

# Mingjue Ruins

The Mingjue Ruins map shows an area a little over twenty miles (thirty kilometres) square, centred near the eastern end of the great Mingjue Canyon, which extends for more than 50 miles (80 km) west and north from this map's western edge. The surrounding region is a mixture of open grasslands, and far less open dead forests, part of the vast Tiantang grassland plains of central and central-western Kumarikandam. Steep, rocky cliff walls lead down into the rough-floored Canyon, which deepens further west here, giving the cliffs a maximum height of roughly 1000 feet (300 metres) at the map's western side. Lower cliffs are found primarily closer to the eastern end, and in the narrower side-valleys east of Guong Mine, which are typically only a few hundred feet tall (less than 100 m) at most. Much of the mapped zone has roughly undulating hummocks scattered profusely over it, sometimes completely grassed-over, at others with rock outcrops showing through the grass cover, or sometimes as tors composed entirely of jagged stone. It is these that are known collectively as the Mingjue Ruins. Amongst them are many genuine, old to ancient ruins that are commonly almost impossible to distinguish from the rolling terrain, unless inspected closely, as they too may be overgrown, partly or fully exposed. Just the more notable features, or recognisable ruins, are marked on the map, with notes given below. The region is centred at about 15 degrees South latitude, so the grasses can reach a couple of yards/metres or more in height, reducing visibility, and concealing all kinds of things quite easily, with other flora, fauna and climatic conditions appropriate for the near-equatorial tropics. The dead forests are all of jungle trees in the main, for example.

With dead forests surrounding it, and a number of weirdly unexpected features to be found across the area, the whole region near the Canyon seems to have been created or convulsed by some vast, probably magical, event long ago. As the map suggests, there is a significant lack of substantial watercourses anywhere in the vicinity, beyond brooks too small to be shown at this scale, together with dry valleys in places. Since these valleys are normally fully grassed-over, they are indistinguishable from lower-lying sections of the general, rolling terrain. There are though small freshwater ponds mapped in places, sometimes quite isolated, sometimes with a small stream or two flowing into, or occasionally out from, them. Although the vast majority of trees across the wooded places are dead, in some cases petrified, there are some stands of still-living trees in parts, of which again, only the more notable are mapped with labels.

Details for the marked sites were taken and adapted from random tables in the "Knaves: Second Edition" RPG rules, published by Jacob Hurst & Swordfish Islands LLC, with most of the names determined also randomly from tables in the "Nomicon" published by Mythmere Games. Site locations were, of course, also placed at random.

## Location Notes

**Acid Pools:** By the edge of the dead forest in the map's northwest corner, is a series of clay-lined ponds filled with acid, surrounded by dead ground where nothing lives, and where small-creature skeletons and their acid-burnt remains may sometimes be seen. There is an acrid tang to the air, and a pale, smoky haze sometimes lies above the Pools when the air is still.

**Almond Trees:** Deep in the dead woodland of the northeastern map corner, is a sizable grove of healthy, living, Almond Trees. Why these have survived, when all the vegetation nearby is long dead, is unknown.

**Angelic Axe-Wielder:** A little northwest of the Moss Agate Domes in the southeastern map corner, still in the same dead woods the Domes occupy, is this 12 ft tall (3.6 m) pale grey stone statue of a winged Angel, bearing a pristine, blue-silvery metal bardiche pole-weapon. Both statue and weapon are in remarkably good condition, and the bardiche is clearly magical. If removed from the statue (relatively easily done, although requiring either someone very tall to do so, or some means to pull the haft free from the statue's height), the weapon will mentally tell its new owner that it is The Bitter Axe, a blessedly powerful magical weapon. Only a positively-aligned wielder though can use it without suffering constant pain.

**Bamboo Forest:** In the northern part of the Ruins in the map's northwest, is this large expanse of living, often quite dense, Bamboo Forest. It extends over both grassy and stony hummocks, and the valleys between, for a distance of around two miles (3 km). Taller and darker-leaved than any of the normal plains grasses, it forms a distinctive landmark from a distance.

**Dead Mangrove Swamp:** An area of dead forest close to the map's central-eastern edge is composed of dead mangroves, and the ground surface for some distance all around shows signs of having once been a typical mangrove swampland. There is no water here now, just evidence there once was, and a few dead

swamp animal bones, aside from the former vegetation. The eastern hummocks of the Ruins begin just on the old swamp's former southern and western boundaries.

**Fallen Aqueduct:** Out on the southern plains between the dead woods in the map's south and southeast, are the remains of a once-well-constructed stone Aqueduct, now largely collapsed and hidden by the tall grasses. Its line was clearly north-south, and if continued far enough, the line north would have taken it by Maple Pond and the Tomb of General Chengdai to The Pavement, perhaps suggesting that the eastern part of the Ruins was once one or more cities or larger towns, as the relative number and proximity of the more recognisable structures there could imply. The Aqueduct's stones are well-cut, if undecorated, and might be readily reused in a new structure nearby. Oddly, although the line of Aqueduct stones can be followed for more than half a mile (800 m), there is no sign of the line continuing beyond the mapped marker.

**Gazelles:** The grassy plains between the dead woods in the map's southeastern corner form the northern range for herds of Wild Gazelles. They have brown and tan vertically-striped coats, and tall, narrow, spiralling, pairs of red-brown head-horns each, providing excellent camouflage among the tall grasses.

**Giant Spiders:** Parts of the southwestern dead forest, extending more than five miles (8 km) southeast from the southern lip of the Mingjue Canyon almost to the edge of the dead forest, is filled with great skeins of webs, home to many Giant Spiders. The two creature markers at either end of the mapped label indicate the normal outer extents of their range. They may be encountered sometimes elsewhere in the adjoining dead woodland, but rarely venture into the Canyon or onto the plains, and then never far from their woods.

**Golden Stones:** Just south of the range of low hills inhabited by the Lich Shundogadang, on the grassland plains, is a large area of patchy, flatter rocks, the Golden Stones. However, these are not native rocks, but outcrops, extending sometimes to an unknown depth, of solid amber. A huge amount of amber is present here, much of it of gem-quality and possessed of at least latent magical potential. Various now-extinct creatures lie encased in it in places, albeit few larger ones are visible in the surface outcrops. It seems never to have been mined or quarried, although given that amber is never truly solidified, always retaining its extremely viscous, glass-like liquid state, any such evidence might well have been concealed by time.

**Great Apes:** In the well-watered valley of the Wild Sheep, south of the east end of Mingjue Canyon, and towards the valley's eastern exit, lives a tribe of Great Apes. They have somewhat greater intelligence than typical gorilla-type apes, likely a result of their proximity to the magical Golden Stones. They make use of the Maple Pond and Lemon Grove from time to time, but shun the Haunted Arboretum, the Canyon, and especially the southern hills of their valley, for fear of the Lich Shundogadang there. They rarely venture into the Ruins north of the Canyon or the dead woods to the east, and are ambivalent about the Jakno Stone.

**Guong Mine:** Where the Mingjue Canyon starts to broaden out in this map's southwest, is the entrance to the long-abandoned Guong Mine. Spoil heaps close-by have taken on the character of the Canyon bottom's rugged, rocky terrain over time, so it is not easy to recognise the area as any different to the rest without care (or someone knowledgeable about mining practices). Without closer inspection, it is unclear too if anything now uses the Mine as a lair, or exactly what was once mined in it.

**Haunted Arboretum:** Right by the eastern tip of Mingjue Canyon, in the south-centre of the map, is this stand of living woodland, with well-formed (and apparently maintained) trees of many, mostly local, tropical types. It is made dangerous because one or more ghostly undead Apparitions inhabit it, driving-away any intruders, when they are not tending the woodland. Whether they are escapees from the retinue of Lich Shundogadang, whose lair is less than 3 miles to the southwest (5 km), or owe their existence to some other source, is unclear. Their animosity to humanoids though is undoubted.

**Hollows Wood:** In the eastern mapped dead woods, north of Dead Mangrove Swamp, are a number of low-lying Hollows, perhaps as if they too were once parts of the long-dried-up Swamp, although apparently unconnected to it. Here though, the Hollows are each half-filled with the headless, humanoid skeletons from hundreds, perhaps thousands, of executions - or perhaps one single, great, mass execution. The weathered state of the bones suggests this was done a long time ago, although the ground in the Hollows has not been overgrown since, for all the tall grasses typically pervade much of the dead woodlands elsewhere.

**Iced Pine:** A couple of miles (3 km) north of Hollows Wood in the northeastern dead woods, is this non-native, tall, dead Pine tree, completely rimed with ice. It retains its icy coating regardless of what the temperature elsewhere close-by may be. The tree (and the ice) clearly belongs in a far less tropical environment, although its icy coating makes identifying its actual type currently impossible (even for a specialist).

**Iron Ponds:** Just south of Mingjue Canyon, a little east of the east end of one of its tributary chasms, and on the northeastern fringe of the dead forest there, is a series of small, irregularly-shaped pools, from which steam rises at times. These are pools of always-liquid molten iron, glowing orange-red or hotter. There are remains of a few dead animals nearby, the more recent ones showing clear signs of scorching, and nothing grows near the edges of the Ponds, which are dry, caked mud with the hardness of stone. Iron removed from the Ponds would start to cool and slowly solidify, heating back to liquid form rapidly if returned to one of the pools again. At night, the Ponds' glow can be seen from a mile or two away easily (1.5 to 3 km). No heat source can be found for these, and their presence is wholly mysterious.

**Jakno Stone:** On the grassy plains between the dead woods and the southern edge of the eastern Mingjue Canyon, in the map's south-centre, is this large, black, stone altar. If it once did bear designs or markings, these have been long worn-away by weathering, and its surface is rather pitted and worn. It does not appear to be of rock native to this area. What its function may have been, or whether it still remains in, at least occasional, use, is unknown.

**Kabo Statue:** Amid some of the more generally rocky parts of the west-central Ruins stands this green stone, humanoid statue of a robed figure with slightly outspread arms, as if in a welcoming posture. It is around 9 ft tall (2.7 m), and while weather-worn, is remarkably intact. However, both arms are weirdly misshapen, and give the impression of having been turned to jelly at some stage, and then resolidified, as their surface seems subtly different, as if partly melted. It is, of course, possible the arms were carved to look this way originally.

**Lemon Grove:** In the grassy hummocks of the Ruins a little south of the eastern extent of Mingjue Canyon is this small patch of living woodland, composed entirely of lemon trees. A distinct scent of lemons fills the air nearby as a result.

**Luhai:** One of the more substantial mounds in the central-western Ruins, a short way northeast of Snapperfly Plain, has a large, arched, locked-shut, double doorway in its southern side. This leads in to a laboratory, once in the lowest storey and cellars of a now-ruined property that stood here, fallen into this outer grassy mound shape. The laboratory, like the doors, is surprisingly intact, well-maintained, and has a substantial number of chambers on several levels. It is the home and workshop for Luhai, a humanoid inventor, that anyone from outside who meets is liable to consider quite mad, despite the ordered state of his lair.

**Maple Pond:** Southeast of the southeastern end of Mingjue Canyon is a region of the southern Ruins with numerous labelled features. Easternmost of these is this small lake, surrounded by tall, healthy, living maple trees. The Pond has a yellow-brown colouring, translucent only to within a few inches/centimetres below its surface, and a sweet scent pervades the whole area within the trees around it. It is not water, but is a viscous, almost tarry liquid: maple syrup. This is perfectly edible and fresh, and can be scooped out and kept in a suitable container more or less indefinitely.

**Moss Agate Domes:** Within the dead woods in the map's southeast corner is a collection of sixteen low stony domes, which stand in a pattern looking like a small village. The domes are hemispherical, between 15-20 ft in diameter and maximum height (4.5 to 6 m), each with a low, rounded, open arch cut into one side, leading to a hollow interior. The archways are about 8 ft high (2.4 m). Each hollow dome is a single Moss Agate nodule, with glittering crystals in any light taken there inside every one. They seem to have been used at one time as a village, and although all remain fully intact, the place appears to have been long abandoned.

**Oozeland:** In the base of the narrowing eastern end of Mingjue Canyon are the lairs of several animal-intelligence (or perhaps smarter), living Ooze creatures. Naturally disguised to look like typical rocks, they are easily mistaken for parts of the terrain, until they pounce on, or engulf, living prey. They are quite slow-moving otherwise, and seem unable, or unwilling, to climb the Canyon's cliffs, for all little else deters them.

**The Pavement:** In the eastern Ruins, well north of the east end of Mingjue Canyon, is a large, fairly flat, open area paved with small, once-neatly laid (if less-so now), brick-tiles, perhaps a former market place for a town or city. There are several other named ruins nearby, with smaller ruined structures in its immediate vicinity, that hint towards this having once been a substantial settlement, or group of settlements close together.

**The Pendulum:** An old, ruined, yellow-stone tower, a little north of the east end of Mingjue Canyon, near the map's centre, still stands quite tall, at almost 100 ft (30 m). Inside it, suspended centrally from the upper parts of the surviving tower is a large, round, bronze pendulum disc that continually swings, maintaining a perfectly regular rhythm. It hangs from a stout iron rod, firmly fixed into the tower's upper walls, yet it connects to nothing else. It is very heavy, with sharp outer edges, and reaches to within two feet (60 centimetres) of each diametric wall at the end of each swing, and within about four feet (1.2 m) of the tower's lowest floor at the

mid-point. Anyone standing in the way could be seriously injured by it, or even killed. The most likely way to stop it would be to cause the collapse of the tower.

**Plain of Dead Locusts:** A huge, fairly level, area on the western edge of the northeastern dead forest, just east of the Soot Geysers and southwest of the Almond Tree grove in the dead woods, is covered to a depth of up to four inches (10 cm) with millions upon millions of dead locust carapaces. They are all long dead, and crunch underfoot, although their depth makes walking here difficult. The Plain is almost 2 miles north-south by 1.25 miles east-west (3 by 2 km).

**Round Mounds:** Towards the northwest map corner, a little west of the Bamboo Forest is a series of grassy and rocky mounds, distinguished from the many others nearby by their relative smallness, and consistently near-circular shapes. No one seems to know whether these are natural mounds, burial hills, or mounds made by an unknown creature. They are also close to the northwestern edge of the Ruins terrain.

**Shundogadang (Lich):** This Lich and his undead servants have occupied, or hollowed-out, an extensive cave and old, wrecked building system in one of the southern Ruin mounds, south of the east end of Mingjue Canyon, one of several such mounds forming a low hill-line on the south side of a shallow valley there. The lair entrance is on the hills' southern flanks, and is not especially obvious.

**Silky Rocks:** On the Canyon floor about midway along its mapped section, near the foot of the southern cliffs, is a large expanse of dark grey, solidified lava flows that indeed look remarkably like rucked-up sheets of silk, with a distinctive silken sheen to their surfaces. The stone would make exquisite decorative carvings, inlays and statues, if carefully removed in suitable quantities, for all it is very hard-wearing, difficult to cut, carve, or sculpt by anyone without sufficient skill and expertise.

**Snapperfly Plain:** An area of the grasslands towards the central-western map edge, by the western edge of the Ruins, has more, and larger, freshwater ponds in relative proximity to one another than many other places hereabouts, together with several tiny, unmapped streams. Unfortunately, this is also a primary breeding ground for the Snapperflies, large, blood-sucking, biting, flying insects that swarm here in huge numbers, ranging in lesser numbers elsewhere across the map too.

**Soot Geysers:** Adjacent to the Plain of Dead Locusts in the map's northeastern corner, is a region of small, sooty cones and vents on the grassy plain, from which periodic bursts of soot and smoke emerge at irregular intervals. Quite where the soot originates underground, or why, is unknown.

**Stinking Clouds:** On the northern fringes of the low hills of the Ruins, not far northeast from the Bamboo Forest, and a couple of miles (three km) southwest of Zhajang Chapel, several small, dry valleys are perpetually plagued by pale yellow-green mists that seem never to move away. These have a most unpleasantly sulphurous stench that similarly pervades the vales. They have no obvious source.

**Stone Map:** Northernmost of the main features in the stonier western Ruins of the map's west side, there are several partly-intact structures near this one, each with some low walls and surface-level floors that have not been completely overgrown. A few have surviving decorative traces of carvings around old door and window openings. This structure though is unusual in having a map carved into its floor that seems to show various physical features like those of the Xinxing Region and the surrounding parts of the Tiantang plains. Markers that probably show settlements are for those that would have been in the region around 500 years or more ago (a few of which still survive currently).

**Swirling Ash:** In the midst of the Ruins a couple of miles (3 km) north of the eastern Mingjue Canyon, is a more open vale area between the local hummocks, whose surface is covered with a fine, grey Ash. Very little grows in it, choked-off by the Ash, which swirls about readily, just in this zone, in any wind. Although it swirls more violently (causing harm to exposed flesh) when the wind is stronger, the Ash never leaves this area.

**Taitan Workshop:** A short way west of the edge of the dead forest nearby, and southwest of the Dead Mangrove Swamp, this is one of the more intact structures in the eastern Ruins, one of several recognisable places across the region east of the end of Mingjue Canyon. It is a squat, square-plan, flat-roofed, low tower, with a few other intact buildings close-by. The main tower has a locked door, and within is an abandoned alchemical workshop, spread over the two interior floors above ground, which has clearly been unoccupied for some generations. There are crumbling texts, books, scrolls and parchments, along with more intact metal and glass equipment, with many containers, not all labelled, holding a range of substances, where they have not leaked or evaporated away from vessels with age-damage, such as cracks or broken seals. Some of the substances remain useable.

**Tomb of General Chengai:** Roughly three miles (five km) northeast from the eastern end of Mingjue Canyon, the entrance to this maze-tomb is set in a somewhat more definite part of the Ruins. The Pendulum is about 1.5 miles, 2.5 km, to the southwest, Taitan Workshop just over 3 miles to the northeast, and The Pavement just under 4 miles, 6.5 km, to the north, and there are numerous lesser upstanding structures scattered around each. The Tomb is detailed by a separate Atlas map.

**Tsalathanto Circus:** In the west-central Ruins is this substantial, partly collapsed, amphitheatre, of a size suggesting it must once have belonged in a city in this area. Numerous stony hummocks and more obvious former stone buildings, extend east from here for around 7 miles (11 km), and between 1.5 to 2 miles north and south of it (2.5 to 3 km), although how much of this was really once part of the same settlement, or connected to it, can no longer be told. Even in its ruinous and partly overgrown form, the Circus retains something of its former grandeur and impressively decorative appearance, including numerous, if rarely intact, statues and relief-cut scenic panels.

**Tsuso Salt Flats:** Near the centre-top map edge is an irregular, low-lying expanse of Salt Flats, perhaps where a salty lake once was, now long dried-up. Nothing grows in or near the area, because of the salt, and it looks like a tiny desert. Each of its longest dimensions is roughly 1.5 miles (2.5 km).

**Wild Sheep:** A broad valley in the southern ruins, south of the east end of the Mingjue Canyon, is home to flocks of Wild Sheep that roam freely, grazing on the plentiful grass, which hereabouts is kept at a generally lower height than elsewhere across the mapped plains thanks to the Sheep. They have particularly finely-marked horns, which would make excellent decorative features if collected and reused, and quite fine wool, which can be found shed in patches at times across this zone too.

**Zhajang Chapel:** In the grassy plains just north of the Ruins, in the map's north-centre, is this small Chapel with a nearby Oratory (a separate small prayer-room). Two elderly monks, Bai and Kuo, live here and maintain both, last survivors of an apparently forgotten religious order. At least, they have heard nothing from the Order elsewhere for decades. A nearby pond and simple gardens provide most of their needs.