MYTHIC BABYLON

MythraS

THE DESIGN MECHANISM

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MYTHIC BABYLON

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THE DESIGN MECHANISM

Mythras

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INTRODUCTION

In the year 1765 BC, King Zimri-Lim of Mari emerged from a planning session with his aides and summoned his personal scribe. As he paced the courtyard in his palace in the city of Tuttul, he dictated a letter to the scribe, who used the cut end of a reed to press the message into a warm clay tablet. That letter, which was to be sent within the hour by speedy messenger, said:

"To my wife, Šibtu, thus says Zimri-Lim: Ask the oracles in Mari questions about Hammurabi of Babylon. Will this man ever die? Does he speak with honesty? Will he bring war? Will he besiege my cities in Suhum while I campaign up north in Apum? Question the oracles, and when you have done so, do it again, and write to me with the answers."

Some days later, the Queen of Mari replied:

"I have asked the questions about Babylon; here is what I've learned. The Man of Babylon is sowing many seeds against this kingdom, but they will not bear fruit. Instead, you will overpower him and capture him. Then you'll see what the God will do to him. His days will soon be at an end. This you should know."

Reassured, King Zimri-Lim organised his troops for departure to the district of Apum. He planned to give battle to the adventurer Atamrum, puppet of the Elamites, who was besieging his allies in the north.

WHAT IS MYTHIC BABYLON?

Mythic Babylon is a role-playing supplement for the Mythras game system. It provides everything you need to take your Mythras game back to the 18th century BC and enter a world of cut-throat diplomacy, Machiavellian politics, and ecstatic prophets. Within these covers you'll find information on the society, culture, religion, trade, laws, and beliefs of Old Babylon and the surrounding lands. The setting is presented as a sand-box with a wide-ranging gazetteer of places to explore, each loaded with plot hooks. For those who like to play against the backdrop of history, we provide a timeline of past and near future events. A bestiary and a chapter for game masters rounds out the end of the book.

This book contains everything you need to create adventures in the lands of Sumer, Akkad, and Subartu from the low lying Eden to the Cedar Mountains and even into the Underworld. Follow in the steps of kings like Gilgameš, Kubaba, or Hammurabi in this mythological and historical setting that was nearly 4000 years in the making.

WHERE IS MYTHIC BABYLON?

Mythic Babylon is set in what will later be called Mesopotamia by the Greeks, which means 'The Land Between the Rivers', referring to the Tigris and Euphrates. At the time our book is set, there is no one name for the whole region. Instead, the southern plain is called Sumer and the central plain is called Akkad. Together, these will one day be called Babylonia after the city of Babylon. The northern plain is called Subartu, but will one day come to be called Assyria after the city of Aššur.

This book focuses on Sumer, Akkad, and Subartu. Peripheral regions such as ancient Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Bahrain are given a more cursory treatment.

WHEN IS MYTHIC BABYLON?

Mythic Babylon is set at the end of the year 1765 BC, just before the military campaign that will catapult King Hammurabi of Babylon into the history books. We chose this period because it's exceptionally well documented, better than any time in the previous or following 600 years. This allowed us to build a broad and deep setting with a minimum amount of make-believe. Nearly all of the characters and all of the places found in this book are attested to historically. By starting at the end of 1765, you can allow your characters to influence great events – either by encouraging them to happen or by changing the course of history. You can also set your adventures on the sidelines, or even choose a different period altogether. We'll give you more advice on how to do this later in the book.

If you are planning on engaging in further reading, the year 1765 BC is in the middle of what's known as the Old Babylonian Period of the Middle Bronze Age. All dates in this book are BC unless otherwise indicated, and are approximate. We've used what is called the Middle Chronology for matching these historical events to to our modern year-numbering system largely because that's the convention you'll find in most history books should you decide to read further. Recent evidence suggests that the Middle Chronology is almost certainly off by a few years, but not by much.

HOW CAN I USE THIS SETTING?

Mythic Babylon is a mythical setting, which is to say that it is built on a historical core, but assumes that all of the myths and stories from the period are true. You can play this setting as either a straight historical game or as a fantastical historical game. You can, if you like, even ignore the historical elements and use Mythic Babylon as an old-fashioned Sword and Sandal setting. This book was designed with all these things in mind.

CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS BOOK

PERIOD WORDS AND NAMES

Throughout this book we've decided to use a mix of period terms and their English equivalents, often side by side, in order to give the book its flavour. We recommend that you use Akkadian words you find comfortable and English for the rest. Some concepts, such as ***naditu*** priestesses,or the **Me**, do not have an easy translation, and so we've largely stuck with the native names in these cases.

For geographical names, we've used the period place-name in nearly all instances in order to help with immersion. Thus you will see the name Khalab instead of Aleppo, and Gubla instead of Byblos. There are a three exceptions, though: we've kept the modern names of the city of Babylon, and of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. We felt the modern names were too iconic to replace, and have a certain gravitas to modern readers that the ancient names lack.

SPELLING

We have, for the most part, used simplified English spelling of Akkadian and Sumerian words – with two exceptions. In this book we use the letter Š to represent 'sh', which we feel gives the book a bit of easy historical flavour. It lets us write certain names, such as that of the city and god Aššur, correctly; neither Assur, nor Ashur feel as satisfying. Where you see the combination 'kh' in this book, it is meant to represent a sound somewhere between a 'k' and an 'h', rather similar to the 'ch' sound found in the Scottish word 'loch'. All instances of the letter 'h' in Akkadian, Amorite, and Sumerian words should be pronounced this way, but we use this for emphasis on a few key names.

In the text, we use bold letters to introduce **Sumerian words**, though not for every use. Similarly, we use bold italics to represent ***Akkadian words***. The few ***Amurru words*** are in semi-bold italics.

HAMMURABI'S LAWS

The Code of Hammurabi is a set of 282 legal precedents and principles. Carved on an immense stele of black diorite, the

A PERSONAL NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

This book was originally conceived about ten years ago as a generic Bronze Age supplement for use with a different (but related) game system. With encouragement from Pete Nash it rather soon became a book about mythic Mesopotamia. The D100 gaming environment changed over the course of that decade, and Lawrence Whitaker expressed an interest in publishing it, even before Mythras was officially a game. Since then, through years of research and writing, Lawrence has offered nothing but faith and encouragement. I would like to thank them both for the opportunity to write this book.

I would also like to thank those friends who gave their precious time to review and play-test this book, and who helped us improve some of the more difficult sections of the text. In particular, these were Blain Neufeld, Marcus Knapp, Brad Milburn, Evlyn Moreau, and my brothers, Graham and Greg Gilmore. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my writing partner, Dr. Paul Mitchener, without whom this book could not have been written.

Chris Gilmore

For me, this project began when Chris Gilmore approached me and asked if I wanted to work with him on a roleplaying book about Bronze Age Mesopotamian myth and history. I jumped at the chance. I love historical fantasy gaming, and I love ancient world history. I thought I knew a little bit about the time period involved- enough to know it would be good gaming fodder.

As it turned out, I had dramatically overestimated how much I knew about the time period, but was completely right about it being great for gaming. Due to Chris's dedication and scholarship, this book made steady progress, and I assisted as I could, learning as we worked. It became clear that what we had on our hands had potential to be one of the best (sickle) swords and sorcery settings I've come across. There's the politics of great kingdoms jockeying for power in a region already awash with thousands of years of history and culture, exotic but relatable. There's myths and magic and superstition, interesting and varied people in a vibrant society, a land shaped by both history and geography in tangible ways.

Thanks to Chris that I discovered it all. It's been a wonderful learning experience, and one we can now share with you, so you can adventure there as we have. As well as Chris, I'd like to thank Lawrence Whitaker for his consistent enthusiasm, and those who have been involved in my early playtests: Nigel Clarke, Julian Hayley, Massie Harper, Richard Lock, Newt Newport, John Reed, and Michael Southern. There will be more gaming in Mythic Babylon!

Paul Mitchener

Code outlines and establishes many aspects of Babylonian social conventions and even addresses household practices, rules governing inheritance, divorce, and even certain elements of sexual conduct. They offer a fascinating glimpse into Babylonian society and its approach to social stratification, the application of justice, and the nature of punishment. Throughout this book, Hammurabi's Laws are summarised in boxed sections, where applicable laws, quoted from the Code of Hammurabi, are gathered together to illustrate first-hand how laws, conventions, and precedents were handled by Babylonian society.

FURTHER READING ON THE WEB

There are some great resources on the web that relate to our time period that are both scholarly and accessible. If you're moved to do further research, you could do worse than start with these.

The *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (ETCSL) is a wonderful online source for translations of Sumerian texts. Here you'll find myths, prayers, dedications, royal inscriptions, liturgical songs, and more.

The *Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary* (ePSD) has a large database of Sumerian and Akkadian words and you can search in Sumerian, Akkadian, or English.

The *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI)* contains a database of cuneiform tablets and their texts, often with one or more photographs of the tablet and a translation. Perhaps more useful to the casual reader is the CDLI Wiki, which contains articles on subjects from Mathematics to Gods, and useful data such as the year names of kings in our historical period.

The *Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus* (Oracc) is a collection of projects that covers some interesting ground. Their database of gods was particularly useful to us.