

Vhangha Village

Vhangha (name meaning unknown) is an almost uninhabited, abandoned ruin of a village in northeastern Mate Ora, southernmost of the isles in the Nga-Whenuatoto archipelago. As the map shows, it is surrounded, and now largely overgrown, by the local tropical jungle vegetation. The climate is hot and wet, with many small streams and pools scattered across the terrain, which streams drain away towards the north and northwest from here in general. Some of the ponds are overgrown with grasses, water plants and moss, and can be hard to spot, as well as deadly if fallen into. Two labelled Mossy Ponds are shown on the map, both situated in hollows, and are far less obvious on the ground than their map images may suggest. That by the map's south edge has a small island in it, on which more jungle trees grow, helping further disguise its true nature. Such still ponds may have living or undead giant frog occupants, of which commonly only their eyes may be seen above the water and vegetation before they strike.

Other inhabitants of the jungle near Vhangha outside the area loosely-bounded by the ruined, yellow-straw-roofed huts surrounding the Temple Tomb that visitors may stumble upon, include the following.

- 1) A solitary, undead giant snake, usually coiled on a convenient low branch, lazily flickering its tongue in and out.
- 2) A small group of poisonous spiders suspended on threads from the higher foliage, all near one another at typical humanoid head-heights, and which are almost impossible to spot before blundering into them.
- 3) A much larger group of small, poisonous spiders that emerge together from a large, gauzy egg-sac that lies on, or hangs from, a nearby branch, and which rush at the nearest living target as soon as it passes close enough. The egg-sac otherwise looks very like some fungi on the trees also seen in the vicinity.
- 4) A beam of sunlight seen in a gap in the foliage that suddenly, and briefly, illuminates the top of the Temple Tomb's ziggurat-like structure.
- 5) A group of three to six small, scaly, rust-red quadrupeds with long, thick, waving antennae (similar to D&D's rust monsters in appearance), is congregating by a little crack in the ground from which mercury is bubbling-up. Easily spooked, if the creatures are scared off, this bubbling ceases, and the mercury slides away back into the crevice. The creatures seem to be magically conjuring it out of the ground.
- 6) A swarm of clattering, golden scarab beetles flies into sight and onwards from and to entirely random directions. They are quite harmless.
- 7) Through a gap in the foliage, what seems the stone statue of a reclining sphinx on an oval stone dais can be spotted, partly decorated with jade and gold. It vanishes when someone tries to reach it, as soon as any foliage (there is always some) intervenes. If required, this statue can be seen again repeatedly, always in a different place. It cannot be reached.
- 8) Haunting, low humming music can be heard faintly, coming from somewhere nearby. A grey-skinned, white haired, small faerie gnome sits cross-legged playing this music on a group of fungi. The fungi are what make the music for the creature. If approached or spoken to, the gnome vanishes (becomes invisible and moves silently away). The fungi make no sound otherwise, and seem no different to other fungous growths in the jungle here.
- 9) A weeping ghost floats by, too distracted by its own ranting to pay attention to anyone who sees it.
- 10) Up to eight giant wasps, stripping bark from trees, or carrying it to where they are building their nest (see also below on these).

The area including and within the zone of yellow-roofed ruined buildings, and the Temple Tomb ziggurat is called here "The Glade" (not labelled as such on the map, as the area is deliberately vaguely defined). This zone though has particular significance, as it is the part of the Village its sole humanoid occupant is currently trapped in, and cannot leave, although she is able to pass beyond part of it when in the subterranean Temple Tomb complex, detailed by a separate Atlas map. "She" is known, albeit by very few, as the Lich Queen.

The Glade has a couple of further peculiarities. One is that at night, the stars seen from within it are completely unlike those usually seen from Nibirum. They also show no motion over the course of the night, although very occasionally, the entire appearance of the stars changes radically compared with how the sky appeared the previous night. Should the stars ever change to the normal Nibirum night sky, the spell holding her here will have broken, and the Lich Queen will be free to leave. Beyond The Glade's area, the stars are always just those normally seen from Nibirum. The other oddity is The Glade is haunted day and night by a host of headless humanoid ghosts. They do not really interact with anyone or anything here. They are simply present. Their nature cannot be determined beyond being headless, and they will not pass beyond the area of The Glade.

few other creatures are liable to be encountered by chance in The Glade, although as noted earlier, a group of up to eight giant wasps may be found anywhere on the map. They are building a papery nest in one or other of the ruins where there is sufficient space and intact roofing to support one. They may be seen flitting about or collecting material for it (stripping bark from the trees).

The remaining labelled map features are noted below in alphabetical order.

The Barrow & Barrow Temple: Long before the Village was here, this region was an important burial ground. The Temple Tomb ziggurat and earthen mound of The Barrow are the only surface reminders of such times. The Barrow is a roughly north-south aligned oval low hill southwest of the ziggurat. It was raised over the Tomb of the Thunder Lizard King, which still lies beneath it (as shown on the Lich Queen's Temple Tomb map elsewhere in the Atlas). On the higher part of The Barrow are some extensive, but low, ruined stone walls. At times, notably on moonlit nights (and by activating the "Ghost Temple" toggle in the fCW file version of the map), a ghostly vision of the full Barrow Temple building in its glory may manifest, or more accurately, its external shell may, as any internal features or decoration that might be expected, are wholly missing.

Flower Ring-Ruins: East of The Glade and Whispering Court, near where two old, long-grassed-over village tracks meet, is a broad circle of what look like low, ruined walls covered in low-growing vegetation, perhaps the base of a high tower that collapsed long ago. However, there are no ruined walls or stonework here, simply flowering jungle plants in the form of a seemingly ruined structure. Clearing the plants away will reveal nothing underlying them to account for their shape, although if the area is left alone, the plants will grow back exactly as they are now over time.

Giant Exoskeleton: The remains of a giant beetle are lying on the lower western slopes of The Barrow, not far from the limb of a pool along one of the main streams that passes near the Village. It seems to have simply died here, as it shows no sign of outward damage. It was a typical giant jungle beetle species from Mate Ora.

Great Root Archway: Along the northwestern greenway track out of the Village, a little outside The Glade, a high arch rises above the old path, composed entirely of plant and tree roots, with greenery sprouting over their outer sides. Its form is that of a masonry arch, but there is no sign of any stonework here now, just this mass of self-supporting roots and foliage in an archway shape.

Hidden Dits: The marked area of the western part of The Glade, extending a little west beyond it, has a number of old wall-line ruins over it, from old wooden and some partly stone structures. Around these are a number of up to 10 feet deep (3 metre), irregularly-shaped, holes in the surface, mostly at least partly overgrown, or with dead branches and long grasses covering them, creating flimsy covers for some. Several are inhabited by swarms of snakes, some poisonous, a few undead.

Old Hall: Southeast of The Glade is a collection of low stone wall ruins that form the largest surface structure other than the Temple Tomb ziggurat here. The architectural lines of these are somewhat rambling and more elaborate than other Village buildings too, as if the place had been built by, or for, someone with much greater abilities than typical of most former Vhangha folk.

Old Well: A short way west of the northwest corner of the Temple Tomb's ziggurat is a low, rectangular, stone dais, into which is set an old, now largely collapsed, well-head. There is no water

in it, and the chute is mostly blocked with fallen rubble and earth, beginning barely a yard/metre or two below the ground surface.

Temple Tomb & Its Entrance: The Temple Tomb's outer structure is a high, three-stepped ziggurat-style artificial hill, surmounted by a small, chapel-like building on top of the uppermost, third, tier. The stonework, while cracked and crumbling a little in places, remains generally sound and solid. Each "step" is around 18 ft high (5.5 m), and curiously, there is no means to access the rooftop chapel other than by flying, or a very difficult climb up the steeply-angled step-edges. In the chapel building on top is an altar with stone channels around it, feeding into lead-lined tubes leading down into the interior (into the Queen's Tomb on the Lich Queen's Temple Tomb map). There is no means to access the interior of the Temple Tomb from here. The way to enter the Tomb complex is by a stairway buried in the floor of the ruined brick building labelled as the Temple Tomb Entrance on the map. The actual entrance tunnel begins in the floor of the building's basement, under the more intact section of its roof, as shown. The stairway looks to have been completely hidden under this building at some stage, although it was clearly excavated and exposed a long time ago, if after the Village's ruination. It is quite practical to enter the Temple Tomb this way, although rubble on the early part of the steps down makes the initial descent a little difficult.

Whispering Court: East of The Glade and not quite as far out as the flower Ring-Ruins, is a more open area where there are fewer large trees, and only a few low wooden ruined wall-lines. Everything spoken - even if only whispered - in this area echoes around it several times before fading.