

tibet in brief

GAME TONE- The game takes place in 1959, a time of great crisis for Tibet. All Tibetan magical and spiritual beliefs are assumed to be true. Player Characters (PCs) are more-or-less normal Tibetans (and a few foreigners) living in Tibet. The dangers characters will encounter depend on where in Tibet they are:

In areas under **Chinese Communist rule**, a cruel army allows no dissent and PCs are in danger of execution, brainwashing and torture.

In **war zones**, guerilla warfare between Tibetans and Chinese soldiers is a way of life. PCs may be conscripted to fight or may be noncombatants caught in the dangers of battle.

In **cities and villages** still under Tibetan control, Tibetans go on with their ancient way of life. Most of the dangers to PCs are from unscrupulous Tibetans using money, sorcery or politics to get their way.

In **monasteries** (many the size of cities), the quest for enlightenment and the spiritual health of the country is paramount, and monks will often undergo dangerous rituals to meet those ends. Even in monasteries there are dangers from sorcerers, criminals and political schemers.

In the **mountains** and on the frozen **plains**, traveling itself can be a danger. Strong weather, treacherous passes and rivers, wild animals, bandits and feuding nomadic tribes can threaten travelers.

In graveyards, ruins, old battlefields and other **haunted places**, the primary danger is from spirits, demons and other supernatural beings.

A major theme of the game is that nothing is as it seems. Demons take human form. Wise teachers reincarnate as children. Advanced practitioners can appear to be insane. Living, breathing humans can be created from the thoughts of a master.

GOVERNMENT- The Yellow Hat monastic sect of Tibetan Buddhism is the official government of Tibet. People all over Tibet depend on monks for their magical, spiritual and medical knowledge. The government is dedicated to Buddhist principles, yet half of government officials are laymen (mostly aristocrats) and the government maintains an army and prison. The head of the Tibetan government is the Dalai Lama, a tulku (reincarnated Buddhist master) and emanation of the Buddha of compassion. The capitol of Tibet is at Lhasa, Tibet's largest city. Tibet is divided into 53 prefectures, each with one monastic and lay prefect.

Aristocrats and monastic abbots administrate local affairs on lands they own. Remote villages are ruled by a hereditary chieftain or by the most powerful person in the village.

GEOGRAPHY- Tibet is a landlocked country in Asia, about $\frac{1}{3}$ the size of the US, bordering India, China and Nepal.

Eastern Tibet borders China and is home to the nomadic tribes currently at war with the Chinese. Eastern Tibet has only a few large towns, built along trade routes to China.

Central Tibet is the most densely populated area, with Tibet's two largest cities and most of Tibet's aristocracy.

Western Tibet is the most sparsely populated region, with the ruins of ancient Tibetan civilizations. Tibetans here are the last to experience social changes.

The Chang Tang, which stretches through the whole North of Tibet is made up mostly of mountains and barren plains with little population.

CLIMATE/ECOLOGY- Through most of the year, Tibet is cold, dry and constantly windy. Dust, snowstorms and highly destructive hailstorms are common. Flora is mostly sedges and wild grasses. Major herbivores are mountain goats, marmots, rodents, gazelles and wild yaks. Major predators are vultures, snow leopards, wolves and bears.

RELIGION- Tibetans do not simply follow one religion, they use a variety of techniques for different situations.

Tibetan Buddhism concerns itself with the fate of the soul. The goal for serious practitioners is to gain enlightenment (freedom from all prejudices, errors and suffering). Lay people usually don't seek enlightenment, they seek to gain enough good karma to have a pleasant rebirth. 10% of the population are male and female Buddhist monks who have studied in a monastery from an early age and taken lifelong vows.

The path of **sutras** uses meditation and a slow detachment from worldly desires to achieve enlightenment within about 10,000 lifetimes.

The path of **tantras** (the specialty of Tibetan Buddhism) uses dangerous secret rituals to achieve enlightenment in a single lifetime. Failure during a tantric ritual means madness or death. A lama (advanced teacher) transmits knowledge of secret rituals when the student is ready. Tantric rituals use powerful imagery, some even require the use of real corpses, the summoning of dangerous entities or sexual intercourse.

Tantric masters are known to gain supernatural powers (such as invisibility, levitation, intangibility, etc.) which may be used to measure their advancement towards enlightenment. People with large amounts of good karma can also perform miracles.

Tibetan **folk religion** is totally unorganized and has no priests (although some people make a living via special powers). Folk religion believes in many minor deities that contribute to every aspect of life. There are deities of every room of the home and spirits that live in the body and provide life force. These entities can be benevolent or malevolent depending upon how they are treated.

Oracles are a part of both Bön, Buddhism and folk religion. There are simple village oracles who have the power to open themselves up to possession by ghosts and other entities. Recognized oracles manifest important Buddhist protectors, live in their own palaces, observe strict codes of behavior and advise the Tibetan government.

In the Tibetan universe, ours is one of many worlds. Humans who die with bad karma are reborn as animals, as hungry ghosts or as hell beings. Hungry ghosts live in a realm of perpetual deprivation and desire. Hell beings live in one of sixteen hot and cold hells. Beings who escape from these realms in to ours cause great harm. Those who die with good karma are reborn in heavenly realms. Heavenly beings are very powerful, wise and live for thousands of years but are imperfect and will eventually die. Those who achieve enlightenment escape the cycle of rebirths and ascend to the highest heavens, where the duality between existence and non-existence is transcended.

MAGIC- When the supernatural is encountered in Tibet, it is rarely visible. Instead, the majority of supernatural happenings are invisible and intangible. They can only be sensed by the clues they leave in human lives. The use of magical knowledge to determine exactly what is happening in this invisible world is very important. For instance, a string of misfortunes could be from a curse, an infestation by malevolent spirits, a minor deity who has been inadvertently offended, bad karma from a previous life resurfacing, etc.

Tibetans believe in and use a variety of magic. Astrology and many forms of divination, simple and complex, are used to predict the future and gain clues about the supernatural. Holy charms (items which have absorbed good karma) cause good luck and keep malevolent spirits away. Sorcery releases the bad karma in certain items to cause illness, poor luck, bad weather and attacks by malevolent spirits. Sorcery is feared and practitioners are often banished. Magic to control weather is highly valued and taught in many monasteries. Exorcism and control of malevolent spirits is very important to Tibetans. Mantras (spoken and written prayers), thread crosses (devices that trap spirits) and gluds (dough facsimiles of humans) are used by monks and other magical practitioners to ward off, trap or dispel malevolent spirits. Sorcerers use these same devices to attract, capture and send malevolent spirits. The major Buddhist sects know complex, secret rituals that will end a person's life, yet try to use them only when it is a compassionate act.

LIFESTYLE- The majority of Tibetans live on land owned by another. Farmers raise crops (mostly

barley) and nomads keep herds of yaks, sheep and goats. Some very poor Tibetans live from begging, serving others and by doing unpleasant labor. A middle class exists only in cities and is made up of merchants, craftspeople and other professionals. Aristocrats live in large mansions with many servants and run their lands by remote. Their wealth comes from taxes levied from the peasants living on their lands. Aristocrats have a very cosmopolitan lifestyle.

More than 10% of Tibetans live in a men's or women's monastery. All monks undergo Buddhist training, yet only a few make a lifelong study of it. Other monks study medicine, astrology, exorcism, weather magic, crafts or martial arts. These skilled monks are often hired out from the monastery and have their own income and possessions. Other monks become simple laborers within the monastery.

Tibetans of all classes enjoy games (including archery and horse trick-riding), epic poetry, travel, picnics and dozens of festivals. Most Tibetans can read, at least a little. Tibetans in general are described as being humorous, hearty, curious and practical.

POLITICAL SITUATION- The new Communist republic of China recently invaded Tibet. Desperate to hold on to their way of life and avoid all-out-war, the Tibetan government and aristocracy have made a deal with the Chinese. In exchange, the Tibetan government and aristocracy have been left in charge (at least nominally). The Chinese have been allowed to enter Tibet and exert their influence. The Chinese are slowly converting Tibet in to a modernized communist state.

The **Chinese** do whatever they can get away with. In the East, they rule with an iron fist. In Central Tibet they threaten, manipulate and propagandize. As the number of Chinese troops in Tibet increases, they become more bold and their demands increase.

The **aristocracy** have made uneasy peace with the Chinese, meanwhile making secret plans to escape with their wealth when the Chinese become too intolerant to allow an aristocracy to exist

The **nomadic tribes** and rich merchants fight guerilla warfare against the Chinese. They have been surprisingly successful, driving the Chinese out of large areas of Tibet. Some rebels want to invade Lhasa (Tibet's capitol) and take control of the Tibetan government.

The **Tibetan government**, headed by the young Dalai Lama, is caught in the middle. They are trying to maintain a fragile peace with the Chinese. They have the Chinese watching their every move and there are indications that the Chinese are looking for an opportunity to arrest the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama has refused to send Tibetan troops to fight with or fight against the nomadic rebels.

The **Tibetan people** worry that peace cannot last long. They fear for the fate of the Dalai Lama.