



CTHULHU IKAŠŠAD

ROLEPLAYING IN THE LANDS OF SUMER AND AKKAD

Matthew Petersen

CTHULHU IKAŠŠĀD

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INTRODUCTION

THE CITIES STAND LIKE ISLANDS above the fruited plain, perched atop the tells made by centuries of habitation. The great temples and palaces churn with bureaucracy, managing the commerce of thousands of citizens. In the plains, the excavations are underway, creating canals and waterworks like the world has never seen. Clay tablets pass in endless streams between people, cities and kings, with their cuneiform script as the backbone of a communications revolution.

But among these first trappings of civilization, darkness lingers. Myths and legends abound of desert demons that haunt the winds, and caravans traveling from the distant trading colonies tell stories of strangeness and woe. Cries ring out at night from wells that have been freshly dug, and some who go wandering in the steppe at night are not seen again. The plains stretch on, holding on to their secrets tightly, even as the earliest academics attempt to wring the secrets of the universe from the desert clay. History has only just begun to be recorded, but the world is already very, very, old. This is the the setting of *Cthulhu Ikaššad*, and the following text is merely an insufficient attempt at rendering the wonders and horrors of the first civilization to make the mistake of writing the wrong things down.

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PART I

RULES AND SETTING

CHAPTER 1



THE LAND BETWEEN THE RIVERS

MESOPOTAMIA—"the land between the rivers." Covering the area stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea, Mesopotamia is the land fed and watered by the twin river systems of the Tigris and the Euphrates. The cradle of civilization, Mesopotamia has nurtured human societies since deepest antiquity. The rulers of the area have varied with the millenniums, with different states and dynasties taking power at different times.

The start of recorded history in the region begins with the start of recorded history itself. The Sumerians, one of the earliest of the literary cultures, developed their cuneiform system of writing towards the end of the 4th millennium B.C.E., and began inscribing onto clay the records and writings of their culture. These tablets mold our understanding of their culture today, as much of their material culture has degraded and decomposed over time.

1.1 CLIMATE AND LANDSCAPE

Known by its inhabitants as *kašûm*, the Mesopotamian steppe stretches out, silty and dry, from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, bordered to the North by Anatolia and to the South by Arabia, and to the East by Persia. Cities dot the plains, raised up on *tells*, the ancient mounds of centuries of city-building.

The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, as well as the Diyala to the North, feed water into the Persian Gulf to the South, and provide a basis for the livelihood of the region.

1.2 INFRASTRUCTURE

The networks of trade and industry that webbed across the plains depended firstly upon the canals that were built to support commerce and irrigate the crops of the area. The building of a canal was the crowning accomplishment of many

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a Mesopotamian king - many royal glorification hymns sing of the completion of canals and the watering of fields. In the arid environment of Mesopotamia, water supply was crucial to survival, and irrigation carried a commensurately high level of importance.

1.3 HISTORICAL PERIODS

Mesopotamian history is one of waxing and waning, of influences spreading across the land, swaying and conquering the kings of the city-states that are the base unit of civilization. Cities dominate their hinterlands, and empires dominate cities.

1.4 ARTS AND TECHNOLOGIES

1.4.1 WATERWORKS

1.4.2 TRANSPORTATION

1.4.3 RECORD-KEEPING

1.4.4 ASTRONOMY

1.4.5 DIVINATION

1.4.6 CONSTRUCTION

1.4.7 MOSAICS

1.4.8 POTTERY

1.4.9 STATUARY

1.4.10 METALWORKING

1.4.11 FAIENCE

1.5 LANGUAGES

1.6 EVENTS

CHAPTER 2

REGIONS AND SURROUNDS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

2.1 AKKAD

2.2 ANATOLIA

2.3 ARABIA

2.4 ASSYRIA

2.5 BABYLONIA

2.6 CRETE

2.7 CYPRUS

2.8 EGYPT

2.9 ELAM

2.10 MEDIA

5

2.11 PERSIA

2.12 SUMER

**2.13 REGIONS FURTHER
AFIELD**

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CHAPTER 3

A CUNEIFORM CULTURE

3.1 GOVERNANCE

Mesopotamian civilizations operated as what some refer to as a “palace economy,” with a system of ‘tributes’ to temples serving as a form of taxation. The resources would then be redistributed by the central authority, whether they be metals, grains, foodst

3.2 CITY LIFE

3.3 COUNTRY LIFE

3.4 TRADE

3.5 FOREIGN AFFAIRS

3.6 SOCIETY

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CHAPTER 4

THE MYTHOS IN MESOPOTAMIA

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CHAPTER 5



CHARACTER CREATION

5.1 INVESTIGATORS IN MESOPOTAMIA

5.2 BIRTHPLACE AND LANGUAGE

The player can come from one of the city-states that dot the land, or from one of the farms or settlements that work the land in the Fertile Crescent. The player could even come from one of the other kingdoms - Ugarit, Hatti, Egypt, or even the distant lands of India and Southeast Asia, from where Gudea imported tin. Some might even hail from Cyprus, Crete, or Greece. As such, they might have any number of native languages, but would likely be fluent in the local language of Akkadian, and would be somewhat assimilated into the local culture.

5.3 GENDER

The society of the time was undoubtedly one that was firmly patriarchal, but women did have some rights that were reserved. As with all games, though, historical accuracy should be subservient to player enjoyment, and there should be any amount of leeway given to players and characters who wish to put women in positions that they might not have attained in the real Mesopotamia. Certainly, many women could read and write, and some women in Babylonian society, as nuns, wielded immense economic power and were feared for their business prowess. These women, the *Nadītu*, lived in temple compounds, but owned their own homes within them. They were allowed many liberties not afforded to regular, married women, such as the ability to engage in contracts and other business arrangements, and were very active in this regard.

5.4 NAME

Names

5.5 EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Schooling exists in a few fields in Mesopotamia; in particular, scribes, mathematicians, writers, priests, and other learned folk would attend school and learn the arcane and recondite art of cuneiform writing. Other fields and craftworks would likely function on an apprenticeship basis. Much schooling occurred in the home, and some students would live with their teacher, or simply learn their trade from their parents. Some cities were renowned as great centers of learning. Šuruppak, Nippur, and others all functioned as temple-courtroom-school cities, revered as loci of religion, justice, and learning.

Literacy was

5.6 AGE AND AGING

As with many ancient civilizations, life soon leads to death. Infection, disease, and illness are prevalent throughout the land, and

5.7 MONEY

5.8 OCCUPATIONS

ADMINISTRATOR

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

ARTISAN

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

BAKER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

BANDIT

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

BRICK-MAKER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

CARTER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

CHAPTER 5. CHARACTER CREATION

COOK

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

JUDGE

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

COURIER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

LABOURER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

DIPLOMAT

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

ENGINEER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

LANDLORD

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

EXCAVATOR

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

METALWORKER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

FARMER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

FAIENCE-WORKER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

MILITARY UNITS

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills
Riches: #

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ARCHER

Cult, Spot Hidden

Riches: 6

CAVALRY

CHARIOTEER

POTTER

INFANTRY

PRIEST

MINER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

SCRIBE

NOBLE

You are trained extensively to read and write in the cuneiform text of the era. You are literate, proud of it, and much in demand by the many people who require to record and seal their transactions. You likely spent many years a child studying how to read and write, and were partially brought up by your teacher, and may even have been adopted by them. You are entrusted with the sacred knowledge of writing, invented long ago, and are a master of many forms of literature produced - contracts, letters, accounts, receipts, and the like.

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

PHYSICIAN

You are the healer of the sick, master of the knowledge of life and death...for the most part. Malpractice carries a heavy cost, in life and livelihood, and there are still many ailments for which a cure is not known. The practice of medicine is inextricably inter-twined with magic, and you know many incantations and amulets that protect and ward the body and cure the sick. You trained for a long time, and are bound by many rules and regulations prescribing both your practice and your punishment should the former fail. There is no future for a negligent physician.

Skills: Art, Bargain, Cuneiform, History, Insight, Law, Library Use, Spot Hidden.

Riches: 4

Skills: First Aid, Insight, Law, Library Use, Medicine, Natural World,

STEWARDS

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

SURVEYOR

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

THIEF

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

WEAVER

Skills: Skills, Skills, Skills

Riches: #

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CHAPTER 6

SKILLS

6.1 USING SKILLS

AGRICULTURE (05%)

ANIMAL TRAINING (05%)

ART (01%)

ASTRONOMY (01%)

BARGAIN (10%)

BOW (15%)

SOCIETY (10%)

ACCOUNTING (05%)

CLIMB ([DEX + STR]%)

CONCEAL (15%)

CRAFT (05%)

CTHULHU MYTHOS (00%)

CULT (10%)

CUNEIFORM (01%)

DODGE ([DEX×2]%)

DRIVE (05%)

DEVISE (10%)

ENGINEERING (05%)

Accounting can be used to analyze records and documents relating to transactions and contracts. The skill grants the understanding of accountancy procedures, and gives the investigator a chance to spot irregularities in the tablets and notice sources of income and objects of expenditure.

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CHAPTER 7



MARKETPLACE

7.1 CURRENCY

7.2 CLOTHING

7.3 TRANSPORTATION AND SHIPPING

7.4 OTHER SUPPLIES

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CHAPTER 8

CONFRONTATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

8.1 COMBAT

8.2 DAMAGE

8.3 HEALING

8.4 WEAPONS

8.5 ARMOR

**8.6 SANITY LOSS AND
RESTORATION**

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CHAPTER 9



TABLETS OF MYSTERY

9.1 MAGIC

9.2 TOMES

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CHAPTER 10



BESTIARY

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CHAPTER 11

SECRET SOCIETIES

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PART II

SCENARIOS

CHAPTER 12

**INVESTIGATIONS IN THE LAND OF THE
ZIGGURAT**

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SCENARIO S1

NIPPUR BY NIGHT

IN THIS SCENARIO, the investigators are a family living in Nippur, the great temple-city of Enlil. They may have various professions, or they may be of a single profession. There should be clear family relations - parents, children, elders, etc. They have to deal with the normal vagaries of life, but also must cope with the strange doings of the people next door. A new family, not from around here, has moved in, and since then, strange noises and sights have emanated from the neat little cottage.

S1.1 KEEPER'S INTRODUCTION

A new family has moved in next door - this itself is strange, as houses are often passed down through a family, and it is rare indeed that there should be a new family in Nippur, holiest of cities. Strange noises are heard at night, and it is not known what they do for a living. Stranger still, there may be stretches of weeks at a time where no person will be seen leaving or entering the house.

S1.2 INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

The suggested party makeup for this scenario is a family - perhaps a man and wife, the parents of one of them, and their children. This allows for

S1.3 THE NEIGHBORS

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SCENARIO S2

THE LAST JUDGEMENT OF GIMIL-ADAD

Inst: Nyarlathotep

S2.1 KEEPER'S INTRODUCTION

S2.2 INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

S2.3 INVESTIGATORS' INTRODUCTION

S2.4 IN COURT

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SCENARIO S3

THE INVESTIGATION OF BAḤDI-LIM

Tell my lord: your servant Baḥdi-Lim sends the following message:

The body of a small child which was hardly one year old was found lying front of the old dike which is upstream from the lower ditch openings on the embankment of the river. The body of the child was cut open at its waist, the contents of its chest were placed on its head, and it was mutilated from head to foot. Nobody can tell whether it was male or female. Nothing is left from its middle down to its lower end. The very day I heard this report, I resorted to strict measures; I questioned the overseers of the city quarters, the craftsmen, and the harbor people, but neither any owner of this child, nor its father or mother, nor anybody who could shed light on this incident came forward ...

S3.1 INTRODUCTION

THIS IS A SCENARIO that is suitable for any number of players. The investigators could be persons with ties to the city government, or perhaps people

who live in the area of the incident. The scenario takes place during the early-to mid-Second Millennium B.C.E., around 1770 B.C.E., but could be shifted easily to another period. The method of introduction of the investigators to the mystery is up to the Keeper to decide; an investigator could be called on at their home, and questioned, or an investigator could be the questioner.

S3.2 KEEPER'S INFORMATION

The Story So Far...
Several days ago, a

Baḥdi-Lim is the chief administrator of the palace of Mari, that great city on the Euphrates, under the rule of Zimri-Lim. He is a busy man, and this additional quandary is too much. The murder of this child has caused agitation and gossip to spread among the people who live in Mari, and there is pressure to resolve the issue quickly and peacefully.

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S3.3 INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

S3.4 AT THE OFFICE

SCENARIO S4

A BUSHEL OF WILD BARLEY

S4.1 INTRODUCTION

S4.2 KEEPER'S INFORMATION

Several months ago, a strange rock from the sky crashed to the earth near a small farming settlement that later began over-producing for its barley quotas. The rock contained several Colours Out of Space, and these have begun to wreak a baleful influence on the surrounding areas.

S4.3 INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

S4.4 IN TOWN

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SCENARIO S5

THE LAST MILE

THE RIVER THAT WATERS THE PLAINS (Nārum-ša-bamātam-išqi) Canal is encountering trouble as it works its way across the plains. Having made good progress on the way from Šadikanni towards the Southeast, it has come almost to a complete halt in the middle of the desert, near the small oasis settlement of Šubtum-ša-enzi. Tools are going missing, the workers are coming down with illnesses, and the cofferdams that hold back the waters keep breaking and erasing days of work. Strange things are afoot, and the administrators back in Šadikanni are getting anxious.

S5.1 KEEPER'S INFORMATION

The Story So Far...

The settlement of Šubtum-ša-enzi (Dwelling-of-the-Goat) is not all that it appears. Populated by a cult to Shub-Niggurath, the beneficence of their god sustains their inefficiently run farms that do not follow the standard date palm/fruit tree/grain crop organization

scheme.

The cultists do not want the canal to be built; if it goes through their land, it shall disturb what they believe to be the resting-place and sanctuary of their god. Excavated into an unnatural subterranean body of stone in the middle of the silty plain, the temple and its surrounds are considered holy. The current course of the canal would come altogether too close to the temple, and could lead to discovery, or worse, quarrying of the rare stone that makes up the temple.

For this reason, the cultists have been systematically sabotaging the works of the canal, and providing setbacks at every turn.

S5.2 INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

A suggested group of investigators might include both laborers working on the canal and bureaucrats sent by the administration to sort out the problems. Excavators, engineers, surveyors, administra-

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tors, and diviners would be appropriate.

S5.3 AT THE OFFICE

SCENARIO S6

CLOUDS OVER TAKULTUM-SIBBAD

Inst: Deep Ones

S6.1 KEEPER'S INTRODUCTION

S6.2 INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

S6.3 INVESTIGATORS' INTRODUCTION

S6.4 IN TOWN

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PART III

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FURTHER READING

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APPENDIX B

HANDOUTS

B.1 NIPPUR BY NIGHT

**B.2 THE LAST
JUDGEMENT OF
GIMIL-ADAD**

**B.3 THE INVESTIGATION
OF BAḤDI-LIM**

**B.4 A BUSHEL OF WILD
BARLEY**

**B.5 CLOUDS OVER
TAKULTUM-SIBBAD**

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