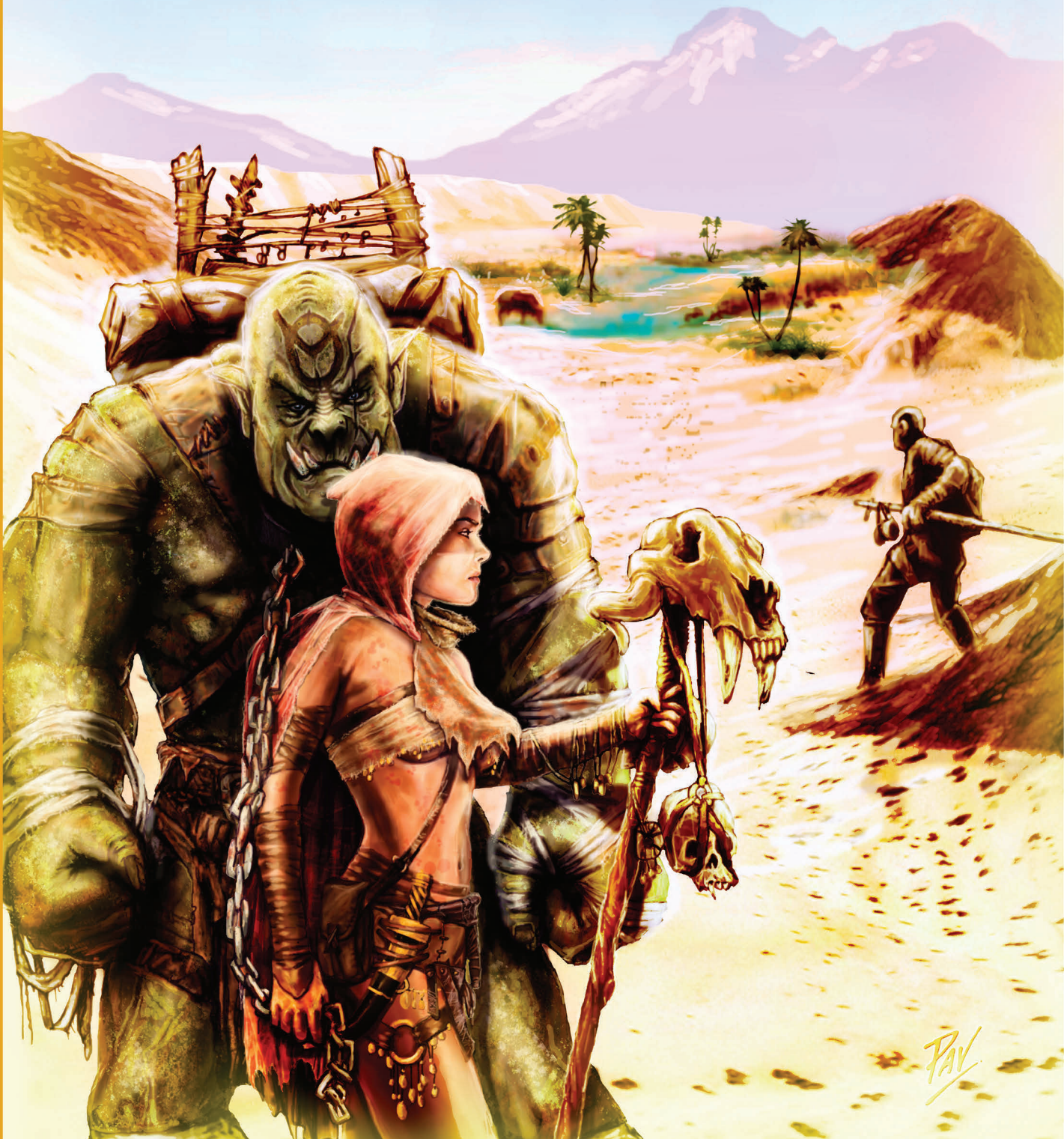




FROG GOD GAMES

# HAZARDOUS HABITATS

## Desertlands



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# HAZARDOUS HABITATS

## Desertlands

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\* (forthcoming from **Frog God Games**)

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# Desertlands

Welcome to the desert. You may already be aware of the scorching heat, aridity, and the sand, but there is much more to see and experience here. Within these pages, you will discover the tools needed to bring any desert and its people to life. The tables presented here allow you to determine the likelihood of running across a settlement during the heroes' travels as well as generating their population, demographics, political systems, lifestyles and prevailing attitudes towards visitors. Dig deeper and you will find wilderness dressing, innovative adventure ideas focused on the biome's unique character, and exciting locations to explore in the desert. The chapter also explains the desert's inner workings, including the many hazards adventurers may face when they set foot on the searing sands. Weather tables simulate the conditions adventurers can expect to encounter during their time here. The chapter also delves into the rigors and logistics of desert travel in addition to addressing the men and monsters who inhabit these scorched lands. Most importantly, this guidebook is system neutral. While some of the details previously appeared in *Dunes of Desolation* from **Frog God Games**, this product adds an extensive amount of new information while stripping away the game mechanics from previously published material, allowing GMs to use this sourcebook regardless of rules system. With this brief introduction in the books, it is time to find out what a desert is and how it functions in the real and fantastical world.

The word desert conjures the image of an intensely hot, windswept landscape of swirling and shifting sand dunes. The air is fiery and dry, the sun relentlessly blasts the arid sand with waves of heat and bright light, and water is nowhere to be found. Nothing survives in this inhospitable, barren wasteland. At least that is the picture that first comes to mind when someone mentions the word desert.

Deserts certainly lack the multitude of diverse lifeforms found in a tropical rainforest or temperate grassland. Desert lifeforms may not be abundant, but their hardiness and resourcefulness compensate for their numerical shortfalls. The indigenous flora has incorporated several different methodologies to adapt to an environment where water is scarce. Some plants grow deep root systems to tap subterranean water sources. Others reduce moisture loss by developing small, spiny leaves to

minimize water loss from exposure to the heat. The largest desert plants — and those most commonly associated with this biome — survive by retaining and storing water for long-term usage. Needles, thorns, or a waxy coating protect their vital leaves and stems against voracious plant-eating creatures and evaporation from the sun's scorching rays.

Likewise, its fauna also developed specialized behavioral and physiological changes necessary to survive in this unforgiving climate. Many desert animals are nocturnal. They hide underground during the hottest times of the day and emerge during the significantly cooler evening and overnight hours. Others have undergone radical physical changes ranging from the creation of a hump to store moisture and fatty deposits, as seen in the camel, to the development of larger and more efficient kidneys to process water multiple times before excreting it. Life in the desert is a difficult struggle, but as its inhabitants prove, it is not impossible.

But what actually makes a desert a desert?

Popular notion defines a desert as an extremely hot, sandy environment with little or no water. This definition is partly true. Certainly, many deserts are hot, but extreme heat does not classify a region as a desert. In fact, the Antarctic icecap is considered by many to be the largest desert in the world in addition to being the coldest place on Earth. What the polar icecap and the arid, windswept dunes of the Sahara share is a lack of precipitation. A desert is generally defined as a region receiving 10 or fewer centimeters of annual rainfall. In warm deserts, the intense heat evaporates more water than the area receives, which creates a greater moisture deficit than cold deserts, which lose little moisture to evaporation, because most water exists in its frozen state and temperatures rarely if ever exceed the freezing point of water. The lack of water and humidity makes hot deserts intensely warm during the day and much cooler at night.

In a moist, temperate environment, much of the sun's energy is used to complete the evaporation process, which uses light and heat energy to convert water into water vapor. In contrast, the desert's surface has no moisture. All of the energy normally devoted to evaporating moisture is instead absorbed directly into the ground, increasing the surface temperature. This phenomenon explains why many people often claim



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“dry heat” feels less oppressive than the same temperature in a humid environment. Sweating is the body’s natural cooling mechanism. However, because the air is more saturated with water vapor in a humid climate, sweat evaporates at a slower rate than in a desert where the air lacks any moisture.

The process works in reverse at night. When the sun sets, the desert cools rapidly because dry air does not retain heat as well as humid air. In addition, the water vapor created during the course of the day retains heat and acts as a greenhouse gas. The desert lacks any water vapor, so there is no greenhouse gas to better retain the heat created during the course of the day. The heat generated during the day is quickly lost when the sun sets and darkness reigns over the arid land.

Likewise, a common misnomer is that light-colored sand is predominately responsible for the desert’s intense heat. However, the opposite is true. Dark colors absorb sunlight, and light colors reflect sunlight. This partly explains why the polar ice caps are so cold. The white snow and ice reflect more sunlight and retain less heat than darker surfaces. If the desert sands were a dark color, the dry ground would retain even more heat and make the surface even hotter.

## Birth of the Desert

The planet’s surface is never static. Biomes constantly yield and advance to other biomes as terrestrial, atmospheric, and oceanographic conditions change. A volcanic eruption can transform a lush forest into woodland overnight. Areas thousands of miles away from the explosion can experience drastic temperature changes as ash and soot block the sun. Even manmade activities can alter the landscape as evidenced by the black blizzards that ravaged the North American prairies during the 1930s. Drought combined with unsound farming practices resulted in the loss of topsoil and spawned vast dust storms. In many ways, the Dust Bowl event is a perfect example of how a desert typically forms. The lack of surface moisture, the felling of wind-breaking trees, and the removal of deep-rooted grasses caused the fertile topsoil to dry out, loosen, and then blow away as worthless dust, leaving the land barren and infertile. In the absence of man’s intervention, three major natural processes account for the creation of the world’s deserts.

Warm air holds more moisture than cold air. This is demonstrated by the fact that the coldest place on Earth is also the planet’s largest desert.

Frigid air retains little if any moisture. On the other hand, the equator has the warmest air, which rises and later cools. As it cools, the warm air releases its moisture as rain around the equator. As the planet rotates, and the air subsequently cools and sinks away from the equator, the sun’s light and heat warms the now dry air again. Because the dry air is warm again, it can absorb more evaporated moisture from the surface without resulting in precipitation. The warm air’s ability to retain moisture from the ground without releasing it back results in the formation of a desert. This process is responsible for the creation of the Sahara and Arabian Deserts.

Tall mountain ranges are also responsible for creating some of the world’s deserts. This phenomenon is known as the rain shadow effect. The jet stream steers warm, moist air from the ocean onto coastal regions and then drives it farther inland. When the warm air approaches a large mountain range, it rises up the face of the mountain and cools as it reaches higher elevations, which prevents it from retaining as much water. The air condenses and releases rain on the front side of the mountain. The now dry air rolls over the top of the mountain where it once again warms as it sinks back to the surface and creates a desert on the lee side of the mountain range. This process is best exemplified by the desert areas east of the Sierra Nevada range, such as those found in parts of California, Nevada, and Arizona.

Cold water currents also play a significant role in the creation of coastal deserts. Cold water is swept up from the ocean floor and pushed to the surface where it cools the warm air coming into contact with it. As the warm air cools, it condenses and releases its moisture as rain long before it reaches land. The dry air then arrives onshore, where it is warmed and can once again hold more moisture evaporated from the surface. This process is best exemplified by the Atacampa Desert in South America, which is generally recognized as the driest desert on Earth though it lies adjacent to the largest body of water on Earth: the Pacific Ocean.

These natural processes are extremely slow and take extended periods of time to turn previously fertile land into inert desert. Sudden climate change, a major terrestrial event such as a volcanic eruption or an asteroid impact, irresponsible human activities, or any combination of these forces can rapidly accelerate desertification as exemplified by the devastating black blizzards of the 1930s. Drought, wind, and deforestation are the three main ingredients to expand or to create a desert.

On the other hand, it is also possible to reclaim desert land with proper irrigation techniques, the reintroduction of fertile soil, and the introduction of plant species with deep and extensive root structures to keep the soil intact. Such efforts must occur in desert lands abutting fertile lands,



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including those surrounding an oasis, and they must exercise caution not to overburden the available water resources.

Like all human settlement patterns, cities, towns, and villages almost always spring up close to a readily available water source where farmland can support food crops such as wheat and rice as well as livestock. Unlike most other biomes, water is scarce throughout the desert, so the areas suitable for settlement are rather limited. Most desert cities lie near the mighty rivers that cut a path through the arid landscape, bringing fresh water to the parched soil, but also deposits of silt and other waterborne nutrients the river picked up along the way. These organic materials are essential for farming. A navigable waterway also offers a quicker and cheaper means of transporting goods than the much slower and more dangerous overland route, provided the intended destination also has a port of its own, which is rarely a certainty in the desert. Coastal communities are also possible in areas near a freshwater sea. In the absence of a river or other large body of water, residents may establish a community in a valley where runoff from the nearby mountains pours into underground reservoirs and rivers beneath the settlement. The water is then brought to the surface by pumps and wells where it is disseminated for drinking and irrigation needs.

# Desert Types

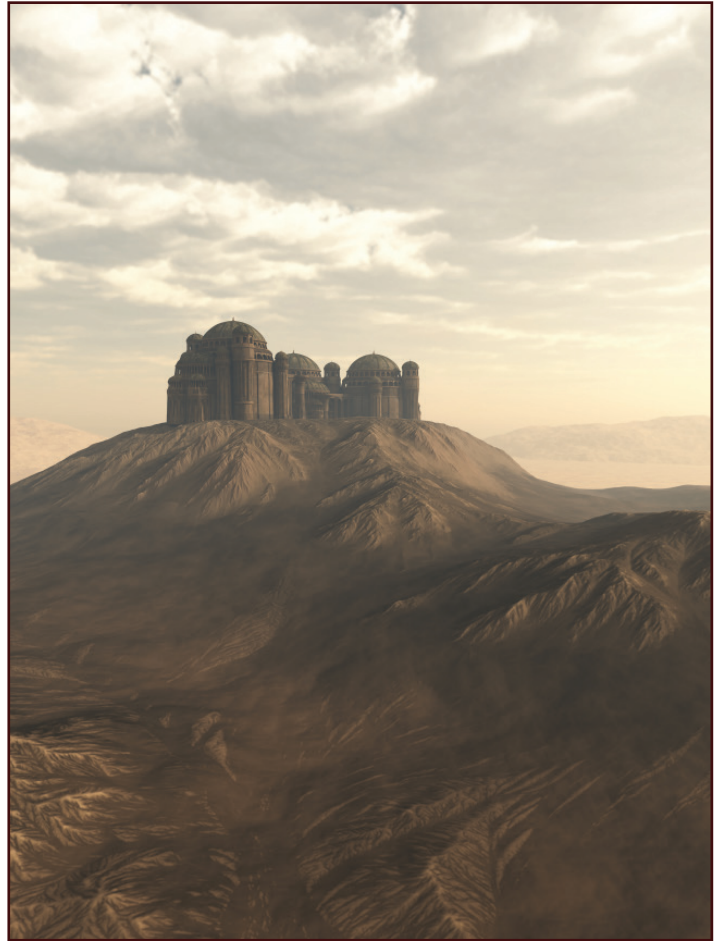
All deserts share the common characteristic where they suffer from a deprivation of rainfall, but not all deserts are the same. The traditional desert of sweltering heat and vast expanses of undulating sand dunes is just one type of desert. The consensus holds there are four types of deserts: the hot and dry desert, the semiarid desert, the coastal desert, and the cold desert. This chapter primarily focuses on the hot and dry desert with lesser emphasis on the semiarid desert and a brief reference to the coastal deserts. Cold deserts appear in the forthcoming Poles chapter. Deserts can also be classified according to their geographic location and the area's prevailing weather patterns, but ultimately these variations fall into one of the four general categories.

## Hot and Dry Deserts

The hot and dry desert lives up to its name as it is generally hot throughout the year with little variation in seasonal temperatures. The best real-world example is the Sahara Desert in northern Africa, which is also the largest hot and dry desert in the world. Naturally, summer is the warmest month with daytime highs routinely reaching greater than 100° degrees Fahrenheit (37° Celsius) and sometimes hitting a sweltering 135° Fahrenheit (57° Celsius). Meanwhile, nighttime lows regularly drop 50 or even 75 degrees from the daytime high temperatures. Daytime highs during the winter months are only moderately cooler. If the desert receives any precipitation, it frequently occurs during the winter months. These storms are short-lived but very intense, dropping as much as one millimeter of rain per minute in quick bursts. It is not uncommon for these weather systems to spawn flash floods that drain into dried stream channels commonly known as wadis. (Weather tables appear at the end of this chapter.)

Sand is the feature most associated with hot and dry deserts, though it is not found in every desert. On average, the grainy material accounts only for 20% of the desert's surface area. Most of the desert's sand accumulates in vast sheets or seas shaped into dunes by the prevailing winds. The most common type of dune is the crescentic or barchan dune. This crescent-shaped mound is formed by winds blowing only from one direction. Over time, these dunes move across the desert as the wind continually pushes the sand farther in the same direction the wind blows. Other types of dunes include long sand ridges known as linear dunes, pyramidal sand caps formed by multidirectional winds called star dunes, and U-shaped mounds of sand referred to as parabolic dunes.

Where sand is not present, the hot and dry desert's soil is rocky and gravelly. These heavier particles remained behind when the wind blew the finer grains of sand away from the surface. This granular dirt is ill-suited to support the tall trees or lush grasses found in the forests and prairies of the world, but it is not devoid of any flora. Low-lying shrubs and



short, woody trees take root in this nutrient-poor soil. These hardy plants rely upon water conservation and water storage adaptations to survive. Characters walking across the desert face a parched, uneven, and desolate landscape. The following table describes the terrain elements found within the surrounding 2d4 miles in the hot and dry desert. When consulting this table, the GM rolls percentile dice for each feature to determine if it is present in the area. One or more types of terrain and/or vegetation may coexist in the same general area, though certain features negate the effects of others as described in the following table. Difficult terrain, as described in this table, only applies to determining the actions a character can take when moving through an area containing this feature rather than its effect on the creature's speed.

**Table 1-1: Terrain Elements in the Hot and Dry Desert**

Terrain Element	Percentage Chance
Gravel <sup>a</sup>	40%
Sand dune <sup>b</sup>	25%
Loose sand <sup>c</sup>	15%
Rock <sup>d</sup>	10%
Salt pan <sup>e</sup>	10%

<sup>a</sup> Gravel consists of small, loose rocks and stones resting atop a base of granular earth. If gravel is present, sand dunes and loose sand are not found in the same area. When collocated with rock and salt pans, the gravel sits atop either surface. Gravel has no effect on overland speed, but areas containing gravel are treated as difficult terrain, if applicable. If there are no other terrain features in the area, the area is instead covered by gravel.

<sup>b</sup> Sand dunes reduce overland speed by half and reduce wheeled vehicle speeds by three-quarters. A creature who attempts to run, charge, or suddenly stop or turn falls prone

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if it fails a moderate difficulty Dexterity check or appropriate Dexterity-based skill check. If sand dunes are present, there cannot be loose sand, rock, or salt pans. Areas containing sand dunes are treated as difficult terrain, if applicable.

<sup>c</sup> Loose sand reduces overland speed and wheeled vehicle speed by half. Land vehicles whose chassis rests upon a long, narrow surface, such as blades, rails, skis, or similar devices move at half speed over this surface. When collocated with rock and salt pans, loose sand sits atop either surface. Areas containing loose sand are treated as difficult terrain, if applicable.

<sup>d</sup> Rock has no effect on overland speed. If rock is present, there cannot be a salt pan.

<sup>e</sup> Salt pans have no effect on overland speed and increase the speed of wheeled vehicles by one-quarter. Land vehicles whose chassis rests upon a long, narrow surface, such as blades, rails, skis, or similar devices move at three-quarters speed over this surface.

The indigenous animals who dwell in the desert must also adapt to their sweltering landscape. The vast majority remains underground during the scorching heat of the daytime hours and ventures outside only after the sun sets. A few intrepid species even manage to eke out an existence within the desert's salt pans. Salt pans were once saltwater lakes or smaller bodies of water that evaporated over time, leaving nothing behind other than the water's salt content. Regardless of whether the fauna or flora makes its home among the desert's dunes, dry valleys, or salt pans, survival ultimately depends upon finding water and maximizing its yield for as long as possible.

Although there is little rainfall in the hot and dry desert, water can be found in isolated locations. Some rivers originating in other locations cross through the desert to later join up with another body of water. Rivers navigating a path through the desert lose tremendous volumes of water to absorption by the parched soil and evaporation from the intense heat. Because of these factors, massive rivers are the only bodies of water capable of making the perilous journey across the sunbaked desert and still remain largely intact. Subterranean springs, rivers, and reservoirs are another source of water for desert inhabitants. Some are found only a few feet underneath the surface, while others lay much deeper beneath the sands. Yet, the oasis is the most well-known and mystical source of water found in the hot and dry desert. Oases are formed by underground rivers or aquifers forced to the surface by pressure or through manmade means, such as a pump or a well. When vegetation takes root around the oasis, its root systems anchor the soil in place and retain more moisture. This in turn allows larger plants to take hold in the fertile ground and not lose their topsoil to unprotected winds or encroaching sand. The date palm tree is the plant species most readily identifiable with the desert oasis. In addition to being a vital food source for the oasis' denizens, the tree's broad leaves provide ample shade to the plants beneath it, which provides some cooling relief and allows the surface plants to retain more moisture from less exposure to direct sunlight and cooler temperatures.

The GM may use the following table to describe the fauna, flora, and minor random events the characters may encounter while traveling through the hot and dry desert. He may use these details as wilderness dressing for the windswept sands or as seeds for an intriguing side trek.

**Table 1-2:**

### Hot and Dry Desert Fauna, Flora, and Random Events

1d20	Encounter
1	A cactus pruned into the likeness of man points north.
2	A lone camel missing its rider crosses paths with the characters.
3	A desert merchant offers to sell his youngest son to the characters.
4	Two young, haughty noblemen race their camels across the sands.

### 1d20 Encounter

5	A gold locket bearing the inscription, "Forever yours, Abdullah," lies atop the ground.
6	Three date palm trees surround a patch of damp sand.
7	Numerous small gourds cover the ground. These inedible fruits of the <i>Citrullus colosynthis</i> plant contain a milky sap reputedly used as an antidote against scorpion stings.
8	Thin blades of waxy, serrated grass cover a swath of ground.
9	Locals claim the olives plucked from the branches of these olive trees produce the finest olive oil in the land.
10	The scent of thyme hangs in the dry air, apparently wafting from a patch of nearby desert thyme.
11	A bright, red scarf is caught in the branches of a lone tamarisk shrub.
12	Three camels run across the sands in a giant circle.
13	Two human skeletons with their hands wrapped around the other's neck lie next to several peyote cacti.
14	Four red acacia trees take root in an oddly-shaped depression.
15	Wasps buzz around the fruits of a common fig tree.
16	A family of foxes peeks out of their den, where they survey their surroundings for potential prey.
17	Dung beetles rummage through camel feces.
18	A sand sculpture of a magnificent palace sits upon a barchan sand dune.
19	A sealed bottle atop a dune contains a note telling the reader to tell Yaharra he is sorry.
20	Two wrens poke their beaks into the sand, apparently looking for something.

## Hot and Dry Desert Adventures

On the surface, a hot and dry desert campaign appears to be the least hospitable environment for adventuring. An environment with scorching temperatures, incessant sunlight, swirling sands, and lack of water seems better suited for survival training than exploration. Yet it is these very elements that give a desert campaign its unique flavor.

In a world where vital resources are in short supply, scarcity inevitably leads to conflict between those vying to control and even exploit these precious commodities for their own purposes. In the cities scattered through the desert, palace intrigues abound within the royal courts and harems, as powerful men and women devise and implement schemes to further their ambitions and the designs of those around them. Behind closed doors, conniving genies wield their influence in these affairs, seeking to carve out a bigger share of the pie for themselves and those they purport to serve.

Desert cities are the epicenter of trade, as merchants from all corners of the world peddle their wares in the city's open-air bazaars. Within these cosmopolitan marketplaces, a hundred different languages, cultures, peoples, and forms of currency interact and change hands every day. Anything is available for the right price, and thieves abound looking to pluck a neglected coin purse from the unwary. Meanwhile, amid the cacophony of competing bids and deals of a lifetime, the common man faces a daily struggle for survival in a harsh, unforgiving climate as he battles the forces of nature as well as dangerous men and monsters looking for easy prey.

The people of the desert vary greatly from one region to the next. Those dwelling in one area may exclusively belong to the same race and share



the same beliefs. Another community may contain an eclectic assortment of religions, races, and ethnicities. As a general rule of thumb, smaller settlements tend to be more homogenous than larger metropolises. When adventurers encounter humanoid in a predetermined location or in a randomly generated community near a road (see **Table 1-23**), the population size affects its demographic makeup as reflected in the following table.

**Table 1-3: Population Effect on Demographics**

Population	Modifier
Fewer than 50	-4d10
51-200	-2d10
201-2,000	none
2,001-5,000	+2d10
5,001-15,000	+4d10
15,001-30,000	+6d10
31,000+	+8d10

After determining the modifier based upon the population size, the GM may then apply that modifier to the following table to determine the demographics of a hot and dry desert community.

**Table 1-4: Humanoid Demographics**

Die Roll	Racial Makeup
<16	<b>Exclusively Homogenous:</b> Everyone is a member of the same humanoid race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable.
16-35	<b>Predominately Homogenous:</b> Almost everyone is a member of the same humanoid race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable.
36-50	<b>Largely Homogenous:</b> The majority are members of the same humanoid race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable.
51-70	<b>Neutral:</b> One race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable outnumbers all others but does not comprise a majority. Nonetheless, their culture, traditions, and beliefs define society, though other peoples exert lesser degrees of influence as well.
71-80	<b>Moderately Diverse:</b> Some races, faiths, and ethnicities, if applicable, are more prevalent than others, but none greatly outnumbers all others. The traditions of several races, religions, and ethnicities combine forces to determine society's overall cultural makeup.

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Die Roll	Racial Makeup
81–95	<b>Largely Diverse:</b> A multitude of races, religions, and ethnicities make up the largely integrated population. The fusion of backgrounds creates a unique society embodying traits borrowed from numerous traditions, though some perspectives influence the community more than others.
>95	<b>Completely Diverse:</b> Nearly every race, faith, and ethnicity imaginable can be found among the population. Most citizens are multicultural and multilingual, embracing their own customs as well as adopting those acquired from neighboring peoples.

The following table modifies the results on **Table 1–6** based upon the community’s demographics.

**Table 1–5: Demographics Effect on Humanoid Attitudes**

Demographic	Modifier
Exclusively homogenous	–5d10
Predominately homogenous	–3d10
Largely homogenous	–1d10
Neutral	none
Moderately diverse	+1d10
Largely diverse	+3d10
Completely diverse	+5d10

Although all humanoids see the same world, every individual perceives it differently. Some easily accept those who do not look like them, believe what they do, or share some common ancestry. Others view their surroundings through narrow, biased lenses. Personal prejudices govern their outlook, leading them to ostracize any who do not comport with their expectations. The GM may use the following table to determine the prevailing attitudes toward others within and outside the community.

**Table 1–6: Humanoid Attitudes**

Die Roll	Attitude
<16	<b>Segregated:</b> Society is strictly divided along racial, religious, or ethnic lines with the more populous groups assuming a dominant role. They treat minorities as inferiors, relegating them to subservient status. Civil or religious authorities strictly enforce boundaries between divergent populations through threats, intimidation, and if necessary violence.
16–30	<b>Prejudiced:</b> Although some integration takes place, racial, religious, or ethnic tension hangs heavy in the air. Many people hold persistent, deep-seated opinions sowing mistrust between members of different groups. Residents keep a wary eye on those different than themselves, perceiving them as second-class citizens who pose a constant threat to their supposedly superior way of life.
31–50	<b>Biased:</b> Few individuals publicly express their misgivings about other people, yet it is difficult to ignore the undercurrent of bias bubbling beneath the surface. Although people can move freely about without restriction, subtle acts of discrimination still permeate society. Interactions between different sets of people may seem courteous and polite on the surface, yet words, gestures, and body language belie the person’s compartmentalized suspicions.

Die Roll	Attitude
51–60	<b>Indifferent:</b> An indifferent society strives to maintain the society’s <i>status quo</i> , sweeping any pervasive prejudices under the proverbial rug. Gradual modification of existing attitudes can occur, though some find its pace too plodding for their liking. Residents rarely let their biases govern their actions and perceptions of other people, yet few go out of their way to welcome those different than themselves.
61–75	<b>Tolerant:</b> Multiple languages, religions, and cultures mingle together, though members of the same race, religion, or ethnicity feel more comfortable with others of their kind than outsiders. A live-and-let-live attitude best summarizes a tolerant society’s outlook toward the community at large, though some innate biases linger in certain circles.
76–90	<b>Accepting:</b> Members of different races, religions, and ethnicities live side by side in almost completely integrated communities. Familiarity forms the cornerstone of an accepting society. However, those hailing from unfamiliar places or arriving with previously unseen customs encounter some misgivings and suspicion from startled observers.
>90	<b>Welcoming:</b> Society welcomes immigrants and visitors, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity into the fold. Newcomers are encouraged to quickly assimilate into their surroundings as they adapt to their neighbors’ customs and traditions while adding their uniqueness to the mix. Indeed, most members perceive themselves as citizens first and foremost relegating association with their race, religion, or ethnicity to a secondary status. Prejudice persists in some isolated corners, but the overwhelming majority strongly condemn such viewpoints and celebrate diversity.

Whenever humanoids gather to live together, they must choose a system of government. In most cases, the common man has little input into this decision. Instead, cultural traditions, religious authorities, and wealth determine who exerts political control over the settlement. In a world starving for resources, many people turn to the gods for aid. With this consideration in mind, theocracies represent the most common form of government in the hot and dry desert followed by monarchies. The GM may consult the following table to ascertain the system of government presiding over the people.

**Table 1–7: Political System**

Die Roll	Political System
01–15	<b>Theocracy (God Figure):</b> All civil authority derives from a divine source. In the case of a god figure, political power rests in the hands of one individual who may be a living deity, a demigod, or a representative chosen by one or more gods. The god figure wields absolute authority over all matters of state including serving as the head of its church.
16–35	<b>Theocracy (Clerical State):</b> In a clerical state, the clergy interprets the deity’s or deities’ commands and codifies them as law. Priests enforce the gods’ edicts, allowing them to preside over all religious and secular matters. Unlike the god state, the priests may select one of its members to serve as its high priest, a role granting the individual supreme authority but not divinity.

## HAZARDOUS HABITATS

Die Roll	Political System
36–45	<p><b>Theocracy (Shared Authority):</b> A single individual serves as the head of state and the titular leader of the church. While recognized as the supreme religious leader, the political figure defers judgment on all ecclesiastical matters to the clergy. This person may have inherited this position from a predecessor, acquired it through force or shrewd political maneuvering, or used vast wealth to usurp the title.</p>

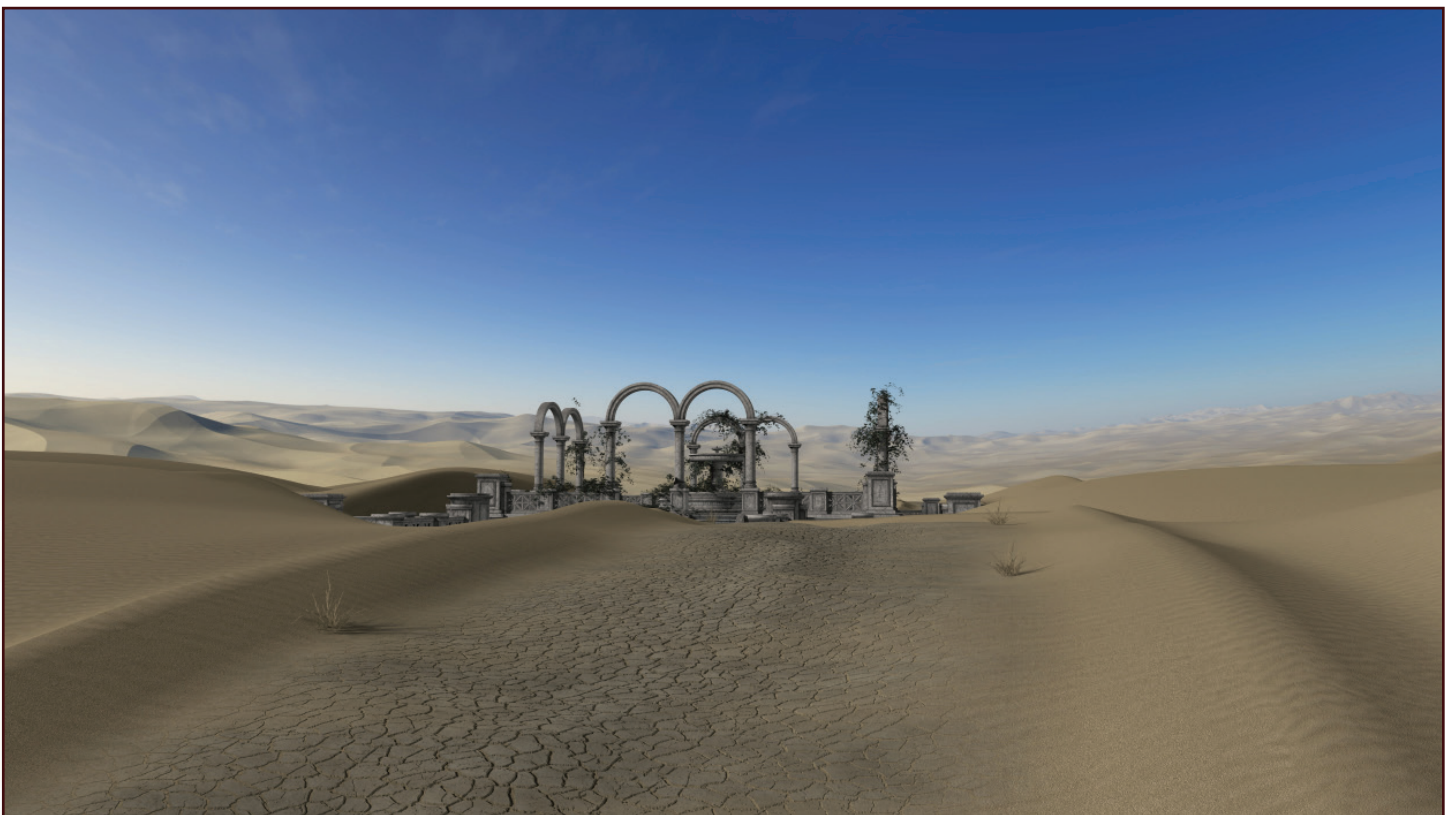
46–75	<p><b>Monarchy (Absolute):</b> A group of blood relatives rules the land with ultimate authority vested in one or two persons known as the monarch. This individual's power is absolute, though the crown may vest some jurisdiction in others. In patriarchal societies, the eldest male descendent of the previous leader functions as the monarch, assuming the title of king, sultan, caliph, sheik, or another suitable designation. In a matriarchy, the oldest female descendent performs the same role as the state's queen, empress, or other lofty heading. The monarch's spouse, typically hailing from a neighboring royal family or a distant relative, functions solely as a consort, preventing the surviving spouse from inheriting the throne when the monarch dies. Younger siblings, living parents, and children undertake other civic and religious duties within the state, while extended family members also enjoy the trappings of nobility.</p>
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76–85	<p><b>Monarchy (Constitutional):</b> In this system, the monarch shares authority with the aristocracy or another group of individuals entrusted to oversee the crown's decisions. The monarch's authority may range from nearly absolute with few restrictions to a mere figurehead. Regardless of the delineation, the nobility plays a prominent role in society and government.</p>
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Die Roll	Political System
86–95	<p><b>Tribal:</b> This society lacks any formal government. Instead, a familial patriarch, matriarch, or a family council usually consisting of the group's elders presides over their individual clans who may live cooperatively or competitively with other bloodlines in a shared community or as parts of smaller, rival communities dwelling close together. Military might more than lineage frequently determines an individual's status within the tribe.</p>

96–00	<p><b>Autocracy:</b> A single individual who seized control of the state through bloodless or violent means wields absolute power over the people. This individual may have attained this position from a predecessor who was a family member or who handpicked this person as a successor. An autocrat often targets one or more segments of society as his or her sworn enemies, encouraging their subjects to take some punitive actions against the autocrat's real or imaginary foes.</p>
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As previously discussed, resources can be very scarce in the desert. A settlement springing up near a thriving oasis, a large river, or along the coast may have enough food and water to establish a permanent community. Humanoids dwelling far from a reliable source of water do not benefit from the same luxury. The GM may consult the following table to determine the people's lifestyle. When the characters encounter people close to a dependable and renewable water source, he may add +2d10 to the die roll. Conversely, he may subtract -2d10 from the die roll for individuals living far from any replenishable water source.



## DESERTLANDS

**Table 1–8: Lifestyle**

Die Roll	Lifestyle
<31	<b>Nomadic:</b> The people live exclusively off the land and are constantly on the move, never staying in the same location for more than one night. They are exclusively hunter-gatherers. To cover more ground in a single day, most nomadic peoples ride atop domesticated animals and frequently travel with large herds of livestock. Most share common lineage with their fellow travelers.
31–60	<b>Semi-nomadic:</b> These individuals have no permanent home, though they may settle down in one location for several days, weeks, or even a few months under the right conditions. Their movements usually coincide with seasonal changes, though they rarely revisit the same exact locale. Although they are predominately hunter-gatherers, they may engage in limited agricultural activities before moving on to their next destination. These individuals typically reside in mobile, temporary shelters they erect soon after their arrival.
61–80	<b>Semi-sedentary:</b> Although they construct permanent settlements, these people divide their time among a few predetermined locations based upon the seasons. They may spend several months in one favorable spot to raise crops, fish its bountiful waters, or hunt a herd of game animals traveling along a migratory route. While they may still be classified as hunter-gatherers, they spend a roughly equal amount of their time raising domesticated livestock, growing agricultural products, and engaging in commercial activities.
>80	<b>Sedentary:</b> The residents live in the same location year-round, where they farm the land, tend to their domesticated flocks, hunt game in the surrounding wilderness, and develop commercial enterprises. Trade routes, civic engineering projects, and a reliable water source can typically be found in a sedentary society.

After deciding how to populate the hot and dry desert, the GM may then move onto adventure ideas to challenge the characters. The next series of tables provide general plot ideas for desert stories as well as mysterious locales to serve as the backdrop for these tales.

**Table 1–9: Hot & Dry Desert Adventure Ideas**

1d20	Event
1	<b>Arak:</b> A rare bottle of the anise-flavored liquor recently surfaced. Local legends claim a powerful genie distilled the spirit centuries earlier and wants to reclaim the precious elixir from its current owner whose whereabouts were unknown until a desert nomad stumbled across a caravan and offered to sell the spirit to the caravan's leader in exchange for his prized camel. The beast's owner scoffed at the offer. When the caravan's leader awoke the following morning, he found his tent soaked in blood and the camel's decapitated head staring him in the face.
2	<b>Camel Race:</b> Intrigue abounds as several competitors get ready to challenge their camels' mettle in a test of speed. One participant plans to drug camel right the contest to increase the animal's stamina, while another conspires to read his bitter rival's came lame. Meanwhile, shrewd gamblers look for every advantage they can to determine the outcome.

1d20	Event
3	<b>Coup d'état:</b> A cabal of individuals assembles every week in a remote stretch of desert to update their progress and further their revolutionary designs to overthrow the current regime. The plotters defer to the judgment of their anonymous leader known only as The Slithering Viper. Despite formulating extensive plans detailing how they intend to cause their revolt, no one other than The Slithering Viper has any knowledge of their goals and objectives after they succeed with their plan.
4	<b>Cultists:</b> A violent sect worshipping a forbidden deity devises plans to disrupt a religious ceremony for the area's most prominent religion. The splintered and disorganized group emerged from prolonged dormancy only a few months earlier. Despite their ambitious agenda, the cultists' petty rivalries and competing interests within the organization preclude them from formulating a cohesive strategy, causing each cell to operate autonomously without any central direction.
5	<b>Dates:</b> Desert residents occasionally speak of "Shagra Laila," a date palm tree whose fruit allegedly grants the eater eternal life, though few believe the legend. Seeds supposedly harvested from one of its dates recently fell into the hands of a local purveyor of illicit goods who was found with a dagger in his back shortly after attaining them. After his murder, the seeds vanished into thin air, and the culprit — who also presumably now has the seeds — remains at large.
6	<b>Drought:</b> The prolonged absence of rainfall is a way of life in the desert, yet there is something unnatural about the recent lack of precipitation. While the rains have visited nearby areas, the clouds strangely dry up when they reach this stretch of the sands.
7	<b>Dunes:</b> A gigantic message scrawled onto the sands proclaims, "We are angry. Doom is coming." Oddly, there are no footprints in the dunes surrounding the writing, leading some to conclude a flying creature wrote the message. Rumors persist about the obliteration of a hedonistic town buried beneath the sands after its amoral citizens ran afoul of an aggrieved genie who condemned the community to eternal ruin.
8	<b>Harem:</b> A wealthy resident seeks beautiful courtesans to join his harem. The vain man only cares about his paramours' looks. Of course, he soon discovers looks can be very deceiving, and beauty is truly in the eyes of the beholder.
9	<b>Hookah:</b> After being neglected and unused for years, a group of young men and women who inhaled this device's intoxicating smoke experienced detailed visions of future events. When their story spread, the hookah vanished under dubious circumstances. Its present whereabouts remain unknown, but rumors persist that it fell into the hands of a disreputable fortune teller.
10	<b>Lost Caravan:</b> A caravan scheduled to pass by the area several days ago never arrived. Cursory searches of the surrounding area discovered camel tracks and some refuse, but nothing else. Rumors claim the shipment included contraband and other illicit goods, making it a prime target for opportunistic thieves. The same stories also assert that one caravan guard left the group after feigning illness to ambush the caravan along with his co-conspirators.

## HAZARDOUS HABITATS

1d20	Event
11	<p><b>Merchant:</b> Riding atop a camel, a trader from a distant land peddles exotic foods and rare delicacies at a steep discount. The eccentric man's motives for offering his wares at such an inexpensive price — as well as his origins — remain steeped in mystery. However, within hours, those who ingested his products begin to act oddly and experience increasingly disturbing psychedelic hallucinations.</p>
12	<p><b>Mirage:</b> Strange accounts about a mirage circulate among the people. The image lingers for a few seconds and then vanishes. Those who have seen it claim they witnessed a creature made of fire or water emerging from the illusory waters. Several witnesses claim to have been doused with a fine mist immediately after the mirage vanished.</p>
13	<p><b>Oasis:</b> A desert traveler recently stumbled upon a lush oasis several miles away. The refreshing pool of water seemingly emerged from the sands overnight, as others who passed by the area only a few days earlier failed to notice it. When observers drew closer, they saw small creatures with bald heads and pointed teeth lurking amid the reeds. One person saw a young boy running out of the oasis only to be cut down a fusillade of needles emanating from somewhere within the lush vegetation.</p>
14	<p><b>Poisoning:</b> Someone or something plans to poison the community's water supply as an act of revenge against the community as evidenced by the sudden disappearance of numerous datura plants growing in the region and the unexpected arrival of a highly skilled yet morally bankrupt apothecary.</p>
15	<p><b>Prophet:</b> Word spreads through the desert of a messianic prophet who wanders the dunes proselytizing converts to his new faith. The man rails against succumbing to the temptations of wealth and the admiration of beauty. He demands his followers divest themselves of their worldly possessions and take no actions to enhance their appearance. Whispers tell of something sinister about the alleged holy person.</p>
16	<p><b>Scripture:</b> While rummaging through a nearby cave, a local child discovered a jar containing four undiscovered pages of holy scripture. The scrolls are badly damaged and difficult to read, but the revelation threatens to challenge long held religious doctrines. The clergy claims the writings are forgeries or an elaborate hoax, while scholars affirm the documents' authenticity. The public remains fiercely divided on the subject, heating up passions on both sides of the debate.</p>
17	<p><b>Stele:</b> Fierce winds swept some dunes aside revealing an ancient stone stele bearing cryptic symbols and images. The only words carved onto the surface spell the name "Tudal Karasham's Code" in the dead language of a civilization lost to the sands centuries earlier. While the official historical records attribute the calamity to a natural disaster, rumors linger about a heretical king daring the gods to destroy his kingdom.</p>

1d20	Event
18	<p><b>Stallion:</b> Bitter rivals fight over ownership of a prized horse. Rumors say the animal can even speak a few words and runs faster than any other horse in the land. No one can say for sure when the beast arrived or the circumstances surrounding its appearance on the market.</p> <p><b>Water!</b> A previously unknown water source recently discovered in the nearby area is causing a tremendous stir among the locals who are squabbling over its ownership and usage rights. The young boy accidentally found the entrance to the subterranean aquifer while playing just outside the village. Unfortunately, the headstrong teenager never told anyone about the ominous gray stone that previously covered the hidden water source. The sculpture carved into the stone depicted a hideous humanoid creature with an octopus head, pincers for hands, and a mollusk shell covering its back.</p>
19	<p><b>Wedding:</b> The scions of two prominent families joyfully await their upcoming nuptials, but a jilted ex-lover intends to ruin the occasion by any means necessary. The groom's former fiancé was recently seen skulking about the kitchens and pantries only a few days ago. When challenged, the woman fled. In her haste, she dropped a small vial of unidentified gray powder.</p>
20	<p><b>Wedding:</b> The scions of two prominent families joyfully await their upcoming nuptials, but a jilted ex-lover intends to ruin the occasion by any means necessary. The groom's former fiancé was recently seen skulking about the kitchens and pantries only a few days ago. When challenged, the woman fled. In her haste, she dropped a small vial of unidentified gray powder.</p>

In the desert itself, many wonders and riches lay buried beneath the swirling sands. Although a desert explorer can travel for miles, days, or even weeks without happening upon another living creature, the dunes hold many secrets ripe for the taking. Beneath the sands are the ruins of lost cities, towns, temples, and palaces that the desert reclaimed over the centuries. Legends of dreadful artifacts, mountains of gold, and rare oddities whisper through the ages, weaving captivating tales of love, betrayal, heroism, and deceit.

But not all of the desert's marvels lay beneath the sand. Rumors speak of a great necropolis, a city of the dead, stretching for as far as the eye can see hidden somewhere in a remote part of the desert. Eons ago, the rulers of a mighty empire laid their god-kings to eternal slumber within its marbled walls. A few men claim to have happened upon the glorious tombs during their desert travels, but none has any evidence to prove it. Other great temples, fortresses, and citadels rise up from the thirsty ground and cast a long shadow over their claims. They are often the strongholds of forbidden religions, great generals, and mad wizards, who ventured into the desert to avoid the judgmental eyes of others and rule over their forsaken fiefdoms. The following table discusses some of the manmade wonders the adventurers may stumble upon during their trek through the hot and dry desert.

Table 1–10: Adventuring Sites

1d20	Location	1d20	Location
1	<p><b>Aqueduct:</b> Advanced civilizations erect these elevated channels made from stone or another waterproof material to transport water from its source to another location. This artificial river may lead adventurers to a previously undiscovered civilization or the remnants of a failed one. In this instance, the aqueduct crumbles into ruins at the perimeter of an enormous rounded dune.</p>	6	<p><b>Megalith:</b> A few dogged skeptics insist erosion created this 60-foot-high, 10-foot-square stone megalith towering over the blistering sand. They claim its uneven, featureless surface confirms their theory. Indeed, the monolith bears no visible marking, etching, or other telltale signs of humanoid handiwork, but its sheer size and conspicuous location amid an otherwise flat landscape belie its manmade origins. The megalith's extreme age leads most scholars to conclude the desert winds sandblasted the monument, permanently erasing any carvings or writing on its surface. These debates aside, the megalith's purpose and its secrets elude explorers at every turn. Yet, the occasional unexplained disappearance near the megalith fuels speculation that something can be found within the structure or beneath it.</p>
2	<p><b>Bent Pyramid (Tomb):</b> Erected solely to house the mortal remains of a ruler or other important individual, this stone monument ascends at a more acute angle at its base and then rises at a shallower angle at it approaches its zenith, giving the structure an odd, moderately rounded appearance. These structures are often structurally unsound. Although the decedent may be buried with their earthly treasures, creatures exploring the bent pyramid's narrow passages and cramped chambers may be subjected to collapses and cave-ins as well as its undead inhabitants or defenders.</p>	7	<p><b>Minaret:</b> A tall, slender tower adorned with colorful, geometric patterns rises 50 feet above the ground. An open balcony at the 40-foot mark overlooks the surrounding area. Deep gouges mar the structure's surface, implying it withstood an attack or siege. Despite its impressive size, the minaret rarely functions as a standalone building. Instead, it is usually an extension of a larger temple complex, military garrison, or royal palace. Therefore, explorers can access the structure supporting the minaret by climbing into the open balcony and then descending the narrow, spiral staircase within it.</p>
3	<p><b>Cave:</b> Carved into the side of a rock formation, this abscess grants relief against the oppressive heat and welcome respite from the sun's relentless pounding. Although originally created by natural processes, humanoid intervention greatly expanded the cool, underground cavern from a lone chamber into a network of tunnels and rooms burrowing into the earth. Clay pots, ceramic jars, metal tools, and other sundry items confirm humanoids previously inhabited the subterranean refuge. As the artery of passageways delves deeper into the ground, primitive paintings drawn onto the walls grow increasingly bizarre, abstract, and horrific. Bones and blood littering the edges imply something terrible happened here.</p>	8	<p><b>Monastery:</b> Deserts offer refuge and isolation for those seeking to withdraw from civilization and lead an ascetic lifestyle. This remote sanctuary exudes an aura of serenity. Its residents spend their days contemplating life's vast mysteries and honing their combat skills. However, something feels amiss. This lonely outpost seems peaceful and safe, but a nagging sensation of imminent danger gnaws at visitors' psyches. The residents' utter lack of emotion, the absence of any visible water source, and the oddly shaped dunes surrounding the compound hint at a terrible secret somewhere within the outwardly placid structure.</p>
4	<p><b>Corral:</b> Sophisticated desert kingdoms and commercial enterprises maintain draft animals at regular intervals alongside roads, highways, and other high traffic areas. Corrals almost always house at least several camels at any time with a lesser number of horses, mules, or donkeys. A small handful of corrals may also keep an exotic mount on hand for a special occasion or for an important guest. Corrals can be an ideal source for local gossip as well as a supply station for the right price, especially if the character expresses a willingness to investigate the mysterious disappearance of their prized breeding camel.</p>	9	<p><b>Necropolis:</b> Constructed from locally quarried stone or bricks, this city of the dead consists of mausoleums where the remains of the departed rest in luxurious comfort. The sprawling, desert complex also includes shrines honoring the gods of the underworld and memorials celebrating the lives of the departed interred within the necropolis' walls. To protect the site against tomb robbers, the architects frequently populate the buildings with constructs who eternally guard the graves. Despite these precautions, thieves almost inevitably breach the necropolis' defenses. The defilement often triggers unintended consequences as the dead rise from their graves to punish the trespassers and dissuade others from stealing their worldly goods.</p>
5	<p><b>Graveyard:</b> Numerous camel skulls and their arched vertebrae protrude through the sand and gravel along with the remains of several other beasts and desert vehicles. The logical presumption suggests that the camels and vehicles were part of a caravan caught off guard by a sudden catastrophe. Strangely, a thorough search of the area fails to unearth any humanoid remains. With the mystery deepening, the winds quickly intensify, lifting the grains of loose dirt and sand aloft where they coalesce into something vaguely humanoid.</p>		

## HAZARDOUS HABITATS

1d20	Location
10	<p><b>Obelisk:</b> Chiseled from sandstone and polished to a smooth finish, this 25-foot-tall obelisk stands alone amid the surrounding desolation. The featureless object may be part of a greater whole buried beneath the earth or a standalone monument erected for a forgotten purpose. Anyone who touches the manmade object feels a warm, comforting sensation, as if being cradled by a doting parent. In some cases, the individual must be forcibly separated from the obelisk, an act that generates significant protest from the aggrieved party.</p>

11	<p><b>Ruins:</b> Formerly fertile lands can succumb to desertification caused by natural processes or humanoid interference. Crumbling facades of razed buildings, partially destroyed roads, and scattered personal belongings confirm the settlement's existence and suggest the desert recently claimed the area. While the exact cause remains uncertain, the community's sudden abandonment and extensive damage points toward a catastrophic event as the catalyst for its rapid demise.</p>
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12	<p><b>Sculptures:</b> Carved into the face of an exposed rock formation, these bas-relief sculptures of a man and woman adorned in royal garb still lord over the dirt and gravel around them. The likenesses of the presumed king and his consort strike a dignified pose while gazing toward the east. The long-deceased monarchs' identities and the rationale for chiseling these sculptures in such a remote area defy explanation. Legends persist that the pair secretly hid a powerful object bound to the survival of their dynasty somewhere in the vicinity around the sculptures. Other tales claim the sculptures still gaze upon the item's location, though the stone images not only keep a wary eye on their prized possession but still guard it.</p>
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13	<p><b>Step Pyramid (Observatory):</b> Crafted from stone, this pyramid's outer walls consist of a series of equidistant steps rather than a smooth surface. The step pyramid rises at a consistent angle with a terrace at its apex. While it may be associated with a specific god or faith, the structure primarily serves as an observatory for charting the movements of the stars and planets through the night sky. Astronomers use this crucial information to create calendars and to predict the seasons, while others watch the skies to portend future events.</p>
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14	<p><b>Step Pyramid (Temple):</b> This version of the step pyramid usually has a more pronounced terrace at its zenith, where priests conduct religious rites and ceremonies for their followers. The step pyramid's interior may perform a variety of purposes including providing living quarters for the clergy, crypts for the deceased, and workrooms for the temple's staff, as well as its teams of artisans. Paintings, sculptures, and other artworks adorn the walls and other areas within the pyramid. Adventurers exploring an active temple encounter the deity's worshippers and extraplanar servants as well as a host of magical traps designed to safeguard its riches.</p>
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1d20	Location
15	<p><b>Step Pyramid (Tomb):</b> The step pyramid tomb served as the prototype for its successors, the bent pyramid followed by the true pyramid. Therefore, step pyramids used as tombs tend to be significantly older than their counterparts. While the observatory and temple use their terraced apex as functional space, the tomb foregoes external functionality for enhanced security. The tomb deters intruders with thick outer walls and a single sealed entrance. Constructs and undead guardian roam its tight spaces, giving the tomb an added layer of defense.</p>

16	<p><b>Tablets:</b> Four brick tablets embedded in an upright position bear strange runes, images, and symbols. The apparent message carved onto their surface defies any conventional modes of translation. The runes are not part of any known language. The images of beasts and celestial bodies adorning the surface have no recognizable meaning, and the geometric symbols of squares, triangles, rhomboids, and other multisided objects also comport nothing comprehensible. Nonetheless, the objects radiate magic, and intermittent eerie green lights pulsate around seemingly random runes, images, and symbols.</p>
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17	<p><b>Toll Station:</b> When encountered along a desert trail, road, or highway, a small garrison of toll collectors and troops representing the local authorities administer and safeguard the toll station against thieves and travelers attempt to evade paying the toll. The amount they demand and their methods of obtaining the levy depend upon the state or entity they represent. An authoritarian regime likely imposes crippling taxes and use heavy-handed tactics to extract a hefty toll from travelers. A state granting expanded rights to its citizens levies a modest fee from travelers and rarely resorts to violence to collect its fair share. A toll station found far off the beaten path is likely abandoned, though its existence indicates it once occupied a well-worn route, which could lead to an unexpected revelation.</p>
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18	<p><b>True Pyramid (Tomb):</b> The true pyramid is a precisely crafted architectural marvel. Its smooth outer walls ascend at a constant angle where they culminate in a golden apex. The structure houses the remains of an important individual, typically a god figure or other person of noble birth. Its inner workings feature steep, narrow passageways, and multiple burial chambers for its honored occupant and the immediate family. Magical constructs frequently guard the entrance and patrol the hallways to protect the pyramid's contents from thieves. An undisturbed true pyramid contains a massive treasury, but few tombs remain unscathed for more than a few decades after their construction.</p>
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19	<p><b>Underground Tomb:</b> Whether carved into the side of a hill or mountain, dug into the loose earth, or incorporated into the contours of a natural cavern, an underground tomb sacrifices strength for secrecy. It is not unusual for an architect to exile or even kill the laborers who built the tomb to prevent them from revealing its clandestine location. Similar to the necropolis, an individual subterranean complex may connect to other nearby burial sites.</p>
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## DESERTLANDS

1d20	Location
20	<b>Ziggurat:</b> This structure shares some common characteristics with the step pyramid, though unlike the latter whose outer walls ascend at a constant angle, the ziggurat incorporates terraced levels into its design. Most ziggurats have a religious function either as a temple or a holy site dedicated to a deity or a pantheon of gods. If the ziggurat is still active, clerics, worshippers, and otherworldly servants of the divine being inhabit its passageways and chambers. The undead spirits of those same individuals usually haunt an abandoned ziggurat.

Man's creations are not the only sites worthy of mention. Beautiful oases also dot the landscape providing welcome refuge for desert travelers and a bounty of undiscovered treasures for those brave enough to take them. Many of these bodies of water support small towns and villages that serve as vital waystations for traders and merchants traversing the desert sands in search of new commodities and markets for their wares. These intrepid souls are an excellent source of information and adventure, as they come into contact with many people from far-off lands and frequently require assistance to protect their goods against theft by marauders or more dangerous adversaries. Experienced desert travelers know that desert is not as lonely as it seems. Dark forces lurk among the dunes, and those that do not keep their wits about them become easy prey.

## Semi-arid Deserts

The semi-arid desert is a step down from the hot and dry desert in terms of temperature and moisture levels. The best real-world example of a semi-arid desert is the sagebrush area of the western United States. Summers are still warm and dry, but the daytime temperatures average around 80° Fahrenheit with occasional highs topping 100° Fahrenheit. Temperatures average around 50° Fahrenheit at night. Furthermore, condensation from the cooling temperatures forms dew, which is a vital source of water for the native plants and animals. Because there is more moisture in the ground than the hot and dry desert, semi-arid deserts do not experience the temperature extremes prevalent in the hot and dry desert. Rain is still a rare event, but when it does occur, it happens most often during the winter months. The rains are brief, but torrential. Lightning strikes may also accompany these thunderstorm cells, as they rumble across the land at breakneck speed.

Semi-arid deserts are less sandy than the hot and dry desert. Because semi-arid deserts receive and retain more moisture than their hot and dry counterparts, the soil is generally firmer, more fertile, and able to support a greater diversity of flora and fauna. Large trees and grasses are still a rarity, but shrubbery is more plentiful and varied than the hot and dry desert. There is also a greater abundance of animals here, particularly in the numbers of birds found in this biome. Lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, and underground reservoirs are still uncommon, but more prevalent than in the hot and dry deserts. These bodies of water sometimes expose veins of valuable metals inlaid in the surrounding rocks. It is not unusual to find rich deposits of copper, silver, or even gold near the small streams, brooks, and rivers rolling over this dusty and rocky terrain.

Semi-arid deserts lack the sandy dunes encountered in the hot and dry deserts. Indeed, the surfaces of these less-arid biomes more closely resemble those found in the grasslands than those associated with their warmer kin. The following table describes the terrain elements found within the surrounding 2d4 miles in the semi-arid desert. When consulting this table, the GM rolls percentile dice for each feature to determine if it is present in the area. One or more types of terrain and/or vegetation may coexist in the same general area, though certain features negate the effects of others as described in the following table. Difficult terrain, as described in this table, only applies to determining the actions a character can take when moving through an area containing this feature rather than its effect on the creature's speed.

**Table 1-11: Terrain Elements in the Semi-Arid Desert**

Terrain Element	Percentage Chance
Gravel <sup>a</sup>	30%
Undergrowth <sup>b</sup>	10%
Loose sand <sup>c</sup>	10%
Rock <sup>d</sup>	15%
Salt pan <sup>e</sup>	10%

<sup>a</sup> Gravel consists of small, loose rocks and stones resting atop a base of granular earth. If gravel is present, undergrowth and loose sand are not found in the same area. When collocated with rock and salt pans, the gravel sits atop either surface. Gravel has no effect on overland speed, but areas containing gravel are treated as difficult terrain, if applicable. If there are no other terrain features in the area, the area is instead covered by gravel.

<sup>b</sup> Undergrowth includes vines, roots, and soft-stemmed vegetation covering the ground. These plants cannot cohabitate areas with gravel, rock, or salt pans. Undergrowth has no effect on overland speed, but areas containing undergrowth are treated as difficult terrain, if applicable.

<sup>c</sup> Loose sand reduces overland speed and wheeled vehicle speed by half. Land vehicles whose chassis rests upon a long, narrow surface, such as blades, rails, skis, or similar devices move at half speed over this surface. When collocated with rock and salt pans, loose sand sits atop either surface. Areas containing loose sand are treated as difficult terrain, if applicable.

<sup>d</sup> Rock has no effect on overland speed. If rock is present, there cannot be a salt pan.

<sup>e</sup> Salt pans have no effect on overland speed and increase the speed of wheeled vehicles by one-quarter. Land vehicles whose chassis rests upon a long, narrow surface, such as blades, rails, skis, or similar devices move at three-quarters speed over this surface.

Walking across countless miles of featureless terrain quickly becomes an exercise in tedium. To spice up the adventurers' journey across the semi-arid desert, the GM may sprinkle in some of the fauna, flora, and minor random events from the following table. He or she may use these elements to keep the characters on their toes or to set the stage for a greater mystery.

**Table 1-12: Semi-arid Desert Fauna, Flora, and Random Events**

1d20	Encounter
1	An old man on the verge of death from dehydration repeatedly mumbles, "The motherlode, I found the motherlode in them thar hills." If revived, the prospector cannot recall any details about what he said, which may be truthful or utterly false.
2	Three coyote pups inexplicably abandoned by their mother incessantly howl for their missing parent.
3	The wind buffets a rope ending in a noose dangling from an overhanging tree limb. An overturned wooden stool rests at the base of the tree.
4	An empty iron coffer bearing the inscription "First Union Bank" rests atop the ground.
5	Blood covers the blade and handle of a rusty machete embedded into an agave plant.

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1d20	Encounter
6	Someone or something carved the words "olive oil" onto the trunk of a yucca tree.
7	An abandoned leather bag containing dozens of love letters between Annabelle and Francis is propped up against the base of a saguaro cactus. The correspondence offers no additional details about the lovers other than vague references to their clandestine affair.
8	Four jackrabbits skulk around a strange rock formation.
9	A nearby thrasher's nest contains what appears to be a polished silver egg.
10	A gold hourglass leans at the base of a dry wash. The glass is cracked, but it remains functional, and experimentation will reveal it has a 45-minute sand time. Any engineer or local merchant will instantly recognize the hourglass as a tool commonly employed by procurators and prostitutes — time being money — to fleece the common citizen. The value of the item, 20 gp, is 4 times the weight of the gold from which it was crafted.
11	Tumbleweed gently rolls along the ground.
12	A young boy claims he saw a jackelope run down a hole just a few minutes ago.
13	Two juvenile rattlesnakes bask in the sunlight atop a flat stone.
14	An owl perches atop a saguaro cactus.
15	Two teenagers squeeze the juice from agave leaves.
16	Someone placed a gob of wax onto a scorpion's stinger, preventing the animal from envenoming its prey.
17	Three tarantulas cautiously circle around a rusty spur.
18	A prickly pear cactus eerily resembles a flattened human face.
19	A scrap of parchment drifting in the breeze offers a reward for the capture of Boxcar Billy, a wanted cattle rustler.
20	Dust partially conceals a five-starred silver badge lying on the ground. The word "Sheriff" appears in the middle of the badge.

## Semiarid Desert Adventures

Semiarid deserts are rough-and-tumble worlds populated with hard men, headstrong women, and fearsome monsters that stalk the trackless wilderness in search of a fresh meal. Pockmarked throughout the rugged hills and plateaus scarring this arid land are secret caves, hidden valleys, and lost mountains concealing the mysteries of bygone civilizations. Some succumbed to the unforgiving environment, others fell at the hands of rival states, and a few disappeared without a trace. Small towns and villages with varying degrees of civil authority populate the sprawling landscape, offering opportunities for would-be adventurers to make their mark in this world exploring the undiscovered country around these settlements or defending the inhabitants against the desert's encroaching denizens or its own citizens. The following tables describe the type of people adventurers encounter in the semiarid desert.

Life in the semiarid desert usually appeals to a more eclectic band of individuals than in the hot and dry desert. The people dwelling here often hail from different lands, toting their culture, religion, and customs with them. As a general rule of thumb, smaller settlements tend to be more

homogenous than larger metropolises. When adventurers encounter humanoids in a predetermined location or in a randomly generated community near a road (see **Table 1–24**), the population size affects its demographic makeup as reflected in the following table.

**Table 1–13: Population Effect on Demographics**

Population	Modifier
Fewer than 50	–4d10
51–200	–2d10
201–2,000	none
2,001–5,000	+2d10
5,001–15,000	+4d10
15,001–30,000	+6d10
31,000+	+8d10

After determining the modifier based upon the population size, the GM may then apply that modifier to the following table to determine the demographics of a semiarid desert community.

**Table 1–14: Humanoid Demographics**

Die Roll	Racial Makeup
<10	<b>Exclusively Homogenous:</b> Everyone is a member of the same humanoid race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable.
11–25	<b>Predominately Homogenous:</b> Almost everyone is a member of the same humanoid race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable.
26–40	<b>Largely Homogenous:</b> The majority are members of the same humanoid race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable.
41–60	<b>Neutral:</b> One race, religion, or ethnicity, if applicable, outnumbers all others but does not comprise a majority. Nonetheless, their culture, traditions, and beliefs define society, though other peoples exert lesser degrees of influence as well.
61–75	<b>Moderately Diverse:</b> Some races, faiths, and ethnicities, if applicable, are more prevalent than others, but none greatly outnumbers all others. The traditions of several races, religions, and ethnicities combine forces to determine society's overall cultural makeup.
76–95	<b>Largely Diverse:</b> A multitude of races, religions, and ethnicities make up the largely integrated population. The fusion of backgrounds creates a unique society embodying traits borrowed from numerous traditions, though some perspectives influence the community more than others.
>95	<b>Completely Diverse.</b> Nearly every race, faith, and ethnicity imaginable can be found among the population. Most citizens are multicultural and multilingual, embracing their own customs as well as adopting those acquired from neighboring peoples.

## DESERTLANDS

The following table modifies the results on **Table 1–16** based upon the community's demographics.

**Table 1–15: Demographics Modifiers**

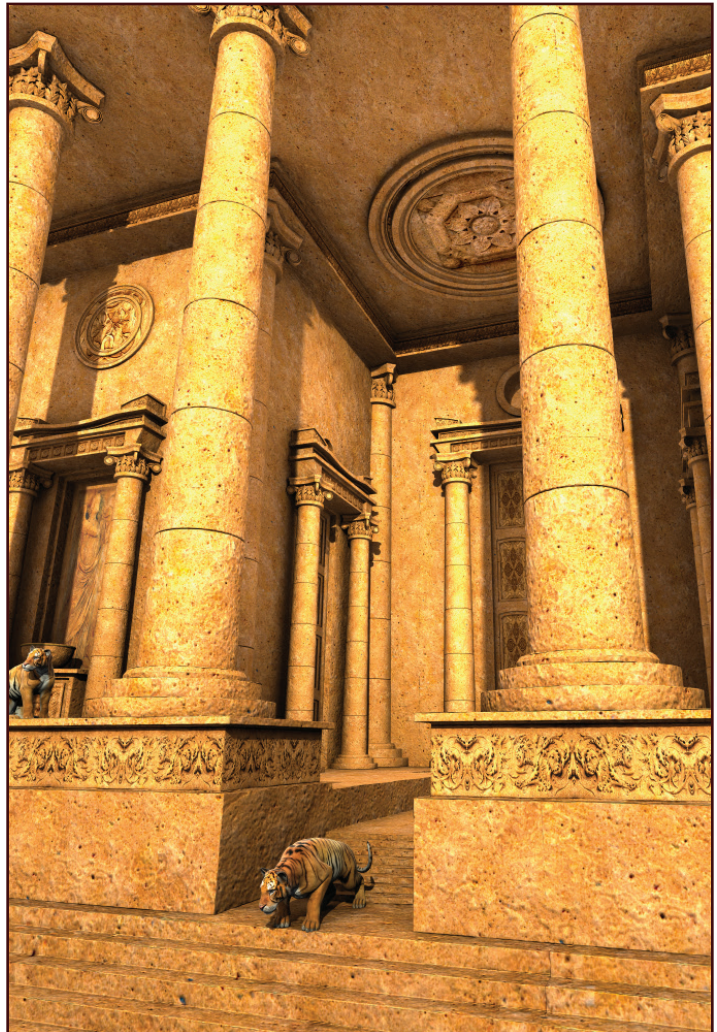
Demographic	Modifier
Exclusively homogenous	–5d10
Predominately homogenous	–3d10
Largely homogenous	–1d10
Neutral	0
Moderately diverse	+1d10
Largely diverse	+3d10
Completely diverse	+5d10

Although all humanoids see the same world, every individual perceives it differently. Some easily accept those who do not look like them, believe what they do, or share some common ancestry. Others view their surroundings through narrow, biased lenses. Personal prejudices govern their outlook leading them to ostracize any who do not conform with their expectations. The GM may use the following table to determine the prevailing attitudes toward others within and outside the community.

**Table 1–16: Humanoid Attitudes**

Die Roll	Attitude
<06	<b>Segregated:</b> Society is strictly divided along racial, religious, or ethnic lines with the more populous groups assuming a dominant role. They treat minorities as inferiors, relegating them to subservient status. Civil or religious authorities strictly enforce boundaries between divergent populations through threats, intimidation, and if necessary, violence.
06–15	<b>Prejudiced:</b> Although some integration takes place, racial, religious, or ethnic tension hangs heavy in the air. Many people hold persistent, deep-seated opinions sowing mistrust between members of different groups. Residents keep a wary eye on those different than themselves, perceiving them as second-class citizens who pose a constant threat to their supposedly superior way of life.
16–35	<b>Biased:</b> Few individuals publicly express their misgivings about other people, yet it is difficult to ignore the undercurrent of bigotry bubbling beneath the surface. Although people can move freely about without restriction, subtle acts of discrimination still permeate society. Interactions between different sets of people may seem courteous and polite on the surface, words, gestures, and body language belie the person's compartmentalized suspicions.
36–60	<b>Indifferent:</b> An indifferent society strives to maintain the society's <i>status quo</i> , sweeping any pervasive prejudices under the proverbial rug. Gradual modification of existing attitudes can occur, though some find its pace too plodding for their liking. Residents rarely let their biases govern their actions and perceptions of other people, yet few go out of their way to welcome those different than themselves.

Die Roll	Attitude
61–85	<b>Tolerant:</b> Multiple languages, religions, and cultures mingle together, though members of the same race, religion, or ethnicity feel more comfortable with others of their kind than outsiders. A live-and-let-live attitude best summarizes a tolerant society's outlook toward the community at large, though some innate biases linger in certain circles.
86–95	<b>Accepting:</b> Members of different races, religions, and ethnicities live side by side in almost completely integrated communities. Familiarity forms the cornerstone of an accepting society. However, those hailing from unfamiliar places or arriving with previously unseen customs encounter some misgivings and suspicion from startled observers.
>96	<b>Welcoming:</b> Society welcomes immigrants and visitors, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity into the fold. Newcomers are encouraged to quickly assimilate into their surroundings as they adapt to their neighbors' customs and traditions while adding their uniqueness to the mix. Indeed, most members perceive themselves as citizens first and foremost, relegating association with their race, religion, or ethnicity to a secondary status. Prejudice persists in some isolated corners, but the overwhelming majority strongly condemn such viewpoints and celebrate diversity.



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Religion holds less sway in the semiarid deserts. The rough-and-tumble populace displays a strong sense of self-reliance, placing their trust in their own ingenuity, grit, and determination rather than that of the gods. Some societies select their own leaders, while others rely upon the wisdom of their elders or fall under the thumb of a strongman or woman. The GM may consult the following table to determine the political system governing a semiarid desert community.

**Table 1-17: Political System**

Die Roll	Political System
01-10	<b>Autocracy:</b> A single individual who seized control of the state through bloodless or violent means wields absolute power over the people. This individual may have attained this position from a predecessor who was a family member or who handpicked this person as their successor. An autocrat often targets one or more segments of society as his or her sworn enemies, encouraging their subjects to take some punitive actions against the autocrat's real or imaginary foes.
11-30	<b>Elected Official:</b> The local residents select an individual to serve as the settlement's leader. The person may wield absolute authority or share civic responsibilities with a council of fellow citizens. The elected official, known as a mayor, magistrate, or similar title, typically defers judicial matters to a judge or sheriff appointed by the elected official.
31-35	<b>Gerontocracy:</b> While birthright, wealth, or political connections normally determine membership in the ruling class, this political system grants supreme authority to the community's eldest residents regardless of their gender or social status. Age is a relative term based upon the person's longevity for their race rather than their age measured in years. Because these individuals cannot bequeath their station to a designated heir or successor, they often rule in a just manner, relying upon their extensive life experiences to better the lives of their subjects. Nonetheless, exceptions exist, especially for those who fear death and pursue every avenue to defy their own mortality.
36-45	<b>Monarchy (Absolute):</b> A group of blood relatives rules the land with ultimate authority vested in one or two persons known as the monarch. This individual's power is absolute, though the crown may vest some jurisdiction to others. In patriarchal societies, the eldest male descendent of the previous leader functions as the monarch, assuming the title of king, sultan, caliph, sheik, or another suitable designation. In a matriarchy, the oldest female descendent performs the same role as the state's queen, empress, or other lofty heading. The monarch's spouse, typically hailing from a neighboring royal family or a distant relative, functions solely as a consort, preventing the surviving spouse from inheriting the throne when the monarch dies. Younger siblings, living parents, and children undertake other civic and religious duties within the state, while extended family members also enjoy the trappings of nobility.
46-50	<b>Monarchy (Constitutional):</b> In this system, the monarch shares authority with the aristocracy or another group of individuals entrusted to oversee the crown's decisions. The monarch's authority may range from nearly absolute with few restrictions to a mere figurehead. Regardless of the delineation, the nobility plays a prominent role in society and government.

Die Roll	Political System
51-60	<b>Oligarchy:</b> A group of individuals determined by birthright, military might, or personal wealth oversee all matters of state and economic development. The oligarchy's views toward personal freedoms range from moderately tolerant to oppressive, with most examples skewing closer to the latter option than the former. The oligarchy's members along with their family and friends, if they choose, act with impunity while those outside the inner circle must abide by the oligarchy's edicts. On some occasions, individuals outside the elite group who are fortunate enough to amass wealth under this system may be granted membership into the oligarchy.
61-65	<b>Theocracy (Clerical State):</b> In a clerical state, the clergy interprets the deity's or deities' commands and codifies them as law. Priests enforce the gods' edicts, allowing them to preside over all religious and secular matters. Unlike the god state, the priests may select one of its members to serve as its high priest, a role granting the individual supreme authority but not divinity.
66-75	<b>Theocracy (God Figure):</b> All civil authority derives from a divine source. In the case of a god figure, political power rests in the hands of one individual who may be a living deity, a demigod, or a representative chosen by one or more gods. The god figure wields absolute authority over all matters of state, including serving as the head of its church.
76-80	<b>Tribal:</b> This society lacks any formal government. Instead, a familial patriarch, matriarch, or a family council usually consisting of the group's elders presides over their individual clans who may live cooperatively or competitively with other bloodlines in a shared community or as parts of smaller, rival communities dwelling close together. Military might, more than lineage, frequently determines an individual's status within the tribe.

Although farming still poses many challenges, the resilient earth is better suited to support plants and grazing animals than the sands forming the iconic dunes found in the hot and dry desert. Nonetheless, resources remain scarce, prompting some communities to choose a nomadic lifestyle over a sedentary existence, especially in regions lacking any replenishable water sources. When the characters encounter people close to a dependable and renewable water source, he may add +2d10 to the die roll. Conversely, he may subtract -2d10 to the die roll for individuals living far from any replenishable water source. The GM may consult the following table to determine their lifestyle.

**Table 1-18: Lifestyle**

Die Roll	Lifestyle
<21	<b>Nomadic:</b> The people live exclusively off the land and are constantly on the move, never staying in the same location for more than one night. They are exclusively hunter-gatherers. To cover more ground in a single day, most nomadic peoples ride atop domesticated animals and frequently travel with large herds of livestock. Most share common lineage with their fellow travelers.

## DESERTLANDS

Die Roll	Lifestyle
21–45	<b>Semi-nomadic:</b> These individuals have no permanent home, though they may settle down in one location for several days, weeks, or even a few months under the right conditions. Their movements usually coincide with seasonal changes, though they rarely revisit the same exact locale. Although they are predominately hunter-gatherers, they may engage in limited agricultural activities before moving on to their next destination. These individuals typically reside in mobile, temporary shelters they erect soon after their arrival.
46–65	<b>Semi-sedentary:</b> Although they construct permanent settlements, these people divide their time among a few predetermined locations based upon the seasons. They may spend several months in one favorable spot to raise crops, fish its bountiful waters, or hunt a herd of game animals traveling along a migratory route. While they may still be classified as hunter-gatherers, they spend a roughly equal amount of their time raising domesticated livestock, growing agricultural products, and engaging in commercial activities.
>66	<b>Sedentary:</b> The residents live in the same location year-round, where they farm the land, tend to their domesticated flocks, hunt game in the surrounding wilderness, and develop commercial enterprises. Trade routes, civic engineering projects, and a reliable water source can be typically found in a sedentary society.

Inspiration comes from many sources. An abandoned object, a cryptic message, or the discovery of an obviously inconspicuous item can set the characters on a journey to adventure. During their travels through the semiarid desert, the GM may consult the following table to set one of these tales into motion.

**Table 1–19: Semiarid Desert Adventure Ideas**

1d10	Event
1	<b>Bandolier:</b> Scavengers stripped the flesh and clothing from an unfortunate skeleton with its skull positioned facedown against the ground. Its lone possession is a weathered, leather bandolier wrapped tightly around its shoulder. The skeleton's bony finger still grasps a single unspent cartridge tucked into the ammunition holder.
2	<b>Heist:</b> Planning and sophistication are on full display as a brazen band of thieves conducts a daytime robbery. In the open desert, they commandeer a passing stagecoach using a series of orchestrated diversions to steer the vehicle into an ambush. If the heist takes place in a settlement, part of the gang goes into the establishment to rob the owners and unlucky patrons while the remaining bandits wait outside with horses at the ready to stage their swift getaway.

1d10	Event
3	<b>Maize:</b> It took countless generations for semiarid desert dwellers to domesticate corn into a viable food crop. The mutations responsible for creating edible maize occasionally take an unexpected turn, especially when supernatural forces intervene, as in the case of this solitary plant surrounded by gnawed bones. Fairy tales tell of a cornstalk capable of uprooting itself to devour naughty young children, leading some residents to speculate the legends of a carnivorous maize plant may be true.
4	<b>Mining Pan:</b> A corroded pan is partially buried beneath the dirt along the edge of a dry stream bed. Tattered strips of canvas litter the ground around the abandoned mining pan. A few stray nuggets containing flecks of some reflective metal or gemstone catch a few glimmers of sunlight.
5	<b>Outlaws:</b> Wanted in the surrounding territories for a series of robberies and murders, this band of outlaws takes refuge in the rough-and-tumble semiarid desert. With such a high price on their heads, these criminals never spend more than one night in the same place, though starvation and boredom occasionally spur them to set foot in a neighboring settlement to procure provisions, release their pent-up aggression, and sample the local fare.
6	<b>Stagecoach:</b> The wooden rear wheels of this luxurious vehicle inexplicably came undone, leaving the stagecoach resting on its rear axle. Someone or something cut the reins, tore off its curtains, and pilfered the cargo hold affixed to its undercarriage. Surprisingly, the interior displays only one sign of a struggle: a partially torn handkerchief with the monogrammed initials "JRK."
7	<b>Superstition:</b> Legends claim that those who catch a glimpse of their shadow at high noon while traveling through the desert must offer an object of great personal value to the land before sunset to avoid running afoul of Death. Those who ignore the superstition perish before dawn.
8	<b>Tequila:</b> A bloody palmprint stains the surface of an ornate bottle of the distilled spirit lying atop the gravel. Something obviously disturbed the loose stones in the area around the discarded bottle.
9	<b>Traffickers:</b> Mescaline, a chemical derived from the peyote cactus as well as several other species, invites a criminal element into many communities. Although popular in some remote areas for religious ceremonies and medicinal purposes, civic authorities frown upon its use in most settlements. The hallucinogen's legality is murky at best in many locales. Therefore, its purveyors and distributors sell the substance on the local black market, often bringing the traffickers into conflict with the authorities as well as rival criminals intent on getting their lucrative piece of the action.

## HAZARDOUS HABITATS

1d10	Event
10	<p><b>Vision Quest:</b> Three disheveled teenage boys aimlessly wander across a patch of remarkably fertile desert soil. Although the earth appears parched and dry, grasses and other plants thrive in the area. The obviously intoxicated young men claim their "vision quest" breathed life into the area, though a viable explanation for how that occurred eludes them.</p>

Semi-arid deserts also offer a mixed bag of intriguing, manmade locales. Many reflect the frontier spirit found in these forbidding lands. The GM may consult the following table to randomly determine an exciting adventuring site in the semi-arid desert.

**Table 1–20: Adventuring Sites**

1d10	Location
1	<p><b>Carving:</b> Images of beasts, celestial bodies, and strange creatures etched onto the rocky face of an exposed cliff indicate that this remote site holds some special significance for the people who created the artwork. The creatures and heavenly objects depicted in the scenes follow no discernable patterns or logical progressions, suggesting that they may have been carved onto the surface at different times by multiple individuals for varying purposes. Despite these competing theories, locals almost unanimously agree that the carvings mark the entrance to a hidden complex built into the rock face or somewhere underneath it. Although no one has found any definitive proof of a concealed doorway or structure, anecdotal tales of shifting walls, loose stones, and secret compartments keep the tales of strange tidings alive and well within the local communities.</p>

1d10	Location
2	<p><b>Cenote:</b> The fresh water flowing in this aquifer would be a precious commodity in any biome, but in the desert, it is priceless. The underground reservoir acts as the primary water supply for settlements cropping up around it, though competition for the lifegiving fluid can be fierce. One community may attempt to monopolize the supply, restricting access to the cenote unless their rivals pay an exorbitant fee for water rights. Not surprisingly, some individuals and settlements muscle their way to the front of the line through brute force, subterfuge, and extortion, though not without some resistance. The semi-arid desert's monstrous denizens also view the cenote as an opportunity to advance their nefarious plans by claiming the watering hole as their own or fouling its pristine waters with contaminants.</p>

3	<p><b>Cliff Dwelling:</b> These recesses cut into the faces of rocky hills and mountains serve as crude homes for the intrepid residents. The abodes provide ample shelter against the sun, while their typically elevated location modestly cools the interior and facilitates air circulation. An inhabited pueblo consists of several families dwelling cooperatively in this harsh environment. On the other hand, unquiet spirits almost certainly haunt a haunted settlement, especially when the inhabitants perished at the hands of others.</p>
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## DESERTLANDS

### 1d10 Location

**4 Farmstead/Distillery:** Although growing conditions are harsh, some plants and domesticated animals can weather the scorching temperatures and aridity. Farmers harvest plants ranging from such mundane crops as corn and legumes to more exotic fare such as agave. This farmstead specializes in the production of the latter crop. Its owner claimed land in a remote location that offers security and secrecy. Alcohol is almost universally legal, yet its proclivity for addiction prompt some outraged citizens to take the law into their own hands. Spirits distilled from the agave plant garner acclaim, but also attract thieves who target the rarest and tastiest bottles of the intoxicating beverage. Hired mercenaries or adventurers defend the farmstead against its outspoken detractors and criminals.

**5 Ghost Town:** Semiarid deserts hold rich deposits of precious metals and minerals. When word of a lucrative discovery reaches receptive ears, prospectors from far and wide descend upon the site like buzzards to a rancid carcass. The newcomers quickly construct residences and businesses to house and supply the throngs of miners digging in the region. However, when they exhaust the vein, the residents abandon the settlement and move elsewhere, leaving dilapidated ruins in their wake. Of course, not everyone made their fortune here. Greed drives people to commit horrific atrocities, and the victims of these grievous crimes rarely leave their old stomping grounds willingly. Some seek the riches denied them, while others plot their revenge.

**6 Mound:** A hemispherical mound sculpted from packed earth and dried mud stands alone amid the desolation of rocky soil and gravel surrounding it. The arched portal granting access to its interior confirms its manmade origins. This structure usually functions as a permanent abode or as a tomb for an important figure. Paintings, sculptures, and other decorative items may adorn its walls. Hidden panels built into the floor connect the ground level with subterranean chambers beneath the structure, especially when the mound serves as the final resting place for someone of great significance. In this circumstance, lifeless guardians such as constructs and undead defend the decedent and his treasures from robbers and defilers.

**7 Red Rocks:** Presumably the remnants of an ancient river canyon, these large, oddly-shaped monoliths stand atop a mesa overlooking the surrounding desert. Renowned for their remarkable beauty, these natural landmarks serve as an ideal gathering spot for the local people. Some use the locale as an outdoor observatory, while others revere the stones as the backdrop for an open-air temple. Its strategic location makes it a coveted hideout for outlaws and bandits who can survey the region from afar. Ideal vantage points allow fugitives to see and elude their pursuers, and brigands can scope out potential victims entering their territory.

### 1d10 Location

**8 Saloon:** Renowned for pouring drinks, serving food, and spreading gossip, the saloon also functions as a casino and bordello in some instances. The added services greatly expand the clientele and the establishment's coffers but come with a heavy price in terms of the nefarious characters populating the building and the arguments fueled by alcohol, raging libidos, and high-stakes action. Despite the dangers of navigating shady people and hot tempers, the saloon's patrons and owner offer adventuring opportunities for the stout of heart.

**9 Standing Stones:** Although it varies greatly in height and width, this mud-brick, stone, and mortar structure stretches more than a mile in length. On average, it is 6 feet high, ranging from 6 inches in height in some spots to 25 feet high at its zenith. Its width fluctuates between 4 inches and 2 feet, with the majority skewing toward 1 foot in width. Rubble surrounding portions of the crude wall suggest it sustained extensive damage during a natural catastrophe or a manmade calamity. Scholars generally estimate its anonymous architects erected the Standing Stones centuries earlier for some unknown purposes. Many speculate its builders erected it as a protective barrier, but there are no contemporaneous written records or oral traditions indicating that anyone inhabited the area at that time. If the site were the scene of a great conflict, the land left only one clue for future generations to uncover: a massive scorch mark near the Standing Stones' nadir that seems to emanate from underneath the parched soil rather than from on top of it.

**10 Tumbleweed:** The air is deathly still, yet hundreds of tumbleweeds roll along the ground orbiting around a central point as if buffeted by an imperceptible current. The foul stench of rot and decay accompany the dead plant matter. When a creature even as small as a tiny mouse enters the tumbleweeds' radius, the balls of fibrous materials mysteriously converge around the intruder, attempting to dissuade them from trespassing by brushing against them. An interloper who ignores the warning and proceeds toward the epicenter of activity feels the dirt beneath them shift, heralding the disinterment of something unearthly.

## Coastal Deserts

Coastal deserts are far less stable and more complex than deserts found in interior regions. They are typically found along the edge of a continent, where several natural forces including the prevailing wind patterns, ocean currents, and atmospheric forces converge to create this unique biome. The Atacama Desert of South America is the best example of a coastal desert. The weather in these deserts is extremely volatile. Violent windstorms and fierce electrical storms are common during the winter months when temperatures can drop well below freezing during the overnight hours. In addition, ultraviolet radiation is extremely high, which makes it near impossible to move about during the day without ample skin and eye protection.

## Water

Water is the desert's most valuable commodity. A pound of gold, silver, or precious stones is worth less than a few drops of the life-sustaining fluid on the tongue of a thirsty man. Water is the mother of all civilization in the desert. Cities, towns, and villages cannot exist without a reliable source of water nearby. It draws political boundaries as competing factions vie to discover new and secure existing sources of water while overseeing its distribution to their thirsty subjects. It shapes the desert's economy as vital trade routes follow its path through the unforgiving landscape, enabling the desert's inhabitants to exchange goods with people from distant lands and forge commercial and social bonds that would never exist otherwise. Water is the force that binds the desert and its inhabitants together.

## Rivers and Lakes

Most large desert cities exist because of an easily accessible and sustainable body of water. Rivers and lakes are the most readily apparent and abundant water supply in the desert. Their banks are the most fertile tracts of land found in the desert, enabling important food crops such as wheat, rice, and other grains to thrive in this warm and moderately moist environment. Grasses and low shrubs also grow well in this soil and can extend for miles inland. Desert rivers typically originate from somewhere beyond the desert's borders. For example, the Nile River originates in distant Lake Victoria and carves a path through portions of the Sahara Desert before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. Others begin outside the desert but lack a sufficient volume of water to endure the long trek across the sands. The intense sunlight, blistering heat, and thirsty soil take their toll, as evaporation and absorption bring the river's journey to an end within the desert. Waterways originating within the desert are usually short-lived, stretching out for several miles before petering out and yielding to the desert sands.

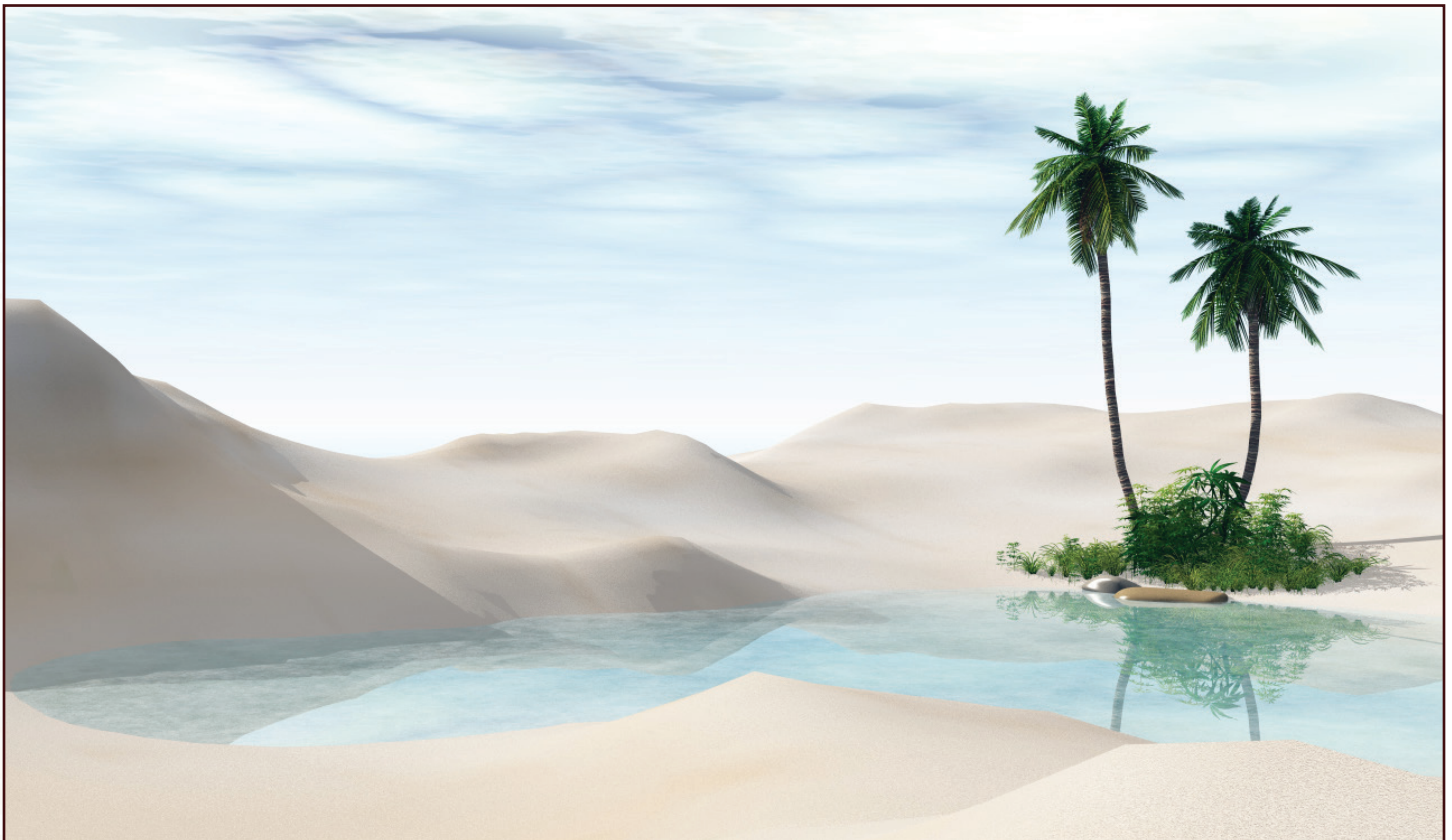
In some circumstances, the river may divide into many smaller tributaries, turning vast areas of desert land into arable farmland. These regions are known as deltas. Most are small, covering several hundred square miles, but an extremely large delta such as the Nile Delta can cover an area of 10,000 square miles. Naturally, an immense delta or a large river

is the easiest body of water to locate in the desert. With grasses stretching for tens or even hundreds of miles from the water itself, desert travelers can follow the trail of plants and animals to the water source. In addition, most of the desert's population takes up residence within or alongside these fertile grounds. Civilization always leaves its unmistakable mark on the land. Roads, way stations, and other manmade structures all eventually lead to a source of water.

## Oases

Most deserts lack such obvious sources of water, so inhabitants must look elsewhere to find the precious commodity. Mighty rivers and massive lakes reveal telltale signs of their presence, but smaller bodies of water leave only subtle clues to their existence. The most famous and celebrated of these is the legendary oasis. Oases are formed by the collaboration of several phenomena. As a rule, water sinks to its lowest level. Water from higher elevations descends through permeable materials, such as sand, and literally hits rock bottom, which is normally a layer of bedrock or stone that traps the water and prevents it from seeping deeper into the ground. This layer of subterranean water is known as the local water table. It is the same scientific principle seen while digging a hole in the sand on a beach. Even though the waves do not reach the hole, water fills it when its depth reaches a certain level. The same concept applies in the desert.

Erosion is the next ingredient needed to create an oasis. Over time, wind and the desert's occasional torrential rains erode the sand cover and create a depression in the ground. When the depression reaches the depth of the local water table, the hydraulic pressure forces the water to the surface and gives birth to an oasis. Moisture seeps into the surrounding soil and is ready to support plant life. As local insects, animals, and birds discover and frequent the watering hole, they bring seeds and other lifegiving materials with them. Humans are rarely far behind, and they too contribute to the oasis's biodiversity by planting date palm trees, other fruit-bearing trees, edible plants, and grains at the site. The oasis becomes the hub of activity for the local residents — humans, animals, and monsters alike. Finding an oasis in the open desert is a much more difficult proposition than discovering a river or other large body of water and its surrounding environs. Although the largest oases can encompass an area of up to 50 square miles, most are significantly smaller. Locating a



## Alternate Water Sources

1-square-mile oasis in a 10,000-square-mile area of sand and gravel seems like a fool's quest, but seasoned desert travelers are up to the challenge. Experience and intuition guide them on their way.

Several clues can lead the desert traveler to an oasis. Wildlife is an excellent source of information about the nearest watering hole. Although they leave no tracks, birds are the easiest creatures to spot and hear in the desert skies, and they are a reliable indicator of an oasis's location. Birds typically fly to and from the oasis in the early morning and late evening hours. Intrepid adventurers who rise before dawn and await the sun's first light may catch a glimpse of passing birds and follow them toward water. Land animals also provide valuable insight about an oasis's location, but spotting them is somewhat more challenging. Most desert animals are active only at night when the desert is much cooler and pitch black. Furthermore, a bird flying overhead may be visible from several miles away, while a small animal traversing the undulating dunes may be visible from only 100 feet away or even less. Finding a small target in the darkness presents many more problems than finding an airborne target in broad daylight. Still, a skilled tracker can pick up a trail of footprints or a fresh scent leading him and his party toward an oasis. Plants and humanoids are the final pieces in this puzzle. Date palm trees can soar up to 75 feet above the desert's surface, allowing observers to spot the distinctive trees from a fair distance away depending upon the intervening terrain. Trade routes often spring up close to oases as well, so the telltale evidence of a desert caravan passing through the area is a sure sign that the trail leads to or from an accessible water source capable of sustaining a large group of people and their domesticated animals. In many respects, oases are the refilling stations of the desert. All traffic in the open desert eventually leads to or from one.

## Other Locations

Finding water on the desert's surface is difficult enough but locating it underground or in unusual places is even tougher. Fortunately, the laws of nature are constant and universal. Water still sinks to the lowest point even if that means seeping underground. The most obvious subterranean location is beneath the surface of a dried riverbed or channel. Deserts see little rain, but the rare thunderstorms that roll across the parched landscape unleash torrential rains in a condensed period of time. Although it seems like an oxymoron, the deluge of water triggers flash floods that collect in channels known as wadis. When the rains end, the parched land and the blazing sun reclaim the water, but moisture sometimes lingers a few feet below the surface. Like oases, wadis form in the lowest elevation in the area, but they are still higher than the local water table so the water is not forced up to the surface like an oasis. Accessing the water found beneath a wadi requires some digging, but it is a serviceable, short-term source of drinking water, if it exists beneath the channel.

Similar to wadis, underground rivers and aquifers are another source of water commonly used by city engineers and planners to provide a consistent water supply to a planned development. Unlike oases and wadis, subterranean water reservoirs are not visible from the surface and require the use of a well or a pump to bring the water to the surface. Because of this limitation, reliance upon an underground water supply is not feasible at higher elevations. Water sinks to its lowest level, so a settlement atop a hill may have to drill a well several hundred feet deep to reach an underground aquifer if one even exists at the site. To avoid this pitfall, engineers prefer building most cities and towns dependent upon a subterranean water network in a low-lying area, most typically at the bottom of a valley surrounded by large mountains. This location solves several logistical problems. Because of its low elevation, the local water table is much closer to the surface than at a higher elevation, so residents do not have to dig deep into the earth to reach water. In addition, water runoff from the mountains drains into the valley, which confines the water runoff from a larger area into a smaller space thus resulting in a higher concentration of water. Furthermore, it is also likely that a nonpermeable layer of bedrock rests beneath the valley, forming the equivalent of a giant, natural pool to collect water from all available sources. Other than a large, sustainable oasis, aquifers are the only other feasible option to meet the water demands of a sizable city or town.

Humans are accustomed to drinking water in its usual, liquid form, but when faced with breaking conventions or dying from thirst, desperate times call for unconventional methods. In the absence of an oasis, wadi, or an accessible aquifer, desert travelers rely upon water derived from the pulp of certain desert plants and condensation to survive. The majority of desert plants evolved water-conservation adaptations rather than water storage adaptations to survive the desert's hot and arid climate, but some developed thick, waxy stems to retain moisture and inhibit evaporation. Cacti are the most recognizable example of these plant types. Unfortunately, cactus juice tastes awful at best and is poisonous at worst. In addition, gaining access to the plant's juicy pulp requires the use of a cutting implement to hack through the hard, outer stem, which is also covered by sharp needles. Cacti and related plants may be found in hot and dry and semiarid deserts, but they are more prevalent in the latter biome.

Condensation refers to the end result of water vapor reverting to its liquid state, which is commonly referred to as dew. The process occurs when air reaches its maximum saturation level, which is known as relative humidity. Dew generally occurs in the overnight hours when the air temperature drops and air contracts. Because cool air holds less moisture than warm air, the excess moisture built up during the course of the day becomes water once again. When the sun rises and the air reheats, dew reassumes its gaseous state. It would seem improbable that dew would form in an arid environment, but the temperature decreases from the desert's daytime high to its overnight low is dramatic enough to spur the transformation. Dew collects only on solid surfaces, so veterans of the sands leave cool, flat objects out in the open overnight, hoping to collect a few precious drops of dew. Dew must be harvested just before dawn, as it evaporates extremely quickly under the glare of the hot, desert sun. Even under ideal conditions, it is difficult to collect enough condensation to meet a human's daily water intake requirements, but it is enough to stave off dehydration for a short time.

As a measure of last resort, many people assume it is safe and even advisable to drink one's own urine to avoid dehydration. Although it is sterile, absent an underlying infection, undiluted urine contains high concentrations of salt and minerals the body wants to excrete rather than retain. Returning those contaminants to the body requires the kidneys to flush them out again, which consumes more water in the process and makes the person ingesting it even more dehydrated. In other words, drinking one's own bodily waste creates more problems than it solves.

## Availability

Even the most seasoned, knowledgeable, and resourceful desert traveler cannot find water that is not there. Although it is possible to gather dew almost anywhere in the desert, coming upon an oasis, wadi, or aquifer in an open expanse of desert is a much less certain prospect. (Rivers and lakes are not listed because they are generally large enough to appear as specific locations on a desert map.) The following water availability tables give the percentile chance of there being a source of water within a 1,000-square-mile area based upon the desert type and season. A 1,000-square-mile area is roughly equal to a square with 33-mile-long sides. A particular area may contain multiple sources of water — even those of the same type — so the GM should note what water sources are available in this area and continue rolling on the chart until his roll results in “no water.” If the GM's initial roll indicates there is no water present in the area, there is no need to make additional rolls on the table. Presented below are the tables for the hot and dry desert with the season along the horizontal axis of the chart, and the available water type on the vertical side of the table.

Although a body of water may exist in a particular location, that does not mean the PCs stumble upon it. The table only indicates water is found in the area if the PCs succeed at finding it. When the GM determines a source of water is present within a 1,000-square-mile area, he may randomly determine its distance and direction from the PCs when they first enter the area. In general, the PCs are always presumed to be moving forward (unless they are lost), and the maximum distance they may travel within that area is approximately 46 miles if they were to travel in a straight

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line from one corner of the grid to the opposite corner. However, those instances should be rare, so it is recommended that the GM roll 2d20 for each water source to determine how many miles away it is from the PCs and roll 1d12 to determine a random direction in a 180-degree arc in front of the PCs. In addition, the water availability table does not include water found in human settlements. Cities, towns, villages, and way stations are presumed to have an ample water supply to meet the PCs' needs.

**Table 1–21: Available Water in a Hot and Dry Desert**

Water Source	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Oasis <sup>a</sup>	01–03	01–03	01–03	01–03
Wadi <sup>b</sup>	04–10	04–06	04–08	04–12
Aquifer <sup>c</sup>	11–15	07–09	09–12	13–18
Plants	16–21	10–12	13–17	19–25
No Water	22–00	13–00	18–00	26–00

<sup>a</sup> There is a 15% chance the water contains a random waterborne disease (see the forthcoming Hazards section).

<sup>b</sup> There is a 25% chance the water contains a random waterborne disease (see the forthcoming Hazards section).

<sup>c</sup> There is a 10% chance the water contains a random waterborne disease (see the forthcoming Hazards section).

**Table 1–22: Available Water in a Semiarid Desert**

Water Source	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Oasis <sup>a</sup>	01–08	01–06	01–07	01–09
Wadi <sup>b</sup>	09–17	07–11	08–14	10–20
Aquifer <sup>c</sup>	18–26	12–16	15–21	21–30
Plants	27–34	17–22	22–28	31–40
No Water	35–00	23–00	29–00	41–00

<sup>a</sup> There is a 15% chance the water contains a random waterborne disease (see the forthcoming Hazards section).

<sup>b</sup> There is a 25% chance the water contains a random waterborne disease (see the forthcoming Hazards section).

<sup>c</sup> There is a 10% chance the water contains a random waterborne disease (see the forthcoming Hazards section).

## Desert Travel

At first blush, the idea of traveling through the desert seems like a fool's errand. The blinding sun, the withering daytime heat, the chilly evenings, the endless stretches of trackless terrain, and the scarcity of food and water conspire to make it seem a hopeless endeavor. But man and beast alike adapted to this challenging environment and devised methods to overcome these imposing obstacles. Through a combination of perseverance and ingenuity, it is possible — but still arduous and dangerous — to forge a path across the unforgiving sands to reach a far-off destination.

Although man has found ways to venture through this harsh landscape, the first question that arises is: Why? Why bother to traverse the burning sands? What reward could possibly be waiting on the other side? The hardest desert travelers scratch out an existence as nomads, wandering the dunes in search of enough food and water to sustain themselves and their livestock. But these souls are the exception, as the vast majority of desert explorers make the perilous trek across the desert for commercial reasons. Trade is the desert's lifeblood. The natural forces that shape the desert often place it between exotic ports of call on one side and landlocked civilizations on the other. The overland route across the scorching sands frequently is the only means of transporting vital goods from one location to the other. In addition to importing and exporting commodities from neighboring areas, the desert also boasts its share of

valuable products. Frankincense, myrrh, and exotic spices are common plant-based materials found in and around desert biomes. Gold, silver, copper, and other precious metals are found in the streams and riverbeds of many semiarid deserts. Sadly, many desert cultures also engage in the despicable business of human trafficking. In most cases, young boys and girls are torn from their families and sold to the highest bidder to serve as slaves or prostitutes. Whether legal, illicit, or immoral, like most inventions the means and methods of traveling through the desert arose out of economic necessity more than any other factor.

## Roads

The foundation of every great civilization does not rest on the cornerstones of its temples, palaces, and outer walls, but on the cobblestones and well-worn paths making up its roads. The ancient adage “all roads lead to Rome” is indicative of this philosophy. Roads connect people, places, and ideas to one another far more than grandiose structures and rampaging armies. They allow goods, services, and even information to travel great distances in a relatively fast, safe, and reliable manner. If traders were left to constantly forge their own routes across the desert, many would fail in the journey by succumbing to the unforgiving, natural obstacles or fall victim to the desert's wicked denizens. Merchants would quickly go out of business if their shipments kept getting lost or stolen instead of arriving at their intended destination. Trade would dry up, commerce would come to a screeching halt, and the desert's largest cities and towns would fall into ruin without the constant influx of fresh coins and essential goods from distant lands. It is hard to imagine any type of desert civilization existing without a network of roads linking them together.

For these reasons, political leaders, mighty generals, and commercial interests combine forces to build and maintain a secure highway system across the desert. But desert engineers face a different set of challenges than those constructing roads in forested and non-arid environments. Desert road builders do not need to fell trees, ford waterways, or in most instances circumvent mountains like their more conventional counterparts do. Instead, roads through the barren dunes and swirling sands must trace a path in close proximity to the desert's most valuable commodity: water. Every living creature that walks along the road eventually needs to stop for food and, more importantly, for water. But water does more than just satisfy the hydration needs of parched desert travelers and their entourages. The life-sustaining fluid forges a crucial economic relationship between the merchants, caravans, and desert travelers who journey on the roads, and the people who live in the cities, towns, and villages springing up around the supply of water. The local residents provide travelers with necessary goods and services, including food, shelter, clothing, supplies, and products purchased from other passing traders. In exchange, travelers spend money and trade goods within these communities, infusing coins and commodities into the local economy. The caravansary is the most direct example of this relationship. These small roadside way stations exist solely to meet the needs of caravans passing through the area. They frequently consist of an inn to shelter travelers, a shop to feed and equip caravans, a water supply, and a secure, grazing area for feeding pack animals. The caravansary's few permanent residents live here for the sole purpose of meeting the needs of travelers passing through the area. Without roads, caravansaries and other desert settlements would be entirely self-sufficient, and travelers would have to blindly forage throughout the countryside searching for food and water.

The following tables represent the percentile chance of encountering a settlement while traveling on the highway or road in a hot and dry desert or a semiarid desert. (Cities are not included on the table, because they are large enough to generally appear on a map of the immediate area.) The type of surface the PCs encounter in this area determines their speed while traveling through it. The GM may consult the table every 24 miles traveled through the area.

**Table 1–23: Settlement in Hot and Dry Deserts**

Settlement Type	Percentage Chance of Presence
Caravansary (fewer than 51 residents)	01–25
Village (51–200 residents)	26–35

Settlement Type	Percentage Chance of Presence
Town (201–5,000 residents)	36–40
No Settlement	41–00

Table 1–24: Settlement in Semiarid Deserts

Settlement Type	Percentage Chance of Presence
Village (fewer than 201 residents)	01–30
Town (201–5,000 residents)	31–50
No Settlement	51–00

Villages and towns are more common in semiarid deserts, making caravansaries unnecessary.

## Constructing and Maintaining Roads

The conventional road is a paved or cobblestoned surface in and around a civilized area or a beaten-down path of bare earth carved out of the surrounding wilderness. Desert roads are much different. They are more akin to a guide than a clearly, delineated map. They consist of identifiable markers set at varying intervals along the route to lead travelers in the right direction. The fierce winds and shifting sands render it impossible to actually resurface the ground with cobblestones or to maintain a surface of bare earth easily distinguishable from the surrounding terrain. The harsh and everchanging landscape necessitates road markers that can withstand the forces of erosion and tower above the desert floor as they guide travelers on their way. Tall steles standing as high as 30 feet above the ground and constructed from hard stone commonly serve as road markers. Engineers may also incorporate natural rock formations or other easily distinguishable terrain features, such as a canyon. Despite every effort to create a uniform path across the sands, desert roads are always more amorphous than traditional roadways. In fact, two different people can easily follow a desert road, and yet their steps may never cross one another's. Still, road planners must exercise judgment when deciding where and how to carve a safe passage through the desert. As previously mentioned, the availability of water is a crucial factor in this decision, but other considerations must also play a role in these decisions. Whenever possible, desert roads avoid steep inclines or sharp descents, as these features are physically taxing when ascending a gradient and hazardous for vehicles when coming down the other side. Unstable mounds of sand also wreak havoc on wagons and other vehicles with wheels, so designers avoid passing through areas with undulating dunes and dense layers of sand. The loose grains cannot support the vehicle's weight, which makes the wheels sink below the surface and causes a significant loss of traction. Because of these factors, desert roads are more than straight lines from one water supply to another. They are carefully planned and cleverly devised arteries making the best use of the landscape they are given.

Over time, even the best-designed roads succumb to the natural forces working against them. Sand dunes constantly move, wind batters road markers, torrential rains wash flood waters into low-lying elevations, and the actions of living creatures all conspire against the road's longevity. Combating these elements is a constant battle requiring money and manpower. The most common way of raising the coin needed to perform this undertaking is to charge a toll to anyone using the road. Tolls are usage fees collected by a governmental or private authority to pay for the road's upkeep. The toll collection site may be as elaborate as a garrison of armed soldiers to as simple as a crude, undersized booth manned by a single person. Naturally, because the toll collection site is a fixed location, it makes little sense to place it in a location that makes it easy to circumvent the toll collection site and return to the road in short order for free. Road builders take great care to strategically locate toll booths at locations that make it very difficult to evade the toll. For instance, the toll

may be situated at the mouth of a ravine that would require anyone trying to circumvent the toll to go miles out of their way to get around the toll or climb up a steep mountain face to find an accessible passage through the mountain.

## Tolls in a Campaign

Toll collection can be a lucrative business, and money always attracts the interest of thieves. Some work on the inside, skimming cash from their employer and pocketing the ill-gotten gains for themselves. Others plan daring heists against vulnerable toll collection sites, often with some help from someone on the inside. A few robberies are works of depraved genius netting a score far beyond the thieves' wildest dreams, but the vast majority of thefts devolve into folly before they even get underway. In addition to directly targeting toll collection sites, robbers also target couriers transporting toll proceeds from the collection site to the individuals or entity operating the toll booth. These couriers are always accompanied by a contingent of armed men also employed by the booth's operator. The savviest larcenists know a group of men traveling across open country is much more vulnerable to attack than those same men fending them off from the relative safety of a fortified position. Planning an assault against an armed group of men requires careful study of the target and extensive familiarity with the terrain. An experienced thief needs to know the armed contingent's size and strength and its planned route to aid in determining how and where to assault the target. A group of men on horseback are a formidable force on flat, gravelly terrain, but they are far less effective traversing a narrow, sloping path through a ravine replete with rocky overhangs ideal for concealing archers. In game terms, adventurers may find themselves on either side of this cat-and-mouse game. The toll operators may hire the heroes to defend their shipment against would-be robbers. Alternatively, the characters themselves may stage the robbery. Transporting large sums of money across the desert offers a wealth of adventure opportunities for PCs looking to make a name for themselves on either side of the ledger as good guys or bad guys.

## Traveling Desert Roads

Only the bravest adventurers stray from the relative security afforded by desert roads and blaze a new trail across virgin sands. There are many incentives for desert travelers to remain on the road rather than go off course and wander across open terrain. Most importantly, roads offer the improved chance of finding food, water, and other basic needs along the way, but there are other benefits. At any given time, hundreds and possibly even thousands of people and animals may be traversing the desert's network of highways. The constant flow of men and beasts provides reassuring comfort that one is truly not alone as long as they remain on the road. The commonly held belief that there is greater safety in numbers rings true from the experience of most desert travelers. Opportunist animal predators prefer zeroing in on a lone target rather than attempting to bring down multiple creatures. Noise and light frequently scare such hunters away or at least keep them at bay until one or both die down. The road offers the prospect that help or aid may be just a few paces or a shout away. As in a modern city, traveling in the company of others along a well-traveled street offers less opportunity for criminals to ply their craft unnoticed or without fear of apprehension than walking alone through a dark, isolated alleyway.

In addition to the logistical and psychological advantages of road travel, there is a commonly accepted principle among many desert peoples that roads transcend political boundaries and offer safe passage through neighboring jurisdictions. This perception exists because even the desert's most xenophobic tyrant realizes his kingdom would cease to exist without trade. Any government audacious enough to restrict the free flow of goods across its borders is guaranteed to elicit the ire of its neighbors and may even lead to war between the competing states. Safe passage is not without its limits, however. Tolls are an accepted practice in most desert kingdoms, and states are free to confiscate contraband from passing merchants and arrest the offenders. Illegal drugs top the list of illicit materials seized in this manner, but restricted goods run the gamut from banned books to destructive wildlife. Though it seems foolish to attempt

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transporting illegal goods with the likely prospect of being searched and possibly discovered, the alternative can be much worse. Experienced smugglers know it is better to forfeit one's goods than one's life. When caught in the act of smuggling on the road, a substantial bribe may buy one's freedom. On open ground, border guards operate under the principle of kill first and ask questions later. In their minds, anyone sneaking around or acting suspicious must be committing a crime. In the end, the smuggler must choose which he values more — money or his life. Not surprisingly, the most experienced and oldest smugglers opt for the latter. In fact, the decision whether to remain on the road or to veer off it comes down to the same consideration even for those who have committed no offense.

For most desert travelers, it is more advantageous to remain on the road than to deviate from it, but it is not foolproof or without charge. Tolls lighten the coin purses of passing merchants, which generates a fair amount of grumbling in many circles. After a few rounds of mead, some miserly businessmen even question whether it is worth the cost until they regain sobriety. The musings of drunkards rarely make sense, but there are in fact some instances where the benefits of road travel can be perceived as detriments. Although noise, light, and numbers may fend off some predators, these elements attract the interest of monsters and highwaymen, which are not as easily frightened as wild animals. Over time, animals, men, and monsters alike come to realize the road provides a consistent and steady stream of victims that, given the right circumstances, may be ripe for the taking. These creatures share many of the same water supplies as the roadside settlements, which brings them into increased contact with passing travelers and residents alike. Numbers grant safety, but they also garner attention.

## Modes of Travel

The fastest mode of travel is usually the best method, but the desert relishes bucking conventional wisdom. Horses are the fastest and most commonly ridden domesticated animal. They can sprint at blistering speeds and cover tremendous ground in a single day. On the other hand, camels are slower, unrulier, and much dirtier than their sleeker, majestic counterparts. There would seem to be no debate which animal is better suited for desert transport, yet an old desert adage sums up the situation best: "A horse may win the race, but the camel is the only one standing at the end." The aphorism expounds on the camel's incredible durability and its unchallenged ability to travel vast distances without stopping for water. Every human settlement in the desert was built on the camel's back. Without the hauling capacity of this remarkable animal, few desert goods would fill the shelves of distant markets.

## Camels

Desert travelers use camels for two primary purposes: riding and shipping. Like the horse, riding camels are a luxury beyond the economic means of the common man. In many large desert cities and towns, riding camels are a status symbol among the elite. Those traveling in such circles are judged not only by the number of camels they own, but by their quality. Size, demeanor, and coloration are desirable traits, yet these features all pale in comparison with the most prized quality: speed. Unlike subjective traits, a race is an easy way to settle the debate of who owns the fastest camel. Men and women of power crave competition, and few contests rival the thrills generated by several tons of flesh and bone barreling down a dusty racetrack at breakneck speeds. The throngs of spectators watching the event share in the excitement of the festivities, as huge sums of money change hands among the betting public. Yet beyond the public spectacle, riding camels are the preferred means of travel across the desert for those who can afford it. Depending upon the terrain, a riding camel can traverse a distance of 40 miles in a single day without risking overexertion. In addition to its rider, the camel can carry sufficient food and water to meet the rider's and the camel's needs for two weeks of desert travel without any impediments to its movement. A dire camel, a larger version of its smaller cousin, is prized for its significantly greater carrying capacity and combat abilities. They are the mount of choice among desert cavalry officers because they offer increased size, strength, and attack abilities

without sacrificing speed. Desert nobility frequently ride atop these proud creatures at public events to flaunt their wealth and power. Whether used for transportation, racing, or military purposes, riding camels move people from one place to another across the desert.

Camels unsuited for racing, combat, or display serve a less grandiose, but far more important role in desert society. Nearly every product sitting on the shelves in the bustling bazaar of a large city or on an open-air stand in a small village made its way to the market on a camel's back. These sturdy, reliable work animals provide the only realistic and affordable means of shipping goods through this brutal and unrelenting terrain. To maximize their carrying capacity, the camel's owner or handler walks alongside the animal rather than ride atop it, allowing it to haul larger loads than if mounted. Because the camel cannot travel faster than the man standing next to it, camel owners happily sacrifice speed in exchange for holding more weight. A fully encumbered camel can handle a load of 600 to 900 pounds, which is placed in saddle bags custom fitted for each individual animal. Camels are rarely given the task of drawing wagons or carts across the desert because such vehicles often get bogged down in deep layers of sand.

Some camels and their masters make the sojourn across the desert alone or in small groups, but the overwhelming majority of camels are part of a much larger group known as a caravan. The average desert caravan numbers roughly 1,000 camels accompanied by a few hundred men. The largest caravans can exceed 10,000 camels and a few thousand men. Although caravans travel in tight formations across the scorching sands and gravel, a typical caravan still stretches for several miles, making them vulnerable to attacks from predatory animals, monsters or bandits. All large caravans include a retinue of armed soldiers to defend them against such transgressions, but losses are inevitable. Caravans are self-sufficient in some regards, but they are ultimately dependent upon the desert's highway system to navigate a relatively safe path across the dunes and to meet the food and water demands of its men and animals. As the caravan nears towns and villages further up the road, the drivers dispatch runners several miles ahead of the main group to gather supplies and prepare the townspeople for its imminent arrival. In addition to meeting the caravan's food and water needs, their arrival also gives the settlement's residents the opportunity to trade or sell locally produced goods to the mobile marketplace. Its economic benefits apply to more than the towns and villages along its route. Caravans offer characters an excellent opportunity to earn additional income as part of the group's armed escorts. Adventurers are in especially high demand when the caravan approaches a dangerous area renowned for ambushes or monster attacks. In some cases, caravan operators may hire adventurers to rid a notorious location of particularly troublesome monsters or men to alleviate the problem once and for all. If too many caravans go missing, the economic and political consequences could be devastating. Caravans are the engine of the desert commerce.

## Horses, Donkeys, and Mules

Camels reign supreme as the mount of choice across hot and dry deserts, but horses and donkeys are viable alternatives for short treks and have some distinct advantages when traveling through semiarid desert terrain. Horses are slightly faster sprinters than camels, though the camels eventually win out in the long run because of their greater endurance. Horses regularly need water and food, so they fare poorly on extended treks in the desert, but they are able to traverse short distances with little difficulty even across the hottest sands. In many nomadic desert cultures, horses enjoy exalted status and are even treated as members of the family thanks to their gentle temperament, while the camel's ill manners relegate it to the role of pack animal. Horses are fast learners and respond more easily to the rider's verbal and nonverbal commands. Their ability to quickly react to the rider's cues makes them more maneuverable in tight quarters, which makes them ideally suited for mounted combat. Horses and camels can both charge straight at an enemy formation in combat, but horses are more agile and require less effort to guide their actions in the din of battle. Because of these advantages, rank-and-file cavalry troops prefer riding horses, with their leaders sitting atop dire camels.

Donkeys and mules are smaller cousins of the horse. A mule is the offspring of a male donkey and a female horse. Although they are slower and have less carrying capacity than a horse or camel, these animals are



valued for their surefootedness, especially along the narrow mountain passes and precarious slopes commonly found in semiarid deserts. Donkeys and mules are predominately used as pack animals to haul goods over and down steep inclines and other difficult terrain that horses and camels would have difficulty negotiating in many semiarid deserts. They have the same food and water requirements as horses, which makes them poor alternatives for long-distance desert journeys. They are too small to be used as cavalry mounts.

## Exotic Mounts

No animal can take the camel's place as part of a large caravan. Flying creatures are impractical for shipping large quantities of goods across the desert, but they make for a spectacular display for the rare few who can afford such legendary creatures. Hippogriffs are the least expensive and easiest to train of the exotic mounts. They are competent fliers, able to cover vast distances in a single day. The largest desert cities use a squadron of these beasts to patrol the skies overhead for danger or to deliver urgent dispatches. Food and water are less of a concern for these creatures because they cover far more ground than their land-based counterparts and can spot sources of water more easily from the air. Griffons are far less common than hippogriffs and are exclusively used by royalty and the wealthiest desert citizens. Griffons cost significantly more than hippogriffs and are much more difficult to train. Their flight abilities are comparable to hippogriffs, but they are better combatants. Even rarer than the griffin is the roc. Only a few legendary figures throughout history succeeded in taming this mighty beast for their personal usage. Rumors also speak of daring men riding sphinxes and other monsters across the desert, yet these tales remain unsubstantiated. In any case, these alternatives to the more mundane modes of desert transport are exceedingly uncommon and should not be the norm for the typical desert campaign.

## Desert Hazards

Life in the desert is a harrowing proposition for even the most adventurous souls. Nature and its creations conspire against humanity at every turn. Soaring temperatures, ferocious winds, and suffocating dust clouds roll across the scorched earth with alarming regularity. When the rains come, the skies open and unleash a deluge of water, thunder, and lightning in the flash of an eye. Water is scarce. In fact, the scant bits of water scrounged from the arid soil are sometimes capable of making the situation worse rather than better. Many of the hardy and resourceful creatures calling this world home are dangerous in their own right. Venomous animals and vermin abound in the dark places of the desert. Invisible pathogens immediately descend on the rotting carcasses of any creature the desert claims as its victim. Danger lurks behind every corner, under the shadow of every dune, and in the false reflection of every illusory oasis. All these factors compound the misery of eking out an existence under the relentless glare of the uncompromising sun, yet men still defy the odds to survive but also thrive in this harsh environment. Life in the desert is possible for those with the stamina, ingenuity, and will to leave their indelible mark on the burning sands of this perilous world.

## Dealing with Hazards

Hazards are natural obstacles characters must overcome to survive in the desert. Many appear under a general heading providing a broad overview of these perils. Others warrant a detailed entry. Those falling into the latter category are presented by name followed by the type of hazard they pose — disease, poison, terrestrial, and weather and an intricate description of the hazard.

Because *Hazardous Habitats* is a system neutral work, we are not presenting any specific game mechanics regarding the detection,

## HAZARDOUS HABITATS

identification, avoidance, escape, dimensions, and effects the hazards and other challenges presented here. However, these sourcebooks offer guidance on how to adjudicate these hazards and challenges in your game. One of the ways we accomplish this is by assigning degrees of difficulty to the various tasks a character may undertake to detect, identify, avert, and escape the obstacle. All hazards and challenges are rated as easy, moderate, hard, and arduous based upon the following definitions.

**Easy difficulty:** An easy challenge is one where low-level character have at least a 50% chance of success. Mid-level characters are likely to succeed most of the time, while high-level characters would almost always succeed absent atrocious luck.

**Moderate difficulty:** A moderate challenge is one where mid-level characters have a roughly 50% chance of success. Low-level characters sometimes succeed when luck is on their side, while level characters are likely to succeed most of the time.

**Hard difficulty:** A hard challenge is one where high-level characters have at least a 50% chance of success. Mid-level characters sometimes succeed when luck is on their side, while low-level characters need remarkably good luck to have any chance of success.

**Arduous difficulty:** An arduous challenge is one where even high-level characters struggle to succeed. They sometimes succeed when luck is on their side. Mid-level characters need remarkably good luck to have any chance of success, while low-level characters succeed on the rarest of occasions, and even then, they need astounding luck to pull off the impossible.

Hazards are then presented in the following format to allow characters to interact with and defeat the hazards. The Detection, Identification, Avoidance, and Escape sections use the scales of difficulty presented above. The Dimensions and Effects sections follow a different format described under those headings.

**Detection:** This section describes the suitable ability check or appropriate skill check that may be used to spot the hazard before encountering it as well as listing the degree of difficulty associated with the preceding check. It may also describe the sense used to notice it.

**Identification:** This section describes the suitable ability check or appropriate skill check that may be used to identify the hazard and its potentially detrimental effects to the character. Naturally, a character cannot identify a hazard he failed to detect.

**Avoidance:** This section describes the hazard's degree of difficulty and the suitable ability check or saving throw type that may be used to avoid the hazard when the character is subjected to its effects. In most cases, avoidance becomes applicable when the character failed to detect the hazard beforehand.

**Escape:** This section describes the degree of difficulty required to escape from the hazard as well as the ability or skill check used to escape from the hazard.

**Dimensions:** This section describes the hazard's overall size as defined below.

*Individual:* The hazard impacts a single creature or object who is exposed to it. However, the same hazard may affect more than one creature or object who comes into contact with it.

*Small-scale:* The hazard affects an area no greater than 1,000 square feet.

*Large-scale:* The hazard affects an area greater than 1,000 square feet but less than 1 square mile.

*Localized:* The hazard affects an area greater than 1 square mile but less than 1,000 square miles. Despite its magnitude, its effects are most strongly felt closest to its epicenter.

*Regional:* The hazard affects an area greater than 1,000 square miles but are not felt worldwide. Despite its magnitude, its effects are most strongly felt closest to its epicenter.

*Worldwide:* The hazard affects the entire world. On this grand scale, the hazard may equally impact creatures and objects regardless of their distance from its epicenter.

**Effects:** This section describes how the hazard affects the character. Its impact is categorized as nuisance, harmful, dangerous, deadly, or lethal. The definition for each category appears below.

*Nuisance:* A nuisance has a minimal impact on low-level characters and no impact on mid-level and high-level characters. At worst, the hazard may temporarily inconvenience the character or deal damage no greater than one-quarter his maximum hit points.

*Harmful:* A harmful effect has a modest impact on low-level characters, such as potentially dealing damage no greater than one-half the character's maximum hit points or having another temporary, minor detriment on the character. Mid-level characters may potentially take no more than one-quarter their maximum hit points, while high-level characters would regard the hazard as a temporary inconvenience.

*Dangerous:* A dangerous effect may imperil the lives of low-level characters, dealing significant amounts of damage to them or otherwise incapacitating them. Mid-level characters would suffer a modest impact from the hazard, while high-level characters would potentially take no more than one-quarter their maximum hit point total.

*Deadly:* A deadly effect almost always kills low-level characters, while potentially imperiling the lives of mid-level characters. The hazard imposes a modest impact on high-level characters.

*Lethal:* A lethal effect always kills low-level characters, and almost always kills mid-level characters. The hazard even imperils the lives of high-level characters.

In addition to indicating the hazard's degree of danger, the Effects section also lists the following information.

*Damage Type:* This listing indicates the type of damage, if any, the hazard deals to affected creatures, such as bludgeoning, fire, or piercing damage. If the type of damage dealt is not applicable to the game system, at the GM's discretion the hazard instead deals normal hit point damage or otherwise impacts the character's health.

*Condition:* This listing states the condition the hazard imposes to a character caught in the hazard, such as blinded, paralyzed, or poisoned.

*Complications:* This listing indicates the complications that may arise from falling prey to the hazard, such as drowning or suffocating.

*Remedy/Cure:* This listing details what actions the creature can take to cure or remedy the hazard's effects, such as succeeding on two consecutive Moderate difficulty Constitution saving throws.

## Terrestrial Hazards

In the desert, the land itself can be a traveler's worst enemy. The featureless sands conceal deadly sinkholes and sinister quagmires capable of ensnaring unsuspecting men and beasts in a matter of minutes. If the hidden dangers were not enough to make men doubt their senses, the tantalizing vision of a distant, illusory oasis is sure to make them question their eyes and their sanity. The terrestrial hazards appearing below challenge even the hardest desert adventurers.

## Contaminated Water (Terrestrial, Disease)

**Detection:** Moderate Wisdom ability check or skill check pertaining to diseases, medicine, or nature

**Identification:** Moderate Intelligence ability check or skill check pertaining to diseases, medicine, or nature

**Avoidance:** Moderate Constitution-based saving throw completely avoids hazard

**Escape:** Boiling or otherwise purifying contaminated water before drinking it

**Dimensions:** Individual

**Effects:** Harmful

**Damage Type:** Constitution, hit points, or Wisdom

**Condition:** fatigued, nauseated, or sickened

**Complication:** Disease deals additional damage every 2d6 hours until cured

**Cure/Remedy:** Successful Moderate Constitution saving throw made immediately after taking damage.

Not every source of water found in the desert is pure and safe to drink. Desert water sources, especially stagnant ones, are commonly contaminated by harmful biological organisms. It is not uncommon for them to also contain trace amounts of arsenic and other toxic heavy metals. Boiling water before drinking it also kills pathogens, but it does not remove mineral deposits from the water.

## Waterborne Diseases

Some diseases are deadlier than others. For GMs seeking added realism, the following entries detail the modifications you can make to the preceding contaminated water hazard listing.

**Botulism:** Increase *Effects* to Dangerous and increase the *Cure/Remedy* to a Hard Constitution-based saving throw. Add Dexterity to the *Damage Type* and paralysis to the *Complication* listing.

**Cholera:** Increase *Effects* to Dangerous.

**Dysentery:** Reduce *Effects* to Nuisance.

## Mirage (Terrestrial)

**Detection:** Moderate Wisdom ability check/skill check pertaining to visual perception

**Identification:** Moderate Intelligence ability check or skill check pertaining to deserts or nature

**Avoidance:** Hazard can be ignored, but not avoided

**Escape:** None

**Dimensions:** Large-scale

**Effects:** Nuisance

**Damage Type:** None

**Condition:** None

**Complication:** Ambush, getting lost, mirage delirium (see below)

**Cure/Remedy:** None

The desert can be a fiendish practical joker, and the mirage is its cruelest parlor trick. For a creature desperately struggling to find just a few drops of water, the mirage is a welcome sight. The shimmering reflection beckons thirsty men like a siren's irresistible call. The parched desert explorer races across the sand, tumbling down the lee side of intervening dunes anticipating the refreshing taste of pristine water only to find that it was all an illusion — an elaborate hoax played by some dark force with a twisted sense of humor. Although frustrating, men in their right mind chalk the experience up to a lesson well learned, yet for those suffering from the ravages of dehydration the letdown can be literally maddening.

A mirage is an optical illusion caused by the refraction of light as it passes through cold air in close contact with significantly warmer air. Because of the lack of moisture in the air, the air temperature at ground level is much hotter than the temperature several hundred feet above the surface. These temperature extremes cause light rays to bend in an upward trajectory, which creates an inverted image. The human eye then misinterprets what it sees by creating an image of the sky appearing just above the ground. In fact, the pool of fresh, blue water is actually the image of the clear, blue sky. The mirage's shimmering effect is caused when hot air from the surface rises and the colder, denser air above it sinks towards the ground. The interaction between the ascending warm air and the descending cold air makes the image unstable thus accounting for the shimmering effect. When the creature moves closer to the mirage, the human eye sees the mirage for what it really is — a cruel, natural practical joke.

Mirages cause no physical harm to the observer, but that does not mean they pose no danger to desert travelers. Some clever monsters or human marauders ambush other creatures in areas where mirages commonly form. These cunning hunters sometimes build deadfall pits throughout the area to ensnare the unwary or conceal themselves within holes dug into the ground so they can emerge from their hiding places and attack at the most opportune moment. Despite the havoc wreaked by these creatures, mirages deal far more damage to vulnerable minds than unsuspecting bodies, as evidenced by the following ailment, mirage delirium.

## Mirage Delirium (Disease)

**Detection:** None

**Identification:** Moderate Intelligence ability check or Easy skill check pertaining to treating diseases or madness

**Avoidance:** Moderate Wisdom-based saving throw

**Escape:** None

**Dimensions:** Individual

**Effects:** Harmful

**Damage Type:** Psychic or Wisdom

**Condition:** Confused

**Complication:** Dehydration, madness

**Cure/Remedy:** Subsequent successful Moderate Wisdom-based saving throw 1d4 minutes later

Mirages tantalize dehydrated creatures with the sight of fresh water just to take it away as they are about to quench their unbearable thirst. To a man dying of thirst, it seems as if the world conspired against him to perpetrate a wicked prank. The taunting is just too much for his comprised mind to bear, and he sinks into madness. Natives call the sickness "mirage delirium" and it only affects creatures already suffering the ravages of thirst. Whenever such a character encounters a mirage, the character becomes captivated by the mirage. A captivated character moves towards the mirage by the most direct means available. When the character comes within a few feet of the mirage, the character sees the illusion for what it really is and begins doubting his senses. Over time, the creature's thirst worsens, and he descends into madness. Most victims of "mirage delirium" eventually collapse and die from dehydration within sight of a mirage. Some transform into undead abominations who haunt the desert in the area around the imaginary oasis.

## Quicksand, Wet (Terrestrial)

**Detection:** Moderate Wisdom ability check/skill check pertaining to visual perception or Easy skill check pertaining to moving through wilderness or getting along in the wild

**Identification:** Easy Intelligence ability check or skill check pertaining to deserts or nature

**Avoidance:** Moderate Dexterity saving throw completely avoids hazard

**Escape:** Moderate Strength ability check or Easy skill check pertaining to swimming or climbing if there is a surface to climb

**Dimensions:** Small-scale

**Effects:** Dangerous

**Damage Type:** None

**Condition:** None

**Complication:** Drowning/Suffocation

**Cure/Remedy:** Escape

Few images are as synonymous with the desert as quicksand. The horror of helplessly watching an outstretched hand sink into the depths of a hungry vortex of swirling sand touches upon man's primordial fear of disappearing forever. There is something about the very earth itself swallowing another person that strikes a vulnerable spot deep within the human psyche. Perhaps being pulled below the surface reminds man of the grave's inevitability, or the destruction of earthly remains reinforces that it is easier for the living to forget the victim without some tangible relic to remind others of their existence. Whatever the reason, the fear of falling into quicksand burdens the weary minds of many desert travelers. Quicksand is an imperfect amalgamation of water and sand. It forms when fine, granular particles like sand or silt become overly saturated by a swell of groundwater, which remains hidden below a layer of sand.

Whenever a creature steps onto the surface and exerts enough pressure on the unstable soil, the loose grains of sand and water quickly separate and transform the mess into a soupy liquid. In short, falling into quicksand is more akin to falling into a previously hidden pool of water than falling through a crack in the earth. Desert explorers typically refer to this type of quicksand as wet quicksand, which is the variety found in nature.

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### Quicksand, Dry (Terrestrial)

**Detection:** Hard Wisdom ability check/skill check pertaining to visual perception or Moderate skill check pertaining to moving through wilderness or getting along in the wild

**Identification:** Moderate Intelligence ability check or skill check pertaining to deserts or nature

**Avoidance:** Hard Dexterity saving throw completely avoids hazard

**Escape:** Hard Strength ability check or Moderate skill check pertaining to swimming or climbing if there is a surface to climb

**Dimensions:** Small-scale

**Effects:** Dangerous

**Damage Type:** None

**Condition:** None

**Complication:** Drowning/Suffocation

**Cure/Remedy:** Escape

Natives tell tales of an extremely rare variety that is far deadlier than its wet counterpart. Although never truly substantiated, numerous legends recount the stories of large caravans and even entire armies marching into a vast expanse of quicksand that swallowed them whole in a few terrifying minutes. It is known as dry quicksand and for good reason. In short, wet quicksand is gooey water, which even in its liquid form is still denser than the human body giving it buoyancy. Dry quicksand, on the other hand, contains no water. Instead, it is comprised of minute, loose particles of granular material infused with air. This may occur when the wind blows extremely fine grains of sand into the air, and those same grains then tumble back to the surface and pile atop one another. Although it is truly solid, dry quicksand lacks density causing heavy creatures that step into it to literally fall through the sand and bury themselves. Dry quicksand is more stable than wet quicksand, so it is able to support some weight before it instantaneously gives way and collapses upon itself. This feature makes it very difficult to detect, because it looks and behaves like solid ground under visual and tactile inspection. The typical patch of dry quicksand is 50 feet in diameter. Because of its ability to support roughly 50 pounds of weight, the momentum of a running or charging character carries him 1d4 x 5 feet into the dry quicksand before he sinks into it. Creatures weighing less than 50 pounds are unaffected by dry quicksand. Creatures that fall into dry quicksand only have seconds to react or face certain death.

### Unconventional Water Sources (Terrestrial, Poison)

**Detection:** Moderate Wisdom ability check/skill check pertaining to deserts, nature, or plants

**Identification:** Moderate Intelligence ability check or Easy skill check pertaining to deserts, nature or plants

**Avoidance:** Moderate Constitution-based saving throw completely avoids hazard

**Escape:** None

**Dimensions:** Individual

**Effects:** Harmful

**Damage Type:** poison

**Condition:** nauseated, poisoned, or sickened

**Complication:** Poison deals additional damage every hour until cured; even if non-poisonous, creature must succeed on an Easy Constitution-based saving throw to avoid being sickened by the horrible taste (see below)

**Cure/Remedy:** Subsequent successful Moderate Constitution-based saving throw immediately after taking damage

Creatures feeling the ravages of dehydration may resort to desperate measures to quench their thirst. Chewing the pulp or drinking the juice of poisonous, indigenous plants is a risky proposition out in the wild. In

addition to its toxic properties, the plant's flesh and liquid taste so terrible that they nauseate most creatures. The desert plant species synonymous with storing water is the cactus. Unfortunately, most cacti and their relatives are poisonous. This is especially true of cacti that bleed a milky, white sap when their stems are pierced.

Even if the water tapped from a plant-based source is safe to drink, its terrible taste may still sicken the drinker. Creatures who resort to drinking their own urine are automatically sickened. They derive no benefits from imbibing their own waste.

### Plant Poisons

Some plants are more toxic than others. For GMs seeking added realism, the following entries detail the modifications you can make to the unconventional water source hazard listings for these dangerous desert plants.

**Agave:** Change *Cure/Remedy* to Easy Constitution-based saving throw.  
**Datura:** Increase *Effects* to Dangerous. Add Wisdom to the *Damage Type*.

**Elephant's ear flower:** Add Strength to the *Damage Type*.

**Peyote cactus:** Add Wisdom damage to the *Damage Type* and confused to the *Condition*.

### Desert Inhabitants

Wildlife does not abound in the desert, but the few species who call this rugged environment home are among the world's hardiest and most resilient creatures. Because of the intense daytime heat in hot and dry and semiarid deserts, nearly all wild creatures are active during the cooler evening, overnight, and early morning hours. Venomous scorpions, spiders, and snakes scuttle and slither across the sands in pursuit of fresh prey. Bright light, roaring fires, and warm bodies attract these creatures like free beer at a seedy, dockside tavern. Larger predators such as coyotes, hyenas, and jackals prowl the dunes as well along with a host of humanoid and monstrous denizens. Their reasons for moving about are varied, but if one thing is certain, they excel at whatever it is they do.

### Vermin

At some point in his life, a terrible nightmare rouses nearly every desert native from a sound sleep. Though it is still warm outside, cold sweat gushes from every pore, coating him in a chilly lather. For a brief instant, he dreamt he shared his bed with a crawling horror — a venomous scorpion or a large spider. These tiny creatures pose no realistic danger to a fully awake and equipped adventurer, but the creatures can leave a painful reminder of their presence.

### Scorpions and Spiders (Poison)

**Detection:** Hard Wisdom ability check/skill check pertaining to visual perception

**Identification:** Easy Intelligence ability check/skill check pertaining to animals and nature

**Avoidance:** Moderate Dexterity-based saving throw, if detected, Otherwise, none

**Escape:** None

**Dimensions:** Individual

**Effects:** Nuisance

**Damage Type:** Piercing, poison, Strength

**Condition:** None

**Complication:** Poison deals additional damage every 1d4 minutes until the creature is cured

**Cure/Remedy:** Subsequent Easy Constitution-based saving throw immediately after taking damage

Even a novice fighter would trample the average scorpion or spider

## DESERTLANDS

underfoot in a split second in a straight-up fight, but these cunning hunters operate under the cover of darkness and attack when their foes are most vulnerable. They use their diminutive size and the shadows to their advantage, avoiding detection as they crawl into the unattended shoes, clothing, or bed of their unsuspecting and often unintentional target while the creature sleeps or is otherwise occupied. Then, in an instant, the victim feels a sharp pinch as the culprit sinks its fangs or stinger into the creature's skin before making its daring escape. Most game systems describe giant versions of these monsters or swarms of these creatures. To incorporate ordinary scorpions and spiders in the game without creating a combat encounter, the GM may give an ordinary spider or scorpion the opportunity to sneak up and bite a sleeping or preoccupied character. The GM may give the character an opportunity to visually spot the approaching vermin or feel it crawling on his skin. An adventure who sees an approaching spider or scorpion or senses it may kill it automatically without making an attack roll. If the creature remains undetected, there is a 50% chance that it bites or stings the character, poisoning the victim. After it bites or stings the character, the character automatically sees or feels the intruder.

### Snakes (Poison)

No desert animal is more feared or reviled than snakes. In nearly every desert culture, snakes are associated with deceit and treachery, making them the perfect operatives for evil deities in nearly every land. In reality, most snakes avoid people whenever possible and lash out only when threatened or provoked. For instance, rattlesnakes shake their tails to generate a rattling sound that warns other creatures not to disturb them. On the other hand, some snakes are very aggressive and pack a lethal bite. Cobras and sidewinders hunt on the sand dunes of many hot and dry deserts. Adders, asps, and vipers are also found in desert areas and the transition zones.

Snake venom comes in two general varieties—hemotoxins and neurotoxins. Hemotoxins destroy living tissue and red blood cells which disrupts clotting. Neurotoxins are paralytic agents that shut down the victim's nervous system. Most snake venoms incorporate elements of both types of toxin, but one is generally predominant. Presented below are the hazard tables for hemotoxic venom and neurotoxic venom. The effects of individual species are detailed in the subsequent Venom sidebar.

### Hemotoxic Venom (Poison)

**Detection:** None

**Identification:** Moderate Intelligence ability check/skill check pertaining to animal and nature

**Avoidance:** Easy Constitution-based saving throw, after being bitten

**Escape:** None

**Dimensions:** Individual

**Effects:** Harmful

**Damage Type:** Dexterity, piercing, poison

**Condition:** None

**Complication:** Poison deals additional damage every 1d4 minutes until the creature is cured

**Cure/Remedy:** Subsequent successful Easy Constitution-based saving throw immediately after taking damage

### Neurotoxic Venom (Poison)

**Detection:** None

**Identification:** Easy Intelligence ability check/skill check pertaining to animals and nature

**Avoidance:** Moderate Constitution-based saving throw, after being bitten

**Escape:** None

**Dimensions:** Individual

**Effects:** Harmful

**Damage Type:** Piercing, poison, Strength

**Condition:** Paralyzed

**Complication:** Poison deals additional damage every 30 minutes and the creature remains paralyzed until cured

**Cure/Remedy:** Subsequent successful Moderate Constitution-based saving throw immediately after taking damage

These animals share the same statistical blocks as those used for poisonous or venomous snakes in your game system. Presented below are two tables to randomly determine the type of snake encountered in hot and dry and semiarid deserts as well as provide more individualized effects for the species' venom. A snake whose bite delivers hemotoxic venom uses the preceding hazard listing unless otherwise noted in the following Venoms sidebar. A snake whose bite delivers neurotoxic poison uses the preceding hazard listing unless otherwise noted in the following Venoms sidebar.

**Table 1-25: Hot and Dry Desert Snakes**

Type of Snake	Encounter Chance
Adder <sup>a</sup>	01–10
Brown snake <sup>b</sup>	11–20
Cobra <sup>a</sup>	21–60
Rattlesnake <sup>b</sup>	61–90
Viper <sup>b</sup>	91–00

<sup>a</sup> Neurotoxin

<sup>b</sup> Hemotoxin

**Table 1-26: Semiarid Desert Snakes**

Type of Snake	Encounter Chance
Adder <sup>a</sup>	01–08
Brown snake <sup>b</sup>	09–20
Cobra <sup>a</sup>	21–40
Coral snake <sup>a</sup>	41–50
Krait <sup>a</sup>	51–60
Rattlesnake <sup>b</sup>	61–90
Taipan <sup>a</sup>	91–95
Viper <sup>b</sup>	96–00

<sup>a</sup> Neurotoxin

<sup>b</sup> Hemotoxin

## Venom

All snake venoms are not made alike. Although they share many common characteristics, the toxins differ slightly from one species to the next. For GMs seeking added realism, the following entries detail the modifications you can make to the hemotoxic and neurotoxic venom hazard listings for each individual species.

**Adder:** Add suffocation<sup>a</sup> to the *Complication* listing.

**Brown snake:** Increase *Effects* to Dangerous and increase the *Cure/Remedy* to a Hard Constitution-based saving throw. Add Strength to the *Damage Type* and suffocation<sup>a</sup> to the *Complication* listing.

**Cobra:** Increase *Effects* to Dangerous and increase the *Cure/Remedy* to two consecutive Moderate Constitution-based saving throws. Add Strength to the *Damage Type* and suffocation<sup>a</sup> to the *Complication* listing.

**Coral snake:** Increase *Effects* to Dangerous and increase the *Cure/Remedy* to two consecutive Moderate Constitution-based saving throws. Add Strength to the *Damage Type* and suffocation<sup>a</sup> to the *Complication* listing.

**Krait:** Increase *Effects* to Deadly and increase the *Cure/Remedy* to two consecutive Hard Constitution-based saving throws. Add Strength to the

## HAZARDOUS HABITATS

*Damage Type* and suffocation<sup>a</sup> to the *Complication* listing.

**Rattlesnake:** Add *Constitution* to the *Damage Type*.

**Taipan:** Increase *Effects* to *Dangerous* and increase the *Cure/Remedy* to a *Hard Constitution*-based saving throw. Add *Strength* to the *Damage Type* and suffocation<sup>a</sup> to the *Complication* listing.

**Viper:** None

<sup>a</sup> Suffocation automatically occurs when the creature's *Strength* is reduced to 0.

Snakes are not the only desert predators with an underserved reputation for evil. Coyotes and jackals suffer from the same misperceptions. In these two cases, the reason is better understood and more transparent. In many semiarid deserts, coyotes and jackals are the bane of farmers and nomads alike. These pack animals are known to attack and kill livestock, putting them at odds with the humans trying to protect their animals from harm. In many human cultures, coyotes are perceived as tricksters and liars, and jackals are believed to be the servants of evil desert deities.

In hot and dry deserts and semiarid deserts, the hyena suffers from a similar image problem. Most human cultures view hyenas as scheming opportunists that make a living off the hard work of others. To make matters even worse for the hyena, it frequently emits an eerie, unsettling yelp that almost sounds like a laugh giving the impression that it is mocking or taunting its victim. Although the average coyote, jackal or hyena does not present an immediate danger to adult humans, they pose a threat to domesticated animals and bring the realistic fear that a monstrous beast may walk among these canine predators.

## Men and Monsters

Hungry animals are not the only predators stalking the dunes and sand plains of the world's deserts. A fair number of men also live in the desert. Some eke out an existence as nomadic herders and hunters, but others make their abode in this rugged landscape to ply their nefarious trades. Bandits, highwaymen, smugglers, and kidnappers search the desert for their next big score. The most daring and boldest criminals go it alone. However, many follow the example set by the desert's canine hunters and assemble into gangs. Like pack animals, gangs are organized according to a rigid hierarchy. There is a clear leader, a second-in-command, followers, and oftentimes there is the

human equivalent of a runt, an inept gang member who serves as the butt of the group's jokes or scorn. Most gangs live communally in remote, hidden locations. Gangs refer to their homes as hideouts, and they are typically found in caves or abandoned towns and villages partially buried under the sand. The hideout is more than just a home. It is also a base of operations to store loot taken from previous jobs and to plan the gang's next caper.

Gangs usually specialize in a particular criminal act using the group's strengths to its advantage. For instance, skilled camel and horse riders are in high demand among gangs targeting caravans and other moving targets. Archers are particularly useful for groups who ambush passing travelers, while stealthy individuals who can move about undetected in the darkness are well-suited as kidnappers. Some gangs are so successful they have outlived their original members and remained in existence for several generations. Examples include Akbar Peshawa and his Thirteen Thieves, the One-Eyed Gang, the Suns of the Desert, and the most unique gang, the Veiled Kiss, which is composed entirely of ex-harem women.

Desert kingdoms and wealthy interests do not let the gangs' crimes go unchallenged or unpunished. Bounties hang over many gang members' heads, and there is no shortage of nearly equally unscrupulous men pursuing these bounties at any given time. Adventurers are frequently sought to protect travelers and goods from harm before they begin their journey across the desert, particularly if the route passes through areas known for gang activity. They may also be hired to rescue kidnapping victims and bring the perpetrators to justice or to stop a gang of smugglers attempting to sneak illicit goods into a town or city. Desert gangs and criminals present a wealth of adventuring opportunities for GMs and players alike.

Men are not the only sentient creatures to stalk the deserts. Monsters also travel across the dunes and the sand plains in furtherance of their plans. Dragons and genies sit atop the proverbial monstrous hierarchy. Wicked blue dragons corrupt and defile desert peoples, while benevolent brass dragons attempt to thwart the schemes of their blue relatives. Genies are fickle and capricious creatures more interested in furthering their ambitions than those of the men and women they purport to serve. Legendary creatures such as lamias, phoenixes, and sphinxes are also encountered in the desert along with giant vermin. The following table can be used to generate random desert encounters. To use the table, roll 1d1000 (3d10). Roll on the Hot and Dry Desert table for encounters in that environment, and the Semiarid Desert table for encounters in that landscape.



Table 1–27: Random Desert Encounters

Creature	No. App.	Hot and Dry Desert	Semiarid Desert
Androsphinx	1	01–03	01–03
Animated Object	1	04	04
Basilisk	1–2	05	05–06
Bat	1–20	06–07	07–11
Black Dragon	1	08	12
Blue Dragon	1	09–10	13
Brass Dragon	1	11	14
Camel	1–6	12–20	15–18
Clay Golem	1	21	19
Doppelganger	1	22	20–21
Flesh Golem	1	23	22
Gargoyle	1–6	24–26	23–26
Ghost	1	27–28	27–29
Ghoul	1–8	29–35	30–35
Gnoll	1–200	36–40	36–45
Hell Hound	1–4	41	46
Homunculus	1	42	47
Iron golem	1	43	48
Lamia	1–12	44–50	49–52
Lich	1	51	53
Mimic	1	52–53	54–56
Minotaur	1–12	54–57	57–60
Mummy	1–12	58–65	61–65
Rakshasa	1–6	66	66
Shadow	1–8	67–72	67–70
Skeleton	1–20	73–78	71–78
Spectre	1–6	79–81	79–81
Stone golem	1	82	82
Vampire	1	83	83
Werewolf	1–6	84–86	84–88
Wight	1–8	87–91	89–91
Wraith	1–8	92–95	92–95
Zombie	1–20	96–00	96–00

## Weather

The desert is a land of extremes. Scorching heat, blazing sun, numbing cold, howling winds and torrential downpours are all features of the biome's weather cycle. Temperatures can easily soar well above 100° degrees Fahrenheit during the day before plunging to 32° Fahrenheit or less at night. Although deserts never experience the ferocious winds generated by monstrous weather systems such as a hurricane, dangerous winds roll across the sandy plains and dunes with alarming regularity, hurling sand, dust, and gravel at everything in their path. On those rare occasions where the desert experiences a storm's wrath, the event is brief yet intense. Swirling winds lash torrents of rain onto the parched earth to trigger flash floods. Ominous peals of thunder tear the heavens asunder, and bolts of lightning plummet from the sky and electrify the shocked earth. Sunlight itself is another weather danger in the desert. Over time, its brightness and UV rays can irreparably damage the eyes and exposed

skin. The sun's rays pose just as great a danger in cold deserts despite the frigid temperatures. Creatures making their way across or through the desert must take numerous and sometimes contradictory precautions against anything nature unleashes on this unforgiving environment.

## Dust storm (Weather)

**Detection:** Easy Wisdom ability check or skill check pertaining to visual perception

**Identification:** Easy Intelligence ability check or skill check pertaining to deserts, nature, or weather

**Avoidance:** Easy Dexterity-based saving throw partially reduces effects

**Escape:** Fleeing the affected area

**Dimensions:** Small-scale

**Effects:** Nuisance

**Damage Type:** Bludgeoning

**Condition:** Blinded

**Complication:** None

**Cure/Remedy:** None

Dust storms obscure vision, smother unprotected flames, and extinguish protected flames (50% chance). Most dust storms leave behind a deposit of 1d6 inches of sand. There is a 10% chance of encountering a dust storm propelled by tropical depression strength winds. These more potent dust storms leave 1d4–1 feet (minimum 1 foot) of fine sand in their wake. The typical dust storm lasts for 1d6 minutes, but stronger ones may last for 3d4 hours before finally subsiding. Sandstorms are dust storms affecting much larger areas (see below).

## Heat (Weather)

**Detection:** Obvious

**Identification:** Obvious

**Avoidance:** Moderate Constitution-based saving throw or skill check pertaining to endurance or stamina at 90° Fahrenheit (32° Celsius); Hard Constitution-based saving throw at 110° Fahrenheit (43° Celsius) and higher (see below)

**Escape:** Cooler temperatures or shade

**Dimensions:** Regional

**Effects:** Harmful

**Damage Type:** none

**Condition:** Confusion, exhaustion, fatigue (see below)

**Complication:** Continued exposure to the heat leads to unconsciousness followed by death (see below)

**Cure/Remedy:** None other than escaping the heat or magical intervention

Nowhere else in the world experiences the temperature extremes found in the desert. Hot and dry deserts are the hottest places in the world. Hot and dry deserts and semiarid deserts are practically synonymous with blistering heat. Summer is exceptionally hot and winter offers little reprieve from the oppressive temperatures. The two key temperatures GMs must keep close account of are 90° F (32° Celsius) and 110° F (43° Celsius). (The key temperatures are lower in most other biomes because of the higher humidity, which increases the heat index. Because of the desert's low humidity, the heat index rarely, if ever, has any impact on the severity of the heat's effects.)

At 90° F and above, creatures must exercise extreme caution. They must succeed at a Moderate saving throw or skill check each hour to avoid suffering ill effects from the heat. An additional saving throw must be made each hour while exposed to these temperatures with failure leading to confusion, fatigue, and/or exhaustion. In addition, for every five consecutive saving throws the creature attempts, the saving throw's difficulty increases by one level, i.e. from Moderate to Hard or Hard to Arduous. Furthermore, the creature cannot attempt a skill check to avoid the effects of the heat when the difficulty level reaches Hard. The GM may penalize creatures wearing armor or clothing inappropriate for their

## HAZARDOUS HABITATS

surroundings as well as those who fail to drink at least 2 gallons of water or other suitable non-alcoholic beverages over the course of the day.

At 110° F and above, the situation rapidly deteriorates. Creatures exposed to these temperatures must succeed on a Hard Constitution-based saving throw every thirty minutes. An additional saving throw must be made at each 30-minute interval while exposed to these temperatures with failure leading to exhaustion or unconsciousness. In addition, for every four consecutive saving throws the creature attempts, the saving throw's difficulty increases by one level, i.e. from Moderate to Hard or Hard to Arduous. The GM may penalize the saving throws of creatures wearing armor or clothing inappropriate for their surroundings as well as those who fail to drink at least 3 gallons of water or other suitable non-alcoholic beverages over the course of the day.

Any creature who becomes exhausted or unconscious succumbs to heatstroke, which is a grave medical emergency. If proactive steps are not taken to remove the creature from the heat and cool his body, the creature eventually dies. These conditions end when the character recovers from the nonlethal damage he took from the heat.

### Sandstorm (Weather)

**Detection:** Easy Wisdom ability check or skill check pertaining to visual perception

**Identification:** Easy Intelligence ability check or skill check pertaining to deserts, nature, or weather

**Avoidance:** Moderate Dexterity-based saving throw partially reduces effects

**Escape:** Fleeing the affected area

**Dimensions:** Large-scale

**Effects:** Dangerous

**Damage Type:** bludgeoning

**Condition:** blinded

**Complication:** Potentially buried beneath blowing sand, suffocation

**Cure/Remedy:** Moderate Strength ability check to dig out of the sand

Wind literally shapes the desert more than any other natural force. It sculpts magnificent dunes from featureless sand and hurls vast clouds of sand and dust across the scarred landscape. Wind is the engine that powers the desert's destructive sandstorms, yet desert winds differ from those in temperate and tropical environments. The high winds that ravage tropical and temperate regions are almost universally spawned by powerful thunderstorms and hurricanes that also unleash tremendous amounts of precipitation. Desert winds are predominately fueled by masses of air interacting with each other which create powerful air currents that do not produce precipitation. They pick up sand, dust and any other fine particles and transform them into minute airborne projectiles in the form of a sandstorm or a dust storm.

Sandstorms reduce visibility and pummel creatures caught in the open with sand. Driving sand creeps in through all but the most secure seals and seams, chafing skin and contaminating gear. Sandstorms can last for hours or even days. The average sandstorm lasts for 2d6 hours. However, 10% of sandstorms drag on for 1d3 days. For every hour of the sandstorm's duration, it buries everything in its path in 1d3 inches of sand. In the case of a sandstorm stretching across several days, creatures could find themselves buried under 10 feet of sand. Characters buried under that much sand can suffocate if they do not escape in time.

### Sunburn (Weather)

**Detection:** Obvious

**Identification:** Easy Intelligence ability check or skill check pertaining to deserts, nature, or weather

**Avoidance:** Easy Constitution-based saving throw; desert appropriate clothing partially reduces effects

**Escape:** Fleeing the affected area

**Dimensions:** Regional

**Effects:** Nuisance

**Damage Type:** Radiation

**Condition:** Blinded

**Complication:** None

**Cure/Remedy:** Curative skin treatments, first aid, removal from sunlight, or magical intervention

Sunlight illuminates and warms the planet, yet too much of a good thing can be harmful. This is particularly true in the desert where the lack of cloud cover and the reflective properties of the lightly-colored desert terrain intensify the sun's rays. Obviously, staring directly at the sun for more than a brief glimpse can temporarily blind the onlooker, but prolonged indirect exposure to sunlight can also harm one's vision. The eyes are not the only organs that the sun can injure. The sun can also damage the body's largest organ — the skin. The damage is referred to as sunburn, and it is not caused by an overexposure to heat. Instead, ultraviolet radiation emitted from the sun causes radiation burns, so it is equally possible to get sunburn on a bright, cold day as it is on a warm, sunny day. The reason people rarely get sunburn during the winter is because they are usually wearing thicker layers of clothing that shield their skin from the sun's harmful rays and generally limit their outdoor exposure to only a few minutes at a time.

To protect themselves against the sun's destructive glare, desert natives wear loose-fitting, white clothing along with a headdress crafted from the same material. Most headdresses also feature a brim or ridge to shield the eyes and face from the sun. Even so, these precautions are not perfect. Scarves protect the neck and lower face, but it is impossible to cover the eyes without sacrificing vision. Likewise, it is too hot to wear gloves during the daytime hours. For these reasons, most people avoid moving about during the brightest time of day. However, that is not always an option. Sunburned humanoids begin to feel its effects within 2d12 hours after exposure to the sun.

## Daily Weather

Unlike the weather in areas receiving ample rainfall, the desert's weather changes very little from day to day. Summers are long, hot, and dry, and winters are short and mild with a few days of rainfall. Presented below are several tables allowing GMs to determine the weather in a hot and dry desert and a semiarid desert based upon the season. The tables are organized according to desert type, so the first group of tables applies to weather in a hot and dry desert, and the second group applies to weather in a semiarid desert. The tables allow the GM to determine the daily high temperature, daily low temperature, wind speed, and the chance of precipitation. All the tables are based upon percentile dice.

### Hot and Dry Deserts

The following tables generate the daily high temperatures, low temperatures, wind speed, and chance of precipitation in a hot and dry desert according to the season. Summers in a hot and dry desert can last for 6 months, while winter is rarely more than 1 or 2 months.

**Table 1–28: Daily High Temperatures**

Die Roll	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
01–10	95+4d6° F	105+4d6° F	85+4d6° F	75+4d6° F
11–20	95+3d6° F	105+3d6° F	85+3d6° F	75+3d6° F
21–30	90+4d6° F	100+4d6° F	80+4d6° F	70+4d6° F
31–40	90+3d6° F	100+3d6° F	80+3d6° F	70+3d6° F
41–50	85+4d6° F	95+4d6° F	75+4d6° F	65+4d6° F
51–60	85+3d6° F	95+3d6° F	75+3d6° F	65+3d6° F
61–70	80+4d6° F	90+4d6° F	70+4d6° F	60+4d6° F
71–80	80+3d6° F	90+3d6° F	70+3d6° F	60+3d6° F
81–90	75+4d6° F	85+4d6° F	65+4d6° F	55+4d6° F
91–00	75+3d6° F	85+3d6° F	65+3d6° F	55+3d6° F

## DESERTLANDS

To determine the daily low temperature, subtract the amounts shown on the following table from the day's high temperature. For instance, if the preceding table generates a high temperature of 109° Fahrenheit, and the low temperature table generates a result of 25+4d6° (which results in a total of 36 degrees), the daily low temperature is 73° Fahrenheit (109° - 36° = 73° F).

**Table 1-29: Daily Low Temperatures**

Die Roll	Low Temperature
01-10	20+3d6°
11-20	20+4d6°
21-30	25+3d6°
31-40	25+4d6°
41-50	30+3d6°
51-60	30+4d6°
61-70	35+3d6°
71-80	35+4d6°
81-90	40+3d6°
91-00	40+3d6°

The following table determines the wind speed measured in miles per hour based upon the season.

**Table 1-30: Daily Wind Speed**

Die Roll	Spring/Autumn	Summer	Winter
01-10	1d6	1d4	1d8
11-20	1d8	1d6	1d10
21-30	1d10	1d8	1d12
31-40	1d12	1d10	3d6
41-50	3d6	1d12	4d6
51-60	4d6	3d6	5d6
61-70	5d6	4d6	6d6
71-80	6d6	5d6	8d6
81-90	8d6	6d6	10d6
91-00	10d6	8d6	12d6

Whenever the wind speed equals or exceeds 30 miles per hour, it triggers a dust storm on rocky, gravelly terrain or a sandstorm on sandy terrain. The preceding section discusses the effects and duration of dust storms and sandstorms.



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The following chart determines the daily chance of experiencing a storm. It is also based upon the season.

**Table 1-31: Daily Chance of Precipitation**

Result	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
No Precipitation	01-96	01-99	01-98	01-94
Storm	97-00	00	99-00	95-00

## Semiarid Deserts

The following tables generate the daily high temperatures, low temperatures, wind speed, and chance of precipitation in a semiarid desert according to the season. Summers in a semiarid desert can last for more than four months, while winters rarely stretch for more than two months.

**Table 1-32: Daily High Temperature**

Die Roll	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
01-10	88+3d6° F	100+3d6° F	76+3d6° F	64+3d6° F
11-20	88+3d4° F	100+3d4° F	76+3d4° F	64+3d4° F
21-30	83+3d6° F	95+3d6° F	71+3d6° F	59+3d6° F
31-40	83+3d4° F	95+3d4° F	71+3d4° F	59+3d4° F
41-50	78+3d6° F	90+3d6° F	66+3d6° F	54+3d6° F
51-60	78+3d4° F	90+3d4° F	66+3d4° F	54+3d4° F
61-70	73+3d6° F	85+3d6° F	61+3d6° F	49+3d6° F
71-80	73+3d4° F	85+3d4° F	61+3d4° F	49+3d4° F
81-90	68+3d6° F	80+3d6° F	56+3d6° F	44+3d6° F
91-00	68+3d4° F	80+3d4° F	56+3d4° F	44+3d4° F

To determine the daily low temperature, subtract the amounts shown on the following table from the day's high temperature. For instance, if the preceding table generates a high temperature of 109° Fahrenheit, and the low temperature generates a result of 25+4d6° (which results in a total of 36 degrees), the daily low temperature is 73 degrees Fahrenheit (109° - 36° = 73° F).

**Table 1-33: Daily Low Temperatures**

Die Roll	Low Temperature
01-10	10+3d6°
11-20	10+4d6°
21-30	15+3d6°
31-40	15+4d6°
41-50	20+3d6°
51-60	20+4d6°
61-70	25+3d6°
71-80	25+4d6°
81-90	30+3d6°
91-00	30+4d6°

The following table determines the wind speed measured in miles per hour based upon the season.

**Table 1-34: Daily Wind Speed**

Die Roll	Spring/Autumn	Summer	Winter
01-10	1d6	1d4	1d8
11-20	1d8	1d6	1d10
21-30	1d10	1d8	1d12
31-40	1d12	1d10	3d6
41-50	3d6	1d12	4d6
51-60	4d6	3d6	5d6
61-70	5d6	4d6	6d6
71-80	6d6	5d6	8d6
81-90	8d6	6d6	10d6
91-00	10d6	8d6	12d6

Whenever the wind speed equals or exceeds 30 miles per hour, it triggers a dust storm on rocky, gravelly terrain or a sandstorm on sandy terrain. The preceding section discusses the effects and duration of dust storms and sandstorms.

The following chart determines the daily chance of experiencing a storm. It is also based upon the season.

**Table 1-35: Daily Chance of Precipitation**

Result	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
No Precipitation	01-92	01-98	01-96	01-92
Storm	93-00	99-00	97-00	93-00



