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January 13, 2007

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GORP Trivia

We regret to announce that we've discontinued GORP's trivia section. Check out our [Trivia archives](#) for questions and answers about the world's people, places, and things.

Desert Cinema
 Question by *Ethan Gelber*

The Question:

The magic and power of the movies is their ability to lead us, disbelief suspended, into new and sometimes unusual worlds. When Godzilla stomps through downtown Tokyo, the moviemakers would like us to believe that it really could happen. When Han Solo and the *Millennium Falcon* dive into the gut of the Death Star, the special effects wizards would have us believe that it really is happening. When Peter O'Toole Lawrence'd his way across the arid sweeps of North Africa, the cinematographers wanted us to feel the sting of the sand as if it were real.

Most of the work required to give life to fantasy takes place in studios. It should therefore come as no surprise that the fiction is as fake as it sometimes seems. But sometimes, studios drag their actors and technicians out into the real and live wilds of rough and tumble Mother Earth. That said, what you see is not always what you think it is.

There are two small North African cities that have been used as desert shoot locales in movies such as *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Sheltering Sky*, and as the home planet of Tatouine in *Star Wars*. What are these cities?

The Answer:

The southern Moroccan city of **Ouarzazate** is considered by many as the gateway to the

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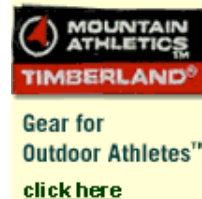
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Great Moroccan South, a region sandwiched between the southern slopes of the snow-capped High Atlas mountains and the northern fringes of the great Sahara Desert. Developed in 1928 by the French as a garrison but originally settled centuries prior (the ancient Kasbah remains and has recently been rehabilitated), it is a small city of some 30,000 people. Its reputation, however, far exceeds these measures.

Given its magical geographic situation — near the mountains, the desert, alongside a lake, in a fertile valley a number of movie producers and directors have taken advantage of the setting. David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*, John Huston's *The Man Who Would Be King*, Bertolucci's *Sheltering Sky*, Scorsese's *Kundun* and much more (especially Biblical films) were partially filmed in this area, often using locals (people and animals, especially camels) as extras.

The southern Tunisian cities of **Matmata** and **Tozeur** are those often associated with the filming of *Star Wars*. Matmata was used for the interior shots of Luke Skywalker's uncle's sunken house on Tatooine. The cave-like troglodyte dwellings actually do exist; they are people's homes providing cool and protection away from the force of the desert sun. In fact, there is even a bar in one of these underground abodes (now a hotel) called the "Mos Eisley Cantina"! Tozeur, a bustling town on the edge of the Chott el Jerid, the largest of Tunisia's salt lakes. It is also on the edge of the sands familiar to fans of the latest *Star Wars* installment.

The Winners:

This week's first four correct answers (credit going to anyone who named Ouarzazate as one city and either of the Tunisian cities as the other) came from Gaetano Auricchio, Angelo Sciulli, Mike O'Toole (any relation to Peter?) and Jan Vandenhende. For form's sake, our fifth bag of GORP.com GORP will go to Trina Burke who was the first to name both of the Tunisian cities. (Jeff Lonard did this as well, and so merits a special mention.)

Other excellent guesses included: Touggourt (Algeria), Petra (Jordan), Tangiers (Morocco), Casablanca (Morocco), Aqaba (Jordan), and Cairo (Egypt).

THANKS for your contributions!