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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SANDSTORM LEGENDS

More than twelve centuries ago the famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsiang, while visiting a place called Pi-mo, in the Taklamakan Desert of Chinese Turkestan, heard the legend of a neighboring town named Ho-lo-lo-kia, which had been buried in a sandstorm. A pious visitor to the town, the story ran, had been treated with ignominy by its king and had announced that the place would be destroyed within seven days. Only one of its inhabitants took warning and escaped to Pi-mo. On the seventh day, in the evening, sand and earth rained down upon the city, leaving nothing visible but a great mound. According to the pilgrim's narrative: "The kings of the neighboring countries and persons in power from distant spots have many times wished to excavate the mound and take away the precious things buried there, but as soon as they have arrived at the borders of the place a furious wind has sprung up, dark clouds have gathered from the four quarters of heaven, and they have become lost and unable to find their way."

Sir Aurel Stein, who explored this region in 1900-01, found that a somewhat similar legend is now told of the town of Pi-mo, which has itself been buried in the sands since the period of Hiuen-Tsiang's visit. He says:

"A holy man who had reproved the wicked inhabitants for certain offences, was treated by them with contempt. He thereupon cursed the town and foretold its approaching destruction. While they still mocked at his prophecy, sand began to rain from the skies and continued for seven days and nights until the whole of the buildings were buried. Only seven pious people who had shown respect for the holy one managed to save their lives. The seven wise men are supposed to have clung to ropes fixed to a high pole after the fashion of a merry-go-round. Being whirled round and round by the raging storm, they rose steadily higher above the ground while the sand accumulated, and thus escaped."

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