

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Historical accuracy of *The Omphalos*

“History is full of people who out of fear, or ignorance, or lust for power has destroyed knowledge of immeasurable value which truly belongs to us all. We must not let it happen again.”

Carl Sagan

Whenever I think I have hit the limits of fantasy, I learn something about the real world that encourages me to keep pushing the boundaries in my books. For instance, recently, scientists from around the world gathered to discuss if they got *The Big Bang Theory* wrong and determine whether the universe is older and bigger than they thought. Therefore, I thought readers might wonder what is fantasy and what is fact. Below are some of the more interesting facts and history I've incorporated into the book. Enjoy.

Although I have taken literary license to portray their **characters**, many of the ghosts were inspired by real people.

Ariadne – In Greek mythology, Ariadne was the daughter of King Minos of Crete. There are different variations of Ariadne's myth, but she is primarily known for helping Theseus escape the Minotaur in the labyrinth.

Cherufe is a mythological Chilean monster believed to inhabit the magma pools of Chile's volcanoes.

Erra was the Babylonian god of war, destruction, death, strife, mayhem, and pestilence.

Gaia Many pagans (modern and ancient) worship Gaia as the spiritual embodiment of the Earth – the ancestral mother of all life.

Gilgamesh was a king of Uruk, Mesopotamia, who lived sometime between 2800 and 2500 BCE. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is considered the first significant piece of literature. It was carved onto stone tablets long before the Old Testament and had some of the same stories and themes (e.g., the Great Flood Garden of Eden).

Gugalanna, in the Sumerian religion (an ancient Mesopotamian civilization), is the husband of Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld.

Minotaur is a creature in Greek mythology, part man and part bull, located in the infamous labyrinth of **King Minos** in Crete.

The Pythia was also known as the Oracle of Delphi. Local women were chosen to be 'The Pythia' by the Temple of Apollo's priests. The Pythias were the most prestigious and authoritative oracles in the ancient Greek world from the 7th century BCE through the 4th century CE.

- Applicants had to pay for the opportunity to ask the Oracle a question. The Pythia would sit on a three-legged stool in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi directly over crisscrossing fault lines that seeped toxic gasses which impacted the priestess' nervous systems and possibly cause delirium. Priests would stand by to 'interpret' the Pythias' ramblings. Their frenzied state could also have been from the priestesses throwing poppy leaves (opium) on the fire to help induce a dazed state for both themselves and the applicants. The priests were also believed to have used a network of spies to gather information on the applicants, making the Pythia's predictions seem more real.
 - o Their most famous prophecy was given to Croesus, the king of Lydia. He asked Pythia whether he should make war on the Persians. The Pythia at the time told him that a mighty empire would be destroyed if he should go to war. It turned out to be Croesus' kingdom, not the Persian's.

Socrates (470-399 BCE) was a Greek philosopher credited with founding Western philosophy. He died by poisoning (drinking hemlock) as a result of being found guilty of impiety towards the gods and corrupting the youth of Athens.

Theseus, in Greek mythology, was a divine hero and founder of Athens. His most famous adventure was defeating the Minotaur in the labyrinth.

Ute Indians are an American tribe that historically lived in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and Utah but hunted over a much broader area. They currently have three reservations in southwestern Colorado and northeastern Utah. They are the tribe that roamed closest to where I grew up on the plains of Colorado.

- Alex's hairstyle (long twin braids) is in honor of famous Ute Indians who wore a similar hairstyle.

Many of the **locations** in the book are based on places I've visited;

Akkadian Empire was located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and was one of the first empires of ancient Mesopotamia (2334 – 2154 BCE).

Berellus (the Dragon's home planet) is based on the planet Kepler 442-b. It's considered to potentially be one of the most habitable planets in the universe. It is slightly more massive than Earth and is just under 1300 light years away (a little less than 8,000 trillion miles).

Delphi was an ancient temple complex on Mt. Parnassus dedicated to the Greek god Apollo. It included lodging for the people who climbed the mountain, a gymnasium, an amphitheater, and a stadium. It was home to the Oracle of Delphi and the Pythia Priestesses, famed throughout the ancient world for divining the future and who were often consulted before major undertakings. The ancient Greeks considered Delphi to be the center of the world and marked it with a stone monument known as the Omphalos. It's now a UNESCO site.

Greece

- **Acropolis of Athens** is the most recognized spot in the city. It sits on a rocky outcrop above the heart of the city and contains the ruins of several ancient buildings, including the Parthenon.
- **Agia Roumeli** is a small town on the southwest corner of Crete at the southern entrance to the **Samaria Gorge**. Tourists usually start at the northern edge of the gorge and hike down through the scenic trail, then take a ferry back to the other side of the island.
- **Ancient Agora of Athens** was the central meeting place for the Ancient Greeks and lies at the foot of the Acropolis.
 - **Stoa of Attalos** is an impressive reconstruction of the Stoa (a community meeting place and shelter for merchants) that once graced the Agora. It is now a museum focused on Athenian democracy.
- **Crete** lies about 100 miles south of mainland Greece and is the largest of the Greek Isles.
- **Delphi** is situated on the southern slope of Mt. Parnassus, miles north of the **Gulf of Corinth**, which splits mainland Greece in two. It was the seat of the Pythias – the most famous oracle in the ancient Greek world.
 - **Temple of Apollo** was home to the Pythia and the most famous building in Delphi. The ruins you can see now were those of the temple built in the 4th century BCE.
- **Kalabaka** is a small town near the monasteries of Meteora.
- **Meteora** is a visually stunning rock formation with a half dozen Greek Orthodox Monasteries situated on top of several of the sheer conglomerate rock formations in the area.
- **Mount Olympus** is the largest mountain in Greece and is situated in the northeast corner of the country overlooking the Aegean Sea. It was also believed to be the mythological home to the ancient Greek and Roman gods.
- **Rio-Antirrio Bridge** is the world's longest fully-suspended cable-stayed bridge (almost two miles long) as it crosses the mouth of the Gulf of Corinth.
- **Trikala** is a small city to the southeast of Meteora. It also has a fantastic Christmas village!

Hebrides is both a sea and a group of islands that lie off the northwest coast of Scotland. The islands are comprised of the Inner Hebrides, those closest to the Scottish mainland, and the Outer Hebrides that lie on the edge of the North Atlantic.

- **Fingal's Cave** is a sea cave in the Inner Hebrides with an unusual geologic structure of hexagonal jointed basalt columns (similar to the Giant's Causeway in Northern Island).

Italy

- **Mt. Etna** rises over 10,000 feet, is situated on the eastern shore of Sicily, and is one of the most active volcanoes in the world. The lava field Alex crosses in the book is based on an actual field created in the early 90's.
 - o **Catania** is a medium-sized city sitting at the southeastern base of Etna.
- **Ionian Sea** borders Italy and Sicily on their east coasts.
- **Tyrrhenian Sea** borders Italy on its western coast and Sicily on its northern shore.
- **Mt. Vesuvius** is an active volcano on the southwest coast of Italy near **Naples**. It's most famous for its devastating eruption in 79 CE that covered the cities of **Herculaneum** and **Pompeii**. One significant difference between Mt. Vesuvius and Mt. Etna is that Naples lies much closer to Vesuvius' crater, with over 600,000 people living in the volcano's danger zone.

Istanbul is the largest city in Turkey (over 15 million people). It straddles the Bosphorus Strait and was once the capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires.

Loch Ness is a large, frigid, deep, freshwater lake in the Scottish Highlands. It is famous for being home to 'Nessie' – the Loch Ness Monster. Interestingly, it is not the largest lake in surface area in Scotland, but it has more water than all the lakes in England and Wales combined due to its great depth (over 750 feet deep at one point).

Stirling is a city of about 40,000 people situated approximately halfway between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Some of the **backstories** in the book are based on historical events or local legends, including;

Afterlife - my book's afterlife is loosely based on ancient Greek mythology's afterlife, which had four levels:

- The first 'level' is the Entrance to the Underworld. In Greek mythology, a soul must cross the river Acheron or the more well-known Styx by paying the ferryman Charon with a gold coin. Once they cross the river, they are judged and sent to one of three places:
- Tartarus was the lowest and darkest where those who had been evil, cruel, or offended the gods went.
- The Plains of Asphodel were for those who had been ordinary people. It wasn't as nice as living, but neither was it as bad as Tartarus.
- The Plains of Elysium were for heroes and those who had pleased the gods.

Ankh is the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic character for life. The Egyptians believed that living was only part of life and that the ankh symbolized our mortal existence and the afterlife. Its first known use was about 5,000 years ago.

Chintamani is a wish-fulfilling jewel in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. It's the equivalent of the philosopher's stone in Western alchemy.

Chiton was a gown or tunic worn by both sexes in ancient Greece, with or without sleeves. The Greeks tended to use light, loose-fitting clothes because it was hot for much of the year. The Chiton is a big square piece of cloth held in place by pins at the shoulders and a belt around the waist.

Druids Very little is known about the ancient Druids, but they are believed to have been the educated professional class (religious and judicial leaders) among the Celtic peoples during the Iron Age (roughly 1200 BCE to 1 BCE). Unlike most cultures, female Druids held prominent roles in Celtic society. Unfortunately, the Romans wiped out their culture.

Some of the key terms associated with the Druids in this book are:

- **Bandruí** is an Irish word for Female Druids.
- **Groves** are how Druids organize themselves (similar to how Wiccans organize by covens). Since the ancient Druids were closely linked to nature, many of their meetings took place in groves of trees.

The Five Elements were believed to be the most fundamental parts on which everything is based, but they varied according to belief and tradition. Four are common among most traditions (Earth, wind/air, fire, and water). The fifth element varies (e.g., aether, wood, metal, spirit).

Iris Mechanism is a mechanical device consisting of multiple leaves (or blades) that can be straight or curved and open or close to shut out light. The curved blades create a perfectly round hole in the middle of the mechanism that is so fascinating I had to include it as the ‘doorway’ to the wormholes.

Cup of Jamshid in Persian mythology is a divination (scrying) cup that also contains an elixir of immortality. Many Persian authors have credited the cup with the Persian Empire’s successes.

Magic can be anything from extraordinary supernatural powers to illusion, certain religious practices, and advanced technology. In many ancient Mesopotamian societies, magic was an everyday event used for various purposes from understanding omens to protecting oneself against spells cast by some witch. The concept of magic started taking on negative connotations in Greece, where it was thought to be used mostly by frauds. But it wasn’t until Christian churches began preaching that magic was the work of demons and such that witchcraft became a hazardous occupation.

Magma is liquid/semi-liquid rock below ground (lava is above ground)

- **Lava tubes** are formed when a hard outer crust of lava cools off, and the lava inside empties out before it cools.
- **Magma/lava temperatures** are not quite as deadly as I thought. You would get a terrible burn if you touched magma, but a person wouldn’t necessarily die if they fell in as long as they could climb out quickly enough.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a theory of what motivates humans. It assumes that basic needs (e.g., food and shelter) must be met before a person can focus on higher needs (e.g., love, esteem, self-actualization).

Mjölmir is the Norse God **Thor**’s (also known as **Donar** to the Germans) weapon – a magical hammer. Thor was associated with lightning and thunder and was the protector of humankind and fertility.

Occam’s Razor is a philosophical principle developed by a 14th-century Englishman who stated that the simplest explanation for a problem is usually the best.

The Omphalos (naval of the world) are sacred stones (often meteorites) believed to be endowed with life.

Red Crescent Society is similar to the Red Cross, but primarily works in Muslim countries.

Runes are letters in various Germanic and Scandinavian alphabets used before the adoption of the Latin alphabet. Later on, Norse mythology attributed runes to divine origin.

Ryujiin is one of the eight dragon kings in Japanese mythology and the sea god. I have used it to name the small dragon species in my books.

Scrying is a method of divination that can take many forms (crystal balls and silver dishes being the most common). In my books, it’s a secure communication method for the Druids, similar to Skype.

Sharur in Sumerian mythology is Ninurta’s (Mesopotamian god associated with farming, healing, hunting, law, scribes, and war) mace. It’s a powerful weapon that can fly over vast distances and communicate with its wielder.

Tilley Hat is a versatile and durable hat made in Canada. They enjoy a cult-like following among some people.

Time Dilation is the difference in elapsed time, as measured by two clocks, due to either the relative velocity between them (special relativity), or differences in gravitation (general relativity).

Tonsure is the practice of cutting or shaving some or all of the hair on the scalp as a sign of religious devotion or humility. It is most often associated with specific Roman Catholic monastic orders.

Triquetra (also known as the trinity symbol) consists of 3 interwoven rounded triangles and was often used by Druids as a religious symbol.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is an agency of the United Nations that promotes world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences, and culture. World Heritage Sites are those sites considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.

Wakan Tanka, in Lakota spirituality, is the term for the sacred or divine. It can be interpreted as the power or sacredness that resides in everything.

Wormholes (also called Einstein-Rosen bridges) are one aspect of the theory of relativity. They theoretically link two different points in space-time via a 'shortcut.' Wormholes change (punch through) the fabric of the space-time continuum.

For more information on the historical places, events, and characters in this book, go to my web page, where I have posted a more complete glossary.