



MYTHIC EARTH

Short Stories





Imagining the Past.Tlaloc. By Dr. Matt Hall

In the game Mythic Americas, which lives within the Mythic Earth setting, players control Forces consisting of tabletop miniatures each representing a human, beast or mythical warrior from a variety of Pre-Columbian cultures within the Americas. Many of the units in the game carry names appertaining to places or beings of significance to the historical culture they represent. For example, the Aztec warlord is a “Tlalocan High Priest” replete with an entourage of “Tlalocan-Bound Dead”. Fans of the Aztec faction may be wondering, who or what is Tlaloc? In this article we will dive into what is known about the

Aztec deity Tlaloc and what they represented to the Aztec people.

Typically depicted as a dark complected being with ringed eyes and long fangs, Tlaloc was revered by the Aztec as the supreme god of rain and water. If appeased, Tlaloc could grant the rains that would bring forth bountiful crops from the soil or, conversely, could withhold rain causing drought. If angered, Tlaloc could even bring forth devastating storms and deluges of rain or hail that could destroy crops and threaten life. As such, Tlaloc was supremely important to the Aztec people and there is abundant evidence that Tlaloc worship was widespread.

Tlaloc was believed to reside in sacred mountainous regions where it was believed that rain came from. The domain of Tlaloc, called Tlalocan, was a mountainous paradise of bountiful moisture and abundant vegetation inhabited by those who had died from causes associated with water – drowning, lightning, and waterborne disease to name a few. In order to appease Tlaloc, sacrifices were made in the mountains at artificial basins created and consecrated specifically for the purpose. Such offerings could come in many forms. Sometimes ornate vases containing grain were offered, precious stones, skillfully crafted idols, or perhaps even animal sacrifices could be made. The most powerful sacrifices to Tlaloc were those of children, whose hearts would be cut out by priests. The tears of such sacrificial victims were viewed as a powerful omen of the imminent rains mighty Tlaloc would bring forth.

There is ample evidence that Tlaloc worship predated the Aztec civilization. For example, Teotihuacan, the largest known Mesoamerican city complex built prior to the Aztecs, is thought to have predated the Aztec empire by over 1000 years. Representations of Tlaloc have been found throughout the complex suggesting that Tlaloc was one of the most commonly worshipped deities at this site.

If you are interested in learning more about Tlaloc I recommend the following:

The gods and symbols of ancient Mexico and the Maya : an illustrated dictionary of Mesoamerican religion
by Mary Ellen Miller and Karl A. Taube.

Aztecs : reign of blood & splendor by Dale Brown.

Processions and Aztec State Rituals in the Landscape of the Valley of Mexico by Johanna Broda.



Imagining the Past. Western Federation **By Dr. Brian Heineman**

In the game *Mythic Americas*, within the setting of *Mythic Earth*, players control Forces consisting of tabletop miniatures each representing a human, beast or mythical warrior from a variety of Pre-Columbian cultures within the Americas. The Western Federation have joined the struggle to bring Balance to the Way.

The Western Federation represents the people inhabiting the mid-western part of North America. This region is dominated by an expanse of prairie encompassing an area of over a million square miles; stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the Canadian arctic and bounded on its westernmost edge by the Rocky Mountains. This landscape is characterized by a large expanse of grass and shrub covered plateau interspersed with riparian areas where woody vegetation is more prevalent, as well as with occasional valleys, canyons and buttes (Penjišević, Milentijević, & Jandžiković, 2018; United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service, n.d.). As this landscape lies in the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains, precipitation can be quite scarce, ranging from 10 inches per year in the north to around 25 inches per year in the south. When precipitation does occur, it is not uncommon for it to come in the form of pelting hail, blizzards, or violent thunderstorms producing torrential downpours and flash flooding (United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service, n.d.).

Prior to European influence, the indigenous populations inhabiting this region were diverse; organized into many different tribes each with their own customs and beliefs (United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service, 2020). These included such legendary tribes as the Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, Dakota, Kiowa, Lakota, Navaho, Osage and Pawnee, to name a few (United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service, 2020). A variety of languages were spoken among the tribes of the plains, including Algonquian, Siouan, Caddoan, Ute-Aztec, Athabaskan, and Kiowa-Tanoan (New World Encyclopedia contributors, 2019). Despite the fact that spoken languages varied greatly, there was significant interaction among various tribes which resulted in sharing of cultural elements, like religious ceremonies such as the Sun Dance, as well as political alliances or conflict (Lycett & Von Cramon-Taubadel, 2016). Interestingly, a form of sign language, consisting of silent finger and hand signals, today referred to as Plains Indians Sign Language (PISL), was utilized to enable communication and cooperation among members of different tribes (McKay-Cody, 1996).

Though indigenous people were organized into distinct tribes, they were unified in their ability to thrive in this turbulent landscape, often subsisting by switching between the cultivation of crops, including maize, beans, squash, goosefoot, plums and sunflowers and gathering wild edible plants, such as prairie turnip and chokecherry, as well as hunting wild game (Minnis, 2010). The American Bison, called *tatanka* in Lakota, was the most important game animal to many indigenous tribes. Indigenous people utilized nearly every part of a bison for food, shelter, clothing, tools or for other ceremonial purposes (United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service, 2018).

In the arid grasslands of the mid-western North American prairie, fire was a powerful force of nature. Frequent wildfires removed accumulated debris and encouraged new growth of vegetation. Often these fires were started by lightning strikes, but could result from careless handling of human-made fires, as well (Allen & Palmer, 2011). At times the setting of wildfires could be more purposeful. Prior to the introduction of the horse by European colonialists, indigenous hunters set fires and utilized landscape features to drive large game, such as bison, to enable large scale harvesting (Roos, Zedeño, Hollenback, & Erlick, 2018). Fire was also used in warfare. Tribal warriors used fire for signaling, in order to deprive an enemy of tall grass or underbrush to hide in, as well as for more offensive purposes or to provide a diversion in order to enable escape (Lewis, 2002).

To learn more about the remarkable people and cultures the Western Federation faction takes inspiration from, I recommend the following reading:

Allen, M. S., & Palmer, M. W. (2011). Fire history of a prairie/forest boundary: More than 250 years of frequent fire in a North American tallgrass prairie. *Journal of Vegetation Science*, 436-444.

Lewis, H. T. (2002). *Forgotten Fires: Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Lycett, S. J., & Von Cramon-Taubadel, N. (2016, August 12). Transmission of biology and culture among post-contact Native Americans on the western Great Plains. *Scientific Reports*, 6, 1-6.

McKay-Cody, M. (1996). *Plains Indian Sign Language: A comparative study of alternate and primary signers*. The University of Arizona. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Minnis, P. E. (2010). *People and Plants in Ancient Eastern North America*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press.

New World Encyclopedia contributors. (2019, March 29). Plains Indians. Retrieved from New World Encyclopedia: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Plains_Indians&oldid=1019309

Penjišević, I., Milentijević, N., & Jandžiković, B. (2018). physical-geographic basis of regional development of great plains (North America). *Researches Reviews of the Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management*, 44-52.

Roos, C. I., Zedeño, M. N., Hollenback, K. L., & Erlick, M. M. (2018). Indigenous impacts of North American Great Plains fire regimes of the past millennium. *PNAS*, 8143-8148.

United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service. (n.d.). Great Plains-Palouse Dry Steppe Province. Retrieved July 16, 2021, from United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service: <https://www.fs.fed.us/land/ecosysgmt/colorimagemap/images/331.html>

United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service. (2018, November 1). People and Bison - Bison. Retrieved July 16, 2021, from National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/bison/people.htm>

United States Department of the Interior - National Park Service. (2020, November 24).

The Plains Indians. Retrieved from National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/the-plains-indians.html>



Imagining the Past. The Tomahawk **By Dr. Matt Hall**

In the game *Mythic Americas*, within the setting of *Mythic Earth*, players control warbands consisting of tabletop miniatures each representing a human, beast or mythical warrior from a variety of Pre-Columbian cultures within the Americas. In building warbands, players make important decisions about how to best equip their warriors to be most able to achieve victory. When leading a Tribal Nations warband into battle, for example, players have access to the tomahawk special weapon which increases a warrior's Strength statistic, gives its attacks a Strike Value of +1, as well as an Exchange of Missiles attack.

In this article we will look at this archetypal American weapon.

The term tomahawk is a derivation of the Powhatan word *tamahaac* meaning "to cut off by tool". Early versions featured stone or flint ax heads attached to a wooden shaft. Native warriors would refer to any such hand-held striking weapon as a *tamahakan*. Later, metal ax heads would be introduced by Europeans. These became highly sought-after trade items due to the superior edge retention of steel. So much so that, in time, European or colonial-produced metal ax heads became ubiquitous among Native warriors and colonial frontiersmen, alike.

Tomahawks come in many shapes and sizes; however, each consists of an edged stone or metal head affixed to a wooden handle. A typical metal tomahawk, such as those carried in the Northeastern part of the United States during the French and Indian War, resembled a small ax, or hatchet, with a narrow, hooked cutting edge. Opposite the cutting edge was often a hammer poll or spike. Similar to an ax head, the head of the tomahawk was forged to include an ovoid hole, or "eye", between the spine of the cutting blade and the poll in order to serve as the point of attachment for a tapered wooden handle shaft. Tomahawk handle lengths varied depending on the preferences of the owner but were typically between sixteen to twenty inches in length. This straightforward design was quite durable and required very little maintenance aside from occasional oiling, sharpening and periodical replacement of the handle. This maintenance could easily be completed in the field. In fact, the head itself could be used to cut and shape a new handle shaft in the event the tomahawk handle cracked during an outing.

The simplicity of the tomahawk belies its effectiveness as a weapon, however. In close quarters, it is an extremely versatile weapon capable of delivering devastating slashes and penetrating strikes with the cutting edge as well as brutal crushing blows with the poll - the back part of the axe head. In addition, the hooked beard of the blade could be used to trap an opponent's limb or to pull them off balance. A tomahawk is a deadly weapon at distance, as well. It could be thrown by a skilled warrior up to fifty feet resulting in grievous injury sufficient to incapacitate an enemy no matter if the weapon struck edge first or not. It is no wonder the tomahawk has withstood the test of time and still sees service in the kit of professional soldiers today. In fact, this most American weapon has seen action in every American conflict since the French and Indian War including World War 2, the Vietnam War, and most recently, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If you are interested in learning more about the tomahawk, I recommend the following:

Tomahawk: Materiality and Depictions of the Haudenosaunee by Scott Manning Stevens

The Fighting Tomahawk: An Illustrated Guide to Using the Tomahawk and Long Knife as Weapons
by Dwight C. McLemore

American Indian Tomahawks by Harold L. Peterson