

My great grandparents were explorers most of their lives. Their house overflowed with all kinds of exotic things from far off places. Once, when I was a small girl, I was looking through a dust-coated album of photographs and found a postcard – a picture of a strange and haunting mountain city called *the City of the Gods*. I quietly took the card out of the album and kept it with me all the time. Each time I looked at the picture, I was almost physically drawn into it. It seemed like the most perfect place, a place where the “real” world was left far behind. Although I had never been adventurous before, I vowed that one day I would find my city, no matter what it took and no matter where I would have to travel.

As I grew, I began to search for “my city.” I started to find a few obscure references in books about mysterious and far off mountains. But it was always referred to as *the Lost City of the Gods*. Travelers had heard stories about it, but no one seemed to have ever seen it firsthand. I began to wonder if perhaps it might be “hiding in plain sight”, so-to-speak – so difficult to distinguish from the mountains around it that everyone just saw the mountains.

I was physically drawn to the mountains. I became an avid climber, trekking up and down, across glaciers and crevasses, over steep rocky terrain, through thick forests, across (and sometimes through) rushing rivers. I loved my travels. The rich and unique flora and fauna of the high country become a familiar part of my life. At times, the quest was almost forgotten in my joy of the present moment. But sooner or later, the deep yearning to find “my” city always returned and drove me further afield.



Finally, I was able to put together clues from many sources, like the ancient *Book of Sanctuary*, the tales of the one-eyed Berber in Macheenen, and the time-burnished runes on a 300-year-old tree in China. The path to the city was revealed to me. At last, the way became clear. Each path led to other paths, each turn took me further in the right direction. After years of searching, it seemed almost easy. Late that summer, I found the final key – the hidden tunnel entrance – and climbed up to my dream. Perfectly disguised in the mountain from which it was created, I discovered an incredible maze of dwellings, stairs, sculptures and crumbling tunnels. My “lost” city was found. To my puzzlement, however, it seemed uninhabited. It appeared to be an empty ruin, populated only by the small furry creatures one finds everywhere in the mountains.



I stayed in this wonderful, eerie place for weeks, making many sketches and paintings. As the days passed, I began to sense that I was not alone. Somehow, somewhen, all around me, there seemed to be a city teeming with life – but it was always just beyond the reach of my senses. Whenever I was sure that I was about to see something I was always disappointed. It was always gone when I turned the corner. The harder I searched, the more elusive it seemed to become.

In the end, winter, and lack of food forced me to leave this wondrous place and descend to the valley below – no closer to understanding what I had found than when I first arrived. Were living beings really there? Or was it just that the stones were imbued with the lives of those who had been there before me? Was this all just dreams and hauntings, or was this real?

On my way back home I became terribly ill. For weeks I was delirious, not knowing who or where I was. It took more than a year to regain my strength, but I never once wavered in my determination to return. But when I finally did try to get back, everything seemed to have changed. Each path led to a dead end, each turn took me further in the wrong direction. All the paths I had traveled before now turned out to be wrong. Every road, track, and trail took me somewhere else.

I haven't given up searching, but for now, all I have are my memories, and these sketches and paintings from the *Lost City of the Gods*.

