

Since the *Cloven Hoof's* recent publication of the article "Darwin and the Devil", we have received a sizable number of inquiries on the subject of H.P. Lovecraft's historical authenticity. The Bolivian ruins of Tiahuanaco, as the possible basis for the Plateau of Leng, have elicited particular comment. We'll get back to Tiahuanaco in a bit, but first we thought you might be interested in a quick trip to another Lovecraftian "creation" - R'lyeh.

The key to Lovecraft's literary figures - both animate and geographic - may be found in his passion for ancient history, classical mythology, and subtle allusion. [Perhaps the most widely quoted example of the last is the name of "Klarkash-Ton" - an Atlantean priest named in honor of Clark Ashton Smith.] To a great extent it is the atmosphere of subconscious authenticity created by Lovecraft's allusions that imparts a very material terror to the works of the Cthulhu Mythos. And the fact that historical allusion is markedly absent from the tales of Lovecraft's mimics has a predictable influence on their impact. If you've ever wondered why the other authors of Mythos-tales failed to strike that certain chord in you, that's why.

And, it might be added, this is a distinction that seems to have eluded the vast majority of Lovecraft's biographers and critics - all of whom seem disposed to classify the author as merely a good writer of horror fiction. After reading Lin Carter's *A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos*, we found ourselves honestly wondering whether the commentary were inspired by admiration or envy. For the moment this shall be a moot point.

But we digress. Occasionally Lovecraft would not bother to disguise the name of a Mythos-locale. A good example of this is the city of Sarnath, subject of *The Doom that Came to Sarnath*. As any good Buddhist will tell you, Sarnath is quite real. Its ruins are located in the Benares District of India at Latitude 25°23'N, Longitude 83°2'E, and the site is a Buddhist landmark. Included in the grounds is the famous "Deer Park", where Buddha is said to have preached the Four Noble Truths of his First Sermon in 528 BCE. Our latest estimates indicate that Sarnath was originally constructed sometime in the late 5th Century BCE, which means that Buddha must have just squeaked in under the wire. The real Sarnath, in any case, has a history as bleak as that of its Mythos counterpart. It was sacked and burned to the ground twice - once in 1026 CE and again in 1193. The moral of the story is that Buddhism and Giant Water Lizard Worship are risky religions around which to build cities.

And now what about Lovecraft's most famous metropolis - the mysterious aquatic city of R'lyeh, located in the islands of the nether Pacific? First described in *The Call of Cthulhu*, R'lyeh was to capture the imagination of readers like no other city in the Mythos. What and where is R'lyeh?

Ironically enough, Lovecraft himself provided the single most important clue in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. Included amongst the haunts of the sea-captain Ahab Marsh was the island of Ponape - and this happens to be a very real island. Our curiosity was aroused, and the first thing that occurred to us was that we had heard the name before somewhere. Back to the library -

Ah, yes: A. Merritt's *The Moon Pool*. [Anybody in the audience who hasn't heard of A. Merritt? Shame on you! Take H. Rider Haggard, add a dash of Sax Rohmer minus the Great Yellow Peril element, and you have Merritt.] *The Moon Pool* is a tale concerning an ethereal monster called the Dweller, who periodically ventures out of the pool in question,

located guess-where, to abduct the minds and/or bodies of innocent terrestrials. The hero, his sidekick, and the villain follow *The Thing* to an underground empire [shades of *The Mountains of Madness*] where they meet *The Girl* and *The Gods*, etc.

So we came to the conclusion that there was something a bit odd about Ponape. We were right. The island houses the ruins of a stone city of indeterminate age and extraordinarily unconventional aspect. At the moment it is called Nan-Madol, and it's the sort of place only Cthulhu could love.

Ponape, if you'd care to pinpoint it on a map, sits in the United States Trust Territory of Micronesia at Latitude 6°55'N, Longitude 158°25'E. If you've mislaid your sextant, draw an imaginary line eastward from the top of Borneo. Then draw another one southward from the tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Where those two lines intersect you will find our island.

About 340 square miles in size, Ponape is surrounded by a barrier reef enclosing a lagoon. It is somewhat sparsely populated by Micronesian natives, has 200 inches of rainfall per year, and includes the two present-day towns of Kolonia and Kapinga. Its two principal attractions are the gigantic Sokehs Rock (called the "Diamond Head of Micronesia") and, of course, R'lyeh.

... Or the City of Metalanim, as it was known throughout the last century. The equally enigmatic name of "Nan-Madol" - accorded the ruins by modern natives - translates to "In Space". No explanation is offered for this odd title, other than that it has been handed down by tradition.

Nan-Madol is occasionally referred to as the Venice of the Pacific, as it is constructed completely on over 50 artificial islets located on a site along the island's southeastern shore. There are no roads per se - only a network of canals interlacing the islets. These canals are fairly wide in some places, but they are as narrow as 10' in others, making even canoe navigation a tricky business. Including both islets and canals, the entire city encompasses over 11 square miles.

The individual islets' foundations rest upon a coral reef. On these rude platforms are massively walled enclosures of basaltic rock-logs. The slabs themselves vary from about 1x2' to 8x10' in size, and the standing walls vary in height from 6' to 20'. The walls of some islets are arranged in simple rectangles. Others comprise freakish, geometrical polygons with swelled or irregular sides, and some include interior vaults and chambers of polyhedral design. Most of the ruins are in advanced stages of decay and decomposition, but others have weathered the ages sufficiently well for initial archaeological investigation to be carried out. One such expedition, chartered by the Smithsonian Institution, has conducted preliminary research in the city, but its findings have not yet been made available. And the surrounding mangrove jungle hasn't helped; only about one block has been successfully cleared of undergrowth. That's what happens with 200 annual inches of rain!

The known city is devoid of conventional inscriptions or hieroglyphs, although certain curious decorations on the ruins have counterparts in other areas of the world. Most of the walls are so obviously irregular - with 5-8 facets to each stone slab - that one suspects the builders felt no inclination towards conventional architecture.

Surprisingly - or not so surprisingly - little is known about the origin of the stone city. A United States Trust Territory Physical Planning Program Report entitled "Ponape Island, Ponape District" suggests without elaboration that the structure was built in the 13th century CE by a Saudeleurs king named "Olo-sopha". For a more detailed version of this legend, however, one must turn to the natives.

They themselves do not claim to be the descendants of the builders of Nan-Madol. To them the city is most certainly haunted. They venture there only with the greatest reluctance during the daylight hours, and they categorically refuse to spend a night in the ruins. Horrible tales are told of those who have so dared - both natives and foreigners - and either died shortly thereafter or simply failed to return from their nocturnal venture. According to tradition the city was created by a race of god-beings - the "Ani-Aramach" - who "came down from the sky in great canoes". At the same time the great stone structures of the city "just flew down from the sky" and settled in their present locations.

This explanation may seem a bit on the fantastic side, but the "non-nonsensical" alternative is hardly more satisfying. The stone quarry is over 30 miles away, and the construction of Nan-Madol would have necessitated first the transport of blocks up to 30 tons in weight over to the city area - and then the raising of some of them as high as 60'. J. Macmillan Brown in *The Riddle of the Pacific* estimates that a labor force in the tens of thousands would have been necessary. He further notes that, within a radius of 1,500 miles from Ponape, there are today not more than 50,000 people. [Hang on, Lemurians, we haven't forgotten about you!]

But back to the legend: The chief architects of the city were two of the god-beings, Olo-chipa and Olo-chopa. It is interesting to note that these names bear a certain resemblance to Oro-tetefa and Uru-tetefa, the traditional masters of the south Pacific secret society, the Brotherhood of Areoi. [For the moment we decline to say anything about Azathoth and Yog-sothoth.]

Other demigods in the Ponapean pantheon include Icho-kalakal, the hideous war-specter god; the gigantic Kona monsters; Kili-unan, the demon of plague and disease; and Luka-lapalap, the Prince of Evil. It is Luka-lapalap who, during the building of the great city, is said to have "flown over the seas and bid the lands rise up". In the darkened tropical forests of the island's interior lurk the Kichin-Aramach, or "Little Ones", whose queerly-concealed cemeteries amidst the jungle are also Taboo to Ponape's human natives.

Can Howard Phillips Lovecraft have known of the Ponapean god of festivals, life, death, and fortune - Nan-ul-lap? Or of the great sea god from the reef and the lagoon - Kutum? What of the city's most dreaded site, Pan-Katara - the so-called haunted island, whose name means "The Sending-Forth of Messengers"? And what of the Itet Monster - a giant water lizard named Kieil-alap-amen, rumored to feast upon human sacrifices upon the isle of Itet?

And then there is Nan-Tauach, the largest and most atmospheric structure in Nan-Madol. Its name means "The Place of the Great Walls", and it is the supposed enclosure of both A. Merritt's Moon Pool and the tomb of the Sun-god Chau-te-Leur. The outlying basalt wall is 15' thick and 20-40' high, and the entire parallelogram measures some 185' by 115'.

Within the outer wall is a courtyard, periodically reinfested with jungle growth. There are irregular terraces of limestone and basalt, which lead up to the inner enclosure, also surrounded by a basalt wall 18' high by 8' thick. Passing through this second barrier one encounters the great vault or chamber of Chau-te-Leur or Chau-te-Reul. Three smaller vaults and numerous mounds are also located within Nan-Tauach.

Excavations in the area have yielded nothing to indicate the true nature of either the vaults or the entire structure. Assorted bones and artifacts have been found, but it remains open to conjecture whether or not Nan-Tauach was designed as a funerary structure. The discovery of certain old texts - such as the "Ceremony of the Nine Angles" - raises certain additional possibilities.

R'lyeh is supposed to have arisen from the sea, and Nan-Madol has had an irritating way of appearing a different size to various explorers who happened to bump into it. In 1857 a Dr. L.H. Gulick wrote in a Hawaiian publication that the non-submerged portion of the city was no greater than 1/2 mile square. We shall leave it to our readers to draw their own conclusions ...

Think you'd care to pay a visit to Cthulhu? It's possible, but the path is not a well-trodden one. Near Kapinga is the Rainbow Cliff Hotel (14 one-room cottages), and the nearby Hotel Pohnpei boasts 15 modern thatched cottages with hot water. Electricity hasn't made it there yet, so at night you have a choice between torches and gas lamps. If you're a lush and require a cocktail lounge with your hotel, try the Kaselehlia Inn in Kolonia, with 10 rooms and baths. Or you can always sleep in Nan-Tauach.

For the fun of it, we called up a travel agent and requested information concerning Ponape. "Po-what?" was the response. "How about a nice trip to Guam or Saipan?" No, Ponape, we said, giving the coordinates. Apparently R'lyeh has yet to become a tourist mecca. The upshot of it was that only one package deal exists at the moment: a 21-day tour of 7 major Micronesian islands, starting from Hawaii and costing \$750.

Always interested in rocking the boat a little, the Church of Satan has requested information concerning an exclusive tour directly to and from Ponape, including only a stop at Honolulu coming and going. If we hear of anything interesting, we'll let you know.