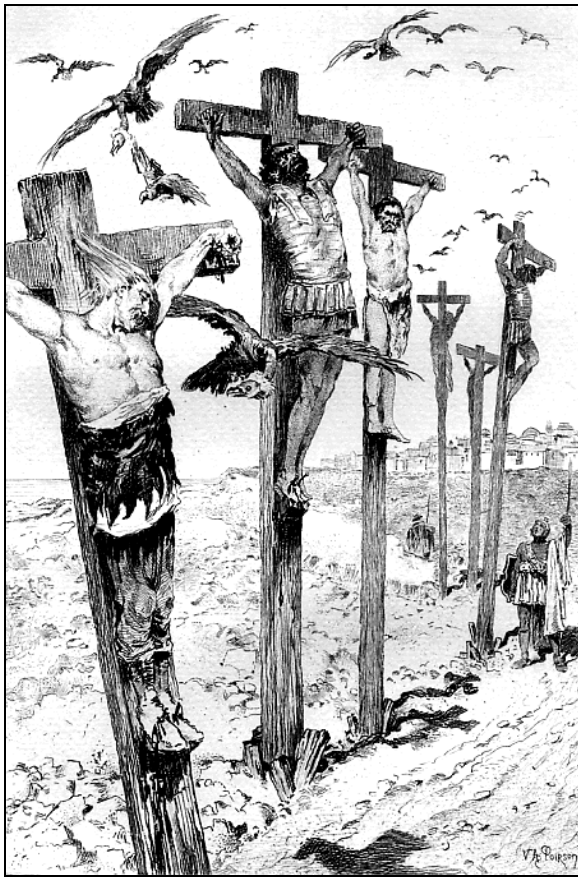
The suffets of Solus are further assisted in their national responsibilities by the council of elders and the senate. The twelve-strong **council of elders** consists of the suffets (representing Solus) and two **elders** elected by the local **city council** of each of the other five Midian cities; in recent times, representatives from the Minean

cities and Maveleth have been admitted as observers, without voting rights.

Traditionally, the **senate** had forty-eight members – the twelve heads of the noble families, who were appointed for life; and thirty-six members elected by the commoner classes, each serving for renewable terms of six years. However, the recent reforms of Queen Dido Yophet have expanded the senate to sixty members by the addition of twelve elected representatives of the Khetsdami class. The noble class, in particular, resent the resulting diminution of their power within the senate.

Each Midian city has its own appointed leaders, also usually referred to as **suffets**, who have similar functions to the suffets of Solus, but with strictly localised mandates. As with the suffets of Solus, these are two in number for each city; one appointed by the Queen, the other elected by the local city council.

As well as their other responsibilities, the suffets are the ultimate arbiters of the law, administered according to the *Code of Dido* – which actually dates from the reign of the third queen, Dido Afeat. The Code of Dido sets out a series of penalties for malefaction, with lesser penalties (usual financial) for minor misdemeanours such as slander, brawling and contract-breaking, giving way to more serious penalties (public floggings, bodily mutilation or enslavement) for crimes such as theft, house-breaking, kidnapping and armed assault, and capital penalties (stoning, beheading or crucifixion) being reserved for the most heinous crimes, including blasphemy, murder and treason.



Crucifixion, a popular punishment in Midia

In times of war, crucifixion is also commonly used as a punishment for cowardice or military incompetence. Nobles found guilty of law-breaking are often able to get their sentences commuted, with exile being a common alternative punishment for the more serious offences. Commoners (unless able to afford expert legal advice) are rarely so fortunate.

Trade

Midia's rich and vibrant economy is dependant upon its command of several vital trade routes across the Middle Sea. Midia itself produces finely dyed and exquisitely embroidered textiles of cotton, linen and wool, refined perfumes, and superior pottery.

Midia is also a net exporter of wheat, raisin wine and salted fish, as well as silver, tin and lead from the northern foothills of the Mountains of Stygia. Midian merchants trade extensively in hard woods, ivory, precious stones, exotic animals, furs and slaves from Charybdis; copper, incense, salt, papyrus, spices and silk via the camel route into the Desert Kingdom; textiles, gold, spiced wine and glass from Kandaria; pottery and horses from Umbria; iron, marble, pearls and finished goods from the Three Cities and the Minean islands; amber from Amazonia; and even furs from Hyperborea. Midia's merchant ships visit every port in the Middle Sea, and there is little doubt that the commercial fleet of Midia is the largest in Mythika. The Midian economy is money-based, with the standard coinage being silver (although gold and copper coins are also in common circulation).

Everyday Life

The majority of 'pure-blooded' Midians have a reasonable standard of living, allowing for the pursuit of many different leisure activities.

Under Minean influence, the Midians have adopted various sporting pastimes over the past century or so, in particular wrestling and running.

Charioteering has become a popular sport with nobles and commoners alike (although only the richest noble families are able to maintain their own chariot teams).

Perhaps the most popular sport of all – at least amongst the lower classes – is the riotous ball game **ulama**. More sedentary and cerebral activities include riddling contests, and board games (most notably **maguli**, or 'little soldiers'). However, Midians are rather less interested in the literary and dramatic contests that are common-place in the Minean lands.

Most Midians – even the noble classes – dress in a similar manner (affluence and status generally being expressed by the quality of the clothing worn, and the accompanying jewellery, rather than by style of clothing itself). Jewellery is commonly worn by both sexes, and is the most obvious sign of wealth and status.

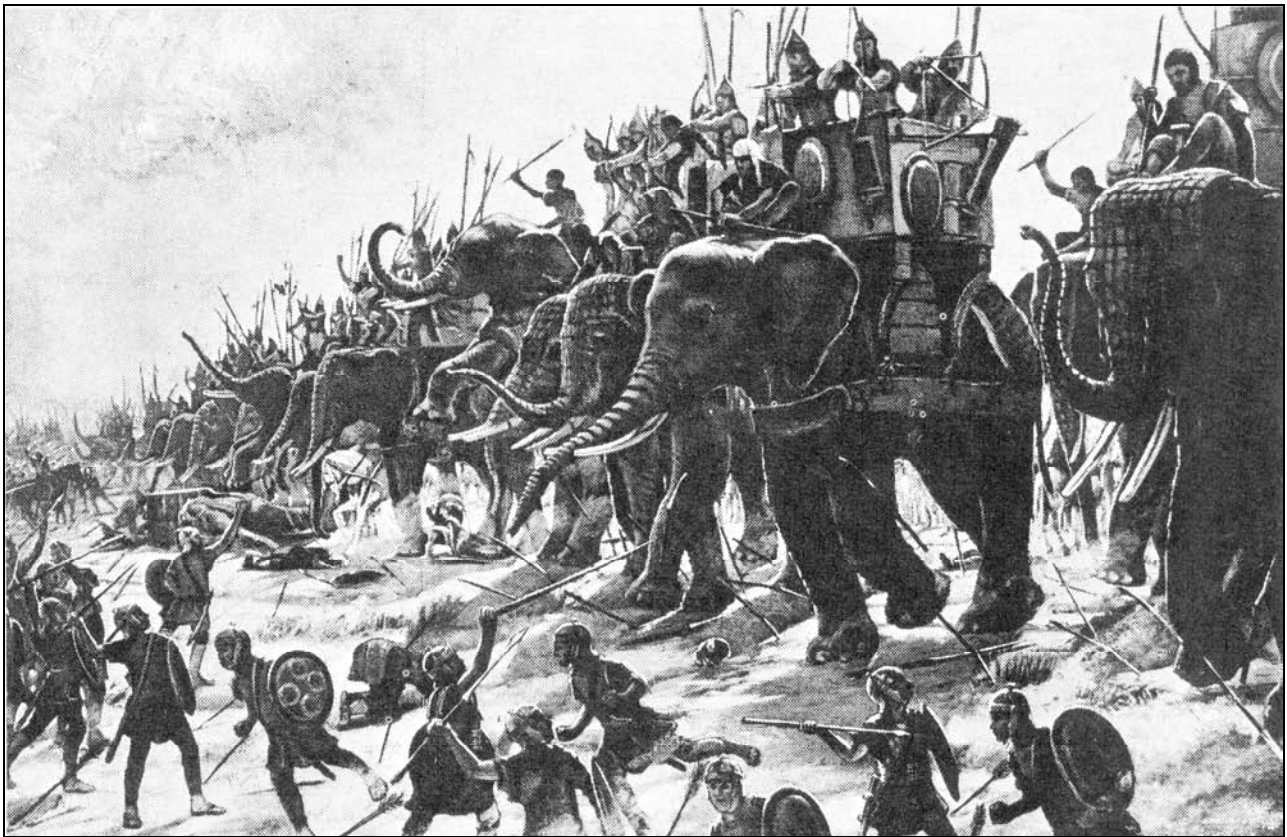
The most distinctive form of jewellery – worn by all Midians from the age of ten, the age of maturity, onwards – is the earring. Most Midians wear a single earring in their left ear (a sign of their submission to the queen). Midian priests and priestesses, however, wear earrings in both ears (symbolising their submission to both divine and royal authority).

Only the queen herself wears a single earring in her right ear (symbolising the fact that even the queen must submit to the authority of the gods).

Although Midian boys and girls may be wed from the age of ten onwards, in practice females are normally wed in their mid-teens, whilst males are normally in their mid-twenties. However, betrothal may last for many years, and it is not at all uncommon for girls to become engaged to their future husbands at the age of ten. Midian weddings are elaborate affairs, even in households of modest means, with the celebrations normally lasting a whole week.

Although the head of the family is nominally the husband, it is the wife who is responsible for the smooth running of the household, including the management of the household slaves. Most noble households will have at least two or three slaves – in the case of the more wealthy households, many more – whilst even amongst the commoner classes, the ownership of a single slave is not uncommon.

Most work is done in the morning, or the later afternoon, with a substantial break of two hours (or longer in the summer months) after noon – a time when shops and markets close, and most Midians will rest. Meals are frugal in the daytime, but the main meal of day, in the evening, consists of several courses, and – especially in the wealthier households – can last up to three or four hours.



Question – What's more dangerous than eighty charging elephants ? Answer – Eighty charging WAR elephants...

Warcraft

The **Midian Navy** is a large and disciplined maritime force, comparable in size and strength with the Tritonian fleet, and significantly larger than the navy of any single Minean city (though certainly no match for the combined naval might of the Three Cities). The sailors and marines of the Midian fleet are almost all recruited from the Midian citizenry (in contrast to the army). The majority of the navy's main force of 200 or so vessels, based at Solus, are biremes, but about a quarter are the larger and faster triremes, modelled upon a design first developed by the Argoseans. In addition to the main force based at Solus, there are smaller forces (or 'wings') or about 50 ships apiece based at Lectis and Etica - mostly biremes.

The **Midian Army**, in contrast with the Navy, is at least partially dependent on foreign mercenaries. Indeed, for centuries, there was no standing army at all in Midia, until the reign of Dido Hayilet. The army today is made up of approximately twenty different units, and one or more army units, called guards (or troops in the case of calvary) are based in each Midian city.

The core units are the **Sacred Guards** of Bel, Eshmun and Tanit, and the elite royal **Didonian Guard**; these are made up entirely of 'pure-blooded' Midians. These highly-disciplined units generally fight in close formation, are armed with long spears and round shields, and wear helmets and breastplates.

The three cavalry troops are the **Elephant Troop**, the **Vermillion Troop** and the **Indigo Troop** (the latter two so-called from the colour of their banners, and the bridle and saddles of their steeds). Like the Sacred

Guards, they are also drawn entirely from highly trained 'pure-blooded' Midians; members of the noble families seeking glory and honour often enter the cavalry.

Other, less elite secondary units are made up of men drawn from the Midian territories, but mostly of 'half-blooded' stock, or belonging to other races.

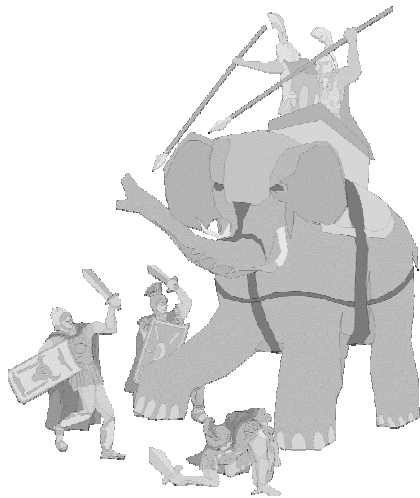
Finally, the auxiliary units – making up a third of the total – consist of mercenaries from overseas, typically formed within their own national units: Khettim, Tritonian, Charybodian, Hyperborean and even Umbrian troops are especially common, whilst Minean mercenaries are rather rare. Most of these secondary and auxiliary units are lightly armed and armoured.

The Elephant Troop

Perhaps the most famous unit of the Midian Army is the **Elephant Troop**, made up of eighty specially trained Charybodian elephants.

These are commonly used for frontal assaults or as anti-cavalry protection. In battle the elephants function as a psychological weapon, frightening the opposing men and horses into flight, and often creating gaps in the enemy lines. They are notoriously temperamental and difficult to control, so riders of the elephants carry a special tool called a *shapet*, spiked at one end and shaped like a hammer at the other, expressly for the purpose of killing rogue elephants in case they charge towards their own army. Each elephant carries a turret that is capable of holding two archers.

War Elephants In *Mazes & Minotaurs*



While it would obviously be impractical to bring your war elephant in a typical *Mazes & Minotaurs* adventure, the Midian mastodons can demonstrate the full extent of their colossal might on the battlefield thanks to the mass warfare rules given in the *M&M Companion*.

Fully-trained war elephants have the same stats and special abilities of standard elephants (see *Creature Compendium*, p 39), with the following exceptions: since they are bred and trained from birth to become living war machines, their Ferocity is upgraded from Aggressive to Dangerous, which increases their Melee bonus as well as their Initiative and Hits Total. When used on the battlefield, they also gain the *Fearsome* special ability, reflecting their tremendous psychological impact on enemy troops.

War Elephant

Taxonomy : Beast

Description : Specially bred and trained elephants.

Size : Gigantic

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Alert

Mystique : Normal

Movement : 120'

Initiative : 15

Melee Attack : +8

Damage : 3d6 (tusks & feet)

Defense Class : 16

Hits Total : 40

Detection / Evasion : +2

Mystic Fortitude : 0

Special Abilities : Charge into Battle (Initiative 21, Melee Attack +14), Fearsome, Tough Skin, Trample.

Awards : Glory 250.



Elephants On the Battlefield

Using the warfare rules from the *M&M Companion*, a single war elephant would have a basic Combat Factor of 45 (versus 25 for a standard elephant).

Because of their special position, the rider of the elephant and the two archers in its turrets *do not* count as extra troops but each of the two archers *do* provide the war elephants with extra abilities of *Missile Weapons* and *Marksmanship* (counted twice, since there are two archers), for an extra CF bonus of +4, to which the presence of the rider adds an extra +1, for a final, truly colossal **Combat Factor of 50**.

Thus, a troop of 20 Midian war elephants would have a Regimental Strength of 1000.

Elephants In Combat

Handling an elephant in battle conditions can be very tricky. This can be overlooked when resolving large-scale battles with the abstract warfare rules given in the *M&M Companion*, which use one-hour battle rounds... but will definitely come into play should the characters be foolish enough to attempt using an elephant during a standard combat using the regular six-second rounds.

At the start of *each* battle round, the rider will have to make a Danger Evasion saving roll with a target number of 15 to make the elephant maneuver as he wishes. Drivers with the *Elephant Rider* background talent (which can be chosen by any Midian warrior class) will be *advantaged* on these rolls, as per the usual talent rules found in the *M&M Companion*.

If the roll fails, the elephant will "get temperamental" and behave in an uncontrolled manner left at the discretion of the Maze Master, refusing to advance, trampling friends and foes alike or moving in a completely random direction. The rider will be able to regain control of the beast if he succeeds at his Danger Evasion roll at the start of the following round.

These Danger Evasion rolls also require the total and undivided attention of the rider, who cannot do anything else during the round. Other characters mounted on the elephant will receive special modifiers reflecting their particular position; they can only attack (or be attacked by) Gigantic opponents in melee. In missile combat, they receive a +2 bonus against Large or Medium-sized targets. A specially-made battle turret will provide a +2 bonus to EDC against missile attacks.



Bel, supreme god of the Midians

Religion

The Holy Triad

Judged alongside the bewildering plethora of gods and goddesses worshipped by the Khettim, the Galleans, the various peoples of the Land of the Sun – and even compared to the Minean pantheon – Midian worship is relatively restrained and straightforward. Although an offshoot of the religion of Kandaria as observed at the beginning of the Age of Magic, the Midian belief system quickly developed its own distinctive form and style. At the heart of the Midian faith is the worship of the three divine figures of **Bel**, **Tanit** and **Eshmun** – collectively known as the **Holy Triad**.

Bel is the supreme lord of the universe – the god of the sky, lightning, thunder and war. He is also thought of by the Midians as the god of the underworld. He is usually depicted as a bearded older (around 60 years old) man.

Tanit is the goddess of the moon, good fortune, visions, harvest, fertility and the earth. Tanit is usually depicted as a voluptuous, middle-aged (perhaps 40-year old) woman. Especially in older temples, she is sometimes depicted as being attended by two other female goddesses, **Astarte** (goddess of love), and **Asherah** (goddess of motherhood) – but rather than being worshipped in their own right, these deities are thought of today as representing particular aspects of Tanit.

Eshmun is the god of the sun, youth, the arts and healing. He is usually depicted as a virile young (perhaps 20-year old) man.

The Development of the Holy Triad

The first Midians, like their Edonite ancestors, venerated four gods: **Asherah**, goddess of the earth; **Astarte**, goddess of love; **Bel**, the supreme sky god; and **Moloch**, the god of fire and death. However, Dido Elishat, the first queen, outlawed the worship of Moloch. Some of the more beneficent aspects of Moloch were absorbed into the Midian depiction of Bel. For example, Bel assumed Moloch's lordship over the domains of death and the underworld. The more unpleasant aspects of Moloch were suppressed altogether. Bel remains the favoured god of most noble families, and patron god of Etica.

After the founder queen's death, her daughter and successor Dido Amella promoted the legend of Dido Elishat's apotheosis. The Midians began to worship a new goddess, **Tanit** – in effect, a deified version of Dido. As patron goddess of Solus, Tanit quickly usurped both Astarte and Asherah in the affections of most Midians, indeed absorbing many of the traits of these goddesses into herself. By the end of the Golden Age of Midia, Astarte and Asherah had been relegated to the role of divine handmaidens, or were even regarded merely as aspects of the great goddess Tanit. Although Bel remains officially the supreme god, most Midians today, especially commoners and Khetsdami, hold the greatest affection for Tanit. The majority of Midians think of Tanit as the one who orders their present-day life, whilst Bel, as god of the underworld, will govern their life in the hereafter.

At about the same time as the worship of Tanit began to take hold, the minor Edonite god of **Eshmun** was promoted to the 'first rank' of Midian gods. His worship became particularly popular with the young and the well-educated, and also within the city of Lectis, where he is regarded as patron god. Many Midians believe that Eshmun is fated one day to die and rise again (and that the periodic 'swallowing of the sun' that Midian scholars refer to as an 'eclipse' is a prophetic warning of this). They further believe that the death of Eshmun (at the hands of the outcast god, Moloch) will be accompanied by much evil and bloodshed throughout Mythika, and will plunge the world into darkness. However, the rebirth of Eshmun, and the final defeat of Moloch, will inevitably follow. Bel will release the dead to be reborn into a new paradise, where even Bel and Tanit will acknowledge the rule of Eshmun as the supreme healer and bringer of eternal joy.

Although in the early days of Midia, it was customary for each of the three gods to have their own temples, by the end of the Age of Magic, all three were worshipped together under one roof (though nevertheless within separate areas, and with their own distinct priesthoods being maintained). This may have been a reaction to the plethora of cults introduced to Midia by the Desert Kings – and an attempt to keep the Midian *cultus* as distinct and unsullied.

Midian forms of worship – at least compared to most other civilisations – are surprisingly simple and restrained. Although there are impressive temples to the Holy Triad in each Midian city, for most Midians, their customary acts of veneration are carried out at wayside shrines, in sacred groves, and before modest household altars.

Although the priests and priestesses of the Holy Triad ensure that the daily round of worship continues uninterrupted, for most people – from the queen herself down to the lowest of her citizens – public reverence for the gods is confined to a few major festivals each year, supplemented by private prayer according to the individual's perceived needs.

Holy Men and Women

Midian priests and priestesses can be readily identified by their shaven heads, and the fact that – unlike most Midians – they always walk barefoot.

Unlike other Midians, priests and priestesses wear earrings in both ears (symbolising their submission to both divine and royal authority). Otherwise their style of dress is similar to that of other Midians. Priests of Bel generally wear purple robes, priestesses of Tanit wear green robes, whilst priests of Eshmun wear white robes.

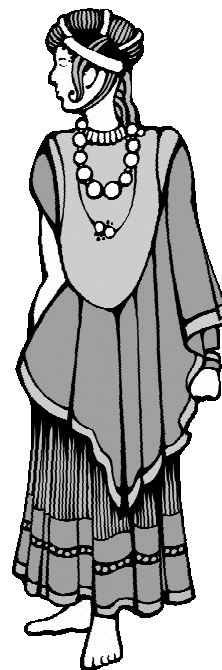
In addition to the 'regular' priests of Bel and Eshmun and priestesses of Tanit found throughout Midia, there are a number of other specialised types of holy men and women. These include:

the powerful **high priests and priestesses** (who are drawn exclusively from the noble class), who lead worship in the main temples of each Midian city, as well as maintaining the Tabernacle of the Gods in Maliba; the scarlet-robed **Adepts of Joy** (temple prostitutes, both male and female), who provide emotional and physical comfort to the distressed and anxious, and the brown-robed **Visionaries of Dido** (who are always female), who use the root extract of a desert plant named **camalla** to aid them in their prophetic trances.

The Vision of the Four Ages of Midia

Perhaps the most famous vision granted by one of the visionaries of Dido was that granted to Dido Amella by **Salamba**, the very first visionary, whilst she was hiding in Maliba from her wicked brother Utipan the Usurper. Salamba's vision prophesied three great ages to come for the Queens of Midia – the Golden Age, the Silver Age and the Bronze Age – to be followed by a fourth age, the **Age of Iron**.

During this Iron Age, said Salamba, Midia will rise to a great height, and will battle with 'another nation' for mastery of Mythika. If Midia wins this battle, its power and glory will far surpass that of any other nation; but if it loses, its fall shall be so great that it shall never rise again. The identity of this mysterious ultimate foe of Midia has, not unnaturally, been the source of much speculation.



A scarlet-robed Adept of Joy

Other Religious Traditions

Although nearly virtually all 'pure-blooded' Midians, and the majority of Khetsdami, remain devotees of the Holy Triad, most Midian cities also contain a bewildering variety of temples – of varying shapes and sizes – dedicated to the gods of other pantheons, especially the Olympian and Desert Kingdom gods. Visitors to Midia are often surprised to find that these temples are frequented not only by their native devotees, but also by considerable numbers of Midians too.

For example, it would not be at all surprising for a Midian mariner preparing for a new sea voyage to make time for a visit to the local temple of Poseidon (should there be one in the port), to offer prayers to the Minean Lord of the Sea alongside his dutiful supplications made before the gods of the Holy Triad.

To some Mineans, this might seem like a shocking act of impiety and disregard for one's own gods – but to Midians, such behaviour is regarded as entirely natural, both in showing respect for others, and also in expressing a pragmatic and practical hope that one's prayers will be answered by someone – even if not necessarily in the way or manner one might expect.

The only Midian city that is entirely devoid of shrines to Athena, Horus, Poseidon, Hathor, Mithras and the like is Maliba. The **Tabernacle of the Gods** is the sole place of worship in the City of Tents, and is consecrated to the worship of the Holy Triad alone. It is believed that here – through the visionaries of Dido – the goddess Tanit from time to time reveals the otherwise unfathomable designs of the gods to mortals. Although non-Midians are permitted to enter – and even to worship – within most Midian temples, the one place that is set aside for 'pure-blooded' Midians alone is the Tabernacle of Gods. To defile this most hallowed sanctuary is punishable by death. Even the queen has not yet dared to challenge this law – to the frustration of many devout Khetsdami.

Deities & Prodigies



A Midian Priestess of Tanit

The dominant view among Minean scholars is that the three main deities of the Midians are actually Olympians in disguise. According to this theory, Bel is a thinly disguised Zeus and Eshmun is clearly Apollo under another name.

In the case of Tanit, however, things get slightly more complicated (or confused?); while Tanit's association with earth, fertility and harvest (as well as her depiction as a voluptuous, middle-aged woman) clearly seem to make her a Midian equivalent of Demeter, some of her other attributes are also reminiscent of other Olympian goddesses such as Artemis (for the lunar aspect) or Aphrodite (as the goddess of love, under her Astarte aspect). Indeed, the triadic aspect of the goddess may well be the key to understanding her true identity – or at least her true nature: most Minean scholars now seem to agree that Midians actually worship *several* goddesses under a single name or form.

Of course, Midians themselves find little interest in such theological debates; their own dominant view on the matter seems to be that “*all goddesses are one*”, regardless of the name and aspect under which you choose to honor her.

In game terms, Priests of Bel and Eshmun should be given the same powers as those of Zeus and Apollo respectively, while those of the Priestesses of Tanit will vary according to the particular aspect of the goddess they have chosen to serve; those who serve Tanit as the earth mother or under her Asherah aspect have access to the same powers as Priestesses of Demeter and Hestia, while those who are specifically devoted to Tanit Astarte will have the same powers as Priestesses of Aphrodite.

Burial Practices of the Midians



A Midian motari, or “place of the dead”

Midians usually bury their dead in the earth in large, communal cemeteries called **motari** (lit. ‘places of death’), normally located at the edge of the city, that are typically marked by stone tablets carved with the names of the deceased and symbols of the gods – most especially Tanit. Nobles and commoners alike are buried with much the same ceremonies.

The only notable exceptions are applied to the burial practices attending the death of monarchs and infants. The queens of Midia are buried in distinctive bee-hive shaped tombs, located in the city of Maliba. Not surprisingly, the funerals of monarchs are elaborate affairs, preceded and followed by several weeks of official mourning.

The death of infants (normally those under two years of age) is a different story. Midians believe that a child only becomes ‘fully human’ when he or she begins to speak; for it is speech that sets us apart from the beasts, and shows that we possess a soul. Should a child die in infancy, then their body is to be burnt and their remains interred in an urn which is buried in a special burial ground named the **tophet** (‘place of the burnt’). The death of an infant – though sad – is not looked upon in the same way by most Midians as the death of an older child or adult.

This common Midian practice has been the subject of much misunderstanding on the part of others, and has led to the heinous accusation that Midians are ‘baby-killers’ or even ‘baby-eaters’.

There is, of course, no truth in this accusation whatsoever – at least, not today. However, it has to be admitted that the first generation of Midians did indeed indulge in child sacrifice to the despicable god Moloch. No doubt, this was done to propitiate the gods, and to earn their favour following the arrival of Dido and her people at Solus, where they found themselves, at first, facing hordes of hostile Charybdian tribesmen. Only as the Midians became more firmly established did Queen Dido Elishat feel strong enough to act against Moloch's worshippers.

The Rituals of Moloch



A few rare copies of the *Rituals of Moloch*, one of the oldest Midian religious texts, are held in the Library of Solus. It purports to describe the rituals that were observed by the Cult of Moloch before its suppression. The god was worshipped in the form of a large bronze bull-headed statue. The idol was hollow and was divided into seven compartments, in one of which Moloch's worshippers placed flour, in the second a pair of turtle-doves, in the third an ewe, in the fourth a ram, in the fifth a calf, in the sixth an ox and in the seventh a child, which were all burned together by heating the statue inside.

The name **Moloch** is obviously related to the Midian word **milco** (meaning 'king'). The Cult of Moloch regarded him – not Bel – to be the supreme god, and identified him with fire, the sun and death. Some scholars (e.g. Aristo of Seriphos) have theorised that Moloch may have originated as a grotesque idol inspired by Chemosh, the first Gorgotaur. Less convincingly, attempts have been made to link him with Typhon, the evil god of the Desert Kingdom.

Various stories have sprung up over the centuries, claiming that the worship of Moloch is far from ended. Sometimes these stories have been seized upon by Midia's enemies as evidence of the 'continuing depravity of the child-killers of Midia' – to quote from *Midia Exposed!* Some have even claimed that several powerful noble families have secretly pledged themselves to Moloch, and are plotting to overthrow the queen and the worship of the Holy Triad – above all the hated Tanith. My extensive researches, however, have failed to find any reliable evidence whatsoever for the truth of these 'conspiracy theories'. All reputable scholars agree that the worship of Moloch in Midia is definitely a thing of the past.

(Note: Ultimately, of course, it is for each Maze Master to decide whether or not Camilco is right, i.e. whether or not the Cult of Moloch is still around, and what secret support it may or may not have).



Dido Elishat, first queen of Midia

The History of Midia

Founding Myth

Notwithstanding Etica's historic claims to be older, the history of Midia really begins with the voyage of Dido to Solus in 42 AM.

Dido was a beautiful and popular princess of Kandaria, the great Edonite city located on the eastern shores of the Middle Sea. Her father, King Mattan, decreed that following his death, the throne should be shared by his daughter and his son, **Malyon**.

However, following Mattan's death, the autocratic Malyon seized the throne for himself alone, and declared his intention to take Dido in marriage for himself – a custom that, whilst not uncommon in the Desert Kingdom, was entirely contrary to the ancient laws of Kandaria.

Dido persuaded many of her brother's subjects to rebel against him, and to join her in searching for a new home across the Middle Sea. Eventually, nine ships joined her, and together Dido and her associates founded the city of Solus, in the heart of the land that thereafter became known as Midia.

The people of Midia – and especially Solus – are very proud of their mythic ancestry. The fact that Midia was established in an act of defiant rebellion by the brave, independently-minded Queen Dido Elishat has always been of great significance to her people.

As a result, the Midians have always cherished freedom and open-mindedness, which explains their attitude of welcome and generosity towards outsiders, but also the determinedly-independent spirit that has sustained them whenever outsiders have come to Midia not as friends but as conquerors.

Midian history is generally broken down into six periods: the three ages of Midian rule (often referred to as the Golden, Silver and Bronze Ages of Midia); and the intervening periods during which Midia was subjected to foreign rule (twice by the Desert Kingdom, and the third time by the Tritonians).



Dido Amella, second queen of Midia

The Golden Age of Midian Queens

(42 AM – 110 AM)

Dido herself (given the epithet **Elishat**, meaning 'Revered' in Midian, by later generations) was a wise and enlightened ruler, whose reign thereafter remained a byword for contentment and prosperity. She had four children – her eldest was a son, Utipan, followed by a daughter, Amella, and finally, after a gap of several years, her twin daughters Leica and Dorca.

In 67 AM, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Solus, Dido announced before the assembled people that her elder daughter, Amella, would succeed her as Queen of Midia.

Many of the nobles – still hearkening back to the days of Dido's father and brother – were shocked that Utipan was being passed over, both as eldest child and sole son. Utipan himself feigned acceptance of the queen's will – but, secretly, began to plot against her.

Five years later he was ready, and, with his co-conspirators, Utipan seized the royal palace, executed most of the queen's faithful advisers, and demanded that Dido abdicate. Dido, however, refused, and taking herself and her youngest daughters Leica and Dorca to a high point on the slopes of Mount Gedyon, outside the city walls, cast herself and them over the precipice rather than submit to Utipan.

For the next three years (72 AM – 75 AM), **Utipan the Usurper** reigned over Midia with such cruelty that his very name came to be seen as an embodiment of terror and oppression (some tales say that he even tried to restore the vile practices of the Cult of Moloch that had been outlawed by his mother).

However, Dido's remaining daughter, and appointed heir, Amella, had escaped Utipan's bloodbath. She established a refuge at Maliba, from where she organised opposition to Utipan. By 75 AM, she was ready, and she marched against Solus. With surprisingly ease, she took the city, and captured Utipan. Ignoring his pleas for clemency, she ordered that he be cast down from the same precipice from which her mother and sisters had plunged to their deaths. Thus ended Midia's brief experimentation with male rule: thereafter all sovereigns from the House of Dido have been female.

Amella took the regnal name **Dido Amella** ('Dido the Fair Mother'), beginning the custom of all Midian Queens taking the name Dido as their first name, in honour of the founding monarch. Dido Amella reigned for twenty-one years (75-96 AM), and during her reign the remaining free Charybdian tribes of the land of Midia were either expelled or enslaved.

Dido Amella was the first monarch to be buried in the Royal Tombs of Maliba. She was succeeded by her elder daughter, who reigned as **Dido Afeat** ('Dido the Wise') for fourteen years (96-110 AM). Dido Afeat's reign was noted for an explosion of learning, and it was during her reign that the ancient **Laws of Dido** were finally codified. However, the Golden Age of Midian Queens came to an abrupt end with the invasion of the Desert King Userkafre.

The First Age of Desert Kings

(110 AM – 206 AM)

In 110 AM, Userkafre launched the first major invasion of Midia. Within six months, most of the main cities had fallen to Khetim armies, including Solus. A gravely sick Queen Dido Afeat retreated to Maliba with her faithful entourage, including her heir and younger sister Hannat. There she died, and was buried in the second of the Tombs of Maliba. Hannat, however, did not assume the queenship, for **Nahomet**, one of the visionaries of Dido, prophesied that Midia must pass 'into darkness' for four generations.

'For the duration of this long night,' said the visionary, 'the House of Dido must take refuge in the **Island of Hidden Hopes**.' Hannat questioned the visionary as to the location of this island, and was given directions to it. Thus began the first exile of the **Queens-in-Waiting**.

The rule of the Desert Kings over Midia was, at first, fairly benevolent. The Khetim religion was introduced to Midia, but was not imposed upon the Midians. However, during the latter part of the reign of Akenre II and, more particularly, during the days of Sahure II, Khetim rule became more oppressive.

Relatively little is now known about the Golden Age of Midian Queens, due to the widespread destruction of many of the temples, palaces, and libraries of this period that took place under Sahure II.



Dido Afeat, the wise law-giver



Dido Boriya, the peacemaker

Within a few years of Sahure's accession, a rebellion broke out against the Desert Kings, resulting in the collapse of the Khettim occupation, and the return of the Daughters of Dido.

The Island of Hidden Hopes

The location of the **Island of Hidden Hopes** (or **Tikvalut** in Midian) is the most carefully-guarded secret in the whole of Midia, known only to the queen, the suffets of Solus, the high priestess of Tanit and a few other trusted individuals. Three times during the history of Midia, it has served as the hidden refuge of the House of Dido when Midia has been occupied by enemy powers. Many attempts have been made by adventurers and foreign governments to find it, but without success. All that is known for certain is that it is located somewhere in the western half of the Middle Sea.

Most Midians believe that even if the secret of its location was uncovered by enemy agents, they would still be unable to find it, as it is reputedly protected by strange mists that Midian mariners refer to as the **Girdle of Tanit**, and there is said to be only one safe approach to the island. Indeed, it is rumoured that from time to time, seafarers will be taken unaware by dense fogs whilst crossing the Middle Sea, only to find themselves shipwrecked and marooned upon the treacherous shores of **Dido's Refuge**, as the island is also sometimes known. Whether this tale is true or complete nonsense is, of course, impossible to know.

It is said that the island, though small, is blessed with an abundance of game and fruiting trees, and a mild microclimate that makes it highly-suited as a safe haven for the **Daughters of Dido** during times of tribulation. It is said that whilst at the island, the **Queens-in-Waiting** are able to commune with the gods, receiving much wisdom that will benefit their people when the time is right for their return. However, when the call comes from the gods to return to their homeland, they must obey it, without delay. Any failure to do so, warned the visionary Nahomet, would result in them earning the displeasure of the gods – and this indeed later happened on the occasion when **Dido Mahut** (in Midian 'Sleeping Dido') was called back from the island to become queen.

The Silver Age of Midian Queens

(206 AM – 119 AH)

The first Queen of the restored Line of Dido was **Dido Boriya** ('Dido the Fat'), who reigned from 206 AM to 240 AM.

Despite her rather unflattering (if accurate) name, Dido Boriya was a much-loved monarch who did much to restore order and heal the harms of the latter part of the Khettim occupation. A forgiving and pragmatic ruler, Dido Boriya refused to expel the now sizeable Khettim population of Midia, but sought reconciliation with them – setting the pattern for future relationships between Midians and other cultures.

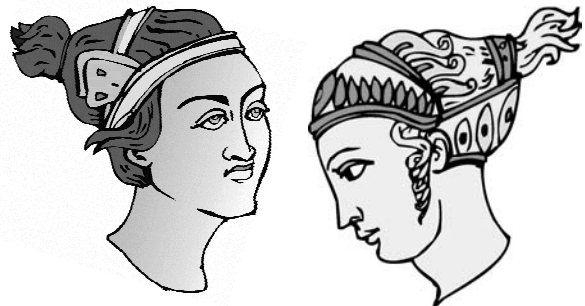
Dido Boriya was succeeded by her daughter **Dido Garbet** ('Dido the Silent', 240-277 AM), about whom very little is now known. Increasingly reclusive in her later years, and famous for her refusal to take a husband, she is best remembered for her oft-repeated line, 'I want to be alone.' She was succeeded by her younger sister, **Dido Dalet** ('Dido the Weak').

During her short reign (277-286 AM), Midia was threatened by the Autarchs of Typhon, then approaching the height of their power (see *Minotaur n5*, "Observations of the Desert Kingdom"). To the consternation of her people, Dido Dalet bought off each Autarch threat of invasion, only for the dark spectre of a Typhonian war-fleet to re-emerge the following year.

For almost a decade, the Typhonians repeated this tactic, extracting a higher price for peace each year, and gradually bleeding the Midian economy dry.

Eventually, the Midians lost patience with their queen. Dido Dalet was removed from power in a bloodless coup (dying a lonely death seven years later), to be replaced by her daughter **Dido Hayilet** ('Dido the Valiant'), one of the greatest queens of the House of Dido. Dido Hayilet (who reigned from 286 AM to 19 AH) refused from the outset to pay the Typhonian tribute.

The Autarchs responded with force – invading Midia by land from their dominion in the Khet Delta, and by sea landing in force at Lectis in 288 AM. Fighting their way along the Midian coast, they took the capital Solus after a nine-month siege in 290 AM.



*Two not-so-great queens
Dido Garbet & Dido Dalet*



Dido Hayilet, the brave liberator



Dido Semaut & Dido Maret

Can you guess which one was known as "the Bitter"?

However, Dido Hayilet escaped, and gathered a fresh army at Karkuan. It was here that the Typhonians were crushingly defeated in 291 AM. The Typhonians withdrew, and began to make preparations for a fresh invasion. However, revolt in the Desert Kingdom (led by Osiris and Isis) led to the abandonment of these plans.

Nevertheless, it was only with the downfall of the Autarchs at the end of the Age of Magic in the **Days of Wrath** that the threat of further invasion was ended. Dido Hayilet's determined and defiant resistance earned her the greatest acclaim for any of the Line of Dido, save Dido Elishat herself.

Dido Hayilet built up the strength of Midia's fleet to new levels, as well as creating the first standing army. She established strong diplomatic ties with neighbouring nations – most notably visiting the newly-resurgent Desert Kingdom, which was then flowering under the reign of Osiris and Isis (The legend that she paid homage to them is, of course, Khettim propaganda, later used by the Desert Kings to justify their renewed occupation of Midia).

Dido Hayilet was succeeded by her daughter **Dido Simehet** ('Dido the Joyful', 19-42 AH), followed by her granddaughter **Dido Heset** ('Dido the Kind', 42-66 AH), both of whom reigned wisely, building on the successes of Dido Hayilet. Midia entered a period of prosperity and peace without parallel in its long and illustrious history. However, this was soon to change.

Towards the end of Dido Heset's reign, in 63 AH, Midia established its first overseas colony, **Hodoshir** (lit. 'New City') on the southern end island of Amphissa. The Argoseans, then in the early days of their colonisation, had founded their own colony, **Augentos**, on the northern end of the island three years earlier.



Dido Simehet & Dido Heset, the Joyful and the Kind

Several other colonies followed along the Charbybdian coast – but Midian overseas expansion was ultimately thwarted by the growing tension between the two Amphissan colonies during the reign of **Dido Semaut** ('Dido the Left-handed', 66-93 AH), the niece of Dido Heset, eventually led to war during the reign of her daughter **Dido Maret** ('Dido the Bitter', 93-119 AH).

The **Amphissan War** (98-103 AH) began as a local affair between two quarrelsome colonies, but quickly escalated into a full-scale war between Argos and Midia. Although the Midian fleet had superiority in numbers, the skill and tenacity of the Argoseans (who were soon joined by the Heraklians) began to take its toll. The vacillating leadership of Dido Maret and her suffets eventually doomed the besieged Hodoshir, whose half-starved citizens surrendered in 102 AH, to be led away into slavery and for their city to be utterly destroyed. But there was worse to come.

A combined Argosean and Heraklian fleet landed troops in Midia itself, and the following year – on the same battlefield where Dido Hayilet had once defeated the Typhonian Autarchs – the Mineans defeated the Midians as decisively on land as they had at sea.

In the humiliating peace treaty that followed, the Midians were forced to surrender their four Charybdian colonies, to be divided equally between Argos and Heraklia. Midia's overseas empire was at an end.

In the remaining years of Dido Maret's reign, unrest (and outright rebellion in Etica in 107 AH), crop failures and the outbreak of disease further sapped the confidence of the Midian populace. Telabyr was occupied by the strong Desert King Menemkhet I in 109 AH, and many Midians wondered whether the Khettim were preparing for a full-scale invasion.

But the final downfall of the Silver Age of Midia came at the hands of a new maritime power that was fast arising. In 118 AH, a Tritonian fleet sailed into the harbour of Etica, and Midia's most disloyal citizens threw in their lot with the invaders.

The following year, Solus fell to the Tritonians. Dido Maret fled to Maliba, only to be forced to drink poison by her own suffets, who tried to proclaim her daughter **Ebenet** as queen. However, Ebenet demurred, preferring to follow 'the call of prophecy' – exile to the Island of Hidden Hopes.

The Silver Age of Midian Queens was at an end.

The Age of Tritonian Sea-Princes

(119 AH – 215 AH)

The **Tritonian occupation** lasted nearly one hundred years. The Tritonians showed very little interest in the Midian hinterland, and the inland cities of Maliba and Maveleth were effectively self-governing, whilst Telabyr remained in the hands of the Desert Kings.

The Tritonians were well-received in Etica (which became the capital of Midia during their administration), but most Midians in the other coastal cities greatly resented their rule – and above all in Solus itself, which greatly begrudged Etica her new-found privileges (such as exemption from the high taxes levied by the Tritonians on all trade in the other coastal cities).

The Tritonians introduced many facets of their culture into Midia, including various aspects of their religion. It was at this time that the worship of Poseidon began to take root in Midia – and, again, particularly in Etica, where a temple to the Olympian sea-god was built that rivalled the local shrine to the Holy Triad of Midian gods in both size and magnificence.

The collapse of Tritonian rule was sudden and complete, following immediately on the destruction of the Tritonian fleet when the Sea-Princes hubristically tried to expand their dominion beyond the Bronze Gates. News of the destruction of almost their entire armada at the hands of the Atlanteans spread quickly, and within a matter of weeks the Midians (as indeed other Tritonian vassals) were rising up against their demoralised masters. The remaining Tritonians in Midia withdrew to Etica, whilst the people of Solus and elsewhere awaited the triumphant return of the Daughters of Dido. Alas, things did not work out as well as they had hoped...



Dido Mahut, the sleeping queen

The Tale of Sleeping Dido

Dido Mahut ('Dido the Sleeper'), also known as the **Twenty-nine Day Queen**, had the shortest reign of any Queen of Midia. For five months, the Midians anxiously looked for the coming of the queen, but without success. The sults of Solus sent messengers to the visionaries of Maliba, asking if the return of the Queen-in-Waiting was at hand, but received no word in reply. Meanwhile, reports were received that the Desert King Amunkhet I was gathering a large army at Telabyr. Why did the Queen-in-Waiting delay?

In truth, it is believed, Dido Mahut had never expected or desired the call back from an exile that had lasted her entire life, to govern a land she had never seen. The comforts and ease of the life she had always known seemed to her more attractive than the chances and responsibilities of life in an unfamiliar land. In the end, her counsellors persuaded her that she had to seize this unanticipated opportunity to restore the rule of the House of Dido within Midia. Alas, she had left it too late. By the time she landed at Solus – six months after the Tritonians had abandoned it – Amunkhet's army was already on the move. Dido Mahut reigned for just twenty-nine days, before sailing back to the Island of Hidden Hopes. Thus did Dido Mahut earn the displeasure of the gods, and the forfeiture of her throne, as predicted by the visionaries of Maliba long before. Alone of all the Daughters of Dido, she never received a majestic burial in the Royal Tombs of Maliba.

The Second Age of Desert Kings

(215 AH – 260 AH)

Amunkhet justified his invasion with the spurious tale of Dido Hayilet 'paying homage' to Osiris and Isis, his ancestors. Few Midians gave this story any credence. Despite this, the Desert King Amunkhet took Solus and most of Midia with barely a fight – indeed, the only real resistance came from the Tritonians holed up in Etica, who defied the Desert King for 3 years, until 218 AH.

The Tomb of Dido

With the exception of Dido Mahut (and, of course, Dido Yophet, the current Queen), Dido Elishat – the founder of Solus – is the only queen of Midia not to have been buried in the Royal Tombs of Maliba. Indeed, no-one knows for sure what became of her body (and those of her young daughters Leica and Dorca) following her plunge from the **Precipice of Milcetpal**. One tale tells that the gods themselves intervened before Dido and her daughters' bodies were dashed to the valley floor below, and that they were instantly apotheosised into the heavens, where their stars still shine down upon mortal men.

Another tale tells that Dido's most trusted servant, **Amlisco the Resolute**, survived Utipan's bloodbath, and recovered the bodies, burying them in a secret tomb before being captured by Utipan. Even under excruciating torture, Amlisco refused to reveal where he had buried the queen – faithful to her in death as in life. With Amlisco's death, the secret of Dido Elishat's final resting place was lost – although some tales tell that she will return in Solus' most desperate hour of need.

Amunkhet was an incredibly ambitious king, and he now embarked upon his next great feat – the construction of a vast fleet to enable the Desert Kingdom to become a naval power.

The recent collapse of the Tritonian Empire had left something of a maritime vacuum, which the Desert King was determined to fill. To turn his land-based dominion into a maritime one, the audacious Amunkhet recruited the aid of Midian mariners and shipbuilders. After five years, Amunkhet was ready, and his great armada set sail to challenge the one remaining great naval power of the day – the Three Cities. However, a joint action of Minean navies off the isle of Seriphos despatched Amunkhet's fleet in 223 AH, and the next year the Mineans rubbed salt into the wound by burning the great Khettim seaport of Pstatis.

During the reign of Amunkhet's successors, Setamun II and Nofret, the Mineans established several colonies along the Midian coast. The trading opportunities these colonies brought re-invigorated the Midian economy, and led to an increase in Midian self-confidence.

Queen Nofret tried to legitimise the continuing occupation of Midia by taking the name **Dido Nofret** – but no-one was fooled.

Following Nofret's death, an unclear succession resulted in civil war in the Desert Kingdom – and the withdrawal of most of the Khettim troops stationed in Midia. Almost immediately, the Midians rose up against their oppressors. This time, there was no delay in the arrival of the next Queen-in-Waiting.

The Bronze Age of Midian Queens

(260 AH – Present)

Dido Hannat ('Dido the Gracious', 260-288 AH) was the first Midian Queen of the Bronze Age. A canny ruler, she took advantage of the relative weakness of the Desert Kingdom (recovering from civil war) and the Three Cities (distracted by the internecine war between Argos and Heraklia) to renew Midia's military defences, whilst at the same time exploiting new trading opportunities. Dido Hannat's signed a treaty, the **Concordat**, with the Minean colonies in Midia in 280 AH that largely eliminated a potential threat, and further strengthened the Midian economy.



Dido Hannat, a canny ruler



Dido Gobaya, protector of the half-bloods

Dido Gobaya ('Dido the Tall', 288-326 AH), her daughter, faced great antagonism from the powerful noble classes, who opposed her plans to widen Midian nationality by allowing so-called 'Half-bloods' to claim full citizenship and to receive the right to representation within the Senate. Although her plans did not come to fruition in her lifetime, her daughter **Dido Yophet** ('Dido the Just'), who became the present Queen of Midia in 326 AH, was determined to succeed where her mother had failed; and since 329 AH, the Khetsdami have been entitled to sit within the Senate. In the meantime, Midian merchant fleets have continued to travel far and wide. Although the Midians have never tried to establish permanent colonies since their defeat in the Amphissan War, a score or more of Midian trading stations have been established across the Middle Sea in the past 50 years. Under the reign of Dido Yophet, prosperity has reached new heights, unparalleled since the first century of the Age of Heroes.

Midia Today

Some Important Personalities

The current Queen, **Dido Yophet**, is the fifteenth ruler of Midia of the Line of Dido. A monarch of considerable grace and beauty, much loved by the common people, Dido Yophet also possesses a sharp intellect and a determined personality. She has implemented most of the reforms that her mother, Dido Gobaya, first embarked upon half a century ago, most notably the granting of new rights to the Khetsdami. Not surprisingly, she has earned the enmity of many noble families – including the powerful House Barca.

Although aged 45, and in the prime of life, she is already grooming her young daughter **Sophonisba** for the day when she will succeed to the throne. Although just 17, Sophonisba has already turned the heads of several hopeful royal cousins and wealthy nobles, but has publicly declared herself 'unready for marriage'. There are persistent rumours that her heart yearns for another, one far away from Midia...

Gisgo Barca is the current head of House Barca, perhaps the most influential, and certainly the richest, of the noble families of Midia. Aged 49, Gisgo is said to be furious that he has been repeatedly passed over for the suffectship by other (in his view less worthy) candidates.



Queen Dido Yophet, current monarch of Midia

Rightly or wrongly, he blames the queen herself for blocking his candidature on at least two occasions. He is a traditionalist, who has very little time for Dido Yophet's 'innovations'. His closest political ally is **High Priestess Battanit Admaga**, the 46 year old chief priestess of the cult of Tanit, who shares his conservatism. Although once a close friend of Dido Yophet, Battanit Admaga has become progressively estranged from her over the course of her reign.

The current Royal Suffet is **Sacarbel of Bybnis**, a member of the commoner classes, and a goldsmith by trade. At just 35, Sacarbel is a popular suffet, relaxed and blunt-speaking, even to the queen. He is passionately loyal to Dido Yophet, and harbours a deep-seated dislike of Gisgo Barca. The People's Suffet is **Hanno Matanibelya**, the 53 year old head of a well-respected noble class. Hanno is a rather weak figure – a compromise candidate who emerged following a deeply-divided election within the Senate two years ago. Hanno tries rather too hard to please all factions – and ends up pleasing no-one.



The fair princess Sophonisba, future ruler of Midia

The most eloquent speaker in the Senate is **Jerubel Bodeshmunca**, the young (27 year old) head of one of the three noble families of Etica. An outspoken opponent of the queen, Jerubel is no lover of Gisgo Barca either, whom he regards as a 'scheming popinjay'. Gisgo's opinion of Jerubel is unprintable.

Foreign Relations

Land of the Three Cities

The Land of the South has rather mixed relations with the Minean world. The Midians have reasonably good ties with Argos (though commercial rivalries sometimes cause tensions). Relations with the Heraklians are rather less good, as the Heraklians (unfairly) blame the Midians for their failure to secure a colony in Midia back in the days of the second Desert Kingdom occupation. However, relationships with Thena are currently very favourable. In his adventuring days, King Theseos visited Midia on several occasions, and it is said he holds a strong affection for the land and, in particular, its women. Rumours that he once had a love affair with Queen Dido Yophet herself are just that – rumours.

Desert Kingdom

Relations between the Desert Kingdom and Midia are extremely warm at present, largely because of the goodwill between Queen Dido Yophet and the present Desert King Nebheptah II.

The Midian queen believes that the reforming Desert King is an enlightened monarch much like herself, and applauds his efforts to make the hitherto somewhat secretive Khetim kingdom a more open society.

The Crown Prince of the Desert Kingdom, Prince Nakhtankh, has visited Solus on two occasions, and is even rumoured to be enamoured of Queen Dido Yophet's own heir, her daughter Sophonisba. It is said that the powerful nobleman, Gisgo Barca, has used these rumours – doubtless groundless – to further stir up resentment against Dido Yophet and her policies.

Tritonis

Midia's current relationship with the Tritonians remains what it has been for generations – tense. Repeated attempts to strip the Tritonian population of Midia of their protected Gokheri status have failed – not least in recent years because Senator Jerubel Bodeshmunca has spoken out forcefully on their behalf, and the current Queen Dido Yophet has no desire to make the difficult relationship between Solus and Etica even more fraught. Yet although trading relations with the Sea Princes are difficult, few feel that a war with Tritonis is a likely prospect.

Umbria

The Midians find the Umbrians rather difficult to understand. Their dour, militaristic and xenophobic outlook is completely unlike that of the free and easy, outgoing Midians. Until recently, the Midians had had relatively little contact with the people of Umbria, apart from hiring a few mercenaries.



However, the traditionally land-based Umbrians have now built for themselves a considerable fleet. Recently several 'trade representatives' from Etica have visited Umbria – supposedly to explore commercial opportunities, but, in the opinion of the blunt suffet Sacarbel of Bybnis, 'more likely they were on a "sucking up mission", rather like in the days of the Tritonian occupation'. True or not, Dido Yophet is getting steadily more anxious about Umbrian intentions.

Charybdis and Beyond

Charybdis remains a lucrative source of trade for the Land of the Ten Cities. The quarrelsome and disunited nature of the Charybdian tribes means that – apart from the odd border raid that is always swiftly punished – there is very little threat to Midia from this direction.

However, the Midian government remains deeply uneasy about its neighbour to the south, the Stygian Empire. Although the Stygian have always sought to expand westwards or eastwards – bringing them into conflict with either the Khettim or the Charybdians – and never as yet northward, the possibility that one day their tactics may change can never be dismissed.

Any incursion would almost certainly come via Morveleth, but the fact that the town is doubtless full of Stygian spies makes Queen Dido Yophet reluctant to station more than a token force there, lest the Stygians learn of it and misread Midian intentions. Dido Gobaya sent a diplomatic embassy southwards into the mountains twenty-five years ago – but none of the party ever returned. Dido Yophet has no desire to make any such overture of her own towards the sinister Stygians.

Land of the Sun

Finally, Midians tend not to get on particularly well with Kandarians and other Edonites. They view their eastern cousins as unscrupulous rivals in commerce, who are rather too ready to belittle the Midians as 'the rebellious western colonies'.

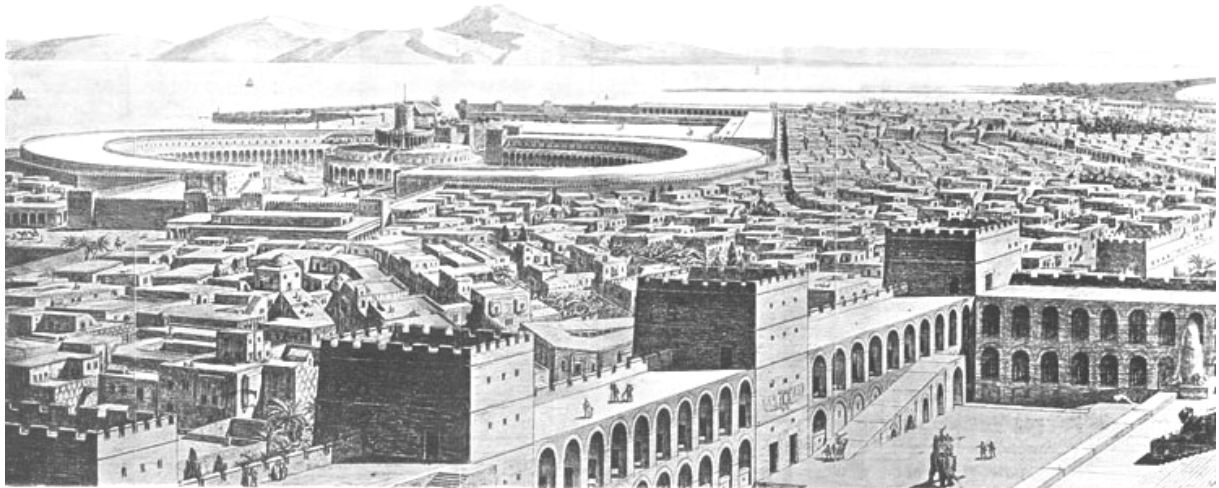
Conclusion

The many invasions of Midia – a land that has spent almost half its history under foreign occupation – have left behind a strong legacy. In many ways, they have contributed to the enrichment of Midian culture, and an openness and tolerance that is the envy of any enlightened ruler. Yet, in recent years, the darker side of this legacy has become more visible. The controversy over the status of the Khetsdami has exposed serious divisions within Midian society.

As their influence seems set to decline in the future, many members of the nobility are openly questioning where the Queen's loyalties really lie. Despite the outward prosperity of Midia, there is growing anxiety behind the scenes. Meanwhile the spectre of foreign invasion – this time from Umbria – seems to have returned. As the Midians prepare to celebrate the six hundredth anniversary of Dido's adventurous voyage in just two years time, just what does the future really hold for the Daughters of Dido and the people of Midia? And what of the prophecy of either glory or disaster to come when the Bronze Age of Midia is no more, and the Iron Age finally dawns? That is a question that a historian like myself can never hope to answer – and for answers to such questions, we can only look to the gods.

INTRIGUE & ADVENTURE IN MIDIA

Five Scenario Outlines for the Land of Southern Promise, by **Andrew Pearce**



All the Queen's Men

The Pitch

Political intrigue amongst the noble houses of Midia.

The Setup

Queen Dido Yophet is deeply troubled. Yesterday, the People's Suffet Hanno Matanibelya was found unexpectedly dead in his apartments.

Officially, the cause of death has been given out as natural causes; but privately, Queen Dido suspects foul play. An emergency meeting of the Senate has been convened, and the election of a new People's Suffet must take place within six days of Hanno Matanibelya's death. Much to her consternation - and deep suspicion - Gisgo Barca, the Queen's most powerful opponent, seems already organised and has clearly won (or bought) considerable support in the Senate, including, most unexpectedly, his rival Jerubel Bodeshmunca of Etica.

If Gisgo becomes the next People's Suffet - as looks likely - Queen Dido fears that it will threaten her regime: perhaps even being the first step towards a military coup against her.

Dido Yophet needs a party of experienced (and discreet) adventurers to find the proof that Barca was behind Hanno Matanibelya's assassination - and all within five days.

The Task

The adventurers (who should be skilled in disguise, subterfuge, interrogation and/or information-gathering) must travel to Gisgo's country estate (2 days journey from Solus), where the Queen believes evidence implicating him may be found (note: his 'town-house' in Solus is just too well guarded for the PCs to infiltrate).

The adventurers will receive the aid of a map of Gisgo's country estate. The Queen, alas, cannot lend any men lest the adventurers fail - 'complete deniability' is important for her to retain should everything go disastrously wrong.

The Plot

Gisgo Barca was responsible for the death of Hanno Matanibelya, and has won the support of Jerubel Bodeshmunca by promising de-facto independence for Etica (under Jerubel's rule, of course).

In addition, Gisgo Barca is a secret devotee of Moloch - shock, horror! Should proof of any or all of these facts be brought to the Queen before the Senate votes, Gisgo Barca will be finished - even his close ally, High Priestess Battannit Admaga, is likely to be deeply shocked and disgusted by such revelations.

The evidence is there at Gisgo Barca's country estate - but getting it, and bringing it safely back to the Queen - that's not going to be easy...



The charming but extremely naïve Inviolata

Shaken, not Stirred

The Pitch

Defeating a fiendish Umbrian plot to steal Midian naval secrets;

The Setup

Famous ship-builder Philoctes – unjustly exiled (in his view) from Argos because of false accusations made against him by a jealous professional rival – has for the past five years been working for the Midians to produce Mythika's first quadrireme – bigger, sturdier and faster than any previous ship (except the Atlantean ones, of course!).

Unfortunately, those darn Umbrians have somehow learnt of this project, and have sent one of their very best spies – codenamed Septimon – disguised as a humble trader, to Midia. Septimon has seduced Philoctes' naïve daughter, Inviolata, and has obtained the secret plans to the *Golden Eye* (or, if you prefer, it could be called the *Moonraker*, or... the *Quantum of Solace!*) the prototype quadrireme nearing completion at a secret Midian base.

The Task

Our heroes must try and locate Septimon (believed to be hiding out somewhere in Solus and waiting for a suitable trading ship to arrive from Umbria). Even if they fail to locate and apprehend him on land, there is always the possibility of a thrilling sea-chase (aboard the *Golden Eye*, no less).

The Plot

The hapless Inviolata may attach herself to the adventuring party, in the hope that they can help her meet up with Septimon again – whether because she's still besotted with the suave secret agent, or because of a desire to get back at him 'for the way he cynically used me to get access to Daddy's plans', is for each Maze Master to decide.

In addition, it is entirely possible that Minean adventurers might be tempted to make off for the Three Cities with the plans, once recovered, rather than head back to Solus – after all, they might reason that Philoctes hasn't acted particularly patriotically himself.

Or, what if Philoctes' plans aren't all they're cracked up to be, and the 'jealous professional rival' wasn't far wrong with his accusations after all?

What if the quadrireme design is flawed in some way (e.g. top-heavy and more liable to flounder in heavy weather)? Pity the adventurers only find this out for themselves whilst in hot pursuit of Septimon aboard the *Golden Eye!*

Of Monsters and Moloch

The Pitch

A classic monster-bash leads to an unexpected discovery in the Woodlands of Samera.

The Setup

A leading Midian nobleman, Hasdrubel Eshbelya, from Lectis, hires the characters to investigate a series of monstrous incursions from the Woodlands of Samera. The village of Goyeta, on the western edge of the Woodland, has been troubled for some months by nocturnal attacks from an unidentified monstrous creature that leaves only dead, fire-scorched bodies in its wake.

The villagers have appealed to Hasdrubel, who has a special affection for the village as his mother – a commoner, shock, horror! – came from Goyeta. He has promised to send them aid.

The Task

The adventurers must travel to Goyeta, and find out what kind of creature has been plaguing the poor villagers, and trail it back to its lair within the forest – and in so doing, will undoubtedly encounter other hazards along the way.

They will additionally learn at Goyeta that the nightly visitations of the monstrous abomination are but the latest misfortune to befall their village – over the past five years, two or three of the village's children have disappeared without trace each year!



Beware the flames of the Red Minotaur !

The Plot

The creature is actually a Red Minotaur (or Pyrotaur), one of three that were being held in captivity by an unusual coven of the Cult of Moloch that has a hidden temple located deep within the Woodlands of Samera. These Red Minotaurs have been used by the coven as a focus for worship, as this particular branch of the Cult of Moloch regards them as living embodiments of their dark god – and has been sacrificing children to them for the past five years. The Red Minotaur that has been plaguing the villagers escaped six months ago from the hidden temple, and has been preying on the citizens of Goyeta and other nearby villages.

Not only must the adventurers find and defeat the escaped Minotaur – they must also deal with the vile coven of the Cult of Moloch, and the remaining two Minotaurs it holds in captivity. As an added plot complication, Maze Masters may wish to place an important Midian nobleman amongst the Cultists – such as Gisgo Barca or Jerubel Bodeshmunca.

A Vintage from Tritonis

The Pitch

A battle of wits upon the mean streets of Solus.

The Setup

The characters are recruited by Captain Carthalo, a senior law-enforcement officer in Solus, to investigate a disturbing report from a Tritonian trader named Hyrkanos (who claims to be the son of one of the seven leading Tritonian Sea Princes).

According to the Tritonian, the Blue Monkeys (see p 7) are involved in an extremely dubious trading scam. The Blue Monkeys (or rather one of their semi-legitimate front organisations, run by a noted wine merchant named Adherbel) are importing wine from Tritonis.

In reality, claims Hyrkanos, the wine is actually highly-prized Kandarian spiced wine, re-packaged and re-labelled on arrival in Tritonis by the Blue Monkeys' Tritonian 'business partners' as rather more ordinary Tritonian wine, and then transported to Solus, where it avoids the rather excessive duties currently being charged by the Midian state on the import of Kandarian wine. Once in Midia, the wine is re-packaged again by the Blue Monkeys as the superior Kandarian wine it truly is.

Another part of this illicit trade is that the Blue Monkeys are paying their Tritonian associates with supplies of the restricted Midian drug *camalla*.

Camalla is a root extract used by the visionaries of Dido to assist them in their meditative trances. Visionaries are able to use *camalla* without apparent ill-effect. However, the effects of the drug on 'lesser mortals' – whilst certainly stimulating – are highly unpredictable, and often damaging.

Hyrkanos says that the Princes of Tritonis are very concerned at the rising amounts of *camalla* that are coming into Tritonis, causing great suffering to those Tritonian citizens who are falling victim to *camalla* misuse. He warns that unless the Midian authorities deal with this trade once and for all, then there will be dire political consequences...

The Task

Enter the adventurers. Their mandate is simple – to find the proof that the Blue Monkeys are indeed behind this illicit and unethical trade – and thereby giving the Midian authorities the excuse for what Captain Carthalo thinks is a long-overdue crackdown on this criminal outfit.



Camalla : the Tritonian Connection

If this helps to improve the rather frosty diplomatic relationship between Tritonis and Midia, then Cathalo thinks 'even better'. The adventurers' mission may well begin with an investigation of the wine merchant Adherbel, and perhaps will involve infiltrating the Blue Monkeys themselves.

The Plot

But there's a sting in the tale. In truth, Hyrkanos is no representative of the Tritonian government at all, but rather a hireling of the Brothers of the Red Hand, the great criminal rivals to the Blue Monkeys in Solus. His story is a carefully concocted, if overly-elaborate scheme devised by the Brothers of the Red Hand to falsely implicate the Blue Monkeys, and to encourage the Midian authorities to act against them – which would, of course, serve the interests of the Red Hand.

The real challenge for the adventurers (apart from staying alive and not getting caught!) is to discover that any 'evidence' they find implicating the Blue Monkeys has been planted by others; to uncover the details of the Red Hand plot, and expose it to the Captain Carthalo (and perhaps to the Blue Monkeys themselves); and to reveal Hyrkanos to be a false envoy.

The consequence of successfully doing all this is that a new 'turf war' will in all likelihood break out between the rival criminal gangs.

This will be welcome news indeed for the Midian authorities, as regardless of which gang comes out of it in better shape, both are likely to be considerably battered and bloodied in the process.

Of course, the adventurers may well need to make themselves scarce in Solus for a while...

Lost Mines of Maveleth

The Pitch

The discovery of a tattered map offers the prospect of riches – and danger – to a party of intrepid adventurers!

The Setup

The Legate of Maveleth, Jacobel of the Hightower, has recently acquired a map which purports to give the location of a lost silver-mine.

Jacobel is sceptical as to the genuineness of the map, but he's been having great difficulty lately with the mining guilds of Maveleth, who have been using their stranglehold over local mining operations to demand greater financial concessions from the Midian government. If (and Jacobel admits it's a big if) the map is genuine, it might just give the Queen access to a source of mineral wealth free from the control of the grasping mining guilds.



In the land of shadows, the Stygian Lords await...

The Task

The adventurers must travel to the location of the supposed mine. They will be accompanied by an enthusiastic Khettim miner Abamakhet (not a member of the Maveleth mining guilds, who certainly cannot be trusted), whose expertise will be invaluable, suggests Jacobel.

The Plot

The map does show the location of some long-lost mine workings, that does include the remains of a silver vein. However, the silver turns out to have been long-since exhausted.

More significantly, however, the mine tunnels connect to an extensive honeycomb of shafts and caverns that ultimately lead down into the subterranean depths of the Stygian Empire!

Clearly, these tunnels could be used by the Stygian Lords as a means to infiltrate or even invade Midia.

And, not surprisingly, various watchful Stygian servants will be found by the adventurers as they make this unwelcome discovery.

And even if they deal with this Stygian menace (who will do everything possible to prevent the adventurers escaping with their discovery), they still have to face the pitiless mercenaries hired by the Maveleth mining guilds who will be found awaiting them back at the cave entrance (having been carefully primed by the mining guild's spy Abamakhet, of course).

Andrew Pearce (2010)

Each issue, **Griffin Archives** unearths an old Griffin article from the glorious 1980s

WHEN GODS WALK THE EARTH

An in-depth look at Divine Intervention and other divine manifestations by Igor A. Rivendell

Remember the fantastic scene in the *Jason & the Argonauts* movie, when Poseidon rises from the deep to allow the heroes' ship to pass unscathed through the crushing rocks ?

Ever since the first edition of M&M, this image has defined Divine Intervention in the minds of most players and Maze Masters. Divine Intervention has always been an essential element of *Mazes & Minotaurs* – and one that is very, very dear to the hearts of many players, for at least two reasons.

The first reason is a purely pragmatic one : Divine Intervention is the ultimate get-out-of-trouble card, the one last, desperate call for help that can still save the day when all hope seems to be gone – a *deus ex machina*, in all senses of the term. The second reason is a subtler and less tangible one : in addition to its intrinsic effects and consequences, divine intervention is also one of the best way to create a sense of awe and wonder at the gaming table, to give players the feeling that their characters are part of a bigger, grander world. In keeping with the spirit of the game, Divine Intervention should always be treated by the Maze Master and the players as a truly unique, truly mythic moment.

Yet, despite its extreme mythical importance (and the enormous impact it may have upon play), the topic of Divine Intervention is treated in a rather vague manner by the *Mazes & Minotaurs* rules ; while those rules clearly give the Maze Master full authority and latitude to decide HOW an intervening deity will react, the section on Divine Intervention in the *Players Manual* only gives sketchy guidelines on how to handle such spectacular situations in play ; these rules also seem to assume that all deities will behave according to the same overall pattern, despite the obvious fact that each Olympian deity has his own unique way of showing his or her power and dealing with trouble – you wouldn't expect Zeus to behave like Hermes (or Athena like Aphrodite).

The main purpose of this article is to discuss Divine Intervention in greater detail and offer useful, practical advice to the Maze Master on how to handle such situations in play. It also examines various other ways in which deities can interact with mortals or display their power in the physical world.



- Hello boys ! Did anyone call for Divine Intervention ?

Divine Intervention 101

There are three very important things a Maze Master should keep in mind in order to make Divine Interventions work in play : Divine Interventions are Unpredictable, Unlikely and Uncertain – what we might call 'the three big U-s' of Divine Intervention.

Let us take a closer look at each of these three parameters and how they may affect play.

Unpredictable

The first thing is that Divine Intervention, as defined in the description of the Divine Prodigies, always results from the deliberate use of a power by a character – in other words, when Divine Intervention does occur, it always happens because a character asked for it (and got lucky on his d100 roll) and not because the Maze Master wants it to happen.

Because of this, Divine Intervention cannot really be planned or prepared by the Maze Master – unlike events which are part of the ongoing plot of an adventure or even random encounters, for that matter. Handling Divine Intervention in play always requires a good measure of improvisation and quick thinking from the Maze Master.

This does not mean, however, that Maze Masters should let themselves be completely caught off-guard by such an event, especially since Divine Intervention has the power to turn even the most carefully planned scenario upside down.

Any Maze Master worth his salt should be prepared for the possibility of such a *deus ex machina* and make sure that if such a spectacular event does happen, it will not ruin the game but *enhance* it.

So if your gaming group includes one or several Priests, you should give the matter some thought before running an adventure, asking yourself which parts of the scenario are the most likely to pit the characters against extreme perils (not to mention certain doom) and how the deities they might call to the rescue would deal with these situations.

Even if you cannot cover all bases, giving the matter some forethought will not leave you completely unprepared when that d100 roll tells you that, yes, Poseidon or Athena is coming to the rescue.

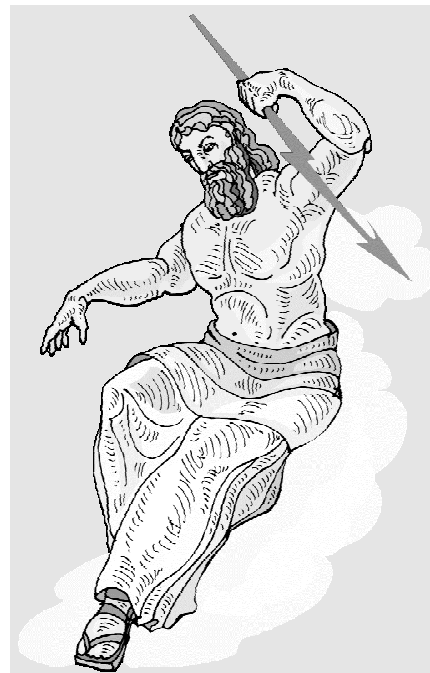
Unlikely

Let's face it : the chances that a deity will answer to his Priest's call are pretty slim – 12% at best and that is for 6th level Priests, who represent the most important, most prominent servants of their deity. Sure, if the d100 roll fails, you can try again – as long as you have enough Power points remaining. But since each attempt costs 6 Power points, even high-level characters won't get that many retries.

A typical 1st level Priest has a Power total of 6, which means he can only try once – provided he still has his full reserve of Power ; by comparison, a 6th level Priest will usually have a Power total of 26-28, which, under the most favorable circumstances, gives him a grand total of four successive attempts.

All this to say that Divine Intervention is an extremely unlikely event – and this is how it should be, considering how spectacular and earth-shattering such an event can be.

What this means from the Maze Master's point of view is that you should never count on such a *deus ex machina* to happen at the right time ; Divine Intervention should never be the only way for the characters to get out alive or to succeed at some otherwise impossible task. Treating Divine Intervention as the characters' « only chance » would simply amount to saying : okay, the party's Priest is level 5, so basically you have 10% chance of survival or success – oh, and you only get three tries. Pretty boring and anti-dramatic, eh ?



- Now, let's see this d100 roll...

This unlikeliness factor does not apply to Divine Calls (see the *M&M Companion*), which are always successful (but can only be used once) ; if you allow divine boons in your campaign and your party has one or several Divine Calls in store, then you should definitely be ready for it.

On the other hand, the Maze Master should not abuse this 100% certainty by deliberately placing the player-characters in a situation where the only escape route is a Divine Call – because this would essentially amount to divine boon extortion (« *You want to get out alive, do you ? So gimme that divine boon right NOW !* »). That's exactly the kind of things players have in mind when they refer to a Maze Master's fairness (or lack thereof). Even with their 100% success rate, using a Divine Call should always remain an option rather than a mandatory requirement ; calling one's divine patron to help is a dramatic decision that should always be left into the character's hands rather than forced upon the player by some artificially-devised no-win situation.

Uncertain

Calling for a Divine Intervention is, in itself, a pretty hazardous prospect. As noted in the description of Divine Intervention in the *Players Manual*, deities do not look favorably on those mortals who disturb them for '*frivolous reasons*' and may well answer their call for help with a quick Divine Wrath attack in order to teach them some manners (after letting him waste 6 Power points in vain).

But what are '*frivolous reasons*', anyway ? Well, this question is actually harder to answer than it may seem at first, especially since some of the Olympian gods are pretty '*frivolous*' themselves when it comes to their own choices of action (just ask Aphrodite...) or that one deity's "*frivolous reason*" may be another

deity's perfectly legitimate request. When adjudicating such matters, Maze Masters should always take into account the deity's personality, temper and agenda.

And while we are on this subject, it does seem quite logical to assume that Priests (not to mention Divine Agents) would be more than passingly familiar with their patron deity's personality, behavior patterns and priorities. In other words, such characters should know better than anybody else which requests are likely to be dismissed as 'frivolous calls' by their divine patron ; in most such cases, a simple warning of « *No, your god will not answer such a frivolous call.* » seems to be a far better and fairer choice than an outright burst of Divine Wrath.

If the character's call is NOT dismissed as 'frivolous' by the Powers That Be AND is answered favorably (ie the d100 roll succeeds and the much-expected Divine Intervention occurs), then the fortunate Priest should certainly not treat this favorable answer as an opportunity to tell his deity what he or she should do – any character foolhardy enough to behave like this in the presence of a god is sure to bring upon his head a good measure of divine displeasure.

In such situations, the displeased deity will never depart without acting in some spectacular or dramatic manner... but his intervention will most probably not be what the presumptuous mortal asked for or expected – perhaps, for instance, the deity saves everybody in the party except the impertinent character or saves the entire party from certain death but takes away all their treasure and mythic items, leaving them stranded on the desolate shores of some perilous island... The possibilities are endless but the message should always be the same : mortals should know their place.

Divine Intervention In Play

So far we have examined everything that might go wrong with Divine Intervention ; it's now time to take a closer look at the bright side of things : what happens when a god answers his servants' call for help in all his glorious, divine might and grandeur...



- Mmh... How shall I intervene today ?



- Okay, it THIS Spectacular enough ?

Divine Intervention can take many forms, regardless of the deity involved but the vast majority of these divine manifestations can be broken down into three broad categories, each of which is discussed in greater detail in the following sections. But before we proceed any further, keep in mind that what is really relevant here is not *what* deities can do (they are *deities*, right?) but *how* they may choose to intervene in the mortal world.

Spectacular Appearances

This is Divine Intervention at its most basic and straightforward level : the deity simply appears in a majestic (and often gigantic) form which looks like his statues and other familiar depictions, with all the deity's iconic gimmicks – such as Athena's shield, spear and helmet, Zeus' handy lightning bolts, Hermes' winged feet or Poseidon's gigantic Triton shape. Speaking of good old Poseidon, his titanic cameo in *Jason & the Argonauts* is a typical example of such a Spectacular Appearance.

The form of an embodied deity will be immediately identified as a divine manifestation by all creatures who witness the event, whether or not they knew the deity before. Everyone stands awe-struck (yes, even Mindless creatures) and the embodied deity can do pretty much what he wants.

Such direct actions should never involve any dice rolling, since direct Divine Power supersedes even the power of the dice themselves : embodied deities always succeed at what they are attempting and cannot take any damage (or similar misfortune) from the weapons or magic of lesser beings (which includes everyone who is not a true deity).

When manifesting themselves in this highly visual and dramatic manner, deities will often make use of their famous mythical powers – Zeus, for instance, may destroy a whole palace with a titanic lightning bolt, Poseidon may slay an enormous creature with a single thrust from his mighty trident or Hermes may grab the characters and take them hundreds of miles away in just a few seconds...

Natural Phenomena

Many Olympian deities are directly tied to natural forces or phenomena – such as the sun for Apollo, the sea for Poseidon or volcanoes for Hephaestus. This type of Divine Intervention may be as dramatic and devastating (and sometimes even more !) as a direct Spectacular Appearance – the only difference is that the god does not show himself directly but prefers to act through the forces of nature, which may range from sudden changes in the weather to full-blown natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions. Of course, the deity has complete control over the forces he unleashes and may ‘miraculously’ save any mortal or creature of his choice from the fury of the natural forces.

Also keep in mind that the Ancients did not really separate the natural from the supernatural as we tend to do, so this type of Divine Intervention may also cover all sorts of uncanny, aberrant events, such as the earth opening in two to swallow a whole army and then closing back on the unfortunate victims, a rain of fire falling from the sky, a blinding rainbow appearing out of nowhere... or any other outrageous special FX you feel appropriate.

Twist of Fate

This is the subtlest form of Divine Intervention – one that allows the deity to intervene in an unobtrusive and unobtrusive way, manipulating the balances of fate and fortune from behind the scenes. Deities tend to favor this low-profile type of Divine Intervention when (for some reason or another), they prefer not to draw too much attention on their actions from the other gods and goddesses – such as when crafty Hera acts behind her husband Zeus’ back or when swift Hermes goes for a quick, covert Intervention in Poseidon’s marine domain.

Unlike the other two types of Divine Intervention, this approach depends heavily (and almost solely) on the circumstances of the situation at hand. It is rarely spectacular in itself but almost always has spectacular (or at least crucial) consequences, with little regard for things like probability or suspension of disbelief : the mad, invincible Atlantean archmage suddenly goes blind or dies of a heart attack, the deadly plague which was decimating the population of a great city simply goes away, a sudden change of wind sends enemy ships crashing on treacherous reefs or takes the heroes’ ship far from the deadly reach of some deadly, cyclopean sea monster... These are just a few typical examples where the unseen hand of a deity can be sensed.

Igor A. Rivendell

Other Divine Manifestations



A god trying his best to act incognito

Divine Intervention is not the only way deities can choose to make their power felt in the mortal world. Other possibilities include :

Unseen Presence

A deity’s invisible presence can often be felt in places which are sacred to him, including temples, shrines and sites of particular mythic significance. As noted in the *Maze Masters Guide*, each Olympian deity also has a *personal territory* in the natural world (such as the sky for Zeus, the sea for Poseidon or fields for Demeter), where he can manifest his unseen presence at will, with varying degrees of intensity, from a subtle, elusive feeling to the absolute certainty of being watched by a great, invisible divine eye.

Deities In Disguise

Deities may also choose to walk the world in a variety of shapes and guises, posing as mortals, beasts or pretty much anything they want. They often use such disguises to act incognito while furthering some secret agenda. Zeus himself used a variety of (sometimes quite bizarre) disguises to seduce or impregnate many mortal women, masquerading (among other things) as a cloud, a golden rain, a satyr or even the goddess Artemis herself... In a somewhat less bizarre vein, the decidedly essential *Jason & the Argonauts* movie include two great examples of such manifestations, with Hera posing as an old woman and Hermes as a lonesome lyrist ; in both cases, the deity puts on a mortal disguise to approach the hero as his glorious destiny is about to unfold ; once he has delivered his message, Hermes cannot resist the temptation to make a dramatic (and suitably divine) exit, growing to giant size before fading away in the sky.

Oracles & Omens

Lastly, gods and goddesses may also choose to express their will or counsel through all sorts of signs and portents, ranging from the cryptic auguries of a mad, blind oracle to improbable and highly ominous ‘natural’ events (such as lightning striking a specific location twice in a row) or mysterious celestial charades involving the position of the stars, the shape of clouds or the flight of birds. The visions conveyed by the Divine Vision prodigy also fall into this category.

THE GREEN MINOTAUR

A not-so-classic monster hunt mini-scenario for low level characters by **Olivier Legrand**



The Green Minotaur – fact or fallacy ?

Introduction

The Green Minotaur is a short scenario for a small party of level 2-3 adventurers. The adventure will work best if there is a Hunter in the party. *The Green Minotaur* can easily be run in a single, 3 to 4 hour session and can fit smoothly in any ongoing campaign. This scenario was created with the Adventure Plot generator given in the *Maze Masters Guide* (p 34-35), with the following rolls :

Patron = 4, populace of a village, town or city.

Main Location = 4, a dangerous forest.

Adventure Goal = 2, defeat a mythic monster.

Complication = 5, obstruction/interference from an unrelated third party.

Masks & Minotaurs

During the course of their travels, the adventurers come across a small isolated village located near a dense (and ominous-looking) forest. As soon as the locals realize the strangers are actually heroic adventurers, they will request the player-characters' help against the terrible menace that has been plaguing their village for many months : a band of savage Green Minotaurs. Several farms have been raided, livestock stolen and villagers killed over the last few months, including several young girls and boys whose bodies were found horribly mutilated and partially devoured in the woods.

If the players ask the Maze Master what a Green Minotaur is supposed to be, they should be told that their characters have never heard of such creatures before... but that the existence of a previously unheard-of or unique type of Minotaur is always a possibility : more than any other Monster, Minotaurs do seem to come in a wide variety of breeds.

If the characters ask the villagers to describe these mysterious Green Minotaurs, the locals will seem surprised that seasoned, well-traveled adventurers would know nothing of such creatures and will then proceed to describe the foul monsters as, well, Minotaurs whose heads seem to be covered with foliage rather than with the usual bovine hair. There are apparently half a dozen of them, armed with clubs, axes and other weapons.

At this point, clever adventurers might suspect that the whole story seems to be a classic Impostaur case (see *Creature Compendium*, p 79)... and indeed a group of local brigands have recently begun to masquerade as the infamous "Green Minotaurs", exploiting the villagers' fear of the monster to cover their own misdeeds.

There is, however, a catch – or rather *two* catches.

Two Monsters Too Many

The first catch is that the Green Minotaur actually exists - a relatively harmless creature, who lives in the deepest part of the forest under the protection of the local Hamadryad and who has nothing to do with the Impostaurs... nor with the horribly mutilated corpses (including several children) which have been found in the woods over the last few months.

The second catch is that the Impostaurs themselves have nothing to do with these mutilated, half-eaten corpses : the villains DID kill several persons during their farm raids but the people found dead (and horribly mutilated) in the woods were actually slaughtered by another, very real Monster...



A cleverly (?) disguised Impostaur

A Sorrowful Tale

There once was a young Dryad called Lyra ; like so many young Nymphs, she was a romantic and adventurous soul; she quickly grew bored of living in her mother's woods and was eagerly awaiting her chance to "see the world" and "live her own life"...

When a small band of adventurers crossed her mother's domain on their way to some perilous destination, Lyra seized the opportunity and, against her mother's best advice, left the woods with her new friends to lead a life of excitement and adventure, travelling around Mythika in search of adventure, glory and treasure...

But one day, while exploring a lost labyrinth, the fellowship of brave maze delvers met a tragic end at the hands of a clan of brutish Minotaurs, who slew all of Lyra's companions, sparing the Dryad's life only for the fun of raping her over and over again.

Weakened by injuries, bound in chains and horrified by her friends' cruel demise, the hapless Nymph suffered the bull-headed brutes' beastly assaults before coming back to her senses and using her last drops of Power to summon a Wood Titan which promptly killed the Minotaurs. Alone, in a state of utter shock and confusion, the Dryad started to wander the wilderness, trying to make sense of what had happened to her – in vain.

As if her fate had not been tragic enough, she soon realized that she was pregnant. Not only had the Minotaurs defiled her soul and body... but they had impregnated her with some monstrous spawn.

Wracked with despair and shame, she eventually sought refuge in the forest where the scenario takes place. There, she decided to meld into a tree forever, probably as a desperate attempt to end her constant suffering... and perhaps to prevent her monstrous child from ever coming to life, trapping it forever in the essence of the tree.

But things did not work that way. After a few months, the Green Minotaur baby did come to life, wracking open its mother-tree and killing its now unconscious mother in the process...

Left alone to survive in the forest, the baby became a beastly creature, solely driven by primal urges of hunger, violence and destruction. Thus was born this unique monster, the Green Minotaur. This sorrowful birth took place three years ago.

The monstrous Green Minotaur baby survived on its own like a wild creature of the forest, well away from the local human villagers, who lived on the other side of the great woods and remained unaware of the Green Minotaur's existence – until recently.

In the deepest parts of the forest, far away from the dead, wracked tree that has once been its mother, the small Minotaur soon came under the attention of Maedra the Hamadryad (see *Minotaur* n°3, p 31).



The real Green Minotaur

The forest nymph sensed that, somehow, this odd creature was "kin" and soon came to the correct conclusion that this being could only be the result of the rape of a Dryad by a Minotaur.

The wise Hamadryad sensed that the poor creature was just a lost, confused child; using her magical powers, she managed to charm the monster and calm his inner rage and primal urges. Under her protection and tutelage, the Green Minotaur seemed to find the attention and love it never had received.

A few months ago, another, far more dangerous Monster settled in the area and began to prey upon the local animals and humans alike, leaving horribly mangled, half-eaten bodies in the forest.

The bravest men of the village eventually mustered their courage and decided to track down the foul beast responsible for those horrors and put an end to its reign of terror. They ventured deeper into the woods than they were used to... and when they stumbled upon the Minotaur child, *they just knew they had found their monster*. They only caught a glimpse of the shy creature – enough time to shoot an arrow at him, to see a green-hued Minotaurian head... but not enough time to see that the creature was no taller than a small human child. Or perhaps they just didn't want to notice this, anyway - they were looking for a monster, after all.

Thanks to its camouflage powers, the terrified and wounded child creature managed to elude pursuit. Thanks to its Supernatural Vigor, the arrow that had hit him did not kill him...

Full of fear, pain and confusion, the Green Minotaur retreated to the deepest parts of the woods and to its Hamadryad protector, the only being who has ever helped and loved him...

When they got back to the village, the hunters told their tale to the other villagers.

This tale began to spread and grow and soon, *everybody knew* that the deepest parts of the forest had become home to a whole clan of fearsome, man-eating, flesh-rending Green Minotaurs...

This rumor eventually came to the attention of some local outlaws, who decided to exploit the situation to raid several local farms wearing green Minotaur masks. And the victims who survived their attacks helped to spread and reinforce the tale of the dread Green Minotaurs.

Meanwhile, an unseen, unknown and very bloodthirsty Monster still roamed free in the forest...

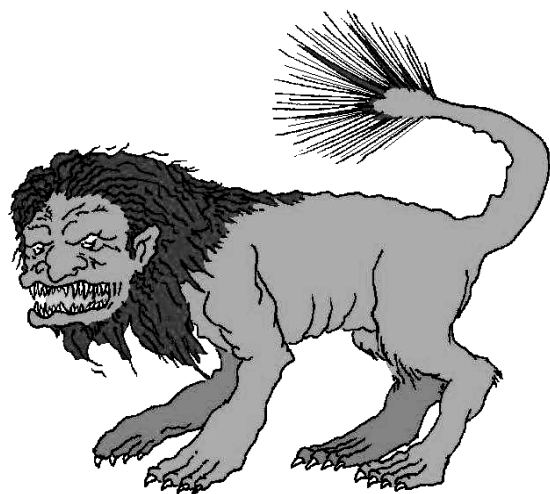
Enter the adventurers.

Monster Hunt !

Much of the action of this scenario will depend on how the adventurers interact with the various NPCs and creatures involved in the current situation : the villagers, the Impostours, Maedra the Hamadryad, her Green Minotaur child protégé... and, of course, the real Monster of the story. As detailed in the *Options & Complications* section (p 39-40), Maze Masters may even add another intervening party to the situation – the local Sylvans who, depending on the adventurers' behavior, may help, hinder or oppose their chosen course of action.

The Villagers

The local villagers' perception of the situation is pretty simple : they want to get rid of the Monster(s) responsible for the grisly killings of the last few months... and since adventurers obviously have far more experience than them in the perilous business of monster-hunting, they will beg the heroic player-characters to come to their rescue and put an end to the Green Minotaurs' reign of terror.



The big, bad Manticore

These poor country folks have nothing substantial to offer in terms of financial or material wealth – but are desperate to get help. If they get the feeling that the adventurers are more motivated by greed than by heroic altruism, they may concoct a tall tale about some “lost treasure” hidden in the forest, somewhere in that part of the woods where - what a coincidence - those darned Green Minotaurs seem to have settled. Of course, only very stupid and greedy adventurers will believe such a story.

If the adventurers do seem to need some extra incentive (other than the selfless satisfaction of protecting helpless, desperate folks from some foul Monster and gaining a few Glory, Wisdom or Experience points in the process), the Maze Master may even choose to make this “lost treasure” a reality (see *Options & Complications* below).

The Impostours

These six men are actually escaped slaves from the nearest big city; they arrived to this area some three months ago, a few weeks before the first sightings of the real Green Minotaur by the locals and its consecutive killings of some villagers who foolishly ventured inside what the creature perceives as its territory. The villains first heard about this “Green Minotaur nonsense” while spying on a group of local hunters who were camping near their cavern lair; they then decided to turn these half-understood fragments of an eavesdropped conversation into a “cunning plan” to disguise their own activities as the doings of an imaginary monster.

The Impostours do not live in the forest itself but in a small network of caverns located just between the forest and the village. Thus, they have never come into contact with the real Green Minotaur or with the local Sylvans (see *Options & Complications* below). For the Impostours, the Green Minotaur is just a silly (but very convenient) local rumor. They know that some horribly mangled corpses were found “in some other part of the woods”, probably killed by “some sort of wild beast” but are too proud of their own stratagem to actually connect the dots here (well, nobody said that Impostours were *that* clever).

The stats for the Impostours can be found on page 79 of the *Creature Compendium*.

The Real Monster

As mentioned above, the various killings which have been blamed on the creature by the villagers were actually performed by the Impostours... and by another, far more dangerous menace : a vicious Manticore, which, unbeknownst to the villagers, the Impostours and most of the forest denizens, has recently moved to the area, after being driven out of its mountain lair by a band of adventurers.

See the *Creature Compendium* (p 73) for stats. This particular specimen is of the wingless variety.



Maedra the Hamadryad

Maedra the Hamadryad

Maedra the Hamadryad is the local wood nymph. She protects the Green Minotaur, whom she sees as a confused, lost orphan and will not hesitate to intervene directly, using her magical powers to their full extent, if she sees the Green Child (as she calls him) threatened in some manner – but her ability to intervene directly is limited by the fact that, like all Hamadryads (see *Minotaur* n3, p 31-32), she is rooted in the ground and thus cannot act (or sees what is happening) beyond her immediate vicinity.

If it feels threatened, the Green Minotaur will usually flee to Maedra's grove, which the creature perceives as the safest place in the woods – see *Tracking Down the Monster* below.

If the adventurers come into contact with Maedra, she will at first try to avoid any form of bloodshed, using her magical powers to calm down aggressive characters; she will then explain that the Green Child is under her sacred protection and has nothing to do with those grisly killings; if the adventurers refuse to listen to her and try to attack her or her ward, however, she will not hesitate for one second before calling a Wood Titan to the rescue.

If the adventurers trust Maedra (and she feels she can trust them in return), she will offer them some very useful information about the true perpetrator of the gruesome killings – “*not those stupid mortal brutes with their stupid masks but a far more dangerous predator, a vile Manticore, which has recently come to these woods from the East.*”

Indeed, since she became aware of the Manticore's presence (reported to her by various animals of the forest), Maedra has been looking for some brave and strong allies to help her defeat the Monster or, at least, drive it out of her forest. She would have gladly used her own magical powers to get rid of the fell creature but, as mentioned above, her absence of mobility seriously limits her ability to intervene and the Manticore has, of course, wisely avoided the vicinity of the Hamadryad's grove.

If the Maze Master uses the *Watchers in the Woods* option detailed below, Maedra's grove will also be placed under the constant watch of four hidden Sylvans armed with bows and poisoned arrows.

The Green Minotaur

Maedra the Hamadryad is absolutely right about the Green Minotaur : it is just a lost, confused child... for now - but who knows what it will grow into, especially if it is driven or taken away from Maedra's soothing, benevolent influence ? This question could easily turn into an interesting moral dilemma, for players who like to explore such themes in play.

Since it is only a child, the Green Minotaur is not very dangerous in a fight. When faced with a fight-or-flight choice, he will always use the flight option... unless the player-characters make the mistake of attacking Maedra while in its presence, in which case it will enter into a blind, berserk fury and fight to the death to protect the Hamadryad.

The Green Minotaur

Taxonomy : Monster

Description : A green-hued Minotaur, with the size of an eight-year old human child.

Size : Small

Ferocity : Aggressive

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Weird

Movement : 45'

Initiative : 11

Melee Attack : +2

Damage : 1d3 (horns)

Defense Class : 15

Hits Total : 6

Detection / Evasion : +4 / 0

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Camouflage (18, forest), Charge into Battle (Initiative 12, Melee +3), Magic Resistance, Sharp Senses, Stealthy (14), Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

Awards : None. This monster is just a lost child.



A stealthy Sylvan scout

Tracking Down the Monster

The easiest way to track down the Green Minotaur is to have a Hunter in the party (as per the regular tracking rules given in the *Players Manual* p 45).

Alternatively, some hunter NPCs from the village could be persuaded to join the adventurers in their exploration of the deepest parts of the woods to help them follow the trail of the monster... but there is a good chance that these tracks will be those left by the Impostours after one of their farm raids; any true Hunter examining those tracks will quickly come to the conclusion that they are just human footprints (no roll needed here). Following this trail will require a successful tracking roll (see *Players Manual* p 45) against a target number of 15 and will lead the party to the cavern hideout of the Impostours.

Depending on how long or complicated the Maze Master wants the adventure to be, the Impostours may be waiting in ambush, drunkenly celebrating their latest farm raid, arguing over the spoils... or perhaps they have already been slaughtered by the real monster, the Manticore. A Hunter examining the tracks left by the Manticore will identify them as those of a huge, probably monstrous quadruped; following them will require a new tracking roll, but with a much higher target number of 20 (10 + the monster's Evasion mod of +10).

The characters could also stumble upon the real tracks of the real Green Minotaur, which definitely look like the footprints of a child-sized but quite heavy humanoid. Following those tracks require a tracking roll, against a target number of 1d6+9 (this randomness reflects the fact that some of these tracks may already be quite old) and will eventually lead the party to Maedra's grove.

Last but not least, the adventurers' search through the woods may also draw the attention of the local Sylvans (see below)... or of the Manticore itself.

Whichever sequence of events is chosen by the Maze Master, the adventurers should eventually encounter the true monster of the story, the fell Manticore. How and when this happens depends entirely on the players' course of action (and on the whims of fate, a.k.a the Maze Master).

Interesting possibilities include joining forces with the Sylvans to track down and confront the monster in its lair, stumbling upon the Manticore while it is attacking some villagers, Impostours or Sylvans (or perhaps the poor, terrified Green Minotaur child !) or simply being ambushed by the vicious, wicked predator itself.

Options & Complications

The Maze Master may choose to weave some of the following options into the plot in order to make the scenario more complex, more dangerous – or both !

Watchers in the Woods

As mentioned above, the deeper parts of the woods may also be home to a small colony of Sylvans (see the *Creature Compendium*, p113).

These beings are loyal allies of Maedra the Hamadryad but have deep reservations about her monstrous child protégé, whom they view as an unwelcome source of trouble; they are fully aware, however, that the poor creature has absolutely nothing to do with the gruesome killings perpetrated by the newly-arrived Manticore.

The elusive, wary Sylvans normally prefer to keep a safe distance from humans but the threat posed by the presence of the Manticore may prompt them to seek an alliance with the adventurers, perhaps with some mediation from the Hamadryad.

They know that is only a question of time before the monster decides to prey upon them and they are fully aware that their poisoned arrows will have little effect on the monster, since its Supernatural Vigor makes it immune to toxins. They will nevertheless make useful allies against the Manticore, especially if the party does not include a Hunter.

Monster in Distress

What if the darn Impostours had stumbled upon the Green Minotaur and captured it, taking it back to their cavern lair ? The masked brutes could decide to torture it for fun – or perhaps try to tame it by force in order to use it as a scout or decoy for their future farm raids. This option could add an interesting dose of drama (and confusion) to the plot, especially if the party finds the Impostours' lair before having a chance to meet Maedra and learn the truth about the Green Minotaur...



Bregos the Monster Slayer

The Great Monster Hunter

The adventurers are not the only monster hunters around ! Rumors of the gruesome killings have caught the attention of an expert, high-level Hunter known as **Bregos the Monster Slayer**, who will arrive in the village shortly after the characters, with his trusty hunting dog Rantanos.

Bregos will quickly take things into his own hands, telling impressive tales of his past exploits, bossing the “natives” around and dismissing the adventurers as “bloody amateurs” whose lack of experience in such matters will only be an extra source of danger for everybody involved and who should leave the “job” to the “real professionals here”.

Depending on how the adventurers react to Bregos’ attitude, this complication could create extra tension or add a degree of comic relief to the whole story – especially if the so-called great hunter turns out to be little more than a bragging buffoon who runs away in terror when the true monster finally appears. Regardless of his actual level of expertise, Bregos will most certainly pose a direct threat to the Green Minotaur, whom the party may have to protect or rescue at Maedra’s request.

Too Many Manticores !

What if there were *two* Manticores involved ? A male Manticore and its “Manticoress” could have chosen the forest as their new territory and as the place to watch their Manticore cubs grow up, which would be *very bad news* for the villagers, the Sylvans and pretty much everybody in the area...

Of course, this option is only recommended if your party’s level of power does seem a little too high for the basic version of this adventure...

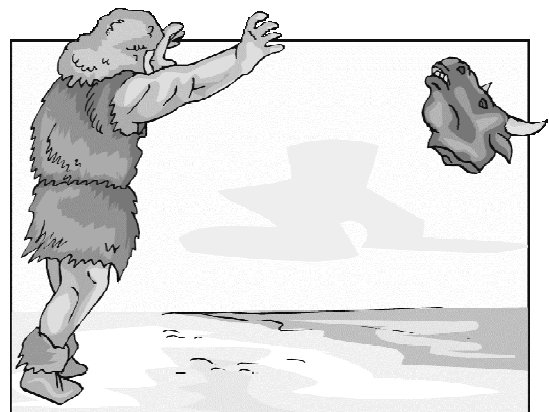
The Lost Treasure

Remember the highly dubious tale about a “lost treasure” hidden somewhere in the forest ? What if this rumor was actually based on some true facts ? Perhaps it was those same rumors that drew the Imposturs to that particular area... and perhaps they did manage to find the lost treasure (or at least some of it) in one of the local caverns.

This treasure, a suitably sizeable amount of coins and gems, could be the long-lost spoils of some long-forgotten marauders (adventurers ?) who met their doom in the woods... perhaps at the hands of the local Sylvans, who protected their homes and families from those unwelcome intruders and dumped their “shiny trinkets” into one of the nearby caverns, away from the sacred ground of their beloved forest.

Written by **Olivier Legrand** (2010)

MINOTAUR MIRTH



- Consider yourself edited ! snarled the Wikipedian



Great labor n°13 : catching the pigeons from Hades

MAZE MASTER'S LORE

MYTHIC SECRETS OF THE MINOTAURS

An in-depth look at Mythika's bull-headed brutes by **Olivier Legrand**



Minotaurs are, without question, the most iconic creatures of the vast *Mazes & Minotaurs* mythic bestiary. The *Creature Compendium* details no less than ten variants or sub-breeds of the dreaded bull-headed monster – and the *Tomb of the Bull King* mega-adventure even introduces us to an infernal, death-cheating über-Minotaur !

Yet, we know very little about the origins, habits or needs of these brutish creatures. How did these grotesque hybrids come to be in the first place ? How long do they live ? How exactly do they reproduce ? Are there any female Minotaurs ?

The following article attempts to shed some light on these matters, with a collection of facts, beliefs and conjectures gleaned from the most learned minds of Mythika. Speaking of Mythika, it should also be noted that the following information pertains to the fantasy reality of *Mazes & Minotaurs* and takes some considerable liberties with the 'real mythology' of ancient Greece... in which there was only one single Minotaur anyway.

All the above questions (as well as a few others) will be answered in the following paragraphs, which reveal many fascinating, shocking and heretofore never published facts about Mythika's Minotaurs. Some of these answers may upset impressionable persons, so reader's discretion is advised.

Unnatural Biology

The first thing to understand about Minotaurs is that they are NOT natural creatures, but hybrid monsters whose ancestors were created by foul (and fortunately forgotten) magical experiments (see below for more details). As living beings, Minotaurs are the very embodiment of man's most primal, feral urges, the physical incarnation of the "beast within" which lurk in the hidden, darkest recesses of the human psyche. This essential monstrosity is reflected in a very obvious manner by the Minotaurs' grotesque appearance and bestial bloodlust but is also made evident by some of the other natural – or, more properly, *unnatural* – characteristics of these creatures, such as their aberrant longevity and their abominable method of reproduction.

Let's start with longevity and aging. Nobody knows really for sure - partly because many of them do end up killed by heroic adventurers and partly because no one has ever met an old or aging Minotaur. One thing is certain : their natural lifespan is far longer than that of humans. Some of them have lived for two or even three centuries before meeting a well-deserved end at the hands of some hero or magician. Perhaps they never get old – and perhaps they would actually live forever if given the chance. This abnormal longevity is made even more abnormal by the fact that it only takes 3 years for a Minotaur "calf" to reach its full adult size.

In other words, Minotaurs grow up very quickly but never seem to get old - a fact which clearly denotes the unnatural, truly monstrous origins of these creatures - which takes us to the next point...

Minotaurs are not a mammal species in the usual, zoological sense of the term. Why ? Because there are no such thing as a female Minotaur. It is a proven and well-established fact : all Minotaurs are male. They reproduce by raping human women or (more rarely) females of other humanoid species.

Some Minotaurs have even managed to impregnate Nymphs, which may produce offspring 'blessed' with some unusual abilities, as shown in *The Green Minotaur* scenario in this issue.

This abomination *always* produces a Minotaur child, who always kills its mother by forcing its way out of her womb after a period of six to nine months of agonizing pain. That being said, such tragedies are not *that* frequent and cannot by themselves account for the survival of Minotaurs as a species.

In other words, because of this utterly unnatural method of reproduction, Minotaurs should normally have become extinct quite quickly... but their supernatural, virtually unlimited longevity simply allows them to defy the most basic laws of natural demography. Although it is impossible to give even very approximate figures here, it is an absolute certainty that the overall Minotaurian population of Mythika has been decreasing through the last three or four centuries (corresponding to the rise of the Age of Heroes), as more and more bull-headed brutes were finally killed by fearless warriors.

Most Minotaurs alive today in Mythika are actually several centuries old and were born during the Age of Magic, sons or grandsons of the first Minotaurs, who came to life as the products of some Autarchs' forbidden experiments – see *A Monstrous Genesis* below for more details.

Mind of a Monster

The intelligence of Minotaurs is very, very limited. They have no real powers of abstraction and their vicious, brutal cunning should not be mistaken for a true, fully-awakened form of intelligence.

The planning and learning abilities of Minotaurs are very extremely limited – and so is their long-term memory, which can be generously described as a confused blur of half-remembered impressions.

Minotaurs have no real sense of the passage of time or even of their own longevity, which seriously limits their ability to learn from past experiences, to develop new skills or to become “wiser” with age.

In other words, a 100-year old Minotaur is not intrinsically more dangerous or experienced than a 10-year old specimen – which is the optimistic way to look at things. What this *really* means is that 10-year old Minotaurs have *already* reached the peak of deadliness and savagery.

The *Creature Compendium* clearly states that Gorgotaurs lack the power of speech, which implies other breeds of Minotaurs are indeed able to speak. That being said, Minotaurs *are* brutish and beastly creatures, whose linguistic abilities are *very* limited; they only use a very basic vocabulary and are impervious to the very concepts of grammar and syntax - “*Me kill little men! Me strong! Me eat little man dead!*” is about as complex as it gets.

It should also be noted that Minotaurs do not have a language of their own; most of them ‘speak’ Minean or the local language of the area they happen to live in (i.e. the language of their victims).



Wot ? No section about Minotaur gastronomy ?

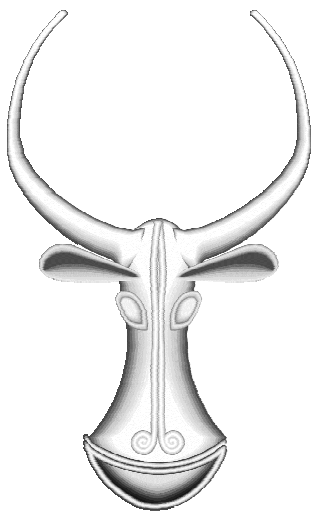
For all these reasons, Minotaurs have never developed anything resembling a form of culture (or even a proto-culture). They do not have any religious habits and probably do not understand the concept of religion itself. Some scholars, however, have pointed out the striking similarities that exist between Minotaurs and many idols and statuettes of the Midian dark god known as Moloch – but whether this gruesome deity (provided it even exists) is actually an ancient, primal ‘Minotaur god’ or the deified form of some very powerful Minotaur from the Age of Myth is a matter for conjecture.

A Monstrous Genesis

According to most authoritative sources, the genesis of Minotaur-kin began some 600 years ago, during the Age of Magic, in the now forgotten land of Gorgoth, south of the Thanatari Mountain. The local Autarch rulers, who were evil sorcerers of immense power, created the first Gorgotaurs by using foul metamorphosis magic on aurochs (wild bulls). The purpose of these first Gorgotaurs was to provide their creators with some extremely strong and tough creatures to guard their palaces, citadels and secret treasure chambers. These Gorgotaurs gave complete satisfaction to their creators as far as sheer physical strength and resilience were concerned but the Autarchs Gorgoth soon came to the conclusion that the monsters' usefulness was greatly limited by the fact that they lacked the power of speech as well as hands with opposable thumbs.

The dark lords of Gorgoth then decided to produce a second, more satisfactory generation of bull-headed humanoids by having the bestial Gorgotaurs ‘mate’ with humanoid females – a monstrous “breeding program” which resulted in the creation of two new Minotaurian bloodlines : the creatures we view as standard Minotaurs, whose mothers were human slaves and captives, and the oversized Megataurs, whose mothers belonged to a now extinct race of large-sized humanoids known as the Thanaros, who had been enslaved by the Autarchs of Gorgoth at the dawn of the Age of Magic.

Minotaur Gods ?



Although most scholars agree on the view that, to quote the present article, Minotaurs “do not have any religious habits and probably do not understand the concept of religion itself”, the Chronicles of Mythika actually mention two very obscure mythical beings which may be regarded, in a very loose sense, as “Minotaur gods”.

The first of these so-called Minotaur gods is the dread **Chemosh**, who was either the first Gorgotaur created by the dark lords of Gorgoth or possibly a unique Gorgotaur of truly Gigantic size – the true story is now long forgotten and nobody knows for sure whether or not Chemosh was eventually slain (and by whom) or if he even existed at all. There is no (and there does not seem to ever have been) any form of ‘worship’ (no matter how rudimentary) associated with Chemosh, only ancient, blurred tales which mention him as “the god” or “the father” or “the lord” of the Gorgotaur – even the name *Chemosh* itself remains a mystery, since Gorgotaur do not have the power of speech. According to some bold scholars, Chemosh might also be the original archetype (or perhaps the alternate name ?) of Moloch, the barbaric bull-headed idol worshipped by some Midians in ancient times.

The other “Minotaur god” is **Vorok**, the mythic progenitor of the Uroks (known to men as ‘Golden Minotaurs’). Vorok is, at best, a half-forgotten figure, whose ‘existence’ is virtually unknown outside the Urok race. The Golden Minotaurs seem to view him more as a ‘sacred ancestor’ than as a true deity in the usual (ie human) sense of the term; they pray to him, but in a very private manner, without any form of established rituals or public ceremonies. Vorok (‘the mighty one’) embodies the essential qualities of Urokness – strength, courage, ferocity in battle and utter loyalty to one’s kin. The fact that Uroks do have a form of religion is another, crucial aspect of their identity that clearly sets them apart from other Minotaurs (see *The Golden Exception* below).

Although Minotaurs remained by far the most prolific branch of their monstrous race, subsequent experiments by the Autarchs of Gorgoth created all sorts of variants and sub-breeds of Minotaurs, including the all-white Albinotaurs, the ultra-tough Bronze Minotaurs, the super-quick Silver Minotaurs, the the bicephalous Twinotaurs or the light-footed Dancing Minotaurs, whose first specimens were the results of what we might call sorcerous genetic tampering by the demented Autarchs. In some cases, these mad experiments also involved the use of unique magical substances, such as extremely potent psychoactive drugs (to produce the first Psychotaur) or the vital essence of fire elementals (to produce the fire-breathing Red Minotaurs).

The Golden Exception

As mentioned above, Golden Minotaurs seem to differ from all other Minotaurs on almost every count – so much, in fact, that some scholars are beginning to consider the possibility that these creatures might NOT be Minotaurs at all – but the last remnants of a completely distinct (and now nearly extinct) race of bull-headed humanoid which were mistaken as just another breed of Minotaur because of their bovine appearance, because the Minotaur race tends to produce so many weird sub-breeds... and also because they tended to consider humans as the sworn foes of their race, for reasons which will be made clearer in a few paragraphs.

But before we delve further through the possible origins of the Golden Minotaurs, let us take a closer look at their most distinctive features.

Whereas other Minotaurs are bestial, bloodthirsty brutes, Golden Minotaurs tend to behave like proud and honorable (if hostile) warriors – in fact, their overall attitude and behavior make them far closer to human barbarians than to other Minotaurs. Regardless of what many adventurers and scholars believe, Golden Minotaurs are fully intelligent creatures, with a language and culture of their own; they call themselves the Uroks, which can be translated as “the Proud Ones”. They also seem to have an average natural lifespan of 120-150 years – a very little-known (and still disputed) fact, which clearly sets them apart from the rest of Minotaur-kin. But the final and most conclusive element is the existence of females, who perpetuate the species in the exactly the same way as mammals... but these female Uroks are far less numerous than their male partners, representing only 20% of the species. Because of this, Golden Minotaurs tend to treat their wives like goddesses (or, if you will, ‘sacred cows’) and to keep their very existence as secret as possible from other humanoids.

The *Creature Compendium* mentions two theories about the true origins of the Golden Minotaurs – according to the Additional Lore section of their description, they “might be the last remnants of a once mighty race that eventually degenerated into the monstrous Minotaurs” or “the descendants of a forgotten king who was turned into a bull-headed humanoid by some angry deity.”



A proud Urok, a.k.a Golden Minotaur

Both hypotheses are actually completely inaccurate and are typical of the way the truth about the Uroks has constantly been garbled and mixed up with entirely unrelated facts: the “ancestral pure breed Minotaurs” theory is clearly a (very) distorted echo of the Gorgotaurs’ role as the original progenitor of Minotaur-kin, while the roots of the “cursed king” story can easily be traced back to the legends of the island of Proteus (see the *Tomb of the Bull-King* module) – and in both cases, the original story has absolutely nothing to do with the Golden Minotaurs.

The true story is actually far simpler : the Uroks are simply the last remnants of an ancient, now nearly extinct race of noble Beastfolk (much like the Acteons or Leonids), who suffered what can only be described as a genocide at the hands of various human nations during the last decades of the Age of Magic... just because those humans mistook them either for a new, more evolved (and thus more dangerous) breed of Minotaurs or for the true lords and masters of all Minotaur-kin. Today, this mass slaughter is only remembered by the Uroks themselves and the truth about these tragic events has never entered the historical and mythical chronicles of mankind – if anything, the fact that Golden Minotaurs are categorized as Monsters rather than Folks in the *Creature Compendium* shows the extent of the prejudice and misconceptions surrounding the Proud Ones.

Olivier Legrand (2010)

Uroks as Player Characters

Playing a Minotaur – even a Golden one – might look as the ultimate “twist in the maze” and would definitely qualify as a change of perspective even for the most jaded M&M players. That being said, Uroks could work very well as a rare nonhuman player-character class, especially in parties which are entirely composed of nonhuman adventurers – Centaurs, Nymphs or even the odd Sylvan Centaur (see *Minotaur* n°3, p 33). Entire campaigns could focus on the epic struggle (or last stand?) of some of the more ancient nonhuman races against those brutal, greedy, power-hungry humans – or, as far as Golden Minotaurs are concerned, on the quest for the legendary Axe of the Urok Kings (see this issue’s *Pandora’s Box*, p 50). In the context of such alternative campaigns, Golden Minotaurs may be treated as a player character warrior class, with the following characteristics and abilities:

Primary Attributes : Might and Will

Gender : All Urok warriors are male

Basic Hits = 12

Battle Might : Uroks add their Might bonus to their damage rolls when using axes and other barbarian melee weapons (just like Barbarians).

Supernatural Vigor : Uroks add their Will bonus to their Hits Total (in addition to the usual Might mod).

Tough Skin : Uroks add +2 to their basic Defense Class against all forms of melee and missile attacks.

Minotaurian Appearance : Uroks receive a -4 penalty on their Reaction and Personal Charisma rolls when dealing with humans.

Weapon of Choice : Two-handed axe.

Level Benefits : Each level beyond the first gives a Urok +4 Hits, +1 to Luck and +2 to Might, Skill or Will (player’s choice).

Possessions : Uroks start with a dagger, a battle axe and little else. They do not possess any wealth.

Restrictions : Uroks never use helmets or shields – helmets for obvious anatomical reasons, shields because they have the utmost disdain for such typically human “cowardly devices”.

Patron Deity : All Uroks worship Vorok, the forgotten god of their race (see p 43).

Background Talents : Select two among Armorer, Healer, Mountaineer, Tactician and Wrestler.

Reputation Effect : The Urok’s reputation effect is a variant of the Barbarians’ Tribal Renown, granting them a reaction bonus equal to their level when dealing with other Golden Minotaurs.

MYTHIC BESTIARY

MORE MINOTAURS

A Quartet of New Bull-Headed Brutes With Something Special



Eunotaur

Taxonomy : Monster

Description : Eunotaurs are to Minotaurs what bulls are to oxen. They can sometimes be found in the personal guard of decadent potentates from the eastern lands. Their castration tends to make them overweight and also takes away some of their natural rage and bloodlust, making them easier to control and coerce than fully-endowed Minotaurs. Their masters like to equip them with ornate bronze breastplates (which is probably no consolation).

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Alert

Mystique : Weird

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 13

Melee Attack : +4

Damage : 1d6 (big axe)

Defense Class : 17 (with breastplate)

Hits Total : 16

Detection / Evasion : +2

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Charge into Battle (Initiative 15, Melee Attack +6), Crushing Damage (bear-like hug), Grapple (Might = 16), Magic Resistance, Stealthy (14), Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

Awards : Glory 160 (with breastplate), Wisdom 30.

Note : Their special condition also makes Eunotaurs completely immune to the *Nature's Seduction* power of Nymphs (which is probably no consolation either).

Silent Guardians

Taxonomy : Animate

Description : These undead Golden Minotaurs act as the mindless guardians of their race's sacred tombs (see *Tombs of the Urok* next page). They were created during the Age of Magic by the use of ancient (and now forgotten) Urok rituals. They attack by grappling those who dare enter the Urok tombs (except for Golden Minotaurs), crushing the intruders to death in a mighty bear-like hug.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Deadly

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 13

Melee Attack : +6

Damage : See below

Defense Class : 16

Hits Total : 20

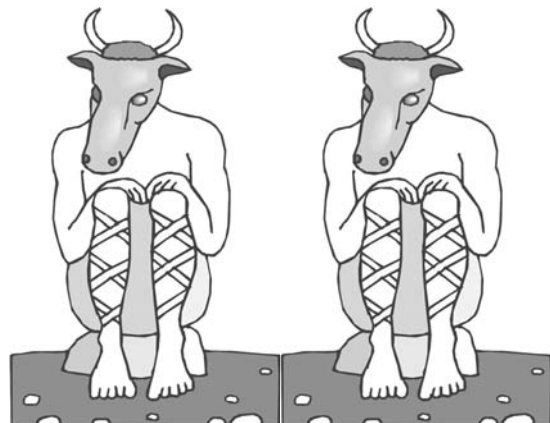
Detection / Evasion : 0

Mystic Fortitude : +8

Special Abilities : Crushing Damage (1d6, bear-like hug), Grapple (16), Magic Resistance, Mindless, Stealthy (12), Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

Note : A Silent Guardian's only mode of attack is its Grapple, followed by Crushing Damage.

Awards : Glory 100, Wisdom 30.



Tombs of the Urok

The secret tombs of the Uroks are located in hidden caverns, somewhere in the Thanatari Mountains; they are actually collective tombs, full of old Urok bones.

When a Golden Minotaur dies, it is the sacred duty of other Uroks to bring their brother's corpse in these tombs, to avoid its 'desecration' (beheading etc) by humans – as happened so many times during the great genocide of their race (see this issue's *Maze Master's Lore*).

The surroundings of the Tombs of the Urok are closely watched by Golden Minotaur warriors, who consider themselves on sacred duty and will not hesitate to kill potential intruders on sight in order to preserve the last home of their long-dead ancestors and fallen brethren.

Skeletaur

Taxonomy : Animate

Description : The undead skeleton of a Minotaur, animated by the foul power of Stygian necromancy.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Dangerous

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Weird

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 14

Melee Attack : +4

Damage : 1d6 (axe)

Defense Class : 15

Hits Total : 12

Detection / Evasion : 0

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Charge into Battle (Initiative 16, Melee +6), Fearsome, Magic Resistance, Mindless.

Awards : Glory 55, Wisdom 40.



Stygian Minotaur

Taxonomy : Monster

Description : This rare breed of Minotaur comes from the Stygian Empire; it has a pitch black skin (as well as black horns), which gives them unnerving powers of concealment in shadows. Born, bred and raised in total darkness, Stygian Minotaurs are also completely blind but this handicap is compensated by their other incredibly sharp senses – which also allow them to function perfectly in total darkness, where they are the most dangerous.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Deadly

Cunning : Alert

Mystique : Weird

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 14

Melee Attack : +6

Damage : 1d6

Defense Class : 15

Hits Total : 20

Detection / Evasion : +6 / +2

Mystic Fortitude : +6

Special Abilities : Camouflage (shadows, 18), Charge into Battle (Initiative 16, Melee Attack +8), Crushing Damage (bear-like hug), Grapple (Strength = 16), Magic Resistance, Sharp Senses, Stealthy (14), Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

Awards : Glory 190, Wisdom 30.

Notes : The Stygian Minotaur's blindness makes it completely immune to the effects of the Aura of Helios and Cloak of Shadows elemental powers (see the *M&M Companion*, p 19) and to other forms of magic affecting the sense of sight (such as the Cloaks of Blending and Shadows – see *Minotaur* n°4, p 30-31). Also keep in mind that creatures with Sharp Senses are immune to the Illusions and Cloak powers of Sorcerers (*Players Manual*, p 39).

A TWIST IN THE MAZE

A Regular M&M Column by Luke G. Reynard

MINOTAUR MANIA !

Welcome to yet another instalment of **A Twist In the Maze** ! As my own homage to M&M's most iconic monster (and as a gratuitous exercise in the fine art of rule-tweaking), I have cooked up a few optional rules for those Maze Masters who'd like to make their Minotaurs even more ferocious and formidable foes than they already are. The six options detailed below, which can be used together or chosen à la carte (damn, I'm beginning to sound like Olivier Legrand !), will help your Minotaur get the attention of even the most blasé adventurers - ouch, another pretentious French term ! Is Legrand actually trying to take possession of my mind ? (Luke, you definitely need to take a break – Ed)



Option n°1 : Goring Crazy

The description of the Minotaur in the *Creature Compendium* seems to imply that it has two main methods of melee attack : either hacking through hapless adventurers using a big, bad Minotaurian axe or inflicting Crushing Damage after a successful Grapple. But what about **HORNS** ?

Of course, it might be argued that a since Minotaurs are man-sized humanoids, their horns may not be the most practical weapon to use against other man-sized opponents... especially when you can rely on a big, bad Minotaurian axe or on the good old Grapple & Crush combo. And if the Minotaur can use its horns as melee weapons, why should he bother with a big, bad Minotaurian axe ? Still, some Maze Masters may feel that the vision of a Minotaur goring a poor adventurer with its big, nasty horns is too tempting to be entirely left out of the game.

An unarmed Minotaur can make a **goring attack** with its horns when it *Charges Into Battle*; this attack receives the usual Charge bonus to Melee and Initiative and does the usual damage for a medium-sized creature (1d6). This option may not seem much of an extra edge at first sight but it allows unarmed Minotaurs to take full advantage of the superior Initiative granted by a *Charge Into Battle*, without having to wait the end of the battle round to make a Grapple attack (since, as noted on p 26 of the *Players Manual*, unarmed attacks are resolved at the end of the round, after all other attacks).

Option n°2 : Blood Frenzy

We all know Minotaurs tend to fight in state of bloodthirsty, frenzied rage... but what if this beastly, blood frenzy had extra effects in game terms ? What if it made a Minotaur even more dangerous when wounded ?

Minotaurs whose Hits fall below one-half of their starting total (ie below 10) instantly enter a state of blind, killing frenzy in which they become Mindless and Fearsome, granting them all the benefits of these two special abilities for the rest of the fight (and as long as their Hits remain below one-half of their original total).

Their temporary **Mindless** state means that they are completely immune to the effects of Sorcery and other emotion-affecting magic, such as a Nymph's *Nature Seduction* or a Lyrist's *Song of Wrath*.

Their **Fearsome** condition gives them +2 to their initiative and Defense Class, as well as the extra benefit of making Minor NPCs flee in terror - provided such NPCs were actually considering fighting a Minotaur in the first place.

If this option is used, you should probably add +20 to the Minotaurs' total Glory award (one-half of what the full Fearsome and Mindless abilities would normally add to the total). If you like the idea but find these effects too powerful in game terms, simply discard the Fearsome effect, keep the Mindless state and halve the extra Glory bonus to +10.

Option n°3 : Last Attack

So a wounded Minotaur is even more dangerous than a unhurt one, right ? But what about a dying Minotaur, then ?

Maze Masters may allow Minotaurs whose Hits fall to zero or less to make a last Melee attack before they fall dead to the ground – yes, a free, extra melee attack, even if they already have attacked during the current battle round, even if they should *know they are dead*. Perhaps this is the difference between “technically dead” and “dead dead”...



Come on everybody, let's do the Twist in the Maze !

Option n°4 : Seeing Red

For some mysterious reason, Minotaurs don't like the color red. It makes them angry. Angrier than they are on a general basis. A Minotaur will always attack someone wearing red preferably to any other target – and if several of his soon-to-be victims are wearing this color, it will start with the redder one. Of course, this is bad news for all these haughty, crimson-wearing Nobles... but on the other hand, it may also provide clever adventurers with various ways to trick and lure a Minotaur, perhaps using the optional rules for tricks and stratagems given in our fourth issue (*Trick... or Threat ?*).

Option n°5 : Strength of the Brute

What if Minotaurs were amazingly, insanely stronger than most other Medium-sized creatures ? Of course, this wouldn't raise their Ferocity, since it is already Deadly, but it could give their *Grapple* attacks the same equivalent Might as those of a Larger creature - 20 instead of 16.

This phenomenal strength could also allow them to use an even bigger, badder Minotaurian axe – a truly **enormous weapon**, as per the rules detailed on p 22 of the *Players Manual*, ie doing 2d6 damage but striking at half normal Initiative.

Option n°6 : More Melee Options

Finally, why not allow our Minotaur friends to use some of those nifty special melee tactics normally restricted to player-characters and Major NPCs ? We are not talking about such subtleties as Subterfuge or Weapon Parry here but maneuvers like Bashing or Double Attack (both of which are detailed in the *M&M Companion*) would also fit very well with the Minotaurian fighting 'style' (if such a word can be used). Speaking of style, why not allow those exceptionally dexterous Dancing Minotaurs to use the Two-Weapon Fighting technique ?

Well, that's all, folks – long live the Minotaur !

Luke G. Reynard

Thanks to Marcus Bone

Only the bravest heroes dare enter the...

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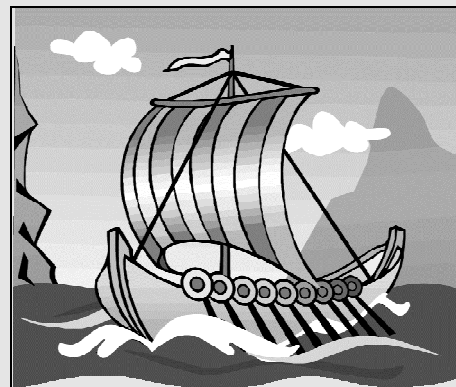
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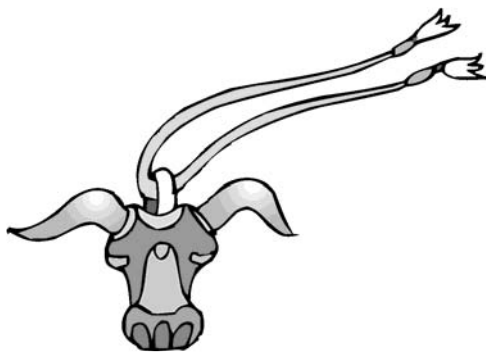


PANDORA'S BOX

A regular selection of mythic items for Mazes & Minotaurs

MINOTAURIAN MARVELS

Since Minotaurs are all the rage in this issue, *Pandora's Box* presents you with a collection of seven Minotaur-themed mythic items. As noted in their description, some of these items are only effective against Minotaurs and "true Minotaur-kin" - a term which covers all Minotaurian monsters (including Megataurs and Gorgotaur) but *not* the Golden Minotaurs, who have a completely distinct mythical origin and history, as detailed in this issue's *Maze Master's Lore*. Such mythic items are also ineffective against Minotaur-like Animates, such as Minotons or the two types of undead detailed in this issue's Mythic Bestiary.



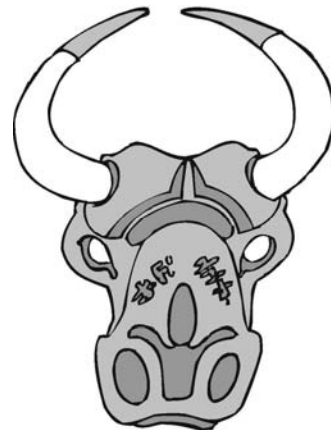
Amulet of the Bullmaster

When worn by a Sorcerer, this bull's head-shaped amulet raises the wearer's Mystic Strength by +4 when using his powers on a Minotaur or any other true Minotaur-kin, negating the +4 Mystic Fortitude bonus given by the creature's Magic Resistance.

Helm of True Imposture

When worn by an Impostaur, this impressive bronze bull's head-shaped mask-like helmet will make its wearer behave in a genuinely (as opposed to simulated) Minotaurian way, raising his Ferocity from Aggressive to Deadly, which will add +2 to the Impostaur's Initiative, +4 to his Melee and +8 to his Hits Total. The mask also provides the protection of a normal, non-magical helmet (+2 to EDC) and has the same Enc value of 1.

Once the helm has been put on, however, it will be *impossible* to remove, except with a successful Feat of Strength - but this feat cannot be attempted by the wearer himself, who will simply feel no desire to take his great new helmet off and will behave in an increasingly Minotaurian manner...

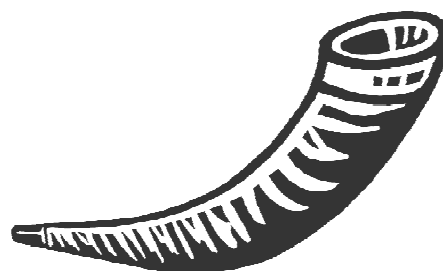


Only a person with a conscious, deliberate desire to impersonate a Minotaur will be affected by these strange effects. In other words, the Minotaur Helm only works on Impostaur. On anybody else, it will simply act as a perfectly normal, non-magical and easily removable helmet of dubious taste.

Horn of Bovine Fear

This item looks like a hunting olifant carved from the horn of a huge bull (actually a Gorgotaur).

Only persons with an above-average Might (13+) can blow it properly: if blown by such an individual, the olifant will produce a sinister, bellowing sound that will make any Minotaur (or true Minotaur-kin) within a number of feet equal to 10 times the user's Might mod retreat in instinctive, animal fear- unless the creature succeeds at a Mystic Fortitude saving roll against a target number of 15, in which case it will immediately attack the person currently holding the horn and will be completely immune to any subsequent use of the horn.



If the monster fails its saving roll, its panic reaction will last for 1-10 battle rounds, during which it will try to flee as far as possible from the sound. Blowing the olifant repeatedly may keep the monster at bay for a greater period but is actually quite risky, since each use of it triggers a Mystic Fortitude saving roll and thus gives the creature a chance to break the spell and become immune to the effects of the horn.

Lastly, it should be noted that the olifant also affects Bulls, including Giant and Magical ones, but not Bronze Animates. (Enc = 1)

Red Cloak of Heroic Tauromachy

This bright red cloak is cut in the finest (and utterly indestructible) magical wool. It gives a +2 bonus to its wearer's EDC against all Melee attacks made by Minotaurs and other true Minotaur-kin... but will also infuriate the Minotaurian monster, who will single-mindedly concentrate all his attacks on the wearer.

These effects also apply against Bulls, including Giant and Magical ones but not Bronze Animates.

Sword of the Bullslayer

This ancient magical bronze sword grants a +2 bonus to Melee and damage when used against Minotaurs and other true Minotaur-kin, as well as against Bulls, including Giant and Magical ones but excluding Bronze Animates. (Enc = 1)

Tunic of Minotaurian Repulsion

This magical leather tunic is made from the flayed skin of a Minotaur. A Minotaur (or any other true Minotaur kin) will *never* attempt a Grapple attack against a person wearing such a tunic.

It should however be noted that this garment has absolutely no effect against other attacks made by Minotaurs and it also gives its wearer a weird, undefinable "Minotaurian" aura which causes a -4 penalty to his Personal Charisma.



- What's the matter, Mino ? Don't like my new Tunic ?

Unique Artifact

Axe of the Urok Kings



This unique, beautifully-crafted and indestructible two-handed battle axe was forged at the dawn of the Age of Magic as a symbol of royalty for the kings of the Uroks – the creatures humans prefer to refer to as *Golden Minotaurs*.

This sacred weapon, which is also known to Uroks as the *Axe of Vengeance*, has been lost since the great genocide which decimated the Urok race (see this issue's *Maze Master's Lore*) but is still actively sought by the last Urok warriors. Many of them believe that finding the axe will herald a new age for the Urok race, which will rise again to crush its enemies and conquer a new empire...

If it is ever found, this legendary weapon has the following characteristics – but only in the hands of a true Urok : +4 to Initiative, Melee, Mystic Fortitude and EDC against all melee and missile attacks, as well as an extra die of damage against all humans as well as against those creatures who are warped living parodies of the noble Urok form – the so-called "true" Minotaurs and their kin... In addition, the Urok would be made completely immune to the effects of Sorcery (and Psychic Powers).

None of those benefits will be granted to a non-Urok wielder. Worse, any human touching the axe will have to make a Mystic Fortitude saving roll against a target number of 20 or suffer a permanent loss of 1d6 points of Luck. This represents the effects of a very powerful curse which was placed on the axe by its last rightful owner, the last King of the Uroks, as he witnessed, helpless and bound in chains, the slaughter of his entire family and entourage at the hands of human fanatics...

Olivier Legrand (2010)

THE SECRET OF ZERZURA

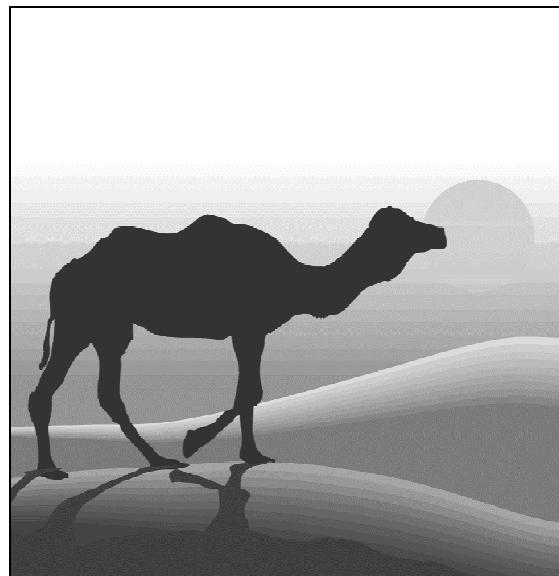
An Epic Desert Kingdom Adventure in Three Parts by **Andrew Pearce**

PART THREE : THE OASIS OF BIRDS

The Story So Far...

Our intrepid heroes have been recruited by the High Priestess of Hathor, the Queen Mother Amenteti, to verify the existence of the fabled Oasis of Birds, Zerzura, which she believes to be the resting place of the mythic heroes Osiris and Isis. However, thanks to the treachery of Amenteti's servant (and secret granddaughter) Akenhathor, the sinister Cult of the Dark Gods is also on the trail of Zerzura.

The adventurers have already braved the wrath of the fiercely independent Ubasti of Khofer, and have faced the perils of the ancient citadel of Beyda – amongst them the duplicitous sphinx Siphelax. Now they face the final part of their journey. What challenges await them in the legendary resting place of the Immortal Ones?



Act IV: The City of Immortals

Perils of the Deep Desert

After completing their exploration of Beyda, the adventurers must face the final – and perhaps most arduous – part of their journey. This lasts for five days. The usual recommendations about journeying in the early and later parts of the day, avoiding the heats of the mid-day sun and the perils of the night, apply even more strongly on this final leg, as the travellers face the challenge of the Deep Desert.

These parched wastelands receive no water from one year to the next, so that even the hardy desert cacti found elsewhere are exceedingly rare.

Even when travelling in the relative cool of early morning and late afternoon, the characters have a heightened risk of exhaustion, sun-stroke or dehydration: each character should make a Physical Vigor roll with a target number of 10 once each day. Failure will mean that the character suffers 1D3 hits of damage for that day due to the rigours of the Deep Desert environment (if the characters are foolish enough to attempt to travel in the middle of the day, the Physical Vigor rolls are made with a target number of 20, and failure will result in 1D6 hits of damage being taken).

Maze Masters should keep in mind that characters with the *Desert Scout* background talent (possessed by most Khettim) are advantaged on all Danger Evasion rolls whilst traversing the desert.

For each of the first four days of travel, and the intervening three nights of rest (i.e. **not** the final night), the Maze Master makes a secret roll upon the Random Event table given next page (note that this is a *different* table from that used in the previous two legs of the journeying, reflecting differences in the frequency of certain dangers faced in the Deep Desert). Alternatively, the Maze Master may simply choose encounters from the table.

On the fourth night, there is just one, automatic encounter: Sounds on the Desert Winds (see next page for description).

How Green is My Valley...

Mid-morning on the fifth day, the adventurers find that the ground beneath their feet starts to become rockier, and they begin to ascend slowly into a rugged, stony, less arid country. Vegetation starts to appear – isolated cacti at first, then shrubs, thickets and flowering plants. The adventurers now find themselves travelling due south, passing through a narrow ravine between two hills.

Deep Desert Journeys

Random Events (Day-time)

D20	Result
1-8	Nothing happens
9-12	Sandstorm
13	Quicksand
14-16	Encounter with Deep Desert Tribesmen
17	Sighting of Shaalud
18	Encounter with Sand Demon
19	Encounter with Mirage Demon
20	Encounter with Thirst Demon

Random Events (Night-time)

D20	Result
1-5	Nothing happens
6-9	Sandstorm
10-11	Encounter with Deep Desert Tribesmen
12-14	Sounds on the Desert Winds
15	Encounter with Anubians
16-17	Encounter with Scorpion Folk
18	Encounter with Stygian Lord
19	Encounter with Sand Demon
20	Re-roll twice for this night

Tribesmen of the Deep Desert

Deep Desert Tribesmen are a primitive group of Khettim, noted for their innate understanding of the ways of the desert.

They speak a language that, strangely, is clearly a dialect of High rather than Low Khemi. There are several different clans of Deep Desert Tribesmen, each bearing a distinctive pattern of tattoos on the faces and forearms. These tattoos are usually sinuous in form – actually idealised portraits of the Shaalud that the Deep Desert Tribesmen worship (and, it is rumoured, that a few actually ride).

Deep Desert Tribesmen are usually very suspicious of travellers, but not automatically hostile: adventurers who make successful Influence rolls (target number of 15) may be able to avoid conflict, and may indeed receive helpful information or guidance (e.g. course corrections, warnings about dangerous areas of quicksand, pointers towards a rare but succulent cacti, etc.).

Sandstorm: A heavy sandstorm causes the characters to halt their journey. They must use their camels for shelter (tents would simply blow away). The sandstorm lasts for 1D6 hours. Each hour, each character must make a Danger Evasion roll and each camel makes an Evasion roll against a target number of 15. Failure results in the target taking 1D3 hits damage from choking (dust inhalation) or abrasion (whirling sands).

Quicksand: The lead camel makes an Evasion roll, and the lead character makes a Danger Evasion roll (target number 15). If both succeed, the quicksand is spotted and avoided. If the rider succeeds but the camel fails, the camel is trapped in the quicksand, but the rider manages to crawl away. If the camel succeeds (but the rider fails), the camel has avoided the quicksand, but, stumbling, has thrown the rider, who lands in the middle of it. If both fail – well, I think you can guess... Once mired in quicksand, individuals, and especially camels, are very hard to extricate (rope and a Feat of Strength will be required). After 1D6 rounds, the poor victim will vanish irretrievably beneath the unforgiving sands.

Anubians: The party encounters 1D3+1 Anubians.

Scorpion Folk: The party encounters 1D3+1 vile Scorpion Men.

Deep Desert Tribesmen: The party encounters 6+1D6 Deep Desert Tribesmen (treat as Bandits). For a description of these denizens of the Deep Desert, see *Tribesmen of the Deep Desert*.

Shaalud: The party sights a shaalud, or desert worm (fortunately, still at some distance away). If the party halts and remains still, there is a good chance of avoiding detection (each character must make a Danger Evasion roll and each camel makes an Evasion roll, with a target number of 10). If the party's evasion rolls are successful, the desert worm will disappear over the horizon, moving away from the party. If the party fails to halt, or two or more of the party (camels or characters) fail their rolls, the hungry shaalud will change direction and head straight to their position (see *Minotaur* n5 for this gigantic creature's description & statistics).

Sounds on the Desert Winds: One member of the party, during his night-watch, will hear on the desert winds the sound of marching feet. The sound is faint and fleeting (other characters awoken by the watchman will hear nothing).

Stygian Lord: The party encounter an itinerant Stygian Lord (accompanied by 2D6 skeletons and 1D3 Stygian Hounds).

Sand Demon: The party encounters a Sand Demon (see *Minotaur* n5).

Mirage Demon: The party encounters a Mirage Demon (see *Minotaur* n5).

Thirst Demon: The party encounters a Thirst Demon (see *Minotaur* n5).

On either side of the defile, the vegetation grows more abundant – including both vines and palms – and, for the first time in a long while, the adventurers hear the sound of birdsong, and the gentle rush of running water.

Although the travellers need to take some rest in the middle of the day, the relatively well-shaded ravine prevents the mid-day sun from beating down upon them as mercilessly as on previous days. As the afternoon winds on, the ravine broadens out, and the pathway starts descending, eventually joining another wider, lower valley that runs from east to west. It is exactly as foretold:

'You will find palms and vines and flowing wells. Follow the valley until you meet another valley opening to the west between two hills. In it you will find a road...'

(Book of Hidden Pearls)

Following the gently-ascending flag-stoned road (the stones seem to be vaguely yellowish in coloration...), the characters will notice that spaced a hundred feet or so apart on the roadside are curious misshaped statues of a short stunted folk. Khetim adventurers (or those with the Scholar talent) may recognise these as terracotta depictions of the mysterious race known as Stubbings. The observant may notice (Detection roll with a target number of 15) that high up in the valley sides are visible cave entrances – from which the really observant (Detection roll with a target number of 20) may spot curious eyes peering. The final valley is home to a tribe of Stubbings...who will turn out to be loyal and devoted servants to the mysterious Guardians of the Immortals. For the moment, the Stubbings choose to remain out of sight, letting the travellers pass on towards their final goal.



Rounding a corner, nestled in the head of the valley, they finally reach the object of their desire...Zerzura.

The Phoenix at the Gate

'Follow [the road]. It will lead you to the City of Zerzura. You will find its gate closed. It is a white city, like a dove. By the gate you will find a bird sculptured. Stretch up your hand to its beak and take from it a key. Open the gate with it and enter the city...'

(Book of Hidden Pearls)

The city that stands before the characters has sheer walls – perhaps 30 feet high – made of gleaming white marble, that nevertheless radiate with a beautiful pink lustre in the light of the setting sun. Rising high above the walls are the branches of trees whose leaves look like silver and whose fruit look like gold. The road ends before the great golden gate of the city. Above the gate, lunging out from a recessed alcove, is a large statue of a strange bird, its wings unfurled and its beak wide open (those with the Scholar talent may recognise it as a phoenix). In an arch around the phoenix is carved the following rhyme (in High Khemi):

*'Come in by gate or not at all,
For those who dare to climb the wall,
Shall earn our wrath, shall earn their fall.'*

On either side of the gate, again set back in the wall within curved alcoves, are two impressive marble statues – great figures standing 10 feet tall – one clearly a male figure, the other female. However, their most notable trait is the absence of any detail in the facial features. The statues seem somehow incomplete, as if left unfinished by their sculptor.

Whoever is the tallest adventurer will be able (by stretching on tiptoes) to reach up and put his hand in the mouth of the bird. As he does so, the statue of the phoenix comes alive, and the creature clamps its mouth firmly shut, trapping the adventurer's hand in a vice-like, unbreakable grip. Yet the adventurer suffers no damage – yet.

As the phoenix closes its beak, a commanding, voice – seemingly emanating from the male statue – sternly demands (in the native language of the adventurer):

'To enter the hidden the city, traveller, you must name those whom you seek. Why are you here, traveller? Whom do you seek?'

The answer is perfectly straightforward, of course – it is Osiris and Isis. If the adventurer with his hand in the bird's mouth gives the correct answer – hardly difficult, as this *is* indeed the purpose of their quest! – then the striking faces of Osiris and Isis will appear on the previously faceless statues, and a soothing female voice (which the observant will recognise as being identical to that previously heard in Siphelax's pit) will say (again in the adventurer's native tongue):



The faceless statue of Osiris

'Well said, truth-seeker! Enter, and receive the treasure thou seekest!'

The adventurer will then feel within the grasp of his hand a key, and the mouth of the bird will unclamp, releasing his undamaged hand – and as he withdraws it, the phoenix returns to stone.

The golden key that the adventurer now holds (inscribed on one side in High Khemi with the names Osiris and Isis) will open the gate of the city.

Entering the City

The adventurers enter the city, which is filled with wondrous sights: marble buildings and statues of gold; fountains and shimmering pools adorned with colourful mosaics and frescoes; fragrant flowers, aromatic shrubbery and tall trees; and everywhere, an assortment of colourful and melodious songbirds.

They are soon surrounded by a sizeable crowd (perhaps fifty or sixty) of curious, clearly awestruck creatures – Stubblings, of the same tribe as those in the valley without the city.

However, the crowd of Stubbings parts, and the curious little creatures bow down in reverence to a tall, smiling figure, aged about 30, dressed in a simple white robe and holding a was staff, who approaches the travellers and welcomes them in several different languages (High Khemi, Low Khemi and Minean amongst them). Then, settling upon whichever language is spoken by all the characters, the figure introduces himself:

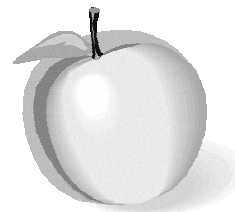
'I am Mentu, least of the Guardians of Zerzura, the Oasis of Birds. Welcome, truth-seekers.'

Your coming amongst us is not unexpected. You have many questions, no doubt, and much to tell of your journey. But the hour is now late, and you are doubtless tired after a long and perilous trek across the Great Desert. Our servants will attend you: they will show you to your rooms, where you may rest and be refreshed. If you have any particular needs, our servants will endeavour to satisfy them. In the morning, you may see more of the city, and then you will come before my brother and sisters at the midday council. We will speak at length then. Until then, take your ease. Farewell!'

The Stubbings of Zerzura will then show the adventurers to a block of adjacent, inter-connecting rooms that stand around a courtyard filled with cascading waterways, fountains, palm trees, flowers and birdsong. In the cool of the evening, it is a peaceful and entrancing place.

The Stubbings will supply the travellers with fresh linen, aromatic unguents and towels for bathing; simple but delightfully refreshing foods (bread, grapes, melons, pomegranates, mangoes, dates – and curious golden-skinned fruit, vaguely reminiscent of peaches, but with a flavour and texture all of their own); and earthenware vessels containing naught but water – but the sweetest and most refreshing water ever tasted.

The Golden Fruit



The **golden fruit of Zerzura** grow upon tall, silver-leaved trees. They are similar to the golden apples detailed on page 40 of the *Maze Masters Guide*, but less potent. First, the attribute gain is temporary – it will only last for as long as the characters are inside or within sight of the city of Zerzura. Secondly, individuals can only benefit **once** from an attribute gain benefit. Eating more fruit will simply give the character indigestion. The first fruit eaten by a character will give 1D3 temporary points to an attribute determined at random. They cannot bring an attribute over 18 (at the Maze Master's discretion, a re-roll may be made for the attribute where eating the fruit would give the character no benefit).

Roll	Attribute	Roll	Attribute
1	Might	4	Luck
2	Skill	5	Will
3	Wits	6	Grace

Failure at the Gate?

Of course, this shouldn't happen...but should the unfortunate adventurer prove his stupidity by failing to speak the correct answer to the question posed by the statue of Osiris, then the bird will clamp shut its beak with a devastating force greater than that of any cleaving sword, severing the hand of the adventurer (and inflicting 2D6 hits in the process). The loss of the hand is permanent (short of Divine Intervention or similar powerful magic). If the Maze Master is feeling kind, it can be assumed that it is the character's non-dominant hand (usually left). If he's feeling particularly unsympathetic, then a roll is made with 1D6: 1-3 the left hand is lost; 4-6 the right hand.

The phoenix will then leave its pedestal and engage in combat against the adventurers. If the phoenix is killed, it will, of course, renew itself in the usual manner, before flying away (presumably taking the key to the city with it...). Come what may, the gate will remain resolutely shut. If, incidentally, another adventurer should blurt out the answer – or indeed *any* answer – to the question posed by the statue of Osiris, the phoenix will simply give that adventurer a steely stare, before returning its remorseless gaze to whichever character has placed his hand in the bird's maw. It should be perfectly obvious that the answer is expected from one person alone...and prevaricating or delaying further is not likely to be well received. Any attempt to free the character's hand will incur the ire of the phoenix – the victim will lose his hand, and the phoenix will attack. Similarly, attempts to climb the city wall will have the effect of provoking the phoenix.

If the characters failed the challenge of the gate from the phoenix – but have somehow since entered the city – then the Stubbings will appear as before, but armed and hostile. Mentu will also appear, but will not be the friendly and courteous figure described above. The adventurers will need to make a successful Influence roll to get out of this tricky situation (target number of 20). If successful, they will succeed in persuading Mentu that their intentions are honourable. The adventure will thereafter proceed pretty much as set out below – but the players should expect the Guardians and their Stumbling servants to be fairly cool in their dealings with the adventurers, as if unsure as to their intentions or whether the long-expected 'Chosen One' is really in their midst. Trust sometimes needs to be earned, after all. Only with the battle at the gate against the Dark God Cultists will the Guardians and their servants finally come to fully trust the adventurers, and recognise their destiny.

And what if they should fail their Influence roll? Oh dear. Mentu will order the Stubbings to kill the intruders, the other three Guardians will appear and join the fight...you get the picture. Even if the adventurers somehow survive this totally unexpected and undesired battle, their mission will have suffered a very serious setback. They will **not** be able to enter the **House of the Blessed Ones** where Osiris and Isis rest, meaning that they will have failed to find the clinching evidence that Zerzura really is their resting place – and the Cultists will turn up, most inconveniently, when they've barely recovered from the battle with the Guardians.

If they return to Kebet, Amenteti's 'reward' (should she learn the truth) is likely to be an unpleasant one. Leaving the Desert Kingdom by the quickest possible route is likely to be the best available option. All in all, this is not a good outcome at all...

The Waters of Zerzura



The waters of Zerzura are enchanted. Not only does drinking of the waters dispel minor aches and pains, but the waters also restore the drinker to full Hits. Regular drinking of the waters also slows down the character's rate of aging (though this effect will only become apparent with the passage of many years).

However, even the powerful waters of Zerzura have their limitations: first, they may slow down the ravages of time, but they cannot halt them – they do not grant immortality but rather longevity (potentially lengthening one's lifespan by up to five times, and greatly slowing the aging process). Secondly, they cannot heal grievous wounds - e.g. a lost eye or a lost hand!

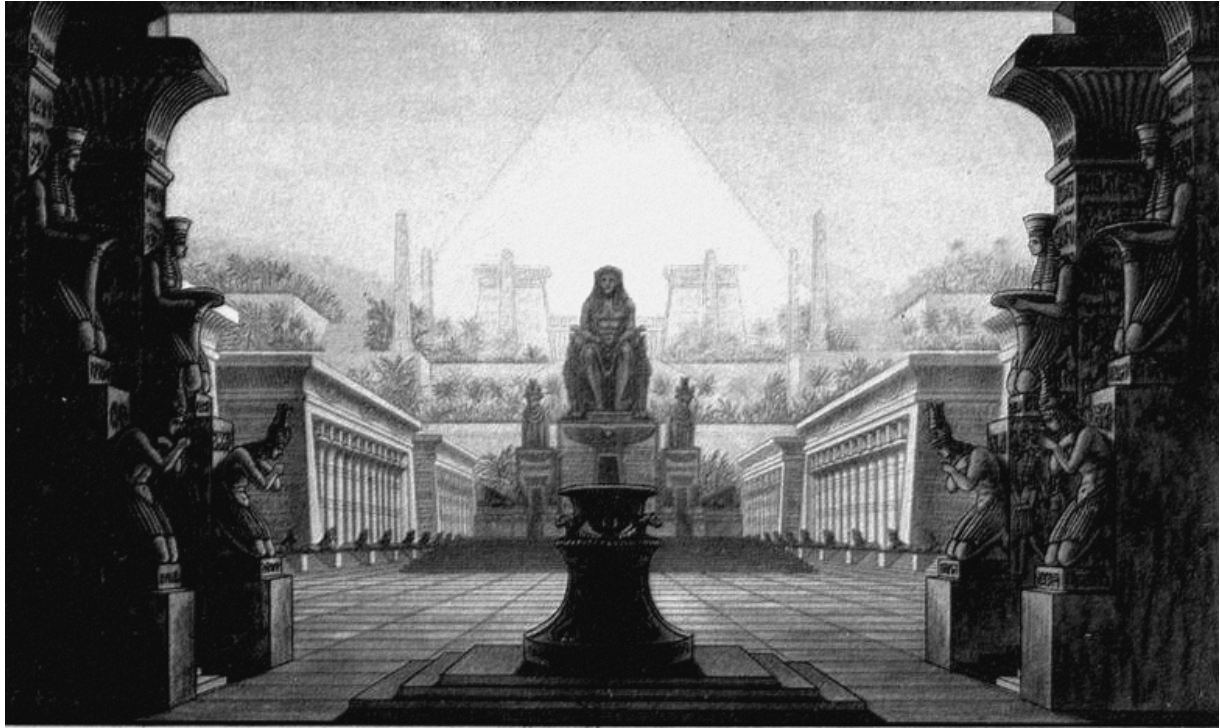
The drawback with the sweet waters of Zerzura is that they quickly create a dependency. If the characters remain more than four days in the city, drinking the waters, they will need to make a Mystic Fortitude roll each day (with a target number of 10 on the fifth day, 15 on the sixth day, 20 on the seventh day and so on).

If a character fails one of these rolls, he has fallen completely under the enchantment of the waters. Leaving the city (and having to drink more mundane water) will result in a strange craving for the waters of Zerzura. Ordinary water will simply not slake the character's thirst, and, within a few days, he will be consumed with an overwhelming desire to return to the only waters that can satisfy...

The waters lose their potency outside the city – so the adventurers can forget any dreams they may have of bottling and selling 'the elixir of long-lasting life'!

The courtyard is lit by the soft glow of dozens of paper lanterns, and as the evening progresses, the birdsong fades away, giving way to the steady chirruping of cicadas.

Some of Stubbings play simple instruments, producing hauntingly beautiful yet soothing tunes on their lyres, rattles, chimes and drums.



A wondrous sight : the fabled city of Zerzura...

After all the hardships of their journey, the adventurers will rest well, and will awaken completely refreshed the next morning – all aches and pains completely dispelled (and injured characters will find their wounds healed, and will be restored to full Hits Total).

Exploring the City

The next morning, the characters awaken from their refreshing sleep. Stubbings once again attend them in their courtyard, and provide a simple but refreshing breakfast – bread, cheese, and goats' milk. Then a Stubbling named Wes appears, and introduces himself as the leader of the Stubbling tribe. Wes offers to show the travellers around the city. He will happily answer more mundane questions, but will steer clear of discussing the Guardians themselves, and will completely refuse to be drawn into any conversation about Osiris and Isis. However, he is perfectly happy to talk about the Stubbings, and how they came to Zerzura.

Wes will show the characters many important locations within the city. These include:

The Park of Serenity

This is a large, open green space – crisscrossed by many paths – and filled with fountains and waterways, and small clusters of flowering, blossoming and fruiting trees. Waterfowl and peacocks seem completely at home within the confines of this park.

The Workshops of the Stubbings

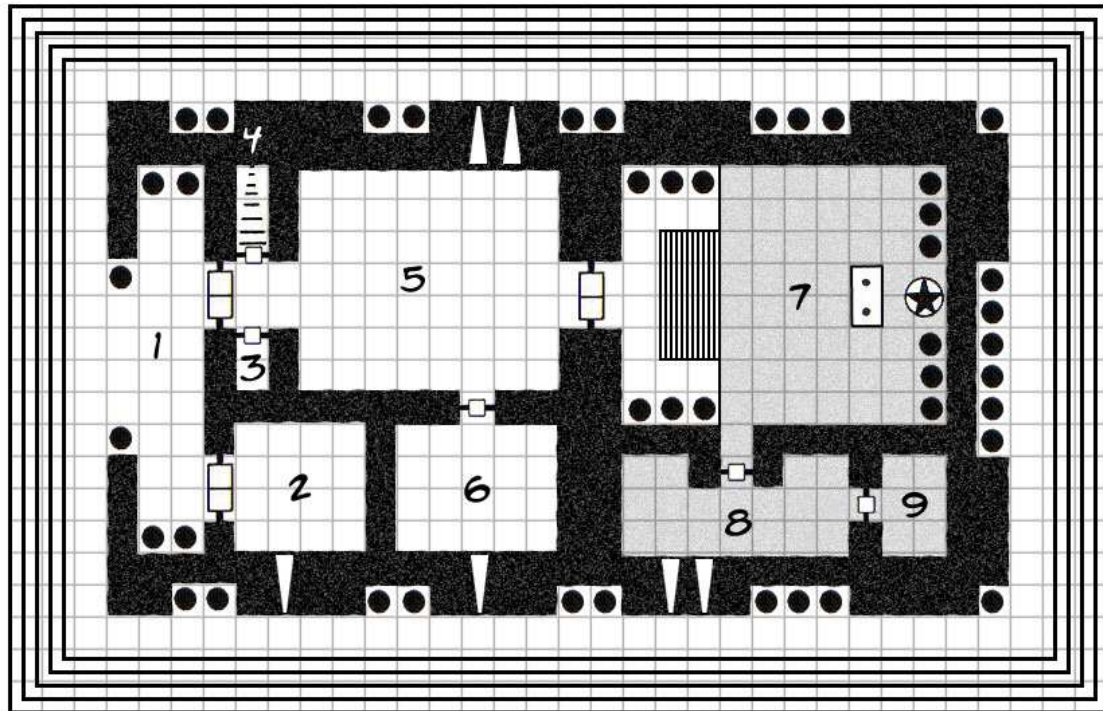
Wes will show the adventurers where his people industriously work on the pots, vessels, ornaments and statues that Stubbings delight in creating. Adjacent to the workshops is a small shrine dedicated to Khnum – the potter god, and the supposed creator of the Stubbling race.

Wes' Tale

The Stubbings of Zerzura are the descendants of a small tribe who came across the valley by accident two-hundred and fifty years ago. They were fleeing from an enemy of which they do not speak.

In return for the protection of the Guardians, the Stubbings became their servants, and provide for their domestic needs, as well as tending the gardens and groves of the city.

As the population of Stubbings grew, there was no longer the need for all of them to serve the Guardians. Most of the Stubbings now live outside the city in caves high up within the Valley of Zerzura, farming the high terraces, repairing the road and creating the statues that stand alongside it. It is accounted a great honour for a Stubbling to be chosen to serve the Guardians and the City.



The House of the Blessed Ones

The Great Fountain of the Outer Court

Wes will take the adventurers back towards the city entrance, to the Outer Court, the large open space before the city gate. The wall of the Great Fountain that dominates the centre of the Outer Court is engraved with mosaic-tiled reliefs of a multitude of different sea beings – dolphins, mermaids, octopi, sea serpents, and the like – truly an extraordinary sight in this city nestled in a hidden valley of the Great Desert. The beings are encrusted with jewels of different hues – agates, amethysts, garnets and emeralds, and above all shimmering pearls.

The Court of Harmonies

The characters hear the court of harmonies long before seeing it. In this tiered, amphitheatre-like court, a dozen or more of the Stubbings are playing a variety of instruments – some familiar to the Desert Kingdom, but some of strange or outlandish design – sistrums, lyres, viols, flutes, bassoons, drums, horns and the like. Wes explains that his people love all kinds of music, and that at any time of day there is always some kind of music being produced in the Court of Harmonies.

The Inner Court

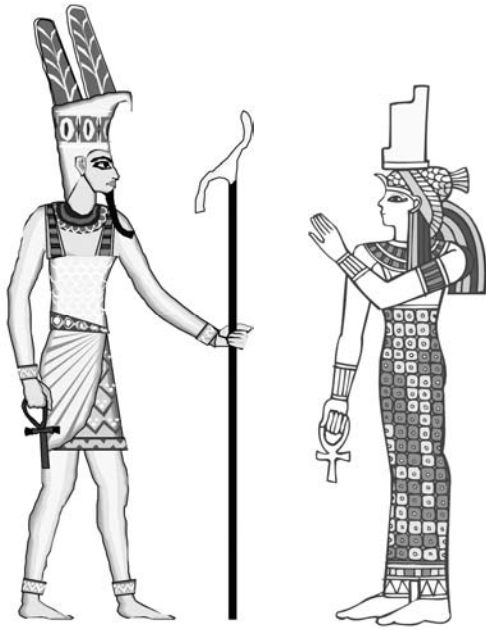
As the characters cross the city, they will pass through the Inner Court, dominated by a large, temple-like structure. Wes explains that this is the

House of the Guardians, and that no Stubbling has ever entered it. He is reluctant to answer any questions the characters may have about the structure, merely saying, 'You will see later. *The Guardians will summon you.*' He is clearly anxious to move on from this place – around which seems to hang a strange silence in a city otherwise filled with birdsong, music, and the sound of running water.

The House of the Blessed Ones

Following the completion of the tour, Wes will return the travellers to their quarters. After a light meal, Mentu appears, and will politely enquire after the adventurers' health. He will then lead them to the great building that is at the heart of the city – the House of the Blessed Ones, as Mentu calls it. '*The House of the Guardians,*' he explains, '*is the name by which our servants know it. But, of course, that is not its true name. For we, too, are but servants.*'

The House of the Blessed Ones is an imposing building that is visible from virtually every part of the city. It is made, like the rest of the city, of shining white marble. Set around the outer wall within recessed alcoves on the north, east and south sides are twenty-six regal statues, which a Khetim adventurer with the Scholar talent may recognise as the kings of the First and Second Dynasties of the Desert Kingdom (the seventeen Old Kingdom rulers, and the nine Middle Kingdom rulers). These are the royal predecessors of Osiris and Isis.



Statues of Osiris and Isis, guarding the Outer Court

Details of the rooms of the House of the Blessed Ones are given below.

Note to Maze Masters: Rooms 2, 5, 6 & 8 have narrow slits high in the walls for additional light and air flow. The grey area of Rooms 7 – 9 (as shown on the above map) are of a lower elevation than the rest of the temple.

1: The Outer Court. Two statues – one of Osiris, the other of Isis – mark the entrance to the House. Within the court are two pairs of statues – Sobek and Set on the south side, Horus and Hathor on the north side: the four gods of the elements. Two pairs of double doors are set in the east wall: one pair is unadorned, and leads to room 2. The other pair is richly decorated with silver and gold inlay, and precious jewels: this pair of doors opens onto room 5 (the Council Chamber). The Guardians customarily take their meals on the steps of the outer court.

2: Quarters of the Male Guardians. Beyond a pair of double doors are the private quarters of the male guardians, Ameny and Mentu. There is a simple, austere feel to these quarters.

3: Vestment Room. This small chamber contains the sacred vestments that are used by the Guardians on high days and holy days, and whenever performing duties within the Sanctuary of the Immortals.

4: Stairs. These lead to the simple, rock-hewn chamber below the House of the Blessed Ones where the mortal remains of four past Guardians – Djoser, Nebptah, Sekhemnet and Khepermun – are interred in simple stone sarcophagi.

5: Council Chamber. Within this room the Guardians meet at noon each day to take counsel together. The walls of the room are decorated with scenes from the *Saga of Osiris and Isis*. Four simple

wooden chairs are positioned in the four corners of the room. Additional chairs are set against the north wall – as if to suggest that the Council of Guardians is augmented by others from time to time. On the far (east) side of the Council Chamber is a pair of double doors, even more richly decorated than those on the west side. Beyond these doors lies room 7 (the Sanctuary of the Immortals).

6: Quarters of the Female Guardians. Behind a single unadorned door are located the private quarters of the female guardians, Inukhet and Sensirios. These are slightly larger and more richly appointed than those of their male counterparts.

7: Sanctuary of the Immortals. This room, the largest in the complex, houses the resting forms of Osiris and Isis. It is divided into two parts. The upper, elevated third is flanked by marble statues of six gods – Sekhmet, Thoth and Meretseger on the north side, and Maat, Khnum and Taweret on the south side. A wide flight of steps leads down to the lower two-thirds of the room. On the east wall are six more statues of the gods – from north to south these are Bastet, Horus, Ra, Hathor, Sobek, and Set. The one notable absentee from this assemblage of gods is Typhon. Set towards the eastern end of the room is a triple-decker bier, consisting of three white marble plinths, one raised upon and separated from the next by four marble pillars at each corner. This is the Altar of Repose. Lying on the bottom tier is the figure of Osiris – wrapped and mummified, although his serene and noble face is quite visible. His crossed arms rest across his chest, bearing the symbols of authority – the sacred flail of kingship and the was sceptre of divine favour.

Reposing above Osiris, on the middle tier, is the figure of Isis. Her fine robes are bedecked with gold and bejewelled with precious stones - but even these treasures pale into insignificance compared with the entrancing beauty of her sleeping face. Around her waist is tied the girdle of Isis – the magical adornment that is the source of much of her power.

Note to Maze Masters: yes, Isis is resting above Osiris, seemingly implying a superior status. In truth, it reflects rather the fact that Isis' prayers brought Osiris back from the dead – hence his lower position, as well as his partially-mummified appearance – whilst Isis herself has never, as yet, tasted death.

There is no sign of visible life from either figure – yet alive, though sleeping, they assuredly are.

The uppermost tier is empty save for two golden candlesticks at the north and south end. These are always alight. Inscribed in High Khemi on the face of the uppermost tier are the names of the eight Guardians – past and present – who have served the Immortal Ones.

Behind the Altar of Repose, on the floor between the statues of Ra and Hathor, a sacred circle and pentangle are marked. This hallowed spot is where the Officiating Guardian customarily stands during the sacred ceremonies performed within the

Sanctuary. It is also where the Chosen One stands throughout the Ritual of Renewal whenever a new Guardian joins the Council of Guardians.

Normally, the only light within this room comes from the candles on the Altar of Repose. However, whenever ceremonies are held, torches in brackets along the west, north and south walls are lit. The walls shine with a golden sheen – they are completely covered in gold-leaf.

8: The Library. Within this room is an assortment of sacred texts relating to the worship of the gods and the honouring of Osiris and Isis. There are also scrolls of considerable historic value – lost histories of the Old Kingdom, ancient legends of the gods, accounts of the building of the Middle Kingdom Pyramids, and the like. A complete set of the Nine Scrolls of Thoth (see Minotaur 5 for description) are also held within the Library.

9: The Reliquary. This room contains several mythic items associated with Osiris and Isis, as well as other items of value. These include the following:

3 Girdles of Isis *

4 Pillars of Osiris *

A Staff of Ra **

A Helmet of Sekhmet **

Assorted statuettes of various Kheftim gods and goddesses (but none of Typhon)

Chests containing various amulets, an abundance of gold and silver items, and jewellery (the precise value of which is not worth noting – after all, no-one would attempt to steal from this treasury, would they?). (**Note to Maze Masters:** feel free to devise sufficiently harsh punishments for any character foolhardy enough to succumb to such larceny).

* See next page.

** See the Pandora's Box column of Minotaur n5.

The Council of Guardians

Mentu leads the adventurers into the Council Chamber (room 5), where they are introduced to the other Guardians of Zerzura.

There are four Guardians in all – two male and two female – of widely different apparent ages. In addition to Mentu, the youngest, there is the radiant **Sensirios**, who appears to be about 45; **Inukhet**, watchful and distant, who appears to be about 65; and **Ameny**, the eldest, who looks as if he could be 100 or more. Though frail, he is clearly regarded, from the deferential gestures of the others, as the senior Guardian.

Each Guardian is dressed in a simple, white robe, wears an *ankh* amulet, and bears a was staff of Immortals; but Ameny's staff is clearly the most elaborately decorated. See the *Appendix* of this scenario for more details on the Guardians.

The Girdle of Isis and the Pillar of Osiris



A sorceress wearing a Girdle of Isis

The original **Girdle of Isis** (which her sleeping form still wears) is a unique artifact, and the source of much of her power. What are commonly referred to as Girdles of Isis are powerful mythic items, but nowhere near as powerful as the original. A Girdle of Isis (Enc 1) gives a +2 bonus to a Sorcerer's Psychic Gift.

The original **Pillar of Osiris** was a sacred red granite obelisk in Sebetos – some 30 feet tall – that served as the rallying-point for Osiris during his first, unsuccessful, attempt at rebellion against the Typhon autarchs of the Delta.

After the failure of the first rebellion (resulting in Osiris' flight to the Land of the Sun), the vengeful autarchs broke up the original Pillar – but many pieces of it were spirited away by individuals loyal to Osiris, and later these became secret tokens used by loyalists as a means of identifying themselves to one another, playing an important part in rallying support for Osiris when years later he launched his second (ultimately successful) uprising against the autarchs. Remnants of the Pillar of Osiris are rare things today, and most have been carefully shaped so as to resemble (on a smaller scale) the original artifact.

To have any power, a Pillar of Osiris must be at least 9 inches long and have a 2 inch wide base, tapering towards a point at the narrow end (Enc 1). Larger versions exist, but have no more power. Any warrior carrying a Pillar of Osiris on their person receives a +2 bonus to their Physical Vigor.

Note: *Anagnosis, the renowned Thenan scholar and Desert Kingdom expert, has speculated that the Pillar of Osiris is a phallic symbol, used in Kheftim fertility rites. This theory, though undoubtedly intriguing, has been disputed by other Minean scholars. The Kheftim themselves seem curiously reluctant to either confirm or deny Anagnosis' hypothesis.*



Mentu, the youngest Guardian of Zerzura

The Guardians will take turns in asking many questions of the adventurers about their journey, and will clearly be very interested to learn of their mission from Queen Mother Amenteti, and all that has befallen them on their travels. If the adventurers reveal that they learnt from the Ubasti that others (perhaps even members of the Cult of Dark Gods) were on the trail of Zerzura, the Guardians will seem disconcerted – only Ameny shows no sign of emotion at such disturbing news. They will also be interested – and impressed – to learn of the defeat of Siphelax at Beyda. Finally, Ameny will raise his hand – and the other Guardians will respectfully fall silent. Ameny then says:

'Your coming amongst us has long been foretold, truth-seekers. Indeed, you are not the first to find the hidden oasis of birds. Others have come, down through the centuries, by many and diverse routes. Some have been truth-seekers also, and have been welcomed. But some have come, driven by less honourable motives – perhaps like these other travellers you speak of. For suchlike, their visits to Zerzura...' (here he pauses) *'...went ill. For any evil that is brought to this place of peace and contentment will assuredly shrivel and die, according the will of those who rest here, those whom we are solemnly charged to watch over and await...the Sleepers of Zerzura. But you know, of course, of whom we speak. Come, it is time for you to see for yourselves – but first, you must be appropriately attired!'*

The Guardians dress the travellers, and themselves, in richly-brocaded vestments from the Vestment Room (room 3), before leading them into the Sanctuary of the Immortals (room 7) where Osiris and Isis rest. As they gaze on in awe at the sleeping figures, Ameny will go on to explain that Osiris and Isis have reposed here in Zerzura for nearly three

and a half centuries, awaiting the arrival of a day when the Desert Kingdom, in great peril, needs them once again. The Guardians have served the Immortal Ones in all that time, themselves preserved in body, only slowly aging, fortified by the waters of Zerzura that the travellers have already tasted. However, even the blessed waters cannot hold death completely at bay. In time – though it might take centuries – each of the Guardians will wither and die. As Ameny sadly explains:

'Of the first generation of Guardians – those who have served since the beginning – I am the last. My brother Djoser and my sisters Nebptah and Sekhemnet – those who alongside me first took the Oath of Fealty to the Immortal Ones – their mortal remains are entombed beneath this House. Soon – very soon – I too shall pass from this fleeting life, and, in accordance with our custom, another will take my place.'

Then, turning to the adventurers, he says: *'The "Book of Lost Pearls" bids that those who see the King and Queen sleeping the sleep of enchantment should not go near them – should not attempt to awaken them, for the time is not yet right. Instead, the book says, "take the treasure and that is all." Well, you have seen the King and Queen. What treasure, then, will you take from this place?'*

The adventurers may be puzzled. They have seen many delights in Zerzura, but nothing that could really be described as 'treasure' – no rooms overflowing with gold and precious jewels, no mythical items of arcane power and might (they **do** exist within the Reliquary, but this chamber has not – as yet – been on the itinerary).

The Was Staff of Immortals

The **was staff of Immortals** (Enc 2) is similar in appearance to the was staff carried by Khetim priests, but with somewhat different powers.

Only a Guardian holding it in his hand can benefit from its powers, which are: first, to grant a Guardian a +2 bonus to his Mystic Fortitude; secondly to reduce the Power Point cost of any spell the Guardian casts by 1 (but not below 1). The was staff carried by Ameny is even more powerful, and grants a +3 bonus to his Mystic Fortitude, and reduces the Power point cost of his spells by 2 (but again, not below 1).

Some Guardians (i.e. Mentu and Inukhet) are not spell-casters, and therefore can only gain from the Mystic Fortitude benefit of their was staff, and not the Power Point benefit. However, all the Guardians are proficient in the use of their staffs in melee combat (see Official Oracle in *Minotaur* n°5 for details). Warriors and specialists who become Guardians forgo their previous weapon of choice, and now use their was staff as a weapon of choice.



The venerable Ameny

Yet Ameny will be quite insistent in emphasizing that they have received the greatest treasure already – *‘the treasure, after all,’* he says, *‘that you were sent to seek.’*

The treasure that Ameny means, of course, is **truth** – the truth about Osiris and Isis, the truth about Zerzura, the truth they were bidden to find by the High Priestess of Hathor, Queen Mother Amenteti – after all, had not Isis herself at Beyda addressed them as *truth-seekers*?

This may seem a meagre reward for their pains – but if any of the adventurers let on that they think so, Ameny will simply shrug and say:

‘We have been Guardians of the truth about Zerzura for centuries, and have never desired any greater reward than that to be found simply by living, and serving the Immortal Ones. What greater treasure can there be than that? But doubtless, those of you who return to Amenteti will be richly rewarded: if that is your desire, then it will be satisfied.’

Ameny sighs then says: *‘But you will need to take to the Daughter of Isis tokens of the truth about Zerzura that you have discovered. There shall be three such signs. Follow me.’*

A Note on Ameny’s Gender

If the majority of player-characters are male (the presumed default position for this adventure), Ameny will also be male. Should the majority of player-characters be female, then Ameny also will be female. Should the player-characters be equally split between the sexes, then the Maze Master may choose to make Ameny either male or female. In the latter case, the Maze Master should also make Inukhet, Ameny’s lieutenant (and the former Guardian Sekhemnet, mentioned below), male. Ameny’s gender affects which of the characters the Guardians will consider as a potential ‘Chosen One’ (as explained later).

Leaning heavily on his was staff, Ameny alone leads the adventurers through the Library (room 8), and on into the Reliquary (room 9). From the Reliquary, Ameny takes a Girdle of Isis and a Pillar of Osiris, and gives them to the adventurers.

He then takes from them the golden key to the gate of Zerzura, stares thoughtfully at it for a moment, passes his hand over it, then gives it back to the adventurers, saying to them: *‘This is the third sign. Look again at the key!’*

Still inscribed on one side of the key are the names Osiris and Isis – but now, for the first time, the adventurers see two additional names in High Khemi inscribed on the other side.

These, Ameny explains, are the ‘secret’ names of the Blessed Ones, knowledge of which (apart from the Guardians) only members of the royal house possess (the kings of the Third Dynasty, after all, do claim to be descended from Osiris and Isis). These names (in High Khemi) are *Once and Future King* and *Healer of All Harms*. Together, says Ameny, these three tokens offer ample proof that the adventurers have truly discovered Zerzura, resting place of the Immortals.

Ameny looks around the room, then suddenly chuckles, *‘So, you had some trouble with the Ubasti of Khofer? Well, we don’t want you to have any such difficulties with them on your way back. Perhaps a small gift might be well received, hmm?’*

Without waiting for an answer, he takes a statuette of Bastet, with emerald jewels for eyes, down off a shelf, and passes it to one of the adventurers.

‘This should please Prince Mafuda, yes?’

Ameny leads the characters back to the Council Chamber, where they rejoin the other Guardians. As he takes his seat, he is suddenly wracked by a coughing fit. His voice suddenly weaker, he says:

‘These three tokens we present to you, that Queen Amenteti, Daughter of Isis, and King Nebheptah, Son of Osiris, may know that you are both truth-seekers and truth-finders. Those of you who return will carry them with honour. But it may be that one of you will not make the return journey.’

In past times, when truth-seekers have come to Zerzura, one has always remained, to take the place appointed for them in the Council of Guardians. My time is very nearly at an end – and, if the gods will it, one of you shall take my place in the Ritual of Renewal.’

Ameny will emphasise that the Chosen One must be some-one of the same gender as himself, in order that the balance of male and female Guardians is preserved. In addition, the Chosen One *cannot* be a Priest. Otherwise, members of any class open to Khettim (i.e. *not* ‘exotic’ Minean classes like Amazons, Centaurs, Lyristis or Nymphs) can be a Guardian. In addition, the Chosen One need not be a Khettim – one of the current Guardians (Sensirios) is actually a Midian.

Regardless of whether the characters are shocked or tempted by Ameny's words, the Guardian will inform the adventurers that they are to be given time to reflect on them. He will summon them to the next Council in twenty-four hours time. In the meantime, they are free to spend time in the House of the Blessed Ones in meditation and contemplation, or to visit any part of the city. The Stubbings will attend to their material needs as before.

Note to Maze Masters: Ameny's gracious invitation means that the adventurers can spend time in the Sanctuary, Library, Reliquary or any other part of the House of the Blessed Ones without let or hindrance.

Tales of a Lost Army

That evening, the Guardian Sensirios will visit the adventurers in their quarters.

She will explain that she has been moved by their tale of strange sounds on the desert winds. She tells them that she believes them to be from the Lost Army of the Deep Desert.

'The Lost Army of the Deep Desert,' continues Sensirios, *'was sent out in the days of Akenre I, greatest of the warrior-kings of the Middle Kingdom.'*

It is said that he sent them, five thousand strong, to crush the Stygian Lords of the Mountain of Doom. But stories tell that the expedition was ill-fated because the army's commander, the cruel and vainglorious Rahotep, brother of the king, had offended the sun god because of his excesses, and had not sought forgiveness for his many transgressions against the gods. Ra decreed, therefore, that unless Rahotep turn back and seek the forgiveness of the gods, none of his army should survive the desert wastes, save one.

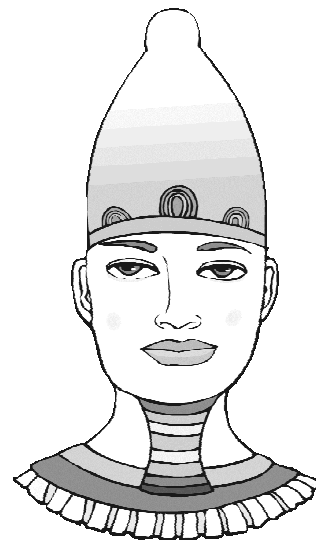
Disaster after disaster befell them, but Rahotep, in his pride, refused to turn back, and with his ever diminishing troop marched further into the Great Desert than any Khetim army before or since – only for Rahotep's last guard to be swallowed up in the greatest desert storm ever recorded by the hardy tribesmen of the Deep Desert.

It is said that the cries of Rahotep's men can be heard still on the desert winds, pleading with the gods for one last chance at redemption.

'But there was one survivor – one whose purity of heart, and honesty of purpose was such as to save him. His name was Djoser.'

The tales tell that Djoser, guided by Ra, was the first to find the blessed sanctuary of Zerzura. It was Djoser who first drank of the waters of life. And it was Djoser who greeted the Blessed Ones and their companions when they surrendered their rule of the Desert Kingdom at the dawn of this present age.

'Djoser was amongst that first generation of Guardians – and the first of them to lay down his life having lived five times the span of a mortal man.'



The cruel and vainglorious Rahotep

He is buried with honour beneath the House of the Blessed Ones. But for all his contentment serving the Immortals, a single great sadness remained within his heart – the dishonour suffered by his former comrades because of the sins of Rahotep.

But before he died, Djoser prophesied that a day would come – a time of peril for Zerzura – when the Ring of Djoser would summon forth the Guard of Rahotep, and allow them to regain their honour, before they could come at last to Amenti – the Place of Reeds – to find eternal rest.'

Sensirios holds up the Ring of Djoser – a simple gold band with a single red ruby – and says, *'You have heard the Sounds on the Wind. You have come to us as the last of our first Guardians draws near to the close of his life. You tell us that Dark Cultists – evil servants of the Lone God – also seek the path to Zerzura. Perhaps this is the time of which Djoser spoke.'*

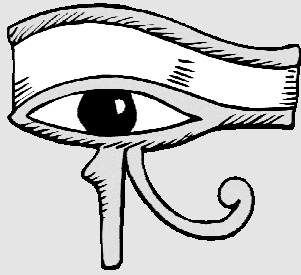
She looks gravely into the eyes of each adventurer, then says. *'I was bidden not to speak of this until the Chosen One has been revealed. Yet my spirit senses doubt within your hearts – uncertainty as to your true destinies. Perhaps in showing you the Ring, and telling you of the Lost Army, I may have eased the burden of your souls. Rest easy this night – and pray that the Immortal Ones may speak to you, and reveal their purposes for you.'*

Sensirios bows her head, and takes her leave of the adventurers.

Note to Maze Masters: *If, for whatever reason, the adventurers never spoke of hearing sounds on the desert winds to the Guardians, then Sensirios' visit does not take place. The Maze Master must find another way for the adventurers to learn the tale of the Lost Army: e.g. part of the 'farewell discourse' given by Ameny, from a scroll within the Library, etc. Alternatively, he may choose to ignore the Ring of Djoser/Lost Army sub-plot altogether – but he may need to reduce the strength of the Cultist onslaught at the Gate to counterbalance this*

A Note to Maze Masters

What next after Zerzura?



Maze Masters need to be clear whether or not *The Secret of Zerzura* is intended to be played as a self-contained adventure, or as the first part of an ongoing campaign.

If *The Secret of Zerzura* is intended to be played as part of an ongoing campaign within the Desert Kingdom, it is strongly suggested that the Council of Guardians should be broken (perhaps through the granting of visions in the night that warn the travellers they are to reject the call of the Guardians). This will act as the first sign that the prophesied 'Dark Days' are at hand – a time during which the forces of evil (represented by the Cult of the Dark Gods) will threaten the Desert Kingdom, and a time during which the Immortals, Osiris and Isis, will rise from their enchanted sleep to defend righteous Khettim once again.

However, Maze Masters may intend *The Secret of Zerzura* to be complete within itself (perhaps allowing Minean characters, in particular, to move on to other parts of Mythika beyond the Desert Kingdom). If this is the case, then it is strongly suggested that the Council of Guardians *not* be broken. This can be achieved in one of two ways. The first way is to encourage one of the player characters to believe he is the Chosen One (perhaps through the granting of visions in the night).

Alternatively, if none of the characters seems likely to accept such a destiny, then Ameny will not die – yet – but will instead receive a revelation that his chosen successor is not amongst the characters, whose destiny is slightly different from past 'truth-seekers'. Their special role, Ameny will realise, is to destroy the Dark God Cultists before the Gate of Zerzura, and to take news of Zerzura back to the Queen Mother Amenteti. It is Amenteti and her son, King Nebheptah, who will then send the true Chosen One to Zerzura in the next expedition.

Either way, the Council is not broken, the coming of the 'Dark Days' is forestalled, Osiris and Isis remain in their enchanted sleep, the Dark Cultists remain a sinister nuisance rather than an all-threatening pervasive evil, and the adventurers receive their reward from Amenteti.

The adventure now progresses in one of three ways, depending on the choice of the Maze Master:

If *The Secret of Zerzura* is part of an ongoing campaign, the plot moves to Option 1 (see below).

If *The Secret of Zerzura* is used as a self-contained scenario, the Maze Master will have to choose between Option 2 and Option 3 (see below).

Option 1 - The Council is Broken

During the night, each of the adventurers will receive visions from Isis and Osiris, warning them that the time has come for the Council of Guardians to be broken, and that none of them is the Chosen One. *'The time of the Faithful Guardians is drawing to an end,'* says Isis, sadly.

'But the time of Valiant Champions takes its place,' responds Osiris. *'And the time of Immortals Renewed shall follow thereafter.'*

The next day – their third in the city – Mentu appears before the adventurers whilst they are still at breakfast, clearly distressed. He tells them that even though it is several hours before midday, the Guardians are convening their Council early, and that the adventurers must come at once.

The characters return to the House of the Blessed Ones, and join the Guardians. Ameny is clearly gravely ill, barely able to sit upright in his chair. He slowly raises his head, and, his breathing laboured, asks them, *'Is the Chosen One amongst you?'*

If the characters deny that any of them is 'Chosen' – and mention their visions as confirmation – there will be a stunned silence from the Guardians, which is eventually broken by the youngest Guardian, Mentu. *'No-one has ever refused the call before!'* he cries – and he will plead with the adventurers to reconsider, and will point how critical the Guardians' situation is. Ameny is clearly almost at the end of his life.

'The Council of Guardians,' cries Mentu, *'has never been broken!'*

Inukhet raises her voice, chastising the characters for their obduracy, and pleading with them to undergo the Ritual of Renewal. Sensirios looks from one character to the next, but says nothing.

However, Ameny himself raises his hand, and the angry voices of Mentu and Inukhet fall silent. In a voice fast failing, the elder Guardian says:

'Enough. The meaning of this is clear now to me. Never before have truth-seekers come to Zerzura without bringing amongst them a new Guardian. But we cannot deny our oldest prophecies, given to us by the Immortal Ones themselves – that a day would come when the Council would be broken, by the will of the truth-seekers, the truth-bringers, of Blessed Osiris and Blessed Isis. We knew this day would come, and we dreaded its coming, knowing it to be the first sign that Calamity would soon fall

upon the Kingdom, and that even for Zerzura, peace and tranquillity would come to an end'.

Ameny looks at each Guardian in turn, and says:

'Today, the Council is Broken – and now I perceive that those who have come as truth-seekers in these last days have a special purpose: not to be Guardians within Zerzura itself, but rather to go out from this oasis of serenity into a world soon to be threatened by chaos and disaster. That is the will of the Immortal Ones – and may they awaken soon to save us from these evil times!'

Ameny gives Sensirios a searching look, then says to her, *'Give them the Ring of Djoser. You were right to perceive their need for it!'*

Sensirios, blushing – and aware of the shocked, even angry, expressions on the faces of Inukhet and Mentu – gets up, bows towards Ameny, then gives the Ring to one of the adventurers, whispering as she does so, *'Speak only the words "Djoser calls forth the Guard of Rahotep!" – everything else will then follow. You will know when the time is right.'*

Ameny turns one last time towards the adventurers, and, raising his hand in blessing, smiles weakly and says: *Go in Peace...take with you the treasure of Zerzura...bear the tokens of truth to your Mistress, the Daughter of Isis...give rest to the restless ones who seek for redemption...and serve the Immortal Ones in the tasks they shall give you. Go with our Blessing. I go now to my rest'*. With that, Ameny's hand drops, and he breathes his last.

The adventurers leave the grieving Guardians with their departed leader, and they prepare to depart early the next day (their fourth in Zerzura). If their supplies need replenishing, then the Stubblings will be very helpful in assisting them. Mid morning the next day, they bid farewell to Inukhet (Ameny's successor), Mentu and Sensirios on the steps of the House of the Blessed Ones, and head for the gate of the city. However, as they near the gate, a number of agitated Stubblings approach, crying out: *'The city is under attack...!'* The adventure continues with **The Battle of the Gate** below.

Option 2 - The Council is Renewed

During the night, one of the adventurers will receive a vision from Isis and Osiris, telling him that he is the Chosen One. *'The Council of the Faithful Guardians must be renewed,'* says Isis. *'And you are the Chosen One,'* continues Osiris. *'You must undergo the Ritual of Renewal, and say farewell to your former life.'*

If the 'Chosen One' is willing to fulfil his destiny, he will communicate that to his fellow adventurers the next morning. Mentu arrives just before midday, and leads the characters back to the Council, where the Chosen One reveals himself to the Guardians. Ameny is clearly relieved: *'Now I may relinquish the burden of this life,'* he says, *'content that the will of the Immortals is revealed.'* With that, he closes his eyes, and breathes his last.



The radiant Sensirios

Inukhet (now clearly the senior Guardian) tells the adventurers that the Ritual of Renewal must take place within 24 hours of the death of a Guardian.

'The Ritual will take place tomorrow at noon. In the meantime, the Chosen One must prepare himself. The rest of you,' she says imperiously, *'may leave us – you have your own preparations to make for the journey back across the Desert.'*

You may say farewell to your former companion tomorrow. Now go!'

Note to Maze Masters

The Chosen One as a player-character

Maze Masters should remember that the Chosen One must be some-one of the same gender as Ameny, and cannot be a Priest. He must be a members of a class open to Khettim (i.e. not 'exotic' Minean classes like Amazons, Centaurs, Lyristis or Nymphs), but may belong to a non-Khettim race, e.g. Charybdian, Midean, Minean. He must be level 4 or higher (Osiris and Isis only take really heroic figures as their Guardians!). Finally (and crucially), he must be a character belonging to a player who is willing to retire him. Although an honourable and fitting way for some PCs to retire, it will not be an appropriate conclusion to the adventures of some characters. If there is no member of the adventuring party who satisfies **all** these criteria – quite a strong possibility – then option 2 is simply not available to the Maze Master. He must either choose option 1 (highly suitable for an ongoing campaign) or option 3 (more suitable for a self-contained adventure).

The adventurers (minus the Chosen One) leave the grieving Guardians with their late lamented leader, and they prepare to depart the next day (their fourth in Zerzura). If their supplies need replenishing, then the Stubbings will be very helpful in assisting them. Late morning the next day, Mentu, vested in ornate ceremonial robes, visits them, and directs them to come with him to the House of the Blessed Ones.

There on the steps, standing dressed in identical robes to Mentu and the other Guardians, is the Chosen One. He bids farewell to his former companions. Then Inukhet says to them:

'The time has come for you to leave Zerzura. Your purpose has been achieved. You have brought to us the Chosen One, and for this you have our thanks. You take from us the proof of our existence that you were sent to obtain. Guard the Secret of Zerzura well!' She turns towards Sensirios, who moves forward. 'One final gift. This was Ameny's last request, should the Chosen One be revealed to us: that you should be given the Ring of Djoser. I understand,' (giving Sensirios a sharp and unfriendly glance) 'that you already know something of its history. Whether it will truly be of service to you, I know not – but Ameny's last wish must be honoured.' From the way she says these words, it's clear that she is sceptical.

Sensirios then gives the Ring to one of the adventurers, whispering as she does so, *'Speak only the words "Djoser calls forth the Guard of Rahotep!" – everything else will then follow. You will know when the time is right.'*

'Now, you must leave,' says Inukhet, *'and the Ceremony of Renewal awaits.'*

Without waiting for a reply, she turns her back on the adventurers and makes her way back up the steps of the House of the Blessed Ones, beckoning her fellow Guardians and the Chosen One to follow.

The adventurers make their way towards the city gate, saddened to have said farewell to one of their number. However, as they near the gate, a number of agitated Stubbings approach, crying out: *'The city is under attack...!'* The adventure continues with **The Battle of the Gate** below.

Option 3 - The Council Awaits

During the night, none of the characters receives any visions from Isis and Osiris. Mentu arrives the next day, as promised, and returns with them to the Council Chamber. Ameny looks at them one by one, then says, *'Which amongst you has received a vision from the Blessed Ones?'*

The answer, of course, is none, and the characters waste no time in denying it, to the clear shock and consternation of Mentu and Inukhet, who shout out, demanding explanations. Sensirios, meanwhile, looks from one character to the next, but says nothing. Eventually, Ameny himself raises his hand,

and the angry voices of Mentu and Inukhet fall silent. The elder Guardian says:

'Enough. It is as I thought. The meaning of this is clear to me. Never before have truth-seekers come to Zerzura without bringing with them a new Guardian. But the Guardian to Come – the Last Guardian – his appearing will be different from all others. These truth-seekers have their own destiny, different from those who came before. They will return to the Daughter of Isis, Amenteti – and soon, very soon, the Chosen One will set out.'

'How can you be sure of this?' demands Inukhet.

'I have seen it,' replies Ameny simply. *'Last night the Blessed Ones spoke to me. The Chosen One will come – but he is not yet here.'*

He turns towards the adventurers. *'Forgive me if my words yesterday troubled you. Set your hearts at rest: you shall all leave Zerzura. But do not doubt that you have a destiny – a part of which was also revealed to me in my dreams. Sensirios!'* He turns to the Guardian. *'Give them the Ring of Djoser. You were right to perceive their need for it!'*

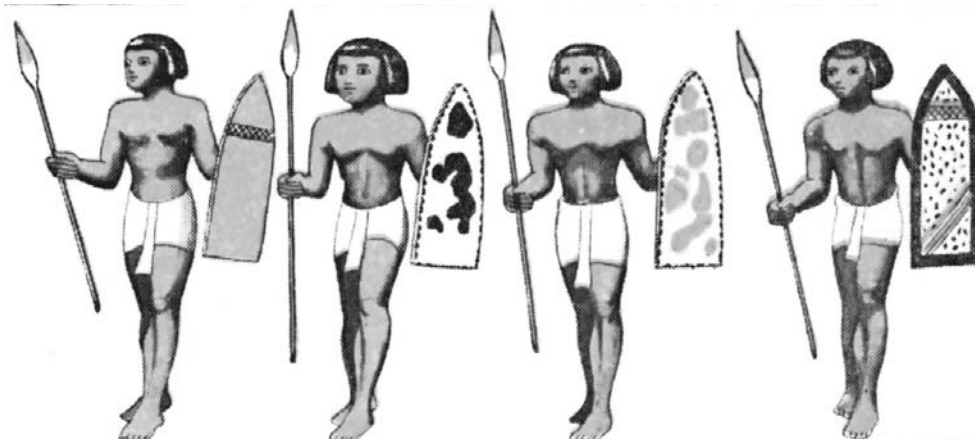
Sensirios, blushing – and aware of the shocked, even angry, expressions on the faces of Inukhet and Mentu – gets up, bows towards Ameny, then gives the Ring to one of the adventurers, whispering as she does so, *'Speak only the words "Djoser calls forth the Guard of Rahotep!" – everything else will then follow. You will know when the time is right.'*

Ameny tells the adventurers that their audience is at an end, and that they must return to their quarters, and begin preparations to depart. If their supplies need replenishing, then the Stubbings will be very helpful in assisting them. Mid morning the next day (their fourth in Zerzura), they are summoned to the steps of the House of Blessing, where they say farewell to the four Guardians. They then head for the gate of the city. However, as they near the gate, a number of agitated Stubbings approach, crying out: *'The city is under attack...!'* The adventure continues with **The Battle of the Gate** below.

Note to Maze Masters

The Chosen One as an NPC

If the Chosen One is an NPC, then the Maze Master may choose (or invent) a suitable candidate. However, one candidate he may seriously wish to consider is the Crown Prince Nakhtankh – someone who could quite legitimately be sent out by the Queen Mother (and King Nebheptah his father) as leader of a 'follow-up' expedition to Zerzura. If the 'Guardian to Come' is the Last Guardian – as Ameny suggests in the Option 3 scenario – then making him of royal blood, a true descendant of Osiris and Isis, is a logical choice (plus, of course, this could easily trigger a succession crisis that might be part and parcel of the build-up to the coming 'Dark Times').



The Last Guard of Rahotep

Defenders and Attackers of Zerzura

In addition to the adventurers, the defending forces may include any or all of the following:

6+1D6 Stubblings, led by Wes (many of the Stubblings have fled from the gate in the face of the Dark Cultists, and most of the remainder flee in terror once the Typhonian Beasts begin to emerge). Only a small number of brave individuals (led by their chieftain) will stand and help the characters defend the city.

The Guardians. Not unnaturally, the Guardians will come to the defence of the city. However, their arrival will be delayed by 6+1D6 rounds (depending on the options taken above, they may be busy mourning a dead leader, busy inducting a new Guardian, or just plain busy...).

Rahotep's Last Guard. These can be summoned at any time by the character wearing Djoser's Ring simply thrusting his fist out and crying "**Djoser calls forth the Guard of Rahotep!**" The Last Guard takes 3 battle rounds for their ghostly form to materialise within 100 feet of their summoner. Once summoned, the Last Guard will fight for 6+1D6 battle rounds before returning, with a satisfied sigh, to their eternal rest.

And what about the attackers? It is suggested the Enemy at the Gate be made up of the three to five members of the Cult of Dark Gods, assisted by three Typhonian Beasts. If the Maze Master feels that the attacking force is too strong or too weak he can adjust it as appropriate. He could strengthen it by adding an extra Typhonian Beast, and perhaps 1D6 minor NPC fighters (minions of the Dark Cultists); he could reduce its strength by removing one or even two of the Typhonian Beasts. Detailed profiles for all NPCs required in the Battle of the Gate can be found in the Appendix.

The Battle of the Gate

Regardless of how exactly we get there (see options above), the final battle at the gate pitches the player characters (with or without the support of Guardians, Stubblings and Rahotep's Last Guard) against the Cult of Dark Gods.

The characters arrive at the Outer Court to find the gate blasted asunder, no sign of the phoenix and the dead or dying bodies of a dozen or so Stubblings. Also standing at the gate are the members of the Cult of Dark Gods, led by the Sorcerer Akensheut (for details, see the NPC profiles below). Akensheut sneers at the adventurers, and says:

'Are you the best defence that this miserable city can come up with? We had hoped to find more of a challenge. Granted, you got here ahead of us – thanks to the treachery of those triple-damned Ubasti. But I doubt it's done you much good. I don't think that whore, Hathor's High Priestess, is ever going to get the report she was hoping for. By the time she sends out another expedition, we'll have long since ransacked this place – and taken its secrets for ourselves! But let me introduce you to some friends...'

At this the ground begins to tremble, and heave, great cracks appearing through the open gateway and across the courtyard. Slowly emerging from the subterranean depths are three unspeakable horrors: Typhonian Beasts!

Let battle commence...

The Aftermath of Battle

Assuming, of course, that the characters are victorious, the Guardians will thank them for saving the city from defilement at the hands of the Cult of



Behold the truly unspeakable form of the Typhonian Beasts !

Dark Gods (even Inukhet seems impressed). If any of the Cultists (other than Akensheut) are captured, they will reveal little more of their mission – for, in truth, most of them are not particularly high-ranking within the secretive Cult of the Dark Gods. They will say only that they are members of the Circle of Sobek, and that Akensheut was leader of their cell.

If the adventurers have the good fortune to capture Akensheut himself, they are likely to learn rather more about the Cult of the Dark Gods, such as the location and identity of key figures (see the Section below, **Follow-up Adventures: Beyond Zerzura**, for ideas of where this might take the adventurers).

The Guardians, and the Stubblings, will bid a final farewell to the adventurers. Some last words of caution will be given by Mentu.

'Be sure,' he says, 'that when you come, after two leagues, to a fork in the valley, that you take the narrow path to the left – heading due north. It will pass through a rocky ravine that at first looks less promising than the wider road ahead, but it is the correct path, and the way by which you came from Beyda. If you carry on the wider road further to the east, you will soon come to a dangerous land that we name the Black Defile – a strange, gloomy place of cold, damp mists. It is said that one of the many roads to the Shadowy Domain of Typhon passes through this mystical place. Doubtless it is from this desolate place that these ghastly Beasts of Typhon were summoned by the foul Servants of the Dark Gods. Do not travel down that path – for none ever return from the Black Defile untouched by what they see there.'

Act V: The End of the Quest

The Return Journey

The return journey sees the adventurers retracing their steps back to Kebet.

Depending on both inclination and time constraints, the Maze Master may either gloss over the return journey very quickly, assuming little of note occurs upon it, or may play out the events of the journey in full – perhaps including two or three encounters drawn from the Random Events tables given in part one (see *Minotaur n5*) and/or earlier in part three of *The Secret of Zerzura*. Special care should be taken by the Maze Master to ensure that any such encounters do not feel anti-climactic.

However, should the adventurers have captured members of the Cult of the Dark Gods (especially Akensheut), the Maze Master may wish to use one of these encounters to facilitate the escape of the captured Cultist(s), or their ultimate demise – e.g. swallowed in the unforgiving maw of a Desert Worm, or meeting their doom within a particularly intractable piece of quicksand.

This option should only be taken if the scenario is envisaged as the beginning of an ongoing campaign – in which case the Maze Master may wish to restrict the amount of information that is initially learnt about the Cult of the Dark Gods by disposing of any captured Cultist.

At Khofer Again

If the Maze Master wishes, he may play out the return to Khofer en route back to Kebet. If the characters give to Prince Mefuda the Bastet statuette provided by Ameny, he will be very pleased – and especially pleased indeed if they tell him of the fate of the Dark Cultists.

'Good,' Mefuda says, 'The evil intent of those men was clear from the moment we saw them. Doubtless they eventually learnt the map they possessed was flawed, and must somehow have divined the right path. But not before you were able to get ahead of them, and prepare a trap for them. Although we do not welcome strangers to our lands, we are pleased that you bested these evil men.'

Know, therefore, that we will be watchful against the appearance of more of their kind – and should others of their unholy allegiance come this way, searching for the Lost Valley, we will deal with them, in our own way. Now go – and remember, should you ever return to Khofer, always pay the reverence and respect due to our goddess! Still, this lesson at least you seem to have learnt...'

An Audience with a Queen

The return journey will last twelve to fourteen days. Eventually, the adventurers arrive back at Kebet – perhaps a month or so after they had set out. They make their way to the Rose Temple, and are admitted, as before, to the presence of the High Priestess of Hathor, Amenteti.



The majestic Amenteti, Queen Mother of the Desert Kingdom and High Priestess of Hathor

Amenteti will listen with great attentiveness to their tale, and, even though years of courtly training have taught her not to readily show emotion, it is clear that she is deeply moved by their description of Zertzura. Her hands tremble slightly as she receives the Girdle of Isis, and the Pillar of Osiris, and she gasps audibly as she examines the golden key of Zertzura, inscribed with the secret names of the Immortal Ones.

'There is no doubt that you speak the truth,' says Amenteti. 'You have done well, for not only have you brought news of Zertzura – you have also fought with the enemies of the Immortals, and triumphed over them.'

She sighs. *'Alas, our enemies are many; and, sometimes, they are found in unexpected places. My servant, Akenhathor, with whom I entrusted the knowledge of your quest, has turned out to be faithless. She is a member of the Cult of Dark Gods. The truth of this was discovered but a week ago – when incriminating documents were found in her quarters, along with this.'*

She holds up a small statuette of Bastet.

'She was bidden to give this to you, to ensure your safe passage through the oasis of Khofer. I am relieved that, despite her treachery, you were able to complete your mission. As for Akenhathor, she was able to elude us – warned by unknown means that we had discovered her true allegiance. Great was the trust I placed in her – and great is the damage she may yet inflict upon us!'

She shakes her head, more in sorrow than anger.

Then Amenteti looks up at the adventurers. *'Still, that is a matter for another time. It is enough that you know, today, that you have earned my gratitude, and that of the King – and your reward is richly deserved.'*

She claps her hands, and one of her guards brings forward the treasure-chest shown to the adventurers at their first audience. *'As promised, all this is yours!'* says Amenteti, with a rare smile.

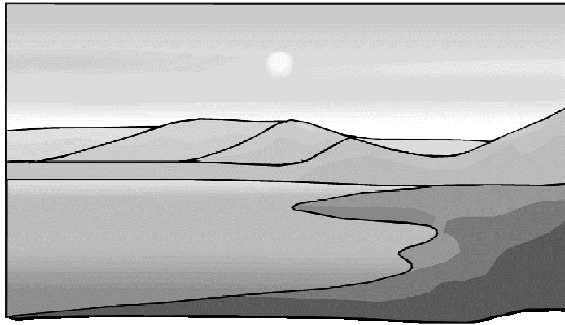
The Treasure

The treasure-chest contains the following:

- 500 gold coins
- 1,000 silver pieces
- an assortment of gems and semi-precious stones (rubies, emeralds, sapphires, garnets, strings of pearls, and the like) worth another 240 gold coins.

The total Encumbrance value of the treasure is 18 (plus another 3 for the chest itself). This may, of course, be divided between several persons for the purposes of transport.

Follow-up Adventures : Beyond Zerzura



The Quest is achieved: and the heroes have (hopefully) received their richly-deserved reward. What next? Well, that depends on which of the three options given earlier in Act IV the Maze Master has followed.

If *The Secret of Zerzura* is intended as a stand-alone adventure (Options 2 & 3), then this is where it ends. The adventurers have their reward, and the Queen Mother has the confirmation of Zerzura's existence she wanted. Amenteti (or the King) will probably send a follow-on expedition to Zerzura (possibly led by the Crown Prince Nakhtankh – especially appropriate if he is destined to be the 'Last Guardian'). And the King and his allies will have made some important discoveries about the activities of the Cult of Dark Gods. The adventurers will doubtless receive a warm welcome – and even aid – from the royal family should they ever return to the Desert Kingdom in the future: and they have also made an enemy, Akenhathor, whom one day they may encounter again...But, for the moment, their adventures in the Khetim land are at an end.

But what if the Maze Master wishes to continue with follow-on adventures in the Desert Kingdom (as per Option n*1) ? Obviously, detailed adventure outlines are beyond the scope of this article: but here are a few ideas that could serve as 'adventure seeds'.

1. The Library Awaits!

The Cultists have clearly found a way to infiltrate the Library of Thoth at Pstatis. Given that Pstatis is one of the main centres for the worship of Typhon, it's not surprising that there should be a Dark Cult circle at work in the city. Is one of the devoted librarian-scholars of Thoth a secret devotee of the Dark Gods? Perhaps the characters should investigate...

2. Into the Crocodile's Maw!

The Dark Cultists that attacked Zerzura were members of the Circle of Sobek. Should Amenteti send the adventurers to Om-kibor, where Sobek is respected before all other gods? Perhaps Amenteti has information that the nomarch of Om-kibor has been acting suspiciously of late...

3. Intrigue at the Royal Court!

Amenteti wants some-one to convey the news of Zerzura's discovery to King Nebheptah at the Royal Court at Sebentos. Who better than the player characters? But will the Dark Cultists continue their schemes to undermine the King? Is there a traitor in Nebheptah's innermost circle at Sebentos? And what about Crown Prince Nakhtankh – rumoured to be an adherent of the Order of Light? Can the secret worshippers of Aten be enlisted in the fight against the Dark Gods?

4. Hunt for Akenhathor!

What has become of Amenteti's rogue acolyte? Will Akenhathor's true identity be revealed? What other secrets does she know that could bring scandal and ruin to the House of the Desert Kings? And how exactly did she learn that the net was closing in upon her – are there other scheming traitors hidden behind the pleasant faces of the priestesses of Hathor in Kebet?

Other thoughts for consideration...

What terrors await those who dare journey to the Black Defile? What has been learnt from Akensheut and his fellow Cultists? Is the conservative Prince Sekhemnet a member of the Cult of Dark Gods, as Akenhathor once hinted – and even if that was just a 'red herring', what other role – supportive or obstructive – may he yet play in the coming struggle against the servants of the Dark Gods? The Ubasti of Khofer – are they friends or foes, or completely disinterested? What aid – if any – can the Guardians of the broken Council of Zerzura now give? What is the ultimate plan of the Dark Cultists – and how exactly are the player characters going to stop them? And when exactly will the Sleepers awaken? Just a few thoughts, ideas and questions – but it's up to each Maze Master to work out where his adventurers go... *Beyond Zerzura*.



Appendix A

NPCs for The Oasis of Birds

Allies of the Adventurers

The Guardians of Zerzura

The long life and collective wisdom of the four Guardians of Zerzura makes them potentially fearsome opponents. However, they do have their limitations.

First, they can only engage in combat whilst within the city of Zerzura: if they leave the city itself (and the protective presence of the Immortals), then the effects of the waters of Zerzura will very quickly wear off, resulting in rapid aging within 1D6 rounds – fatal to all the Guardians with the possible exception of Mentu, the youngest.

Secondly, whenever the Council of Guardians is diminished in numbers, then so is the power of the *Was Staff of Immortals* they bear (giving +1 rather than +2 bonus to Mystic Fortitude, or +2 rather than +3 in the case of Ameny's *Was Staff*). This needs to be especially borne in mind if the Maze Master has elected to follow Option 1, as detailed above.

Ameny

Level 6 Khetim Sorcerer, apparent age 100+, senior Guardian of Zerzura.

Personality: Though old and increasingly frail, Ameny still possesses a sharp mind and an acute understanding of human nature. The respect that his fellow Guardians have for him should always be in evidence.

Attributes: Might 11, Skill 12, Luck 17, Wits 19, Will 21, Grace 12.

Combat: Initiative 14, Melee +3, Missile +7, Basic Defence Class 15, Hits Total 18.

Magic: Psychic Gift +9, Mystic Strength 21, Power Points 29.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +3, Danger Evasion +12, Mystic Fortitude +11*, Physical Vigor +10**.

Personal Charisma: +8 (+14 to Minor NPCs).

Background Talents: Scholar, Healer.

Mythic Items: Was Staff of Immortals, Ankh Amulet.

* This score takes into account the +3 bonus granted by the *Was Staff of Immortals*.

** This score takes into account the +2 bonus granted by the *Ankh Amulet*.



Inukhet, the most aloof of the Guardians

Inukhet

Level 5 Khetim Noble, apparent age 65, second Guardian of Zerzura.

Personality: Inukhet is the most aloof of all the Guardians, and clearly has little regard for the adventurers. She is clearly not one to suffer fools gladly. Nevertheless, her devotion to the Immortal Ones is very strong. She clearly expects to succeed Ameny as senior guardian very soon.

Attributes: Might 9, Skill 19, Luck 21, Wits 21, Will 16, Grace 13.

Combat: Initiative 24, Melee +9, Missile +12, Basic Defence Class 17, Hits Total 28.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +9, Danger Evasion +12, Mystic Fortitude +10*, Physical Vigor +9**.

Personal Charisma: +8 (+13 to Khetim).

Weapon of Choice: Quarterstaff (*Was staff*) – special.

Background Talents: Scholar, Orator.

Mythic Items: Was Staff of Immortals, Ankh Amulet.

* This score takes into account the +2 bonus granted by the *Was Staff of Immortals*.

** This score takes into account the +2 bonus granted by the *Ankh Amulet*.

(**Note:** If Inukhet has replaced Ameny as senior guardian, she will have his *Was Staff of Immortals*)

Sensirios

Level 4 Midian Elementalist (Water & Light), apparent age 45, third Guardian of Zerzura.

Personality: Most striking in appearance of all the Guardians, Sensirios is as warm and gentle as Inukhet is cold and remote. It is quite possible that she will form a romantic attachment with one of the characters – or, indeed, that one of them will fall for her...

Attributes: Might 13, Skill 13, Luck 18, Wits 18, Will 20, Grace 15.

Combat: Initiative 14, Melee +5, Missile +7, Basic Defence Class 15, Hits Total 14.

Magic: Elemental Mastery +7, Mystic Strength 19, Power Points 20. *Her primary element is water.*

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +5, Danger Evasion +10, Mystic Fortitude +11*, Physical Vigor +10**.

Personal Charisma: +9 (+13 to Minor NPCs).

Background Talents: Scholar, Healer.

Mythic Items: Was Staff of Immortals, Ankh Amulet.

Mentu

Level 4 Khettim Hunter, apparent age 30, senior Guardian of Zerzura.

Personality: Graceful and gracious, Mentu will seem the perfect host, and is the Guardian with whom the adventurers are likely to spend most time. However, beneath his friendly exterior, Mentu does have a hot temper – which will certainly come to the forefront if the arrival of these latest ‘truth-seekers’ deviates from normal expectations...

Attributes: Might 12, Skill 19, Luck 16, Wits 15, Will 11, Grace 13.

Combat: Initiative 16, Melee +6, Missile +8, Basic Defence Class 14, Hits Total 16.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +6, Danger Evasion +4, Mystic Fortitude +5*, Physical Vigor +4**.

Personal Charisma: +3.

Weapon of Choice: Quarterstaff (Was staff) – special.

Special Ability: Hunting Bonus +6.

Background Talents: Desert Scout, Healer.

Mythic Items: Was Staff of Immortals, Ankh Amulet.

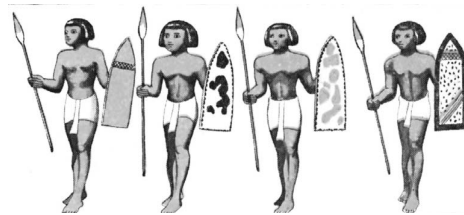
* This score takes into account the +2 bonus granted by the Was Staff of Immortals.

** This score takes into account the +2 bonus granted by the Ankh Amulet.

The Stubblings

The profiles for the 6+1D6 Stubblings who remain to defend the Gate of Zerzura are as detailed in the *Mythic Bestiary of Minotaur* Issue 5 (page 42). However, their leader Wes has a Ferocity of Aggressive (+1) rather than Peaceful (+0), giving him an Initiative of 14, a Melee Attack of +2, and a Hits Total of 6 (and a Glory of 10) – other stats as in the standard Stubbling profile.

Last Guard of Rahotep



Taxonomy : Spirit

Description : See illustration.

Size : Medium

Ferocity : Deadly

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 60'

Initiative : 17

Melee Attack : +7

Damage : 1d6 (weapon)

Defense Class : 22 (with shield)

Hits Total : 20

Detection / Evasion : +4

Mystic Fortitude : +8

Special Abilities : Charge Into Battle (Initiative 19, Melee +9), Fearsome*, Magic Resistance, Mindless, Sixth Sense, Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin, Uncanny Agility.

Awards : None (they fight on the heroes' side, remember?).

* This special ability reflects the impact of the Last Guard's supernatural aura on the minions and servitors of the Dark Gods

Members of the Last Guard are also able to perform the Shield Wall special maneuver.

Rahotep himself has exactly the same stats and abilities as the members of the Last Guard but also has the *Regeneration* special ability, which reflects the heavier gear that was placed upon him by the Powers That Be. .

Enemies of the Adventurers

The Dark God Cultists

The Enemy at the Gate is made up, first and foremost, of a number of Dark Cultists equal in number to the player characters (but always at least three, and no more than five).

Depending upon the level of the characters, and their classes, the Maze Master will need to choose carefully which of the following Cultists will be suitable opponents. However, Akensheut will always be included as the leader of the Cultists. If the Maze Master feels that even the full set of five Dark God Cultists (and three Typhonian Beasts, don't forget...) is insufficient challenge to the players, he may add 1D6 *minor NPC fighters* (minions of the Dark Cultists) and/or an extra *Typhonian Beast*.

If captured, Akensheut will not be easily intimidated, and will resist most attempts to gain information from him. However, he is a leading Cultist, and does know, for instance, the identity of the head of the Circle of Sobek – the nomarch of Om-kibor, no less! He knows, however, very little about the other two Circles – the Circles of Typhon and Set. Akensheut is a cunning opponent, and will take advantage of any opportunity that the characters may give him to escape on the journey back to Kebet.

Sholankh

Level 4 Khettim Priestess of Typhon, age 38.

Personality: Sholank is an icy, emotionless creature, who hides her true visage behind a black mask engraved with sinister symbols. She is an individual of few words, unlike the bombastic Akensheut – but she does enjoy whispering the following into the ear of every dying opponent: *'The Lone God awaits you!'*

Attributes: Might 16, Skill 14, Luck 18, Wits 10, Will 19, Grace 9.

Combat: Initiative 11, Melee +6, Missile +4, Basic Defence Class 15, Hits Total 16.

Magic: Spiritual Aura +7, Mystic Strength 19, Power Points 20.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +6, Danger Evasion +7, Mystic Fortitude +7, Phys Vigor +9.

Personal Charisma: +7 (+12 to followers & priests of the Dark Cult).

Background Talents: Scholar, Beastmaster.

Possessions: Black mask and dagger (which she *will* use if all else fails).

Note: *Most unusually, the Cult of the Dark God includes both priestesses and priests, even though all three of the Dark Gods are male.*



*The evil Sorcerer Akensheut
(noticed the Amulet of Set ?)*

Akensheut

Level 5 Khettim Sorcerer, aged 49, high-ranking member of the Circle of Sobek, and leader of the Dark Cult assault on Zerzura.

Personality: Akensheut is a supremely-confident, incredibly arrogant servant of the Dark Gods, and is well-versed in the ways of the Cult of Dark Gods. His great weakness is that he will taunt his opponents at every given opportunity, sometimes overlooking in his self-assurance the flaws that may exist in his plans.

Attributes: Might 14, Skill 14, Luck 13, Wits 19, Will 18, Grace 11.

Combat: Initiative 15, Melee +3, Missile +6, Basic Defence Class 13, Hits Total 17.

Magic: Psychic Gift +7, Mystic Strength 19, Power Points 23.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +3, Danger Evasion +8, Mystic Fortitude +6*, Phys Vig +5.

Personal Charisma: +4 (+9 to Minor NPCs).

Background Talents: Scholar, Healer.

Mythic Items: Amulet of Set, Ring of Summoning (a special item that allows the wearer, if he knows the right incantation, to summon 1D6 Typhonian Beasts once per day).

* *This score takes into account the +2 bonus granted by the Amulet of Set.*

Other Possessions: Copy of Map of Amenteti, Sorcerer's staff, dagger, and pouch containing 10 gold coins.

Kamun

Level 3 Khettim Noble, aged 26.

Personality: The handsome Kamun is a member of an ancient and venerable noble house; his uncle is the current nomarch of Amedfa. In the fullness of time, Kamun might hope for an important position in the royal court himself. However, Kamun is both ambitious and impetuous, and has no intention of waiting. He is a relatively recent recruit to the Cult of the Dark Gods – but, given his connections, a very useful one.

Attributes: Might 12, Skill 16, Luck 20, Wits 12, Will 10, Grace 19.

Combat: Initiative 12, Melee +6, Missile +6, Basic Defence Class 17*, Hits Total 20.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +6, Danger Evasion +5*, Mystic Fortitude +9*, Physical Vigor +4.

Personal Charisma: +8 (+11 to Khettim).

Weapon of Choice: Spear.

Background Talents: Desert Scout, Musician.

Mythic Items: Amulet of Protection.

** These scores takes into account the +1 bonus granted by the Amulet of Protection.*

Other Possessions: Bow, spear, flute, and pouch with 8 gold coins and two rubies, each worth 5 gc.

Ipyset

Level 3 Khettim Hunter, aged 29.

Personality: Ipyset is an unpleasant and unkempt Khettim, given to vile oaths, and with an exceedingly lustful disposition. Given half a chance, he'll try to have his wicked way with any captured opponent – male or female – and it is said that his debauched affections are not confined to humans. His scarred visage bears testimony to his involvement in many hunts and battles.

Attributes: Might 13, Skill 20, Luck 14, Wits 18, Will 12, Grace 10.

Combat: Initiative 17, Melee +6, Missile +8, Basic Defence Class 13, Hits Total 15.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +6, Danger Evasion +4, Mystic Fortitude +1, Phys Vigor +2.

Personal Charisma: +1.

Weapon of Choice: Bow.

Special Abilities: +4 to missile damage versus Beasts or Monsters; Hunting Bonus +7.

Background Talents: Desert Scout, Bowyer.

Mythic Items: Bow of Marksmanship (see *Minotaur* n4 for full description).

Other Possessions: Quiver full of arrows, three javelins.

Bhohan

Level 3 Charybdian Barbarian, aged 35.

Personality: Bhohan is a colossal man-mountain, who several years ago escaped a lifetime of brutal servitude within the household of a high-ranking Khettim noble by strangling his master. Eventually, a fugitive and half-starved, he was found and taken in by the Circle of Sobek – which has since found ample use for his muscles. His many tribulations, alas, have only served to dehumanise him. His delight in the pain of others mirrors the suffering he himself once knew as a slave.

Attributes: Might 19, Skill 13, Luck 16, Wits 10, Will 14, Grace 13.

Combat: Initiative 11, Melee +7, Missile +3, Basic Defence Class 14, Hits Total 24.

Saving Rolls: Athletic Prowess +7, Danger Evasion +3, Mystic Fortitude +4, Phys Vigor +7.

Personal Charisma: +4 (+7 to Charybdians).

Weapon of Choice: Axe.

Special Abilities: +4 to damage with Barbarian melee weapon; +1 to EDC vs melee attacks (unless surprised or wearing a breastplate).

Background Talents: Woodsman, Wrestler.

Possessions: Axe.

Typhonian Beast

Taxonomy : Monster

Description : Unspeakable. I mean, just take a look at the illustration (p 67).

Size : Large

Ferocity : Deadly

Cunning : Average

Mystique : Eldritch

Movement : 90'

Initiative : 15

Melee Attack : +8

Damage : 2d6 (bite)

Defense Class : 18

Hits Total : 36

Detection / Evasion : 0

Mystic Fortitude : +8

Special Abilities : Entangle (20' reach, Might = 20), Fearsome, Magic Resistance, Mindless, Poison (bite, paralysis), Regeneration (2 Hits / round), Supernatural Vigor, Tough Skin.

Awards : Glory 440, Wisdom 40.

Appendix B : Designer's Notes

The Real Zerzura: Inspirations for an Adventure...

'All you need for a good script is an original idea...it doesn't have to be *your* original idea.' (*Malcolm Hulke, script-writer*)

The inspiration behind ***The Secret of Zerzura*** began with a viewing of the film *The English Patient* (itself based on the book of that name by Michael Ondaatje). *The English Patient* tells a heavily-fictionalised account of the story of Count László Almásy, a Hungarian adventurer who in the 1920s and 1930s was a leading member of the 'Club Zerzura', a band of desert cartographers and explorers who spent much of their time hunting for the legendary 'Shangri-la of the sands' – Zerzura.

Zerzura was long rumoured to have existed deep in the Sahara Desert. The allure – and danger – of the deep desert dates back at least to Herodotus, who recorded that the Persian king Cambyses once lost a great army in the desert wastelands – the incident that, of course, inspired the Lost Army of Rahotep in part 3 of ***The Secret of Zerzura***. But the first certain mention of the name *Zerzura* – which in Arabic means 'Oasis of Little Birds' – dates from the 13th century. Later, in the 15th century, an anonymous treasure-hunter's guide entitled ***Kitab al Kanuz*** ('The Book of Hidden Pearls' in Arabic) describes Zerzura as a white-washed city of the desert, on whose gate is carved a bird. The description of Zerzura given in part 1 of ***The Secret of Zerzura*** (Minotaur 5) was taken directly from this 15th century manuscript.

Another intriguing tale is that of a camel driver called Hamid Keila, who in 1481 was rescued from the deep desert, following an unusually severe sandstorm, by a group of men the like of whom he had never seen before. They were tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed. What is more, they carried straight swords, not scimitars. The strange men came from a city in the desert called Zerzura where they took the half-dead Keila and treated him with kindness. The citadel was well watered with springs, and vines and palms sprouted, and the dwellings were richly furnished. The people of Zerzura spoke Arabic, but with many peculiar words that the camel driver could not understand until they were carefully explained. The strange people were evidently not Muslims, because their fair-skinned women were unveiled, and Hamid Keila saw no mosque and heard no muzzein.

Some months later, the camel driver turned up in Benghazi, and was brought before the local Emir, to whom he told his tale. The Emir asked the camel driver how he came to be in Benghazi. Looking uncomfortable, he said he escaped one moonless night when he had regained his strength, and after a difficult journey north had arrived in Benghazi. The Emir was puzzled and wondered why, if his rescuers were so kindly, it had been necessary to escape. The Emir ordered his guards to search the luckless camel driver and they discovered in his robes a huge ruby set in a gold ring. Asked how he had obtained the stone, Hamid Keila could not answer and the Emir judged that he had stolen it from people who, although apparently infidels, had shown him great kindness. The Emir ordered the unfortunate man to be taken into the desert again and to have his hands cut off. Had the hapless camel driver encountered the descendants of a lost band of Teutonic crusader knights?

The first European reference to Zerzura comes from 1835, from the English Egyptologist John Gardner Wilkinson, based on the report of an Arab who claimed to have found the oasis whilst searching for a lost camel. According to Wilkinson, the oasis abounded 'in palms, with springs, and some ruins of uncertain date'. The hunt for Zerzura began in earnest between the two World Wars – but although explorers, including Count Almásy, found evidence of human settlement from days when the Sahara Desert region was far less harsh than today (such as the exquisitely-beautiful Cave of Swimmers), of Zerzura and its hidden treasures there was no such trace. Over the centuries, Zerzura has joined the ranks of Camelot, Shangri-la and El Dorado as a mythic place of wonder and delights.

But what if, in Mythika, Zerzura truly existed? This is the premise underlying ***The Secret of Zerzura***.

Andrew Pearce (2010)

ALMANAC OF MYTHIKA

MYTHIKAN CALENDARS

by Anagnosis of Thena, translated by Andrew Pearce

*'This thing all things devours:
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel;
Grinds hard stones to meal;
Slays king, ruins town,
And beats high mountain down.'*

(Ancient Sphinx riddle, as recorded by the noted Minean scholar Tolkenos¹)

The answer, of course, is **time**. Time, the devourer of all things. Time, the measure by which men mark the passage of seasons and years, the rise and fall of cities, sages and kings. Time, which governs when to sow, when to reap, when we are born, when we die.

Marking the advance of time is something that men have been doing since first they looked up into the heavens, and marvelled at the regular, cyclical movements of the celestial bodies through the skies, and the slower yet just as certain passage of the year from summer to winter and back to summer again. In time, men learned to allocate names to discrete periods of time - hours, days, weeks, months and years.

We Mineans are so used to how the passage of time is marked that we scarcely give it a moment's thought. But how did the present-day conventions of our calendar come into existence? And how do they differ from those observed in other lands - as in many cases they do? These are questions that I will strive to answer in the first part of my latest encyclopaedic enquiry, *The Almanac of Mythika*.

The Music of the Spheres

The marking of the passage of time cannot be separated from our observation of the movement of certain celestial objects through the heavens above (The skies above Mythika, incidentally, will be the main topic of discussion in part two of *The Almanac*). For now, it will suffice to note that whereas most of the bright heavenly lights - the **stars** - move through the skies according to a fixed pattern relative to one another, our Minean forebears noticed long ago that a small number of these lights moved according to different principles that were harder to predict. Their 'dance' through the heavens - according to the mysterious, unfathomable *music of the spheres* - has fascinated

¹ Oddly enough, in our own reality continuum, this riddle can be found in a fantasy novel called « *The Hobbit* », by one J.R.R Tolkien.



Once again, Anagnosis of Thena draws his mighty Stylus of Scholarly Sapience to enlighten the masses

philosophers and sages for centuries. These heavenly wanderers came to be known as the **planets**, and from the Age of Myth onwards they have been recognised as being seven in number.

Brother Sun, Sister Moon

Two of these planets are acknowledged as the greater lights, governing day and night, and are known as **Helios** (also known as Sol, or the Sun) and **Selene** (also known as Luna, or the Moon).

Sometimes these greater lights have been the focus for divine worship; and though we Mineans know better than to bow down before them as the heathens do, we still recognise that there is a strong association between them and certain of the gods - notably Apollo and Artemis.

Long ago, we Mineans observed that the journeying of the Sun through the heavens followed a particular cycle that takes $365\frac{1}{4}$ days² to complete, as through the year he seems to rise higher and lower in the sky, giving days that grow progressively longer or shorter from one solstice to the next.

² In the 'real world', the length of the year is 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds - which is why even having leap years every four years doesn't quite remove the small but increasing discrepancies that creep into the modern Western Calendar with the passage of very large periods of time. However, applying the mysterious 'Law of Simple Solutions' that rightly seems to be at work in M&M, let us assume that Anagnosis is correct and that the Mythikan solar year is exactly $365\frac{1}{4}$ days long.



Helios and Selene (a.k.a Brother Sun and Sister Moon) posing together for the titanic family album

This cycle – the so-called solar cycle – coincides with the passing of spring to summer, summer to autumn, autumn to winter and winter back to spring again. It is not surprising, therefore, that this solar cycle – which so precisely marks the passage of the seasons – came to be regarded, at least from the Age of Magic onwards, as the obvious way to mark the progression from one year to the next.

(No convincing explanation, incidentally, has ever been put forward as to why the cycle of the year amounts to the peculiar number of 365¼ days. Why not 365, or 366? Why this curious imprecision? If the gods know the answer, they have not deigned to reveal it to mortal man).

However, although the journeying of the Sun gives us the most logical method for discerning the passing of the seasons, it is not the only, or even indeed the oldest method that man has employed to measure the march of time. In the Age of Myth, it seems, most cultures used a different scheme based not upon the movements of the great light of the day, but rather those of his more mysterious sister, the great light of the night – the Moon.

Again, long ago, our earliest ancestors perceived that the Moon observed her own cycle, during which she moved through phases of greater and lesser luminosity – at her most radiant, displaying a bright disc of light known as the Full Moon, at her dimmest the merest sliver of light that became known as the New Moon. The cycle from one New Moon to the next is 29½ days.³

³ In our world, the length of the lunar cycle is actually 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes and 3 seconds. Again, we shall assume that Anagnosis is correct and that the Mythika lunar month is exactly 29½ days long.

This cycle – the so-called lunar cycle – is marked by a period of time known as a **month**.

Curiously, by some mystical gift, or curse (generally ascribed to the goddess Aphrodite), the onset of the bodily issue of blood observed within women occurs at 28 day intervals – and in some cultures, this is referred to as the woman's 'moon-time'.

Thus, amongst Mineans, as indeed amongst many other cultures of Mythika, two contrasting methodologies for marking the passage of time evolved: one based upon the development of so-called lunar calendars, and the other upon the development of so-called solar calendars (with the former, more ancient, method of calculation being usurped and replaced by the latter – in many parts of Mythika, as far as I can tell, this change coincided with the beginning of the Age of Magic).

The great draw-back of lunar calendars is that they do not allow their users to keep track of the passage of the seasons, and so are of no use at all to farmers – and this, more than any other reason, is undoubtedly why solar calendars came to displace them (the theory promulgated by Thyatira of Amazonia, the renowned socio-historian, that the triumph of solar calendars over their lunar counterparts represents the 'supposed victory of phallogentric brutish patriarchy over the more subtle and sophisticated norms of life-enhancing matriarchy' is one that I most heartily reject!).⁴

⁴ But doubtless this theory would be enthusiastically endorsed by occasional Minotaur contributor Danielle R Virgo!

The Minean Calendar

Months of the Year

The Minean Calendar, of course, is the one with which all Mineans are immediately familiar (indeed, many Mineans are entirely ignorant of the fact that most other cultures use different calendars). Although the modern Minean Calendar is a solar one, the echoes of a one-time lunar calendar remain in the division of the year into twelve months that can be equated, very approximately, with the true months observed under a lunar calendar.

These twelve months are divided equally between the four seasons; and each month is named after one or other of the twelve Olympian gods. Most of the months have something in their character that reflects an aspect of the god to which they are dedicated. The Minean Calendar begins – as do most Mythikan calendars – in the spring, and, in order, the months of the year are as follows:

Month of Hera (Hereon): Marks the beginning of spring, and the month when marriages are blessed more frequently than at any other time of year. In war-time, many young men and women consummate their marriages in Hereon so as to give the wife a chance to conceive before her husband goes to war – and possible death.⁵

Month of Ares (Areson): Marks the beginning of the war season – the six-month period of the year during which warfare is traditionally permitted.⁶

Month of Aphrodite (Aphroditeon): Marks a month dedicated to fertility, young love, and joyful abandon. Appropriately, therefore, dedicated to the goddess of love.

Month of Apollo (Apollleon): The first month of summer, and the one during which the longest days fall - therefore dedicated, appropriately, to Apollo.

Month of Athena (Atheneon): A golden month, usually blessed with exceptionally good weather. Often a month for battle, during which Athena as goddess of victory is invoked. Also the month (in Thena, at least) during which new magistrates begin their yearly term of office, this time invoking Athena as goddess of justice and righteousness.

Month of Hephaestus (Hephaesteon): The hottest month of the year. This month, appropriately, is dedicated to the god of the furnace and volcano.

Month of Demeter (Demetreon): The beginning of autumn, and the month of great harvest, dedicated to the fruitful Demeter, goddess of the earth.

Month of Artemis (Artemiseon): The month of the hunter-goddess. Warfare was no longer permitted, supposedly, during the six months thereafter; but by way of compensation, the hunting-season reaches its climax at this time of year.

Month of Poseidon (Poseideon): The beginning of a four month period during which sailing is considered ill-advised is marked by a month dedicated to Poseidon.

Month of Hestia (Hestion): As winter truly begins, and the longest nights fall, this month is dedicated to Hestia as goddess of home and hearth (where most people spend the majority of their time in this month if they have any sense). Some dark cults call this month **Hadeon** in honour of Hades, god of the underworld.

Month of Hermes (Hermeon): As journeying by land or sea becomes even more perilous at this time of year, this month is dedicated to Hermes – the god who protects travellers.

Month of Zeus (Zoseon): The reason why the twelfth month of the year is named after Zeus is not entirely clear. Zeus, of course, is lord of thunder and storms, but these are not especially prevalent at this time of year over and above certain other times. The most likely explanation is that, as lord of the Olympians, and as supreme judge, Zeus is given the 'honour' of closing the year – and, of course, is thereby placed next to his wife Hera, who opens the new year that follows.

Mystery of the Missing Days

It is not at all clear why Zoseon – the month dedicated to the lord of the Olympians – should have the fewest number of days. However, every fourth year (in years according to the current Age of Heroes divisible by four, e.g. most recently 332 AH, 336 AH, and 340 AH), an extra day is added to the end of the year, giving Zoseon 29 days.

There are many tales and theories which attempt to explain or justify this strange fact. According to most scholars, Zeus himself took those three days out of time to build himself some secret place located outside the universal flow of time itself.

Some ancient tales, however, tell a different (and slightly more *risqué*) story. Long ago, during the Age of Myth, Hera's month was originally 28 days and Zeus' was 31 days. However, jealous Hera, fed up at yet another one of Zeus' many infidelities, tricked her husband in some way (perhaps he lost a bet with her on something or other?), and the forfeit she made Zeus pay was to surrender 3 days to her - making her month 31 days and reducing him to 28. However, as a partial compensation, Hera agreed that every 4 years Zeus could get an extra day. *'Don't be too saddened, my love, cooed the cunning Hera, 'length isn't everything'.*

⁵ *The month of Hereon is the equivalent of March in the modern Western Calendar of the 'real world', and the other months continue thereafter in succession – Areson equivalent to April, Aphroditeon to May, Apollleon to June, etc.*

⁶ *Sadly, despite the 'theory' that warfare could only be observed during the six permitted months of the year, this custom was more often observed in the breach than in the honouring, especially in lands far beyond the Minean influence, such as Umbria and Hyperborea. Heroic quests and the like, of course, do not count as 'warfare'.*

MINEAN CALENDAR



SPRING

HEREON

ARESON

APHRODITEON

SUMMER

APOLLEON

ATHENEON

HEPHAESTEON

AUTUMN

DEMETREON

ARTEMISEON

POSEIDEON

WINTER

HESTION

HERMEON

ZOSEON

The length of the months varies, as 365 days cannot, of course, be divided equally by twelve. Most months have 31 days; some have 30 days; whilst one, Zoseon, has 28. A rhyme for remembering the days of the month is as follows:

*Thirty days hath Demetreon,
Areson, Apolleon and dull Poseideon;
All the rest have thirty one,
Except Zoseon, which has twenty-eight days clear,
And twenty-nine in each leap year.⁷*

Days of the Week

The Mineans, in common with many other cultures, follow a seven-day week. Each day of the week is named after the seven planets (Helios, Selene, plus the five 'lesser planets') that follow their own unique paths through the heavens.

In order, the days of the week in the Minean Calendar are the days of **Helios, Selene, Heraklon, Argo, Seriphon, Thenos** and **Proteon**.

Of course, it is common knowledge that the five 'lesser planets' also give their names to five great Minean or proto-Minean cultures; namely those of the Three Cities, Seriphos and Proteus.

Although the seven-day cycle was probably well-established as long ago as the Age of Myth, and is found in all places of Minean rule or influence today, it is uncertain when exactly the current names became attached to the various days – possibly sometime in the Age of Magic, possibly as late as the first century of the current Age of Heroes (especially if Polybios' hypothesis about the naming of the planets is correct – see below).⁸

Some religious cults have developed attachments to certain days of the week. For example, devotees of Ares often honour the day of Heraklon above all others; disciples of Athene generally keep the day of Thenos as a high-day; adherents of Hermes have a special regard for the day of Argo; and followers of Apollo undoubtedly favour the day of Helios over other days. But it is a mistake to think that all cults follow this logic. Followers of Aphrodite, for example, do not think of the day of Selene as being particularly important – Full Moons and New Moons, on the night of whatever weekday they occur, are far more special to them.

⁷ Any resemblance the Minean calendar bears to the modern Western Calendar of the 'real world' (the so-called Gregorian Calendar) in terms of the distribution of months of particular lengths is, of course, entirely co-incidental! Minotaurians may well recognise echoes of this rhyme in one commonly-known in the English-speaking world today.

⁸ Again, by curious chance, the order of the days of the Minean week resemble the order of the days in the Western Calendar of the 'real world', themselves based on classical antecedents: for the day of Helios, read Sunday / dies Solis; for the day of Selene, read Monday / dies Lunae; for the day of Heraklon, read Tuesday / dies Martis; for the day of Argo, read Wednesday / dies Mercurii; for the day of Seriphon, read Thursday / dies Jovis; for the day of Thenos, read Friday / dies Veneris; and for the day of Proteon, read Saturday / dies Saturni.

The Naming of the Planets

It is currently a matter of some scholarly debate as to which came first: the naming of the cities, or the naming of the 'lesser planets'. The consensus view, until recently little challenged, was that the planets received their names first – probably in the Age of Myth by the proto-Mineans – and the fact that some of the cities (i.e. Argos, Heraklia and Thena) are relatively recent, dating only with certainty from the beginning of the current Age of Heroes, would seem to support this argument.

However, Polybios of Dekelea, in a recent paper given at the Akademia, has put forward the hypothesis that the planets had other names in earlier ages, now forgotten, and that rather than the cities being named after the planets, the planets were actually named after the cities, in relatively recent times. Polybios has not, alas, produced much in the way of hard evidence for this theory, but I nevertheless find it a rather attractive one.

In common with most Mythikan cultures, the Mineans regard the rising of the sun as the beginning of a new day. It is customary to divide the daylight period into twelve hours – with the sixth hour coinciding with noon. As a result, the exact length of an hour will vary considerably depending upon the time of year.

Calendars of Other Cultures

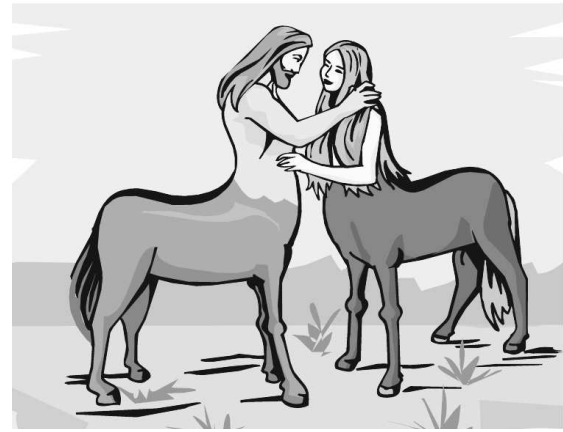
The Minean Calendar is commonly used wherever Mineans have settled. Nevertheless, there are many other Calendars in use within Mythika today.

Amazons

The Amazons – not surprisingly, given that they are a female culture where the worship of Artemis, a moon goddess, is highly favoured – have retained their ancient lunar calendar. This consists of twelve lunar months, beginning on the night of a New Moon, and alternating in length (i.e. a 29-day month followed by a 30-day). This Amazon 'year', at 354 days, is a little shorter than the Minean one.

The names of the months are most certainly *not* derived from the Olympian gods, most of whom the Amazons abhor; but though the names are clearly of some mystical significance, their exact meaning is known only to the Amazons themselves.

The Amazons have a seven-day week, like the Mineans, but each day is named after one of the seven Amazon Houses, beginning with the day of Antianera – the royal house – which is held in highest honour. The nights of the Full and New Moons are also of great religious significance. More surprisingly, perhaps, the Amazons also observe the solstices and equinoxes – most notably the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice, when their fertility rites, the Sacred Mysteries of Artemis, are performed. Unlike most peoples, the Amazon day begins not at dawn but at sunset.



- I've got a good feelin' for this Spring equinox, babe...

Centaur

The Centaurs use a simple solar calendar that makes no distinction for the months of the year at all – simply the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter. Nor, it seems, do they bother with naming days, or grouping them into weeks – one day is much the same as another to the Centaur temperament. They do observe the equinoxes and solstices – probably borrowing from the Galleans – but in a decidedly low-key manner. For Centaurs, the New Year begins with the Spring Equinox, which falls in the Minean month of Hereon. The Centaur day begins at sunrise.

Hyperborea

The Gallean tribes, rather like the Centaurs, use a simple solar calendar based upon the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter, with no months as such. The equinoxes and solstices are very important to them, and their Druids have surprisingly sophisticated means of calculating them, involving the use of hallowed places made up of standing stones circles. For Galleans, the New Year begins with the Winter Solstice, which falls in the Minean month of Hestion, and the day begins at sunrise. Galleans observe a nine-day week, with each day named after one or other of their gods: in order, they are the days of Belenos, Danu, Ogmios, Taranis, Belisima, Dagda, Lyr, Morrigan and Gorbannon (only the Horned God seems not to have a day dedicated to him).

Less is known about how the Cimbrians and Thuleans mark the passage of time. However, both break the year down into two (rather than four) seasons, known as Sun Time and Ice Time. The equinoxes mark the transition from one season to the other. Little is known about how – if at all – they name or observe the days of the week.⁹

⁹ *The uncanny accuracy of the Gallean calculation of the equinoxes and solstices is reminiscent of the similarly remarkable mathematical skill of the pre-Celtic peoples responsible for building Stonehenge in Britain in the 3rd millennium BC. The nine-day Gallean week perhaps echoes the nine-night week observed by the ancient Celts.*

Charybdis

Very little is currently known about Charybdis methods of marking the passage of time, but it seems that the lunar cycle is more important to them than the solar one. There are two clearly-defined seasons in Charybdis: a dry season (roughly equivalent to Areson to Demetreon) and a wet season (roughly equivalent to Artemiseon to Hereon). Different tribes seem to have ceremonial weeks of differing lengths – for those in the far north, near the coasts of the Middle Sea (perhaps under Minean or Midian influence) these are usually six or seven days long; but further south, in deepest Charybdis, five-day weeks seem rather more common. Most Charybdisians fear the night, and the coming of dawn therefore heralds the start of each new day.

Desert Kingdom

To quote from my earlier work (*Observations of the Desert Kingdom*):

*'Since ancient times the Khetim have divided the year into twelve months, each of thirty days. These twelve months are divided into three seasons: Inundation or **akhet** (the time when the Khet is in flood), Winter or **peret** (the time when the sowing takes place), and Summer or **shemu** (the season of harvest). At the end of the year there are five additional intercalary days of celebration, each dedicated to one of the primary gods (minus Typhon). Every fourth year a sixth intercalary day is added, dedicated to the god of chaos.'*

Inundation, the first season of the year, runs roughly from Atheneon to Artemiseon; winter runs from Poseideon to Zoseon; and summer runs from Hereon to Apolleon. The months of the year are known simply as 'First month of Inundation', 'Second month of Winter', 'Fourth month of Summer', etc. Each month is made up of three weeks of ten days. The days themselves are named after fantastical creatures that were revered or feared by the ancient Khetim. In order, they are the days of the Phoenix, Griffin, Sphinx, Hydra, Dragon, Manticore, Pegasus, Salamander, Asheeba, and Unicorn. The Khetim day begins at sunrise. The Desert Kingdom Calendar is quite possibly the oldest still in regular use in Mythika.¹⁰

Land of the Sun

The calendar in widespread use within the Land of the Sun – first devised in the Age of Myth by the ancient Hazirian civilisation – is, like that that used in the Desert Kingdom, a solar calendar based on a year of twelve months of thirty days. However, there the similarities end. Each month is made up of five weeks, each consisting of six days. These six days are named, in order, Sunday, Moonday, Fireday, Skyday, Waterday and Earthday – i.e. they are named after the greater celestial lights, and the four primordial elements of the universe. The months of the year are named after the gods of the ancient Hazirian pantheon. A 'normal' year, according to the Land of the Sun calendar, is 360 days

¹⁰ The calendar of the Desert Kingdom is very close to that of ancient Egypt. The main difference is that while the Egyptians did add intercalary days to the year's end to bring the total of days up to 365, they never added a sixth in the leap year, which tended to make their calendar progressively less accurate with the passage of time.

long - 5¼ shorter than the true solar year. After six years, this 'shortfall' amounts to 31½ days – long enough to require the addition of a thirteenth 'leap month' of 30 days every six years. This still leaves a shortfall of 1½ days, which after twenty-four years has become 6 days long. At this point, a special festival week (the 'jubilee week') is added, bringing the cycle of the calendar and the solar cycle back into harmony with one another. According to the Land of the Sun Calendar, the New Year begins with the Spring Equinox; and each new day begins at sunrise.¹¹

Midia

The official calendar used in Midia is virtually identical to that used in the Land of the Sun. However, Midia is such a multi-ethnic society that several other calendars are also in common use, most notably the Minean Calendar. The Midians seem quite relaxed about this potentially confusing situation, and from a young age most Midians learn how to move back and forth between different calendar systems with ease.

Proteus

Perhaps the oldest of all calendar systems, little is now known about the ancient Protean method of calculating the passage of time. What we do know is that this long-dead scheme was a lunar calendar, with a 7-day week.

Tritonis

The calendar of Tritonis is identical in every way to the Minean Calendar, save that each of the days is named after one of the seven noble Tritonian Houses. The months are named simply 'first month', 'second month', 'third month', etc. The first month of the year is the equivalent of Hereon.

Umbria

This is identical to the Tritonian calendar, save in one respect: instead of a 7-day week, there is a 5-day week in which each day is named for one of the five kingdoms of Umbria. There is some evidence that the earliest Umbrians used a 7-day week, but that at some point early in the Age of Heroes they switched to a 5-day week as a deliberate attempt to mark themselves out from their neighbours.¹²

Atlantis & Sybaris

The Atlantean calendar is little-understood but is thought to involve a mathematically complex synthesis of solar and lunar cycles. It is believed that an adapted form of the Atlantean calendar is used in Sybaris, a former colony of Atlantis.

Next Issue: Mythic Skies.

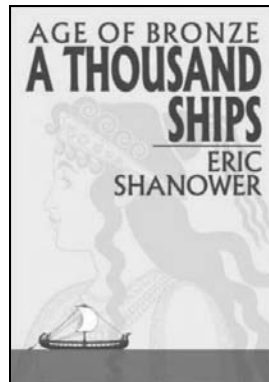
¹¹ The Land of the Sun Calendar is similar to those used by the Sumerians, Babylonians and Persians.

¹² The fact that the Umbrians switched from a 7-day to a 5-day week is rather reminiscent of the way that Soviet Russia – a highly-regimented, somewhat paranoid society, not unlike that of the Umbrians – experimented for a time in the 1920s and 1930s with both 5-day and 6-day weeks.

Muse's Corner

A semi-regular column about books, movies and other sources of inspiration for Maze Masters

GRAPHIC EPICS



Back in our first issue, I was telling you about *Wrath of the Titans*, the official Bluewater comic book sequel to the *Clash of the Titans* movie... and probably one of the most M&M-esque graphic mini-series ever published... but there are many other excellent comic books and graphic novels worthy of a Maze Master's attention as sources of inspiration for scenarios or even whole campaigns. This issue, we take a closer look at two very different comic book series set in the so-called age of heroes...

Eric Shanower's **Age of Bronze** (Image Comics) is a monumental, very detailed retelling of the Trojan War, which favors historical verisimilitude over mythical grandeur; the costumes, weapons, ships and buildings of the Achaeans are pure Bronze Age (as opposed to the more extravagant mix of different time periods usually associated with mythic Greece in movies like *Troy* (or in *Mazes & Minotaurs*) and the culture of Troy is vividly recreated from what we know about the Hittites, often considered to be the 'historical Trojans'. A lot of thought and scholarly research have gone into this work and the result is a very compelling narrative, which manages to shed a new light on a very old story by taking it back to its true Bronze Age roots.

In keeping with this realistic approach, psychology over mythology, the various fantastic elements of the Homeric tale are rationalized (Nymphs are 'just' human priestesses living in the woods, Chiron the Centaur is a normal human with only two legs etc) and the gods mainly exist in the minds of their mortal worshippers, leaving the human protagonists solely responsible for their actions and decisions - whereas the aforementioned *Troy* movie simply removed the gods from the picture and replaced them with... nothing, creating an embarrassing vacuum in the substance of the tale. No such mistake here: Shanower clearly knows what kind of

story he wants to tell us. With 29 issues published, *Age of Bronze* is far from over and its completion will likely take a few more years; this is clearly a lifetime's work, as well as a labor of love, which anyone interested in the story of the Trojan War should check.

And even though the fantastic elements of the tale have been deliberately downplayed, this series is nonetheless a great source of inspiration for Maze Masters, especially for campaigns featuring the Umbrians, who are (more or less) modelled after the historical Achaeans of the Bronze Age (whereas the Land of the Three Cities, Mythika's equivalent of mythic Greece, is clearly rooted in Homer, mythic tales and Hollywood movies).

Radical Publishing's new adventures of **Hercules**, written by Steve Moore, also choose to downplay the more fantastic aspects of a well-known legend, but in a very different style. Here, the mythic hero Hercules is portrayed as an invincible, Howardian warrior rather than as a superstrong demigod, at least in its first five-issue miniseries, **The Thracian Wars** (illustrated by Admira Wijaya), which features a lot of fast-paced, epic action, with plenty of bloody battles and dramatic decisions, in an ancient world more reminiscent of Conan's Hyborian Age than of what we might call classic mythic Greece. While the story does refer to the famous Twelve Labors (which took place before the events of the Thracian Wars), it does so in a way that leaves the reader wondering whether these fantastic events did *really* occur... Is Hercules truly the son of Zeus or just a formidable warrior turning into a living legend?

A second series, **The Knives of Kush** (illustrated by Cris Bolson and also in five issues), takes Hercules and his companions to Egypt, in the midst of a civil war, to battle a sinister secret cult (the eponymous "Knives of Kush"); while it follows the same vein as the first series, this second storyline does give us a glimpse of some supernatural elements - no, sorry, no spoilers. Both mini-series are very entertaining and present Maze Masters with plenty of ideas to recycle and "minotaurize"; *The Knives of Kush*, in particular, is highly recommended to anyone interested in running a campaign set in the Desert Kingdom with foreign adventurers as its heroes.

That's all for this issue, folks! The next instalment of *Muse's Corner* will almost certainly take us to the movies, with a review of the much awaited remake of the *Clash of the Titans* cult classic.

Minotaur Play Nymph n°7



PANDORA, by John William Waterhouse