

NIC: Some stories have layers, history, detailed recorded mass sightings, grainy videos, blurry photographs, and countless witnesses. Are these stories, with their multiple first-hand accounts, years, decades, and sometimes even centuries, of so-called evidence, more likely to be true? Sometimes we come across something different: a genuine mystery. Something that appears to have no recorded history, no website, and no public record at all. Something uniquely strange and mysterious. This is one of those stories.

The city of Pasadena has a long and colorful history. The name Pasadena means "key of the valley," and the area was part of a Mexican land grant in 1843. From its early roots as a haven for teetotalers, a recovery resort, and a citrus grower's paradise, Pasadena flourished. A number of colorful characters made their homes and fortunes in the area, but perhaps nobody was as colorful as Jack Parsons, a rocket scientist who moved to Pasadena from Los Angeles as a young boy. It was Parsons' interest in science fiction that led him into rocketry, and by 1941 he had founded Aerojet to sell technology Parsons himself had developed. At the time, Parsons was living in a large ornate mansion on Orange Grove Avenue.

Oh, and there's one more thing. Parsons was the leader of the Ordo Templi Orientis, Aleister Crowley's brand new religious movement, the religion known as Thelema. Thelema had another infamous member living under the same roof: a pulp science fiction writer named L. Ron Hubbard.

After Parsons and Hubbard allegedly failed to summon the goddess Babalon to Earth, and after Hubbard, again allegedly, made off with Parsons' life savings and his wife, Parsons continued his work in rocketry until his controversial death in 1952. The police ruled it accidental, but people who knew Parsons at the time of his death suspected assassination.

There are a lot of interesting angles to explore there. So what is this story about? Well, this story is about a mystery. And Jack Parsons' part in our mystery wasn't revealed until decades after his death, when some of his writings and poetry were published by a small magazine in San Francisco. That magazine was called *Strange Worlds*. Parsons' writing wasn't really unique or remarkable in any way. His stories were too personal, barely sketches really, and his poems were simple, but not simple in an elegant way. Hubbard was the writer in the mansion, not Parsons. But one thing Parsons did do better than Hubbard, better than almost anybody, if you asked those who knew him, was research. Parsons was a paper trail Lisbeth Salander, way before anyone had dragon tattoos.

An unremarkable short story called, "Where is Tanis?" was the fourth story credited to Parsons in that magazine. It was written in the second person, and it was short, almost reading like a documentary sketch. It was certainly the most poorly written, and sorely lacked cohesive narrative structure. But that short story is the entire reason we created this podcast.

From Pacific Northwest Stories and Minnow Beats Whale, you're listening to Tanis. I'm Nic Silver. We'll be right back.

NIC: Cultivating and protecting a sense of mystery feels like something from the past: a relic from the analogue age. It's like knowing a phone number by heart, or directions to your uncle's house: there's no need. We have our contacts and extremely accurate GPS in our hands or pockets at all times.

GPS: You've arrived at your destination.

NIC: In the age of Google, and Reddit, and Wikipedia, are there any genuine mysteries left in the world? We can pause a movie to look up an actor and we know every single film and television project they've ever done, who they're married to, who they were seen kissing in the French Riviera, and of course, the cold pressed juice they had for lunch is right there on Instagram.

Before the break, I mentioned a short story published way back when in *Strange Worlds* magazine, called, "Where is Tanis?" This is where our story really begins. Now, I'm not talking about the Tanis of 20th Dynasty Egypt, the ancient city mentioned in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, although there may be a connection. I'm talking specifically about the myth of Tanis. Tanis as mystery. Maybe one of the last pure mysteries left in the world. One last chance to be truly surprised.

I'm talking about the Freemasons, the Templars, the Illuminati, and the Doukhobors. About the deep web, Tor browsers, and black sites. I'm talking about old VHS tapes passed from college dorms to conspiracy nuts in brown paper bags. Notes, surreptitiously left in old phone books, and stories told over decades via classified ads. I'm talking about whispers in the dark, standing next to a stranger waiting for a subway train in the middle of the night. One word: Tanis.

The Hebrew story of Moses discovered floating in the Nile River, from Exodus, is usually located at Tanis. However, historians agree, those stories are most likely

spiritual allegories, as no supporting archaeological evidence has ever been uncovered. It's widely accepted that the ancient Egyptian city of Tanis was flooded by the Nile around the 6th century AD. So all we really know is that Tanis was a city in Egypt. But the myth of Tanis actually begins much earlier. What if the ancient Egyptian city was named after the myth and not the other way around?

ADAMS: What you need to understand is that, as far as human history is concerned, the Tanis of the Egyptians is brand new.

NIC: That's Carl Adams, a historian and religious studies professor at Oxford University. This interview was recorded for an episode of Pacific Northwest Stories from 1999, way back when we were on terrestrial radio, for a documentary exploring three mysterious places: the Bermuda Triangle, Easter Island, and Atlantis.

The producers decided against including Professor Adams's interview in that show because they were unable to confirm the veracity of the content of that interview. Basically, they were unable to find any corroborating evidence to support his claims about Tanis.

ADAMS: If you know where to look, Tanis has been there from the beginning. The Bronze Age, ancient Greece, Rome, the Aztecs and the Mayans. There is mention of Tanis in the first compiled gospels that would eventually comprise what we now call the Bible. And it's mentioned again in the Dead Sea Scrolls, although some of those sections have yet to be released for public study.

ALEX: So, Tanis is a city?

ADAMS: Sometimes, maybe, but not that city.

ALEX: I don't understand.

ADAMS: It's not an easy thing to understand. Tanis is something else. Deeper and more fluid. Some say Tanis is the location of the Garden of Eden. Others describe Tanis as God him- or herself. It's been called Gaia, or if you believe Robert de Boron and Joseph d'Arimathie, Tanis is actually the Holy Grail. Sometimes Tanis is a place, sometimes it's a concept. Sometimes it's even a person. The ancient Egyptian city was named to honor Tanis the mythic legend, not the other way around.

ALEX: Sometimes Tanis is... a person?

CARL: Or a god, or as one Egyptian high priest was convinced, a cat.

ALEX: So, nobody knows exactly what Tanis is?

CARL: I don't believe you can say that.

ALEX: Why not?

CARL: Because in every recorded mention concerning the myth of Tanis, there are common throughlines.

ALEX: What kind of throughlines?

CARL: Well, for one, Tanis moves, and seems to migrate every four hundred years or so. And it changes. It's kind of hard to explain the many facets of this myth without serious study.

ALEX: I'm starting to get that sense.

CARL: When it comes to Tanis, they say you always know it when you see it. Even if, by that point, it's too late.

NIC: Thank you to Christina Rains and Alex Reagan, who produced that segment, for allowing us to share it with you on this show.

Professor Adams claims that Atlantis was actually an avatar for Tanis, active for about four hundred years before sinking into the ocean. In fact, in ancient Sumerian, the glyphs for the words Atlantis and Tanis are almost identical. And perhaps, even more telling, the Sumerian symbol for Tanis predates Atlantis by at least ten years. Professor Adams went on to describe other possible incarnations, and other potential cultural references. And then he started talking about the feeling and fear associated with the Tanis myth itself: an overwhelming sense of religious awe, or a soul-shattering foreboding, depending on who was telling the story. According to Professor Adams' reading of the ancient texts, some say Tanis is evil, a dark pocket of mind-altering terror and pain. Others say Tanis heals completely, body and soul. But all reports appear to agree on one thing: when you experience Tanis, one way or another, you are forever changed.

So why are we here? Why Tanis? Why did this myth mean so much to me that I created a show to try and figure it out? Remember when I said the world is wanting for mystery? Well, I believe I may have found one. A big one. Tanis, an ancient legendary myth. Maybe the original Garden of Eden, the cradle of humanity, maybe the source material for Camelot, maybe hell itself. Some say Tanis is where Lucifer landed when he originally fell from grace. Yet others claim Tanis hold the key to eternal life. But no matter what it is or was, or where it is or will be, outside of vague hints and whispers,

there are only a handful of articles written on the subject of Tanis, almost every one of them by Professor Adams.

Aside from the ancient Egyptian city, there's absolutely no mention of Tanis on the internet. At all. At least, not until I ventured into the deep web. And that's coming up, after the break.

[Advertisements]

MK: "Tanis?" I thought you said "tennis." Yeah, this thing has five letters, it could be Tanis. Yeah, that actually makes sense.

NIC: That's Meerkatnip. I'm guessing not her real name. She's an expert in illicit underground internet commerce, among other things. It took me three weeks and a whole lot of BitCoin to get her to agree to a five minute Skype conversation.

NIC: So, what I'm looking for is anything related to the myth of something called Tanis.

MK: And you said you want me to exclude the ancient Egyptian shit?

NIC: Right.

MK: Well, there's not a lot.

NIC: Yeah, I'm not surprised.

MK: The stuff you're looking for might be pre-digital?

NIC: Uh, I have no idea what I'm looking for.

MK: You're sure this is some kind of famous thing?

NIC: I'm actually not sure about anything.

MK: [sighing] It's your money.

NIC: We'll get back to Meerkatnip in a moment, I promise. But first, a bit more background. Just about a year ago I was researching a story on '50s pulp fiction, and I picked up a copy of *Strange Worlds* magazine from a used bookstore in San Francisco. While reading the short story "Where is Tanis?" I remembered Professor Adams' interview. It was the combination of that interview and the short story "Where is Tanis?" that inspired me to start asking questions. I haven't stopped. I'll include a link to a PDF version of the short story "Where is Tanis?" on our website. I was going to read you the story myself, but I decided to bring in a ringer.

NIC: Well, here we are at Pacific Northwest Stories studio, and we're gonna track down my friend and producing partner, Alex Reagan, who's working on her podcast.

[The sound of knocking, a door opening.]

NIC: See what she's doin'...

ALEX: Hey! Come in!

NIC: Hey!

ALEX: Just gimme one sec.

NIC: Okay.

[Rustling, the sound of a printer.]

ALEX: How's it going?

NIC: It's going pretty good.

ALEX: Are you workin' on the new show?

NIC: I am workin' on the new show.

ALEX: Ahhh.

NIC: And to that end...

ALEX: Uh huh?

NIC: I was wondering if you might be willing to read something for us.

ALEX: Oh, sure.

ALEX: Just go like that, just a touch there. [The audio becomes clearer.]

NIC: Let's hear what you sound like?

ALEX: Okay, so I'm gonna tell a story comme ça.

NIC: Can I move this closer?

ALEX: Well...

NIC: Or is that...

ALEX: No, this is better 'cause this thing blocks my view.

NIC: Oh, okay.

ALEX: So I kinda have to have it out.

NIC: Oh, okay.

ALEX: (reading) “Your uncle told you that the Runner knows the way, or will remember the way, but first the Runner must find the map. Then, and only then, can the search begin.

“The last Runner to locate Tanis had been young, but strong. He was also trained by your uncle, who had been trained by his father before him, and so it has been and so it shall be. “Now it's your turn. You're the Runner. You know the last was almost killed. You will come to understand that this is common. Even the most experienced Runner risks losing his life every time he steps onto the path.

“Tanis is eternal, forever, but it's only existed here, in these woods, for a relatively short time, most likely less than two hundred years, but nobody knows for sure. Tanis is always moving, or you're moving, and it's always changing, or you're changing.

“Once, the last Runner told you that he remembered something, which is very rare. He told you that he led his Seekers through the deep evergreens, toward the sound that only the Runner can hear, the constant throb and hum of what they call “the Calm,” the beating heart of Tanis. His Seekers came out of the woods into a clearing and the Runner, who was looking at the red rock, knew that if he turned back around, the Calm was now behind him.

“The quest was over for his group of Seekers. In the Calm, time stops, or slows, or disappears altogether. You know that the Runner never enters the Calm. You know that the Runner brings those who are looking, the Seekers. You know that the Seekers, and only the Seekers, may enter the Calm. In Tanis, if they're lucky, your Seekers' dreams can become reality. If they're not, the Seeker enters a nightmare world, an unimaginable hell of their own creation.

“Your father had a saying he taught to your uncle once, a long time ago. ‘So as it was. So shall it be in Tanis, eternal. In Tanis they'll see.’”

NIC: Thank you to Alex Reagan for taking the time out to read that story for us. Professor Adams believes that Tanis was the inspiration for Dante's Ninth Circle of Hell. The name “Tanis is actually” mentioned in a few stanzas of an unfinished work by Romantic poet and visual artist William Blake, called Songs of Sorrow, discovered more than a century after its author's death:

Tanis, from the heat and fire
From the sand and spire
Her light to bed
Her darkness fled
Across the sea
Eternal, she

Professor Adams believes Blake is referring to the last time Tanis moved, when it vanished from Europe where it had existed for centuries, from the Renaissance to Napoleon.

ADAMS: The migration of Tanis was always monumental. There are references throughout history, if you know what you're looking for. But all sources agree, right around the time of Blake's poem, during the dawn of the 19th Century, Tanis just disappeared.

ALEX: Disappeared?

ADAMS: Tanis simply vanished. Even those who knew where to look could no longer see it. Tanis was simply... gone.

ALEX: Where did it go?

ADAMS: I believe it was sometime in 1823 that Tanis moved from Europe to North America.

ALEX: Wait, so... There are reports of Tanis in North America?

ADAMS: Not at first, but you have to remember that, at that time, North America was very sparsely inhabited. Separated by an ocean from the civilized world.

ALEX: Right.

ADAMS: There was very little record keeping, and I believe that's precisely why there's no mention of Tanis for decades. Not until the Haida.

ALEX: The Haida?

ADAMS: The Haida tell stories about it. They use the name Xanu, but it's Tanis. There's no question. The first hint of the new location appeared in 1834. It was a fur trapper working in the Puget Sound area of Washington, in Fort Nisqually, a Hudson's Bay trading outpost. The trapper wrote a letter detailing a story he'd heard from the Haida,

hints that a kind of demonic will-o'-the-wisp that lured people in and drove them to acts of insane brutality. Abrupt, unspeakable violence.

ALEX: Sorry, just so we're clear: are you saying that you believe Tanis is currently located in Washington state?

ADAMS: Definitely. Somewhere in the Puget Sound area.

NIC: Professor Adams passed away a few years ago. I was, however, able to track down his former assistant, who was kind enough to forward what he was able to salvage before the university and Adams' family sold or destroyed it. Aside from the material on Blake and Atlantis, there were only a few pages related to Tanis. But those few pages were very interesting. They were pages from the Fort Nisqually fur trapper's journal, written the day before he brutally massacred nine of his friends and colleagues.

"April 7th, 1834. I woke up, my mouth filled with blood, trying to scream. I could hear the horses, restless outside. I stood up and spit the blood onto the ground. There were no wounds in my mouth. My head was aching, and there was a low ringing in my ears. I stumbled outside into the forest, trying to get away from the sound which seemed to be coming from everywhere at once. And that's when I saw her. Her light, gossamer nightgown seemed to spill out around her like smoke. She turned and walked deeper into the forest, and I knew she wanted me to follow.

"I tried to catch up, but she was always ahead, just out of reach. I finally caught up with her in a clearing. She was beautiful, but I... can't remember... exactly what she looked like. And I don't remember how it happened, but I think I noticed her lips and then she was kissing me. And then... she was killing me. I was on my back, unable to move, and she was on top, holding a knife. Slowly she cut me open, removing one organ after another. I tried to scream but I couldn't make a sound. I tried to move but there was nothing I could do. Cut. Cut. She was smiling and singing some kind of nursery rhyme. Cut. Cut. Cut.

"I knew death was coming. It was dark and terrifying, like slowly sinking into a thick black pain. I was being erased forever. And then, I managed to move. I stood up and looked down. The woman was below me. She was dead. Her organs scattered on the grass like flowers. I dropped the knife. My hands were shaking. My mouth was full of blood. Her blood. Then the world began to spin, and I passed out. When I woke up, I was alone. But I knew she'd be coming for me."

We've heard questionable testimony from Professor Adams, an excerpt from a mad trapper's journal, part of a mysterious short story written by an aspiring magician-slash-rocket scientist, and one stanza of a lost poem by William Blake. So what now? Well, now, we're heading back to the deep web, where Meerkatnip says she found something.

MK: I'm sending it now.

NIC: Is it something significant?

MK: Nn, what do I know?

[Pause]

NIC: Okay, so what am I looking at?

MK: [sighing] It's an old classified ad from the '50s, there's a corroborating digital reference that was deleted 13 seconds after it was created.

NIC: So how are you able to get this?

MK: By using a rolling cache system, a catch-all parsing algorithm I actually helped create. There's a net setup for those who can find it. A large percentage of text is cache encrypted.

NIC: A large percentage of text? What text?

MK: Everything.

NIC: E-everything? That, that sounds...

MK: Impossible?

NIC: Kind of, yeah.

MK: No, text is nothing, it's tiny. Text is actually a microscopic percentage of all the shit online. In this case, in 2001, somebody converted a small percentage of classified ads from the '50s into text for a cultural research project.

NIC: So... Okay, so what did you find?

MK: There were a few things. A series of letters, a group of people all over the world communicating via classified ads. They're talking about something secret, something they thought was pretty damn important, that's for sure. They used the word Tanis twuhh... 75 times. But it's weird, my program says it was encrypted.

NIC: If it's encrypted, how do you know it's Tanis?

MK: Well, encryption was different in 1952. It was a simple substitution cipher, my program decoded it automatically. The same cipher used in a bunch of old pre-Enigma shit from Germany. My system just does it and makes a note.

NIC: Wow, sounds like a good system.

MK: Yeah, you bet your ass.

NIC: Uh, so the classified ads are from the '50s?

MK: That's right.

NIC: And they were being deleted. Do you have any idea why?

MK: No, it's not my department.

NIC: So, could you forward that stuff to me?

MK: Will do. There's another interesting message here. This one's a bit more recent.

NIC: Tanis?

MK: Yeah, definitely.

NIC: Where's it from?

MK: It's from another flash archived cache, this one was deleted after... one-sixth of a second. They're getting faster.

NIC: Who's getting faster?

MK: Well, whoever doesn't want you to find this message.

NIC: Me?

MK: No, not you, like the collective you.

NIC: Oh, okay. Um, does this happen often, this super fast deletion?

MK: Yes, it happens all the time. Constantly.

NIC: Oh.

MK: But this level of sophistication and speed is... interesting. I don't think even the NSA could pull that off.

NIC: No?

MK: No, no way.

NIC: [pause] Oh.

MK: Yeah.

NIC: Okay, so this second message, the one-sixth of a second reference to Tanis, where was that message from?

MK: Website in North America.

NIC: What website?

MK: Craigslist. Seattle, Washington.

NIC: Forty miles north of the fur trapper's outpost at Fort Nisqually, in the middle of the Puget Sound, sits Seattle, Washington. A coastal seaport, and the fastest growing city in North America. Seattle is where Jimi Hendrix was born, where Nirvana helped dramatically increase flannel shirt sales in the '90s, and home to the Tanis podcast.

NIC: So you were able to download the content of that Craigslist ad?

MK: Obviously.

NIC: Okay! Could you read it to me?

MK: I emailed it to you.

NIC: Okay, thanks. Um, thank you. But it's more dramatic if you read it.

MK: Okay, it's your nickel.

NIC: Thanks.

MK: You ready?

NIC: Yeah, I'm ready.

MK: It's a short one.

NIC: Okay.

MK: It's only four words.

NIC: Okay, ready.

MK: "Seeking Tanis. Runner available."

NIC: That's it?

MK: That's it. "Seeking Tanis. Runner available."

NIC: "Seeking Tanis. Runner available." Four words. Four words from somebody who must have read the short story "Where is Tanis?" Meerkatnip explained that there's no way to reverse engineer a contact for whoever placed the ad. The Craigslist ad was interesting, but essentially it was an interesting dead end. So I decided we would place an ad of our own. Instead of, "Seeking Tanis. Runner available," our ad would read, "Seeking Tanis. Runner wanted."

We ran that ad everywhere we could. And it didn't take long to get a response. A response that changed everything.