

# War of the Mountain King

## A alternate-history RPG fantasy campaign setting

### #3 Technology

Prior to the coming of the Americans, Pasales was locked in a Medieval era level of technology - and not a particularly advanced era, at that. The central problem for Pasalan innovators was that any technological problem that was *truly* difficult could usually be fixed with a spell. This degraded innovation, particularly since mages were and are extremely touchy about their prerogatives. Pasalan peasants quickly learned to make do and accept their circumstances until the problem was so large that a mage *had* to be brought in. The alternative was having fireballs ignite their fields.

This did little to spur technological growth. Forget gunpowder: steel weapons and armor did not start showing up in Pasales until at least 1500 AD or so. The printing press (even the Chinese kind) and distillation were both unknown prior to the Americans. The roads are typically dirt tracks, because the nobility flies. Medicine and dentistry were worse than useless, because the nobility can be healed by magic. The fastest way to send a message is usually just to know a noble who knows the right spell. Towns are not disease-hive warrens mostly because towns are heavily-regulated collections of specialists trained to provide nobles with goods and services that cannot be replicated by magic. Generally assume crude, pre-gunpowder technology at best among the peasants, and the rough equivalent of early 20th century living among the nobility (which is yet one more reason why the ruling classes of Pasales are horrifiedly fascinated with the Americans).

In contrast, American technology is a good deal more comprehensible. It's at a fairly straightforward 1930s Industrial Age level: there's a bit more reliance on steam power because the oil industry is still gearing up, and it's unlikely that the USA will develop a nuclear bomb any time in the next

twenty years, but generally the tech and vehicles look like something out of a Thirties movie. Note, by the way, that American military technology includes poisonous gasses, and that the USA does not have any compulsion against using them in wartime. In fact, the reclamation of California required exactly that.

And then there is the stuff that Pasalans have created in imitation of American technology. Turns out that while most Pasalans can't actually wrap their head around *why* American technology works, they can duplicate it via rote actions, or by coming up with a spell that does the same things. An example of the former: the pirates of northwest Pietu don't understand at all the chemical nature of gunpowder, but they do know how to make both it and crude cannons. An example of the latter: a Taryba Vergai mage saw a light bulb and immediately realized that if you wired several mice together to form a grid powered by a cat, you could use the lifeforce of the latter to stimulate the lifeforce of the former until the mouse glowed strongly enough to light a room.

As that last example suggests, there is a basic ethical/moral mismatch between Pasalan and American views of technology and research. Torturing a small animal to death in order to power a room would revolt an American; to a Pasalan it's actually a humanitarian gesture, because some of the less socialized mages would probably use a human slave. On the other hand... the Americans are right now busily in the middle of their equivalent of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, and the Pasalans would be equally revolted at the sight. Not because it is using human subjects; but because the Americans chose their test subjects on the basis of ridiculous racist theories. A related example: in this Fascist-free America, 'eugenics' is still a popular scientific theory in 1942. The rest of Pasales thinks that the entire concept is absurd.

Technology transfers between America and the rest of the planet can best be described as "the Americans don't want to sell, and the Pasalans don't

want to buy, but it happens a lot anyway.” Even if Pasalans don’t understand how an item works, they can still use or abuse it. Handguns in particular are easy things to sell, at least to the nobility (and not excluding the mages). There’s not really an equivalent trade back in magic items and hybrid technologies, although the very few American magic-users that exist are always ready to buy things that might help them understand their abilities.

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