

Tucked away in the rarely treaded-upon dunes of the Arabian Desert lies a vast assemblage of seemingly desultory stones and rags. One might gaze upon them and think of them as mundane, just another jilted ruin in the endless expanse of sand and cacti, not worth remembering. They would not know, however, that these abandoned abodes were ever more than just indistinguishable remains of another epoch.

At some point in time, a bustling empire thrived where the ruins lie, building a metropolis under the scorching sun that shook other figureheads of the desert to their cores. The people who lived in this city benefitted from its prosperity; every citizen possessed material wealth, access to the finest wines of the lands, and they were all educated far above the time's standard. They used their power and influence to spread far and wide across the droughty expanse, conquering the lesser kingdoms and pulling them apart brick by brick. The warriors of this lost world razed nations and wiped their populations off of the map, integrating their cultures into their own and accreting a diverse sense of the arts. Augurs predicted that they would last for aeons to come, but even they could not anticipate the empire's downfall.

As time went on, people lost their sense of purpose. As they kicked every other society to the curb, they then turned on each other and tore themselves to bits and pieces. The once proud and imposing buildings found themselves crumbling into pieces as the people that built them fell with them. Homes became houses as the beings that lived in them faded away, leaving behind nothing but sentiment and long-dead familial love. Squares where bazaars were held lost the stalls that decorated them with vibrant shades of red and yellow — once a merchant's haven, now they lie buried under dunes and rubble. Monuments dedicated to their victories crumbled to dust, and the odes and traditions their people fought for went with them. The ballads and tragedies they wrote down on tablets faded long ago, never to be appreciated as they rightfully should have been. The royal palace, which housed the highest members of the society, was the last to fall. Once a symbol of robustness and the empire's longevity; now, not one slab of it remains unburied by the desert sands.

Walking through the city today is much akin to walking through a graveyard of shattered dreams. Each toppled church and each snuffed out brazier is an

aide-memoire that different people's visions of the future were never fulfilled.

Prospects of employment, marriage, birth, and eventually retirement: goals people still strive for to this day. Many of them never came to fruition, never reaching a sense of closure. Unique stories that went unfinished because their authors were no longer there to complete them.

Amidst the remnants of this forgotten era, only one lonely relic remains intact: a statue in what was once the most extravagant square of the nation. It is impossible to discern who the statue represented, as all that remains of the desert colossus are a pair of legs and a few shattered emeralds strewn about its base. On its last legs both physically and metaphorically, the oolite it is made of has been gradually weathered by the sands of time, flaked away by the harsh winds. Yet, it still stands proudly, as if it is still representing the glorious empire that built it. Ignorant, or rather, purposefully in denial of the fate that befell its people.

At its feet lies a golden plaque, devoid of the lurid jewels that formerly encrusted it. It reads as follows:

I AM OZYMANDIAS  
VENERABLE, EMINENT,  
ILLUSTRIOUS AND HALLOWED  
LEADER OF A FECUND NATION  
THAT HAS RISEN ABOVE ALL  
AS JUDGE, JURY, EXECUTIONER,  
AND GOD

LESSER NATIONS OF THE WORLD  
GAZE UPON THAT  
WHICH I HAVE CULTIVATED;  
REVERE MY PEOPLE  
MY YOUTHS  
MY PALATINATE  
AND KNOW YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

SPEAK MY NAME IN HIGH REPUTE,  
AND FEAR MY ETERNAL ARMY OF A MILLION MEN,

WHO FIGHT ONLY IN REMEMBRANCE  
OF ME  
AND MY DISTINGUISHED PEOPLE

This display of hubris makes it easy to conclude what kind of person Ozymandias may have been: a harsh pharaoh, who ruled over his people with an iron fist. Perhaps for a while, he believed he was a God amongst men, and the populace he controlled too believed that he was one. It would not have been hard to believe so, what with the nation's wealth which he had in his pockets and the blood of many on his hands. Today, however, Ozymandias' name means nothing. He has left nothing behind to show the extent of his might, his people's reverence for him, and the spoils of the many wars he commandeered.

Once the likeness of his shanks topples away with a final heave and the plaque of gold is wizened beyond comprehension, there will be nothing left to remember him by. The statue's crumbling will erase with it the rest of the once unstoppable nation and all the others it vanquished, and the story will be lost forever to the sweltering desert.

Nobody will be around to hear the last whimpers of a civilization lost to time.