



A Swiftly Tilting Planet: The Great Pole Shift

"... We may be standing at the edge of the ultimate disaster. If we avoid or ignore the possibility of a pole shift, we will have only ourselves to blame should there be a cataclysmic repeat of the 'myth' of Atlantis."

- - John White, *Pole Shift*

Not just satisfied to rotate and revolve, the Earth gives a grandiose hiccup every couple of few millennia when the poles shift sharply by tens of degrees, sending icecaps sliding into oceans, flash-freezing mammoths, ripping holes in formerly placid continents and coastlines, and hurling whole civilizations into the drink. At least it does in the world of High Weirdness, where little trivia like the laws of thermodynamics can nod off with no one the wiser. Psychics, magi and mad scientists differ on whether the Great Pole Shift is the ultimate disaster, or the ultimate opportunity. As a GM, of course, your answer is "both."

The "sleeping seer" Edgar Cayce seems to get the most credit in the modern era for predicting the Great Pole Shift, which he said would be caused by earthquakes and tectonic instability - - and begin in 1936. However, Cayce was only the best-known prophet to revive an old theme in crank science and mysticism going back to Plato's dialogue *The Statesman*, if not before. The theory took a rest during the ascendancy of Ptolemy's fixed Earth, but came roaring back after Copernicus unhinged everything again. Burnet and Whiston, two English churchmen in Newtonian England, came up with divergent theories on the Pole Shift to reconcile Enlightenment mechanics and Biblical history. Following them was a whole parade of folk including Fourier, the founder of socialism and Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy. Velikovsky put Pole Shifts into his *Worlds In Collision* tales of wandering comets (as did Nazi astronomer Hans Hoerbiger), and a chap named Hugh Auchincloss Brown in 1948 adduced the Greek geographer Leucippus' explanation (unequal ice formation at the poles) for the coming disaster. The Norwich shoemaker (and member of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor) Sampson Mackey described - - in verse - - a detailed theory of "organic" pole shifting, where the shifts are just part of the natural "wobble" of the Earth. Most recently, a channeler named Lori Toye received Pole Shift information from Saint-Germain in 1983, and drew an attractive map of the post-Pole Shift Earth. And if you can't trust Saint-Germain, who can you trust?

"On the basis of a decade's hindsight, I think that the possibility of a catastrophic pole shift at the end of this century is increasingly unlikely. To be more precise, I do not think a pole shift will occur as predicted."

- - John White, a decade later

Well, if you're determined to be an old meany about it, you can trust geologists and astrophysicists, all of whom have pretty solid evidence that even if a sudden Pole Shift were possible (it isn't), it hasn't happened in geological time, and certainly not in recent history. Charles Hapgood's (of Piri Reis map fame) dogged 1958 theory that the poles don't dramatically shift, but the Earth's crust does (which Einstein contributed a preface to) is as close to real science as any of them get, and it ain't that damn close. (As a geologist, Einstein was a great physicist.) But that's no reason to slow anyone down. There are as many different causes of the Pole Shift (meteors and comets, the rogue 12th planet, alignment of the non-rogue other planets, volcanoes, ice caps growing, ice caps melting, natural wobbliness, aliens, divine intervention) as there are results (total global catastrophe, return to a paradisiac Golden Age, evolution into a fifth dimension, return of the giant Lemurians) and target dates (December 21, 2012 is the usual suspect here, but Richard Noone's delightfully twitchy *5/5/2000 - - Ice: the Ultimate Disaster* gives, well, May 5, 2000, and the Greys say it's coming in 2003). As always, Joscelyn Godwin's euphonious *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival* is an indispensable source for this, and similar, fun.

"The Zetas talk about how most of humanity is in Millennium Denial; that the Earth will experience cataclysmic changes described in a Zeta Vision given to Nancy . . . The Zetas say that in spite of Millennium Fever the government will not Sound the Alarm . . . that the establishment is Suppressing the Word and hiding the truth behind Cataclysm Masks . . . that signs such as Deformed Frogs and the increasing incidence of Deep Quakes are appearing . . . there will be Crop Failure for three years running going into the shift but these will not be caused by Psi-Tech Pathogens, and that . . . Diet Adjustments will occur."
- - Zeta Reticulan spokesmen, as channeled by "Nancy"

The Pole Shift doesn't have to be the nova in your campaign; it can be the Big Secret battled over by the hidden factions. Since the axis around which the pole shifts will remain relatively unscathed in the disaster, rival entities might try setting off Pole Shifts designed to "Atlantis" their enemies while leaving them stable and pretty. Perhaps the CIA plans to use the HAARP projectors in Alaska to trigger the Pole Shift and screw over the Japanese, or to stop the Grey-aligned NSA/MJ-12 group from dumping one on Europe with the ELF sonic transponders in the oceanic trenches. A campaign of high-tension Weather (and Earthquake, and Volcano, and Typhoon) War, with global devastation as the stakes, makes a fine blend of [GURPS Illuminati](#) and my old disaster column. Make the Pole Shifters dependent upon the ley lines or power points of the Earth's Global Grid, and you can add [GURPS Places of Mystery](#) to the mix.

". . . It was clear now that the Tower of Babel had been simply an attempt, however hasty and deservedly a failure because of the pride of its architects, to build the most powerful menhir of all. But the Babylonians got their calculations wrong. As Father Kircher has demonstrated, had the Tower [of Babel] reached its peak, its excessive weight would have made the earth's axis rotate ninety degrees and maybe more . . ."
- - Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*

With magical Pole Shifting, you don't even have to use it as a modern McGuffin; Eco's Templars were using the "telluric currents" to plot their own Pole Shifts in the 13th century, and a clever GM can make anyone from the pyramid builders of [GURPS Egypt](#) to the arcology architects of [GURPS Cyberworld](#) (or [GURPS CthulhuPunk](#), heh, heh, heh) hip to the power of the Big Ooops. Tie Cayce's failed

1936 prediction to Hoerbiger's theories and toss a Pole Shift into a [GURPS Cliffhangers](#) game for instant Lost World adventures. The Pole Shift can make a great device for the Monumental Age ancient astronauts campaign frame I mentioned earlier, as the Lemurians, Hyperboreans, and Atlanteans battle to sink each others' not-yet-Lost Continents in 10,000 B.C. As the elusive Benjamin Vandgrift suggests, perhaps these "lost races" still battle for control of an ancient astronaut Pole Shifter hidden somewhere on Earth - - that would make an interesting twist on the standard Illuminati vs. Rosicrucians game.

You can even set closer-to-real historical games around the Pole Shift - - Immanuel Velikovsky found signs of the Great Pole Shift in the stories of the Exodus and the sun standing still for Joshua (second millennium B.C., give or take). Herodotus reports that the sun swapped directions (the visible sign of the Great Pole Shift if you don't happen to be in the way of a sliding ice cap) four times in Egyptian recorded history. The earth really has swapped magnetic poles in geological time, and there's nontrivial evidence that the "Folgheraiter Event" of 860 B.C. marked the last such - - a fine time to toss in a Great Pole Shift to go. Did a Templar Pole Shift cause the exceptional good weather of the High Middle Ages (grapes in Massachusetts!), and did their arrest cause the Great Famine of 1315, when their cathedral-driven Pole Shifter went haywire?

*"Some say he bid the angels turn askance
The Poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more
>From the Suns Axle; they with labour push'd
Oblique the Centric Globe to bring in change."
- - John Milton, Paradise Lost, X*

To Pole Shift your current game, simply decide where you want the new equator to be - - if, say, you want to see the jungle reclaim the Eiffel Tower, get a globe and run a string around it that passes through Paris. You'll find you have a real choice of places to put the rest of the equator, so you might want to narrow it down by picking somewhere halfway around the world to get the icecap. (That can be some boring chunk of land you care nothing for, or a Lost City you intend to bury in the glaciers, Fortress of Solitude style.) Then, once you've picked the new Poles, shift! You may have to twitch a flat map around a while before you get the hang of it, but don't be afraid to let continents drift wildly, flood seacoasts, turn rivers into seas and lakes into deserts, and otherwise act up big. Suddenly, you've got a big world with all-new geography, just like a Standard Fantasy World - - but with evocative names and cool potential for survivor cultures and awesome ruins. ("The Ancient Ones called it . . . the Chrysler Building.")

"Because when the poles shift, we will go through an electromagnetic 'no zone' for about three and a half days, and then, after that time we'll be on a totally different dimensional level of the Earth. Whereby anything that is happening on this level will make no difference. That's a preparation prior to the time when all the systems, the social and the financial systems and all this kind of thing breaks down."

- - Drunvalo Melchizedek, "Conversations with Drunvalo"

After the shift, a brave new world awaits you. The Great Pole Shift is an excellent reason to have magic return, if it ever went away. The conspiracy which created the Shift, whether it's alien-savvy MJ-12, revenant Templars, or finally-triumphant Lemurians, will still be around from their Place of Refuge. The ecology has crunched, which justifies restoring tyrannosaurs (if people don't mind a Pole Shift,

they won't mind a time-rip or a genetic experiment gone awry) for that great *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* feel. If the Shift happens in 2012 (or was caused by aliens), you can have pockets of higher-than-high tech, although much of the world will be in a *Mad Max* state, or even dropped to sword-and-sandal barbarism. In short, you can have anything you want in the world, if you're willing to turn it upside down first.

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