

Busiris RPG - Beyond the City Walls

Introduction

Although the City of Busiris itself is a fascinating place to explore and adventure in, it is just a gateway to an entire world. Beyond its ancient cyclopean walls lie towns and lush farmland, soaring mountains, the immense expanse of the Great Salt Desert, and beyond this the dangers and fabulous wealth of the jungle interior.

Each of these locations has a history, and part to play in modern Busiris. Underlying all of them, however, are the ruins and terrible secrets of the Ancient Ones.

The Province of Busiris

The province is a narrow strip of fertile land between the coast and the Rim Mountains. It is fertile because all the rains that run in off the ocean hit the mountains and then tumble back down to the shore in torrents.

The men of the Empire are past masters at irrigation and have turned the dusty red soil into productive farmland. All along the coast are fields of tall barley, wide orchards of date palm, carob and olive in the rockier patches and vineyards and tea plantations on the cooler slopes of the foothills.

The marshlands that accumulate at the mouths of the many rivers and streams are cultivated for papyrus and wading birds. The coast is dotted with fishing villages.

There are seven towns of reasonable size and countless villages and farmsteads along the coastal strip. Each town is a centre for granaries and trade and all but one are on safe harbours on the coast. The last is in the foothills of the Rim Mountains in the centre of the wine and tea growing region.

This is a rich new province with plenty of land for noble, priest and freeman to make a living.

The Thousand Isles

Along the coast of Busiris are many coral reefs and small island chains.

Many of these islands, especially close to deep water channels, have become home to the province's fishing fleets. There are a native people but these have been pushed back onto the more remote islands and atolls.

The fisher folk also act as pilots for merchant and military vessels as they pass through the treacherous reefs.

The Rim Mountains

The source of the life giving rains that inundate the coastal strip is also the province's protection against the Great Salt Desert. The mountains are tall, barren and jagged, many reaching over 12,000 feet. The tallest have snow upon them all year round. Lower down snow is exceedingly rare given the equatorial climate.

On the ocean side there are steep foothills, many now terraced for the cultivation of tea and vines. Further up, at the beginning of the high passes through the Rim are Imperial Outposts. Solid stone forts built upon ancient ruins that watch the many caravans toiling by and prevent the worst of the bandits from plundering the province below.

Through the passes and you come to the high plateau of the Great Salt Desert. On this side there are no foothills, just the steep scree-strewn flanks of the mountains themselves.

The Great Salt Desert

This is an immense expanse some six-hundred miles across and over a thousand long from north to south. Towards the west and the mountains it is flat salt pan. The few streams that come out of the passes soon peter out in the unrelenting glare of the sun. The only features are piles of glacial moraine - huge boulder piles that offer a little shade in this pitiless waste. Some of these piles conceal waterholes or even ancient ruins.

Well marked caravan routes snake down from the high passes and across the salt pan, often diverting from the most direct route to visit known waterholes. The Empire has abandoned the few outposts it held here in recent years under pressure from Mogadai raiders.

Beyond the salt pan to the east is the dune sea, an area of constantly shifting sand. After every storm the terrain is utterly changed, and occasionally the sand will be scraped bare of the rock beneath and expose ancient ruins. Here there is no water at all and no shade.

The salt desert is cold, being at an average altitude of 8,000 feet. The dune sea however, is much lower down and blisteringly hot.

Eventually the dune sea gives way to scrubby savannah. A strip some fifty miles wide runs the length of the desert and borders the Jungles.

The dune sea is the home of the Mogadai, fierce desert nomads who raid, smuggle and trade with equal abandon. They are famous for their use of fast camels. Their cousins, the Bedu, live in the salt desert and the Rim Mountains. Their favoured mounts are great lizards which, though slower than a camel, are far more dangerous. The Bedu are more used to the Empire and its ways and have formed alliances with it and its merchants.

The Jungles

No civilised man has ever crossed the jungles of the interior. Most travellers are restricted to the trading posts along its edge. A few expeditions have set out to achieve this objective but not one has ever returned. So as far as is known the jungle is endless.

The Jungle is made up of titanic trees, many as big around as a fortress tower and as tall as any building in the empire. Many of the tribes close to the Trading Posts build their villages in these trees, high above the many dangerous predators that haunt the jungle floor below.

The tribes themselves resemble the Nubians in skin and size, though pygmies have been encountered in the savannah lands and many have been captured as slaves by the jungle tribes and sold to traders.

The Ruins of the Ancient Ones

It has become obvious during the Empire's short tenure on this continent that they are not the first great civilisation to inhabit it. Long before the Empire came, and in fact long before the folk memory of the Mogadai, Bedu and jungle tribes, there was a civilisation that covered much of the land from the coast to as far inland as any man has been.

These Ancient Ones (as they have come to be called) left behind huge edifices of unmortared, fitted stone that dwarf even the greatest of the Empire's achievements to date. Despite their unequalled masonry though many have fallen into ruin. Whether this was as a result of time, war or earthquake no one is sure.

From the dimensions of their buildings modern masons have speculated that the Ancient Ones were tall (over 8' on average) and slender. Their deeply carved pictographic writing remains mostly undeciphered, even by magic. What is sure is that these ancient ruins, often now buried underground, have become the lairs of bandits, raiders, ghastly cults and strange monsters. Even terrible demons have been encountered.

The discovery and exploration of these ancient ruins has become an industry in itself, distracting many adventurers and tomb-robbers from their normal pursuits, much to the relief of the Imperial authorities.

The underground trade in ancient artwork and artefacts is brisk and profitable. Of special interest is their mastery of crystalline structures that seem capable of holding or changing magical power.