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INTRODUCTION

SACRED SITES

Unearth the divine secrets of the deities in these four sacred sanctuaries. As in the original *Sacred Ground*, *Sacred Ground II* presents four holy sites to use as PC home bases, as settings for your next adventure, or as lairs for your characters' most powerful adversary. Each entry provides complete maps and illustrations of the location, along with magical and mundane protections, NPC stats and backgrounds, and plot ideas to bring the site to life.

Sacred Ground II presents material that's adaptable to any fantasy campaign, whether it's a published setting or a world that you've created. You can use these locations straight out of the book at a moment's notice, or make them a foundation for holy places of your own design.

THE SITES

The sites included in this book include a monk's retreat, a druid's grove, a place of healing, and the domain of a seer. Each was created by a distinct group with its own goals and motivations, and harbors secrets and dangers unique to itself.

HAI SHEN GONG

This vibrantly colorful Middle Kingdom temple sits atop a wind-blasted cliff overlooking the crashing waves of a dark ocean below. Adherents congregate daily to pray, ring bells, sound gongs, and utter chants. The head priestess personally attends to the fiery beacon that warns ships away from the dangerous shoals.

EARTHBLOOD GROVE

On the edges of civilization is an old-growth stand of hardwood trees with the reputation of being haunted and filled with strange fey creatures. Those concerned

with such things know the secret of the forest: it is a druidic grove with a powerful natural relic hidden in its heart.

CRECHE HOSPICE

A small country estate houses an unfinished temple complex and the headquarters of the Crèche Knights. The hospice is a pilgrimage site, hospital, garrison, and inn all at once, but also a prison for an entity called the Blasphemer, which prophesies that other creatures like itself will soon rise to plunge the religions of the world into chaos.

THE ORACLE OF SUMURA

This ancient mountain tower is kept by mystics dedicated to the Lady of Fate, and is home to the goddess' oracle. At the request of supplicants, this young girl can plumb the depths of history and unravel the threads of destiny.

SECTION LAYOUT

Each holy site is described using the headers below for easy reference. The index in the back of this book also lists all of the NPCs given in this book, as well as the new rules material, for quick reference.

AT A GLANCE

This section provides a quick rundown on the site's history, construction, layout, and defenses. It also briefly discusses the group that built it and why, and describes a few of the primary people inhabiting it, as well as their

basic goals and motivations. Finally, it gives an explanation of the primary uses for the site at present.

PLACEMENT

The Placement section discusses the sorts of locations where the site would work best in your campaign world. This section usually gives you some choices designed to help adapt the site into your campaign with minimal effort, and suggests changes that might help it fit in realistically.

CHARACTERS

Here you can find statistics and descriptions for the site's most influential characters and for "typical" inhabitants. In addition, this section describes their personality traits, motivations, goals, and their potential interactions with other NPCs and the player characters. The larger politics involved in the situation are often outlined in this section, as well.

THE SITE

This is the bulk of the entry, where the physical description of the site is given room by room. Detailed accounts are included here of the site's layout, traps, hazards, magical protections, design features, creatures, magic items, and all the crunchy bits that make the site what it is.

SCENES

This Scenes section contains ideas for ways PCs can become involved with the site. This includes hooks for getting the characters to the site and suggestions for

involving them in the internal machinations of its inhabitants, as well as larger plotlines that can involve your players.

ALTERNATE VERSIONS

Finally, we give some ideas for modifying the site so that it can play a different role in your campaign. The personalities and goals of the site's inhabitants might change drastically, or the site itself might be transformed. What if the residents are really the evil minions of some dark god, for instance, and not the kindly caretakers they would have the PCs think them? Maybe they're hiding a deeper agenda that only the player characters can discover. These kinds of variations are suggested in this last section.

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CHAPTER ONE

HAI SHEN GONG

AT A GLANCE

Hai Shen Gong (hai shuhn gohng), literally “the sea spirit temple,” is a colorful place that sits atop a wind-blasted cliff and overlooks the crashing waves of a vast ocean below. It is built in the traditional, gaudy style of Taoist temples throughout the Middle Kingdom. The effigies of five deities and one demon live inside it, the most important of which is the Sea Goddess. Smoke hangs thickly in the temple air, the by-product of countless wax candles and incense sticks, and a fireplace outside fuels a towering light beacon that stands like a sentinel at the cliff’s edge. The beacon itself is a perfect pearl as large as a boulder. It pulsates brightly at night atop its tower to warn ships away from the dangerous cliffs and shallows below.

Unlike other Taoist temples, Hai Shen Gong houses a small population of mendicant nuns who dedicate their lives to the ocean and their goddess.

PLACEMENT

Even though Hai Shen Gong is in a fairly remote location, each year it still draws a number of visitors seeking the Sea Goddess’ wisdom before embarking on their sea adventures. One assumption of this chapter is that the campaign in which the temple is located is an Asian analogue, specifically one similar to mythic China (generically referred to here as “the Middle Kingdom”). However, any setting will work as long as it possesses a number of animistic deities.

To use Hai Shen Gong in a campaign world that is less sino-centric, consider the following:

- If your world has a nation that’s an Asian analogue but the current campaign isn’t set in it, then the temple could have been built by Middle Kingdom immigrants. They were part of a trade mission to a distant country when a

storm blew their ship off course. After landing on this strange shore and settling in, they built Hai Shen Gong to honor the Goddess for delivering them safely.

- The temple can be used “as is” but populated with nuns from local races and cultures. Their form of worship is strange and different when compared to the mainstream faiths in the region, making Hai Shen Gong a cultish offshoot. The temple’s gaudiness and alien trappings emulate the diversity of ocean life.
- You can change the décor of the temple and the names of its inhabitants, but leave everything else more or less intact. The layout is simple enough that Sea Goddess worshippers in any culture could have built the temple.

CHARACTERS

The following NPCs are residents of Hai Shen Gong.

SHI XUAN-LAN

Reluctant Leader

“Next time Old Hu pisses in the incense pot, shoot him.”

Originally born on the plains north of the Middle Kingdom, Shi Xuan-Lan (shih shwen lahn) never expected she would end up at the absolute end of the world worshipping an ancient sea goddess her people never imagined existed. The Butong family, commoners in the service of the ruling Prairie-Lion Clan, reared her, naming her *Kita* (keeta), or “summer meadow.” By the time she could walk she was no stranger to the saddle. As a teenager, she caught and tamed a notorious stallion called Hellwind (both for his blazing speed and his wicked flatulence.) As a young woman, she exhibited the kind of ambition all seven of the khan’s increasingly worthless sons lacked. She had a hunter’s steady hand and precision, a killer’s instinct, a warrior’s battlefield