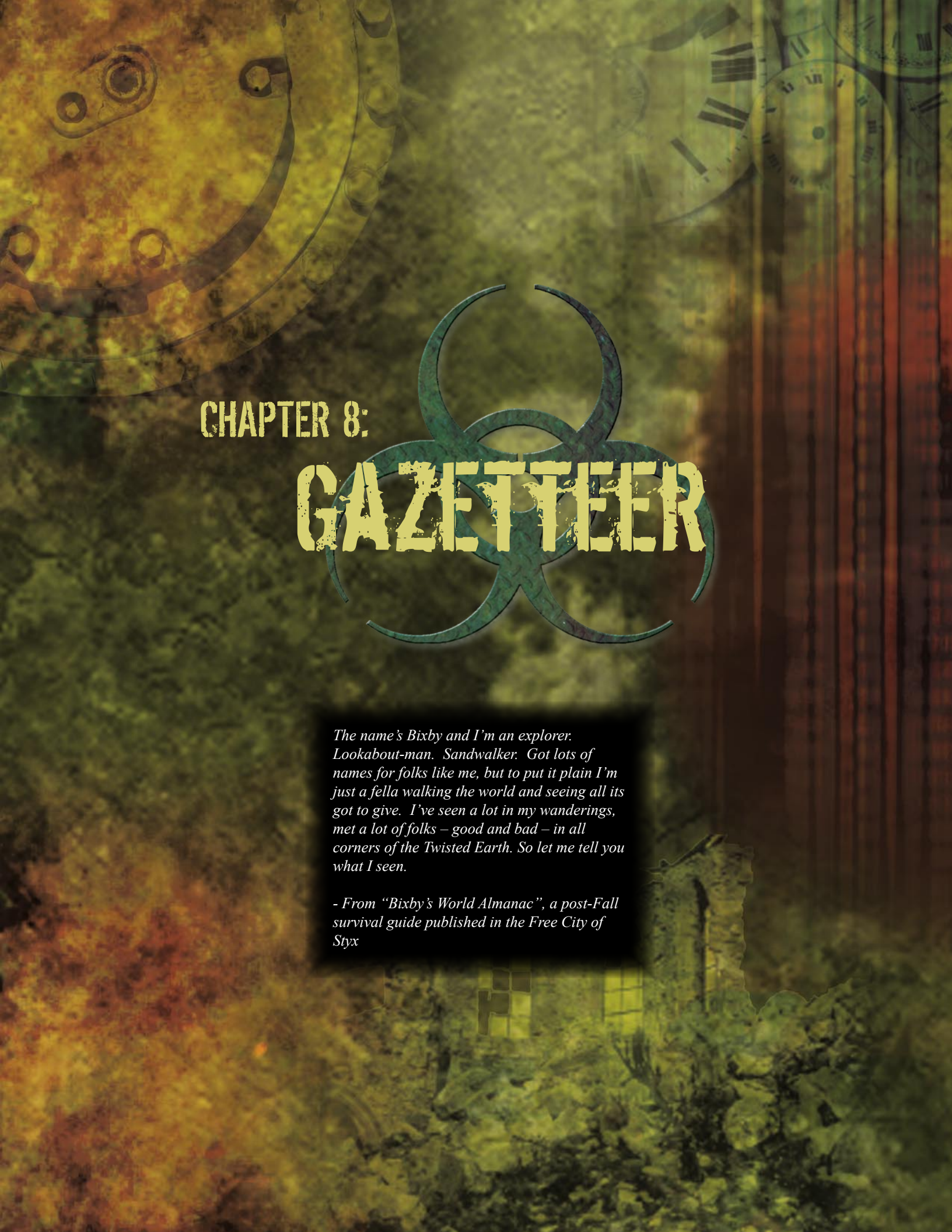




CHAPTER 8:

GAZETTEER

*The name's Bixby and I'm an explorer.
Lookabout-man. Sandwalker. Got lots of
names for folks like me, but to put it plain I'm
just a fella walking the world and seeing all its
got to give. I've seen a lot in my wanderings,
met a lot of folks – good and bad – in all
corners of the Twisted Earth. So let me tell you
what I seen.*

*- From "Bixby's World Almanac", a post-Fall
survival guide published in the Free City of
Styx*



BAJA CLIFFS

I learned from the Far Traders of Lost Albuquerque that south of the Poisoned Shores and well beyond the mountains of the Bone Desert, lies a distant and savage territory known as the Baja Cliffs. The Far Traders know about the tribals there with intimacy, for they alone are the few outsiders permitted to pass through the territory of the cannibalistic headhunting Hill Tribes without invoking their wrath.

The Far Traders tell of a nation of scattered and isolated tribal villages deep in the desert-like Baja Hills, that forage for their food from the desert; iguana, rats, and vipers provide their main sustenance. Some fresh water streams do exist high up in the mountains of the peninsula, and fish and mountain cuttlefish are caught when and if they can be found, and sold as luxuries to the passing traders.

In return, the Far Traders bring the normal fresh water, as well as trinkets and novelty items that the savages find astonishing. Things such as lighters are

articles of worship (I can see how a hand-held source of quick and infinite fire would be amazing to such primitive folk), as are car horns, shiny hubcaps, and even bottlecaps.

Obviously the people of the Baja Mountains are frightfully xenophobic, and again only the gypsy-like Far Traders are given sanctuary from their attacks (being the sole bringers of trade, water, and other luxuries, one does not bite the hand that feeds, so to speak). But anyone not bearing the colors of the Far Traders is fair game.

THE KNOWING

The Baja Cliffs comprise what was once Baja California, a region of California stretching down into Mexico. This is a rough and untamed region, its northern edge littered with ruins but its southern reaches lost to towering mountains and dry, lightly forested ravines, valleys, and peaks.

Among these peaks live isolated tribes of primitive folk, true tribals who live in small villages among caves, forests, and valleys where they can make the best use of easily defended natural features. These small tribes wage war against one another almost yearly, taking captives for wives and slaves or for future ransom (a large part of their "trade", in fact, is exchanging captives for needed goods).

There is little of interest to be found by outsiders in the Baja region, but persistent tales of fresh water sources and even legendary "lost cities" sometimes tempt northerners to the locale – only to be driven off by the tenacious attacks, ambushes, and xenophobia of the mountain people.



BIG HOLE

They say there ain't nothing in the world quite like the Big Hole – and I believe it. I been there on

my travels, dear reader, and believe you me it's one of the greatest wonders of this here Earth.

The Big Hole's been around since before the Ancients, and extends for maybe a hundred or so miles through the high mountains of the Big Rocks. It's a mighty canyon, deep as a mile in some parts and full of treacherous cliffs, craglands, and broken mesas, where once they say a river carved its way through the very rock itself towards the earth's bowels. It's an incredible sight! The Big Hole presents one of the greatest obstacles

to travel between the east and the west, even more so than the gigantic peaks of the Big Rocks. It's a dry, waterless region down in the great canyon gulf, and little if anything is believed to live down there – 'cept of course maybe big ugly beasts like mutagons and certainly a terralops or two hiding in the shadows of the mighty canyon walls.

What's most remarkable, though, is the means merchants and the folk of the canyon region use to travel down the canyon. At each end, you see, the canyon tapers and rises abruptly, almost completely preventing descent into the canyon depths. Even if one could get a caravan down into the valley, navigating the rocks and dry river beds would be a nightmare for the several score miles required to come out the other end.

Regardless, the city of Styx (on one end of the canyon) and Kingman Town (on the other, some hundred or so miles distant) still manage to keep not only in contact, but a lively and active trade. How, you ask?

Airships. That's right, airships. Seems some genius in the city of Styx a long time ago came up with the know-how to make lighter-than-air craft. Big bladders of leather and canvas, filled with hot air or helium. The people of Styx use them to fly over the canyon, badlands, and mountains, avoiding the dangers that would otherwise threaten them below.

They load them with trade goods from east and west; water from secret reserves high in the mountains, salt sold by the Salt Merchants in Styx, and corium from as far west as the Necropolis. Hang-gliders escort them in as they approach the city, keeping a sharp eye out for the rare mutated flying beast that might attempt to prey on them in their foolishness.

I had the wonderful privilege of flying on one of these so-called "zeppelins" on my travels to the West. They are gigantic! Huge balloons, with enclosed structures dangling from the bottoms, filled with brimming cargo holds, colorful passengers from each end of the canyon, and brave men dangling off the sides by harnesses and arming giant crossbow mounts that scan the sky for attackers.

It may sound terrific and frightening - and it is! The world is so different from on high – seeing the great canyon far, far below is dizzying, but its somehow so strange and hypnotic. The pilot of one airship told me that the Ancients used to travel by air as easily as we do by land; it's hard to imagine!

If you ever plan on going west, to California or beyond, I suggest you pay the handsome fee and go by air rather than risk the mountain passes, or face the unknown dangers of the deep canyon.

THE KNOWING

The aptly named "Big Hole" is, of course, the Grand Canyon, a natural feature of the American Southwest that has been an awesome site for countless

generations, even into the past of the Ancients. Created by the wandering of the Colorado River through soft stone cliffs, it has evolved into a massive canyon system covering hundreds of miles.

Following the Fall, and decades of mindless chaos, the Grand Canyon stood as a silent but impenetrable barrier between the radiated wastes of the west, and the wind-swept deserts of the east. The Big Rocks, which became towering obstacles to east-west movement and migrations due to their sheer height (and the habitation of weird mutant creatures fleeing the low lands), likewise turned into near-legendary barriers to the people on either side of their peaks.

This situation would not remain forever. With the birth of new, ruthless societies among the deserts, movement from east to west became a priority to expand trade, open new markets, seek new sources of goods, and force civilization onto those unwilling to buy and sell. Though efforts were made in the early years to secure old passes through the Big Rocks, these ultimately proved impossible or unreliable. Instead, alternative means had to be devised to bridge the east-west barrier.

The solution was the Big Hole, which could be crossed by the use of airships moving on the winds produced by the trapped gales in the gorges and valleys. Inspired people living in a fledgling "city", soon known as Styx due to its unique flavor and atmosphere, devised these floating zeppelins to offer a service to those who sought to trade on both sides of the Big Rocks. And so the airships were born; the Big Hole is now a kind of "artery" for traveling airships moving east and west, safe from attack (unlike ground convoys) and piloted by the masterful pilots born and bred only in the Free City of Styx. The Cartel, Clean, and Salt Merchants alike pay to have these flying ships loaded with goods to continue trade in the east (or west).

Rumors have it that the canyon floor, long abandoned due to this new form of transportation, has become infested with all manner of bizarre mutant creatures and even savage tribals. Stories are even beginning to circulate that some of these creatures are beginning to develop wings and means of flying, hovering, or gliding to reach their otherwise evasive quarry: the airships of Styx.

Flying Creatures: While the depths of the Big Hole may indeed hide mutant dangers, the skies are also home to flying beasts from the mountains – winged things, giant mutant birds, and even rumored "bird-people".

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Big Hole is one of the most impressive and awe-inspiring sights of the Twisted Earth, a great barrier of insurmountable terrain running more than one hundred miles through the gap between the Big Rocks and the Mountains of Misery.

Botany Bay: At one point, a treacherous gorge leads up and up into the Big Rocks where a fortress of broken stone exists nestled among the stark naked cliffs. Known as “Botany Bay”, this is the secret citadel of a group of *pirates* who employ captured airships to raid other zeppelins in the Big Hole for transporting rare and precious goods. Armed with muskets and other weapons, these pirate zeppelins (emblazoned with the traditional skull and crossbones on the sides of their dilapidated gas-bags) race up to and overcome heavily-laden trade ships, with lightly-armed men swinging from ropes at almost a thousand feet above the canyon floor in daring boarding actions. Once captured, the crew and passengers of the surrendering ship are mercilessly thrown overboard to fall to their deaths.

The pirates of Botany Bay, said to be a collection of murderers, thieves, and outcasts expelled from Styx, have grown rich as a result of their continued activities, forcing the trade ships to begin arming themselves and keep vigil against unknown zeppelins in the gorges.

Kingman Town (Cartel; formerly Kingman, Arizona): Kingman Town is the ancestral home of the Cartel traders, a group of post-ruin profiteers and die-hard merchants who have risen from squalor to become one of the most successful trading associations in the wastes – east and west of the Big Rocks.

Kingman Town lies at the far end of the Big Hole, and gleams like a light at the end of the tunnel for those making the awesome voyage from Styx down the great canyon. A rolling ruin laid waste by time and the elements; it was built up from virtually nothing by the hard work and sweat of the Cartel and their slaves. Junkyards in the surrounding desert were scavenged to make walls and fortifications, and old oil fields in the city’s vicinity were quickly brought online to begin production. It was this oil, ultimately, that would bring power and influence to the Cartel worldwide.

Kingman Town is now a great paradox – though a strong and powerful bastion of civilized trade and ideals, it is physically a gray and grotesque sight, a blemish upon the earth. Towering derricks and oil wells dot the landscape here, obscured only by the dust kicked up by motorized patrols crisscrossing the region to ward off invaders and scavengers wandering into their lands. Huge encampments sit in the shadow of these oilfields, where virtual hordes of starving and destitute survivors are drawn by the promise of food and purpose to join the Cartel armies. The town itself gleams with a thousand pinpoints of light fueled by a central oil power plant at the city’s heart, but its streets and buildings are choked with soot and oily smoke, day and night. Every now and again the forest of derricks and oil towers surrounding the town erupt with short-lived gushers of flame that ascend into the air, lighting the gnarled city and its sky filled with hovering airships momentarily like flashes of hellish

lightning.

Kingman Town is home to the largest Cartel presence on the Twisted Earth, of course, but also has a “foreign quarter” where outside merchants may purchase charters to open business there. The Clean currently have the largest “guest” presence here; the Foundation has also purchased the rights to build a small way station in the city as a forward exploration base to scout out the Mountains of Misery. This place, named “Fortress Minauros”, is little more than a fortified keep with two or three off-road vehicles and a garrison of ten paladins and a single master scribe (and assistants).

Monastery Of The Sky (Brotherhood Of Radiation): Jutting from the side of a mountain, overlooking the Big Hole from a tremendous height, is the remarkable Monastery of The Sky, carved completely from solid rock like a towering “lighthouse”. Nearly eight stories tall, the monastery’s walls fall straight down to the floor of the canyon almost one thousand feet below.

The monastery was originally built by a group of zealots from the Brotherhood of Radiation who were attempting to take an airship east to the lands of the Far Desert, to spread the message of their movement in that godless region. Unexpected problems with the ship forced the pilgrims to beach on this mountainside, where they languished for weeks – freezing and starving - before another ship arrived.

Strangely, the monks ultimately decided to instead remain at this isolated mountain spot, and build a monastery to mark the spot they had made a safe but perilous landing. Over time, the monastery was carved from the mountain rock by loving hands and hard work, and populated by growing numbers of contemplatives seeking to live in isolation from the world.

The monastery has its own zeppelin docks, where airships from Kingman Town or Styx can let off passengers and make contact with the Monastery inhabitants. Regular supply drops of food and building materials are performed monthly, paid for by the Brotherhood in Styx. A small settlement of outsiders has begun to grow on the gravel slopes around the monastery rock, mostly comprised of prospectors and adventurous people using the monastery as a base for exploring the Big Rocks on this side of the Big Hole. Those in the know quietly say that they are in fact outcasts and criminals exiled from Styx, left in the care of the monks here who feed them and keep them isolated from civilization.

Screaming Caves: Pilots of the Big Hole tell tales of a gorge branching off the main artery of the Big Hole, leading to mountainous ravines riddled with caves among the Mountains of Misery. These caves, it is said, moan and cry in response to the buffeting winds, making audible echoes heard for miles among the bleak and barren peaks. The slopes

leading to these caves are said to be littered with the ruins of airships lured by some “mysterious force”, to be wrecked upon the cliff sides - killing crew and passengers alike. Some believe the destruction of so many ships in this area is a result of some strange magic, while others believe it is simply due to the sudden strong winds that frequently rush down the great gorge.

Styx (formerly Marble Canyon Nuclear Power Station): “Styx” is a legend among the wastelands both east and west, a kind of great sprawling city where man and mutantkind melt together under the shadow of the city’s trademark twin “Holy Towers” (cooling towers from the power plant the city was built around). It is here, under the majesty of the Big Rocks and at the mouth of the Big Hole, that this growing post-Fall metropolis has bloomed from the cracked desert into a flower jealously envied by people across the Twisted Earth.

Styx was forged with the blood, sweat, and tears of slaves, laborers, and merchants alike. Survivors of the nuclear holocaust came here long ago to shelter, and soon learned that the old power plant could be revived to minimal levels of operation to provide electricity. Merchants, seeking a way across the Big Hole, aided in founding the city’s walls and providing muskets to fight off years of raider attacks.

Styx is a true “city”, with nearly ten thousand people living among its crowded, squalid, and yet magnificent streets. Styx is filled with colorful bazaars, meandering slums, religious quarters dedicated to strange and bizarre post-holocaust sects, walled stockades maintained by the various trading clans for the storage of their goods, and the huge “palace” of Styx’s kings.

Styx is a stubbornly independent city, whose people have refused all offers to join the various clans and pseudo-societies that now wage war over the surrounding lands. It is a self-proclaimed “free city” where peace is violently maintained, where freedom and sanctuary is given to all who can survive for a year and a day in the city. Traders of all clans, and even rival groups, have come to settle here and set up outposts and quarters, putting aside their feuds to trade in the City.

Among the major groups represented in Styx are the Cartel, Far Traders, CrystalTime and Clean Water Clans, Salt Merchants, Foundation, Rangers, and Brotherhood of Radiation. The mercantile associations occupy the largest quarter of the city, while the Foundation and Rangers have both been granted permission to build fortified stockades as supply points for their movements east and west, using the Big Hole for travel (the Foundation have “Fortress Nessus”, the Rangers “Fort Vax”). The Brotherhood of Radiation was attracted long ago by stories of the city’s two Holy Towers, which they purchased at great cost to serve as a second “Mecca” (second only to the

City of Lights itself); as part of the deal, they continue to operate the plant and supply flickering electricity to the entire city.



BIG ROCKS

Towering, skycraping, rising into the sky like sentinels of some prehistoric time, the Big Rocks are the world’s greatest barrier and largest mountain range. From the beyond the

Deserts of Nowhere in the north, to the high-altitude narrows of Trader Pass in the south, the Big Rocks cover many, many dozens of miles with impassable peaks and cliff-ringed countryside that almost seems to whisper a haunting “allure” to those folks who see them, even from a great distance away.

Legends abound about the Big Rocks in almost every culture, community, and tribal camp in their shadow; legends that speak of lost cities, magical mountain springs, hidden valleys, and mountaintop aeries that permit views unimaginable to the ground-born eye of our kind.

THE KNOWING

The title, “Big Rocks”, is obviously a barbarized name for the mighty Rocky Mountains, a sprawling chain of high peaks that have long been the backbone of the American continent. On the Twisted Earth, the Big Rocks region specifically covers large parts of what were once the states of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Idaho. These include the Deserts of Nowhere, Forbidden Lands, Far Desert, Big Hole country, Cursed Desert, and Forgotten Desert regions.

This region is so huge that to detail every lost city, forgotten valley, and mountain pass would be virtually impossible. Needless to say, the Big Rocks’ old passes and trails have long been abandoned due to vast deterioration by unchecked elemental forces over the decades, and any ruins that may have once sparkled like jewels in its crown of peaks have long been forgotten. Now, the peaks only stand as a great “wall” separating the vast deserts of the east with the dusty deadlands of the west. Stories tell of forays by adventurous merchants into the border highlands of the Big Rocks that uncovered pure mountain streams viable as unending water sources, and the discovery of tribals and other primitive survivors among the towering mountains – none of which, sadly, appeared to have advanced beyond a shattered, primitive level.

Creatures: The Big Rocks are one of the last remaining havens of life on the Twisted Earth, from mountain birds to natural animals (such as deer, bear, cougar, and others) among the many valleys

and slopes. Tribal peoples do live along the edges of the Big Rocks, but the higher elevations are largely desolate and cold. The Big Peaks are also home to numerous aerial creatures, mutant and otherwise, that can pose deadly threats to climbers and those unaccustomed to the dizzying heights.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Big Rocks certainly contain an unknown number of lost cities, valleys carpeted in ashen ruins, and tribal settlements scattered across the peaks and valleys like pearls scattered from a broken chain. Only a handful are hinted at here.

Lost Albuquerque (Far Traders; formerly Albuquerque, New Mexico): Just as Needle Rock was a landmark for pioneers of the Old West in their trek westwards, so too Lost Albuquerque is a welcome sight to desert caravans navigating Trader Pass. By night or by day, the distant subtle glow is like a lighthouse beacon reassuring that one is on the trade route west (or east) from Styx to Trade City.

Believed “lost” (“destroyed”) due to some cataclysm even before the Fall, Lost Albuquerque lies like some mythical “El Dorado” at the southernmost tip of the Big Rocks near Trader Pass – within sight but unattainable. The presence of raiders in these hills have kept corium miners and prospectors from spending too much time in the hills searching this legendary ruin, though rumor has it the Far Traders may know ways into the city where even raiders never go.

In truth, the ruins of the city (or, to be accurate, the hill-caves nearby) are the ancestral home of the Far Traders, who maintain a sizable population of their women and children within sight of the glowing, fused wreckage of the ancient city. From here their nomadic camps and moving “cities” of tents and wagons originate, spreading out across the deserts to do trade far and wide.

Mountain Home (People Of Ultraviolet; formerly Kremmling, Colorado): The rather strange name of the mountain people who live here comes from the land’s near-legendary founder, a fair and just mutant leader named King Felix “Ultraviolet”. A survivor and hero of long-forgotten “mutant wars” in the east, Ultraviolet came to lead a band of followers and pilgrims across the Far Desert to a series of natural mountain valleys just fifty miles or so from the lost city of Ember (see the Forbidden Lands). With him he brought many talented men, women, and children as well, to populate his new “kingdom among the peaks”. Modeling this new society after the legendary knights of the Round Table and the kingdom of Avalon (with himself as King Arthur), Ultraviolet set about creating a peaceful paradise where man and mutant could live in harmony, maintaining a peace far from the raiders and savages of the outside world.

King Ultraviolet’s efforts have culminated in a

small but stable community high in the Big Rocks, colored by dreamy ideals of the rule of law, peaceful intentions, and universal brotherhood. Served by a cadre of elite “knights” (who must each vow to adhere to chivalric ideals and the judgment of his peers), and ruled by a benevolent king rumored to possess the ability to read minds, the self-styled “empire” is certainly unique to this isolated corner of the world.

“Mountain Home” is the much spoken-of capital of this kingdom, a colorful city allegedly built on a rocky promontory and covered by a segmented dome to protect from the elements and the odd airborne attack by aerial creatures. According to stories, Mountain Home was planned and built by a reactivated thinker robot brought along by King Ultraviolet in his people’s exodus to the Big Rocks.

Salt Merchant Passes: The southern spur of the Big Rocks is often traveled by the Salt Merchants of Salt City, who know of obscure mountain roads and old passes that have escaped the devastation of time. They use these to transport their salt commodity from the Cursed Desert to distant places such as Styx (in the Big Hole region) and outposts in the Far Desert. These lost trails are marked by the Salt Merchants to warn of terrain dangers (sudden drops, unstable roads, rockslides, etc) as well as the locations of known or suspected predatory creatures and tribal raiders among the mountains.



BURNING LANDS

The Burning Desert is a stretch of terrible land skirting the central plains of our Dead Earth like a scorching belt of unforgiving

Gehenna. I myself have traveled near these lands on my journeys along the caravans of the Water Merchants, and it was from these wise and honorable folk that I get most of what I know of this particular wasteland. Beware; the legends of this place seem to suggest a greater danger beyond mere heat.

According to the Water Merchants of the CrystalTime Clan (who are well-established in the town of Free Water and northwards towards distant False Watertown), the Burning Desert is an awful, forbidding place. It is a dry desert land of unrelenting sands and dunes, intermittent only once in perhaps a hundred miles with the remnants of dry river beds and old salty-bottomed dry lagoons. Rough terrain is uncommon here but not unknown; for the most part, the Water Merchants say, it is merely an expanse of dust that never ends.

The worst part of the Burning Desert is the macabre legends that surround it. According to the CrystalTime, no one enters the Burning Desert and

emerges alive – or at least, not sane. Tales tell of an invisible heat that burns all who pass through this barren country, imparting them with an insatiable thirst that cannot be purged even with all the water in the world. Folk who make the mistake of wandering the desert either never come out alive – or come out raving mad, dying of thirst, the heat so great their hair falls right out their heads.

Though I'm no expert on such things, sounds a great deal similar to what I learned as a boy was the Number One symptom of radiation overdose...

THE KNOWING

The truth about the Burning Lands (or “Burning Desert”, as they are equally known) is a much more insidious and lethal danger, beyond the mere heat and lack of water that would otherwise classify it as deadly. No, the Burning Desert is cursed with a greater danger, the danger of *radiation*...

The Burning Desert covers what was once a sprawling area covering half of Kansas (in the southeast) and nearly all of what was once Nebraska (to the northwest). Towards the northwest it blurs into the flat and wind-swept nothingness of the Forbidden Lands, while far, far to the southeast it stretches on and into the northern reaches of the Grass Plains Empire. This entire region was once bespeckled with the secret, isolated nuclear missile silos of the US missile command – and was blasted into oblivion as a result.

Today, complete and utter devastation of this long-lost plains country has left it dead and empty. Sand has managed to collect here in vast waves seen rarely in the old Midwest, creating a dizzying and foreboding sea of sand as far as the eye can see.

This same devastation has also left the desert tainted through and through with radiation (anywhere from 100 to 500 Rads, with unpredictable hotspots of 2000 Rads or more in certain areas) – from the sand-covered soil to the swirling dust itself. Like the Purple Desert, far to the east, the Burning Lands are often the origin of the much-feared radiation storms that rage over lands to the north and south.

Hotspots: Here and there, concealed beneath the shifting sands, under mountains of dust and parched soil, are the remains of old nuclear missile installations and other sites bombarded heavily during the Fall. Gigantic craters have long filled with the waves of dust swirling through the region, and the wide-open spaces of these states have long been swept almost completely clear of their nuked cities and towns. Every now and again, a traveler (walking 10' to 50' above, on the tops of dunes) will actually be passing over such a site – and suffer the effects of the radiation permeating the area.

Such spots typically radiate anywhere from 500 to 5000 Rads – depending on the site's actual nature, and proximity to a sunken crater or long-buried silo. Those who wander the Burning Desert risk unwittingly

stumbling through such areas, for there are no existing maps or charts pinpointing the most radiated areas for folks to navigate by. As such, they remain among the Burning Lands' greatest dangers.

Radiation Storms: Radiation storms are not uncommon, typically conjured up once or twice a month due to the unchecked winds blowing across the blasted Midwest basin. Radiation storms here are merely mundane sandstorms (albeit particularly-violent ones), but the sand they sweep along with them is permeated with lethal radiation. As such, these storms not only cause blindness, disorientation, and a re-shaping of the landscape – but they also carry with them deadly doses of radiation (anywhere from 100 to 500 Rads per day of travel within the storm). Storms in the Burning Lands usually last one to two days at most.

Lifeless: In addition to other dangers, the very desolation of this place itself poses a hazard – no game, edible plant, or other creature of any kind is to be found among the radiant dunes of the Burning Lands. Those that are to be found there are certainly ill fated travelers or migrating beasts that are slowly succumbing to radiation – and to consume them would be suicide in any event.

AREAS OF INTEREST

Despite being one of the most desolate places in all of the Twisted Earth, the land skirting the dust land, as well as pockets within, are of some interest to travelers nearing the region.

King Lee's Wall: An ancient legend circulating in the Burning Lands speaks of “King Lee's Wall”, a wall of stone said to rise straight from the sand abruptly, only to end abruptly just a quarter of a mile or so away, diminishing quickly into the desert. The structure is known by only those of great age, who claim the wall was built by a mad Ancient (during their decadent reign) for no other purpose than to work his subjects to death.

Link Town (CrystalTime Water Clan; former megalopolis of Lincoln/Omaha): A belt of built-up, soot-blackened ruins stretch from the eastern edge of the Burning Lands, glowing against the weird crimson haze that often gleams off the distant sands, day and night. Here, ancient buildings towering into the sky have long decayed into skeletal stubs that grovel beneath this terrible glow, as if subservient to its power. Link Town is so-named not only due its Ancient name, but also due to the fact that the CrystalTime Water Merchants use the city's easternmost ruins as a stopping point for their caravans skirting the Burning Desert, north and south. Though they maintain a sizable presence here (along with large numbers of roaming tribals and other nomadic peoples come to shelter in the ruins from the open desert, as well as do trade), they are at the mercy of the great sandstorms that sweep in from the Burning Lands

every month or so, tearing through the unprotected streets with almost hurricane-force.

The CrystalTime have adapted to this regular (and deadly) danger by removing water and other community stocks underground and into the old sewers of Link Town, where they remain protected from the power and radiated dust of these storms. Link Town is well known for its crowded underground marketplace, a gathering point for merchants seeking companion caravans through the wastes. The Water Merchants are also rumored to have uncovered and re-activated an old subterranean power plant, for they light a fraction of the City with beaming blue lights (old street lights, and some lighting on hastily-erected skeleton towers) so that caravans far away can navigate by the city's light, even in high winds and sandstorm conditions.



CURSED SEA

The Cursed Sea is a legendary place most folk in the region of the Ultraviolet Empire and even as far north as Barter Town have heard of. But in case the name isn't familiar, I'll spill what I've heard.

According to legend, the Cursed Sea was once, in fact, a great ocean that lay nestled among the Big Rocks, far north of the Big Hole, Styx, and the trade settlements of the south. Salt has been sought here for countless generations, for the Cursed Sea is perhaps the single greatest source of the stuff known to folk of the wasteland. Though many earlier expeditions and peoples tried to establish operations here to mine the salt, it was only upon the arrival of the Salt Merchants (their original clan name is apparently unknown) that a permanent settlement was erected.

The Cursed Desert, according to the tales, is a great dust bowl of salt desert – so salty, in fact, that the very sand gleams blindingly like cut glass during the day, and sparkles at night like a field of fallen stars for as far as the eye can see. Strange formations of salt crystal jut from the dust bed into the air like underwater formations once described by the Ancients, while elsewhere veritable dunes of salt stretch on forever.

More sinister tales surround the Cursed Sea as well. Though the hearty and secretive Salt Merchants have an established settlement at the southernmost reaches of the sea, the rest of the sea is unknown and desolate. Towards the center of the desert, the sand turns aquamarine in color, and the remnants of bones and animals can be found here, petrified, turned to a bright green stone through some "evil magic". Tales also tell of strange glowing creatures that walk the haunted salt sea at night, to be seen moving in the distance, but no

such creature has ever been located or killed. If these are connected, none can be sure.

THE KNOWING

The area that is now known as the "Cursed Desert" was formerly the Great Salt Lake Desert (including Great Salt Lake, now long-gone), located among the elevated barrens of northwestern Utah. Circled by towering, wind-swept mountains, the naturally salt-rich basin was forgotten after the Fall for many decades. Following the drastic climatic changes that swept the planet (affecting many lakes and inland seas), the Great Salt Lake too fell victim, its already salty water disappearing and leaving only a vast bed of sparkling mineral-enriched "dust" (actually crystallized salt), "icebergs" of salt, and weird, haunting formations of bizarre shape and colossal size littering the valley floor for miles in all directions.

Adding to the mystery of this desert is the actual existence of a region of a stranger, "bluer" color that stands out from the pale white expanses, somewhere to the north along what was once the northern shore of the Great Salt Lake. Here, natural mineral consumption of natural detritus and debris (including animal remains, but also loose-pored rocks and the like) has turned the ground and anything in contact with it, slowly, over years, into a turquoise-studded wasteland. Such objects, when found, are brittle and encrusted with the blue mineral – in effect, fossilized and given a coating of thin "stone". This is entirely a natural (albeit uncommon) phenomenon, but one which has lent a cursed air to the salt basin.

Despite the legends of "cursed magic", the people that are the Salt Merchants are no fools, and sometime in their history their wanderings brought them here – and here they have remained. The white, beaming landscape, though blinding under the sun, is continuously worked by these strange but industrious people for shiploads of salt, which they provide to distant cities (such as Styx) for the necessities of life.

Blinding: Workers and slaves of the Salt Merchants are given sun goggles while working the salt sea for any extended period of time. The unrelenting light of the Twisted Earth's sun here is magnified by the brilliance of its polished white "sand", crystallized salt, making it almost impossible to open one's eyes during the height of the day. Laborers working in the open-air salt mines typically begin to go blind after four or five months; after two years or so, their sight is completely gone forever. As such, great caution must be taken by guards, Salt Merchant overseers, etc when out in the desert.

Poisoned Ponds: Every now and again the blinding brightness of the Cursed Desert will be broken by black pools of water bubbling up from below the crusty surface of the land. Though the unknowing often rush forward for a drink at the sight of the unexpected find, Salt Merchants (and even their

slaves) know better – these saline-rich pools are lethal if consumed. Though tempting, to drink means madness and certain death.

Lifeless: The Cursed Desert is almost completely lifeless – no natural animal life could possibly live here, the ground being so laden with saline minerals. No plants, herding animals, or other beasts are to be found by the explorer of this desolate region.

Salt Creatures: Some rumors abound of strange burrowing “worms” and other creatures that attack animals and men wandering the sands. Tales tell how such creatures do not devour the flesh of their victims, but use some special ability to literally “drink” the salt from their bodies – a horrific process to witness indeed.

AREAS OF INTEREST

Despite being one of the most desolate places in all of the Twisted Earth, the land skirting the dustland, as well as pockets within, are of some interest to travelers nearing the region.

City Of The Dead (formerly Salt Lake City): Infrequent rumors arise about this lost mountain stronghold of the Ancients, said to be populated only by the skeletons of the Ancients who died there during the Fall. According to some superstitious storytellers, these fleshless dead rise once a year to dance among the streets and beneath the ruins of gnarled skyscrapers and temples to lost gods. The truth, of course, cannot be known.

Salt City (Salt Merchants): “Salt City” is a legendary city few have seen, located over the Big Rocks and across the Deadlands at the base of a great mountainous range, sitting like a vigilant gateway to a dazzling sea of sparkling white sand beyond. What was once a camp for wandering nomads has, over the generations, become a sprawling, bustling city of semi-permanent tents and stucco fortifications and towers. It is the home of the near-mythical Salt Merchants, a people who religiously keep to themselves, only crossing the mountains to civilized lands to trade their most precious spice – salt.

Salt City is a “secret city”, so to speak, one that its inhabitants protectively keep from discovery. Though outside of their homeland the Merchants are relatively hospitable and honest folk, trading freely with all seeking their spice, those who seek to follow their caravans, seek out their source of salt, or otherwise intrude upon their worldwide monopoly are soon marked for death – a *brutal* death.

A favorite method of execution among the Salt Merchants is to leave a man out in the baking sun, slowly feeding him salt-laden water as his thirst grows until he dies an agonizing and delirious death.



DEADLANDS

The Deadlands are a region of desert and dry mountains that occupy the land north of the great desert oasis of Vegas (the so-called “City Of Lights”) and the territory of the near-legendary Rangers. Rugged, unpredictable, and deadly in their dryness and heat, travelers (such as the trail-borne nomads) also tell of glowing horizons at night, strange reddish aurora, and weird mutant creatures that wander out of its heart to terrorize the settlements of the desert.

There is another, rather curious point I’d like to relate here. Legends surviving from my own people speak of a place, near the “Glimmering Oasis”, which once served as the testing-grounds for the awesome Fire Arrows of the Ancients. Called “nuclear bombs”, these weapons are the source of what today we know as radiation. Perhaps the “Glimmering Oasis” in fact refers to Vegas, and thus the Deadlands are so-called because only the most horrendously mutated life can thrive there (the radiation being so strong from experiments of the Ancients in the vicinity).

Whatever the reason for its terrible life, the Deadlands are far from dead, despite its name. All manner of mutant beasts originate from this hot-bed of new life. Water in the Deadlands is abysmally scarce, and legends tell of false waterholes filled with poisoned, radiated liquid.

THE KNOWING

The Deadlands, despite their name, are among the most thriving regions of mutant and animal life on the Twisted Earth – and yet one of the oldest deserts as well, having been a basin of dust and barren rock since well before the Fall of the Ancients themselves.

The Deadlands cover all of what was once Nevada, and into southwest Utah. Here, sand is the soil, and broken mesas the thriving life that grows from it. In the southern expanses the land is generally level, however, a sprawling ocean of hard-packed sand that goes on for as far as the eye can see, over which a semi-permanent sky filled with suspended dust glows orange or hellish red by the varying light of the rising or setting sun. The odd settlement or two of humanoid habitation rises from this desolate, oppressive landscape here and there, often as not vanishing in a few years due to abandonment or the depravations of another group from the Deadlands.

In the north, across a barren, inhospitable belt of desert, the land is broken by the rude upshot of table- and mushroom-like mesas and mountains of bare-naked rock, looking like petrified fogs from some heroic past. Here the sedimentary fog of the sky finds a barrier, and sandstorms rage angrily against their

stoic faces almost year-round.

Sandstorms: Sandstorms are frequent in the Deadlands, especially in the north but sometimes ranging as far south as the fabled City of Lights itself. Such storms are strong and violent, but often short-lived (lasting a day or so at most), though their effects can be devastating on unprepared communities and nomadic camps – leveling them in a single night’s time, as well as disorienting travelers in the region, re-shaping the dunes and covering old landmarks with equal ease.

Radiated Areas: The entire western edge of the Deadlands is known widely for its inhospitable nature – not due to mutant creatures (prevalent everywhere else in the region), but due to the glowing sands which are the tell-tale sign of radiation (Rads range in the 200-500 area, with spikes in old detonation sites reaching upwards of 800 or more).

Stretching as far south as what was once Death Valley, to north past the outskirts of Reno, this huge region lends an eerie green-yellow glow to the entire western horizon once the sun dips low and its own radiance is dispelled from the world. In this twisted, nightmare light, beasts from this distant part of the desert emerge and begin their infestation of the eastern country, moving ever closer in growing numbers towards the odd settlement and community among the sands.

Creatures: All manner of creatures exist as a result of the radiated hotspots of the Deadlands, dwelling among the mesa country or skittering in packs over the dry open expanses of the south desert. In the highlands, where bizarre rock outcroppings and overhangs create deepening shadows, terrolops are known to hunt for prey, prey that includes prox beasts wandering north from the gloom-lit deserts. Flying creatures are believed to also reside among the tall mesas, but the rumors are unsubstantiated.

In the rest of the Deadlands, where only rolling sands are likely to meet the eye, mutant raider bands are actually quite common – though generally small (those with any power typically set up settlements of a kind, close to other areas where there are people to raid) – as are roving packs of mutant coyotes, wolves, and (in abundance) wild dogs.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Deadlands are home to numerous fledgling communities, and at least one major city.

City Of Lights (Brotherhood of Radiation; formerly Las Vegas, Nevada): Legends of this fantastic city are known far and wide, carried on the awed lips of visitors and merchants who have seen the city either up close or from afar, silhouetted against the gloomy miasmal sand-sky by day, or the dim western glow by night. Kept lit by the bizarre inhabitants of the city, the fabled “Holy City” literally glows like an oasis of glittering jewels in the otherwise desolate and

hideous ocean of choking dust.

The City of Lights is the home of the widespread Brotherhood of Radiation, a cult of holistic new-world mutants who have risen from humble beginnings as refugees to command the entire city – and even begun to spread out along the caravan routes east and west like mind-numbing poppy seeds carried on the wind. Bringing with them a pacifist vision of a united future for all mutantkind, in the ashes of the Ancients, they are a people that believe the Fall was a punishment invoked on man, and that they, mutantkind, have been given a chance to learn from this and set up a new civilization of peace and harmony.

The City of Lights is a semi-public citadel, open to pilgrims from distant lands and visitors who seek to know more about the Brotherhood and its message for the world. The City itself is a miracle of preservation – the city, though still largely empty in many districts, appears to have been spared the devastation of the nuclear war. The Brothers appear to have somehow managed to turn the lights back on in ol’ Vegas, bringing a marvelous aura of color to its dusty skyline. The signs and storefronts of ancient casinos, clubs, bars, and strip joints glitter, sparkle, and hum in the city’s maze of streets and sand-dusted boulevards. Old parks, once elegantly kept by water pumped into the city, are now dry dustbowls where sprawling, decrepit camps of faithful pilgrims rise now and then with the newest influx of newcomers.

At the heart of the City of Lights is the Great Temple, a structure believed once to have been a major power plant supplying the entire region. This is the worldwide center of the Brotherhood, but what secrets lie within are for the Brotherhood and its most trusted circles to keep – and keep alone.

Copper Pit (formerly Ruth, Nevada): Far to the north of the City of Lights lies “Copper Pit”, a dark and evil place if any could be labeled that. Copper Pit is a grotesque and disordered mess of the dispossessed who somehow managed to miss the attentions of the Brotherhood of Radiation – and were instead lured here by the promise of food and shelter, and fellowship with other mutants suffering from the same deformations and mutations.

Copper Pit is home to a growing “pseudo-society” of mutants, raiders, and slavers, all from a number of now-defunct groups and bands all over the Deadlands. Once, the nearby town of Ruth served as their meeting place and communal gathering point, but since the explosion of mutant refugees from across the Deadlands, the indistinct leadership has converted a massive copper strip-mine on the town’s outskirts (almost five miles wide at its largest point) into a huge, open-air “tent city” for their varied peoples. Rumor is spreading about who it might be who is now leading these ex-raiders and why, and also the real motivation for his invitation to refugees to come to Copper Pit. Many suspect the raiders of Copper Pit to be led by a

particularly cunning mutant, likely a reject or outcast from the Brotherhood, attempting to create a mutant army from the discontent and homeless for some upcoming conquest of the entire Deadlands.

Copper Pit itself lies in the shadow of a great mountain, surrounded by old walls of stucco reinforced with metal plate, razor wire, and even the odd mine or two to keep out rampaging beasts (and unwanted scum) from the Deadlands. One can't really tell if this place existed before the Fall, or whether the locals built it up afterwards – it looks like a well-ordered dump with streets running through it like a fancy city grid.

Copper Pit is like a magnet to desert bounty hunters, mutant survivalists, and gunrunners. In fact, outside of the mysterious mutants who allegedly rule the place, the law here is pretty much dictated by the town's powerful gunrunners – and everyone else pretty much either works for them or hopes to barter with them. Anyone else left in town is either in the wrong place or just doesn't know it yet.

Croptown: In the Deadlands, "Croptown" is perhaps the sole source of replenishable food in the region. Once a kind of "biodome" built high up in the Nevada Mountains and away from the cities, it was home to some fascinating botanical experiments that were meant to double or even triple the agricultural output of the Ancients in their wars. The experiments didn't succeed in time, and the center was abandoned during the chaos of the apocalypse. Over time, nomads and survivors came to find the domed town largely intact, and those with agricultural knowledge brought the place back to life.

Behind the stucco walls of this mountain fortress grow fields of beans, carrots, and corn, along with other crops that the inhabitants use to trade with the other communities of the Deadlands. In exchange for their large and abundant foodstuffs (which are obviously highly desired), the people of Croptown receive muskets, rifles, and ammunition, as well as other goods such as medicines and the like from the traders of the area.

Mercury Caves (formerly the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, near Mercury, Nevada): Well-known among the folk of the Deadlands are the so-called "Mercury Caves", somewhere in the heart of the desert. The caves are said to cover hundreds of miles underground, and appear to have once been man-made for some unknown purpose, beneath otherwise unassuming desert country. Stories abound of hideous, super-powerful creatures with batteries of mutations that every now and again find their way out of the caves and into the desert, to prey on outlying Deadlands communities. No force has ever mounted an expedition powerful enough to investigate the cave system in full, or find the unknown source that spawns these ghastly, mindless creatures to feed upon the surface world.

Reno: The squalid ruin of Reno has, by and large, escaped much of the devastation that struck the rest of the Twisted Earth. Lying far, far to the west across the worst of the Deadlands, beyond the barrier of glowing sands, Reno grew from a forgotten landmark among the whipping sands to a thriving den of obscene iniquity. It's also a seductive pit of quicksand that few can escape.

Originally only shattered survivors of the Fall, few in number and dwindling fast, called the towering spires and crowded avenues of this ghost town home, but the arrival of ruthless profiteers from Foundation-held lands in old California changed everything. Arriving in motorized caravans like a band of savages, they found only a weak and easily cowed populace among the city ruins. Their takeover was swift, and soon Reno became the subject of a bizarre project – to once again "open business".

Since their arrival, these loosely associated brigands (among them many unscrupulous merchants expelled from their respective clans) have come to rule the city. Some twenty or so small groups have since coagulated into five or six major "families", each controlling a sector of Old Reno, all of which converge on the flashy, downtown quarter. Each family has ruthlessly garnered local support in their respective neighborhoods, fielding "armies" from those addicted to their drugs or under their "protection". The families of Reno are preservers of some of the oldest and most profitable ventures – gambling, prostitution, and especially drug-manufacturing. Each family has its specialty, and thus each district of the city is like walking into a separate kind of Sodom and Gomorra.

Reno exists under an open-door policy to one and all – so long as visitors keep their views on local activities out of their city. The abundance of drugs has meant the near-total slavery of the entire city populace to the families, however, with families selling off their rare and precious daughters to one family or another to supply the next drug shipment. Visitors to the city are first drawn by the intact lights of the casinos and clubs that stand out among the ash-blackened ruins, only to be swayed by hookers (many transvestite, due to the shortage of women these days) and, inevitably, by the powders and needles that promise an escape from the nightmare world of the desert. The dead (whether they died from disease, shootings, or drug overdose) are carted out of town and buried in the graveyard that rings the ruins like a grim shackle – a vast, gloomy cemetery almost as big as the city of Reno itself.

Ruin (formerly Nellis AFB): The so-called "Ruin" is a garbled flatland of wind-swept rubble and radiated wastes whose glow can be seen as a colorful aura from the nearby City of Lights. It is common knowledge that this was once a powerful base of the Ancients, but the detonation of ICBMs targeting the site completely destroyed it. Much of the radiation

here has diminished over time, but it is clear the area is entirely desolate.

Yucca Mountain: A vague, confused legend among the mutants of the Deadlands has been circulating for generations – the legend of “Yucca Mountain”. According to the tales, this was a lonely, isolated mountain where the Ancients, in their fear of radiation and the powerful mutants its taint might create, stored millions of barrels of radiated waste and sealed it all underground in a vast, unlit labyrinth of stone and steel.

According to legend the mountain still exists, and beneath it the great vats of radioactive fluid that could potentially seed the entire Twisted Earth with its glow, spawning a new race of “super-beings” that will fruitfully multiply and eventually conquer the world, making it ripe for a new age of mutantkind.

The legend of Yucca Mountain is especially well known among super mutants in the Deadlands; the mythical mountain is also believed to be secretly sought after by the Brotherhood of Radiation. Various stories place the legendary mountain throughout the Deadlands, from the glowing barrier in the west to north of Copper Pit, to somewhere among the high mesas and their twisted heights.



FAR DESERT

The name of this well-known expanse of country refers to a vast region of desert and dry wasteland skirting precariously between the Burning Desert, Forbidden

Lands - and the distant steppes of the Savant Empire. The Far Desert has variably been identified with a variety of names throughout the generations, including the Dry Plain, the Waterless Waste, simply “The Desert”, and even Old Nevada (the latter being a total misnomer, since I’ve never found evidence that the Ancient kingdom of Nevada ever reached this far).

Towns such as Free Water, Midway, and the ruins of Amarillo are just a few of the oases scattered through this legendary and raider-infested region.

THE KNOWING

The Far Desert stretches like a broad band across a tremendous area of the new American landscape, from the narrows of Trader Pass (at the foot of the Big Rocks) in the far west, curving gently northwards away from the Grass Plains empire to the long-dead shores of the Dust Seas Region. This landscape, covering well over one thousand miles, is as varied as the Twisted Earth itself, given to highlands, lowlands, broad expanses of hard-packed, wind-swept desert, and dune seas rivaling the monumental sand peaks of

the Forbidden Lands and Deserts of Nowhere.

If any place on the Twisted Earth could be called the new “birthplace of civilization”, the Far Desert might well be such a place. Though this thousand mile-long band is surrounded by some of the most hostile regions in the world (including the radiated Burning Lands, the Grass Plain with their rising empire of super-mutants, as well as entire horizons where bandit armies wait and watch the Far Desert from hiding), it is here that men and mutants alike have come to make their home, and cross the broad sands in search of trade and fellowship.

Motivators for this unique and fragile situation come from the two polar ends of this region – the Big Hole in the west and the Dust Seas Region in the east. Shadowed under the sky-scraping orange peaks of the Big Rocks, the Big Hole marks the ending of this place, but the beginning of a fantastic corridor to the region of Old California – and its military monasteries, ruined cities, and enterprising traders. Styx, a free city of unrivaled legend and envy among the wastelands, sits at the far end of this gigantic canyon, and from here merchants of all clans set out to trade with the world.

Styx’s desert roads set out east into the Far Desert, crossing hundreds of miles. Ancient highways here are used where the sand can be cleared or where nature acts kindly; elsewhere, when dunes grow high and all remnants of mankind are lost, the merchants strike out with age-old knowledge of the stars and hidden desert landmarks to cross the empty wastes for the oasis-like communities dotting the Desert.

The Far Desert is home to dozens of unique and colorful settlements and communities. Sand-dusted but intact cities and ruins speckle the landscape every ten to fifty miles, becoming home to those who survived the Fall in shelters, or who returned to the cities from the wasteland to make homes among their burnt-out shells. Elsewhere, where not even a ruin rises from the sand, new communities have been built of stone, steel - or entirely of semi-permanent mud. Nomad tribes and their colorful encampments lurk near the trade routes seasonally, expecting to trade with passing merchants for what goods they need. Wanderers of all kinds and colors, from places east and west, walk the desert trails like free-floating sagebrush without aim or purpose.

Though days and even weeks sometimes pass without encounter or companionship in the Far Desert, it is likewise not uncommon for travelers along the routes to pass other wanderers, travelers, and merchant convoys plying the dunes either on foot or in land-borne fleets of elegant wooden wagon-ships. Where roads are present, massive swarms of smoke-shrouded trucks, cars, and cycles lumber down the old wind-swept concrete to protect from raiders and other dangers. At such times, the deserts echo with the eerie thunder of dozens, even scores of engines for many,

many miles.

Encounters: Encounters with merchants and other travelers moving either east or west along the routes occur roughly 5% of the time in the desert (1 in 20 chance, per week traveled). Certainly, the passage of larger groups can be seen from great distances in the flat and featureless country, up to five or ten miles distant in clear weather and low-wind conditions. The actual nature of passing groups depends on the circumstances, of course, but examples might include a merchant caravan, an exodus of refugees, one community's army marching off to raid another, a huge battle, or simply small groups of sandwalkers, lone traders, or even bold raiders moving through the area.

Asphalt Arteries: Streaking across the Far Desert, separated at times by miles of barren wasteland, are long stretches of ancient highways and interstates, many of which appear to have once run the length of the entire region, east to west. These great "veins of stone" are used regularly by merchants, traders, and road warriors to cross great distances on wagon trains and motorized vehicles.

Creatures: All forms of mutant life live up and down the Far Desert, whether preying off the smaller settlements and villages along the trade routes, or dwelling just out of sight among the hills and ridges miles distant. In addition to humanoid dangers (local communities on the warpath, or seeking to waylay weak parties on the open road), raiders are a significant hazard along the routes, as are the odd wandering herd of othydont and, in some instances, the rare swarm of doom harvesters wandering in from the border country between the Desert and the Burning Lands. Other creatures are no less common, making the Far Desert, as a whole, one of the more inhabited stretches of land in the Midwest region.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Far Desert covers a vast area, and along its great length numerous communities and settlements have sprung up, over time, like fragile flowers budding on a pulsing, blood-carrying artery. Fueled by the passage of merchants and traders for generations now, these stand as some of the strongest villages, towns, and cities on all the Twisted Earth.

Amarillo: The ruins of Amarillo rise abruptly from the powdery yellow wasteland and reach into the sky, the tops of their once-magnificent glass and steel skyscrapers now little more than ash-blackened skeletons of buildings. One long artery of cracked asphalt strikes deep into the city's dark and shadowy heart, coming out the other side after five or so miles to vanish once more into the desert.

At the heart of the old city, various traders using the route through the city (including the Clean, Cartel, and CrystalTime) have set up a kind of "fortified

community", occupying several city blocks and encircled by a makeshift wall of old cars, barbed wire fences, and fiberglass partitions scavenged from the ruins. Here, trade is conducted regularly during the day with local inhabitants and passing caravans, and shelter is offered (for a price) to those seeking it in one of the settlement's boarding houses. The shadow of towering skyscrapers looms hauntingly over the squat, tiny settlement, set up as it was at the city's center, with eerie cries in the distance meeting the ear only once in a great while.

Every now and again, during the day, the solace of the Amarillo trading fort is broken by the sounds of gunfire in the distance. The traders here often conduct raids into the surrounding downtown area to hunt wild men, which seem to be unusually abundant in Amarillo's ruins. Armed with muskets and the odd hunting rifle, the traders are in little danger, uncontested as they sweep the streets of these savage, hairy apes. Once in a while a trader will be killed or injured, putting an end to these "glorious" hunting parties for a few weeks, but the taunting hoots and screams of the wild men, originating from the ruins, inevitably irritate the traders to once more mount a raid against those they share the city with.

Unbeknownst to the rather arrogant traders who maintain the route through the city, the wild men have, for a long time, been watching their every move. Dwelling freely in the ruins outside the traders' fortified camp, they watch from atop buildings and elevated points up and down the nearby skyscrapers – the same skyscrapers that loom over the traders' heads, day and night. The wild men, though savage and primitive, have a particular cunning, and it may be that they are just biding their time for the right time to strike in one gigantic mass and sweep the presence of the outsiders completely from the city...

Apolis (CrystalTime; formerly Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota): To many, the great burned-out ruins of this ancient metropolis mark the navigable eastern edge of the known world – beyond this, only the CrystalTime Clan of water merchants are said to travel, linking up with a smattering of communities in the country's east. The great Purple Desert, deadly barrier through which no living thing can pass and survive, lies to the south and east and thus makes this even more of an impassable frontier.

The ruins are large, sprawling, and hollow. Some tiny communities of exceptionally miserable folk do live on the western side of the metropolis' shell, doing only minor trade with passing CrystalTime merchants. Raiders west of the city are known to prey on these people, as well as make their hideouts in the city ruins themselves, emerging at night to hunt the blasted highways outside of town.

In addition to gangers, the CrystalTime have heard stories that another reviled threat – ghouls –also call the ruins of Apolis home.

Blinding Sands (area formerly including Altus Air Force Base, Oklahoma, and Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas): This region is well known throughout the Far Desert, and accorded a wide berth as well. The “Blinding Sands” are so-called because of the dim radiance that hovers over the desert day and night – a pale shadow of the deadly glow of the Burning Lands, but a potentially lethal wasteland nonetheless. Towards the heart of this region of land, the desert is pocked with craters and devastated dunes, obviously a place saturated during the Fall by the greatest and deadliest of fiery weapons.

Cavern Country: There is a part of the Far Desert where ancient riverbeds break the flat deserts and miles of meandering waterways long lost to sand and caked mud. Tribal folk dwell among the natural caves and caverns (some more than a half a mile deep) in the sides of the ancient riverbeds, using the old channels to keep in meager numbers of their livestock, or to gather for war against their neighbors just miles distant.

Though generally viewed as savage and war-like, the tribal people of this region are known to make journeys of dozens, even hundreds of miles to do trade for the things they need; foodstuffs, water, muskets, etc. The Far Traders, in specific, appear to anticipate these visits regularly, mid-year, with much fanfare to entertain and awe their most primitive customers.

Crawling City (Far Traders): One of the most magical and magnificent features of the Far Desert, indeed all the Twisted Earth, is the near-legendary Crawling City. The so-called “Crawling City” is, in fact, a semi-permanent, perpetually roaming “settlement” of wheeled wagons, carts, mongol-style yurts, and huge rolling “fortresses” (drawn by gigantic mutant beasts of burden, sometimes in teams of up to twenty or so for larger wheeled buildings). The Crawling City is the city of the Far Traders, a nomadic trade people who have long plied the old trade routes since just after the Fall. Bringing primarily a supply of scrap, scavenged wonders, and the odd technological artifact from the farthest corners of the world, the Far Traders’ arrival in any part of the Twisted Earth is generally a spectacular carnival event looked forward to even by the most primitive tribals and warlike communities with equal excitement.

The Crawling City’s core is made up of four to six gigantic “fortresses”, made of wood and towering nearly three or four stories over the sands. Pulled by huge armored lizards and trains of green camels (a trademark, so to speak, of the city), these serve as mobile watchtowers for distant danger as the city wanders, and strong points for outlying traders to retreat to in times of attack (which are rare). Surrounding this core of towering battlewagons are the wagons and wheeled homes of the trader people, numbering anywhere from three or four dozen to nearly a hundred.

The Crawling City is said to be forever on the move, but it does stop regularly at times to pick up new Far Traders from along the routes, new goods from settlements along their route, or to shelter from sandstorms. Regardless, the exact location of the Crawling City varies by the month, ranging from as far north as Link Home to the area of Lost Albuquerque, the traditional home of the Far Trader people.

Desem Oins (formerly Des Moines, Iowa): This ruin has long been recognized as a true “ghost city”, a hollow, largely intact ruin in the far northeast corner of the Far Desert where only the far-reaching CrystalTime Water Merchants are known to travel. According to legend, Desem Oins was abruptly abandoned by the Ancients just prior to the Fall, leaving the city streets utterly empty of cars and rubble. One can only guess that Desem Oins, unlike so many cities of the Ancients, somehow managed to escape the Fall relatively unscathed by war. How, no one knows, but whatever happened was so frightful that it sent the population running, and running fast. Though much of the western part of town is badly decayed from wind and the trespass of travelers over the generations, every now and again tales filter through to the northern settlements. Tales that adventurers and explorers, searching deeper into the city to the east, have found homes still filled with abandoned goods, dusty but operable, and even meals still sitting on tables as if their occupants just “up and left” in a matter of minutes.

Though time has certainly taken its toll, and some of the city is said to be slowly buried under shifting sands, profiteers and adventurers persist in coming to explore the fabled ruins.

Fortress Of The 66 (formerly Winslow, Arizona): Far to the south, among the towering peaks flanking both sides of the Big Holes region, an army of vehicle-mounted raiders has long preyed upon the travelers of the trade routes. Known as the “66 Knights”, not due to their number but to the number “66” on their shields (taken from the ancient name of the trade route 66, which ran the length of this region east to west), they have long been a threat to the continued survival of trade in the area.

The Knights raid in large, well-organized packs on horses and vehicles, and have been known to field muskets and even modern-era firearms scavenged (it is believed) from the lost cities of the Mountains of Misery. Now and again it is said they even use “artillery” concealed in mountain strongholds to bombard passing caravans out in the open in Trader Pass below (though they use these sparingly; ammo is impossible to come by). The Knights are said to be particularly cruel raider scum, giving no mercy to captives or surrendering enemies, and rewarding only brutality and savagery among their own ranks.

Free Water (formerly Blackwell, Oklahoma): Free Water is a small settlement situated along the

north-south trade routes of the CrystalTime, formerly a haven for the local tribal raiders once known as the “Nightwind”. Though generations ago these were a scourge of the nearby landscape, the discovery of a now-secret water source in the nearby desert tamed and domesticated these people into willing trader folk.

This thorny settlement is one that everyone knows – like a jewel of an oasis sitting smack dab in the most hostile of wastes, it has come to be one of the single-most important stops on the major trade routes of the Cartel and Water Clans. It also marks one of the only known sources of pure water in the entire world, something that the locals guard with brutal jealousy.

No one knows where the water comes from, though, and it remains a mystery to this day. The tribals of Free Water, who call themselves the “Nightwind” (and decorate themselves head to toe with black pigment and war paint), have only barely managed to learn how to manufacture black powder rifles, and yet still they have, in their possession, knowledge of a heretofore-unknown source of what appears to be unlimited fresh water!

The town first became important when the CrystalTime water merchants discovered it almost a generation ago. Though they had been savages, the diplomats of the CrystalTime managed to secure from the tribals a trade agreement; in exchange for what appeared to be a vast supply of water that the Nightwind held, the CrystalTime would bring metal goods, muskets, and other luxuries. The agreement has benefited both ever since.

The source of the Free Water water supply is still unknown; the tribals guard the secret violently, with almost a religious passion. Many newcomers snoop around town in hopes of finding the true source, but Free Water’s too small to conceal the supply seen exchanged in a single day’s trading. Most believe the Nightwind must get their water from outside, somewhere in the desert, but as yet no one can figure out where.

Free Water is an oasis along the trade corridor of the Far Desert, offering behind its stony walls shelter and abundant water for those who are willing to pay. The CrystalTime Water Clan supports a growing population here, and has converted some of the nearby ruins of Blackwell into a kind of “depot” for their caravans using the north-south route in the area.

Grubbbville (formerly Waterloo, Iowa): “Grubbbville” (also known as “False Watertown”) is a ghost town of sorts, placed under restriction by the CrystalTime and denied water for almost ten years now. Without water this far north in the Desert, Grubbbville has withered away into nothing, leaving only dry empty ruins of what was once a potential boomtown.

The history of Grubbbville is well known in the Far Desert, made an example of for all communities to remember. These ruins, inhabited by a miserable

population of desert survivors, were involved in a terrible fiasco and con not too long ago. The CrystalTime water merchants still remember the affair, and avoid the town like the Blue-Spot Plague.

Some time past the Mongoloid inhabitants of the ruins of Grubbbville came up with a plan to improve their miserable and scant existence through brazen trickery. Subsisting on wasteland scavenging (and venturing south to Texaco and north to Fargo to trade these pitiful items), one day a local showed up in Texaco with what appeared to be a good hearty supply of fresh water. Although the man wouldn’t sell to the curious CrystalTime merchants in Texaco (who are always looking for new sources of water), he told them all a baloney story that started something of a mad “gold rush”.

The native told how the people living in the town found an “infinite supply of water” beneath the ruins, in great subterranean tanks. Overjoyed, they planned on keeping this secret until only a week later, some scavs found another such tank nearby in the desert, filled to the brim with forgotten water reserves. Then, just days later, a child had been sucked under into yet another giant water silo, and was only barely rescued when his cries for help reached the ears of nearby scavengers. With so much water on their hands, the native expounded, the folk of the new town would surely be more than willing to do trade with the CrystalTime, and anyone else coming out to look for water themselves.

It was all a lie, set up by the people of the ruined town to lure in the suckers. Water prospectors were waylaid and ambushed for their food and water, guns and possessions. Most were murdered or taken prisoner until the locals could figure out what to do with them.

What first had seemed like a genius plan soon turned sour, though, as the CrystalTime water merchants became interested and came snooping around. The folk of the town made the awful mistake of attacking the merchant scouts (slaughtering them to a man), which tipped off the main force of CrystalTime merchants that all was not as it seemed. Pretty soon, enraged by this treachery, the CrystalTime hired a virtual army of mercenaries from the southern communities and moved on the area of False Watertown.

The locals panicked when they saw the might of the CrystalTime mercenary army. They were soundly defeated in a bloody battle that shattered their community. The CrystalTime freed who they could from the miserable oubliettes of the savage scavenger people, and brought to justice (i.e. executed) the town’s leaders. As a final condition of their surrender, all members of the tribe were branded, marking them as raiders.

Today the old ruined settlement is more often known by the name “False Watertown” (for the whole

shameful episode of its history), or “Grubville” – an insult leveled at the place’s inhabitants, who are known throughout the region as lowly “grubs”. Few if any folk remain in town, most having fled after the fiasco to seek their fortunes elsewhere. But having been branded, one and all, as untrustworthy scum, most are shot on sight throughout the wasteland, regardless of their true intentions.

Kansas City: The entire state of Kansas was home to a great number of missile bases the Ancients used to bombard one another all across the world. It’s no wonder that Kansas – and Kansas City – would come to be some of the most devastated lands in all the Twisted Earth.

Just south of the Graveyard of Bone Cities, Kansas City is said to lie, skirting the edges of some ancient river now long dried-up. Little hairless jackals, as pink and wrinkly as moles, skitter over the flat parched land here, and there’s little to eat except maybe for the odd six-eyed rabbit now and then. Mainly tribals tell tales of this area of dry land, for no large community was ever willing to plumb its desolate depths for possible finds out there in the wasteland.

Kansas City is said, by those who claim to have seen it, to be no less dry and vacant – a ruined city, flattened from the weapons of the Ancients, until all that was left was a dried-up ember that was once the home of so many thousands.

Lil’ Vegas (formerly Las Vegas, New Mexico): This bustling boom-town rests along the major trade routes leading to the Free City of Styx in the lands of The Big Hole. Lil’ Vegas is a squalid, decadent ‘burg, sometimes referred to as the “Sodom of the Far Desert” by traders and wayfarers alike. The town itself was once little more than a regional power plant supplying electricity to the old cities of Santa Fe and Albuquerque, but a meltdown in the past left the town deserted even before the Fall.

Since that time the old desert town was rediscovered, at the foot of the Big Rocks. Enterprising corium miners located the subterranean power plant’s core where they began, just a few decades ago, a sprawling mine to extract the stuff. Since then Lil’ Vegas has exploded in population and power, and with each new year more and more unwitting prospectors are lured by the dream of opening their own mines – only to find out the grim truth of squalid housing, traditional company store policies, and outright slavery of those who can’t hold their own. The mines of Lil’ Vegas are home to a vast number of slaves, not only purchased from the Clean and other merchant groups, but also composed of those who have either fallen on hard times as miners or who have simply crossed the town’s leadership with unfortunate effects. Stories also speak of bizarre mutant monsters dwelling in the tunnels and mines, having been released by the exploration of corium-diggers in the past. This, however, is a secret Lil’

Vegas has kept to a low whisper, dismissing such accusations as rumor. Sadly, the promise of lucrative food and liquor supplies, safe shelter from the desert, and whores as part of one’s weekly payment have kept the town thriving despite the growing discontent of the people living there.

Lil’ Vegas is an ugly, dirty town, but one that can be seen for miles distant – they have power and electricity which they use to light strings of Christmas-tree bulbs all around town. It’s like an old-time carnival, glimmering with tiny dots of vibrant color from miles away.

Gambling dens and drug parlors thrive in the town’s colorfully lit streets and back alleys. The town’s “mayor”, Big Ben, a particularly cunning and business-wise ex-miner himself, even has his own harem, and often awards those who work for him with visits with the ladies.

Scab (formerly Oklahoma City, Oklahoma): The “Scab” is a sprawling ruin of fused glass, broken stone, and rusted metal rising from the rugged plains of the Far Desert. Once a great city skirting the central plains of old America, it (like so many other great metropolises) was erased from living existence in a matter of minutes by colossal strikes of nuclear bombs and missiles. Millions were evaporated in the intense heat, and even those that had fled in the light of the early warning system were killed as more missiles danced across the plains to devastate hidden missile silos just out of sight of the main roads.

In the end, the Scab and the many miles of cropland around it became a radiated, burning wasteland. Though the fires have long burned out, and the winds have rubbed away some of the most harmful radiation, the huge craters, blasted cityscape, and encroaching bleakness of the wasteland outside have kept this place from ever growing again. Water merchants and traders who ply the Far Desert give the Scab a wide berth, but mutant animals and bizarre monstrosities have been spotted at a distance among the ruins. It is even said terrolops – terrible wasteland predators – dwell in the outer reaches of the Scab, while towards its heart even more hideous beings reside in secret.

None can tell if life thrives, or barely clings, to these heat-blistered ruins, and the glows seen far away emanating from within the ruins at night could either be hotspots of radiation, or the tell-tale signs of scattered communities sheltered at its crumbled center.

Skeleton Base: In the distant northeast reaches of the Far Desert, legends among the shattered tribes of natives speak of a mythical place, “Skeleton Base”, somewhere among the tangerine sands, perhaps still naked to the burning crimson sky after all these years. Once a storage place of magical weapons for the armies of the Ancients, it is said that in their final years they conjured a great metal-skinned “demon” to guard the base for all eternity, only to surrender its vigil should they ever return. Persistent tales over

the generations have spoken of the base, of chance discoveries, and unerringly similar descriptions of the great centauroid demon that still guards the gates to this base – a base surrounded by the picked-clean bones of those who have fallen to the entity that watches over this sacred place of the Ancients.

Socorro (Cartel): Once home to a cell of the Far Trading clans, their gradual transformation into a nomadic group left this large and important site open to new leadership – leadership taken up eagerly by the enterprising “Cartel”. Socorro is one of the more concentrated areas of trade along the routes of the Far Desert, being a kind of “nexus” for caravans striking out from Styx in the west and into the deserts of the east.

Socorro lays strategically in the center of Trader Pass, skirted north and south by tall mountains that glow with a gray, grim color in the clear light of the sun. Miles of flat, featureless terrain stretch in all directions, with ruins of old roads striking out from the settlement’s walls like tendrils of some growing monster. Walls of fortified stone, steel, and fiberglass stand like firm reminders of Cartel power, while scaffold-like towers rise overhead with heavily-armed guards and watchmen keeping vigil for approaching convoys, caravans, and the odd raider bold enough to come within sight of this Cartel fortress.

Socorro, though formidable and foreboding, is one of the Cartel’s strongest settlements, with a population of soldiers, traders, diplomats, and laborers numbering well over two thousand. A significant population of “foreigners” also lives here in peace and security, including Clean, visiting Far Traders, a growing cell from the Brotherhood of Radiation (though certainly no mirror of the vast enclave in Styx), and even a Foundation outpost built within the city with Cartel permission.

In many ways Socorro is like its bigger counterpart, Styx, in that it has become, over the decades, a place where numerous groups have learned to live side-by-side and conduct peaceful (if ruthless) trade. Unlike Styx, however, the Cartel makes sure everyone in Socorro knows who’s in charge – and anyone crossing them, breaking their rules, or disrupting the fragile peace will be cast out into the sands of Trader Pass. Since it is well known Socorro is watched day and night by raiders of the desert and in the mountains (like the Knights of The Forty), this can be worse than outright execution. Outcasts attacked by raiders will be watched with remorseless smiles as they are cut down just outside Socorro’s walls...

Socorro offers more than a chance for outsiders to trade goods while on their way through the Pass – it offers security and shelter. A good 20% of the population at any given time is only temporary, taking shelter behind Socorro’s walls in traditional “boarding houses” or caravan rest inns before striking out in a few days or weeks for distant places. Scavs are a

common sight in Socorro, with colorful stalls dotting the city’s narrow streets selling all manner of junk and garbage scavenged from the Pass or the mountains on either side. Automobile parts are a specialty of these ruins scavengers.

Texaco (CrystalTime Water Clan; formerly Ames): Once a simple truck depot along a barren stretch of highway, “Texaco” is perhaps the last stop on the CrystalTime trail to the great unknown, the lands beyond the Big Muddy and through the Purple Desert. Texaco, despite being a distant landmark in an otherwise pale sea of sand, has grown over the years to become something of a stable “oasis” on the edge of the known world. Though nominally controlled by the CrystalTime, they permit all comers to visit and trade within Texaco’s sheltered walls, or to shelter from the sandstorms and dangers of this far-off corner of the world.

Water caravans from Texaco move east perhaps once a month, but move in secret; those who attempt to follow are often shot at or run out of town, bounty pending. The CrystalTime make it clear that their sources of water, in the east, are a jealously guarded secret.

Topeka: Legends of the Far Traders tell of a haunted, nightmarish place that they call “Topeka”. According to these wandering nomadic folk, the name is the same as a city once populated by the Ancients prior to the Fall, but abandoned just before the collapse of civilization as the people of its region retreated en masse to a great underground vault beneath the earth.

Tales among the Far Traders (and the CrystalTime as well) speak of how, every so often, male travelers in the region of Topeka vanish, never to be heard from again. Most attribute these disappearances to the region’s notorious bands of depraved raiders, or the nightmarish “Burning Ones” known to wander the desert in their radiated hell of an existence. But one story relates how a certain young scav did in fact discover the truth of this buried vault. It all came about because of a woman.

The feral discovered on his journeys a woman apparently lost in the desert, which claimed to be from the vault beneath Topeka. She insisted that if he only trusted her and let her live, she’d take him back with her and reward him – she alluded to scores of young beautiful women like herself that lived in the vault and who were simply dying to meet a man.

Well, of course the feral scav went with her (who wouldn’t), but according to the tale it was all a trap. The vault did in fact exist, but it was populated by a degenerate and troglodilian people that needed new blood. The poor feral was to be drained for all his vital essence in hopes of repopulating the stock – a process that would surely kill him. The feral escaped Topeka, according to the story, despite an army of pale-faced ghouls that chased after him when he tried

to flee. He tried to bury the vault behind him, but the story is vague as to whether this was successful or not.

They say that if a traveler is ever in the vicinity of Topeka, to be wary of any minks that one might mysteriously bump into. They may very well be agents of the Topeka vault-ghouls looking for another chump to waylay.

Trade City (Cartel/Clean; formerly Tucumcari, New Mexico): "Trade City" is the name for an ancient crossroads at the eastern end of Trader Pass, a sort of "gateway" to the Far Desert. Trade City is a convenient stopping point for caravans not unlike Socorro to the southwest, and is in fact home to one of the largest open-air bazaars this side of Styx.

Trade City is maintained by fragile agreement between the militaristic Cartel and the ruthless, profit-seeking Clean Water Clan. The town is fast becoming a sprawling one, barely contained within a series of walls that have been expanded again and again every two or three years. At the town's heart, oil containers and crude stockyards are jealously guarded against theft and sabotage, as is a complex of water tanks (above and below ground) used by the Clean to trade with the locals of the desert as well as passing caravans.

In addition to stockpiles of gasoline and water for trade, Trade City has grown rich also due to an influx of corium into the local market – corium mined just north in Lil' Vegas and brought here now and again by lucky slaves and prospectors who managed to escape. Other items, mostly junk but others of striking interest, also surface in the markets here as a result of scav visitors and passersby who trade in the bazaar.

Trader Pass: Trader Pass is a label for the broad area separating the Big Rocks from the Bone Peaks, which narrows as one heads ever westwards towards the Big Hole. Trader Pass is, to speak, the gateway between east and west, linking the Free City of Styx and the region beyond to the trade routes of the Far Desert.

Trader Pass is frequently the scene of passing caravans and convoys going one way or another beneath the shadow of distant mountains. Sadly, it is also the scene of ever more frequent bandit raids originating from the Mountains of Misery to the south, which strike with brutal savagery at weaker trains moving within sight of their elevated strongholds along the south. As such, the sight of barren, burnt-out wagons and trucks is becoming an all too frequent site along the much-traveled Trader Pass route.

Despite the numerous raider bands in the area, apparently there is no cohesive organization among these groups - yet. The Cartel has begun hiring on additional mercenaries to help guard their caravans moving from Tucumcari to Styx along this route, as has been the practice of the Far Traders for generations.

Waterbeds: Located on the outskirts of the infamous Arid City, under the watchful eye of the Savant Empire, are the muddy lakebeds that comprise the famed "Waterbeds". Originally excavated by the industrious Clean Water Clans, the Waterbeds continue to produce fresh, uncontaminated water that is traded far and wide by the Clean throughout the wasteland. Protected by an agreement with the detached and mysterious Savants (who rule the Grass Plains region), the Clean overlook the rumors of cruelty and other macabre stories to perpetuate their colossal wealth.

The Waterbeds is a virtual fortress maintained by the Clean.



FORBIDDEN LANDS

The term "Forbidden Lands" refers to an extent of desert, mesa-country, and dry high- and lowlands that covers the so-called "Raider Territories", the Badlands, and the beginnings of the Deserts of Nowhere. Some scholarly folk even extend it as far east as the Burning Lands as well.

The Forbidden Lands are so-called because they're an ugly, inhospitable place. Despite the heat, lack of drinkable water, and even reliable shelter (if there ever were ruins in this land, they were long ago swallowed up by the sands of the desert), man- and mutantkind still stubbornly cling to life in this wasteland.

Raider gangs predominate here, sweeping down from mountain caves and ravines (makeshift bases) or from across the blindingly-bright desert dunes. A few scattered settlements of survivors do dot the plains, but those I've encountered were always vigilant of raider activity. Few folk, even solitary wanderers like myself, find hospitality in this land. Heck, few communities can afford to give it.

Cartel caravans pass through this territory periodically, and have suffered cruelly at the hands of such bands as the Ravagers, Crazy Bull, the Templars, and others. If you're looking for steady pay (usually in water, but other forms of payment are frequently arranged), the traders of this dangerous region are always looking for scouts, caravan guards, and hired guns.

I myself wandered the Forbidden Lands for a good long time, and though I met a lot of folks in a lot of places, I learned one thing is pretty much true out here. No one trusts anyone. Water and other resources are so scarce that they're the most precious commodities around (and so are women, but what's new?). Vehicles, gasoline, and water make up the currency in the Forbidden Lands.

I did try, on my travels, to make the best of a bad

situation. I guess I just have a knack at getting on people's good side. I remember helping one settlement get its central water purifier back online with only minimal tools, and at another community I taught the folk how to treat the Red Fever as best I could. One tribe of savages took me prisoner, and though I thought I was sure to end up in their stewpot by nightfall, I found all they needed was someone to treat the chicken pox their children were dying from.

Heck, I burned through my supply of meds pretty quick out there, and got little in return except maybe some water and a good home-cooked meal. You know, though, it really is something else – seeing those wary, paranoid looks slowly change into smiles and warm laughter of friendship. I guess anyone can change. I guess, deep down, we're all the same.

Even in the Forbidden Lands. And that's reward enough.

THE KNOWING

The Forbidden Lands are a roving region of true wasteland running from northern Wyoming to northern New Mexico, skirting the barren foot of the Big Rocks to the glowing dune seas of the Burning Lands. What was once a major meeting place of highways connecting the American east and west suffered badly from the nuclear exchange (legendary places such as NORAD are in this region), but the roads remain and thus life continues to eke out an awful existence within.

The people who live here comprise a variety of mutants, both peaceful and savage. In the north, towards the Deserts of Nowhere, the broad open roadways of the south vanish and turn into dry dusty deserts where mere footfalls can kick up clouds of choking dust visible for a mile or more. Sandstorms sweep this region, striking down into the southern reaches of the Forbidden Lands at times with the whipping fury of mountain winds coming in from the Big Rocks. Savages dwell here, often in nomadic villages but sometimes in the ruins of old towns, or hollowing out caves from underground water ducts crisscrossing the Forbidden Lands. Some are simple and primitive and yet peaceful; others are savages of the truest sense – cannibals and trophy-takers.

The middle and southern reaches of the Forbidden Lands, however, are home to an irregular collection of struggling and dying communities of all shapes and sizes. Many comprise entire populations of refugees and survivors from other long-dead communities, having wandered the region for generations from home to home. Others are the descendants of survivors who found a place after the Fall and clung stubbornly, violently to their own little place despite years of raider attacks and visits by disease-carrying outsiders and merchants. Xenophobes are commonplace here; hospitality is almost non-existent.

Walled towns and small defensible villages appear

every ten to thirty miles here, but their isolation and bitterness against one another – and the raiders that infest the wasteland – have made this an ugly, cold, and heartless region. Though individual communities often have their own laws and customs to protect their own, outsiders are as good as dead in almost every corner of the Forbidden Lands.

Some few trade settlements do exist in the Forbidden Lands, but these are invariably temporary things set up by visitors from the Far Desert (the Cartel are the only real group to explore trade here), and offer only limited goods. Others are spontaneous creations, where gangs and refugees come together and make “tent cities” where anything can be had – old broken vehicles, parts, scavenged goods, and perhaps locally-grown herbs and medicines. Refugee fathers often travel great distances to sell their daughters at such desert bazaars, while others come just to watch the brutal gladiatorial fights pitted for the entertainment of the crowds (usually part of a scheme to perpetuate the settlement; bored visitors will soon leave, drying up the town completely in a matter of days).

Travel here is unsafe and unsure. Raiders roam in large bands, declaring one part of the region or another their own and brutally murdering those who do not pay tolls or pay proper respect. Those that give wayfarers even a chance are rare; most bands, such as the infamous “Ravagers”, simply take what they want when they find it, and leave no survivors. Even the various “civilized” communes every now and then partake of piracy and raiding, and lone or weak-looking travelers are fair game to one and all. Refuge is a great privilege.

Creatures: The Forbidden Lands are home to various groups, not all of which cling to civilization as one might expect. Ghouls are known in the region of Ember, while Sandmen are near-legendary as “boogie-men” who live under the very sands of the desert in forgotten water conduits and pipeline crisscrossing the Forbidden Lands like secret passages. Entire communities have been known to disappear in a single night's time due to the mining of Sand Men beneath their walls, emerging in savage packs to carry off women and children to their underground warrens.

Other creatures, such as Snuffle Hogs and Othydents, also roam the Forbidden Lands in loose groups, but the large numbers seen elsewhere (such as the Deserts of Nowhere) are uncommon at best in the Forbidden Lands.

Hidden Dangers: It is not uncommon for lone travelers striking off the known paths and highways to literally “fall through” the sand and into heretofore-unknown abysses of darkness and ruin. Old towns and rural water reservoirs dotting the Forbidden Lands have long been buried, and now and again someone will literally stumble upon them by dropping in. Most of these surprising places are empty, haunting

reminders of what once was a desolate place even in the time of the Ancients; others have since become home to strange creatures angry at outside intrusion...

AREAS OF INTEREST

The desolate and unforgiving Forbidden Lands are filled with settlements and communities that come and go with each passing decade.

Barter Town: The wretched hell-hole known as “Barter Town” is perhaps one of the few permanent trade settlements in the Forbidden Lands, a grotesque collection of shacks, old decayed buildings, and corrugated iron shanty slums compressed within a walled stockade in the middle of the desert. A self-styled “oasis of freedom and trade”, it is a vile town where life is cheap and theft rampant.

Barter Town is famous as a trading hub in the Forbidden Lands, overshadowing even the Cartel outpost of Midway, far to the south. Barter Town is controlled by no single trade association, but rather by enterprising and utterly ruthless local lords (upwards of three or four such “slave lords” at a time, typically led by one singularly manipulative member or another) and their army of well-paid, savage minions.

The people of Barter Town consider themselves better than the wandering riffraff and raiders of the Forbidden Lands due to the imagined “glory” of their city, but in truth they are little better. Slavery, murder, assassination, and drug use is rampant in the city; curfews are strictly enforced after nightfall to prevent slaves from escaping over the town walls – those caught are often shot on sight. Sprawling dens of iniquity rise like churches to vice and sin throughout the choked streets and alleyways, where captive girls from the desert are forced to serve as house whores for paying passersby, merchant and scav alike.

Thugs prowl the streets, feeding off of anyone showing weakness. The lords of Barter Town are often behind such activities, using their cronies to acquire valuable goods from passersby who are otherwise unwilling to trade. They say the power of the lords of Barter Town is absolute; this is almost a certainty, though their loyalties to one another are questionable.

Traders, nonetheless, crowd at the gates of Barter Town to get in, and the town’s markets are renowned throughout the region for the goods to be found there – gasoline purchased in Midway (and sold at elevated prices here to raiders and road warriors equally), slaves, the rare woman, corium, and of course, water.

Ember (formerly Denver, Colorado): What was once the proud city of Denver, gateway to the Big Rocks, is now little more than a blasted, radiated ruin stretching for mile upon mile under the glory of the distant Big Rocks as they ascend into the crimson sky. “Ember” (as it is now known) is given a wide berth by the people of the Forbidden Lands, for it is rumored to be infested with mutant ghouls who live

beneath the city by day, and emerge in packs to feed on anything living once night falls. Even the largest raider gangs of the region avoid the subtly-luminous ruins of Ember, giving up on prey who manage to reach the city for shelter – assuming they will perish at the hands of the ghouls who live within.

No one can say for certain what secrets Ember holds, for no one has gone into the city and lived to tell about it. In addition to packs of savage night-stalking ghouls, radiation is a lethal danger among the blasted ruins, and skeletal towers of steel and molten glass overhead most likely offer other dangers as well. Other mutated creatures, products of this same radiation, are likely to make homes among the ruins in small numbers.

Glow Mountain (formerly Cheyenne Mountain): Legends persist throughout the Forbidden Lands of what has been called “Glow Mountain”, a place among the Big Rocks where once the Ancients’ own Gods of War met in secret to plan their conquests of the earth. It is here, the most ancient myths say, that the Gods came to reveal the End of the World – and brought about the Fall that destroyed mankind once and for all.

No one knows exactly where the mountain is, and no one is too keen on finding it either. More practical legends say that the mountain meeting place of the Gods was a great fortress, but they destroyed it once they had finished off man, leaving only a glowing radiance that spawned the deadliest Red Fever – killing trespassers within hours. Others contest this, saying the Gods promised the mountain would never “glow”; its very name, “No Rad”, may lend some truth to this.

Other superstitions say the Gods instead placed guardian creatures of animate metal there to guard all approaches to their great mountain fortress – some even suggest the Gods themselves remain locked within, waiting and watching the progress of man’s broken descendants ... perhaps one day to emerge and either grant boons to the worthy or wipe out all life once again.

Midway (Cartel; formerly La Junta, Colorado): Midway is the only real major settlement in all of the Forbidden Lands, a fortified “city” once little more than one of so many communities struggling to stave off the desert’s raiders. When the Cartel first came to the Forbidden Lands they sought out to make friends with the people here, and through the efforts of their diplomats they secured Midway as a permanent base for their oil-supplying operations in the Forbidden Lands.

Midway is an oil town, and much desired by the raider gangs of the desert. Unfortunately for them, Cartel presence here is strong, and the Cartel have shown on occasion the willingness to call on reinforcements from the Far Desert if need be to defend the city. Though raiders intermittently attempt raids (sending in spies, or sabotaging

Cartel oil reserves), the Cartel continues to make tremendous profits selling gasoline to road scavs, local communities, and others bands using Midway as a kind of “trading post” with the savages. Since gasoline is the one thing that keeps the road gangs alive, the Cartel makes a bundle off of selling to them as well – albeit at elevated prices to those who have a bad history with the Cartel.

Midway, though nominally open to all comers, is slipping slowly towards martial law. Visitors are welcomed only with a suspicious stare from Cartel guards (armed to the teeth, with automatic rifles and grenades) from nearly every tower and stretch of wall. Lone travelers, often suspected as spies, are subject to interrogation before even allowed entrance into town. And once inside, one can definitely feel the effect a steely military presence has – there is very little energy, freedom, or even joy in the faces of the people.

Ravagers’ Fortress (Ravagers): The fortress of the Ravagers, one of the wasteland’s largest raider armies, lies within the foothills of the Big Rocks in the Forbidden Lands. The remains of what can only be described as a military base of the Ancients’ design, the Fortress has since become home to some of the most savage and ruthless bandits of the region. Old stone galleries in the mountainsides now serve as vast garages for vehicles and cycles; barrack-houses serve as prisons for their captive harems and slaves. Tunnels once used to store ammunition and material for the prolongment of the Final War are infested with the Ravagers’ men, and somewhere within, their great leader himself makes his home in unlit darkness and secrecy.

The Cartel has long planned to perform a daring assault on the Ravagers’ Fortress, but the raider citadel is far too intact for even their mighty armies to assault without fear of great casualties. It is even rumored that the Ravagers have scavenged artillery and even war machines from the ruins of the citadel, keeping them in secret tunnels to emerge in case of just such an attack.



FORGOTTEN DESERT

*There ain't much I know
about the so-called*

*Forgotten Desert, mostly
cause I ain't never been there*

myself. Most of anything I know I heard from a fella named Juro. If I haven't mentioned it before, Juro is a fella I've come to trust over the years, a fella not at all unlike myself. I first met Juro as I wandered the wastelands of California, sitting alone among the rocks around his own cozy campfire. Me myself I was parched with thirst and caked with dust, and I was

surprised when the bald ranger just smiled a wry smile and invited me to join him at his fire.

Juro shared with me his water and some iguana-on-a-stick, and through the night we came to talk about who we were and where we were going and why. Seems Juro was a traveler, a wanderer not unlike me, who sold little trinkets and other odds-and-ends he scavenged from the abandoned ruins of the Ancients throughout the western region. Oh, things like old tinker-toys, and the little oddities the Ancients were known to play with. But through these travels Juro had seen a lot of things, met a lot of people, and it was with great joy that I sat there listening to him tell his exciting tales of the west.

It was Juro who first mentioned the Forgotten Desert. According to my old friend, the desert lies north of the Deadlands, creating a vast lonely plain of dry scrubland and parched earth between the Big Rocks and the Range of The Lost. According to Juro, there ain't much out there but desolation; even the Ancients were hesitant to settle that land, being so dry and distant. But Juro did say that in his travels he had seen the desert, and in it were a scattering of peoples – tiny communities – the tiny remnants of folk who left the mountains during the Fall to seek shelter in the desert. They must've hung on despite the gritty wilds, for Juro says the small towns out there still talk the Ancient talk and manage to do some trade in little machines and tinker-toys.

THE KNOWING

Not much is known of this distant wasteland of desert, except for the dramatic landscape – a great rolling basin of parched earth, its color ranging from a reddish orange in its wide open places to deep black at the foot of the mountains and rock mesas where shadows congregate in fear of the crimson sun. Wind howls and rages freely over the flats, picking up dead and dried sagebrush and tumbleweed to blow about for miles like castaways lost in a storm of chaos. Cacti the size of melons sit in blanketing clusters where rough rocks sprinkle the land; elsewhere, where only sand and dusty soil cover the bare bedrock below, the desert is utterly barren and empty.

The Forgotten Desert's emptiness is accentuated only by miles of old roads that seem to go on forever, only to abruptly vanish into the sands with little or no warning. No one alive knows where these roads once led to, but many believe they once connected the lands of the south with the legendary Lost Paradise believed to be beyond the Range of The Lost to the north.

Creatures: The Forgotten Desert is thriving with life, from miserable mutated coyote and wolf-like predators, to birds and other mundane animals (moles, desert rabbits, etc). Other creatures do live here, but they are uncommon at best. Snuffle hogs are the only real danger in the open desert, but stories of subterranean beasts in the ravines and gorges are not

unknown.

Sandstorms: As elsewhere, sandstorms are a common occurrence in the desert, kicked up by rampaging winds and an unbalanced world climate. Sandstorms pick up and tower into the sky for miles, oftentimes blocking out the sun and turning the red-hot desert into a twilight world of blinding dust and choking sand suspended in the air. Travelers can easily become lost while the storm rages, falling into ravines or over cliffs while stumbling about. Storms in the Forgotten Desert last for one or two days at most.

Savages: The colorful wasteland of the Forgotten Desert is home to numerous tribes of primitive peoples, generally making their homes in the old caves, gorges, and natural ravines that lie within the Desert's heart. Hunters and gatherers, these tribals typically remain isolated in the hills and mountains and shun outsiders, fearful of technological wonders brought once every ten years or so by visiting scavengers and traders. In return they sometimes are known to speak of their legends and myths of lost places in the Desert mountains, tales which speak of old abandoned mines and even rumors of secluded, forgotten forests.

AREAS OF INTEREST

Natural features form the major sites of interest in the Forgotten Desert. No cities or major ruins are known anywhere in the entire region, making it one of the most desolate and inhospitable of wastelands.

Boils Of The Earth (formerly Broken Lava Beds, Oregon): Days and days of flat featureless sand finally give way to one of the Twisted Earth's most bizarre landscapes – a dozen or so miles of smooth, barren black rock, oddly-shaped outcroppings with a marble-like luster, riddled here and there with scores of tunnels that lead in bizarre, maniacal directions. Believed to be a region cursed by the ancient gods, even the desperate tribals of the desert do not come here in search of food, shelter, or anything that might offend if removed from the presence of the great black rocks.

The "Boils of The Earth" predate even the Ancients and stretch back into eternity as simply a geological feature of the prehistoric landscape. Miles upon miles of lava tubes create weird tunnels beneath the long-cooled lava beds here, creating cathedrals of stone beneath the ground, hidden pitfalls and crevasses that drop fifty to a hundred feet into darkness, etc.

Strange mutated bats, the descendants of creatures that once flocked in the tunnels, are said to live in this cursed land, growing large and fat and developing moderate intelligence. According to primitive legend, these "bat-people" are led by a powerful individual of magnificent size (stories say with a wingspan of nearly twenty-five feet) and human-like intellect, with strange "magical" powers of prophecy and auspices.

If the rumored bat-creatures do, in fact, infest the

tunnels underneath the area, one can only guess at their motivations and outlook on the other peoples of the land. However, seers of the Desert's tribes share one common prophecy amongst them – that one day the sky will turn red and black with the wings of these creatures at the End of Time, when they will emerge to feed off all mutantkind and slaughter all life.

Dry Lakes: The southern stretch of the Forgotten Desert is marked by miles and miles of old dry lakebeds, now little more than shallow to deep depressions in the wide-open plain. Tribals visit these places once every year to dig for water, which is trapped beneath the ground in sunken reservoirs. The desert tribals alone hold the knowledge of which lakes bear water and when, for the water ebbs and flows with the changing seasons. Water merchants in the past attempted to start operations here, but the distance involved in transporting goods, as well as locating stable and reliable water sources, proved too difficult to conquer.

Hell's Canyon: In the distant north of the Forgotten Desert, according to the tribal wanderers of the region, lies a canyon so deep that it is said to lead directly into the fiery pit of Hell itself. Miles and miles of barren terrain of mountains and gorges weave their way up to this great yawning abyss, like passages of some confounding labyrinth set in place to defend man against the intrusion of demons from its darkest depths.

The actual existence of this place, like so many others in the Forgotten Desert, is entirely speculative, but the ruggedness of the terrain in the northeastern desert is unerringly similar to the "mountains and gorges" described by the superstitious people of the Forgotten Desert.



GLOWING HILLS

I first heard tell the legends of the Glowing Hills from a savage tribal who claimed to have come from the region of the Deserts of Nowhere. I have always been fascinated by the simple stories and primitive superstitions of these savage peoples, and this tale is no exception.

The savages of the desert have long lived under a canopy of fear from the strange aurora-like glow that permeates the northern horizon of their land. Stories tell of strange inhuman beasts that, perhaps once every decade or so, wander out from the deserts' heart into the lands of the savages. Such creatures, according to legend, bring with them the Red Fever (which I have come to believe is their word for radiation sickness), terror, and death.

One story told to me by the very same tribal fellow

tells of one tribe's ritual of manhood; to become fully initiated in the tribe's warrior house, an aspirant must spend a few weeks out in the Deserts of Nowhere, braving whatever dangers he might find there, while also ensuring he does not find himself lost or out of supplies. Such a test would indeed prove a warrior's capabilities!

Tales of the so-called "Glowing Hills" originate from this very tribe. According to legend, one such aspirant returned one day with bizarre tales of a land he discovered deep in the desert where the terrain turned to hills, and hills into distant mountains. Strangest of all, the land was dotted with ruins, one of which the boy did in fact explore – "a deep and terrible pit of metal halls, lightless corridors, and filled with skeletal remains". A terrible glow permeated this rolling land and all its ruins, a white-hot fluorescence which burned him and caused his hair to fall out (he died only a few days after returning home).

The tribals no longer venture too far into the desert, and the mythical Glowing Hills are, to them, a kind of "netherworld", the place one goes if he wanders too far and falls off the edge of the world. It is, according to their beliefs, a cursed land where everything is dead and from which no one can escape death's inevitable grasp.

THE KNOWING

The "Glowing Hills" comprise a part of the Big Rocks that once sheltered numerous missile bases of the Ancients just prior to the Fall. During that great cataclysm, these bases were saturated with nuclear attacks that ravaged all of northern Montana, turning into a vast radiated wasteland. The tell-tale glow that has earned the region its name can be seen almost 100 miles away over distant peaks like an aurora of greenish flame visible from dusk till dawn.

Radiation: The Glowing Hills are a dead and isolated place where nothing lives, and only rubble and wreckage of old military installations dot the sandy slopes and high-elevation plateaus once every twenty or thirty miles. Radiation here is typically a constant 100 Rads, but certain areas near craters or long-buried buried missile silos radiate anywhere from 1000 to 2000 Rads – making any visit to the Glowing Hills a lethal endeavor.



GRASS PLAINS EMPIRE

I cringe at the thoughts that are conjured up by this most terrible of names, the Savant Empire. But no good lookabout-

man worth the name can claim he's never heard that dread appellation. Savants. Let me tell you what I know. It may very well save your life some day.

Most, if not all of what I know about the Savants and their great empire comes from a fellow I met a long time ago in Free Water, a big one by the name of Clickitat. A feral, not untypical of the desert scavs and survivors that leech off the refuse of places like Free Water, I was surprised to find that this winged giant had more to say than just a few grunts. Heck, when we first met I swore he was itching to wrestle my water from me rather than strike up a conversation.

Conversation sprung up when the wilderness feral heard I was joining the next Cartel caravan heading south across the deserts to the city of Styx. I found Clickitat quite eager to relate the tales of his own journeys along this migratory path that merchants have traveled for countless generations, until the point, late into the night under the shadow of Free Water's waddle and daub huts, I asked him what was the greatest danger of the deserts south of Free Water. Clickitat was silent for a good long time but he finally told me of his own encounters and history as they related to the Savants.

The Savants are a nation of bizarre mutant entities that dominate the lands south of the desert and east of the Big Rocks, an arid land the rises from the unforgiving sands, turning into the flat open grassy plains that – unlike anywhere else in the world – have seen the steady fall of rain in all but the driest months. This arable paradise, stretching for countless miles towards the unknown lands of the east, skirts the south like a promised paradise just out of the reach of human hands.

The "protectors" of this land are the Savants. According to my friend Clickitat, these arcane beings are perhaps the southlands' greatest menaces. My feral friend himself was a first-hand witness of their depravations. His tribal people, living on the outskirts of this pleasant steppe country, were among so many nameless victims who were crushed by these malevolent folk, who swept across the plains to destroy or enslave all peoples within their reach. But it was Clickitat's stories of the Savants themselves that terrified me most, and so I will not hesitate to describe here those details he shared with me. I wonder at times as to the imagination of that primitive giant, which may have indeed colored this story, but I'll tell you true as I can.

They came sweeping across the plains, their fore protected by massed armies of thousands – yes, thousands – of slave races. Men, mutants, and monstrosities all bound by their great mental control to charge before them in a massed pack, ravaging, pillaging, and burning everything in their wake. These huge armies, stretching from horizon to horizon in what seemed a sea of churning naked bodies, moved as one with the simple gesture of the Savant hand or

rod of office; with such coordination as to suggest that all, so many dozens of battalions, were dominated by the legendary Savant mind powers.

The Savants themselves hovered behind this awesome wave of men and monster, coursing along on the backs of whirring flying saucers that flew across the plains. From the tops of these floating platforms the Savants stood, dressed in their magnificent and archaic regalia that can only be described as bizarre – long flowing clerical cloaks and robes, covered in unknown runes and writing, with massive ornate headdresses covering their deformed heads and faces (no Savant's face has allegedly ever been seen), with articulated tubes and pipes feeding them air from packs on their backs.

With glowing energy rods the Savants strike at those on the ground, while others near and about them simply fly through the air without wings – propelled by some “magical force” it seems. All who have seen the Savants have fallen, and only scattered survivors of these vicious raids of salvage remain to tell the tale.

According to the hushed tale of Clickitat, the Savants killed his parents and took his people as slaves, no doubt to join their endlessly-growing mentally-dominated armies. Clickitat told me that he managed to escape by fleeing into the wasteland, and grew up eternally in the fear that the Savants would return some day to claim him as well.

I have since heard stories from Cartel caravaneers and Water Merchants that the Savants do indeed exist, and occupy a substantial amount of territory in what can only be regarded as the breadbasket of our Twisted Earth. They jealously guard a land where grass grows freely, where livestock range the plains, and where fertile earth is rumored to facilitate crops fit to feed tens of thousands. The Water Merchants have, on occasion, made forays into Savant country to trade water supplies, which if true means they are the only peoples known to have encountered the Savants and survived to tell about it.

THE KNOWING

The so-called “Grass Plains Empire” is a vast region of arid grazing country largely preserved despite the continental shift in temperature to a more dry and hot climate. This sprawling expanse of scrub plains and grassland cover much of what was once the great state of Texas, as well as the swampy, forgotten lands of Louisiana and Arkansas.

Few people can speak with any certainty of this vast plain, because though precious and enviable, they have become home to a growing empire known only as the “Savants” – powerful mutant overlords with mastery of mental abilities that permit them to bring cruel dominance over those who would oppose them. Over time, these mysterious mutants have come to unify the Grass Plains under their wicked majesty, closing off the lush savanna to the outside world.

In truth, the actual number of mind-mastering Savants is small, but they command vast armies of slave thralls and mentally-controlled servitors (of nearly all stocks) throughout the region. The Savants have revived habitation of some of the Grass Plains' heartland cities (such as the ruins of Houston, Shreveport, and Little Rock), ruling supreme in these miserable, hollow, ash-blackened shells like a proud Satan atop his bitterly-cold throne of Hell, surveying a twisted domain of wreckage and ruin all around.

The Savants are known throughout the region for their bitter hatred of the Ancients, for some unknown reason, but they have nonetheless preserved and improved upon long-lost technologies, even reinventing their own (their legendary “hover platforms” are just one example) when possible. They are a true threat on the Twisted Earth, possessing power, intelligence, and unbridled hatred.

AREAS OF INTEREST

No one can tell for certain the mysteries and wonders of the Grass Plain Empire, but a few areas of note are known even outside the rolling country.

Arid City (formerly Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas):

The so-called “Arid City” is a great ruined city (two cities, in fact) nestled at the edge of the Grass Plains Empire. Originally home to primitive survivors and ruin-pickers, the city was taken over by the Savants nearly two decades ago and its people forced into slavery in the city's revived factories and water mines. The Savants, cruel and inhuman masters, separated themselves from their thralls in a separate part of the city that came to be known as the “Savant Citadel”.

The Savant occupation of the Arid City continued for years, and the city's proximity to the Far Desert attracted merchants such as the Cartel and Clean – both of whom managed to make a fragile peace with the Savants in exchange for trading rights. The Savants, eerily wary of outside intrusion, set up a “foreign quarter” in this city to permit foreign traders to visit and do trade. From here, goods gleaned from the Clean and Cartel would head out in Savant caravans throughout their empire.

Suddenly, however, only a few years past, the Savants mysteriously abandoned the Arid City for no known reason. Left in their wake were a collection of primitive people, who have begun warring for control of the old ruins. The Clean have retained control of the old water mines here, though the Cartel have pulled out; it remains to be seen which of all the factions will eventually come to dominate this ghastly ruined city.

Forests of Iron: Legends speak of a broad, flat plain where the land is dotted with towering spires of broken, twisted, and rusted iron, almost in the manner of some primeval forestland stretching as far as the eye can see. In long forgotten times this entire region was rich with the “black gold”, the fuel that kept the

empires of the Ancients strong and great. The towers pumped night and day, and glowing flames from the top of each ensured that night never fell on this mighty place.

But it is said that with time, even the great forest of metal towers began to slow, wind down, and stop. The abundant gold pumped from the earth began to dry up, and the liquid that kept the Ancients in power became in short supply. Wars were fought for the last dwindling reserves, until the losers, in spite, targeted the Forest (and other fields like it) with their weapons of ultimate destruction.

Now, only broken, blasted, and radiated ruins remain where the black gold was so abundant.



GRAVEYARD OF BONE CITIES

*Many tales have I heard
about this nightmarish
and haunting land, from
merchants I've traveled with*

in the Texaco-False Watertown region, that by the time I came to the area myself, I thought I'd be well-prepared for the eerie sights of this eastern portrait of man's holocaust. They call it the Graveyard of Bone Cities, or simply "The Graveyard". Let me tell you, reader, one has to see it to truly believe it. From what I saw, I can easily understand the hesitation even the mighty Water Clan have of passing through it, and the superstition the tribals of the desert have created surrounding its origins.

What I saw, I won't ever forget. When I first came to the Graveyard it was on a solo expedition of some foolhardiness, having traveled south from the outskirts of the great Apolis ruins as a guest of CrystalTime water merchants headed via the pioneer trail to Free Water. The CrystalTime trailmaster, a most generous fella by the name of William Water, told me in the comfort of his master wagon that my endeavor was foolish, perhaps even suicidal. When I told him of the stories I had heard and my curiosity to see the legendary Graveyard, he only shook his head sadly as if he were sure he'd never again see me. I should have realized my true danger when he voluntarily gave me twelve liters of water and a fast fraxx – from his own personal stock – and sent me on my way. Before I left, he stuffed a strange thing he called a "crucifix" in my hand.

It took a few days to cross the sun-parched dunes, even riding swiftly on my fraxx, until at last, atop a great rise, I spied eastwards across miles of muddy plains something few men have ever seen. Stretching out before me lay a desolate land, something that looked like a great lava flow or mighty gorge snaking across the plains and to the horizon. A great reddish

glow hovered on the noontime horizon, silhouetting what at first I thought were strange mountains dotting the range.

These weren't mountains, as I soon saw, as the sun rose ever higher into the sky. They were, in fact, great domes, bigger than any other dome I had ever seen – bigger even than Eden, the dome from which I myself come. No, these were gigantic – as big as the cities the Ancients once made, their polish still gleaming in the sun as the wind whipped strongly over the plains revealing their glass to the sky.

It was an awesome, impressive sight. Not only one dome, but many – from where my fraxx nervously waddled, I could spy three great domes within maybe ten miles; another could be seen just on the horizon, but as night fell I could see numerous other glows and auroras which I can only guess denote the locations of many other cities well beyond the flat horizon.

Yet if not for my fraxx, I would have died there. In my foolishness, the next day I sought to head out into the plains and have me a look-see, the object of my own personal quest very much in mind. This, I thought, could in fact be what I was always looking for, what my people were looking for – a new home. Any one of those great domes could hold a city of people! I rode until mid-day across the plains; ignorant of many signs that should have warned me away, but blinded I was by my ambition to explore those distant monoliths of urban construction.

Sometime during my trip I passed out and fell off my fraxx. I should have been dead. I woke three days later, high up on the rise, the glow of the Graveyard still burning in the sky. There I lay, in the sand, my foot tangled in the stirrup that had held me atop the fraxx. That fuzzy little critter stood nearby, grazing on weeds poking through the dune. Somehow I had been dragged along for those many miles after I had fainted, and ended up there, once more out of that cursed valley.

The next few days passed and I got awful sick, mighty tired. I thought I was gonna die what with all the puke streaming from my mouth and nose well into each night. I knew then, as I know now, why that land is considered so darn haunted – and deadly. Radiation. The entire Graveyard is one giant bowl of ruin, a wind of radiation trapped perpetually in its gorges and valleys.

The weakness caused by the Red Fever had made me faint in the first place. If my fraxx had not broken and run for safety (apparently those critters have an inherent sense of radiation's dangerous presence), dragging me along with it, I would have perished there. I'm sure of it.

Look back on this tale, reader, as a warning. I don't know what the Graveyard of Bone Cities is – presumably great cities of the Ancients which were ruined in their Big War – or what secrets they might hold. Maybe we, the survivors of mankind's fall, are

not meant to know. Like staring up on starry nights at that moon of ours, so blue and green with its water and fertile continents, perhaps we are only meant to see – not reach – this paradise just outside our grasp.

THE KNOWING

The truth behind the Graveyard of Bone Cities is one that speaks volumes of the chaos that was the Fall of mankind. A region of Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri, the “Graveyard” was anything but.

During the height of the Ancients’ reign, mankind’s population was obscenely abundant all across the face of the earth. Untold prosperity in America meant a population explosion over a course of nearly forty years since the end of World War II, resulting in a cascading increase that went unchecked and even unrecognized for decades.

By the 1990s it was realized that over-population in the cities was reaching a critical level, and food riots were erupting almost weekly due to shortages and inefficient city planning/distribution. What had once numbered thousands, the homeless rate had reached the millions nationwide, and the result was open violence, dissent, and chaos among the streets of the existing megalopolis cities – New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, etc. The government needed to come up with a solution to the growth rate and food shortages.

The solution was a project known as the Metropolis Project, a massive-scale effort to create new cities for habitation in the American heartland. Using pre-fabricated buildings (and advanced dome technology to protect against the growing UV threat due to America’s grotesque industrial might), entire metropolises would be erected almost like squatter-tents in the Midwest – a region already suffering from the bio-engineered Grain Plagues the Asian Compact had sent to devastate American agriculture.

The Metropolis would solve two problems at once – relocating to these domed cities would alleviate the vast concentrations of people, and each city would also manufacture food products under sheltered domes to supply the rest of the country.

Each Metropolis was a virtually self-contained domed city with accommodations for upwards of one million people each, with ingeniously thought-out road systems and city structuring. An ionized calcium fusion reactor below the city streets powered each domed Metropolis, giving power for residential, local industry, and agricultural needs for a virtually unlimited future. Advanced processing plants situated in each city converted harvested grains into bland but edible foods that could be made in mass numbers and shipped out immediately for other cities on the continent. Gardens and parks within the domes, and polarized sections of dome shielding, permitted sunlight and greenery to grow in an otherwise hermetic environment.

The domes, however, proved just as susceptible to the wars of the Ancients as any other city. Though defense batteries of anti-ballistic missile rockets protected many, biological weapons striking elsewhere caused more damage than the missiles themselves. Diseases detonated in the atmosphere by the missiles spread the contagion over hundreds of miles; workers returning from the fields to the domes brought with them the sicknesses, which spread like wildfire among the cramped metropolis conditions.

Nuclear blasts during the final days of the Fall finished off those domed cities in the region that had otherwise weathered the storm so far. Detonations blasted the entire region as a deliberate means of wiping out human life in the area; in the end, the remaining domes were either blown off the face of the earth or abandoned by the dying, diseased survivors who instead sought out the deserts as refuge.

Now the region of once-great Metropolis domes is nothing but a wasteland of haunting monuments to the glory and ingenuity of the Ancients.

Lifeless: The Graveyard is entirely lifeless due to the lethal radiation permeating the entire basin. Mutant creatures from the Purple Desert, far to the east, sometimes wander in, but seldom remain long due to the lack of life here to prey upon.

Radiation: The very sand of the Graveyard is radiated, making travel here almost suicidal. Typically speaking radiation reaches the 250 Rad level daily, but numerous spots exist (generally in and around the great domes) where the radiation levels reach well into the 1000 to 2000 Rad range. Even breathing the air here can be deadly, being so laden with radioactive dust that an accumulation of 75 to 100 Rads per day alone is not uncommon.

Radiation Storms: Radiation storms from the Purple Desert (to the east) are not uncommonly found wandering into this blasted region, bringing glowing storms of whirling sand that last for several hours at a time, bringing with them a virtual “snowfall” of radiated sand in excess of 1000 to 1500 Rads.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Graveyard of Bone Cities is all but destroyed, the desolation of nuclear war having completely taken anything of value from the landscape. Though massive gleaming domes rise from the horizon like the crescents of distant moonrises, these are invariably destroyed, bombed-out, or abandoned.

Lost Metropolis (Alpha, Beta, etc): These are great domed cities, or the ruins of them. Dotting the gray landscape like half-buried eggs, many are lost to the sand or cracked open by nuclear strikes long forgotten. Roadways crisscross this entire region connecting each “future city”, along with elevated monorail skyways that once crossed dozens of miles on towering pilons – many of which no longer stand. An eerie wind carrying airborne radiated particles howls across the

flats, bringing death to those who transgress in this most cursed of areas.



GREAT RIFT VALLEY

The Great Rift Valley lies diagonally across the rough and abyssal territory of southern California. Tales tell

how this land was, even in the time of the Ancients, a place of earthquakes and great catastrophes, and by the looks of it today it's no wonder.

The Great Rift Valley is a region riddled with mighty gorges, ravines, and cracks that stretch from the desert plateau of Kingman Town in the southeast to the Frisco Bay area in the northwest part of the land. At its heart is a single continuous rift, a huge scar upon the land - its rocky, mesa-like cliffs falling anywhere from ten to almost fifty feet at various points along its miles-long length, sometimes even vanishing into the depths of the earth. The cliffs are notoriously unstable, the rift volcanic, and wanderers who've come too close have been said to sometimes fall to horrible deaths in burning lava below. Tremors are still reported to shake the land every few years or so; the glow of underground hotspots in the crack sometimes can be seen as far south as Calico.

The Great Rift represents a monumental barrier to the peoples of the Sierra Gehenna region, separating the lands of the civilized - the valley of the monastery-fortresses of the Foundation on one side, the desolate ruins of Bakersfield and the legendary mega-ruin of Necropolis on the other. Places like Kingman Town sit at strategic points along the Great Rift, where reliable passes down into the valley have been established. These mark important junctures on the trade routes that connect the lands of the east with the territories of the west.

The Great Rift, though largely a rocky dry desert, is not entirely empty. All manner of wildlife has come to populate this terrible region; I myself wandered this land a great deal during my service with the Foundation, and it ain't a safe, hospitable place. Not only the odd band of savage raiders (as well as slavers from up north come looking for captives), but also giant "mole rats", huge mutated scorpions, and the odd aberration spawned by the radiated atmosphere pervading the belt of devastated cities that ring the valley.

If you ever go to California, you're sure to come to the Great Rift Valley at one point or another - one has to at least skirt it in order to get anywhere. If you ask me, stick to the established trade routes as much as possible. It's a harsh and dangerous place, the Rift Valley.

THE KNOWING

The Great Rift Valley was, of course, formed by the violent movement of the San Andreas Fault, triggered deliberately by the impact of ICBMs targeting the California fault line to cause an unprecedented catastrophic event. Clusters of powerful ground-burst weapons, combined with special nuclear "burrowing bombs", hit with simultaneous precision all along San Andreas to cause a chain of eruptions, quakes, and massive tectonic movements that helped shake apart what was once California.

The sudden tectonic upheaval of the San Andreas Fault pushed the Pacific Coast Range westwards into the Pacific Ocean, slowly separating a part of the rugged dry terrain from the rest of mainland America in a matter of decades. The tremors and quakes that resulted from this unexpected cataclysm where unheard of in magnitude and severity, leveling entire cities throughout the California landscape, even sucking those on the edge of the fault line down into the depths created below. A gradual widening occurred, ripping the earth apart and forcing the cold water of the Pacific to drain in from San Francisco Bay in the north. Such flooding helped to cool the subterranean magma rising from the sudden splitting of the earth, creating vast clouds of steam the length of California that served to block out the sun for nearly six months - as well as virtually killing all life, human and animal, along the broken seam (if not by sheer heat and suffocation, then by the after-effect of turning California into a wasteland with no growing vegetation whatsoever).

This was all part of the chaos of the final Fall, when bombs were falling all over the world, and thus the fault line eruptions were largely lost to the more direct impacts of ICBMs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, and nearly every major city on the West Coast. In a matter of hours, all human life here was virtually rubbed out of existence anyway.

Over time, however, the San Andreas continued to rumble and spread, and with the decades came to become what is now known as the Great Rift Valley - not exactly a true rift valley (such a feature would require millions of years of plate activity), but enough to be called a "tear", created by the gradual movement of the Coast Range into the Pacific and the rising of lava from below to cool. This action has created a desolate "badlands" along the valley floor, which is now anywhere from one hundred yards to one mile in places, with broad collapsed regions several miles across in some rare spots. The entire region is dotted with ravines, gorges, and splits in the earth running roughly parallel to the San Andreas Fault. Each year the Rift Valley grows larger by a minuscule amount, but enough to trigger frequent tremors and quakes all across the region.

Quakes: The entire region is frequently affected by at least minor tremors that rumble throughout the

Sierra Gehenna range to the coast of the Poisoned Sea. Most tremors are minor, but their unusual frequency (perhaps once or twice each year, regularly) speaks volumes of the continued instability of the San Andreas Fault. In mountainous areas, more violent quakes have the potential to wipe out entire communities in mudslides or avalanches; in the valleys, sandstorms have been known to be kicked up as a result of major quakes that sweep the desert in the wake of cataclysmic collapses and fires to cause further death and destruction.

Sandstorms: Sandstorms are not as frequent in the Rift Valley region as in other spots on the Twisted Earth, but earthquakes have been known to kick up storms lasting anywhere from ten to twenty hours.

Radiation: Large areas of the old California landscape were ravaged by the nuclear war, leaving in some spots mile upon mile of radiated, glowing sands. Rad hotspots range from 100 to 500 Rads in such areas.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The region of the Rift Valley is filled with lost cities and ruins, as well as other physical oddities that stand as mute testament to the power and devastation of the Final War.

Bernardino (Cartel; formerly San Bernardino): The city of Bernardino was ravaged by food riots and panic during the last weeks prior to the Fall, and it shows clearly in the wrecked buildings, burned-out skyscrapers, and highways leading in and out cluttered with column upon column of old abandoned cars, trucks, and other vehicles left to rust and disintegrate under the ugly yellow sun.

Despite the eerie appearance of this lost ruin and the horrific sight of its crowded, congested roads, Bernardino has become a major outpost of the Cartel trade movement in recent years. Based east in Kingman Town, the Cartel first came here seeking to establish control of the fabled Necropolis – only to abandon these efforts after only a few months to concentrate on a “sure bet” – the holding of the Bernardino ruins. Since then, Bernardino has become a growing base for the Cartel in southern California.

In addition to the Cartel, all major merchants from as far north as the Crux have a presence here – mostly a detachment of mercs, one or two large warehouses for storing trade goods from Kingman Town and the east, and maybe even their own walled compound. The Cartel don't take too kindly to those who won't contribute, though, and they've recently begun levying a heavy tariff on lone wanderers and scavs – in an effort to keep out the small-fries that waste their time with junk trinkets or who are prone to theft and petty crimes.

It's not a friendly place, but it's a bustling place, and where there's money to be made there's sure to follow civilization.

Cactus Forest: Skirting the Cartel trade routes of the south is the so-called “Cactus Forest”, a dry wasteland of wind-blown brown dirt, bare animal bones jutting from the earth, and a maze of small, large, and gigantic mutant cacti rising into the sky. A virtual forest of prickly vegetation covers this wasteland, haven to all kinds of life from the deserts outside. Shade, secret underground pockets of water, and other animal life make it ideal for the perpetuation of this small enclave of nature among the sands.

Tribals from the desert come to the forest frequently to hunt birds and Snuffle Hogs dwelling among the taller cactus fronds, and forage for fruit, moisture-rich leaves, and berries. Cacti milk is fermented and sold by the poor tribals to passing Cartel caravans, which has become popular for its unique flavor and texture as far east as Socorro.

Calico (Cartel; formerly Barstow, California): The outpost-town of Calico rises from abandoned, burned-out ruins at the edge of a frontier of radiated deserts and wasteland. A Cartel fort along the trade routes, Calico is the last settled area for a long, long time north and east.

The Cartel came to build up these ruins to provide security to trade caravans moving to the Rift Valley region from the Foundation lands of the north, as well as the City of Lights and other settlements in the Deadlands. It is a major arterial nexus connecting Bernardino and Junkyard as well, making it an important site for trade in the area.

In addition to a small Cartel force garrisoning the fort, as well as a sizable civilian population (mostly laborers bonded to the Cartel, but also independent scavs come to sell goods in the market), the Foundation maintains a presence here in a part of town given them by the Cartel for their own purposes. Surrounded by walls and defended by a small force of their mysterious paladins, the Foundation provides much-desired additional security to the Cartel here – no one will attack Calico as long as they remain.

Rumors are already beginning to spread, however, as to why the Foundation has come so far south from the Sierra Gehenna region to set up an outpost here, but some speculate they are only here due to Calico's proximity to numerous sites of interest to the Foundation – including the Melted Wastes, the Scarlands, and Junkyard (which, some say, the Foundation is actually spying on for a planned raid sometime in the future).

Death Valley: History has blazed a terrible reputation of this lost valley, where it is said no life can live for long in its dry, unforgiving expanse. Desolate and dry, with air thick with dust and mile upon mile of no plant or animal life, it is said the temperatures here rise so high during the summer that the sands grow so hot that men will burn both mind and body in a matter of hours.

Tribals from the surrounding regions are said to

sometimes send potential chiefs to the valley as rites of passage, where they must suffer and survive on willpower alone for at least a week to prove themselves worthy.

Junkyard (formerly Twentynine Palms MC Base): The town of Junkyard lies north of the Cactus Forest among blowing sandy wastes that stretch on from horizon to horizon. Built from the ruins of an abandoned Marine base deserted during the Final War, Junkyard is just that – a graveyard of outdated military vehicles, equipment, and discarded wrecks. When the Fall came, there was no time to reactivate much of this old junk for service, and the base was abandoned and sealed-up with automated traps to last decades. And so it stood, lost and forgotten in the wastes, until about thirty years ago.

Refugees from the desert were the first to discover the old Marine base – standing untouched, dusted with sand from the decades of neglect, like a metal and stone oasis rising from the desert. Desperate for food, water, and shelter from the mutant raiders pursuing them and the harsh elements, the group decided to brave the unknown and attempt to penetrate the base. Though several of the desperate scavengers died of booby traps and automated defenses, at long last they made it to the secret command bunker of the base where they proceeded to turn the defenses around to guard their new home against future attacks.

Since that time Junkyard has become a trade city of sorts in the region, lying along the routes to the Foundation strongholds of the Sierra Gehenna and the roads to the City of Lights in the Deadlands. Built almost entirely of junked military equipment, the city is a growing metropolis of rusted, decayed beauty that stands in stark contrast to the world outside. Some power has been devised within the city to power old watchtowers and searchlights to guard the approaches of the base, and fences of barbed wire, burned-out cars, sandbags, and even old crates/concrete road blocks surround the place in an improved perimeter.

Beyond these walls a virtual city has been set up in the base's heart, where traders and scavengers gather to do trade, day and night – in Junkyard, business *never* stops. Locals in town sell off minor military items (old web gear, helmets, body armor, and sometimes arms and munitions) frequently in exchange for water, foodstuffs, and other goods not readily available among the junk heaps. Junkyard also possesses a small fleet of refurbished jeeps and cars, and is even guarded by immobilized tanks built up into pillboxes to watch over its vulnerable points.

Junkyard is a sprawling place, and rumor has it the locals have only revealed part of the city's glory to traders visiting its bazaars. It is said that beyond lie places the local folk forbid others to go, but where it is almost certain other, rarer, and more powerful artifacts of military power lie dormant in warehouses, junk piles, and old refuse pits.

Leaning City Of Fresno (formerly Fresno, California): Located north along the trade routes from the south towards the Sierra Gehenna settlements, the so-called “Leaning City” hangs precariously along a dramatic slope slipping with each passing year into the Great Rift Valley. Here the old city ruins have largely collapsed leaving only scattered rubble buried in piled-up sands, but old signposts, telephone poles, and monorail pilons rise above the dusty slope at bizarre angles into the sky. Odd campfires can be seen burning in the charcoal-black rubble, and the sounds of wind chimes and barking animals echo out even as far as the trade route trails.

Fresno was one of several California cities destroyed by the upset of the San Andreas Fault, but unlike Bakersfield, it was not swallowed “whole” by the formation of the rift. Instead, Fresno perched precariously on its lip, slowly slipping with passing time into the bowels of this volcanic abyss.

Abandoned to its fate by the merchants of the region due to the inherent dangers of living there, Fresno has nonetheless come to be inhabited over the years by a fluctuating population of refugees and the miserable dispossessed. With nowhere else to go, the roving scavengers have come to make the dilapidated ruins and their slipping slopes as their home, dwelling among the collapsed buildings or in makeshift camps amid the jungle of rubble. Campfires and small groups of grubby survivors can often be seen from the trade route higher up along the Rift's edge.

In recent years traders have ventured into Fresno's ruins to potentially trade with the refugees there, hoping for lost finds from the rubble, only to discover that plague is prevalent in a large portion of the population. Since that time traders have begun moving quickly past the Leaning City instead of stopping and camping, even at night or in the face of sandstorms. Some caravans have even contemplated abandoning the trails north unless someone does something about the problem.

Melted Wastes (formerly Edwards AFB): The Melted Wastes were once one of the Ancients' greatest military bases; where gigantic birds of steel rose into the sky to deliver fiery arrows down upon the enemy half a world away. Entire fleets of these birds, numbering into the hundreds, rose from here and never again returned, marking the end of mankind.

This great place was destroyed during the Fall, blasted from the map by nuclear strikes that still cause the surrounding deserts to glow with a hellish radiance of light, day and night. All animal life in the region ceased to exist long ago, leaving the borders scattered with bones that come and go with the rising and ebbing of the desert sands. Towards the heart of the twenty miles or so of wasteland, just north of the fabled Necropolis and the San Gabriel Mountains, it is said the very sands were fused by the tremendous heat, filling the huge bomb craters with “glass” that gleams

with blinding light on clear days – visible as pinpoint flashes from miles away.

Necropolis (formerly Los Angeles, California):

The sprawling ruins of old Los Angeles, known by the legendary title of the “Necropolis” (“City of The Dead”), lie like a forgotten ash-heap on the far side of the San Gabriel Mountains, sandwiched between these formidable peaks and the shores of the awful black waters of the Poisoned Sea. Legends throughout the history of the Twisted Earth speak of this dreadful, massive metropolis, its maze of ash-covered streets, towering pinnacles and spires, and abundant life living among its lost streets and valleys.

Seeking to explore these largest of city ruins, various groups (including the Cartel and Foundation) have, throughout the past, attempted to gain some kind of foothold in the Necropolis, to no avail. The mutant creatures dwelling there congregate in huge packs, splitting vast neighborhoods amongst their various clans and peoples – wild men, too, infest the inner regions of the city in great numbers.

According to Foundation reports, the Necropolis is dominated by a number of powerful groups, including a race of warlike mutants called the “Broken Ones” (who have turned many of the ancient coliseums into bloody arenas for the cruel entertainment of their savage people), “serpent people” among the dead skyscrapers of the city’s heart, and outlying regions infested with giant mutant bugs and their towering hills of mucus and stone, built from rubble scavenged from the ruins and the body parts of the communities they have wiped out in the path of their expansion. It is even said that robots freely walk sections of the streets, futilely attempting to reconquer the city in the name of their ancient masters who died so long ago.

Poisoned Shores (formerly San Diego,

California): Once a major naval base of the Ancients for operations in the Poisoned Sea, this great city was apparently targeted en masse by weapons of the Great Enemy during the Fall. Crushed almost to dust by numerous catering blasts, the city and its millions of inhabitants were wiped from the planet in a matter of minutes, leaving only glowing red clouds to blow in from the shore to devastate miles of populated suburbs to the east.

Now the Poisoned Shores are shunned as one of many major radiated sites along the coastal waters – in this case, nearly twenty miles north and south where old blasted ruins run right up to the waters. At the city’s old heart, it is said that huge towers of steel (former dockyards) rise right from the waters like drowned skeletal giants, along with the half-exposed grounded remains of rusted and burned-out transports and warships.

Tales say that the waters off of Poisoned Shores glow once the sun sets, revealing the presence of unexploded but leaking nuclear warheads still submerged off the coast and throughout the city’s

harbor.

Radiant Mountains: On the far side of the Great Rift Valley tower the so-called “Radiant Mountains”, formerly the Pacific Coast Range of old California. Though only fifty miles or so away, the presence of the Valley between the eastern wasteland and the mountains seem to make them appear a world away. Civilization has long left the Radiant Mountains and the western side of the Rift, and only obscure legends remain of this distant coastal range.

The mountains get their name from the glowing spots seen at twilight through dawn along the entire western horizon – glows which range in color from crimson to greenish-yellow, peeking out from just behind the mountains from old coastal sites bombarded during the Fall. These sites include Los Alamos, Vandenberg Air Force Base (a major missile site), Camp Roberts and Hunter Liggett Military Reservations, and other, forgotten coastal cities and installations. Lost to time and the slow growth of the Rift Valley, whatever these blasted sites may now contain can only be speculated at. Certainly no one makes the journey across the Rift and through the Radiant Mountains to find out.

Scarlands: The terrain of this bleak region is nearly legendary among the wastelands of old California. From horizon to horizon, the flat deserts are swept by raging winds driven by burning gales circulating at the Scarlands’ heart. Here, the once-level ground has become a virtual badlands of craters of colossal size and seemingly random placement, as if the entire stretch of desert was saturated during the Fall for some unknown reason. Now there is nothing but flattened wastes as far as the eye can see, broken only now and again by the subtlest remnants of buildings separated in places by up to twenty miles distance.

The Scarlands were once used by the Ancients to test their most advanced weapons and technologies, centered around the Fort Irwin military reservation. During the Fall, it was one of the first places to be struck by nuclear strikes, reducing the hundred miles or so of research areas to glowing, radiated rubble.

Even to this day, the Scarlands are shunned by inhabitants of the region, due to the prevalence of Red Fever in the sands and ruins there. Radiation levels rarely top 500 Rads in the open country, but certain hotspots do exist around telltale craters where Rad levels skyrocket to over 3000 Rads.

Sunken City (formerly Bakersfield, California):

The legendary “Sunken City” can be seen by travelers along the Cartel routes from far away, resting at the bottom of the Great Rift Valley like a cemetery of broken headstones and collapsed skyscrapers. The rift swallowed up the city when it first opened during the Fall, sucked down to the valley bed below in a matter of violent hours. They say the end for the millions living there was like the fall of Pompeii, happening so quickly that no one within was able to escape alive.

Though flattened ruins of the old city surround the Rift crack here, the Sunken City's heart sits at the bottom of a ravine branch nearly a mile wide, along the eastern side of the valley, where jagged cliffs rise straight up for nearly 100 or so feet – the deepest point of the fault line. It is this that mainly keeps travelers and scavs from descending into the tempting ruins to scavenge, for there has never been found a safe way down to the valley floor where the Sunken City lies.

Now and again, traders coming up and down the trails will sometimes speak of strange noises echoing from the sunken ruins in the valley below, as well as sightings of strange, short-lived lights among the darkened ruins.



LOST MUD SEA

This distant corner of the world is only legend; they say, like the impassable Bone Peaks of the southwest, a dried-up sea of mud stretching on

forever bound the southeast corner of the Twisted Earth. If there is truth to this I cannot openly say, but I have reliable information that suggests otherwise. Whatever the truth, it is unlikely that anyone will ever venture this far to find out, for the Lost Mud Sea lies beyond the lands of the dreaded Savants and their cursed citadels of power.

THE KNOWING

The so-called "Lost Mud Sea" is just a myth; it is, in fact, the beginnings of the Gulf of Mexico, skirted by mud flats around the coast (these likely being the origin of the tales that speak of "vast muddy plains"). There is no vast expanse of dried-up ocean, but an ugly brown-green sea still poisoned by the industry and wars of the Ancients.



LOST PARADISE

The so-called "Lost Paradise" is, if you ask me, just a myth. I first heard about this land after visiting the northern region of Sierra Gehenna. A fellow member of

the Foundation, an aging master scribe in the bustling town of Redding, related to me a mythical tale about this supposed paradise that he himself had heard from traders of the Restored States of America.

According to those brave folk that once lived north of the desert region (in case you've never been there, it's a dry hot country of rolling mountains,

interspersed with dry forests that are prone to summer wildfires that rage for weeks on end), the land north ascends into higher and higher mountains, like the towering fortresses of mythical giants. These distant peaks are said to be beyond even the Restored States (which, as far as I can tell, are really, really, far north), and beyond them lies the Lost Paradise.

The Lost Paradise was described only vaguely to me, as a land of rich pine forests, steady heavy rains almost all year-round, and towering mountains with snow-covered peaks (in case you don't know what snow is, it's what water becomes when it falls from the sky in cold weather; it's white, fluffy, and really cold, and sort of piles up like sand). Wild animals are said to live freely here, where no man can ruin it. Even the Ancients respected this land, and kept their hand clear of it. If such an unbelievable paradise does in fact exist, I hope to someday find it!

THE KNOWING

The Lost Paradise exists well beyond the Range of the Lost and the Forgotten Desert, in a place unreachable by current means and methods – at least no has tried. Only rumors exist about this legendary "Shangri-La" (formerly the forests of Washington State and the Cascade range), but tales speak of deep and lush forests, multitudes of fresh and drinkable waterfalls among the mountains, great gorges and rapid rivers moving down them like veins of sapphire blue.

If the Lost Paradise even exists, however, or if it is just a beloved myth spawned by miserable and desperate people of a dry and unforgiving world, is something that can only be guessed at.



MOUNTAINS OF MISERY

I've heard many stories of these mountains, said to be "haunted" by the primitive people who skirt their foot all

along the southern edge of the world. Legends speak of entire cities buried in mud, or blasted so completely that they glow like pockets of green radiance visible in the lost mountain valleys on any clear dawn.

In the west, in Styx and Socorro, more practical stories speak of raiders who have come to infest the foothills of the Mountains, raiding passing merchant caravans using Trader Pass, and using their dangerous terrain to dissuade outsiders from pursuing them back to their mountain strongholds.

THE KNOWING

The Mountains of Misery cover what was once Arizona and parts of New Mexico. A country of dry hot peaks and wind-swept valleys prone to sandstorms and drought, the lack of water, life, and proximity to other regions largely meant a slow abandonment of the mountains to time and the elements.

In recent years, however, certain raider groups have come to make the northern reaches of the Mountains of Misery their home, making entirely new strongholds on mountainsides or finding hidden retreats among the caves - rough country perfect for hiding their numbers and weathering the frequent storms that ravage the cliffs skirting Trader Pass.

AREAS OF INTEREST

There are few areas of note within the Mountains of Misery.

Bend City (Benders; formerly Boquillas, Texas):

Bend City lies in the shadow of the Bone Peaks, overlooking The Big Bend - a miles-long bend in what used to be a mighty river that separated two great kingdoms of the north and south. Bend City lies in a sandy and muddy region that rises into rocky hills and mountains to the north and west. It is here, in this distant isolation, that the settlement has withstood the centuries.

Bend City lies behind a mighty wall of stone and metal, reinforced over the years with bulwarked towers and palisades armed with flame-throwers, machine-guns, and anti-vehicular crossbows manufactured within the commune itself. The City is a virtual fortress that has denied entrance to all comers since the dawn of this new age - the xenophobic inhabitants fearing all outside life.

Their isolation, however, does have its drawbacks, and Bend City relies on the water merchants of the Clean Clan for drinking water. In exchange for braving the dangerous, raider-ridden routes to their city, the Benders offer a most valuable commodity - oil and refined gasoline (the only known settlement still producing the stuff in mass quantities besides Kingman Town).

According to rumors, the mountains and deserts surrounding Bend City are home to numerous violent road gangs of Raiders who have, for years, sought to conquer Bend City and plunder its massive oil reserves.

Mud Wastes (Entropists; formerly Phoenix, Arizona): The "Mud Wastes" comprise an entire valley buried under a sea of hard-packed mud, once released in a sudden, spontaneous flow (due to a nearby nuclear detonation) to bury large parts of the city of Phoenix in a matter of days. Those few who escaped during the Fall could only look back to see highways lined with jammed cars suddenly swallowed up in waves of drowning mud - and their home lost to

a great catastrophe.

But that is ancient history, and the city was long ago abandoned. Wind, time, and other factors effectively clipped-off the towering spires of Phoenix's lost skyscrapers and buildings, leveling the entire valley. Now, it is merely a weird landscape of oddly contoured mudflats circled by a belt of mountains in all directions.

Though isolated from civilization, the Mud Wastes have become home to a weird pseudo-society spawned by the chaos of the Twisted Earth. Known as the "Entropists", they are a group of men and women whose origins are largely unknown. Dedicated to a mindlessly destructive cause, they seek only to destroy all life and bring an end to human (and mutant) existence once and for all. Wherever they go, they slaughter man, woman, and child, and destroy/poison whatever resources they cannot take with them. They are known as experts in vehicular modification and maintenance, and are said to possess a fleet of classic-era vehicles, chromed and painted in vibrant, chilling colors and schemes (leering faces, frowning mouths, etc). All members of the society shave their heads, and are trained from the day they are inducted in the use of the katana - an ideal weapon for beheading the innocent, and a symbol of their power and doomsday cause that is already growing in recognition throughout the Mountains, Trader Pass, the Big Hole region, and even parts of the Far Desert. In some areas, to be seen carrying such a sword is enough to be executed as a suspected member of this awful brotherhood.

The Entropists live in a "tent city" at the center of the Mud Wastes, with smaller camps throughout the Mountains. Rumors say that the tent city near Old Phoenix is only a surface base, and that the society actually lives below in old cooled tunnels and caverns that were once the buildings and streets of Phoenix (now buried under mud).



RANGE OF THE LOST

They say that the far northern reaches of the Sierra Gehenna rise and rise into first foothills, then mountains, which

comprise the near-mythical "Range of The Lost". Here, I am told, tribal peoples dwell among lost mountain valleys and cloudy peaks, coveting secret forests and river gorges where game is plentiful.

I ain't never been this far north, but tales of tribals living the Great Forest region of the Sierra Gehenna seem similar - perhaps there is some truth to the tales of "lost tribes" living in this volcanic range.

THE KNOWING

There's not much to say about this distant corner of the world, since few have ever visited the towering peaks and returned to tell of it. The mountains comprise the southern reaches of the old Cascade range, extending far north from what was once Oregon into Washington state. Now, with roads swallowed up by encroaching forests or buried from years of elemental exposure, the range has become an isolated, impassable barrier to the people of the lower-altitude regions.

Tribal communities dot the valleys deeper in the range, generally numbering no more than 30 or so warriors (and their families). These tribes make the best use of natural features to make their homes as safe as possible from wild animals and the attacks of other tribes; for instance, in some areas, caves have been hollowed out like lost Pueblo settlements, while elsewhere entire villages have been built at tree-top level in more heavily-forested valleys (their elevated huts reachable only by elevator-like pulley systems). Natural silt islands in the middle of rapid rivers in the gorges have also been transformed into hard-to-reach village sites (accessed by rope-drawn ferries that fight against the surrounding white waters).



SIERRA GEHENNA

The Sierra Gehenna region is well-named; it is a vast region swept by flaming-hot winds, nestled like a desolate depression between two towering mountain ranges

on either side. Miles and miles of desert lie in the valley below, split by the forgotten and abandoned remnants of old highways and the rubble and ashen ruins of lost cities destroyed in the Fall.

In the mountains surrounding this great valley, and rising from the rocks throughout, jut the austere and grim faces of Foundation monastery-fortresses; huge citadels of stone built to oversee vast stretches of country, from which these advanced peoples can mount attacks against those moving through their lands.

I've been to this corner of the world, which was once a great bed of Ancient civilization, now a ash-covered basin of burned-out ruins and lost roadways meandering in the valleys. Settlements ranging from small trade hubs to large slaver cities dot this hellish, lawless region, connected by well-traveled routes often crowded at times with mile-long caravans and convoys of trade goods and slaves – slave typically taken from the poor primitive tribes of the mountains and sold in the skin markets of the Gehenna cities.

The Sierra Gehenna is a dangerous, awful place of radiated ruins and degenerate peoples. An abundance

of technological wonders are known to surface now and again among the ruins here, and even slavers and strong-arm communities are known to utilize advanced weapons to guarantee their long life and prosperity. The Foundation, born in this land, stands as the biggest of the bullies, its message of preservation looming more like a threat than a promise to the people of the region.

THE KNOWING

The Sierra Gehenna is the region of northern California, above and beyond the Great Rift Valley. From San Francisco in the south to the northern wilderness that rises into the Range of The Lost, the Sierra Gehenna is small but highly populated.

This desolate region is dominated by some of the most infamous ruin-settlements of the Twisted Earth, where savage warlike peoples form into virtual “city states” and pockets of villainy among the deserts and hills. Mutant armies have risen and fallen under the shadow of the twin ranges that flank this valley, while great societies such as the Foundation have risen by strength of arms and domination by might to force their will on others.

Such is the way of the Sierra Gehenna, a cruel, hard land where might makes right and where the only survivors are those who learn to prey on others. Slavery is by far the greatest trade here, with large armed and motorized bands leaving the great ruins regularly to head into the mountains and raid the savage villages there for new flesh. Those taken, including women and children, are branded and sold like cattle in open-air “stockyards”, destined for markets all over the Twisted Earth.

The law of this land is largely dictated by whoever is most powerful in the local vicinity. In areas of general lawlessness, communities usually elect their strongest and most capable warriors to make and enforce harsh, cruel laws. On the open road, there are no rules, only the law of brutality.

But with the growing number of Foundation strongholds in the valley, soon these advanced preservationists will come to infringe upon the slaver communities and other settlements – this is a growing fear among all the valley people, who have seen these arrogant “masters of the new world” rise from the ashes to become a major power – often at the expense of others.

The area is at the dawn of a violent and potentially disastrous age.

Sandstorms: Sandstorms in the Sierra Gehenna can be particularly fierce, with winds from Asia sometimes creating an orange haze in the sky that lasts for a week or more. Sandstorms coming lower can ravage the landscape like the fiercest of flurries, blinding the unprotected and misleading travelers for days on end.

Creatures: The Sierra Gehenna region is notoriously alive with mutant life, from the decadent

havens of “civilization” called “towns” and “cities”, to the seemingly barren wastes themselves. Desert anemone, doom harvesters, gronts, mutagons, snuffle hogs, terrollops, and utarn all commonly appear in the Sierra Gehenna.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Sierra Gehenna is filled with life, a great valley interspersed with cruel and barbarous settlements and towering monastery-fortresses of the Foundation.

Ashbin (formerly Stockton, California): The city of Stockton was reduced to ashes after a single week of conflagrations that left it little more than a rolling landscape of skeletal remains, soot-blackened and charred. The nuclear strikes on the port facilities of San Francisco during the Fall spread raging infernos on the coastal winds, carrying a rain of embers that ignited the city like a match. The news of nuclear war sent the public into a panic to escape the city, and thus the town was ultimately abandoned to its fiery fate.

The remains of Ashbin are an eerie, haunting place, where the wind howls like a continuous, sad moan through the few standing ruins. The landscape here is one vast, indistinguishable mess of blackened rubble, broken stone, and smoky gray glass fused by the intense heat of the city’s devastating firestorm. Entire road networks and highways are now buried under the rubble, and not a single building over two stories remains standing. The going is extremely difficult for those combing the ruins for lost artifacts, requiring great stamina and perception to avoid falling into collapsed sewers or the weakened interiors of burned buildings.

Quiet, jealously independent scavs seem to populate the sooty heaps of the Ashbin with unusual frequency, and some suggest that these ruin-pickers may know of some legendary mother-lode hidden in the ashes that others are not aware of. Their presence has already begun to attract members of the Brethren from San Francisco, who have come here in growing numbers to destroy whatever might be found.

Crux (formerly Sacramento, California): Rising from the ashes of a blasted ancient cityscape, nestled among low rolling mountains of the central Sierra Gehenna region, is the infamous city of Crux. A major hub of trade throughout the Sierra Gehenna, Crux has risen from a collection of squabbling ruin-pickers to a city ruled by powerful merchants that is divided into strict districts by its traditional occupants – its gangs. A true den of iniquity, Crux is nonetheless an important trading center in the sparse lands of the West.

Crux is a rambling sort of place – once the ruins of some old city, now taken over by vagrants, desert survivors, and anyone who wants to muscle into a building in town. The outskirts are filled with all manner of meek folk – little naked children staring at passersby from the cracked sidewalks, beggars and the

elderly peeking from dark doorways, and maybe even a coveted woman here and there – most, if not all, so badly abused or beyond their prime (or downright diseased beyond recognition) that not even a desert scav would spend a night with her.

The town gets only uglier and more dangerous the deeper one goes. Here the gangs have taken over, from the amoral gun-runners (who’d just as soon sell a gun to Old Scratch) to the brutal and sadistic slavers. A common entertainment is to shoot at the weak beggars and lepers – running from one side of the street to the other, they’ll shoot at his feet until, finally, they pop him in the head and let him out of his misery. There are parts of town where people are literally nailed to posts or building walls to mark gang territory – in other places, severed heads are used.

Crux virtually teems with life, its people a considerable force in the Sierra region. Over the years the old gangs have grown due to the influx of traders, refugees, dispossessed, and scavengers from the deserts and trails, though many of these have proven more than a burden to the city than a benefit. Hunger and sickness is common in Crux – but so is the arrival of regular Cartel and Clean caravans from the south, whose approach is often cause for great celebrations throughout the city.

In Crux, the Cartel have a growing influence due to their diplomatic efforts to gain promises from the gangs for increased support and stepped-up patrols of the roads leading to the valley. In exchange, the Cartel supply the three or four major gangs in control of the various quarters of the city with weapons, armor, and medicines to help prop them up. Cartel stockades in Crux look more like fortresses than marketplaces, with hordes of hungry city-dwellers congregating in diseased masses at their gates hoping to beg or trade away their last few belongings (much of it garbage) for a meal or shot of drug.

Crux has an even darker side, the semi-sanctioned sweeps of local gangers through the poorer neighborhoods for target practice and/or fun, which leaves many homeless dead. In addition, flashy drug-dealing merchants from Reno have long been a problem in Crux, flooding the city’s backstreets and gangs with their potent, addictive chems. Though making a tremendous profit here, their presence has left many of the masses burned-out and suicidal.

The Foundation has a small presence here in the form of a fortified trading post used to do business with scavs from the ruins and deserts. The Foundation actively uses these desperates as a means of combing the area for artifacts of interest, paying handsomely, no questions asked, in food and water to those who bring exceptional finds to their door.

Fortress Avernus (Foundation; formerly Ione, California): South of Crux stands a fortress of stone and steel erected on a natural rock promontory overlooking the dead town of Ione, California. The

Foundation moved here several years ago to build the fort as a means of keeping watch over the trade routes south of Crux; to this day their heavily-armed and armored paladins are a welcome sight to travelers on the open road. Keeping a strict peace and hunting raiders who would otherwise threaten the merchants of the region, Avernus is just one of several fortresses throughout the Sierra Gehenna region.

Fort Avernus, unlike some other Foundation forts, is dedicated solely to their military branch. It is home to a garrison of nearly fifty paladins and support personnel, with an enclosed courtyard where the Foundation's flying machines can land and unload supplies. The fort itself is kept stocked with provisions permitting the base to survive a three month siege if need be.

The town of Ione, outside the fortress on its one vulnerable flank, is utterly abandoned but said to be riddled with electronic sensors and booby traps to prevent intruders from infiltrating through its dusty streets.

Fortress Caina (Foundation; formerly Downieville, California): The so-called "Fortress Caina" is really just an isolated base in the Sulphur Mountains, discovered several years ago by the Foundation's central core. The base they expected to find was little more than a refueling depot and helicopter landing field for the former National Guard, but they took it over nonetheless after discovering the base gave unprecedented access (for foot patrols, off-road rovers, and Reavers alike) to the Sulphur Mountains.

Fortress Caina has since grown into a stockade where the Foundation trains tribals drawn, lured, or captured from the Mountains to serve as new recruits. It also has a growing vehicle pool, armory, barrack row, and operational airfield.

In winter, Fortress Caina is dusted with snowfall from January through March, a result of its elevation in the Mountains.

Fortress Dis (Foundation; formerly Redding, California): Fortress Dis is the grim and foreboding capital of the Foundation movement. Built of gleaming white rock like some towering Babylonian palace, with crenellated fortifications and towers overlooking the city at its feet, its walls flap with the white and blue banners of the Foundation and its stone battlements echo with the marching of heavy armor. A huge operating satellite dish (for inter-fortress communications), blinking with lights, surmounts the fortress.

Fortress Dis is a massive complex supporting the Foundation's central core (said to be an artificially-intelligent computer center the Foundation downloads all technological data it uncovers into, for future reference and tactical simulations), training halls for its brothers, high-security armories, and medical facilities rivaling those of the Ancients. Though much

of everything in the actual fortress is kept under a veil of secrecy, no doubt this great monastery hides many more technical laboratories and storage facilities underground as well.

The city that has sprung up outside the fortress, known as "Dis", is a squalid citadel of dilapidated streets and built-up quarters. Refugees and scum from the desert have long been attracted to the glory of the Foundation, and built this city first as a squatter's camp, then eventually to provide services and supplies to merchants making the journey here to trade with the Foundation.

Relations in Dis are uneasy at best. The Foundation has seemingly watched with silent disinterest, the growth of this town into a virtual "city", conducting their operations despite the masses of beggars and diseased at the foot of their great monastery-citadel. Few, if any of the locals are ever granted admittance into the ranks of the Foundation, who instead draw their numbers from the fit, malleable-minded warrior types of other communities (tribals included).

The Clean have a tentative agreement with the Foundation to trade water in Dis, and have their own private district where security is provided for by the Foundation. Other groups, such as the Cartel, have only a small presence here. Slavers and followers of the Brethren are not permitted in the city (this does not, however, prevent agents of either from slipping in and spying on Foundation activities here).

Fortress Phlegethos (Foundation; formerly Emigrant Gap, California): Fortress Phlegethos is a strategic stronghold controlling a major pass connecting the Sierra Gehenna valley with the Deadlands miles beyond. The fortress looms over one half the mountain pass, built into the side of the mountains, with huge ramparts of white stone overlooking the passage of trade caravans. Dust storms through the pass are not uncommon, and as such the tops of the huge fortress are illuminated by deep red lights that burn through fog and sand clouds like lighthouse beams.

Phlegethos was built by the Foundation to help aid the traders making the journey between the Deadlands and the Sierra Gehenna. At the base of the citadel is a small trade town and way station for such caravans (who often must stay here to weather sand storms in the mountains), known for thieves, unscrupulous merchants, and other villainous figures. The Foundation only barely patrols the camp, preferring to watch from the fortress walls with unemotional detachment the goings on below.

It is rumored the Foundation is well aware the pass is frequently employed by the drug-traders of Reno for their caravans, and charges them a toll in meds for safe passage, not unlike traditional "protection money".

Fortress Stygia (Foundation; formerly Paskenta NG armory): Rising from the flattened ruins of an ancient mountain-valley town, Fort Stygia stands like

some Tibetan monastery rising from a wind-swept plateau at the foot of towering snow-dusted peaks. Fort Stygia was once a small town (Paskenta), its only notable feature being a national guard armory on the town's outskirts, at the foot of a nearby mountain.

During their rise to power, the Foundation uncovered sources of information thought lost that revealed the location of several armories and bases in the Sierra Gehenna region. They came to Paskenta in search of the alleged armory here, and finding the town abandoned, faced no opposition in claiming the remaining military hardware there – a storehouse which included weapons, armor, and vast supplies of untouched munitions.

The Foundation decided to build a fortress here due to the armory's natural defensibility – it was built into the side of the mountain overlooking Paskenta, making best use of a natural cave for the storage of vehicles (mostly trucks and jeeps). The Foundation has since built a towering monastery/fortress on the mountainside, and has effectively turned the base's underground caves into weapons laboratories, storage facilities, and computer centers to support their cause. The town itself has been reduced to all but rubble to provide excellent visibility leading up to the fortress.

Great Forests: The Great Forests of the north lie among the ever-climbing foothills of the Range of The Lost. Wild and mutated forests, these stubborn stretches of woodland cling to life despite the treacherous mountain terrain of gully, gorges, and crevasses. Great redwoods, over time dying due to radiation and the drying of the worldwide climate, still stand in places like skyscraping towers among their smaller cousins that blanket the mountains.

The Great Forests are home to tribes of primitive peoples that live among the gorges and cliffs in difficult-to-reach citadels of stone and wood. Outcroppings of rock on mountainsides have become villages reachable only by pulley elevators and lifts; in other places, it is said the tribals even maintain ingenious hot air balloons made from hides to fly them over impassable canyons to their villages on the opposite side, safe from other tribes and the slavers who sometimes come to take their women and children away.

Mephisto (formerly Modesto, California): The former city of Modesto, California, was split in two by the cataclysm that created the Great Rift Valley. Utterly devastated and shorn in half, almost every standing structure was reduced to ruin and sucked down the gravel slopes of the gorge created suddenly beneath the city streets. In the Fall, almost all inhabitants of the city were killed in the first hours; others died of the fires and total chaos of the city's destruction soon after.

The ruins on the east side of the Great Rift sometimes serve as a temporary stopping point for Cartel caravans moving along the routes towards

Sierra Gehenna, but these stops are seldom long-term. The sight of so many hundreds of thousands of bones, skulls, and burned-out ruins within sight of the north-south trail is unsettling even in these dark and gloomy times.

Moaning Caves: The Moaning Caves lie east of the Ashbin, among cliffs leading up into the southern spur of the Sulphur Wastes. Between this dry forested crag country and the desolate ruins of the former city, lie the exposed trade routes connecting the Sierra Gehenna with the cities of the Great Rift Valley region. As such, this is a region prone to raider attacks.

The Moaning Caves are a natural feature of the landscape comprising caverns stretching for miles beneath the earth. The Caves are home to a large tribal population of men, women, and children who live in sheltered camps at the openings of these caves (prisoners are kept in cold, wet, unlighted pits deeper in the caves), so that the soot of their campfires does not smoke them out. The people here live in relative security from the slavers of the north, and have grown bold – raiding trade caravans of the Cartel and Clean for several years.

The savages of the Moaning Caves perform raids with anywhere from twenty to thirty warriors at a time, employing spears, crossbows, and even muskets taken from past victims. Foods, weapons, and especially medicines are taken by the tribals back to their caves whenever found. Water stocks are oddly left behind, but poisoned with natural extracts from the forests to make them deadly to those coming across the scene of a past ambush. The savages also use the forests to great advantage to attack, harass, and wipe-out pursuing parties that attempt to follow them back to their caves.

San Francisco (Brethren): What was once a gateway to the Pacific is now a legendary ruin from which a glow emanates, visible from miles away. Like the many lost cities on the west side of the Great Rift Valley, San Francisco was a victim of the Fall that was so badly radiated that for decades no life dared return.

Since its destruction, and the years following, survivors have risen from the ruins of San Francisco. Once shattered and spread out among the buried rubble, they have since united under an unknown figurehead into a powerful, growing force, dedicated to learning from the mistakes of the Ancients and destroying all remaining examples of technology in the world. This group, known as the "Brethren", are allegedly "based" in the ruins of San Francisco, but send out subversive agents along the trade routes to seek out hotbeds of the technology trade (such as Dis and Crux) to keep tabs and perform sabotage whenever possible. Though underestimated as a primitive and flawed "cult" by such organizations as the Foundation, the reality is that the Brethren movement is spreading in popularity due to a general resentment of the effects of the Fall, and the arrogance of technologically-

superior people such as the Foundation themselves.

San Jose: The ruins of San Jose burned down during the Fall like many smaller cities in the shadow of San Francisco. Ashes carpeted the spaces between the old buildings and streets, collapsing entire structures with their sweeping weight. Assisted by the raging fires and the city's almost complete abandonment in the final days, San Jose was almost completely devastated.

Since the time of the Fall, redwood saplings from the Big Basin have begun to spread south, the product of sandstorms ranging from across the Poisoned Sea. The wind-carried seeds have been adversely affected by the low grade radiation present among the ruins, growing with unusual vigor to heights ranging anywhere from twenty to forty feet in a matter of years. These towering trees are possessed with odd and gross shapes, twisted with gnarled knots and protrusions that resemble human faces and moaning mouths. Due to the enriched soil of ash and soot from the city's destruction, a virtual forest has grown up among the old streets and towering buildings, swallowing up what was once a great city under a canopy of strangling branches. Whatever secrets the city's ruins may still contain, are now hidden in this strange, twisted forestland.

Persistent rumors of a strange nature continue, however, to claim a race of ghostly "plantmen" inhabit the old overgrown ruins. It is said these gnarled people move with stealth among the foliage and underbrush, their eyes glowing eerily like green fireflies in the night, utilizing javelins and pit traps to dissuade intruders into the ruins of the old city.

Shingletown (Slavers): Shingletown is a dilapidated boom-town whose growth has been spawned only by desperate people drawn by the promise of great riches – riches to be had in the slave industry. Shingletown lies at the foot of the Sulphur Mountains, and roars with the sound of off-road vehicles, horses, and gunfire all night long.

Shingletown is a place for adventurers and slavers to meet and sign up for various forays into the hills to take slaves. Though there is an excited, almost carnival air in the city (whorehouses have begun to spring up like a forest of trees, and already outnumber the drinking holes two to one), as well as electricity flickering in the dark streets, the well-hidden truth is that less than half of the hunters that go into the mountains emerge alive. Still, the promise of pay is well worth it to many – a pay given in hot meals, good liquor, plentiful ammunition, a variety of highly desirable drugs from Reno (sold to the Slavers at cost in exchange for a lucrative deal to provide slaves for their drug factories in the Deadlands), and of course, captive women. Shingletown is run by the Slavers of Slave City, and their control is almost complete, being they are the major provider of pay and entertainment for the rabble here. Don't cross them, or there will be

trouble.

Slave City (Slavers; formerly Alturas, California): This miserable "city" lies among barren heights, at the foot of rising mountain peaks. Mosquitos and buzzing insects infest this wet country where mountain waters form stagnant pools in the plateau flats – pools littered with the bloated white corpses of those discarded as "useless" and "worthless" by the slavers who hold the town under strict control.

Slave City is surrounded by a great stucco wall that glows a punishing white in the hot mountain sun – dotted by muted watchtowers that are barely discernible from the bulwarked walls themselves. Waddle and daub buildings sit neatly in a grid-pattern among tidy little streets, gardens, and crosswalks just the way the towns of the Ancients must have looked. As evening approaches, there is a slight buzz that echoes through the mountain valleys as electric streetlights come on to illuminate the town in a soft civilized glow all night long, year round.

Slave City was set up by the Sierra Gehenna Slavers to act as a base in their operations against the tribals of the eastern mountains, which they raid regularly to take captives for their accursed trade. The "city" has, over the years, become an infamous slave-fort, with vast provisions made for the housing of slaves in absolute squalor – in covered pits sunk into the ground, overlooked by cruel sentries who spit down, urinate onto, or throw food when it suits them. Towers are strategically situated to watch over the bustling central bazaar and the quarters of town where the Slavers and their mercenary contingent live, drink, and womanize.

Traveling caravans come and go from Slave City with frequency (roughly once a week), marching dozens of naked slaves alongside them, chained to each other by their necks and bound wrists behind them. These journeys are long and take a terrible price; it is not uncommon for one out of every five slaves to die en route to markets in distant towns.

Sulphur Mountains: The Sulphur Mountains are a vast high country of dry forested peaks, interspersed for miles at a time with sulphurous, volcanic slopes where little vegetation grows and even fewer lifeforms manage to survive. Despite the harsh nature of this sometimes steaming and tremor-affected landscape, the mountains are known to be a haven for tribals once abundant all across the Sierra Gehenna range.

The tribal people of old California dwell in primitive camps and villages throughout the mountains, usually isolated from each other but, in some rare instances, coming together to trade and exchange rumors of the activities of the more advanced slavers and valley peoples who prey regularly upon them. The mountains have made an ideal retreat for the tribal people, who use the forests, gorges, and ravines to hide their people and wage guerrilla war against the

ruthless slavers and their hired mercenary forces. Open battles are idiocy for these people, who instead prefer ambush and deception to face-to-face engagements.

Roads are almost non-existent in this terrain; only secret mountain trails, known only to the local savages, provide any access to the deepest reaches.

Rumor has it that an influential chieftain who has come to gain the trust of all the tribes is leading the tribals of the Sulphur Wastes. It is said this great figure will soon lead the people in a campaign to bring vengeance against the oppressors in places like Slave City, Willows, and Crux.

Willows (formerly Willows, California): The small town of Willows grew as a watering hole for merchant and slaver caravans moving north-south along the trade routes of the Sierra Gehenna region. Not nearly large enough to compete with the city of Crux, the town has had to suffice with being a temporary stopping point for pioneers, trail-blazers, and over-burdened caravans moving along the routes.

Willows is a grotesque pit of misery and depravation; its people are geared towards only one end, and that is feeding like leeches off of passersby. Men and women of all ages prostitute themselves to passing merchants, caravan guards, and even powerful solo travelers, while local peddlers vocally fight for the right to sell their worthless goods and trinkets to strangers and passersby. The local drinking holes – which offer diluted alcohol, a few cheaper drugs from Reno, and sometimes an in-house stable of “girls” (not all of which are guaranteed to actually be female, but this practice is common) – are prone to outbursts of violence, acts of thievery, and mugging in the dark alleys leading to them.

The population of Willows believes firmly that tomorrow may never come, and live each day hand to mouth with immorality and vice on their minds and in their eyes. Merchants and traders stopping in town have learned to keep largely to themselves and keep extra watch, due to the increase in bravado and underhandedness of the local people.



WILDS OF DESOLATION

A region exists along the frontier of the Grass Plains Empire, where the rule of the mighty Savants ends and the chaos of savage mutantkind begins. Though little is known of this rugged, mountainous enclave of terrain, it is said that tribes of mutants fleeing Savant rule and lordship have made this barren wasteland home for numerous generations. Savages one and all, these tribes are said to sever heads and shrink them in

boiling chemicals, and wear them as charms of luck to inspire valor in battle.

Other stories also speak of cannibalism, and powerful shamen among their ranks that command weird mental powers to shield their brethren against the onslaught of Savant expeditions set after them into the Wilds.

THE KNOWING

The Wilds of Desolation are anything but desolate, and the stories about this rugged natural country are largely true. Inhabited by mutant tribes fleeing the Savant armies of the south (who mentally dominate them and use them as thralls and slaves in their growing armies across the grass plains), the Wilds have become a virtual “Stalingrad”, a bloodbath and meat-grinder against savant expansion.

The Wilds are currently home to almost twenty separate tribes and primitive communities, none of which have technological capabilities beyond spears, javelins, and slings.

Mutants: The Wilds are home to warlike and cruel mutants who have no concept of mercy. Strapped for resources, these tribes are more likely to kill (ambush) strangers entering their part of the Wilds than make peaceful contact. Those with signs of advanced technology are certain to be slain outright, either mistaken for Savants or simply to glean their artifacts for the mutants’ use.

Creatures: The mutant tribes share the Wilds of Desolation with other creatures as well, many of them bizarre oddities finding their way southwest from the Purple Desert, across the Big Muddy. Though rare, these strange creatures are feared by the mutants of the Wilds, and often an appearance will be taken as an omen, and used as a tribe’s totem for generations.

AREAS OF INTEREST

There are few areas of interest in the Wilds of Desolation, with only one worthy of note.

Zark’s Sky-Lake: Nestled high up in the mountains of the Wilds lies a dying lake, the shores of which still echo the calls of mutant birds and vulture-like carrion feeders soaring on the mountain winds. Zark’s “Sky-Lake” is believed to be one of the last places where natural life still lives, thriving at the depths of the lake in the form of fish and fresh water life.

The mutants of the Wilds come here every year or so en masse, a gathering of the bestial tribes to show off their new articles of war, war songs, and carefully-groomed champions. Such gatherings draw tribals from all over the Wilds numbering up into the thousands, and are marked by drinking contests, the trading of slaves, captives, and other goods, as well as ritual combat and gladiatorial games.