

SUMMER PALACE OF THE WINTER QUEEN

NO ONE IS QUITE SURE WHO OR WHAT THE WINTER QUEEN REALLY IS. THE TALES MENTIONING HER SUGGEST SHE MAY BE A DEITY OR AN EXCEPTIONALLY POWERFUL, PROBABLY IMMORTAL, PERHAPS FAERIE, CREATURE. FEW SUCH TALES GIVE USEFUL DETAILS ON HER NATURE, THOUGH MANY CULTURES IN THE HIGHER NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN LATITUDES OF NIBIRUM PRESERVE VARIANTS OR FRAGMENTS OF THE STORIES, WHERE THE QUEEN HAS NUMEROUS ALTERNATIVE, TYPICALLY APOTROPAIC, LOCAL TITLES. IT IS CLEAR SHE IS THOUGHT TO POSSESS GREAT MAGIC, MUCH EXCEPTIONALLY OBSCURE KNOWLEDGE, AND A CONSIDERABLE BURDEN. HUMANOID IN FORM, SHE APPEARS AS VERY TALL (AROUND 8 OR 9 FEET HIGH; 2.4 TO 2.7 METRES), DRESSED IN A LONG, HOODED ROBE, WITH PIERCING BLUE EYES, BEARING A LONG STAFF OR CROOK TALLER THAN SHE IS, AND AN AIR OF GREAT SADNESS. HER CLOTHING AND PHYSICAL FEATURES ARE SAID TO ALTER SUBTLY FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT. A SAMPLE PORTRAIT OF HER ACCOMPANIES THIS SET OF ATLAS MAPS.

SHE CANNOT LEAVE THE PALACE, AND HAS NO CONTROL OVER WHERE IT GOES, AS THE PALACE MOVES MAGICALLY, AND INSTANTLY, ONCE A DAY TO A NEW LOCATION. IT IS SAID TO BE NEVER IN EXACTLY THE SAME PLACE TWICE, BUT ITS LOCATION IS ALWAYS IN AN ICY, REMOTE, SPOT, CONCEALED BELOW THE SURFACE. ITS SOLITARY ENTRANCE, WHILE SMALL AND HARD TO FIND, HAS NO DOOR (THERE ARE NO DOORS THROUGHOUT THE PALACE), AND CAN BE RECOGNISED BY THE PROFUSION OF PERFECT REPRESENTATIONS OF SUMMER FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE ALL AROUND IT, MADE OF CRYSTAL-QUALITY ICE. THIS SUMMER ARRAY OF PERFECT SPECIMENS IS ASTONISHINGLY BEAUTIFUL, ALL OF WHICH OBJECTS ARE VERY FRAGILE. DAMAGING ANY IS A SWIFT WAY TO RAISE THE WINTER QUEEN'S IRE, SOMETHING THE TALES STRONGLY WARN AGAINST.

WHEREVER THE PALACE ALIGHTS AND FOR FIFTY MILES AROUND (EIGHTY KILOMETRES), THE WEATHER WORSENS AND TURNS WINTRY, IF IT WAS NOT WINTER WHEN IT LANDED. SOMETIMES, IT SETTLES IN THE CLOUDS, WHERE IT STIRS THEM TO WINTER STORMS, POURING HAIL AND SNOW DOWN TO THE SURFACE BEneath IN ICY GALES. EVEN THEN, THE PALACE REMAINS DEEPLY HIDDEN BY THE CLOUDS, FOR ALL IT STILL HAS ITS ICE-FLOWER-SURROUNDED SINGLE ENTRANCE.

WHILE SOME TALES ALLUDE TO IT, ONE REALITY ABOUT THE PALACE IS THAT THE SOULS OF ALL WHO HAVE DIED RECENTLY IN THE FROZEN PLACES OF THE WORLD, AND ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DIED FROM COLD ELSEWHERE, MUST PASS THROUGH IT ON THEIR WAY FROM WHEREVER THEY WERE TO WHEREVER THEY MAY BE GOING. A FEW MAY LINGER IN THE PALACE FOR A TIME, AND SOME MAY BECOME TEMPORARY GUESTS OR SERVANTS OF THE WINTER QUEEN. THE QUEEN HAS NO CONTROL OVER WHICH MAY STAY OR MOVE ON IMMEDIATELY, HOWEVER. SHE FREQUENTLY CONVERSES WITH THOSE PASSING THROUGH EVEN SO, FROM WHICH MUCH OF HER SECRET KNOWLEDGE DERIVES. OCCASIONAL TALES MAY HINT DISPARAGINGLY THAT THE QUEEN IS MERELY RUNNING A FERRY SERVICE FOR THE RECENTLY DECEASED.

THE PALACE CHANGES ITS FORM WHENEVER IT MOVES, NEVER THE SAME TWICE, THOUGH ALWAYS IN PLAN-VIEW HAVING THE SHAPE OF A GIGANTIC SNOWFLAKE, WITH WALLS, FLOOR AND CEILING COMPOSED ENTIRELY OF SOLID, IF AT LEAST SLIGHTLY TRANSLUCENT, CRYSTAL-LIKE ICE. THIS IS ALWAYS BEAUTIFUL, WITH GLITTERING FACETS LIKE GEMS THAT REFLECT LIGHT ON OR JUST WITHIN THE SOLID ICE SURFACES. SOMEHOW, LIGHT PALELY MANAGES TO ILLUMINATE THE WHOLE INTERIOR WITH A SOFT RADIANCE, NO MATTER HOW DEEPLY BURIED THE PALACE MAY APPEAR TO BE. AT TIMES, RAINBOW-COLOURED BEAMS, ARCS AND SPOTS MAY BE SEEN, LIKE HALOES IN THE OUTDOOR SKY THAT ARE CREATED BY REFRACTION OF SUNLIGHT THROUGH TINY HEXAGONAL ICE-CRYSTALS IN THIN, HIGH-ALTITUDE, CLOUDS. SOMETIMES SUCH LIGHT EFFECTS MAY BECOME DAZZLINGLY BRIGHT BRIEFLY. THE ICE WALLS, FLOORS AND CEILINGS REFLECT LIGHT AS WELL, WHICH IN PLACES CAN TAKE ON A MIRROR-QUALITY SURFACE. SUCH MIRRORS CAN ALLOW GLIMPSES OF PAST OR FUTURE EVENTS AND PLACES, MEMORIES LEFT BY THE PASSING SPIRITS, PERHAPS. THE WINTER QUEEN DOES HAVE SOME CONTROL OVER SUCH LIGHT, VISION, VISIONARY AND ILLUSORY EFFECTS WITHIN THE PALACE.

QUEEN AND PALACE ARE SO INSEPARABLE BECAUSE IN ESSENCE, THEY ARE PARTS OF THE SAME THING. MANY OF THE QUEEN'S "SERVANTS" ARE ACTUALLY LIVING ICE-CONSTRUCTS WHICH APPEAR FROM, AND CAN RETURN INTO, THE INNER ICE SURFACES OF THE PALACE AS REQUIRED, THUS TOO ARE SIMPLY ANOTHER ELEMENT OF THIS WHOLE BEING.

PALACE INTERIOR

THE AIR THROUGHOUT THE PALACE IS ALWAYS FRESH AND CALM REGARDLESS OF CONDITIONS IMMEDIATELY OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE. WHILE COOL, IT IS OF AN EQUITABLE TEMPERATURE FOR WHOEVER PHYSICALLY ENTERS IT (SOMETHING WHICH CAN FEEL DIFFERENT FOR EVERY ENTRANT). THE ATMOSPHERE IS ORDINARILY SOLEMN AND SLIGHTLY SADDENING, AS IF COLOURED BY THE EPHEMERAL NATURE OF SUMMER, COUPLED WITH THE PRESENCE OF THE MANY PASSING SOULS. CEILING HEIGHTS, WHILE VARIABLE AS BEFITS AN APPARENTLY NATURAL CRYSTALLINE ICE FORM, ARE RARELY LESS THAN 15 TO 20 FT (4.5 TO 6 M), TYPICALLY OF ANGULAR, SOMETIMES SPECTACULAR, VAULTED NATURE.

REGARDLESS OF ITS FORM, THERE ARE ALWAYS SEVEN MAJOR AREAS WITHIN THE PALACE: A GUARDED SURFACE ENTRANCE AND RECEPTION AREA, THROUGH WHICH ALL MUST FIRST PASS, WHETHER PHYSICAL, IMMATERIAL, LIVING OR DEAD; A BALLROOM FOR PARTIES AND ENTERTAINMENTS; A BANQUETING HALL FOR FEASTING AND ITS ADJOINING KITCHEN; A CRYSTAL GARDEN RICH WITH MORE SUMMER ICE-FLOWERS; A HALL OF MIRRORS OF ICE; A RANGE OF SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS; AND A THRONE ROOM WITH THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS NEARBY.

SURFACE ENTRANCE: SURROUNDED BY A SMALL GARDEN OF SUMMERY ICE-FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE, THE ENTRANCE IS ALWAYS A LOW, POINT-TOPPED, OPEN ARCHWAY AROUND 5 FT TALL BY 3 FT WIDE (1.5 BY 0.9 M) SET IN A BACK-SLOPING WALL OF ICE. THE ICE-PLANTS ARE PLACED ON BOTH THIS WALL AND THE MORE LEVEL SURFACE JUST IN FRONT OF IT, ALWAYS WITH A CLEARED PATH LEADING A LITTLE INDIRECTLY TO THE ENTRANCE, SLIGHTLY WIDER THAN THE ARCHWAY. THIS PLATFORM, WALL AND ARCH ARE PRESENT EVEN WHEN THE PALACE IS SET IN THE CLOUDS, AS THEY ARE PARTS OF THE PALACE ITSELF. THE PALACE CANNOT BE ENTERED BY ANY MEANS IN ANY OTHER WAY. PUSHING PHYSICALLY INTO THE SURROUNDING CLOUDS, OR DIGGING INTO THE ICE BEYOND WALL OR PLATFORM FINDS NO TRACE OF THE PALACE, FOR INSTANCE, WHILE MAGICAL TRANSPORTATION DEVICES AND SPELLS WILL NOT FUNCTION INTO OR OUT FROM THE PALACE. SOMEONE WHO HAS DIED IN THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT OR CIRCUMSTANCES WILL HAVE THEIR SOUL PASS THROUGH HERE AT SOME STAGE, ALTHOUGH THE TIMING IS ALWAYS UNCERTAIN, AND USUALLY INCONSISTENT WITH THAT IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD. EQUALLY, THE DEAD HAVE NO CONTROL OVER WHEN OR FOR HOW LONG THEY MAY BE HERE. ONCE THROUGH THE ARCHWAY, THE PALACE OPENS-UP IMMEDIATELY AS MAPPED, AND THE ENTRANT FINDS THEMSELVES AT THE START OF THE RECEPTION AREA.

RECEPTION AREA: THIS COMMONLY HAS SEVERAL AWKWARD, NARROW PLACES IN IT, SOMETIMES WITH SEPARATE ICE-WALLED CHAMBERS AS WELL. THERE ARE PHYSICAL GUARDS OF VARIOUS KINDS, MANY TO MOST OF MAGICALLY-ANIMATED ICE CONSTRUCTION, OFTEN ARMED AND ARMOURD WITH ICE THAT HAS THE PROPERTIES OF MAGICALLY-EMPOWERED METAL. MORE TYPICAL ARCTIC-ENVIRONMENT INTELLIGENT CREATURES MAY BE ENCOUNTERED HERE AT TIMES TOO. THE NUMBERS INVOLVED ARE ALWAYS MORE THAN A PHYSICAL GROUP COULD OVERCOME, AND FRESH ICE-CONSTRUCTS WILL SIMPLY MANIFEST FROM THE ICE WHENEVER REQUIRED. SUCH CONSTRUCTS ARE RATHER LIKE ANTIBODIES INSIDE A LIVING CREATURE, WHOSE NUMBERS INCREASE TO MATCH THE LEVEL OF THE INVADING THREAT. THIS MEANS SUCH CONSTRUCTS MAY APPEAR ALSO FROM ANY ICE SURFACES ELSEWHERE IN THE PALACE IN RESPONSE TO THREATS. A FEW GUARDS MAY BE INCORPOREAL SPIRITS, SOULS TEMPORARILY ON THE PALACE'S STAFF, AND IF SO, THEY MAY BE KNOWN TO WHOEVER HAS JUST ENTERED. THIS LATTER IS ALWAYS INTENTIONAL.

BALLROOM: A LARGE, OPEN AREA FOR ENTERTAINMENTS. WHEN IN USE, TEMPORARY LOW ICE PLATFORMS MAY GROW FROM THE FLOOR FOR PERFORMERS OR AN ORCHESTRA, SAY (OFTEN MADE UP OF PASSING SOULS), ALONG WITH FEATURES SUCH AS TABLES AND SEATS WITH REFRESHMENTS. GLITTERING LIGHTING EFFECTS, ENHANCED BEYOND THE PALACE NORMS, CAN BE EMPLOYED HERE TOO. MOST GUESTS ARE NORMALLY DISEMBODED SPIRITS, THUS THE EVENTS CAN HAVE A SOMBRE TONE, RATHER MORE WAKE THAN PARTY, FOR INSTANCE. A LITERALLY HAUNTED BALLROOM.

BANQUETING HALL: A SUBSTANTIAL ICE-TABLE, COMMONLY OF ANGULAR “C” OR “U” SHAPE, IS THE DOMINANT FIXED FEATURE, WITH FIXED ICE SEATS - USUALLY BENCHES - ALONGSIDE IT, AND A LARGER THRONES-LIKE CHAIR FOR THE QUEEN AT THE TABLE’S HEAD. DESPITE MOST GUESTS AT THE FEASTS HERE BEING SPIRITS, ANY PHYSICAL GUESTS WILL FIND THE FOOD AND DRINK OF EXCELLENT QUALITY, ALBEIT THE FOOD IS EXCLUSIVELY BREAD AND THE DRINK FRESH WATER. HOWEVER, THE BREAD HAS AN ARRAY OF FORMS THAT INCLUDE MANY TYPICAL LOAF TYPES, AND MORE MADE TO LOOK LIKE MEATS AND FRUITS. EACH HAS A HINT OF THE TASTE ITS APPEARANCE WOULD SUGGEST. THE BREAD PROVIDES BETTER SUSTENANCE THAN MEALS OF GREATER VARIETY FOUND ELSEWHERE, AND HAS MILDLY HEALING PROPERTIES FOR THOSE IN NEED OF IT, IN ADDITION. SIMILARLY, THE WATER COMES IN AN ARRAY OF DIFFERENT TEMPERATURES, COLOURS AND TASTES, AGAIN WITH BENEFICIAL EFFECTS THAT COMPLEMENT THE HEALING POWERS OF THE BREAD. ALL THE TABLEWARE IS OF EXQUISITELY-FASHIONED ICE, WHILE STILL POSSESSED OF A STRENGTH AND DURABILITY CLOSER TO METAL AND POTTERY THAN ICE. EVEN THE SPIRITS CAN PARTAKE OF THE FOOD AND DRINK, USING THE UTENSILS AS NORMAL, THOUGH ONLY SO LONG AS THEY ARE SEATED AT THIS TABLE.

A KITCHEN AREA EITHER ADJOINS OR IS CLOSE-BY THE BANQUETING HALL. THIS CONTAINS A PHYSICAL, IF SEEMINGLY MUCH TOO SMALL, BREAD OVEN, MATERIALS AND WORKSPACES SUITABLE FOR PREPARING BREAD. THE QUEEN MAY BE HERE AT TIMES, PHYSICALLY MAKING THE BREAD. SHE PREPARES ALL OF IT DAILY.

CRYSTAL GARDEN: A SWEEP AREA, A FOUNTAIN AND POOL OF RUNNING FRESH WATER FORM THE PRIMARY PHYSICAL FEATURES IN THIS PART OF THE PALACE, ALL SCULPTED FROM ICE, WITH LIGHTING THAT VARIES FROM A SPARKLING SUMMER DAYLIGHT QUALITY, AS IF THROUGH MOVING LEAVES, TO A GLOWING SUMMER TWILIGHT. PLACES TO SIT AND REST WILL GROW UP FROM THE ICE FOR ANY PHYSICAL PEOPLE COMING THROUGH THE GARDEN. THE WHOLE AREA IS PARTICULARLY PEACEFUL AND PLEASANT, IF RATHER IN THE FASHION OF A SUMMER GRAVEYARD, COMPLETE WITH PASSING SOULS WANDERING THROUGH FROM TIME TO TIME. THE GARDEN IS FILLED WITH AN ASTONISHING VARIETY AND PROFUSION OF DELICATELY-TIPPED SUMMER ICE PLANTS, OFTEN WITH A LIGHT HINT OF SUMMER FRAGRANCES ON THE AIR. THE PLANTS MAY HAVE HERBAL PROPERTIES AS REPORTED TO THEM IN LORE, OR ADDITIONAL, SOMETIMES UNEXPECTED, MAGICAL ONES. SUCH PROPERTIES CAN BE USED ONLY IF GIFTED FREELY TO SOMEONE BY THE WINTER QUEEN. TAKING ANY WITHOUT PERMISSION RENDERS THEM INEFFECTIVE. SUCH ICE PLANTS ARE ALSO FRAGILE AND QUITE EASILY DAMAGED; DOING SO PURPOSEFULLY MAKES THE QUEEN EXTREMELY ANGRY. WHILE SHE CAN RESTORE THE DAMAGE FAIRLY EASILY IN MOST CASES, THE OFFENDER IS LIABLE TO BE EXPELLED FROM THE PALACE INSTANTLY, DEPOSITED ON THE SURFACE SOME CONSIDERABLE DISTANCE AWAY, YET STILL WITHIN THE PALACE’S FIFTY-MILE REGION OF INFLUENCE, SO THE PERSON CAN ENJOY THE WORST WINTER WEATHER THE PALACE’S PROXIMITY GENERATES.

HALL OF MIRRORS: A CONFUSING AREA SET WITH NUMEROUS TALL (OFTEN CEILING-HIGH) PLATES OF MIRROR LIKE ICE, ALONG WITH SIMILARLY MIRRORED SURFACES ON PARTS OF THE NEARBY FLOOR, WALLS AND CEILING. MULTIPLE REFLECTIONS ABOVE, AND IT WOULD BE VERY EASY TO BECOME LOST, FRIGHTENED, OR BOTH HERE, ESPECIALLY AS VIEWING ONE’S OWN REFLECTION FORCES THE PERSON TO REVISIT THEIR OWN FEARS, FAILINGS OR PERCEIVED PHYSICAL-FEATURE FLAWS. THE LONGER THIS GOES ON, THE WORSE SUCH FEELINGS BECOME. SOULS PASSING THROUGH HERE MAY BE REFLECTED AS WELL, SOMETIMES UNDERGOING A SIMILAR PROCESS. A FEW MAY BECOME TRAPPED WITHIN THE MAZE OF MIRRORED REFLECTIONS AND BE UNABLE TO PASS BEYOND THE PALACE. MOST SPIRITS SIMPLY DRIFT THROUGH HERE WITHOUT PROBLEMS, HOWEVER.

SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS: PHYSICAL CREATURES REQUIRING REGULAR REST WHO SERVE THE QUEEN, AND THOSE WHO BECOME HER GUESTS, WILL BE ALLOCATED PERSONAL SPACES IN THIS AREA, EACH - SHOULD IT BE NECESSARY - SEPARATED FROM OTHERS BY FRESHLY-GROWN, TEMPORARY (OR OCCASIONALLY MORE PERMANENT), ICE WALLS. EVEN SOULS THAT REQUEST A SECLUDED SPOT MAY BE PROVIDED WITH SPACE HERE. ALL SUCH CAN BE ACCOMMODATED COMFORTABLY. THE AREA WOULD SIMPLY EXPAND OUTWARDS SHOULD MORE SPACE BE REQUIRED.

THRONE ROOM: A RAISED AREA OF VARIABLE SIZE WITH THE QUEEN'S THRONE, OFTEN WITH ONE OR MORE FREE-STANDING WALLS, DOMINATES THIS PART OF THE PALACE. THIS IS WHERE VISITORS, WHETHER SOULS OR THOSE PHYSICALLY PRESENT, ARE FIRST BROUGHT, IF THEY COME TO THE PALACE WITH A SPECIFIC NEED OR REQUEST FOR THE WINTER QUEEN. HERE, SHE WILL LISTEN AND DECIDE WHAT IS TO BE DONE. THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS, A PRIVATE APARTMENT SUITE WHERE FEW ARE EVER PERMITTED, EITHER ADJOIN THE THRONE ROOM, OR ARE SITUATED NEARBY, OFTEN WITH CONCEALED ACCESSWAYS WHEN ADJACENT TO THE THRONE ROOM ITSELF.



QUIRKS OF THE PALACES

TEN SAMPLE PALACE MAPS ARE PROVIDED IN THIS SET IN THE ATLAS. EACH HAS ITS OWN PECULIARITIES.

THE FIRST PALACE: PROBABLY THE MOST DIFFICULT OF THE TEN SAMPLE PALACES TO NEGOTIATE, WITH SEVERAL VERY NARROW PASSAGeways, AND A NUMBER OF OTHER PLACES WHERE THE WALLS ARE RICH WITH SHARP, PROTRUDING ICE CRYSTALS LIABLE TO SNAG LOOSE CLOTHING. THE FLOOR-TO-CEILING FREESTANDING WALLS IN THE RECEPTION AREA AND SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS ALSO CONTINUE THIS "NARROW WAY" THEME, IF IN A SMOOTHER-SURFACED FORM, WITH THE RECEPTION AREA EVEN HAVING ITS OWN ENCLOSED CHAMBER IN THE CENTRE, INCLUDING A SINGLE ACCESS POINT (NO DOORS, OF COURSE). THE HALL OF MIRRORS RUNS BETWEEN THE CENTRAL PEXUS AND THE BANQUETING HALL, IN THE BROADEST OF THE SIX RADIALLY-PROJECTING WINGS OF THE PALACE, LIABLE TO BE PROBLEMATIC FOR THOSE OTHER THAN THE WINTER QUEEN GOING TO AND FROM A FEAST THERE.

THE SECOND PALACE: THIS HAS A VERY LARGE, OPEN, CENTRAL PEXUS, IN THE MIDST OF WHICH IS THE HALL OF MIRRORS, SURROUNDED BY SIX BROAD, FLOOR-TO-CEILING FREESTANDING WALLS THAT EACH HAVE A "T"-FORM IN PLAN, WHICH ALSO SERVE TO DIVIDE UP THE OUTER PART OF THE PEXUS INTO THE PALACE'S SIX OTHER MAIN AREAS. ONLY THE RECEPTION AREA AND THRONE ROOM HAVE FREESTANDING WALLS BEYOND THIS. THE SUBSTANTIAL ONE IN THE RECEPTION AREA ALMOST BLOCKS THE EXIT INTO THE PALACE PROPER. THE HALL OF MIRRORS IS UNUSUALLY WELL-ORDERED, IF AS PROBLEMATIC TO TRAVERSE AS NORMAL. MOST OF THE OUTER ENDS OF THE RADIAL WINGS, EXCEPT FOR THAT BETWEEN THE SURFACE ENTRANCE AND RECEPTION AREA, SEEM TO BE LITTLE-USED.

THE THIRD PALACE: ALL PARTS OF THIS PALACE ARE BROAD AND OPEN, WITH ONLY THE RECEPTION AREA HAVING A FEW FREESTANDING FLOOR-TO-CEILING WALLS TO RESTRICT ACCESS IN A LIMITED WAY. THE LARGE ICE-PANELS SEPARATING THE CENTRAL THRONE ROOM FROM THE REST OF THE COMPLEX HAVE MIRRORED INNER SURFACES, THOUGH THEY REACH ONLY ABOUT HALFWAY BETWEEN FLOOR AND CEILING. THE CENTRAL THRONE ON ITS HEXAGONAL DAIS CAN FREELY ROTATE TO FACE IN ANY DIRECTION. PASSAGE THROUGH THE HALL OF MIRRORS IS RESTRICTED BY THE NUMEROUS, ROUGHLY 10 FT TALL (3 M) MIRROR-PLATES THERE. UNUSUALLY, THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS AND SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS SHARE THE SAME WING OF THE PALACE.

THE FOURTH PALACE: FREESTANDING FLOOR-TO-CEILING ICE WALLS CREATE NARROW WAYS IN VARIOUS PLACES, INCLUDING IN THE RECEPTION AREA, THRONE ROOM, CENTRAL HALL OF MIRRORS AND THE SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS. THE RECEPTION AREA HAS A LARGE, ENCLOSED CHAMBER AT ITS INNER END, CONSTRUCTED FROM SOME OF ITS EXTRA WALLS. THE HALL OF MIRRORS, SEGREGATED FROM THE REST OF THE PALACE BY MIRRORED WALLS (THE OUTER ONES MIRRORED ONLY ON THEIR INNER SIDES), HAS SMALLER ICE-MIRRORS SCATTERED AT DIFFERENT ANGLES WITHIN IT TOO. NONE OF THESE LATTER RISE ABOVE 10 FT (3 M) TALL, HOWEVER. THE CRYSTAL GARDEN'S SUNKEN AREA, WHILE ANGULAR, HAS AN ODDLY IRREGULAR SHAPE, MUCH LIKE THE MISMATCHED ANGULAR POOL AND FOUNTAIN BY ITS OUTER END.

THE FIFTH PALACE: DOMINATED BY A LARGE CRYSTAL GARDEN THAT OCCUPIES THE ENTIRE CENTRAL NEXUS, THE ICE FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE HERE COAT THE SIX IRREGULAR INTERIOR WALL-BLOCKS AND THE SURROUNDING OUTER WALLS AS WELL, SPILLING OUT, INCREASINGLY ONLY AS LIGHTLY SCRIBED FORMS FURTHER FROM THE GARDEN, INTO ALL THE RADIATING SIX WINGS. FREESTANDING FLOOR-TO-CEILING WALLS ARE FEW; ONE EACH IN THE RECEPTION AREA, THRONES ROOM AND SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS ONLY. BY CONTRAST TO THE HUGE GARDEN, THE HALL OF MIRRORS HERE SEEMS RATHER A SHRUNKEN AFTERTHOUGHT, TUCKED AWAY IN A WING THAT SCARCELY NEED EXPLORING, IT MIGHT SEEM. FINALLY, NOT A QUIRK OF THE PALACE AS SUCH, RATHER OF THE MAP, AS IT WAS DRAWN USING A BLACK-AND-WHITE MAPPING STYLE. BY TOGGING THE "COLOUR COVER" OPTION, THE MAP CAN BE VIEWED EITHER IN ITS GREYSCALE FORMAT, OR WITH AN ICY-BLUE FILTER SUPERIMPOSED ON IT.

THE SIXTH PALACE: THIS MAP TOO WAS DRAWN IN GREYSCALE, SO THE COLOUR COVER TOGGLE WILL AGAIN PRESENT THE MAP EITHER AS NORMAL IN BLACK-AND-WHITE, OR WITH A BLUE-TINTED FILTER OVER IT. A LARGE, CENTRAL, BALLROOM STANDS OUT PROMINENTLY. IT FILLS THE AREA SET WITHIN THE LARGEST, CENTRAL, HEXAGONAL LINE, WHICH ITSELF IS MERELY A FLOOR DESIGN IN THE ICE. A SMALLER, BUT STILL HUGE, SUNKEN HEXAGON FILLS THE BALLROOM'S CENTRAL FLOOR, WITH A LARGE, ANGULAR, SLIGHTLY RAISED FLORAL DESIGN IN ITS MIDDLE. A SIMILAR DESIGN IS SET IN THE CEILING DIRECTLY ABOVE IT. THE BALLROOM'S FORM SETS THE TONE FOR THE WHOLE PALACE, WHICH IS FOR WIDE OPEN AREAS IN GENERAL, WITH MORE LARGE-SCALE FLORAL PATTERNS SHOWING FROM JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THE ICE ELSEWHERE, ON FLOORS, CEILINGS AND WALLS. ONLY IN TWO PLACES IS THIS OPEN PATTERN PUNCTUATED BY SOME FLOOR-TO-CEILING FREESTANDING ICE-WALL BAFFLES, AT THE ENTRANCES TO THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS. AND WITHIN THE FIRST PARTS OF THE RECEPTION AREA TO BE ENCOUNTERED BY NEWCOMERS, CLOSE INSIDE THE SURFACE ENTRANCE. THE MAIN CHAMBERS FOR THE REMAINING AREAS OF THE PALACE LIE TOWARDS THE OUTER ENDS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE RADIAL WINGS, SOMETIMES WITH SPILL-OVER FACILITIES IN ONE OR BOTH OF THEIR LARGER FLANKING CHAMBERS. THE CRYSTAL GARDEN, FOR INSTANCE, OCCUPIES ALL THREE MAIN ELEMENTS IN ITS RADIAL WING, EACH WITH ITS OWN SUNKEN AREA CONTAINING AT LEAST ONE FLOWING WATER FOUNTAIN. THE ELONGATED SUNKEN AREA ALONG THE AXIS OF THE MAIN, CENTRAL, LINE OF THE WING HAS THREE FOUNTAINS, A SINGLE SMALL ONE TOWARDS ITS INNER END, AND AN ELABORATE DOUBLE ONE NEAR ITS OUTER. THE HALL OF MIRRORS THOUGH HAS ITS VERTICAL ICE-MIRROR PANELS SCATTERED ONLY ALONG THE MAIN CENTRAL PART OF ITS RADIAL WING. THERE ARE NONE IN EITHER OF THE TWO LARGER SIDE CHAMBERS. LIKE SEVERAL OTHERS IN THIS COMPLEX, THESE LARGE SUBSIDIARY AREAS ARE EMPTY AND APPEAR TO SERVE NO OBVIOUS FUNCTION.

THE SEVENTH PALACE: THIS HAS AN UNUSUALLY ELONGATED FORM, GIVING A STRETCHED HEXAGONAL SHAPE TO THE GREAT CENTRAL CRYSTAL GARDEN, WITH ITS SUNKEN ELONGATE HEXAGONAL STRUCTURE AND CENTRAL FLOWING-WATER FOUNTAIN. IN ADDITION, THE OUTER WALLS HAVE INTRIGUINGLY LARGE, OFTEN VERY WELL-DEFINED, ICE CRYSTALS IN THEM, SOMETIMES UP TO SEVERAL FEET - A METRE OR SO - ACROSS. THESE ARE VISIBLE AS DISTINCT PLATES ON THE WALL SURFACES IN PLACES, AND DEEPER WITHIN THE EXTERIOR ICE, WHICH IS MORE TRANSLUCENTLY TRANSPARENT TO A GREATER DEPTH THAN IS NORMALLY THE CASE. THESE CRYSTALS IN TURN SEEM TO ALLOW A GREATER PREVALENCE OF RAINBOW-COLOURED REFRACTION EFFECTS WITHIN THE PALACE AS A WHOLE, MAKING IT SEEM MORE CHEERY AND BRIGHT THAN MANY OTHERS CAN BE. THERE ARE VERY FEW FREESTANDING ICE-WALLS INSIDE - JUST TWO IN THE RECEPTION AREA AND ANOTHER BEHIND THE THRONES, SCREENING THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS. THE THRONES ITSELF IS AT THE INNER EDGE OF THE THRONES ROOM, WHERE IT ABUTS WITH THE CRYSTAL GARDEN. PETITIONERS TO THE QUEEN WILL ACTUALLY BE STANDING IN THE GARDEN WHEN THEY FIRST MEET HER, AS A RESULT. ALL SIX RADIAL WINGS HAVE A LONG, NARROW, CORRIDOR-LIKE EXTENSION AT THEIR OUTER ENDS, WHICH SEEM TO BE USED ONLY IN THE SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS AND QUEEN'S CHAMBERS, OTHER THAN IN THE ACCESS-TUNNEL BETWEEN THE SURFACE ENTRANCE AND RECEPTION AREA. THAT OFF THE HALL OF MIRRORS DOES STILL HAVE MORE, THOUGH OFTEN VERY NARROW, MIRROR-ICE PANELS ALONG IT, COMMONLY HERE LIKE IRREGULAR CRYSTALLINE SHARDS. REFLECTIONS AND VISIONS IN THESE SHARD-MIRRORS ARE COMMONLY PARTICULARLY DISTURBING, AS IF IN-KEEPING WITH THEIR "SHATTERED" FORMS. AS WITH PALACES

5 AND 6, AN ICY-BLUE COVER CAN BE SUPERIMPOSED ON THIS BLACK-AND-WHITE MAP USING THE TOGGLE, IF DESIRED.

THE EIGHTH PALACE: A LARGE CRYSTAL GARDEN IN A HUGE, STEP-SUNKEN HEXAGON FILLS THE CENTRAL NEXUS, WITH A LARGE, CIRCULAR POND AND FOUNTAIN AS ITS CENTREPIECE, SURROUNDED BY A GREAT, SIX-“PETALLED”, ANGULAR, FLORAL LINE DESIGN INCISED INTO THE FLOOR. THE GARDEN IS ESPECIALLY WELL-ORGANISED, WITH MANY FORMAL “BEDS” OF ICE-PLANTS AND FLOWERS. THE HALL OF MIRRORS SPRAWLS OUT INTO THE ADJOINING CHAMBERS OFF ITS RADIAL WING. THIS SIZE AND COMPLEXITY MAKES IT EASIER THAN NORMAL TO BECOME DISORIENTATED AND DISTURBED HERE, AND ABNORMAL NUMBERS OF SPIRITS ARE TRAPPED, GAZING INTO ONE OR OTHER MIRROR, OR EVEN CAUGHT WITHIN ONE. BY CONTRAST, THE BANQUETING HALL, KITCHEN AND THROPE ROOM ARE CONDENSED INTO SHARING A WING. THE THROPE IS SET UPON A SUBSTANTIAL, CUT-DIAMOND-PROFILE-SHAPED RAISED PLATFORM. THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS THOUGH THEN OCCUPY THE ENTIRE ADJOINING RADIAL WING BY THE THROPE ROOM. THE REMAINING MAIN AREAS OTHER THAN THESE ARE ORGANISED MUCH AS NORMAL, EACH SET IN THE LARGER CHAMBERS TOWARDS THE OUTER END OF THEIR RESPECTIVE WINGS. ONLY THE RECEPTION AREA HAS ANY FREESTANDING FLOOR-TO-CEILING ICE-WALLS IN THIS PALACE.

THE NINTH PALACE: SMOOTH WALLS, CEILING AND LEVEL FLOORS CHARACTERISE THIS PALACE. THE RECEPTION AREA HAS THE SOLE FREESTANDING FULL-HEIGHT ICE-WALL IN THE WHOLE PLACE, WHERE THE SURFACE ENTRANCE LOBE ADJOINS IT. THE LIGHT WITHIN HAS A STRONGLY BLUE-GREEN CAST, SOMETHING WHICH IS SHARED BY ALL THE ICE HERE, AND EXTENDS INTO THE RAINBOW-COLOURED SPOTS AND ARCS THAT SOMETIMES HAPPEN AS LIGHT REFRACTS THROUGH THE ICE. EVERYTHING WITHIN THE PALACE - THE WINTER QUEEN, PASSING SPIRITS, AND EVEN ANY VISITING PLAYER CHARACTERS - SEEMS BRIGHTER, MORE ALIVE (AN ODD THING FOR THE SOULS IN SOME RESPECTS), AND SOMEHOW MORE REAL THAN NORMAL. THIS EMPOWERMENT EXTENDS TO FACETS OF THE PALACE TOO. SO THE HALL OF MIRRORS, AS IN PALACE 8, SPREADS INTO ITS ADJACENT CHAMBERS, AND IS AGAIN SIMILARLY INCREASED IN DANGER FOR ALL WHO VENTURE WITHIN. HOWEVER, ITS REVELATORY POWERS ARE ALSO ENHANCED, AND MAY PROVIDE STRONG AND POSITIVE NEW INFORMATION AS LIKELY AS SOMETHING TERRIFYINGLY NEGATIVE. THE CENTRAL THROPE ROOM HAS A LARGE SUNKEN FLOOR HEXAGON, WITH A TWO-STEPPED RISING CENTRAL DAIS, ATOP WHICH IS THE QUEEN'S THROPE, ABLE TO ROTATE FREELY TO FACE IN ANY DIRECTION. THE BALLROOM IS UNEXPECTEDLY ELONGATED, RUNNING THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF ITS WING, WHILE THE VARIOUS CONNECTED CHAMBERS OF THE CRYSTAL GARDEN ARE ALL LINKED BY A SERIES OF PEATLY-EDGED SUNKEN PATHWAYS AND ANGULAR AREAS, THREE OF WHICH HAVE SMALLER SUNKEN HEXAGONAL FRESHWATER POOLS, EACH WITH ITS SMALL CENTRAL FLOWING FOUNTAIN. THE SMOOTHNESS OF THE SURFACES HERE CREATES FREQUENT ADDITIONAL REFLECTIVE SURFACES, IF NOT QUITE SO MIRROR-LIKE, OR SO DANGEROUS, AS THOSE IN THE HALL OF MIRRORS.

THE TENTH PALACE: THE CENTRAL THROPE ROOM HAS A LARGE HEXAGONAL ICE DAIS FOR THE ROTATABLE THROPE TO REST UPON, WHILE THE UPPER PART OF THE DAIS HAS BEEN FURTHER SCULPTED INTO A RAISED FLORAL FORM, WITH THE THROPE RIGHT AT ITS ROUGHLY CIRCULAR CENTRAL POINT. MUCH LIKE PALACES 8 AND 9, THE HALL OF MIRRORS HERE IS PARTICULARLY CROWDED WITH ICE-MIRROR PANELS, WITH SIMILARLY INCREASED DANGER TO THAT NOTED FOR PALACE 8 (IF WITHOUT THE ADDED REVELATORY PROPERTIES OF PALACE 9). SPIRITS GAZING INTO THE MIRRORS, OR TRAPPED WITHIN THEM, ARE ESPECIALLY COMMON IN THE LARGER HALL AT THE OUTER END OF THIS WING. THE CRYSTAL GARDEN IS HOWEVER UNUSUALLY SMALL, OCCUPYING ONLY THE END CHAMBER IN ITS RADIAL WING, WITH ITS AREA OF SUNKEN FLOOR, WHICH IS HERE ODDLY OFF-KILTER TO THE CHAMBER ITSELF AND THE CONNECTING ENTRY PASSAGEWAY. THE FOUNTAIN AND POOL IN ITS MIDST IS ALSO OFF-CENTRED, AND ANYONE SPENDING TIME HERE WILL FIND IT A LESS RELAXING SPOT THAN THE GARDEN IS MORE TYPICALLY IN OTHER VERSIONS OF THE PALACE. THE REMAINDER OF THIS WING IS GIVEN OVER TO THE SERVANT & GUEST QUARTERS. THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS TAKE UP AN ENTIRE RADIAL WING OF THEIR OWN OFF THE THROPE ROOM, BY CONTRAST TO THESE SOMEWHAT CRAMPED QUARTERS AND GARDEN. THE BALLROOM WING ESSENTIALLY HAS TWO SEPARATE ROOM SPACES, AS EITHER THE BROADER MID-POINT CHAMBER, OR THAT AT THE OUTER END MAY BE USED FOR ENTERTAINMENTS, BUT NEVER BOTH TOGETHER FOR

SOME REASON. ONLY THE RECEPTION AREA HAS ANY FLOOR-TO-CEILING FREESTANDING ICE-WALLS HERE, RESTRICTING ACCESS FROM THE SURFACE ENTRANCE MUCH AS NORMAL.



RPG USE

THE SUMMER PALACE OF THE WINTER QUEEN IS SOMEWHERE ADVENTURERS MIGHT, VERY RARELY, NEED TO FIND FOR SOME KEY ITEM OR PIECE OF INFORMATION, FOR EXAMPLE, PERHAPS FROM SOMEONE LATELY DECEASED IN CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WILL HAVE LED THEIR SOUL TO END UP PASSING THROUGH THE PALACE. IF KILLED THEMSELVES, YET LIABLE TO BE BROUGHT BACK FROM THE DEAD SUBSEQUENTLY, THE PALACE MIGHT BE SOMEWHERE SUCH ADVENTURERS' SPIRITS MIGHT RESIDE IN THE INTERIM. OR THE PALACE COULD SIMPLY MAKE A GOOD TALE FOR SOMEONE TO TELL TO THE ADVENTURERS.

THE COMMUNITY ATLAS MAPS ALLOW GMS TO ESTABLISH THE PALACE'S APPROXIMATE LOCATION AND CURRENT FORM RANDOMLY VIA THE PALACE LOCATIONS MAP. THE TEN GENERAL LOCATIONS ALLOW A SIMPLE ID10 ROLL, WHILE THE TEN PALACE MAPS MEAN ANOTHER ID10 ROLL CAN ESTABLISH WHICH PALACE WILL BE THE FIRST ENCOUNTERED. FRESH ROLLS CAN ESTABLISH BOTH FACETS FOR ANY SUBSEQUENT DAYS SPENT THERE. EVEN IF THE LOCATION ROLL COMES UP WITH THE SAME REGION OF PIBIRUM, THE PALACE WILL HAVE MOVED FROM WHERE IT WAS INITIALLY - TO BENEATH ANOTHER MOUNTAIN GLACIER, OR DOWN FROM ONE INTO THE ICE-CAP IN A VALLEY MILES AWAY, SAY.

TO CLARIFY, THE TEN POSSIBLE LOCATIONS AS MAPPED CAN INCLUDE THE PALACE BEING INSIDE A HUGE ICEBERG OR AN AREA OF PACK-ICE ANYWHERE ON EITHER OF PIBIRUM'S GREAT POLAR SEAS, THE FRIGID (NORTHERN) AND RAGING (SOUTHERN) OCEANS, OR BURIED IN A VAST SNOWCLOUD ABOVE EITHER OCEAN. ON LAND IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE, THE PALACE MAY APPEAR BURIED IN ICE SOMEWHERE NEAR THE MOST NORTHERLY PARTS OF MAINLAND ALARIUS, OR ON EITHER OF THE TWO LARGEST, MORE NORTHERLY GREAT ISLANDS OFF ITS NORTHERN COAST. IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE, THE PALACE MAY BE BENEATH THE ICE IN SOUTHERN EZRUTE, OR TOWARDS THE GLACIATED TIPS OF THE TWO MORE SOUTHERLY PARTS OF MAINLAND PEREDUR. THERE IS THOUGH NO REASON WHY, AT GM'S DISCRETION, THE PALACE SHOULD NOT BE ABLE TO APPEAR IN ANY GLACIATED OR HEAVILY SNOW-COVERED REGION ELSEWHERE ON PIBIRUM, INCLUDING THOSE RARE PLACES WHERE HIGH-ALTITUDE GLACIERS MAY BE FOUND WITHIN THE TROPICS.

