The Pyramid of the Sceptanar

1. Burial chamber
2. Burial chamber
3. Chamber of the King
4. Grand Gallery
5. Air shafts
6. Air shafts
7. Ascending corridor
8. Escape shaft (sealed)
9. Descending corridor

(Many of these corridors are for the comfort of the builders; all access tunnels have been sealed after completion.)
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INTRODUCTION

"The span of earthly things is as a dream; but a fair welcome is given he who has reached the South."
—Old Mulhorand saying

The South, the ancient South, is the place where mankind first reached greatness in the Forgotten Realms at the beginning of the age. The remnants of this greatness are the three kingdoms of Mulhorand, Unther, and Chasenta, kingdoms of mystery and ancient empires.

This book tells of the rise and fall of great realms, of god-kings and ancient magic whose power is unmatched anywhere in the Realms. This is the story of the Old Empires.

The ancient south can be termed "a slumbering giant." It is an extremely powerful land that wishes to be left alone to engage in its own self-indulgent, decadent pursuits, not caring what goes on beyond its borders.

Still, many of their neighbors do not see them this way. When a plague occurs elsewhere in the Realms, you can often hear whispers of Southern magic. The South is considered to be a place of twisted power, better left untouched. Even the most reckless adventuring parties give the South a wide berth.

Yet it is rich in magic, and on occasion outsiders venture to Mulhorand or Unther and become entangled in the labyrinthine politics of their gods.

Many things are unique to the Old Empires. They have strange gods. They wield weird and powerful magic. And there is a hint of the weirdest magic of all—technology, a word that causes hardened sages to shudder. There are strange monsters and strange men, great treasures and unknown delights, and life-ending perils. In short, nearly anything that an adventurer could want. This book documents all of these.

How to Use this Book

This may be the hardest section of this supplement to write, perhaps because the answer is so easy that you have to be careful not to miss the forest for the trees. There are two ways to use any RPG supplement. One is to read through it solely for pleasure, enjoying the work for its own sake. The other way is to use it as a source of background and adventure in your campaign.

If you are running a campaign outside of the Forgotten Realms, this book can still be useful. This book contains dozens of new spells, magical items, characters, and monsters that can be taken out of this supplement and used in any campaign, regardless of setting. Cityscapes may be redesigned for use in other campaigns. Adventure ideas and rumors can be transferred to other settings. This is meant not just as a Forgotten Realms book, but as a source book for any inventive Dungeon Master running campaigns in any world.

The other use, of course, is as a FORGOTTEN REALMS game supplement. If you are running characters from outside of the Old Empires who travel in these reaches, please make sure you read through the book carefully. And that has its customs and taboos that seem strange to outsiders, and the Old Empires is no exception.

How a character deals with culture shock can be as interesting as how a character handles a new monster, as both are unfamiliar challenges that test his ability.

If you are running characters from the Old Empires, be sure that the characters realize that the attitudes of their homelands are often quite different than other places in the Forgotten Realms. They should understand their homelands, and be able to imagine what it was like to be a child there, what they were taught, and what they were brought up to believe.

The Old Empires is known as a high-powered area. There is lots of magic, much of it quite strange. There are also major challenges in obtaining this magic, which is how it should be. The essence of an adventure is not casually fulfilling a quest, but discovering a major challenge and using every resource you have, including your intelligence, to succeed.

As you read through The Old Empires, you will find that this supplement places a strong emphasis on the politics and the personalities of these kingdoms; this book is full of strange names and devious political factions, all scheming to achieve their ends. There are two reasons for this.

First, one distinguishing feature of the Forgotten Realms is the number of distinct and interesting characters that player characters can interact with; as it says in the Source Book of the Realms (p. 17) "more than anything, these individuals are the Realms." In the same way, these characters are the essence of the Old Empires.

The second reason is the nature of high-level campaigns. Many high-level campaigns collapse very quickly when the emphasis is solely on monster bashing and treasure snatching. The secret to a successful high-level AD&D® campaign is to get the PCs to interact with the campaign world in ways other than combat. There is a lot of fun in getting involved in politics, making plans and alliances, and outwitting truly clever NPCs. It isn't easy to run a good political campaign (and most players don't want a campaign where the action consists only of political maneuvering), but when it works, it's a real thrill.

If the details in the political sections seem too trivial, you can feel free to ignore them, but you might want to give it a try. It can be a lot of fun. The politics of the Old Empires, like its characters, operate on a grand scale.
HISTORY OF THE OLD EMPIRES

Toward the end of the previous age, tribes of humans were pushed out of the Great Kingdoms of the southeast, which were covered in desert. Legends speak of a great war in which powerful humans fought against the gods to wrest away their power. The humans won and became god-kings, but the war destroyed their kingdoms. These god-kings, Re and Enlil, led the scattered remnants of their peoples into Mulhorand and Unther. The two god-kings and their spouses became the leaders of the royal houses of these two nations.

The people of Unther, who prided themselves on the purity of their race, warred against "barbarian" peoples and drove them from their lands, but the god-kings of Mulhorand, who were openly worshiped by these people, took them in as full citizens. Since then, the peoples of Mulhorand have primarily been racially mixed Turami and Mulan (the race of Unther and Mulhorand).

Two thousand years before the start of the current age, Mulhorand and Unther began to develop huge cities in the river deltas of their lands. Magic increased the fertility of the already rich soils and the two nations prospered. Prosperity enabled the god-kings to build larger states and, over the course of centuries, large empires were established. The two lands clashed occasionally, but the rulers of Unther and Mulhorand both realized that warfare would result in mutual destruction, so all conflicts were carefully limited and the border of the Alamber Sea kept the peace.

Mulhorand expanded to the north and east, conquering the Priador Plateau (which is modern Thay), Thesk, and beyond even into Ashanath and Rashemen.

Lands farther north paid tribute to Mulhorand and its god-kings. At its peak, the Mulhorand Empire stretched as far east as Sempahr. While the empire was not the kindest of masters, it did bring laws, culture, and magic to thousands of people who had not known these things before.

Unther was somewhat less kind to its conquests. It expanded north as far as Yuirwood, where it warred for centuries against the elven tribes. It reached west as far as Chondath, swallowed most of the eastern Shaar, and even went to war against the southern dwarves in the Great Rift. Unther gained a reputation for having fierce and ruthless warriors who were hated by those they conquered.

At their peak, 1,000 years before the start of the current age, the First Empires of Mulhorand and Unther were at a level that has never been equaled since. Their magic was extremely powerful, and they had learned a new science—technology—that gave them greater power.

Two events brought the first great Age to an end. One was the rebellion of the archmage Thayd (from whom the later-day Red Wizards named their kingdom), who challenged the might of the god-kings, along with that of many of the most powerful wizards of Mulhorand and Unther. Thayd's goal was to overthrow the god-kings and unite the empires into a single grand Overempire that would be able to achieve limitless dominion over the Realms. After much destruction, the god-kings triumphed and the wizards were slain. After that time, in Mulhorand, the god-kings placed magic under their strict control, and created a bureaucracy of priests to maintain its control. Mulhorand became the bureaucratic theocracy that it remains to this day.

The people of Mulhorand and Unther might have rebuilt their losses, except for the Orcgate Wars. Five years after the deaths of the wizards, a huge gateway opened in southwestern Thay. It was a gateway from a world of orcs. Millions of orcs had come from another world, seeking a new place to live. They immediately clashed with the empires of Mulhorand and Unther, and overran their northern and western possessions. The god-kings themselves stirred into battle, and orc-shamans summoned their pantheon in response. Gods died, cities were laid waste, and entire regions were devastated. In the end, the orcs were either slaughtered or driven into the far north, but the holds of Mulhorand and Unther on their far-flung provinces were broken, and the two empires dwindled. The god-kings withdrew into their towers, creating continually reincarnating incarnations to lead their cities. Thus the First Empires of Mulhorand and Unther ended.

The lands lost by the southern empires were quickly retaken, but not by them. Instead, two new powers rose to prominence after the Orcgate Wars, the powers of Narfell and Raumathar. These were warlike nations that coalesced out of the migrating northern tribes that were paid to fight as mercenaries in the Orcgate Wars. They had weapons of iron (as opposed to the bronze weapons that Mulhorand and Unther used at the time) and soon developed powerful magic of their own. They quickly subdued large tracts of land, replacing Mulhorandi culture with their own.

Unther was never able to regain its southern empire after the Orcgate Wars, and soon its holdings in Chondath collapsed. So proud Mulhorand and Unther were now reduced to small kingdoms, once-great powers that were twilight kingdoms in the brilliant shadows of Narfell and Raumathar, the two new great powers.

And, for the most part, the two nations were content, for both still prospered; their rulers still built great monuments, and their peoples never starved, and wise men prophesied that the fiery powers of the north would soon consume each other.

The prophecy came true. Eventually, Narfell and Raumathar went to war. It was a bitter and bloody struggle, full of the tales of great heroes: Rauthok, Jeshken, Halduplac, and many others who were naught but names to the kingsdoms of the south.

Several times, the two northern giants tried to convince Unther and Mulhorand to join in the war, but the lords of the south merely shook their heads.
and fortified their borders, waiting for the inevitable.

It came. Narfell and Raumathar held one final cataclysmic battle and destroyed each other. Netherworld fiends fought against dragons, cities were burned. One hundred and fifty years before the founding of Cormyr, the nations of Narfell and Raumathar were dead, their people scattered into tiny enclaves, their lands in ruins. Mulhorand and Unther decided to pick up the pieces.

Unther leaped across the Eastern Reach and founded cities on that body of water’s northern coast. Mulhorand expanded northward under the military leadership of Anhurtep, a vigorous incarnation of the god-king Anhur, and founded the cities of Bezantur, Tyraturas, Amrutheh, Delhumide, and Nethjet. Mulhorand offered to take in the survivors of the war and bring prosperity to the starving victims of the great war. Mulhorand heroes slew many of the monsters summoned by the wizards of Narfell and Raumathar, and once again the standard of Mulhorand flew over the battlements of the Priador. Thus began the Second Empire of Mulhorand and Unther.

Unther, which had declined greatly, could not reach the elves of Yuirwood with its traders or its armies. The cost of expansion bankrupted its treasury, and taxes were raised. Rebellions against the taxes were ruthlessly crushed, and harsh laws were brought down to preserve public order. Some of the hardest hit by these taxes and laws were adventurers, who were beginning to bring wealth from the ruins in Narfell and Raumathar and complained most bitterly against the confiscation of most of the fortunes that they fought so hard to acquire. Some of these adventurers turned to freebooting, becoming pirates in the Sea of Fallen Stars. Others led rebellions in a number of cities hard hit by the tax: Delthuntle, Laothkund, and Mourktar.

Eventually a large group of cities on the southern coast of the Wizard’s Reach also broke away to form what is known as the Union of Chessenta, though using the word “union” to describe Chessenta is a joke.

Chessenta achieved brief glory early in its history under the great general Tchazzar, the war god, who was actually a polymorphed red dragon. The Chessentan Empire held sway as far west as Chondath, and even subdued Unther and held it as its vassal. After the death of Tchazzar, the Empire broke up; Unther tore free from its influence, and its distant outposts were ruined. The union’s confederation of city-states swore fealty to a central monarch, but each city-state seemed to have a different idea about who the monarch actually was. The union eventually deteriorated into a constantly changing network of warring factions; it remains this way to this day. There have been two Cimbar vs. Amruthar Wars, an Akanax vs. Raumathar War, an Akanax vs. Luthcheq War, and three Mordulkin vs. Luthcheq Wars.

There has been much warfare in Chessenta that scenarios from all over the Realms have flocked to join; there is always at least one major war going on there at all times. For the last century, Chessenta has been reputedly one of the best places to go to get mercenaries; even Mulhorand regularly relies on their services.

And what of the other two lands? Mulhorand kept its Second Empire together for a little longer; until the Red Wizards rebelled four hundred years ago and created the nation of Thay.

Mulhorand made a half-hearted attempt to take Thay back, failed, and decided to concentrate on its bitter internal politics. Unther is even worse: Its military is gutted by corruption and archaic weapons and tactics, its immortal ruler (Gilgeam son of Enlil) has become embittered by misfortune and rules a small, wasted, overtaxed tyranny, aided by greedy administrators. As a result, Unther is on the brink of revolt.

Current Operations
At this time, there are a number of notable schemes and events taking place in the Old Empires: Mulhorand, the oldest empire, is suffering from a recent spate of assassinations that climaxed in the assassination of Pharaoh Akonhorus. The assassins have not been identified and are known to use magic to charm the victims’ friends or bodyguards into becoming their murderers. The new pharaoh is Horustep III, who is a child of 11. In most nations, this would mean that he would be easily manipulated by his advisors, but in Mulhorand it means that a Pharaoh is finally young enough and energetic enough to want to make changes. (The Fangs of Set, an organization responsible for Akonhorus’s death, also has plans to deal with Horustep, and the priests of Horus-Re are not happy about the situation either.)

There is a major confrontation brewing between the priests of Horus-Re and the priests of Anhur in Mulhorand. The priests of Horus-Re, who have been the de facto rulers of Mulhorand for centuries, are blaming Anhur for past defeats and are trying to destroy his priesthood by stripping its leaders of lands and traditional power and appointing its greatest members to extremely dangerous positions. Anhur’s followers are becoming more bitter in their opposition to the priesthood of Horus-Re. The priests of Anhur are also going to embark on a private enterprise to purge the Alamber Sea of pirates and the influence of the Thayvian fleet.

Unther is collapsing. The alliance of the bandit chief Furifax and the cult of Tiamat are plotting to overthrow the government, which is extremely unpopular. An incarnation of Tiamat schemes in the small town of Firetrees. Other factions are trying to align themselves with whomever they believe will be the winning side. Messemprar is in revolt; the palace is under siege, and the armies of Unther have been turned back, forcing the god-king to hire a force of Chessentan mercenaries to crush them. There is trouble even in Unthalass, the capital of Unther.

In Chessenta, the rulers of the city of Luthcheq are waging a war of terror
against wizards. They have invented winchweed to prevent magicians from operating in their city, and they have hired mercenaries to assassinate wizards across Chessenta. Their goal is to clear Chessenta of all wizards and march in with their army, unopposed. (This is a ludicrous notion, but the lords of Luthcheq are considered to be lunatics.)

Cimbar is under attack by an alliance of warriors from Airspur and Soorenar, who plan to destroy the city and divide the spoils evenly.

**Timeline**

-2488 DR The great kingdom of Raurin destroyed. Exiles flee into the west, eventually settling on the shores of the Alamber Sea.

-2135 DR The god Re founds the city of Skuld and gives it the name “City of Shadows”. This is Year 1 of the Mulhorand calendar.

-2087 DR The god Enil finds pearls on the west coast of the Alamber. He founds the city of Unthalass (“City of Gems”).

-1967 DR Unther and Mulhorand clash at the River of Swords. The first Mulhorand/Unther War begins.

-1961 DR Gods agree that the River of Swords will be the eternal boundary between Mulhorand and Unther. There are occasional clashes, but there is never a major war between the two southern powers again.

-1500 DR Expansion of Unther and Mulhorand.

-1250 DR Unther battles against the elves of Yuirwood and the dwarves of the Great Rift. Mulhorand, for the most part, ignores them.

-1087 DR The Thurgist Adept Thayd rebels, along with most of the wizards in Unther and Mulhorand.

-1081 DR Thayd and his conspirators defeated. Thayd is executed, but prophesies that Mulhorand and Unther will never be as great again.

-1076 DR Oregate opens.

-1075 DR First battle of the Oregate Wars. Orcs overrun many northern settlements, slaying thousands.

-1071 DR Battle of the Gods. Re is slain by the orc-deity Gruumsh.

-1069 DR Orc pantheon defeated. Orcs driven from the south.

-1050 DR Power struggle between Osiris and Set to succeed Re. Set murders Osiris.

-1048 DR Osiris resurrected by Isis. Horus-Re battles Set, cast him into the desert and becomes chief of the Mulhorand pantheon. Set worship is abolished. The tower of Set in Skuld is destroyed.

-900 DR Rise of Narfell and Raumathar.

-734 DR Enil decides to leave the Realms. Gilgeam, son of Enil, becomes King of Unther. This is Year 1 of the Untheric calendar.

-623 DR Narfell attempts invasion of Mulhorand and Unther by sea. The two southern nations defeat the Narfell fleet. Neither northern empire attempts to invade the Old Empires again.

-150 DR The great conflagration. Narfell and Raumathar destroyed in one final battle. Monsters and minor powers summoned in the last battle invade the south after the battle ends.

-148 DR The god-kings’ final battle. An alliance of the Summoned is defeated and they are sent back to their home planes.

-135 DR Founding of Bezentur. Other cities soon built on the coastal areas of the Wizard’s Reach as Mulhorand and Unther once again expand northward.

1 DR Founding of Cormyr. This year is 2134 on the Mulhorand calendar.

108 DR First Great Flood of the River Alamber nearly destroys Unthalass.

202 DR Tribes of “barbarians” from the south invade southern Unther and Mulhorand.

205 DR Mulhorand and Unther chase defeated barbarians back to their base settlement and exterminate them. A dying shaman prophecies that their empires shall soon crumble.

482 DR Delthuntle and Laothkund break free of Unther.

504 DR Teth and Nethra declare their independence. Unther begins a long campaign against the North Coast Cities.

643 DR The wizard Nezram leaves his tower on the shores of Azulduth.

679 DR Unther forced to recognize the independence of the North Coast Cities. Unther never recovers from this long, costly, and bloody campaign. End of Second Untheric Empire.

681 DR Nezram’s tower destroyed by the green dragon, Chathullandroth. Nezram’s children scattered or slain.

731 DR Second Great Flood of the River Alamber devastates Unthalass.

823 DR Mourktar breaks free of Unther.

922 DR Battle of Thazalhar: The Red Wizards ensure their independence from Mulhorand. End of Second Mulhorand Empire.

929 DR Alliance of Chessenta drives Unther back beyond the Riders to the Sky Mountains.