

RAGING SWAN PRESS

WILDERNESS DRESSING: DESERTS



PREPARE QUICKER, PREPARE BETTER



WILDERNESS DRESSING: DESERTS

Tired of glossing over the details of your PCs' overland journey (except for the inevitable, violent random encounters)? Want to add in minor features of interest to their journeys? Want to make their journeys seem more "real"? Then Wilderness Dressing is for you! Each instalment in the line focuses on a different type of wilderness or a feature therein and gives the harried GM the tools to bring such features to life with interesting and cool noteworthy features.

This instalment of Wilderness Dressing presents loads of great features and details to enliven travel through a sandy wasteland. Designed to be used both during preparation or actual play, Wilderness Dressing: Deserts is an invaluable addition to any GM's armoury!

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TABLE A: MINOR EVENTS

The PCs' travels should not be boring affairs wherein either they encounter no one of note or they end up fighting everyone they meet. Use this table to generate minor encounters of interest or use it as inspiration (or possibly the prelude to) a larger encounter.

D%	
1	The smell of spices is carried on the wind.
2	During the night, the howling of a pack of jackals makes it hard to sleep.
3	Nature conspires to create severe heat conditions (DC 15 +1 for each previous check every 10 minutes or suffer 1d4 nonlethal damage).
4	A slight breeze gives a needed respite from the sweltering conditions.
5	Five stones are arranged amid the sand in a semi-circular pattern.
6	Patches of sand feel wet to touch. (In fact, it is soaked in acid which deals 1d4 acid damage).
7	The wind has laid bare a small nest of eggs (DC 20 Survival identifies as lizard eggs).
8	The setting sun envelops the landscape in blood red hues.
9	Two sets of neatly folded clothing lie in the party's path; nothing can be seen of the owners.
10	Drifting sand partially covers a large, polished purple stone.
11	Several large birds circle on the horizon (DC 10 Knowledge [nature] identifies as vultures).
12	A goat herd nibbles at the sparse scrub.
13	The party come across an empty, partially collapsed tent.
14	Close by a flock of birds are startled, and take flight.
15	Much needed shade is found under a rocky outcropping.
16	A pack of hyenas trail the party for a while. They stay back at a safe distance and flee if attacked.
17	A silk caravan passes the party.
18	Suddenly the winds dies down and the air is still.
19	In the night sky, a stationary dark shape blots out the stars.
20	A loud animalistic roar breaks the silence.
21	Giant footprints are discovered (DC 15 Survival identifies as desert giant footprints).
22	A young boy is frantically searching for a lost sheep.
23	Several rocks stick up through the sand. They seem to be arranged in circular patterns, but whether it is a natural occurrence or man-made is impossible to tell.
24	A dung beetle rolls a ball of dung up a dune.
25	A monitor lizard warms itself on a nearby rock.

26	The party travels through an area of pitch-black sand.
27	Tracks from large slithering creatures cross the sand.
28	A group of escaped slaves come crawling through the dunes, near death from thirst and starvation.
29	In the quiet desert night, far off chanting can be heard on the wind.
30	Heaps of animal droppings cover the sand (DC 10 Knowledge [nature] identifies as camel droppings).
31	On the top of a nearby dune, several vultures feast on a recently dead camel.
32	A flying carpet passes over the party; the carpet's passengers take no notice of the PCs.
33	Scorch marks in the sand tell of a magical duel.
34	Bestial tracks cross the sand (DC 20 Knowledge [nature] identifies as jackalwere tracks).
35	A desert cliff has steps carved into it.
36	In the distance a massive sandstorm rages (DC 15 Survival predicts the likely path of the sandstorm in the coming hours).
37	The dried out husk of a kobold lies in the sand.
38	A large mesa stretches out before the party.
39	A silken veil is blown over the party by the wind.
40	Tracks reveals a gnoll slaver caravan is operating in the area (DC 11 Knowledge [local] reveals).
41	The party finds a skeleton clutching a dust-filled waterskin.
42	A PC finds a huge, cracked tooth (DC 15 Knowledge [arcana] identifies as a dragon's tooth).
43	A perfectly circular hole pierces the bedrock.
44	The stinking rotten carcass of a death worm lies in the sand.
45	A natural sandstone bridge spans a deep chasm.
46	At night, the glow of a campfire rises from the dunes. A DC 10 Survival check reveals it is about three miles away.
47	A perfectly clean skull sits on the sandy ground.
48	Small waves ripple in the sand as if something is moving beneath.
49	While the party camps at night, green lightning can be seen shooting up from the ground some miles to the south.
50	A 20 ft. by 20 ft. carpet is laying halfway up a dune. It is in pristine shape, and not a single grain of sand mars the carpet's surface (worth 150 gp; DC 20 Appraise values).
51	A still wet bloodstain, in a roughly human shape mars the sand. It is evident (DC 15 Heal check) that whatever bled here probably died.
52	A whirlwind traverses the desert against the prevailing wind direction.

53	A small lizard watches lazily as the party passes.
54	A raving mad hermit yells insults at the party.
55	A nomadic tribe on camels pass the party travelling in the opposite direction.
56	The unmistakably sound of a rattlesnake reaches the party, but no snake can be seen nearby (DC 10 Survival check reveals the sound can travel on the wind for several hundred feet).
57	A vulture falls from the sky, dead.
58	An eight-inch long bluish tinted scale is found on the ground (DC 15 Knowledge [arcana] identifies as a blue dragon scale).
59	A small merchant caravan approaches over the dunes.
60	A well-guarded caravan takes steps to keep the party at a distance.
61	At night, a sickly green glow is seen over the dunes to the east.
62	The party has several vultures circling overhead.
63	A jackal is trapped in a snare.
64	The rearmost party member's waterskin has been leaking for a while, it is now half full.
65	The wind has formed a lifelike face in the sand.
66	A large scimitar lies in the sand.
67	At night the sound of huge wings come from far above the campsite.
68	A character falls over a stone sticking up through the sand. Worn, unreadable runes cover every surface.
69	A lone gnoll scout observes the party.
70	A small rodent flees from the party into a hole in the sand.
71	Sand covers most of an ancient ruined building.
72	A family of meerkats watches the party curiously from their underground tunnel entrances; should anyone approach them, they quickly dive back into the safety of their tunnels.
73	Something reflects the sun on a dune a few miles away.
74	A nonvenomous snake slithers below the sand as the party approaches.
75	The night is pleasantly warm.
76	Thirteen silver pieces lie in the sand.
77	In the horizon a range of mountainous peaks rise from the desert.
78	Wisps of smoke seen over a dune leads to a campfire used by someone during the night.
79	A dragonlike creature sits on a rocky outcrop in the distance (DC 18 Knowledge [arcana] identifies as a desert drake).
80	A scorpion kills a beetle, and carries its prey off.
81	Nomads are collecting water from cacti.
82	A green human shaped rock feels cold to touch.
83	A group of gnolls have passed this way a few hours ago (DC 15 Survival reveals).

84	A crate dropped by a caravan lie in the sand.
85	The wind is noticeably colder than usual.
86	A desert tortoise has been flipped over and is struggling to regain its footing before the sun cooks it alive.
87	Bats fly over the party's campfire.
88	Two small scorpions are engaged in their own duel for a dead beetle.
89	A spear has been driven into the sand.
90	The wind blowing around nearby hoodoos plays a haunting tune.
91	A large patch of cacti are in full bloom.
92	A single boot – half-filled with sand stands forlornly halfway up a dune.
93	At dawn cacti are dripping with dew.
94	A desert owl flies over the party's campfire at night.
95	A distant pack of gnolls travel hastily away from the party.
96	The desert shows signs of recent precipitation.
97	The party reaches an oasis, where they can stock up on supplies.
98	No living things have been seen for miles.
99	A bottle of fine wine is found, the contents have long since evaporated.
100	An oil lamp lies discarded in the sand.

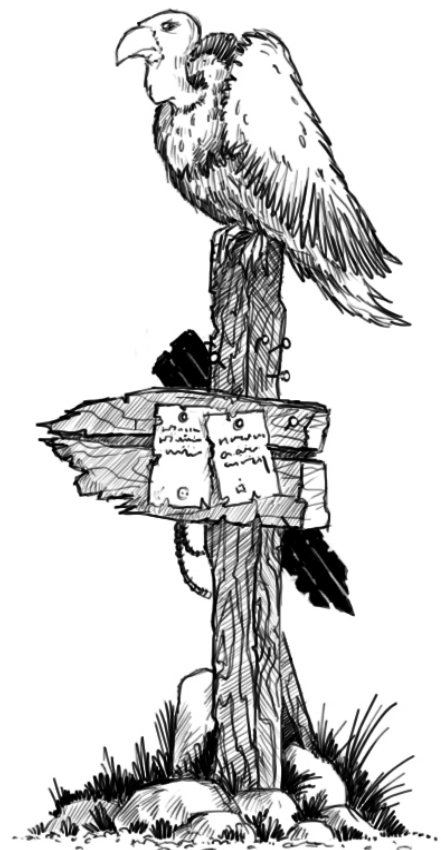


TABLE B: DESERT DRESSING

The desert through which the PCs travel should not be devoid of interesting, minor features. Use this table to generate such features as desired, possibly using them to add detail to a party's campsite or to break up an otherwise uninteresting day's travel.

D%	
1	At the bottom of a large sinkhole sits a dead dust digger (DC 14 Knowledge [dungeoneering] identifies).
2	Several animal skeletons lie around a small oasis.
3	A heat phenomenon has fused the top layer of sand into glass.
4	Four gnolls riding dire hyenas are seen in the distance.
5	A giant bird flies overhead with a dead camel in its talons (DC 9 Knowledge [nature] identifies as a giant vulture).
6	An oasis turns out to be a mirage.
7	A well stands in the middle of some ruins.
8	A giant scorpion scuttles into view.
9	Cries for help lead to two men buried up to their necks in the desert sand.
10	A lone eroded statue of an eagle-headed man stares off into the distance.
11	In the shade of a dune, a lamia is sheltering from the searing sun.
12	The party discovers an abandoned campfire; it is nothing but embers now.
13	A single black monolith with strange inscriptions have been unearthed by a recent sandstorm, (DC 20 Linguistics identifies the inscription as an unknown language in the region).
14	The skeleton of a huge creature lies in the sand.
15	A troupe of wandering janni actors ask to travel with the party for protection.
16	The soft sand is deep here and counts as difficult terrain.
17	Clicking sounds from over the dune reaches the party.
18	An ancient ruined watchtower is partially buried by sand.
19	Camel-riding slavers question the party concerning escaped slaves.
20	The sand comes alive as several scarab swarms break through the sand.
21	A dead camel is quickly devoured by giant ants from a nearby hive.
22	Over the next dune, a small oasis is located.
23	A tablet with worn off hieroglyphs lies halfway down a dune.
24	A cave entrance has been revealed by a recent sandstorm.
25	A large patch of sand feels cold to the touch.
26	Dire hyenas pick up the party's scent.

27	A burnt out shipwreck lie halfway down a dune.
28	Ten feet high cacti form a thorny desert forest.
29	The party must cross a wadi; the dry riverbed has steep sides (DC 15 Climb scales).
30	A severe sandstorm makes travel impossible today, unless the party possesses magical protections.
31	A randomly determined character trips and lands in a patch of cacti and takes 1d6 damage.
32	A catatonic man in fine clothes is found wandering aimlessly under the searing sun.
33	A crude wooden tower stands in the sand.
34	A ruined aqueduct rise out of the sand at a strange angle.
35	A djinni sits in front of a chessboard, he invites a party member to play.
36	The party comes upon a scene of carnage and bloodshed, a caravan has been raided. Both men and camels have been put to the sword; nothing of value can be found. A DC 20 Survival check reveals gnolls are responsible for the raid, and footprints show several persons from the caravan are now prisoners of the gnolls.
37	Screaming curses, a frightened gnome rushes into view.
38	A lonely wooden sign proclaims: Hell's Courtyard.
39	A shredded backpack lies in the sand
40	A ruined tower floats several feet above the sand.
41	Black smoke rise towards the north.
42	A small bird peeks out from its nest in a cactus.
43	The partially eaten carcass of a small brass dragon is found, it bears marks of electricity damage.
44	The wind is very hot today.
45	During the night, several fire elementals fight for territory a few hundred feet from the campsite.
46	An efreeti rampages through the dunes ahead, he is looking for something.
47	A skull has been placed on a wooden pole.
48	Bones are littered in front of a cave entrance
49	A veritable maze of man-sized hoodoos rise out of the desert sand. A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check identifies them as natural, although it is hard to shake the impression that some of them are very humanoid in shape.
50	The wind has revealed an ancient battleground, it has been long looted and only the bones now remain.
51	A dire hyena guards a cave.
52	Several ruins surround a mine entrance.
53	The desert divides and a long canyon stretches out ahead of the party. The shadowed canyon provides welcome sheltered from the heat.

54	A small stepped pyramid stands on the horizon.
55	Several animal headed statues lie in the sand, they seem to have been toppled on purpose, and some have been defaced.
56	During the night, a bright light from an unknown source is projected up in the night sky.
57	This abandoned oasis is an illusion (DC 19 Will disbelieves).
58	The desert ahead is covered by a blanket of black smoke; it seems the ground itself is on fire.
59	Confused and muddled tracks cut across the party's route.
60	An abandoned wooden palisade in severe disrepair stands on top of a dune.
61	A sandstone wizard tower stands between two dunes.
62	Wearing torn and bloodied clothes a man runs towards the party, repeatedly screaming: "It is coming."
63	A discarded amulet is found half buried in the sand (worth 25 gp; DC 15 Appraise values).
64	The ground trembles slightly.
65	Four camel riders observe the party from afar, the camels have painted blue symbols upon their fur, (DC 20 Knowledge [arcana] identifies as protective arcane symbols).
66	A sandstorm descends on the party, causing 1d3 nonlethal damage per hour of exposure.
67	Four skeletons lie around a campfire; they are long dead and have nothing to loot.
68	Clouds gather and thunder and lightning follow, but precipitation does not.
69	A line of rocks pierce the desert sand.
70	A wide wadi stretches out before the party.
71	Upon breaking camp at dawn, several humanoid footprints are discovered within the camp; the posted guards saw nothing.
72	A small whirlwind spells out the word "Help" in the sand, before abruptly dying away.
73	A mournful howl greets the rising sun.
74	Suddenly the tall dune the party is traversing collapses. Treat as an avalanche, but reduce by half the time taken to dig out buried characters.
75	The party comes upon a collection of ruins, a tent town have been set up nearby and an archaeological dig is taking place.
76	A dwarf has been tied to a hoodoo, and left to die of exposure.
77	A rope leads 20 feet up into the empty sky.
78	The shade from a huge tree protects the dried out husk of a dead dwarf.
79	A <i>permanent image</i> (DC 19 Will disbelieves) covers an area of quicksand.
80	An abandoned oasis, all the irrigation canals filled with sand, squats forlornly in a hollow.
81	A dead nomad grasps a sand-blasted scroll in his hands.

82	A wizard is calmly walking around, drawing sigils in the sand, with his staff.
83	Two desert giants demand the party leave their territory.
84	A blue dragon flies over the party. A DC 20 Perception reveals two humanoids on its back.
85	A massive earthquake has split open a flat rock, revealing a tunnel leading downwards.
86	The sand gives way to reveal a 400 ft. long rift, the bottom of which cannot be seen.
87	The party comes upon a nomad camp; the inhabitants are friendly and offer refreshments.
88	A sphinx challenges the party to a duel of riddles.
89	Steam shoots from the ground at random intervals; anyone caught within takes 4d6 fire damage.
90	During the night, several small flames sprout from the flat expanse of sand. A DC 15 Knowledge (local) check tells of the belief that it is the souls of the ones taken by the desert, trying to escape to the afterlife.
91	A long stone bridge stands in the desert, traversing nothing but sandy dunes. A DC 15 Knowledge (engineering) check determines the style to be used in the far north.
92	The top of a pyramid is ringed with unidentifiable arcane symbols.
93	In the morning a randomly determined character is stung by a small scorpion, which had sought shelter in his clothes during the night. The sting is excruciatingly painful (DC 14 Fortitude; <i>freq.</i> 1 rd./4 rds.; <i>effect</i> 1 Str damage; <i>cure</i> 1 save).
94	In the distance, two dragons are fighting a ferocious battle in the sky.
95	The party is caught in a sirocco, the fiery hot duststorm deals 1d6 fire damage per minute of exposure (and lasts for 1d10 minutes).
96	Stones are arranged in arcane patterns to be seen from the air. (DC 25 Perception reveals).
97	A green crystal spire pierces the monotonous sandy landscape.
98	The party finds a summoning circle drawn in the sand; it seems incomplete as if something has broken out of it.
99	The party spend the night in an oasis populated by fey, the night is a drunken revelry, but the oasis and all in it disappears at dawn.
100	Suddenly the sand beneath the party's feet starts to form a large hole (DC 15 Reflex avoids). Anyone falling in takes damage (2d6 from a 20 ft. fall) and finds themselves in a large hall built of sandstone. In the northern wall, a doorway enticingly beckons the unwary to proceed.

RANDOM DESERT ENCOUNTERS

D12	EL	CREATURES*	NOTES
1	1	Kalim and Herab (male gnolls ¹ ; 2)	These two young gnoll warriors were exiled from their tribe after being found guilty of tomb robbing; they have been left behind buried up to their necks in the desert sand to die of exposure or from the depredations of the desert wildlife.
2	2	Sula (female jackalwere; <i>Bestiary</i> 3)	Sula asks to travel with the party as her own caravan was attacked by gnolls. She bides her time and tries to slay a single party member at an opportune moment. Outwardly she pretends to be scared and a little confused; within she is an icy, stone cold killer.
3	3	Young dust digger ¹ (<i>Bestiary</i> 2)	A young dust digger has recently made its lair in the party's path. Now it awaits prey to stumble into its sinkhole.
4	4	Yossuf (male janni)	Yossuf is an elderly janni enjoying his solitude in the deep desert; he is very hospitable and offers food and water to those in need. He is also a good source of information on the desert and its inhabitants.
5	5	Gnolls (4) and a dire hyena (1)	A patrol of gnolls are using a dire hyena to search the dunes for a caravan's stragglers. The stragglers are added to their growing number of slaves back at camp. If they outnumber the party, they attack. If not, they flee.
6	6	Giant scorpions (3)	These scorpions nest between some rocks and ferociously defend their territory. The surrounding area is covered in dense rubble and their lair is buried beneath a large boulder. Injured scorpions retreat to their nest.
7	9	Advanced death worms ² (2; <i>Bestiary</i> 2)	Two death worms have been hunting the dunes for years and have grown bigger and more aggressive than normal. The locals have posted a bounty to rid the area of the pair. Hopefully the days of the crawling death is soon at an end.
8	9	Mummies (4)	Tomb guard of Akh-en-Tholus. Recently the tomb of the pharaoh Akh-en-Tholus (see Encounter 11) was breached and looted by two tomb robbers. The enraged pharaoh sent his undead tomb guard to punish the guilty and any who are found with them. They attack the party from ambush rising from the sands to sow confusion amid their prey and carry any slain enemies back to their master as proof of their devotion.
9	10	Behirs (2)	These behirs survey their domain from their lair in a desert cliff. They attack the party on sight, using their breath weapon for maximum effect and then engaging in melee.
10	11	Hashab and Serlim (desert giants; <i>Bestiary</i> 3)	Hashab and Serlim are patrolling their tribe's territory, and turn away the party from their ancestral lands. If the party is not aggressive, they share information about the terrain and any interesting sites nearby.
11	12	Akh-en-Tholus (human lich necromancer 11)	In the forbidden tomb of Akh-en-Tholus, the pharaoh himself awaits behind legions of lesser undead and his tomb guard. In this tomb he was imprisoned millennia ago and only recently was his prison opened. Now Akh-en-Tholus bides his time before he is once again powerful enough to conquer the nearby lands with his undead army.
12	13	Ahmentherap (adult blue dragon)	The Emir of the Bloody Dunes lurk beneath a stretch of blood red sand dunes. Ahmentherap lairs in a network of sandstone caverns; from here he oversees his many plots and schemes in the area. If the party trespasses into his territory he observes them and if they are deemed a threat lets them pass unmolested. Otherwise, he attacks eager to add more treasure to his hoard.

*Unless noted, the creatures encountered use the standard statistics found in the *Bestiary*.

1: A creature with the young creature template (+2 on all Dex-based rolls, -2 on all other rolls, -2 hp/HD).

2: A creature with the advanced creature template (+2 on all rolls [including damage] and special ability DCs; +4 to AC and CMD; +2 hp/HD).

DESERT TERRAIN FEATURES

Deserts have many area features that can make encounters and battles within them exciting and interesting. Many of these features offer canny combatants distinct advantages in battle.

STEALTH AND DETECTION

In general, the maximum distance in desert terrain at which a Perception check for detecting the nearby presence of others can succeed is $6d6 \times 20$ feet; beyond this distance, elevation changes and heat distortion in deserts makes sight-based Perception impossible.

The presence of dunes in sandy deserts limits spotting distance to $6d6 \times 10$ feet. The scarcity of undergrowth or other elements that offer concealment or cover makes using Stealth more difficult.

TERRAIN FEATURES

Light Undergrowth: Consisting of scrubby, hardy bushes and cacti, light undergrowth functions as described for other terrain types. Light undergrowth increases the DC of Acrobatics and Stealth checks by 2. It costs two squares of movement to enter such squares.

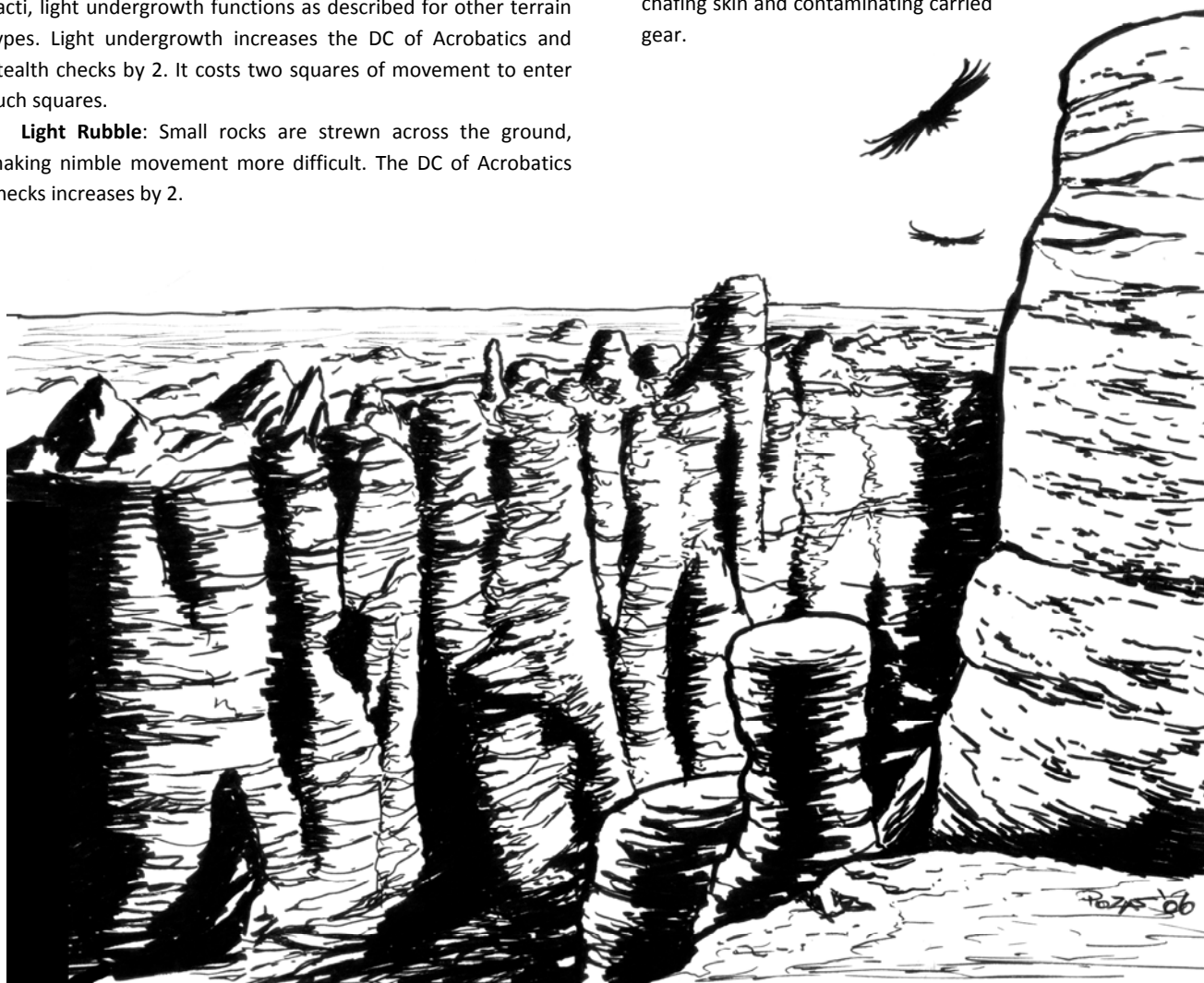
Light Rubble: Small rocks are strewn across the ground, making nimble movement more difficult. The DC of Acrobatics checks increases by 2.

Dense Rubble: A great mass of small rocks and larger boulders covers the ground. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter a square with dense rubble. The DC of Acrobatics checks increases by 5, and the DC of Stealth checks increases by 2.

Sand Dunes: Created by the action of wind on sand, dunes function as hills that move. If the wind is strong and consistent, a sand dune can move several hundred feet in a week's time. Sand dunes can cover hundreds of squares. They always have a gentle slope pointing in the direction of the prevailing wind and a steep slope on the leeward side.

SANDSTORM

A sandstorm reduces visibility to $1d10 \times 5$ feet and provides a -4 penalty on Perception checks. A sandstorm deals 1d3 points of nonlethal damage per hour to any creatures caught in the open, and leaves a thin coating of sand in its wake. Driving sand creeps in through all but the most secure seals and seams, chafing skin and contaminating carried gear.



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