

The Glass of Sand

An Inverse World Island by Stephanie Bryant

The Glass of Sand is an island city-state in the Island Ring. It is huge, easily supporting several thousand inhabitants. Shaped like an hourglass on its side, the topside is terraced stonework, with buildings densely packed into the terraces on either slope. Small caverns are cut into the sides of the slopes to provide greater shelter and protection from the elements. Underneath, dense vines bear delicious fruits, which are picked by trained monkeys.

At the apex of the hourglass is the hub and trading center of the Glass of Sand, along with the power plant that provides electricity to the many homes, businesses, and factories on the topside. The city bustles with trade, as it is one of the best-known technological ports in Invells.

Oh, yes. And it moves. Very slowly, throughout the day, the hourglass tilts from one side to the other, then back again, though the shifts are gradual and the total slope is never too abrupt. In a single “day” of Sola’s, it makes two full shifts. Most who are born here can tell the time literally by the feel of the angle of the ground beneath their feet... unless they move to the other end of the Glass!

Tax collection plays a major role within the city, and no commerce occurs without the government taking their cut. The government justifies this through the presence of protective guards, but also provides free electricity to all tax-paying citizens. Nonetheless, the taxes have taken their toll; little leisure exists for all but the very rich, and many work-houses abound for people to find low-paying jobs in factories and assembly lines.

At the midpoint of the Glass is the center of activity on the Glass, and nowhere is that more evident than at the Apex Bar, a vibrant club with a seemingly-endless supply of Sandy Red wine, among other infused spirits and beverages.

The Wine sea

The Glass of Sands holds a secret. Inside the island lies another, hidden city. Its citizens know of and even have trade with the topsiders, but this is a shifting city of folk who want nothing more than to be unseen. A hatred of the central authorities characterize the culture here.

Beneath the surface of the Glass, the Wine sea sloshes back and forth, very slowly, carrying its weird little civilization with it. The motion powers the massive turbines near the Apex, and there is no solid land to be had aside from the constantly-flooded Apex. This is a city that lives, breathes, and dies on rafts of tangled ropes, vines, and refuse. Ropes and electrical cords hang from above and are used commonly to swing from area to area, as recreation, sport, and even combat.

The Wine sea itself consists of “Sandy Red” wine, the long-fermenting wine of the fruits that grow on the underside of the world. Merfolk who are born of the Wine sea are universally immune to alcohol and drunkenness. Nonetheless, few dare to swim in the Wine sea due to the great Wine sea Eel that harbors there.

In the Rafts, people are prohibited from using currency-- no doubt a reactive measure against the topsiders’ taxations.

The people of the Wine sea steal electricity from the topsiders. Liberally. It is, after all, their own sea that powers the turbines in the first place.

At the neck of the hourglass sits a tavern, similar to the Apex Bar, but much seedier, with a passageway to the surface. This is not the only passageway-- where are the others?

[Cultural note: Think 1920’s Prohibition underground for this hidden city.]

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Locations

The Apex Bar (Topside)

Sights

- Metal and glass tables
- Brilliant blue lighting
- Lots of foot traffic, even when nobody is stopping for a drink

Sounds

- Thumping music from the upstairs dance floor
- Clinking glasses
- Orders shouted by patrons
- The constant thrum of the turbines

Smells

- Alcohol, especially Sandy Red
- Sweat and attraction

Occupants

- A lithe “dancer for hire” (a merfolk with a fluidic body), soliciting patrons at the bar
- The overly polite, but effective, goblin bouncer
- A three-man crew, just off their shift at the power plant, dirty and needing to let off some steam
- An off-duty tax collector. Nobody speaks to him, not even the bartender, who never presents a bill.

Questions

- What special effect does the music have on a person when they go upstairs?
- With so much technology, what does this bar have that none other does?

Rumors

- Sometimes, patrons go upstairs to dance and never come back down.
- The Sandy Red served here has mystical properties

Moves

- When you order a drink, roll+Cha. On a 10+, pick two from the list below. On a 7-9, pick one.
 - You get what you ordered.
 - It doesn't cost you anything significant.
 - A nice-smelling stranger comes to talk to you.

- When you get into a drunken barfight, roll+Con. On a 10+, you come out on top of the fight the bouncer thanks you for your help. On a 7-9, you win, but the bouncer asks you to leave. Either way, you attract the attention of the local rowdies and miscreants.

The Power Plant

Sights

- Large turbines moving slowly, powered by fluid
- Workers on catwalks
- Dirt and grease
- Everyone wears a respirator

Sounds

- Groaning metal
- Sloshing fluid
- The thrum of the turbines

Smells

- Oil and grease
- Alcohol (wine)

Occupants

- Dirt-stained laborers in grime-smeared goggles and respirators
- An efficient-looking foreman with a clipboard

Questions

- Why does the smell of wine permeate the turbines?
- What would happen if the world stopped tilting?

Rumors

- The foreman is making bootleg alcohol in one of the unused turbine enclosures.
- There's a circle of laborers who are part of a kidnapping ring. What are they kidnapping people for?

Moves

- When you stop a turbine without proper shutdown procedures, roll+Str. On a 10+, it stops and can be repaired later. On a 7-9, it breaks irreparably, spilling liquid everywhere.

Vineyards

Sights

- Lush vineyards covered in ropy vines with green leaves and bright red fruits, bathed in Sola's light.
- Small monkeys crawling over it all, plucking fruit.

Sounds

- Chattering of monkeys
- Chirping birds who make nests in the fruits
- Farmers calling to each other

Smells

- Rich, sun-warmed fruit
- Thick soil, enriched by simian feces

Occupants

- Nimble farmers in harnesses walking along the tops of the vine trellises, doing repairs and maintenance.
- Monkeys that harvest the fruit

Questions

- Why did an entire trellis fall off the underside of this island two weeks ago, carrying Farmer Thommas with it?
- Where are the monkey offspring?
- Why doesn't anyone eat redfruit?

Rumors

- The redfruits are poisonous until fermented, which is why the monkeys don't eat them.
- Redfruit is actually extremely spicy and needs fermentation to make it palatable.

Moves

- When you try to catch a monkey, roll+Dex. On a 10+, select three of the following. On a 7-9, select two:
 - You catch a monkey.
 - You avoid being bitten.
 - You don't fall.
 - The trellis you're on does not break.

The Fruit Market

Sights

- A dimly-lit street with colors and booth signs everywhere
- Weird technological devices
- Tax collectors lurk on every corner

Sounds

- Shopkeepers haggling in hushed tones
- Clinking coins
- Metal being tested against metal
- Monkeys shrieking in cages

Smells

- Fruits starting to go bad.
- Oily machine parts
- Caged monkeys

Occupants

- An elderly woman selling redfruit
- An old man and a young girl playing a board game
- The ubiquitous tax collector, quietly notating transactions and collecting fees.

Questions

- Why haven't you paid any taxes since your arrival here?
- What does the old woman sell in secret?

Rumors

- There are dark magics for sale in the Fruit Market... their price is somewhat other than coin...
- Technology and black magic are not as incompatible as you might think.

Moves

- When you buy something at the market, roll+Wis. On a 10+, pick three. On a 7-9, pick one.
 - The item works as promised
 - The item is not cursed
 - The item only costs you coins
 - The tax collectors do not bother you

The Agency

Sights

- Stonework hallways, bereft of any dirt or mess.
- Stone desks, immobile, with cold-faced tax collectors behind them
- Well-trained monkeys in niches near the ceiling.

Sounds

- Papers shuffling
- The whirr of a pencil sharpener
- Punch-button accounting tools
- Muffled sounds of weapons clashing
- Monkeys chittering quietly at each other.

Smells

- Dry paper and stone
- Sawdust
- Monkey

Occupants

- A fresh-faced young tax collector hastily walking down a corridor, late for an appointment.
- A security guard, lazily lounging next to the front door.
- The monkey trainer, part of the night watch security detail

Questions

- Why do the tax collectors spend three hours a day practicing how to fight?
- Where do they keep the money they collect?

Rumors

- The monkeys are not merely well-trained; they are mystically controlled
- The Agency building harbors a dangerous secret

Moves

- When you pay your taxes, roll 2d6+Int. On a 10+, they are accepted as correct. On a 7-9, they are accepted, but you overpaid.

The Lantern's Peace

Sights

- Glowing walls, infused with Sola's light (flickering slightly)
- Warm wooden pews
- A faintly glowing altar

Sounds

- A bustling kitchen
- Quiet prayers
- An aged Lantern, dispensing advice

Smells

- Melted wax
- Crisp linens

Occupants

- Ethyl the Lantern
- A young child, sweeping the floors
- A volunteer, here to pick up the bread for the poor

Questions

- Why is the light of Sola flickering here?
- What is wrong with the Lantern's eyes
- Where is the bread going?

Rumors

- Ethyl has been blind for years and doesn't realize the light of the temple is flickering.
- The Lantern's Peace has connections with the terrorist cell

Moves

- When you seek guidance at the Lantern's Peace, roll+Wis. On a 10+, you learn something about someone you know. On a 7-9, you learn something about yourself.

The Sandriders Men's Club

Sights

- Rich copper metal fixtures on warm vine-worked wood
- A fully operational home bar
- Comfortable sofas and reading chairs
- A thorough library
- A game board, already set up to play

Sounds

- Men speaking about various topics of the news
- Papers being ruffled
- Cards shuffling

Smells

- Brandy and scotch
- A Fireplace

Occupants

- Upper-middle-income men of all occupations
- A serving staff, well-trained and groomed

Questions

- How does one gain admittance to this club?
- Why do some men stay until dawn?

Rumors

- The Sandriders were originally an adventuring group that retired here and founded the club
- There is a mystical treasure in the deepest cellars of the club

Moves

- When you have a drink at the club, roll+Cha. On a 10+, you learn or confirm a rumor that only these men would know. On a 7-9, you learn a rumor, but share one of your secrets.

Some NPCs

Mayor Kelvine

The mayor of Glass of Sand, Kelvine (Kel-vyne) is a middle-aged man with jet black hair and sparkling black eyes. His wings are raven-black and feathered, but fairly small, blending in easily with his normally-dark clothing. He's well-respected, having been elected and re-elected after he released the electricity from his turbine factory for all citizens to use, free of charge. He has been mayor for over twenty years as a result, and values his position highly.

Kelvine knows about the Wine sea and tolerates its existence. He believes it's important for people to have a black market, and as long as the Wine sea maintains a no-currency rule, he is content with their anarchy. Unfortunately, anarchy might not be content with the mayor.

The Lantern, Ethyl the Elder

Ethyl is an ancient Lantern who went blind about three years ago, as the cancer that is slowly killing her spread to her eyes. Unbeknownst to her, her little light Point has been absorbing her cancer, sacrificing its very existence so that she might live long enough to see another Lantern installed here at the temple. Point's lantern home has been outfitted with battery-powered lights to hide its fading nature.

Ethyl does important work in Glass of Sands. She feeds the poor, grants shelter and asylum to those in need. Ethyl works equally with those of the Wine sea as well as Glass of Sands, and she keeps their secrets well.

She has contact with the Wine sea Liberation Front, in the form of giving them many bags of food each week to distribute to those in need down below. She has also hidden defectors until they can escape to the Apex or another one of the entrances to the Wine sea.

Mad Thea, the Fruit Seller

Mad Thea is a black magician and seller of dark magics.

Mad Thea knows that the Tax Collectors are building The Crystal, because they have bought several components from her to aid in its completion.

Doctor Glassner

A practitioner of dark arts, Dr. Glassner is the mastermind behind the Crystal. He is a technomage, one of those rare people who blends science, technology, and old magic to create something new.

Captain Grey Cat

An outsider, visiting the Glass of Sands for a week or two, Grey Cat always wears a mask and is rumored to be hideously scarred or deformed beneath it. He's a generally decent guy, though, always willing to help a fellow captain out with rumors and information.

Donovan the Tax Inspector

Donovan is a dedicated investigator into tax fraud. The majority of tax collectors catalog commerce and collect fees based on the value of items bought and sold. Sometimes, there is a gap between what is reported, and what is observed. Donovan is the man who minds the gaps. Over the past five years, he's expanded his original assignment to investigate missing redfruit to include many other resources, both technological and human.

He's also recently lost his wife and daughter, both supposedly killed during a terrorist action.

In reality, his wife is Marius' sister, and they were both taken to the Winesea, to protect them should Donovan get too involved with the Crystal.

Jehanne

Donovan's wife Jehanne was recently spirited to the Wine sea for safekeeping. Donovan is getting too close to the truth about the Crystal, and Marius worried that Jehanne and her daughter would be in danger. There's precedent for other tax inspectors abruptly disappearing like this.

Jehanne is a practical woman who fully intends her current situation to be temporary. She frequently returns to the surface *in cognito* to accept goods from Ethyl and spy on her husband, unaware that this is driving him mad with grief when he catches a glimpse of her or the scent of her soap in the air.

Down in the Wine sea, Jehanne is known as Genna and operates a transit raft where she distributes bread for the poor.

Marius, of the Wine sea Liberation Front

Marius is the red-haired, charismatic leader of the Wine sea Liberation Front. He is strident and a forceful personality, who firmly believes in the mission.

Dangers and Fronts

Dr. Glassner's Laboratory

Dr. Glassner's lab and assistants form something of a technomagical cabal with Mayor Kelvine. Dr. Glassner's vision for the Crystal is that it will serve as a keeping-place for, well, anything. Anything you want to trap or hold can be kept there. It could be a great library of knowledge... or a prison for dissidents. It could be a warehouse, a treasury, or even an infinite batter. There is literally nothing it cannot hold and contain, and its capacity is potentially infinite.

Dr. Glassner just needs one important component, something that he cannot get easily (a Little Light).

Impulse: To master forbidden knowledge.

Moves:

- Learn forbidden knowledge
- Demand a sacrifice

Impending Doom: The keeper of the key can imprison anything or anyone in the Crystal.

Grim Portents

- Create the Crystal of Holding (check)
- Charge the Crystal with Energy - A massive power outage as all electricity is diverted.
- Create the Key (requires Sola's Little Light) - A Lantern loses her light
- Attune the Key and Crystal to each other - Sola flares, and the Mayor makes his move.

The Winesea Liberation Front

A group of anarchists who hate the tax collectors and the mayor. Impulse: Change the status quo. The WLF is a resource the PCs can use to hinder the Laboratory.

Moves:

- To attack through direct means
- Observe a foe in detail

Taxation Agency

The Tax Agency is a group of law-abiding, uncorruptable agents of the island whose sole purpose is to assess and protect the fees that pay for the services provided by the island, including the work houses.

They are under the command of the Mayor and will do his bidding, with the exception of one or two rebellious agents. They are a resource usable by the Mayor and Dr. Glassner to maintain the status quo.

Impulse: Maintain status quo.

Moves:

- Muster an army of collectors
- Investigate corruption

Creatures

Tax Collector

Intelligent, Organized, Group. 6 hp, 0 Armor. Damage: 1d8 (1 piercing if using a knife)

Stone-faced, serious, in white wigs and long black coats.

Not everyone parts with their fees willingly, and so all tax collectors carry a knife, with which they are expert fighters, training in both unarmed and armed combat for several hours a day. As a result of their ubiquitousness, the tax collectors are also de facto guards and watchmen of the city, and so those positions have been scaled back considerably.

Moves:

- To assess a person, place, or thing.
- Skilled offense: Roll damage twice, take the highest.
- To extract their fee.

Farmer Monkey

Tiny, Horde, Devious. 3 hp, 0 Armor. Damage: 1d6

Chittering and non-stop motion, effortless movement among vines and along walls.

Farmer monkeys are redfruit-harvesting trained monkeys that live on Glass of Sands and are domesticated to harvest redfruit and perform small tasks. They have been trained to guard the Agency, though no one can quite figure out how the Agency managed that, since no one else has been able to train them to be so quiet.

Farmer monkeys are small, perhaps no more than 8" in height.

The monkeys do not eat redfruit. No one knows if this is because the redfruit is poisonous to them or simply because of the taste, but it protects the crops from them.

Moves:

- Throw something nasty at an opponent
- Steal something small
- Climb along walls and ceilings

Wine sea Eel

Large, Terrifying, Solitary, Construct. 12 hp, 2 Armor. Damage: 1d10

A churning of the wine, the hint of a dark form beneath the surface, then stillness.

The Wine sea Eel is a large construct that filters the Wine sea wine into something palatable. It is, however, autonomous and perceives anything swimming in its waters as a contaminant, which it tries to devour and filter out. The rafts that float atop the Wine sea are programmed as non-contaminants.

- Ensnare something
- Devour a contaminant
- Filter it and eject its remains into the downside soil.