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BEASTS
& BARBARIANS

UMBERTO PIGNATELLI
DEATH OF A TYRANT

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A Sword and Sorcery Savage Worlds adventure for a party of four Seasoned characters

BY UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

Editing: Jakub "Erpegis" Osiejewski, Mike "Upior" Slabon,

Playtesters: Daniele Bonetto, Luca Coero Borga, Maner Samuel, Paolo Boiero, Pierpaolo Ferrari.

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Deep in the Red Desert, the cruel Tyrant of Quollaba rules the City of Gems with an iron fist. The population is terrified by the foreign soldiers and the dark magic of their evil master.

The situation hasn't changed for more than ten years. But now someone is conspiring in the shadows to purge this injustice from the world – someone who doesn't fear soldiers or magic, someone who, with the might of his sword and the courage of his soul, will free Quollaba from the darkness it has been under for too long.

Dare you be one of these souls?

Night missions, breathtaking chases, fights among the desert sands, and many other dangers await you in the first adventure of the *Beasts and Barbarians* series!

Book of Lore Bonus: The Red Desert! In this appendix you'll find extensive background on this sandy land, with its strange and dangerous plants, animals and other weird creatures. You'll learn a lot on the customs of the Nomads Tribes, the only people who manages to live in such a hard place. Sitting around their campfires eating mutton and smoking Red Lotus, you'll hear legends of Djnni, demons and Crystal Beasts, and will learn all the dangers of dealing with Red Nomads.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Death of a Tyrant*, the first adventure of the *Beasts and Barbarians Savage Words* setting.

This scenario is made for a party of four Seasoned heroes (20-25 Experience Points), but it can be easily modified for parties of different size and experience by following the instructions in the Player Guide.

If you want, you can play it with characters of your own design. Otherwise, you can download a set of pregenerated heroes for free from the same site you've downloaded this adventure.

If you don't use gaming terrain, you will find it handy to have gaming stones and several copies of Burst Templates to represent specific terrain features in fights.

The parts in italics are intended to be read aloud or rephrased by the Game Master to the players.

If you want to play this scenario, stop here: the following sections aren't intended for your eyes, but if you are the Game Master, keep reading and prepare to venture into the Dread Sea Dominions!

CHARACTERS REQUIREMENTS

This scenario can be played with all types of heroes. There will be tough fights, so strong warriors will have plenty to do, as well as various situations in which stealth and clever words can save the day, so rogues and diplomatic types will

invaluable. Also, the heroes will face the harshness of the desert, where survival-oriented characters have their chance to shine. Finally, although not necessary, a sorcerer or Lotustmaster will give the party a substantial advantage.

The only real requirement is that at least one hero has a basic ranged weapons skill or an offensive spell working from a distance. Otherwise, the Game Master should change The Temple scene in Part 1 to fit the party's skills.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The scenario doesn't require the heroes to start as a group, so the party can be brought together as the adventure progresses. It is particularly suited for roguish or mercenary types, since at the start the characters are hired as killers, which might seem unsuitable for good oriented heroes.

If your heroes don't suit the part of killers, stress the fact that the person they are going to murder, the Tyrant, is truly evil. They are not committing a homicide, they are... well, aiding a freedom fight, and with Zanator's death the world will be a better place.

BACKGROUND FOR THE GAME MASTER

Ten years ago, the Caldeian sorcerer Zanator, worshipper of an evil god called Ulasha the Devourer, emerged from the Red Desert and, with dark magic and an army of Caldeian heavy archers, conquered the small but prosperous Quollaba, one of the Independent Cities, killing the old king and crowning himself. He became known as the Tyrant of Quollaba.



The day he took the power, he celebrated a strange rite to Ulasha in the biggest temple of the city, proclaiming himself Chosen of Ulasha.

During the solemn ceremony, the Tyrant announced that whoever dared to raise a hand against him would suffer the terrible curse of the mysterious god.

During the early years of his evil reign, a few attempts were made on his life, but the killers were always captured before carrying out their plans (the Tyrant had many spies), and died horribly in the dark dungeons of Zanator's palace.

For fear of the spies and of the curse, the murder attempts ceased after a few years.

Quollaba owes its wealth to the fact that the desert surrounding the city is full of Desert Tears, precious gemstones that emerge from strange crystal formations. One of the first acts of the Tyrant's government was to severely restrict and control the gathering of Desert Tears. Since then, only the Tyrant's supporters have been allowed to pick the stones and illegal gatherers have been killed mercilessly. This policy has made the city even richer, as the price of Desert Tears has soared.

Many years have passed, but the Tyrant still has enemies, and trio of very influential people have decided to hire a party of assassins to get rid of Zanator once and for all. They are looking for foreign assassins, both because the locals are terrified of the Tyrant's power and because, if the curse is true, it will fall upon total strangers rather than potential supporters.

The conspirers are Zamira, Nekerios, and Sulak.

Zamira is the First Concubine of the Tyrant. Despite living a pampered life, she is the daughter of the old king and has not forgotten that the man who shares her bed is her father's killer. She wants Zanator's end and her throne back.

Nekerios is one of the captains of the Tyrant's guards. He is a very ambitious man and has an affair with Zamira. In truth, he just wants to become king, with or without Zamira.

Sulak, a rich merchant born in Quollaba, was one of the first to side with the Tyrant and soon became his First Counselor. He has always been stealing large sums of money from the city's treasury. Now, he fears that Zanator will find out, so he has decided to join the conspiracy.

The Tyrant lives secluded in his palace at all times, so attacking him is almost impossible, except during a major religious festival. On the Night of the Devoured Sun, Zanator himself celebrates an unholy rite to Ulasha in the main temple of the city.

That is when the assassins should strike.

It is a perfect plan. If Ulasha's curse is true, it will be unleashed on the assassins and no one will ever know about the conspiracy. Instead, if the killers survive and are caught, they won't be able to give any information away, as they do not know the identity of those who hired them.

The conspirators just need one more thing: the assassins.

PART I: DEATH OF A TYRANT

ON THE ROAD TO QUOLLABA

This adventure starts *in medias res*, with the heroes traveling for Quollaba, a small Independent City in the middle of the Red Desert. The best way to reach the City of the Tyrant, as Quollaba is known, is to join one of the caravans going there, and probably this is how the characters travelled to the Tyrant's city. If they come from the same place, the heroes can join the same caravan and get to know one another.

Depending on the pace the Game Master wants to give to the game, the trip might include some interesting encounters, useful to make the heroes acquainted each other. Otherwise, it can be entirely skipped.

What is the reason for which the heroes decided to go to such a place? Continue to read to discover it...

BACKGROUND:

THE SELLER OF WATER AND DATES

The Game Master can read this introduction aloud, or he can give it as handout to the players (see Appendix, Handout I). The following scene happened, involving all the party, in a village or town near the Red Desert or in one of the Independent Cities (Game Master's choice).

It was just another afternoon at the bazaar. The voices, smells and colors almost dazed you with their amazing variety. Around you, people of all races invited the customers to look at their enticing wares. The heat was almost unbearable and your throat felt dry as a camel's arse.

Luckily, the market was full of water sellers that day. They are the humblest merchants around but surely they did the most business today. A cup of fresh water was exactly what you needed in that moment.

As if evoked by your desires, an old nomad with dark skin and bright blue eyes approached you: "Here, master, the freshest of waters and the sweetest of dates to quench your thirst and please your palate."

Suddenly many other sellers surrounded you, but the first one continued: "Don't heed these rotten sons of a desert vulture, their water is as hot as camel piss and their dates are full of worms. If you choose my wares, I shall give you some of these marvelous date cakes, for free."

The seller smiles, revealing surprisingly white teeth. He seemed likeable, so you bought a cup of water and some dates from him.

"The cakes..." he said, "they are special. Only my cousin, who owns the Snake Inn in Quollaba, bakes them. I am sure that, after eating one, you'll want more. But, noble stranger, you

will have to hurry, because he only prepares them for the Night of the Devoured Sun."

The story seemed exceedingly strange, even coming from a desert merchant, and you looked at the cakes more closely. They felt heavy and seemed to have something inside. You cautiously broke one in half and... By all the gods! You found an unpolished gem! You can buy wine for a month or even a good horse with these (number of players) cakes!

You definitely wanted more cakes.

You lift your head and looked around for the merchant, but he has disappeared in the crowd.

Quollaba, he said. An interesting place to visit.

This is the reason for which the heroes are now almost arrived at the city.

Someone clearly wants them to get to a certain place in Quollaba, the Snake Inn, before a certain date, the Night of the Devoured Sun.

Look at the sidebar to check what the heroes know about the city. Regarding the celebration, any character making a successful Knowledge (Religion) roll knows that the Night of the Devoured Sun is a particular rite to honor a strange desert divinity which represents the night, defender against the day's heat. The festival will be in ten days from today.

A hero can have retroactively retrieved the same information by speaking to a priest or holy man in one of a temple (with a Persuasion roll and the expense of 10 Moons).

A Common Knowledge roll reveals that the gems are Desert Tears, precious stones found mainly around Quollaba. A Streetwise roll determines that their market value is around 300 Moons each. The same information can be revealed by a jewel maker or other similar artisan.

If the heroes have no horses, the Game Master should decide they used the gems to buy suitable mounts (they'll need them later).

With all these hints, the heroes should be curious enough of what they'll find in Quollaba.

QUOLLABA



The heroes are allowed a Common Knowledge (-2) or Knowledge (Red Desert Area) roll to check what they know about Quollaba. Every entry below includes the previous information. So a character who scores a raise also receives the information in the success entry, and so on.

Failure. *Quollaba is a small Independent City in the heart of the Red Desert.*

Success. *Quollaba is famous for the Desert Tears, precious gemstones found in the desert surrounding the city.*

Raise. *Ten years ago, Quollaba fell into the hands of a cruel Tyrant, a desert warlord who killed the old king and began a*

reign of terror in the city. He also forbade anyone to gather or trade Desert Tears, except his followers.

Two Raises. *Some say that the Tyrant is actually a powerful Caldeian sorcerer and that he still holds Quollaba because the local population and the neighboring cities fear his terrible powers.*



QUOLLABA, AN OPPRESSED CITY

You finally come in sight of Quollaba's fortified walls. The last two days of your journey have been particularly unpleasant. The Road of Gems, the main route leading to the City of the Tyrant is dotted with tall poles on which men are hung and left to die. They are illegal gatherers of Desert Tears and their punishment should serve as an example for anyone wanting to imitate them. This Zanator definitely isn't someone to be messed with.

At the city gates, the heroes are stopped and questioned by the city guards. They are impressive looking, heavily armored men with olive skin, clearly not of the same race as the commoners. They all have a stylized snake embossed on their breastplate. With a Common Knowledge roll the characters recognize them as Caldeian.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

Entering the city isn't easy: the guards question everyone, especially armed strangers. Roleplay this encounter emphasizing the fact that the guards are on high alert. At a certain point, when it is clear that the heroes will not be allowed to enter the city, a third person, a handsome man dressed as an officer, joins the conversation.

"What is happening here?" He asks.

The guards address him respectfully. "These strangers, Captain. They look suspicious."

The captain stares at you. "These men have certainly come here to find work as caravan guards. The Tyrant wants the Road of Gems to be safe and caravan guards are welcome in Quollaba, as long as they behave properly. I am sure these people are ok. Let them pass."

"As you command, Captain Nekerios!" The guards snap to attention.

THE COUNSELOR AND THE FIRST CONCUBINE

Thanks to the Captain's intervention, the heroes are admitted into the city. Quollaba is a typical desert city (see Appendix I for a description), but there is an atmosphere of oppression: no boys running in the streets, no cheering, no merchants singing the praises of their wares in the bazaar. The characters might decide to explore Quollaba a little (in this case refer to Appendix I), but in the end they head for the Snake Inn.

As they are making their way there, they have another encounter.

You are walking down a crowded street, when suddenly everyone stops and bows low. For a moment, you are the only



people standing straight and this give you a clear view of what is happening. Four tough-looking slaves, probably eunuchs, are carrying someone in a sedan chair. The people part at its passing and bow in respect.

"You, strangers! Hurry up and bow!" a woman whispers worriedly.

If the heroes don't bow and are spotted, they are just looked at with reproach but nothing bad happens to them. The text considers the other case, in which the characters keep a low profile and bow.

The sedan chair comes closer and you manage to see its two occupants. One is a sweaty, fat man, wearing rich robes and a gaudy golden necklace. He is fanning himself but it does not help his sweating skin. The other is a tall, black haired woman of great beauty, though her gaze is as cold as a stone.

They both seem to be completely oblivious to the bowing crowd.

Curious heroes might try to question one of the locals, such as the woman who whispered to them. She is reluctant to speak to strangers, because the Tyrant has many spies, so a Persuasion roll is required.

In case of success, she reveals that the two personalities are Sulak, the Tyrant's Counselor, and Zamira, the Tyrant's First Concubine. With a raise, the woman provides some background information about them. Sulak, once just a rich merchant, has supported the Tyrant since the beginning and risen to great power, while Zamira is the daughter of

the old king, kept alive by the Tyrant only because of her great beauty.

After this brief conversation, the woman goes away.

THE SNAKE INN

The Snake Inn is rather small and stands in a pleasant square with a bubbling fountain from which anyone can drink. Despite the gloomy atmosphere of the city, this is an open show of wealth: free water in the desert.

The inside of the building is cool and shady. The innkeeper, a man with a long, tidy beard, speaks to you with a humorless face.

"What can I do for you?"

Amib, the innkeeper, has learnt to keep his mouth shut, which is the safest way to live under the constant watch of the Tyrant's spies. If questioned about the market seller and his date cakes, he says that he never bakes cakes, has no cousins, and doesn't know anyone remotely similar to the man the characters met. He is sincere: he has nothing to do with the whole story.

If the heroes decide to leave the inn, Amib warns them to find lodging as soon as they may. Having no place to stay is a crime punished with imprisonment. He offers rooms and food at a reasonable price, an offer the party should accept, otherwise the scene below takes place in any other suitable lodge the party finds.

You are sitting around a table deciding what to do, while the inn is filling up with people for lunch. An old beggar comes in with a chipped bowl in his hand, asking for something to eat. When he walks past your table, under the dirt and rags you recognize the very market seller you were looking for!

He whispers: "This afternoon, at the Koralon estate. Be sure nobody follows you."

He is about to say more, but just then some guards enter the inn. The beggar turns around and quickly leaves.

The guards sit down for lunch and show no interest in the party. So, the heroes can safely leave the inn, but the beggar is nowhere to be found.

THE CONSPIRATORS

THE KORALON ESTATE

Everyone in the city knows about the Koralon estate (no roll required) and the party can discover the following information: it is an old country estate outside the city walls, destroyed and razed by the Tyrant when he took power. The Koralons were influential nobles and refused to surrender to the Tyrant, who made an example of them.

The estate, now crumbling ruin, can be reached on horseback in an hour.

Let the party make some Notice rolls and throw the dice, faking opposed Stealth rolls. Nobody is actually following the heroes, but this will make them a little more uneasy.

When the party reaches the ruins, read the following part.

A man, dressed as a desert nomad, emerges from a crumbling building. You recognize him as the date seller and the beggar.

"Welcome, my friends. I apologize for the strange way in which I summoned you here but, given the situation, no other method would have worked. You can call me Guran, although that is not my real name. No need to introduce yourselves; I know perfectly well who you are. And now, if you want to follow me, the people I represent wish to speak to you."

With these words, Guran enters the ruins and leads the party to a colonnade, where three hooded and masked people await.

The tallest of the three speaks first. His tone is that of a man used to command others: "We have no time to lose. You are here because we want to propose a risky, but very lucrative business."

The second person, a plump, short man constantly waving a fan, continues: "We want you to kill...the Tyrant."

If the heroes are interested, the plump man goes on.

"The reward is gems like those we gave you. A sack of them, enough to last you a lifetime. We have a plan. The Tyrant never leaves his palace and it is impossible to get to him. But once a year, on the Night of the Devoured Sun, Zanator celebrates a particular ritual to his unholy deity, Ulasha, in the main temple. You will kill him on that night."

At this point the third conspirer speaks. To your surprise, you hear a woman's voice.

"The temple is guarded on that night, but not as much as the palace, and we have bribed an acolyte. He'll make sure a window on the upper floor is left open. You can sneak in from there, find a place on the balcony, and, when the Tyrant appears, shoot him down with an arrow."

The first man continues.

"Once you've done your part, you must flee the city. Someone should wait outside the temple with fresh horses. For religious reasons, the city gates will be open, although guarded. If you are fast enough, you can leave Quollaba before the guards at the gate find out that their master is dead. At this point come here, you'll be rewarded and we'll never see one another again."

The woman concludes: "The Night of the Devoured Sun is tomorrow, so there is no time to waste."

With these words, the heroes are dismissed. They are not supposed to have any further contact with Guran or the conspirers. They can make some educated guesses on who the three hooded individuals are, because they have already met every one of them. Let them make Smarts rolls. For each success and raise, they recognize Nekerios, Sulak, and Zamira.

ULASHA THE DEVOURER



The heroes might be curious the strange god worshipped by the Tyrant. With a Knowledge (Religion) or Knowledge (Arcana) (-2) or Knowledge (Legends and Lore) (-4) roll, the characters learn the following information. Each entry includes the previous one. So, for instance, a character scoring a raise also receives the information from the success entry.

Failure. *The character knows nothing about this god.*



Success. *Ulasha is a desert divinity, more similar to a demon than to a true god. He is associated with avidity, lust, and power.*

Raise. *Ulasha the Devourer is a very dangerous deity. He is adored in the Red Desert, but his cult is much more ancient. It comes from Caldeia, where it was imported from the decadent Tricarnia. Ulasha is usually depicted as a giant snake.*

Two Raises. *Ulasha is a trapped deity, condemned by his greatest enemy, the Sun, to eternally live in darkness. He tries in every way to come back to the world of men. He fears the secret name of the Sun God (which the hero knows: Golar Ammon) and shouting it before Ulasha grants +4 to a single Intimidation roll against the Tyrant Snake in the last part of the scenario.*

AN UNHOLY FESTIVAL

The party can ask around about the Night of the Devoured Sun, but nobody in Quollaba knows or wants to speak of it. It is a very important rite to Ulasha, the evil god of their lord, and only Ulasha's followers (the Tyrant, his priests, and some of his guards) are admitted to the temple.

With a Knowledge (Religion) or Knowledge (Arcana) -4 roll the heroes discover that during the ceremony Ulasha metaphorically swallows his enemy, the Sun. With a raise, they also find out that the influence of the stars makes Ulasha's followers particularly weak on the night of the ritual.

CAPTURED!

It is possible, though very unlikely, that the heroes are captured by the guards before they manage to kill the Tyrant. If they are arrested for a minor offense (going where they shouldn't, cheating at dice, harassing a woman) Captain Nekerios helps them, because he needs their services, even though he isn't at all happy about it.

If they are caught while doing something that clearly hints at an attempt on the Tyrant's life, they are locked away in prison. Zanator will decide their fate after the Night of the Devoured Sun. Even in this case Nekerios helps the heroes, freeing them a couple of hours after dusk, but the heroes are Fatigued (the guards have beaten them up) and lose a Bennie for their blatant inability.



THE NIGHT OF THE DEVoured SUN

The heroes have a whole day to study the temple and choose a suitable escape route. Players are notoriously unpredictable, so the paragraphs below describe the most likely and appropriate plan.

PREPARING THE ESCAPE ROUTE

Before killing the Tyrant, the heroes should decide how they are going to escape after the deed. If they study the safest way to reach the gates in advance, they are allowed a cooperative Smarts roll. For each success and raise they gain +2 to the events of the second, third, and fourth round of the "Escape from Quollaba" Chase (see below). With a success they earn the bonus only for the second round, with a single raise for the second and third round, and so on.

In addition, they must find a place where to hide their horses. With a Notice roll, they locate an abandoned building or dark alley near the temple; otherwise the mounts are kept a little further away (see the "Escape from Quollaba" section).

SNEAKING INTO THE TEMPLE

The Temple of Quollaba is a large, squat building, sixty by sixty yards, with a massive gate at the front. It includes the main hall and the priests' quarters. It used to be a temple of the Divine Couple but, when the Tyrant took power, the old gods were replaced with the foul demon worshipped by Zanator.

During the Night of the Devoured Sun the temple's gate is watched by six guards, while two groups of two guards each patrol the perimeter. It takes them 20 rounds to complete a round of the perimeter.

The heroes can easily spot the window left open by the acolyte, it is along the western wall. It is quite high up (20 yards from the ground), so the party must find a way to reach it. Two different methods are detailed below, but others can be devised by clever players.

Climbing. The heroes can decide to climb the temple's wall to reach the window. It is the most straightforward way. A single Stealth roll is required to reach the wall while the guards aren't looking or are very far away. As per the standard Savage Worlds rules, two Climbing rolls, one each round, are required to climb the 20 yards to reach the window. Using a rope is considered as having Climbing Equipment (+2). Heroes failing the roll don't fall, they simply don't advance. Only with a critical failure they fall to the ground, suffering normal damage. No more than two characters can climb up the rope at the same time.

Nearby Palace. A palace stands right in front of the opened window. It used to belong to a executed merchant and is now empty. The characters can break in (with a Lockpicking roll), reach the top floor, and use a rope and hook to reach the temple. It requires a single Agility (+2) roll.

(M) Tyrant's Soldiers (9): See page 32.

(M) Tyrant's Officer (1): See page 32.

UNEXPECTED EVENTS

Even the best laid plans can go astray. At the start of the Night of the Devoured Sun, draw a card from the Action Deck and check the list of events below.

2 - Clear Night. *It is a very clear night: no clouds, bright stars, and full moon. Reduce low light modifiers by 2 while outside.*

3-5 - Drunkard. *A drunkard starts wandering by the temple's wall exactly when the party is trying to sneak in! He is very conspicuous and, if not stopped, he'll attract the guards' attention in 1d4 rounds.*

6-7 - Additional Guards. *For some unknown reason, the number of guards outside the Temple is increased by 50%.*

8 - 9 - Hay Cart. *The heroes spot a cart full of hay left outside a stable. It might help in speeding up the escape from the temple (see the Escape from Quollaba paragraph), or it can be*

placed in a strategic location to aid the party in leaving the city. But, first of all, it must be stolen, which requires a *Stealth* roll to avoid being noticed by its owner, a farmer. Otherwise, he'll come out of the stable cursing and screaming.

10 – Patrol. A group of guards is checking the roads around the temple. They patrol the area for the whole night. While outside the temple, the heroes outside must make a *Stealth* roll or meet them. The patrol includes four Tyrant's Soldiers plus an Officer.

J – Mare in Heat. In a nearby stable a mare is in heat, which makes the horses very tense. The heroes staying with the horses are required a *Riding* roll (-2) during the night to prevent the mounts from whinnying, thus alerting the guards.

Q – Change of mind. You should never trust a traitor! The bribed adept hasn't left the window open, so it must be *Lockpicked* or *bashed in* (*Toughness* 10). Due to the awkward position, any roll to pry it open suffers -2 and, in case of critical failure, the hero must also roll on *Agility* to avoid falling.

K – Inspection. A few moments before the rite begins, a guard scrupulously inspects the balcony where the characters are hidden. It is full of hiding places (+2 to

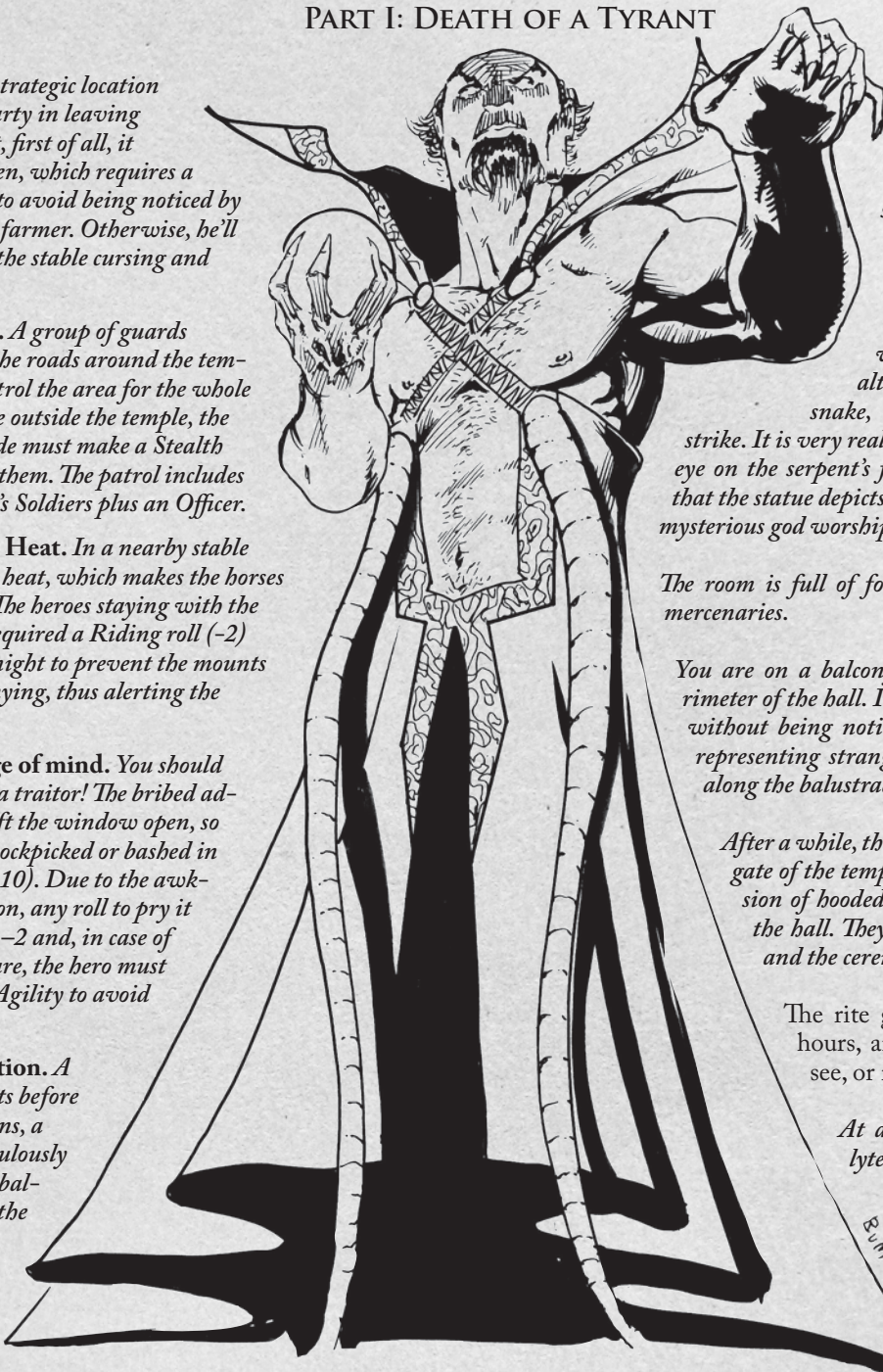
Stealth rolls), and luckily the priests are chanting, so, if the heroes are spotted, they have three rounds to dispatch the guard before he raises the alarm.

A – Blaze! This is a very strange night. A large fire is spreading on the other side of the city, so half of the guards outside the temple are ordered there to check the situation and all the remaining soldiers are distracted (-4 to *Notice* rolls). On the downside, the sky is as bright as during the day.

Joker. Draw another two cards and combine their effects. Good luck!

IN THE TEMPLE

When the heroes finally manage to enter the temple, read the following part. This paragraph considers the case in which the party goes in through the open window. But, if the situation is different, change the description accordingly.



The temple looks even bigger from the inside than from the outside. The air is filled with the smoke of incense and the chants of the believers.

An enormous statue stands along the north wall, in front of a stone altar. It represents a giant snake, a desert cobra ready to strike. It is very realistic but for a third, closed eye on the serpent's forehead. You understand that the statue depicts *Ulasha the Devourer*, the mysterious god worshipped by the Tyrant.

The room is full of followers, mostly Caldeian mercenaries.

You are on a balcony running along the perimeter of the hall. It is the perfect place to spy without being noticed, since several statues, representing strange humanoids, are placed along the balustrade, providing good cover.

After a while, the chants stop and the great gate of the temple swings open. A procession of hooded, black-clad priests enters the hall. They approach the altar, bow, and the ceremony starts.

The rite goes on for a couple of hours, and still the heroes don't see, or recognize, the Tyrant.

At a certain point, two acolytes come in from a secondary room, bringing a placid, black slave. From his expression you understand he must be drugged. The acolytes take him to the altar and start tying him up. Suddenly the man realizes what is going to happen and tries to fight back, but the clerics are very skilled and in a few moments the victim is immobilized, his eyes rolling with fear.

In the meantime, the chant starts again and becomes louder. A hooded priest steps out from the group. The acolytes hastily help him to undress, until he is completely naked, except for a loincloth. He is a bald, aquiline man of indefinite age. You finally recognize *Zanator, the Tyrant!* He takes a stone dagger and prepares to kill the slave!

This is the right moment to act! The Tyrant is 12" away from the heroes (so, within short range of any decent bow, and, only tonight, he is particularly weak; for this reason dispatching him is considered a *Finishing Move* (no need to roll)).

The round immediately after the attack, all the people in the temple are shocked (they are *Surprised*), so this will give the heroes a second chance to shoot, just in case the first arrow went astray.

DEATH OF A TYRANT

When the Tyrant dies, read the following description.

The Tyrant observes the arrow in his chest with an astonished expression. He raises his eyes to meet those of his assassins and, for a moment, you feel a cold shudder. Then, he collapses to the ground, dead.

"He is dead! He is dead!" a priest shouts hysterically.

Panic ensues!

PART II: THE PRICE OF BLOOD

ESCAPE FROM QUOLLABA

After the Tyrant's death, the characters must escape as soon as they can. There are simply too many opponents in the temple to consider fighting them, and many more guards are on their way.

If you need a battle map, the temple's hall is 18" by 18" with a 4"-wide doorway along the southern wall.

Ulasha's statue is placed half-way down the northern wall and the altar is just in front of it. The priests and followers of the god are roughly 4" away from the altar.

A 2"-wide balcony runs along the perimeter of the room. It is lined with statues (Toughness 9, Medium Cover) placed at 4" intervals, and can be accessed via stairs from the southeastern corner of the room.

The heroes start on the balcony, halfway down the western wall, and they are within 3" of the window they used to sneak into the temple.

The Game Master can easily play this part of the scenario without a map, keeping in mind that the following events happen:

Round 1. 2d6 Soldiers and an Officer start moving toward the stairs to reach the balcony.

Round 2. 1d4 Soldiers open fire on the heroes from the ground floor of the temple. They'll continue to shoot each round until the last hero has left the temple.

Round 4. The Soldiers and the Officer start the round on the balcony 6" away from the heroes.

Round 6. The Soldiers outside the temple open the gate and swarm in (see the Sneaking Into The Temple paragraph). At this point, the characters should have already left the Temple.

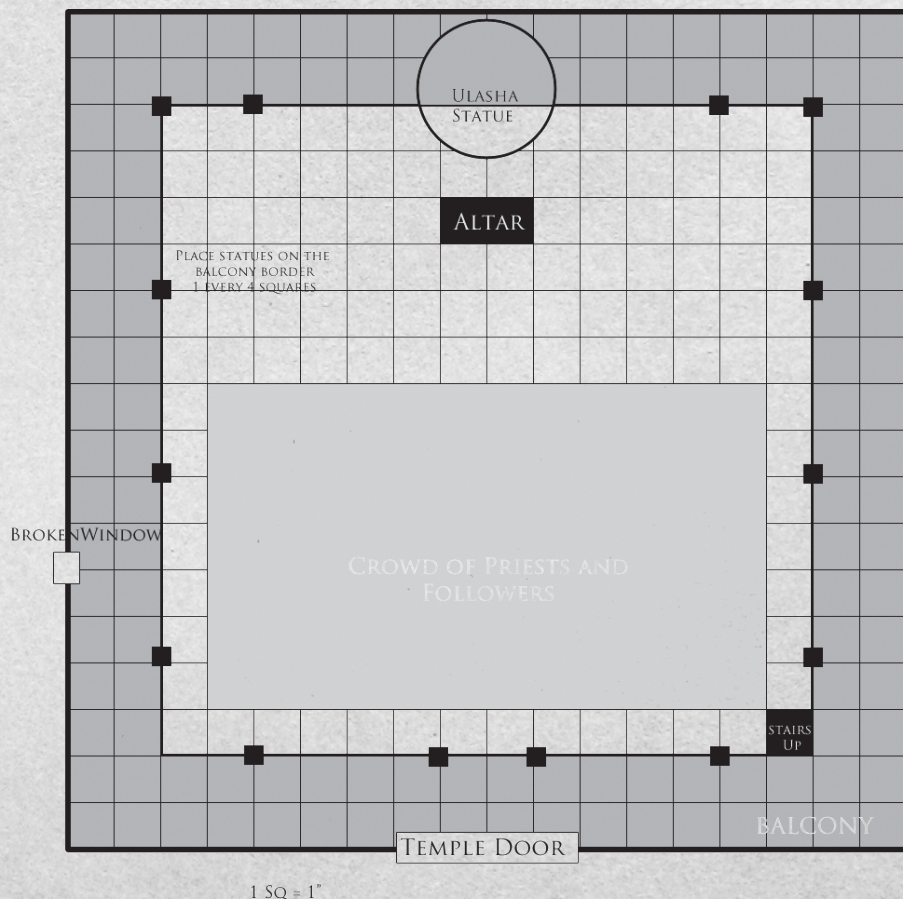
(M) Tyrant's Soldiers (20): See page 32.

(M) Tyrant's Officers (2): See page 32.

(M) Priests of Ulasha (8): See page 31.

Leaving the temple. The most logical way to leave the temple is by using the same rope the heroes used to get in. Going down is a little trickier, so a single hero can be climbing down the rope at any given time. With a successful Climbing roll, it takes him a full round to go down; if he scores a raise, he is so fast that another character can try to get down in the same round. With a failure, the hero is clumsy and only climbs half the way down this round, while with a critical failure he falls, suffering 2d6 damage. Naturally, nothing prevents the characters from using an extra rope (maximum two ropes in total).

The heroes can find alternative ways to leave the temple



quickly, for example another character can place a cart full of hay under the window. In this case, a single Agility roll is required to jump into the hay, and the entire group can leave the temple in one round. The only drawback is that,

in case of failure, the character misses the target, suffering 3d6 damage.

The cart is listed in the Unexpected Events table, but clever players can find one of their own, with a Notice roll.

Once outside the temple, read the following part.

You have just left the temple, when several screaming soldiers and priests run out after you. One of them, an officer, shouts: "They killed the Tyrant! Stop them!"

You turn around and... oh no, you see a large group of mounted soldiers, probably returning from a mission outside the city, coming toward you. They unsheathe their swords and charge at you with a terrible war cry!

Meanwhile, inside the temple someone blows a very loud horn, awakening the entire city.

The situation is getting ugly here: you must get away from Quollaba!

Leaving the city is considered a Chase sequence, to be ran with the following rules.

The chase lasts 8 rounds and is based on Riding. The heroes, if they hid their horses close by (see Preparing the Escape Route) or if they left the temple in two rounds or less, draw an additional card for the first round (two if they did both the things).

In certain rounds some scripted events happen, as detailed below, they are in addition to any Complication it might arise.

Because timing is very important (see Through the Gates! below), anytime a player character acts on a Face card give the group a Speed Token (three if he acted on a joker). They'll be useful after.

Both the heroes and the pursuers are on horseback, so, for obstacle damage calculation purposes, they are considered as moving at an average speed of 15" each turn (full gallop).

To keep the number of pursuers manageable, consider the Tyrant's soldiers divided in four groups of four soldiers plus an officer. They make a single group Chase roll, with Riding d6 plus the Wild Die.

(M) Tyrant's Soldiers (4 groups of 4): See page 32.

(M) Tyrant's Officers (1 leading each group): See page 32.

CHASE EVENTS

Round 2. Pile of Barrels. Along the road, there is a pile of barrels, held in place by a wooden stick. The character leading the Chase can decide to remove it with an Agility (-2) roll, causing the barrels to roll down the road! All the characters behind him suffer -4 to Chase rolls for the whole turn. If he renounces, the second most advanced character can try and remove the stick, and so on. In case two characters are on the same Range Increment, the one with the higher initiative is considered as leading the Chase.

Round 3-4. Maze of Alleys. This part of Quollaba is a true maze of narrow streets. During these rounds, all the characters involved in the Chase use lower of Smarts or Riding as Chase skill.

Round 5. Move That Cart! Some fool has left a cart in the middle of the road! During this round all the characters involved in the Chase must make an additional Riding (+2) roll to avoid it. In case of failure they suffer the effects of hitting a hard obstacle. Alternatively, a character can decide to jump over the cart! In this case the Riding roll suffers a -2 but, in case of success, he automatically gains a Range Increment.

Round 6. Lepers. On the Night of the Devoured Sun, all the people of Quollaba stay safely at home, except the lepers. They worship Ulasha the Devourer, so they hold a procession through the city, chanting and dancing. Just now, they are right in the way of the Chase. During this round Intimidation or Fighting are used as Chase skill (to cut a path through the lepers). If a 1 is rolled on the Fighting or Intimidation die, regardless of the Wild Die, the lepers react angrily, attacking the hero trying to get through (d6 attacks with Fighting d4, remember each attack has +1 for each attacker, to a maximum of +4 (Gang Up bonus), Damage: 2d4).

THROUGH THE GATES!

The chase ends when the party reaches the city gates, but it doesn't mean their troubles have ended. The guards are frantically trying to close the massive doors!

Count the Speed Tokens the group has, and then run the scene following these instructions:

Speed Tokens Result

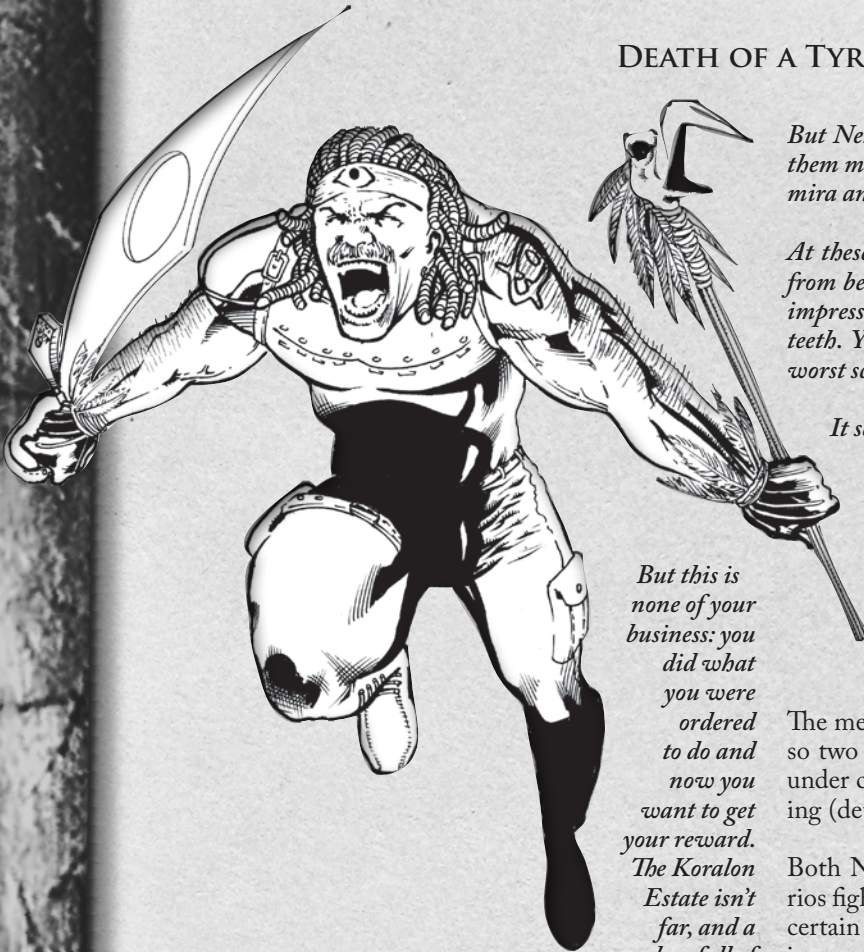
8+	The group was super fast. They easily manage to go through the gate.
5+	Each character must do a Riding roll, with -1 for each counter below 8. If he is successful, he barely makes it out; if he fails, he manages to go through but hits a hard obstacle (3d6 damage). Only in case of a critical failure, he hits an obstacle (as above) but doesn't manage to go through the gates and must try again the next round.
4 or less	The gates are shut and the heroes must fight their way out of Quollaba.

(M) Tyrant's Soldiers (6): They are guarding the city gates. See page 32.

A TREACHEROUS PAYMENT

You manage to leave Quollaba just in time! The city gates close behind you, leaving your pursuers inside! They frantically try to reopen the gates, but you spur your horses and, when they finally manage to come out, you are far away, a small dot in the distance. In the meantime Quollaba is awakening: you see lights from many windows and hear shouts. The people of Quollaba are rebelling, it seems.

DEATH OF A TYRANT



But this is none of your business: you did what you were ordered to do and now you want to get your reward. The Koralon Estate isn't far, and a bag full of gems is awaiting you there!

But Nekerios hasn't finished speaking just yet. "But I deserve them more. They'll help me to pay mercenaries to get rid of Zamira and Sulak. Men! Kill them all!"

At these words, a band of darkskinned, scarred men emerges from behind the crumbling columns. They are armed with an impressive array of weapons and their grins reveal sharpened teeth. You recognize them: they are Kashiti mercenaries, the worst scum of the Ivory Savannah!

It seems that more blood will have to be spilled tonight.

This is the final battle of the first part of the adventure, so it is supposed to be tough.

The battlefield is a square area, 24" by 24", full of ruins (detailed below). Nekerios is placed roughly in the center of the battle area. Place the heroes 6" away from him.

The mercenaries have had the time to plan a good ambush, so two thirds of them are placed within 12" of the heroes, under cover. The other third is on the roof of the tall building (detailed below), armed with bows.

Both Nekerios and the mercenaries start on Hold. Nekerios fights defensively (using the Defend Option) until he is certain to have support from his men. The melee mercenaries run to engage the characters as fast as they can, while the archers pepper the heroes with arrows from the roof.

The mercenaries keep fighting until they are down to three or less or Nekerios is dead. In this case, they try to flee. Nekerios instead fights to the death.

When he dies, read the following passage.

Nekerios looks at his wounds, almost with disbelief. For a moment, he has the same expression you saw earlier on the Tyrant's face. Then he says "Ulasha... so it is true." And he dies.

The heroes still don't know what Nekerios means, but they'll soon find out.

(M) Kashiti Mercenaries (3 per hero): See page 30.

(M) Nekerios, Captain of the Guards (WC): See page 30.

TERRAINS AND PROPS

• **Columns:** There are several half-broken columns in the area. Each column is 1" by 1", has Toughness 10, and grants Medium Cover. The columns are quite unstable, so with a Strength (-4) roll, the heroes can make them collapse. Those in the way of a falling column (a straight line 2" wide by 6" long) must make an Agility roll or suffer 2d8 damage. Place up to six columns onto the battlefield, represented by gaming stones.

• **Old Well:** An old, empty well, 15" deep, is located roughly in the center of the battlefield. Characters falling into it suffer 3d6 damage. Getting out requires Climbing rolls, with a penalty of -4 due to the smooth surface of the sides. A character can be thrown into the well as a consequence of a Trick or other situation arising during combat. The well can be represented by a Small Burst Template.

The heroes reach the Koralon Estate an hour before dawn.

You arrive at the ruins and dismount from your horses. The beasts are tired because you have been riding at full speed, eager to get your money.

A lonely figure emerges from under an arch. He is the tall conspirator, still hooded and masked.

"Is he dead?" he asks.

Obviously the man is referring to the Tyrant.

After your answer, he seems to relax a bit.

"Yes, he is. I see the lights in the city. The people are rebelling, as planned. So this disguise is no longer needed."

He uncovers his face, revealing traits you know very well. The man is Nekerios, the Captain who helped you enter the city!

"Surprised?" he asks, with an amused look. "Well, I have always been an ambitious man and I am on the winning side. I, Sulak and Zamira are the new lords of Quollaba."

Then he extracts a fat purse from his pocket.

"But I imagine you have little interest in my words. Here are the gems. You deserve them." He throws the purse at your feet. The bag opens, revealing a mass of large, shimmering Desert Tears.

• **Ruined Walls:** There are several blocks of stones in the area, the remnants of some collapsed walls. They are 1" by 4", have Toughness 8 and grant Light Cover. They are considered Difficult Ground. Place up to four of them onto the battlefield.

• **Tall building:** A single two storey building still stands, but the walls along the second floor have been knocked down. It is a squat structure 6" by 6", and 6" tall. On the ground floor there is a single 2"-wide opening leading into a room where a flight of stairs (3" by 2") can be taken to the second floor. Otherwise, a character can reach the second floor with a single Climbing or Agility (-2) roll. Shooting from this higher position lends a definite advantage: the archers have a clear line of sight and reduce by one the Cover modifier of any target in Light or Medium Cover. Place the tall building where you want, within 3" of the border of the battlefield.

WHAT TO DO NOW?

After Nekerios's death, the party can grab the purse and inspect the Desert Tears. They are worth around 5000 Moons. The problem is that the gems are all of different sizes and it is impossible to share them fairly among the heroes. The only thing to do is to sell them and share the money.

So, the party must now find a city or trading post.

Near the ruins the heroes can find Nekerios's and the mercenaries' horses. Nekerios had a good horse (+1 Pace), while the Kashiti mercenaries ride strange Savannah horses with black and white stripes (zebras), too wild to be ridden by anyone who isn't a Kashiti (-4 to Riding Rolls).

The heroes aren't supposed to return to Quollaba now. If they approach the city, they see that unrest and fighting have spread everywhere and smoke rises from several areas. In addition, a large squadron of soldiers faithful to the Tyrant is engaging a crowd of citizens right by the gates.

The heroes have the gems, as well as horses and enough food and water to reach the first oasis. Their only problem is finding a buyer for their little treasure but, everything considered, this is not bad for a night's work!

The adventure seems to have come to an end, but this is actually only the beginning!

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE: FLASHBACK

This optional sidebar is suitable for groups of experienced players, who are more interested in narration than in pure combat.

If the GM is confident about the players' abilities, this scenario can be played in a non-linear way. In this case, start the adventure with the Escape from Quollaba scene. Give the players minimal information: it is night, they are in a city in the Red Desert, and they have just done something very illegal, so they must escape. DON'T REVEAL the nature of the offense (the murder of the Tyrant): throw them directly into the action, with the city guards at their heels.

At the end of the chase scene, when the party leaves the city, the players will surely ask what happened before. In this case,



play the scenario from the start up to the Tyrant's murderer. Then, you can skip the chase (you have already played it) and take up the story from the Treacherous Payment scene.

The advantage of this technique, used in many suspense movies, is that you'll surely catch the players' attention and you'll start the game with a blast.

It is very powerful, but should not be abused.

However, the GM must not forget that flashbacks have a major downside: the invincible player syndrome. If a player knows his character will survive the first part of the story, he might feel his decisions have no consequences or he might perform certain actions only to emphasize his "immortality".

In this case, tell the player that this is only a part of the story and he should play as if his character could die. Mature players will understand and behave properly.

Although the heroes are unlikely to get captured or killed during the first part of the scenario, it can happen, so the GM must be prepared to face these situations.

If the heroes are captured, Nekerios will free them (see the Captured! Sidebar on page 8). If a hero gets killed, (but only in the flashback part), he will simply be knocked unconscious.

In both cases, warn the players that if they are "saved from death" they'll be penalized, starting the next session with one Bennie less.

THE OASIS OF THE HUNCHBACK

The nearest civilization outpost is a four-day ride from Quollaba.

It is a small caravanserai in a tiny oasis, commonly named the Oasis of the Hunchback, after his owner, Katu, an ugly and deformed Kyrosian refugee.

The place does not offer many comforts: a water well, a crumbling building, and a few palm trees, all surrounded by a makeshift wooden palisade, whose gate is always open.

Yet, after a long trip in the desert, you aren't too picky, especially because you are sure that Katu has something to wash down the dust in your throat and satiate your hunger, after many days of canned rations.



Once you have finally arrived, you give water to your tired horses, tie them down by the watering place near the main building, and then you walk in.

The inside of the house is smoky and smelly, definitely not a model of cleanliness. There aren't many other travelers at the moment, just a small group of nomad herders eating mutton and drinking sour milk. They briefly look at you before returning to their food.

Katu limps toward you. He is even uglier than the last time you saw him and not very talkative either. He takes your orders, limps back to the hearth, where a quarter of mutton is roasting, and start cutting chunks of meat.

Give the players some time to roleplay their encounter with Katu, if they want to. He is a grumpy, close-mouthed man, but not a bad fellow. The news of the recent events in Quollaba hasn't spread yet, so he knows nothing of it. After a while, or immediately if the heroes start talking about what happened in Quollaba, go on with the following part.

You have just swallowed the first morsel of mutton, when you hear the sound of hooves approaching and see a cloud of dust rising outside the door. The party of riders must be rather numerous.

Katu goes to the door to see who the newcomers are.

When they come through the gate, you notice they are black clad nomads. A single figure stands out among them, a man dressed in white, who rides bareheaded.

"I know them. This is Tul, a holy man of the desert, and his followers. They are a little crazy, but peaceful."

But the nomads don't look so peaceful. They dismount their horses and come into the inn with grim faces.

One of them, a tall fellow with a long black beard, says: "Disgrace! Disgrace and death upon us all! The Tyrant of Quollaba is dead!"

At this revelation, Katu turns white: "D... dead? How... how did it happen?"

"Foreign assassins killed him, five days ago." The nomad says, bluntly.

"Are they mad? Killing the Tyrant? Everyone knows about the curse pronounced by the Tyrant the day he seized the throne!" Katu says, shocked.

"I am the Chosen of Ulasha, raise a hand against me and you'll face the rage of my God!" the tall man says in a solemn voice, repeating the words of the Tyrant.

"We are all doomed!" Katu cries.

At this point the man in white, Tul, enters the inn. Everyone looks at him with various expressions, ranging from curiosity to veneration.

He is a surprisingly young fellow, bald and fair-skinned, but he is clearly a fanatic: his face, willingly exposed to the harshness of the sun, is covered in blisters, and his half-blind eyes shimmer with the light of madness.

"The Sun God spoke to me!" Tul shouts. "Four strangers killed the Tyrant and brought the curse upon us all! We must find them! Have you seen them?"

Everyone immediately stares at the party. There are four of them. They are strangers. They are armed.

Tul observes you and there must be something true in his ramblings about the Sun God, because he somehow recognizes you: "It's them!" He thunders. "I smell the stench of death within their souls! They are the killers!"

This is a very tense moment. The best way to handle this scene is through the Social Conflict Rules. The party must do cooperative Persuasion rolls for three rounds and sum up the successes. If the heroes mock or openly displease the holy man, they suffer -4 to the Persuasion roll. On the other side, if they claim that they killed the Tyrant to clean the word of a great evil, they gain +2 to the roll. As usual, very good role play should be rewarded with a significant bonus (+2 to +4).

Social Combat Outcome Table

Success Scored	Effect
Zero	Tul is convinced that the heroes mock or ridicule him! Now only their blood can pacify Ulasha the Devourer. He orders the people in the caravanserai to butcher them, and both his followers and the herders obey. Only Katu hides under a table.
1-2	Tul frowns at the heroes, but won't raise a hand on them. He orders the party to get out of the caravanserai immediately, to not taint the people inside. If they obey, before they are out, he adds. "Gallop as fast as you can but you cannot outrun the Devourer. He will have you!"

3-4 Tul accepts the heroes' words for what they appear. They risked, though unaware, their lives to free the desert from the evil of Zana-tor. They are doomed, but at least they deserve the compassion of the men, and a plate of hot food before facing their doom, in the desert. Before the party goes away, he says these last words: *"I'll pray for you, strangers, but I feel the dark presence of Ulasha upon you. Go away, run fast, but be prepared to the worst."*

5+ As above, but Tul is convinced of the heroes' good intentions. He shares a meal with them, and gives them his blessing, if they want. Before leaving he says. *"The Devourer is a creature of darkness, strong and powerful, but he fears the true name of the Sun God: Golar Ammon. Remember it: Golar Ammon. Only he can save you now."*

If the heroes remain in the caravanserai after Tul's demise, they'll have to face Katu's fear.

"You madmen! You don't know what you've done! You killed the Tyrant condemning all the desert peoples! Leave my inn at once!"

For no reason the hunchback wants the heroes to stay under his roof for the night. He gives them provisions for free, but in the end they must leave the oasis at once.

The nearest city is three days away on horseback.

(M) **Desert Nomads (3 per hero):** See page 30.

(M) **Tul, Desert Prophet:** See page 32.

(M) **Desert Herders (1 per hero):** See page 30.

PART III: IN THE DESERT

LOST

Read the following part when the heroes decide to go back into the desert.

Three days. Maybe four. It is the distance separating you from civilization and the end of this accursed desert. You have water and food, but you must be sparing, as there will be no other oases before the end of your journey.

At least there is no doubt about the way to follow: go toward the rising sun and you won't get lost.

Unluckily for the characters, their journey isn't over yet, because Ulasha's shadow reaches very far.

Here are the dangers the adventurers have to face during their desert trip.

Orienteering Problems. Let the group make a Survival or Smarts roll, to keep the right direction, but ignore the

result. Tell the players they are quite sure they are going in the right direction, but, a few hours later, they discover that the sun is in the wrong position. They have deviated from the right path. In the space of a day or little more, they are completely lost.

It is the effect of Ulasha's curse: the Devourer is luring them back to Quollaba.

Are We Cursed? A *detect arcana* spell reveals a strange, faint aura around the characters, but it is too weak to clearly understand what it is (it isn't a standard Power from the *Savage Worlds* manual). Moreover, *dispel* and similar methods to eliminate it don't have any effect.

Dwindling Rations. The characters are supposed to have provisions for five days when they arrived at the Oasis of the Hunchback, where they plan to replenish their supplies. If they were forced to leave it in hurry, they had no time to grab extra food and water. If Katu gave them ration to get rid of them, or if they sacked the Oasis, their supplies will last for eight days. It is a reasonable margin for a three days' trip, but their journey won't be over that soon... Keep track of the provisions and use the *Starving* and *Thirst* rules from the *Savage Worlds* core rules.

The heroes can try to forage, but it's very difficult in the desert, and they suffer -4 to Survival rolls.

Besides these problems, other dangers await the party on the long journey.

Day 1 - Bad Dreams. One of the heroes has bad dreams. *Beasts and Barbarians* is a setting where superstition is common. The constant blathering about curses and the fact that they are actually lost in the desert are enough to instill fear even in the bravest of hearts. During the first night, every hero must make a Fear check. If all the heroes succeed, nothing happens; if one or more characters fail, pick the one who rolled the lowest number (roll a die in case of a tie) and give him handout 2 (found in Appendix II - Handouts), for his eyes only.

For convenience, the content of the handout is also reprinted below.

You are in the ruins of the Koralon estate. Nekerios and his men are moving toward you. But no, it isn't the Kashiti, it's the Tyrant's guards. They surround you, weapons raised. You are ready to fight them, but suddenly something terrible happens. Nekerios and the soldiers stop dead in their tracks: their skin and faces are changing, they are becoming monsters, the most hideous creatures you have ever seen! But wait, you feel a weird sensation and your skin is changing too! You are turning into a monster!

You wake up screaming.

Note for the player: your character is Nauseated (-1 to all Attribute rolls). This effect will fade when you successfully (Game Master's and other player's judgment) tell the other characters about your anxiety and fears. This must be accomplished with roleplaying, no roll is required.

The goal of this roleplaying situation is to scare the party a little, and having a hero behave strangely is a good way to



accomplish it. If the player roleplays the situation well, he should be rewarded with a Bennie.

Day 2 – “I am sure this is the right direction”. The party simply wanders in the desert, getting lost.

You are pretty sure you are going in the right direction, but you are also quite certain you’ve been past this weirdly shaped dune twice before. You must admit it, you are lost.

See the Orienteering Problems paragraph above for further details.

Day 3 – Winds in the Desert. The mother of all sandstorms is coming.

You sniff the air. It smells different than the past few days, bitter and pungent. And you feel a sort of goosebumpy sensation on your skin. The horses are nervous too. A foreboding feeling is growing stronger.

The air in the desert is becoming electric. The heroes can make a Survival roll. Characters not acquainted with desert life suffer –2. If they score a success, they understand that the strange smell precedes a sandstorm, which will be upon them the next day. The heroes can start looking for shelter (this requires a separate roll – see below). If they fail the roll, the terrible sandstorm catches them unaware.

Searching for shelter can be done with a Survival or Notice roll, both at –4. The rolls can be cooperative and retried every 4 hours. With a success, they find a rocky den large enough for the party and their mounts. There is no source of water inside.

If they fail to find shelter, the heroes must make a Vigor roll every 8 hours or suffer a level of Fatigue (recovered in the following days, see below).

Day 4 and 5 –Harsh Decisions. The storm lasts for two whole days.

The wind has blown incessantly for two days. Cramped in your uncomfortable refuge, the howling of the wind sounds to you like a thousand tormented souls. The sand makes it impossible to see farther than your arm, but, at times, you glimpse strange shapes in the darkness. People? Desert jinni? Or simply mirages? Who can tell?

There isn’t much to do: doze for a while, eat and drink sparingly, and wait. Finally, the sand settles and in front of you the landscape of dunes is completely different from before.

Fatigued heroes are allowed a Vigor roll each day to recover a level of Fatigue. The forced halt has also dramatically reduced their provisions. Unless they got some extra rations from the caravanserai, their food is now finished. Tell the players that, if they want to eat, they will have to kill their mounts. This will keep them going for another two days, but they’ll be on foot in the desert. Stress the irony of the situation: they are rich, with a bag full of gems, but they lack the most vital resources. See the Dwindling Rations paragraph above.

Day 6 – Strange Cacti. The day after, the party finds a strange life form in the Red Desert.

You have been marching for several hours. The heat and fatigue are not your only problems, since your waterskins are getting



lighter every hour. Suddenly, behind a dune, you see something green!

You make for it hoping it isn't a mirage, and luckily it isn't.

A grove of cacti stands in front of you. But, like everything else in this desert, there's something weird about them. They are covered in a thin layer of pinky moss, and strange orchid-like flowers blossom on them.

These cacti can make the difference between life and death for the heroes. They contain enough water to let them recover any Fatigue due to Thirst (see the Savage Worlds core rulebook), plus sufficient supplies for another two days.

The problem is the strange moss. A character with the Lotus-mastery Arcane Background recognizes it as a parasitic type of Red Lotus, about which little is known. The same conclusion can be reached by any hero with a Healing (-2) roll.

Eating the plants has unpredictable effects, depending on the amount of Lotus ingested and on the characteristics of the person eating it. So, each hero who eats the cactus must roll a d8 on the table below. Removing the moss and trying to eat only the cactus's pulp helps a bit: the hero gains +1 to his Vigor roll, if needed. The same bonus applies to characters with the Poisoner Edge.

Strange Cacti Effects Table

d8 Effects

1 **Suffocation!** The character must make an immediate Vigor (-4) roll. In case of failure, his

throat swells dramatically in a few seconds and the hero suffocates! Each round he must make a Vigor (-4) roll or suffer a level of Fatigue. If Incapacitated for a number of rounds greater or equal to half his Vigor, he dies. His mates can help him, for instance by keeping his throat open. It is a Dramatic Task, based on Healing. There isn't a fixed duration, but, for the victim, as described above, the sooner is the better.

Stomachache. The character must make a Vigor (-2) roll an hour after the ingestion. With a failure he has a terrible bellyache, with vomit and diarrhea. He suffers a level of Fatigue.

Strange Taste. The pulp of the cactus has a strange taste, but nothing bad happens to the hero.

Sleepy. The character must make a Vigor (-2) roll or feel very drowsy, and fall asleep. If left sleeping for at least two hours, he wakes up rested (all Fatigue recovered), but a little groggy. For the remainder of the day, he discards any Initiative Card higher than 10.

Numbness. The hero must make an immediate Vigor (-2) roll. In case of failure, he feels a strange numbness in the arms and the legs. For the remainder of the day his Agility and Agility-related skills suffer -1 to rolls. In case of a success, the numbness is more like a form of anesthetization, and for the rest of the day he gains the Improved Nerves of Steel Edge.

8

Visions! The hero has strange psychedelic visions. He gains the Delusional Hindrance ("I see things you don't see!") in the Major form for a whole day. In truth, the hero can see and interact with the many spirits that move, unseen, in the world. This will make him able to touch (and damage) the Crystal Specters in the next scene.

TERROR IN THE DESERT

The following encounter happens on the sixth day in the late evening, supposing that the group marches in the cooler hours of the day. Probably they are in desperate conditions now, half-delirious from thirst after several days exposed to the merciless sun upon their heads.

The moon and the stars have been in the sky for a couple of hours when finally something good happens. You see a faint light coming from behind a dune, not far from your current position. It could be a nomad camp, an inhabited oasis, or the den of an evil jinni. But you don't care: light means people, and people mean food and water.

You reach the top of the dune and see a very strange scene: a field full of strange crystal formations which, under the light of the stars, shimmer in a ghostly way. There are several formations, of various shapes and colors. Some are similar to transparent thorny bushes, while others resemble quartz obelisks, as tall as a man, rising from the sand. They are surely natural, but nevertheless an incredible spectacle.

You suddenly realize these are the famous crystals from which the Desert Tears, the gems you are carrying, are extracted.

The field of crystals extends directly in front of you.

When the heroes cross the field of crystals, something happens. Let the party make a Notice roll to avoid surprise.

For a moment you think it is just the sound of the wind among the shimmering crystals, but what you hear is actually many voices, moaning and grieving in a continuous litany: "Free us! Please, free us!"

The voices come from the crystal formations, and you suddenly notice that among the crystals there are poles stuck in the ground with people nailed to them. You could swear they weren't there a second ago! You recognize these unlucky souls: they are the gem thieves you saw along the road to Quollaba. Why are they here now? And how do these people manage to speak? The last time you saw them they were most certainly dead!

With a swift move, the gem thieves move away from their poles – the nails unable to restrain them – and you understand: they are ghosts!

They hover towards you with the hands stretched to reach your necks and their litany changes.

"Ulasha! Ulasha!" they shout, and there is a terrible hunger in that evil word.

The heroes must defend themselves against the Crystal Specters, but sword and bow are useless. They must find another way to defeat these insubstantial enemies.

The battleground is a square area, 24" by 24". Place the heroes in the rough center of it.

The Crystal Specters start within 3" of the crystal they are linked with (see below), and attack the nearest living being. The only exception is when a linked crystal is attacked; in this case, they rush to protect it.

(M) Crystal Specters (3 per hero): See page 29.

TERRAINS AND PROPS

• **Dream or Reality?** This whole scene is partially a dream induced by thirst, and partially an effect of the subtle curse of Ulasha. The specters exist, but usually they aren't so strong to manifest in the real world and only the characters see them. It also means that the wounds the party suffers aren't true. If at least one of them survives the battle, when he checks his fallen comrades he sees they aren't really wounded (all their wounds are temporary and wear off in an hour) but only passed out and they can easily be revived. The only exception is if all the party is "killed" by the specters. In this case the sun of the following day will burn them to death.

• **Linked Crystals:** Each ghost is actually only a projection of the living energy of the soul trapped inside a specific crystal formation. So, destroying a crystal kills the connected specter or, more correctly, frees him. Crystals come in two sizes: small and big. Small crystals are roughly man-sized and quite fragile. They have Toughness 7 and when they break a linked specter immediately vanishes, with a relieved expression on its ghostly face. Big crystals are harder to shatter, they have Toughness 9 but when they are broken, three specters vanish. Blunt weapons are particularly good against crystals, and deal +2 damage. There is no need to keep exact track of which specter is linked to which crystal. When the need arises, simply remove the specter closest to the shattered crystal. Small crystals could be represented by 1" by 1" paper tokens that you can easily make at home, while big crystals can be represented by Small Burst Templates. Draw an "X" on the back of every token and Small Burst Template, to distinguish them from Normal Crystals (see below). Obviously when you place the Crystals onto the table, the players must not see their backs.

Place at least 2 Big Crystal and a suitable number of Small ones, so that every specter is linked to a crystal. They are at least 8" away from the heroes and 4" away from each other.

• **Normal Crystals:** Not all the crystals on the battlefield are connected to a specter. Many of them are simple mineral formations. They come in the same size and have the same Toughness as the Linked Crystals, but breaking them simply doesn't have any effect. Use 1" by 1" tokens and Small Burst Templates to represent them, but don't put any mark on the back of these tokens. Place one Normal Crystal for each Linked Crystal on the battlefield.

• **How to Distinguish Crystals:** There are several ways to distinguish Linked Crystals from Normal ones. The most effective one is the *detect arcana* power. It allows the spell

caster to look at the back of every crystal token within the range of the spell. Otherwise, a character can use his magical wisdom to recognize the crystals. For each success and raise on a Knowledge (Arcana) or Notice (-4) roll, the player can look at the back of a Crystal token within 6" of his hero. By doing this, the heroes understand that the Linked Crystals don't simply reflect light but have a sort of inner glow, so they can be told apart from the Normal ones. Any hero affected by Lotus-caused Visions (see above) has +4 to the Notice roll.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

When all the Crystal Specters are freed, read the following part.

You wake up among piles of shards, catching your breath. Now that they are broken, the crystals don't shimmer anymore. They are lifeless, like cheap broken bottles, and you don't feel or see anything strange in them. Even the wounds you suffered are now only mere itching, as those caused by the desert's sun. You are almost convinced that the specters you fought were only visions evoked by your thirst, when you spot something still glowing among the fragments. A single fragment, as long and sharp as a dagger, emits a faint white light.

Any character touching the crystal shard is allowed a Spirit roll. In case of success, he feels a strange magical energy. With a Knowledge (Arcana) or Knowledge (Legends and Lore) roll, the hero understands something more. This crystal is very particular: the entity within is still alive, and very, very hungry. Only a very strong soul, as that of a powerful sorcerer or a demon, can appease it. In gaming terms, the shard can be used as a dagger (Str+d4) or fitted to a spear with a Repair roll (Str+d6, 2 hands, +1 Parry). It deals +2 damage to opponents with the Arcane Background (Sorcery) or the Demon Special Ability. Every time the shard causes a Shaken effect or inflicts a Wound to a demon or mage, the bonus increases by +2, up to a maximum of +6. At this point, the weapon can be used one last time, then it explodes, dealing 2d8 damages in a Medium Burst Template.

In addition, the heroes find a precious gemstone, a Desert Tear: roll on the Treasures of the Desert Table (page 42) to determine its nature and worth.

THE SURVIVOR

After the battle with the specters, the night is quiet, even though your belly is emptier and your throat more parched than ever.

Read the following part if the heroes still have their horses with them.

The day after, what you have feared for some time finally happens: the horses collapse to the ground and don't get up anymore. Poor beasts, they have served you well and don't deserve such a sad end.

If the heroes end the pain of their mounts now, they should be rewarded with a Bennie. After dealing with the horses, go on with following paragraph.

As you are marching, you suddenly spot a human figure! A tall man, dressed as a desert nomad, standing still on the top of a dune, watching you: you are safe!

You run toward him but, when you are a few yards away, he falls face down in the sand.

The party rushes to the man's aid and recognizes him as Gulan, the water seller who recruited them!

Actually, he is the shadow of the old Gulan they known. His face is much thinner, his beard whiter, and generally he seems twenty years older. The last few days must have been a hard test for him, too. The man has a nasty, infected wound on his left leg that smells a lot. With a Healing or Survival roll, the heroes understand he must have been bitten by a poisonous beast of some kind. No roll is required to understand that there is no way to save him.

Despite his conditions and the fever devouring him, Gulan recognizes the characters.

"The rebellion! We won! We took the throne! But the priests... Ulasha! Ulasha! All dead! Save the queen! Please, save the queen!"

After speaking these words, he dies. You lay him gently on the sand and lift your eyes to look in the direction he came from. A few miles away from you, you see the walls of a city.

It is Quollaba, but looks very different from the last time you saw it.

MANAGING IMPORTANT MOUNTS

This scene is scripted in a way that will make the heroes feel the pressure of Ulasha's curse on them. Killing their horses in the desert is part of the pressure building process, a mere narrative device to make the heroes feel more alone and desperate, not to make them kill harmless beasts.

Hence, during The Survivor scene, put the character in front of the moral dilemma of releasing his mount from suffering but, before he delivers the killing blow, Gulan appears on the dune. At this point, the party has a new hope of finding water and there is no need to kill the beast just now. In this way, you build up the narrative tension without hindering the players.

PART IV: QUOLLABA, A CURSED CITY

WHAT HAPPENED IN QUOLLABA

This is a brief summary of what happened in Quollaba after the heroes' departure. The city revolted and, under the guidance of Zamira (First Concubine) and Sulak (Counselor of the Tyrant), the people attacked the Caldeian soldiers serving the Tyrant.

At dusk, the few surviving Caldeians, with some priests, were forced to retreat to the temple, where the Tyrant's body still lay on the ground, lifeless.

The citizens tried to bash the doors in, to erase all trace of the Tyrant's hateful rule but, in the meantime, the priests of Ulasha celebrated an old rite of their twisted religion: they cut off the head of the Tyrant, put it on the altar, and prayed the Devourer to have their lives saved.

A few moments before the rebels burst through doors, the dark miracle happened: the mighty statue of the Devourer, the three-eyed giant snake, came to life and bent its head towards the priests. The third eye opened, revealing only total blackness. With trembling hands, the priests put the head of the Tyrant into it and their master's eyes opened again, full of life and rage!

The Tyrant-snake hybrid took possession of the mighty serpentine body, and immediately turned to killing.

When the rebels came into the temple, all the Tyrant's followers, soldiers and priests were dead, killed by the terrible venomous bite of the monster.

But the giant snake was still hungry. It attacked the rebels, feasting on their bodies. The population was ready to face soldiers, not a supernatural horror, so they fell into panic.

And then the real massacre started: the Tyrant chased his former subjects throughout the entire city, destroying walls, roads and buildings with the might of its massive body. The evil soul really enjoyed the cat-and-mouse chase and Sulak, the traitor counselor, was among the first to be killed that night.

Finally dawn came, and the sun forced the mighty creature to take refuge in the dark shadows of the temple. The abomination is very strong but, like Ulasha, it cannot stand sunlight.

But the horror wasn't over: the bodies of the soldiers and priests killed by the giant snake came back to life as twisted creatures, hybrids of man and snake. Also Sulak, the traitor counselor, was turned into a monster and, due to its size, he became the leader of the pack, the Big One.

Unlike their master, the snake men can stand the light of the sun and they wander the city hunting the few survivors.

When the characters come back in Quollaba, ten days have passed since the terrible night of the murder. The Tyrant snake and his servants have slaughtered almost the entire population, and Quollaba is reduced to an empty shell.

Only Zamira, once the First Concubine and now self-proclaimed queen of Quollaba, resists.

With a few trusted men (the eunuchs guarding the harem and Gulan, her faithful servant) and some women from the harem, she has managed to escape the slaughter and found shelter in the Tower of the Widow, one of the easiest buildings in the city to defend.

The Tower of the Widow was the prison where the wife of the former king, Zamira's mother, was imprisoned by the Tyrant until she died. So it has grates at the windows, a very strong gate, and – more precious than gold – a well, which ensures a supply of fresh water.

But these defenses aren't enough against the horror lingering outside the tower: only the strong will of the princess has prevented the survivors from giving in to desperation and trying a desperate and hopeless escape from the tower.

In the morning the eunuchs leave the tower to scavenge for food, but it is becoming more dangerous every day. So, the queen has been forced to send her most trusted man, Gulan, to look for help outside Quollaba. While leaving the city, Gulan was bitten by a snake man and this explains his death in front of the party.

QUOLLABA, A DESTROYED CITY

There is no sign of life coming from Quollaba, no voices, no smoke and no guards at the gates. Only a flock of vultures circles over the city. The gates seem to be open, but some kind of a barricade blocks the way in. You need to get closer to understand what's going on.

When the heroes approach, they see that the main gate of the city is actually open, though obstructed by a makeshift barricade. With a Tracking or Knowledge (Battle) roll, the characters understand that a battle was fought here between men from inside the city and attackers from the outside. With a raise, it is clear that the defending force was made up of the Tyrant's soldiers (the heroes find a shield and some broken weapons), who were probably assaulted by the revolting citizens.

You enter the city and find it almost razed to the ground. It is too much even for a rebellion. It is as if someone had destroyed the houses with a battering ram, but there are no bodies, though you see many pools of blood in the streets.

Examining the destroyed houses, with another Tracking roll the characters understand that the destruction was caused by some kind of massive creature. The whole thing seems so weird that no further supposition can be made.

The absence of dead bodies is due to the snake men's insatiable hunger. They have eaten every non-soldier corpse, but have brought their comrades back to the temple, to be transformed.

There is no sign of life, except for a few wandering jackals, which seem very scared, too.

First of all, the party must find water and food. The houses by the gates have been sacked and nothing useful can be found there.

The heroes remember that a big fountain stood in the small square in front of the Snake Inn, not far from their current position, so it is the most logical direction for them to take.

If they decide to explore the city in other directions, use Appendix I to create some encounters.

SNAKES IN THE SNAKE INN

You reach the small square where the Snake Inn stands. It is full of debris, but – incredibly – the fountain is spouting bub-

bling, fresh, water! The first you have seen in several days! Finally you can refresh yourself!

There is a hidden ambush nearby, so heroes with the Danger Sense Edge can feel it.

The fountain is full of water, but there is something floating in it: a corpse, face down.

It is the first body the heroes find, so they'll look at it. When the party is close to the fountain, the trap is sprung.

With a mighty roar, the corpse suddenly stirs, spraying water everywhere! Now that you see him, you cannot hold back a scream of horror. The creature is a strange human-snake hybrid, with a serpentine head and curved fangs, a scaly hide and long arms ending in razor-sharp claws. But the scariest thing are the rags it wears – you recognize the uniform of a Tyrant's guard.

The creature moves quickly, just like a real snake, and attacks you with viciousness.

The heroes, except the ones who successfully used the Danger Sense, must check first for surprise, and then must make a Spirit to avoid Fear. The hero who had Bad Dreams (see the Lost scene on page 15) recognizes these beasts as the ugly creatures he dreamt of. For this reason he suffers -2 to the Spirit. If he fails the roll, he subtracts 5 from the Fear Table roll.

The snake man isn't alone. A pack is currently raiding the Snake Inn and they join the fight in the second round. The beasts fight with the sole purpose of killing and tearing apart the heroes, not necessarily in that order.

The battlefield is a square, 18" by 18", with a fountain in the center (see below), where the snake man was sleeping. Place the heroes within 6" of the creature.

The square is surrounded by buildings, so the perimeter of the battleground is closed by walls, except for a road to the south (the one the heroes have come from) and another 4"-wide road going north.

The building on the eastern side of the square is the Snake Inn. It has a door, 2" wide, and a window, 1" wide, which the snake men use to approach the heroes. As they are emerging from the inn, they can move only at half their Pace during the first round (they must go through the inn and reach the door or window).

On the western side of the square there is a building with a flat roof. At the start of the fourth round, unexpected help comes from that direction.

In the middle of the fight, you hear the unmistakable hiss of an arrow. You turn to look and spot a bare-chested man on top of a building with a flat roof. He is shooting arrows at the snake men with a composite bow!

You don't know him, but surely he is a friend!

Indeed he is Unoch, one of the surviving eunuchs of Zamira (see description in the following paragraph). Unoch is an Ally of the party, so hand the players his stats.



(M) Snake Men (2 per hero): See page 31.

(M) Unoch, Queen's Eunuch (1): See page 33.

TERRAINS AND PROPS

• **Fountain:** The fountain counts as Difficult ground. It can be represented by a Large Burst Template.

AS FAST AS YOU CAN!

When the last opponent goes down, angry growls are heard coming from the south road.

In the meantime, the bare-chested man reaches you. He looks neither like a Quollaba citizen nor like a Caldeian. Now you recognize him: you saw him on your first day here, he was one of the servants carrying the sedan chair in which Zamira and Sulak sat. He speaks to you, and from his voice you understand that he is a eunuch, although a strong warrior.

"I am Unoch. We'll talk later, the big pack is coming. We must flee!"

Just then, a large group of humanoid reptilians appears. There are at least thirty of them, and among them there is an enormous specimen, two times the size of a man, venting its rage with a mighty roar.

"Come on! This way!" says Unoch and runs off.

This is a chase sequence. Unoch knows all the shortcuts through the destroyed city, but the snake men are faster than the heroes, so the two factors balance each other out.

Agility is the Chase skill, even though other skills can be used at certain times (see below).



To avoid slowing down the game, the pursuers are divided in three groups of ten snake men (the Big One is part of the third group). Each group moves as a single entity, making a group Chase roll.

Every time a group of snake men are dealt a deuce they lose sight of their quarry and can be removed from the table. The chase ends when heroes throw off all the snake men, or after ten rounds.

The scene takes place in the destroyed city and several special events happen in certain rounds, as explained in the table below. These events are in addition to the standard Complications.

(M) Snake Men (3 groups of 10): See page 31.

(M) Big One (1): See page 29.

(M) Unoch, Queen's Eunuch (1): See page 33.

CHASE EVENTS

Round 1 – Slope and Cart. The street here goes downhill, then turns right with a sharp bend and around the corner... there is a broken cart in the middle of the road! It is the very same cart the heroes saw during their escape from Quollaba. Describe the scene and tell the heroes they *may* use the downhill slope to gain some extra speed. In gaming terms, they can add up to +2 to their Chase roll (player's choice), but tell them they have to avoid the cart too and more speed they decide to gain, more difficult will be stay safe: every hero must make an Agility roll to avoid it, with a penalty equal to twice the bonus they chose to use in the previous roll (so, -2 if they chose +1, -4 if they chose +2). If they fail, they hit the hard obstacle (2d6 damage).

Round 3 – Into the House. Unoch knows the streets like the back of his hand, so he leads the party into a half de-

stroyed house and tells them to stay put. He hopes that the snake men will move on without spotting them. In this round, the heroes use Stealth as Chase Skill, while the snake men use Notice.

Round 4 – Jump from the Balcony. The diversion slows down the snake men only for a little time. The monsters soon find the heroes and the chase continues on the second floor of the house. At this point, Unoch leads the heroes to the balcony. The street is narrow and Unoch wants them to jump across to a balcony on the other side! In this round, don't use the standard Chase rules, but let the heroes make a single Strength roll. If they fail, they fall to the ground, suffering 2d6 damages. If they are successful, they reach the other side, and they are dealt 3 cards. Don't roll for the snake men.

Round 6 – Dead End. The chase continues down a street which turns out to be a dead end! Unoch curses and mutters, but there is no time to go back. Luckily, the wall at the end of the road has enough footholds to be climbed. Both the heroes and the snake men use Climbing as Chase Skill in this round.

Round 8 – Open Ground. The heroes are now very close to their destination: a lone, fortified tower, in the middle of a square. The area is clear and the ground flat, giving the snake men, who have longer legs, +1 to their Chase rolls. But the heroes are not alone now: multiple arrows shot from the tower hinder the progress of the snake men. Run the chase as normal, but draw an additional Action Card for the tower defenders. On their turn, they fire a volley of 2d6 arrows on the nearer group of monsters (Shooting d6), ignoring the normal Range rules.

Round 10 – Tower of the Widow. This round the heroes reach the reinforced gate of the fortified construction, the Tower of the Widow.

"Open the door!" Unoch shouts.

A reinforced gate opens and slams behind you.

You are inside.

THE QUEEN OF QUOLLABA

The defenders of the tower gather around you. You see some tough-looking eunuch guards and a number of girls, more suited to handling silks and velvets than bows. Their faces show great weariness and, in some cases, hopeless desperation for the plight they're in.

Then the Queen approaches.

The party recognizes Zamira. They met her twice, first in the streets of Quollaba, then disguised as one of the conspirators.

Zamira is tired like the others, but there is a new fierceness in her eyes. She seems a different, more mature person, now. The terrible trials of the last few days have brought out her stronger side. She is definitely the Queen of Quollaba, even though her subjects are only a handful of eunuchs and some harem girls.

"So, in the end you have returned," says the Queen. "The will of the dark god has been strong enough to lure you back. His vendetta will not spare any of us. He will have the life of every conspirator and assassin. He has already taken Sulak and Nekerios. Only you and I are still alive."

Despite her apparent courage, you glimpse great fear in her eyes.

The Queen tells the heroes what happened in the city during the revolt. She was told that something terrible spawned in the temple, where the Tyrant died, but she wasn't there to see it. Instead, she has seen many snake men and knows the monsters well.

Then, she takes the heroes to the upper floor of the tower.

Surprisingly, there is a room full of books.

"Izara, my mother, was held prisoner here for nine years, before dying," Zamira says. "The Tyrant kept her alive to force me into doing what he wanted, but he never let me see her, not even when she was about to pass away. My mother wasn't allowed many luxuries, but reading was one of them. She had an impressive collection of books. I don't know how she got them, but I've been reading some of them, as there isn't much to do locked up in here. And I have found out the terrible truth: Ulasha's curse is real. By killing his Chosen One, we did him a favor. We evoked his curse and allowed him to manifest himself in this world. Now he is looking for all the people who committed the crime: we, the ones behind it, and you, the perpetrators. When all of us are dead, he'll gain tremendous power, so great to let him remain in the world of man forever."

If questioned about a way to stop the curse, she answers in the following manner:

Zamira shakes her head in frustration: "I've looked through all these books, but I've found nothing. Many of them are in languages I don't even understand. If you want to look at them, you are welcome."

Zamira's hopes have been resting in Gulan. She has sent him to find help and the news of his death is a terrible blow to her.

At this point, she speaks of finding a way to escape from the city, but she is very disheartened. The heroes understand she needs some time to come to terms with Gulan's death. He was her trusted servant and saw her grow up.

The heroes are exhausted, they need to rest for a while before devising a plan or doing anything else. The defenders of the tower have very little food, but share it with the party and show them to a place where they can rest. In the meantime, the snake men have surrounded the tower, staying outside the range of the bows. Now, the heroes can either get some sleep or search the library for more clues (see sidebar on page 23).

The heroes have two blocks of four hours before the next scene starts. If they sleep for four hours, they recover a level of Fatigue. If they rest for eight hours, they are allowed a Spirit (-2) roll. In case of success, when they wake up, they feel confident that not all is lost. They gain a Bennie.

In addition, one of the harem girls is a talented healer (Healing d8) and can tend heroes' fresh wounds.

THE LIBRARY OF THE TOWER OF THE WIDOW



Izara, Zamira's mother, gathered a very interesting collection of books in her library. Many of them are in foreign languages and exotic dialects. The heroes are allowed a search roll in the library for every block of four hours they spend here. If they spend both blocks of four hours in the library and don't rest, they must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of

Fatigue.

The search is made with an Investigation or a Smarts (-2) roll, which can be cooperative. Obviously, only literate characters can participate in it. If a hero knows the Keronian language, or if he has the Scholar or Sage Edge, he adds +1 to the roll (up to a maximum of +3).

There are lots of things to be discovered in the library, so two entries are given for each positive roll result. In this way, if two heroes achieve the same result, they get different information.

Failure

The heroes find confirmation of what Zamira told them: by killing Ulasha's Chosen One and evoking his curse, they have allowed the evil deity to manifest himself in the world.

Success

1) To become as powerful as he is now, Ulasha must take control of some vessel, like a physical body, and use it to interact with the world. If the vessel is destroyed, Ulasha will be banished from this world.

2) In his physical manifestation, Ulasha will try to stay close to crystal formations, because they enhance his power. Destroying the crystals will greatly reduce his strength.

Raise

1) Ulasha has an ability to corrupt men. He will try to seduce them with promises of power and wealth, but he must not be trusted. He is called the Devourer for a very good reason: his favorite food are the souls of his followers. If a hero discovers this piece of information, he and all the characters he shares it with gain +4 to resisting Ulasha's temptation in The Lies of Ulasha Scene.

2) The relationship between desert crystals and demons is two-fold. The demons use "full" crystals as energy sources to manifest themselves, but an "empty" crystal can be deadly for a demon like Ulasha, because it is capable of sucking the demon's energy.

Two Raises

1) One of the dusty books contains an ancient prayer to the Sun God. Reciting it will grant some protection against the dark deity. A hero can spend two rounds reciting the prayer when facing Ulasha. In this case he makes a Spirit roll. If successful, he and all the party members within 5' of him gain +1 to Spirit rolls during the encounter. If he scores a raise, the bonus extends to +1 to Toughness rolls. Characters with the Holy Warrior Edge roll with +2.

2) In a strange leather book the heroes find a spell! It is the Summon Ally (Spirit of the Betrayer). The spell can be used



to evoke the creature directly (see the *Beasts and Barbarians Player Guide*) with *Sorcery d8 and 10 Power Points*. Any character capable of reading Keronian can do it. The scroll crumbles to dust after use. Alternatively, a character with the *Sorcery Edge* can try to learn the spell. It works exactly like the *Tome of the Forbidden Secrets* in the *Beasts and Barbarians Player Guide*.

ASSAULT ON THE TOWER

You are awoken by Unoch at dusk. "Something is going to happen," he whispers in your ear.

Indeed, you hear a cacophony of enraged shrieks coming from outside. You look out and notice that the reptilians are very agitated. Their leader, the Big One, is hissing something to them. After a moment, the whole pack moves swiftly toward the tower. Their intent is clear: they want to come and get you!

"Take your bows!" thunders Unoch. "Shoot them down before they get too close!"

The eunuchs and the harem girls immediately take position by the arrow slits.

"The door is strong. It will hold." Unoch says to you, but he doesn't sound so convinced.

A big fight is about to break out, with the heroes and the few survivors against the savage snake men.

The battle area includes the tower (see below) and its surroundings. The enemies start at 50" from the tower and approach it from all directions. It is not necessary to place



the miniatures onto the battlefield during this first phase. To keep things simple, consider the enemies as running at an average Pace of 10", so the heroes and their allies have five rounds to shoot them down. If they are armed with standard bows (range: 12/24/48), the enemies are at Long Range in the first two rounds, at Medium Range in the third and the fourth, and at Short Range in the fifth round.

When the monsters reach the tower, most of them, led by the Big One, start ramming the gate, while the other snake men attack the windows, trying to smash them in. The beasts are excellent climbers, so they manage to reach the window on the second floor in two rounds (no roll required). There are three snake men for each window, so reduce the size of the group attacking the gate accordingly.

In two rounds the gate is destroyed (see below) and the snake men swarm in, led by the Big One. More or less at the same time, the monsters on the walls tear the grates at the windows and enter the tower. A bloody, close quarter fight is now unavoidable.

The focus of the fight is the Big One. When he is dead, the rest of the pack disperses and flees.

But the battle isn't over yet. Go on with the next scene immediately.

(M) Snake Men (6 per hero): See page 31.

(M) Big One (1): See page 29.

(M) Unoch, Queen's Eunuch (1): See page 33.

(M) Harem Girls (3): See page 30.

TERRAINS AND PROPS

• **The Tower of the Widow:** The round tower has three stories (each of 6" in radius), but only the first and second floor are involved in the battle. There is a single access point, the main gate. Reading the map clockwise, place the gate (3" wide) at six o'clock. A stairwell opens in the center of each floor. Moving between two floors is equal to a movement of 6". Use a Small Burst Template to represent the stairwell.

• **Arrow slits:** The tower has ten arrow slits on every floor. Reading the tower map clockwise, they are placed every 30 degrees, except at three and six o'clock, because these positions are occupied by windows, protected by grates. Due to the shape of the slits, it is impossible to fire on enemies closer than 4" from the tower.

• **Grated Windows:** The tower windows are 1" wide and are protected by metal grates (Toughness 8). It is possible to shoot on close targets through windows, but with -2.

• **Gate:** The tower gate is quite strong (Toughness 12), but the snake men will be able to tear it down in two rounds, plus one if the characters barricade it with assorted furniture.

• **Assorted furniture:** On the first floor of the tower there are two cabinets (2" by 1") and a table (2" by 2"). The second floor is mainly a library, so there are shelves along the walls (the books catch fire on 4-6 on a d6) and two tables (3" by 2"), both littered with scrolls. The Game Master is free to add additional props as he sees fit.

OPTIONAL: A MORE FOCUSED COMBAT

Not all players like complex, long fights as the one described in the Assault On The Tower Scene. If your group is one of those, you can play a stripped version of the combat above: let the archers shoot as described in the main text, then focus the scene only on the party's actions. The clash occurs on the first floor of the Tower, immediately after the Big One has come in with his followers. The heroes must stop him.

The characters involved in the fight in this case are:

(M) Snake Men (3 per hero minus the casualties inflicted by the archers): See page 31.

(M) Big One (1): See page 29.

(M) Unoch (1): See page 33.

IT'S NOT OVER YET

When you deliver the killing blow, the Big One falls to the ground and the snake men, shocked by the unexpected turn of events, stop dead in their tracks, with an expression of stupor on their twisted faces.

In the meantime, the body of the Big One writhes in agony and undergoes a terrible mutation. In a few moments, the mighty beast is replaced by the dead body of a fat man: Sulak, the third conspirator.

At this sight, the last snake men flee in terror. The battle is over.

Give the players a moment to relax, and then continue.

A few moments after, from the third floor you hear the sound of glass being shattered and a cry of terror. It is Zamira's voice!

You run up as fast as you can and find a terrible scene in front of you: two winged snake men, a type you haven't seen before, have flown through the windows and attacked the Queen.

One turns to face you, while the other flies off with the screaming Queen in its claws!

The battlefield is Zamira's room, which occupies the entire third floor of the Tower. It is a circular area, 5" in radius, with four 1"-wide windows at three, six, nine, and twelve o'clock.

Place the flying snake man within 2" of the window at three o'clock. The creature fights to the death to cover the retreat of the Queen's captor.

Once dead, the creature reverts to its original form, i.e. one of the priests of Ulasha the heroes saw in the temple on the night of the Tyrant's murder.

When the party looks out the window, they see the following scene.

The second beast flies away and makes for the city temple, the place where this whole mess started.

(M) Winged Snake Man (1): He is a Henchman. See page 31.

TERRAINS AND PROPS

• **Furniture:** The third floor room has a king-size bed (3" by 3"), two closets (2" by 2"), and a small table (1" by 1"). A stairwell, placed in the middle of the room, leads to the lower floor. It can be represented by a Small Burst Template.

TEMPLE OF THE SNAKE MEN

The heroes and the few survivors can rest for a moment and decide what to do. The party remembers Zamira's words: if all those who have participated in the conspiracy are killed, Ulasha will have the power to remain in the world of man forever.

In addition, if still alive, Unoch decides to go to the temple to save the queen, with or without the heroes.

Besides each character's personal feelings, these two reasons should be enough to persuade the party to heroically sneak into the temple to rescue Zamira and try to put an end to the Devourer's threat.

Only Unoch and the party will go to the temple, while the surviving eunuchs will remain in the tower to protect the harem girls. If all the girls are dead, the eunuchs will join the party.

TRIP TO THE TEMPLE

It is getting very dark and the empty city seems spookier than ever. Led by Unoch, you move through the empty streets qui-

eter than a desert cat, your eyes and your ears ready to notice the slightest sign or danger.

Luckily, there is no snake men around, and the party safely reaches the temple. If the heroes decide to explore the city a little, use Appendix I as a guideline to create some improvised encounters, but halve the number of snake men found, since most of the monsters are at the gathering described in the next paragraph.

WE NEED A DIVERSION

When the adventurers reach the temple, read the following part.

The temple is quite different from ten days ago. The buildings overlooking the square are razed to the ground and the side alleys are full of debris. The temple itself is crumbling in many parts: the entrance has collapsed and a large breach in the wall is the only way in. The windows on the upper floor are smashed in.

The snake Tyrant has wreaked havoc in the streets and the flying snake men have smashed the windows to use them as entrance to the temple.

Your biggest problem now are the snake men. Almost all the surviving creatures, at least fifty, have gathered in the square, right in front of the big breach leading into the temple. They are on their knees and praying, a strange hissing sound coming from their throats.

Fighting isn't a viable option, as the enemies are too numerous. So, a different way to handle this situation must be devised. Many solutions are possible for this encounter, depending on the players' ideas.

The following part describes two examples of how the heroes can try to get into the temple.

Diversion. The party can try to find a way to lure the snake men away from the square. Possible plans are starting a fire in a collapsed building, or something similar. Very good ideas should be rewarded with a Bennie.

If the players are stuck, the Game Master can intervene, using the default solution detailed below.

Unoch takes a deep breath before talking. "All right: one of us must lure the beasts away from here, so that the others can get in. I'll do it. I am the one who knows the city best, and I can keep them busy for a while."

You understand that this is a suicide mission, but you see no other way.

Then he looks intensely at you: "You must promise me that you'll save the Queen."

After the heroes' make their promises, go on.

Unoch moves into the open. Then, he starts shooting arrows at the praying snake men. Their reaction is immediate. The whole pack charges him with a mighty hiss. Unoch stands still until the very last moment, then, as quick as leopard, he is off.

The trick works and the square is soon deserted.

Doing It Quietly. Another viable option is to quietly sneak around the building, find a window on the second floor, and get into the temple from there. Reaching a window while remaining undetected requires two Stealth rolls for each character. Let each player make the first roll, and then move to the second round of rolls.

The snake men start as Inactive sentinels and, due to their semi-trance, the party must fail three rolls to make them Active, instead of getting them "up" after the first failure as with normal rules. When the snake men are on the alert, each subsequent Stealth roll by the heroes becomes an opposed roll against the enemies' group Notice.

At this point, a single failure causes 10 snake men to come and investigate the cause of the noise and, if they are not dealt with in three rounds, another 10 will arrive on the scene. After three more rounds, the whole pack comes and the party should retreat and find another plan.

If the heroes reach the window unnoticed, they only need a single Climbing roll to enter the temple.

If they go in through the same window they used to enter the temple ten days ago, they are lucky: the rope is still there (it counts as Climbing Equipment).

The drawback of this solution is that, if the party causes any noise while in the temple in the following scene, some snake men will come to investigate.

(M) Snake Man (50): See page 31.

IN THE WOLF'S DEN

The temple looks even worse from the inside. The columns are in ruins, the statues destroyed, and there are large pools of blood everywhere. But the strangest thing is that Ulasha's massive statue in the main hall is no longer there, and there is a giant hole in the ground in front of the empty pedestal, revealing the existence of a lower level.

Ulasha is a creature that comes from deep within the earth and it instinctively looks for underground nests. Finding no passage, he made one by himself.

The temple hall contains nothing of interest. When the party decides to explore the lower level go on with the following part.

You are in a dusty place full of webs, the catacombs of the temple. You clearly understand that some immense creature has crawled down this passage. The tracks lead to a wall which has been breached, revealing a natural cave. There is a strong, reptilian smell in it.

Ulasha, driven by his primeval instinct, has destroyed the wall to reach the cave.

You step through the breach and into the cave. If you weren't in such a terrible predicament, this place would look marvelous to your eyes: the walls and the floor are filled with crystal forma-

tions, as those you found in the desert, letting out a strange luminescence, apart the tall ceiling, which is cloaked in shadows.

In the middle of the cave an enormous snake is sleeping. You recognize it as the massive statue that once stood in the temple, but it is alive now. The snake has coiled itself around a stone slab, on which a human figure lies, moaning softly.

It is Zamira, and she is still alive.

THE LIES OF ULASHA

The Tyrant isn't sleeping, he is fully aware of the heroes' presence. When the party is close enough, he reacts.

The terrible creature lifts its head, opening its three eyes: two are wicked reptilian eyes, but the third socket contains the head of the Tyrant, now full of life.

"Sssso, assassinssss, you have finally come back to the crime scene. To rescue your princesss."

The evil creature speaks through the Tyrant's face, with a hissing voice.

"The otherssss were weak, but you had the courage to deliver the blow. I feel you know how to kill. I give you a chance to live: sssssurrender and adore me, and I'll make you the firstsss of my disciplessss."

No player should accept such a thing but, well, the voice of a demonic entity like the Devourer is very powerful. It is a Test of Will pitting Ulasha's Persuasion against the heroes' Spirit. It has the same effects as a standard Test of Will, but it affects the whole party. In case a hero rolls a critical failure, he is drawn to Ulasha and will fight on the demon's side until the creature suffers a Wound. Treat this effect as the puppet Power.

Remember that if the heroes read about Ulasha's seductions in the library of the tower, they have +4 to the roll.

After trying to lure them to its side, the vicious creature attacks the party!

The cave is of irregular shape, roughly 18" by 18", with a single entrance, the breach in the southern wall used by the party.

Place the Snake Tyrant in the middle of it. The beast is coiled around a stone slab (3" by 3") on which Zamira is lying.

In the the dark top of the grotto, a couple of Winged Snake Men, the same horrid creatures which kidnapped Zamira, are hidden, and they attack the heroes from the second round.

They use two special tactics: one of them spits poison staying 8" from the ground, while the other tries to Grapple the heroes. If he is successful, he grapples their victim and flies up. Then, when he reaches the highest point, 12" from the ground, he lets the poor victim fall onto a stalactite (see below)! A flying snake man suffers an Encumbrance Level while flying with a "passenger".

When the Tyrant Snake is finally dead, the adventure is finished. Go to the End.

(M) Winged Snake Men (1 per two heroes): See page 31.

(M) Tyrant Snake (1): See page 32.

(M) Zamira (1): See page 33



TERRAINS AND PROPS

• **Shingles and other Debris:** Right in front of Ulasha's slab there is a patch of shingles and other debris (2" by 5"). It counts as Difficult Ground.

• **Stalagmites and Stalactites:** Stalagmites and stalactites dot the room. Each of them is 1" by 1" wide and can be represented on the battlefield by gaming stones of different colors. Both of them grant Light Cover and have Toughness 6. Any character thrown on a stalagmite as effect of a Trick or some other similar attempt (see above) must do an Agility roll to avoid being impaled, suffering 1d6 extra damage, with AP 4, in addition to any eventual falling damage. So a hero thrown down from 12" landing on a stalagmite suffers 3d6 damage with AP 4. A hero breaking a stalactite, instead, can cause a small cave in. Each time a stalactite is broken, draw a card from the Action Deck. If a black card is dealt, stones fall down from the ceiling, and any target in a SBT from the stalactite must do an Agility roll or suffer 2d6 damage. Place up to nine stalactites and four stalagmites on the battleground.

• **Tips on How to Kill a Demon:** If the heroes have got this far, they have probably gathered some tips about how to kill Ulasha's physical manifestation. It is useful to summarize them here:

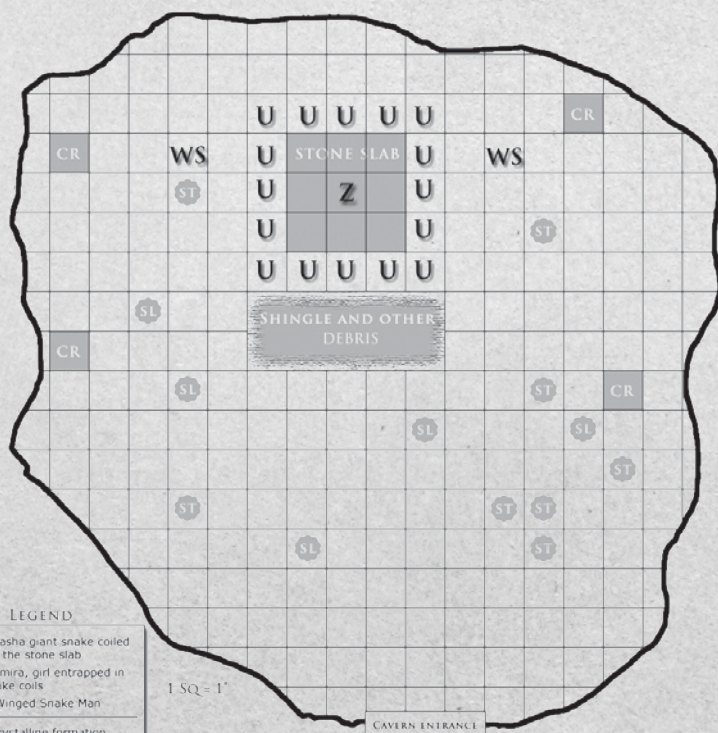
1. He fears the secret name of the Sun God (see page 8).
2. A prayer to the Sun God grants some protection against the evil creature (see page 23).
3. The Desert Crystal the characters found in the desert is a powerful weapon against the demon (see page 19).

• **Zamira:** The Queen of Quollaba starts the fight trapped in the demon's coils! She is the last of the three conspirators still alive and her life lends more power to Ulasha. As long as the girl is trapped in his coils, Ulasha can choose to inflict a Wound (only one for round) to her to make a free Soak roll or to regain 5 Power Points. He cannot use this option to Woak a wound inflicted by his Weakness. Freeing the girl from the snake requires winning an opposed Strength roll against the Tyrant Snake. When the girl is free, Ulasha loses some of his power and confidence. If the demon still has some Bennies, the Game Master will give one of the Snake Tyrant's Bennies to the hero who has freed Zamira. If the demon has no Bennies left, the hero receives one from the Game Master as usual. Zamira is a Wild Card, so she can suffer three Wounds, she but cannot soak wounds caused from Ulasha in this manner.

• **Crystal Formation:** Ulasha chose this cavern as his nest for a reason. The crystal formations enhance his powers. Each crystal formation has Toughness 6 (2) and can be represented by a Small Burst Template. Every time a crystal is destroyed, the Tyrant Snake loses some of his powers, as explained below.

Place four crystal formations onto the battlefield, at least 8" away from each other.

Crystal Destroyed	Effect
1 st	The Tyrant Snake loses +2 to recovering from being Shaken
2 nd	The Tyrant Snake loses 5 Power Points
3 rd	The Tyrant Snake's Spirit and Sorcery dice drop by one step.
4 th	The Tyrant Snake automatically suffers a Wound, which cannot be Soaked.



ULASHA DEN

THE END

The mighty Snake Tyrant collapses to the ground with a groan and Zanator's head shouts angrily for one last time.

And then he dies.

While you, (say the name of the character who freed the Queen) hold Zamira in your arms, the spirit of Ulasha leaves the cave and all of you feel a great sense of relief.

But it isn't over yet. The ground starts to shake. The massive energies released by killing the demon are causing a small earthquake.

You run, carrying Zamira in your arms, and manage to get out of the temple just in time. You turn around and see the building collapse in front of you.

Many buildings of the city also crumble to pieces, except the Tower of the Widow which miraculously withstands the quake.

If Unoch volunteered to lure away the snake men, the heroes find him still alive. He was about to be captured by the beasts, when they stopped and fell dead to the ground, reverting to their original shape of Tyrant's soldiers.

Now Quollaba is free, but it is reduced to an empty ruin. There is water in the city and some food but, without horses or camels, leaving won't be easy. Yet, the curse is broken and the future looks bright.

Some hours later, a caravan of traders approaches the city. Jamezil, the caravan master, is totally shocked by what he finds. He was at the Oasis of the Hunchback a few days ago and found it deserted, so he didn't hear the big news. He left and wandered aimlessly in the desert for many days.

"It is incredible." He admits scratching his head. "I never got lost in the desert, but last week I was completely stranded. And now I've got to Quollaba and I find it destroyed."

Zamira asks the party to stay and help her rebuild the city. They can accept or keep their well-earned money and leave.

To conclude the adventure, read the following part.

Hey... wait a minute, there is something strange in the gem pouch! It is moving! You throw the bag to the ground and draw your weapons. The gems are... hatching, and small, three-eyed snakes emerge from them!

You quickly stomp them with the heel of your boot.

You curse the fact that you definitely won't get very rich this time!

But luckily Zamira is a generous queen and she orders her new Counselor to hand you a purse.

"I have to rebuild a city, but a queen knows how to reward her saviours" she adds with a smile.

You weigh it in your hand. It isn't fat as the gem pouch, but the gold inside is definitely real, and you'll be able to get drunk for months with it!

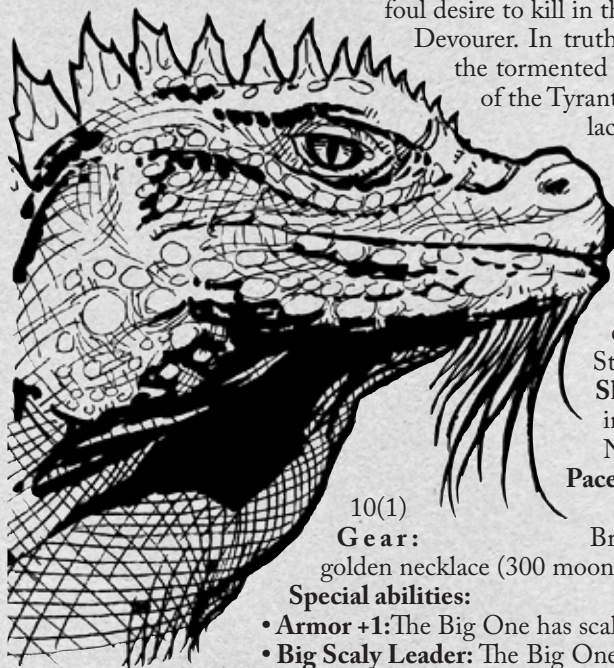
With a laugh, you ride outside Quollaba, this time without any intention to come back.

The queen's purse contains 1000 Moons for each hero.

CREATURES AND NPCs



BIG ONE



This massive snake man is the biggest of the whole pack. He is stronger and smarter than the others, and driven by a foul desire to kill in the name of his master, the Devourer. In truth, this mighty shell holds the tormented body of Sulak, Counselor of the Tyrant. In fact, the golden necklace, symbol of his position, is still around his neck, though encased in the flesh due to the massive growth of his body.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6.

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:**

10(1)

Gear:

Bronze Battle Axe (Str+d8),

golden necklace (300 moons of value).

Special abilities:

- **Armor +1:** The Big One has scaly skin.
- **Big Scaly Leader:** The Big One is the leader of the pack. For this reason he has the Command Edge.
- **Claws:** Str+d6.
- **Impervious to Pain:** The Big One doesn't feel pain as a normal creature does, and is very fast to recover from physical trauma. He has the Combat Reflexes and Improved Nerves of Steel Edges.
- **Size +2:** The Big One is eight feet tall.
- **Tail Lash:** Str+d6. The Big One uses his long tail to lash at his opponents. This attack counts as having the Sweep Edge. The Big One can make a standard attack (a claw strike or axe blow) and a tail slap in the same round suffering no multi action penalty.

CRYSTAL SPECTER

When he died, this poor soul was trapped within one of the strange crystal formations of the Red Desert, near Quollaba. The crystals are semi-sentient beings, usually content with feeding on the souls trapped inside them. A single soul can support a crystal for several years, but Ulasha's curse has made them hunger, turning them into dangerous, supernatural predators.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d10.

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Special abilities:

- **Irregular Movement:** Crystal Specters move in a very strange way. Sometimes they seem to be forced to crawl, other times they move faster than any living person. For this reason, they roll d4 as Running Die, but the roll of this die can ace. The Crystal Specters





don't suffer a multi action penalty when running.

- **Ethereal:** Crystal Specters are immaterial and can only be harmed by magic and magical weapons, but their claws can easily tear the flesh of living beings. The only notable exception is a character who had Visions (see the Strange Cacti Effects Table on page 17). He can touch and fight them normally, ignoring this Special Ability.
- **Spectral Claws:** Str+d6. The claws of Crystal Specters ignore all types of armor, except magical.

DESERT HERDER

A simple herder of the Red Desert, he is very superstitious.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d6, Shooting d4, Survival d8.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: -

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bone dagger (Str+d4), herder's staff (Str+d4, 2 handed, +1 Parry, Reach 1), sling (damage: Str+d4, Range: 4/8/16).

DESERT NOMAD

These desert nomads are religious fanatics and followers of Tul, a Holy Man of the Desert. They have left their tribes to be with him and obey his every order, as they believe the Sun itself speaks through him.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d4, Notice d6, Riding d8, Shooting d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: Born in the Saddle.

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bronze short sword (Str+d6), dagger (Str+d4), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48, RoF: 1), desert robes.

Special abilities:

- **Fanatics:** If Tul is hit by an attack and a Desert Nomad is within 3" of him, the nomad throws himself in the path of the blow, suffering the damage instead of his master (as per the Fanatics Setting Rule). If he dies in the act, all the other Desert Nomads, filled with holy rage, have +1 to damage rolls until the end of the fight.

HAREM GIRL

This beautiful girl comes from Zanator's harem. After the Night of the Devoured Sun, she has found herself at the side of Queen Zamira. Although she isn't a warrior, she is determined to survive. The Game Master should roll on the Ally Personality Table from the Savage Worlds rulebook to add some flavor to her.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d4, Healing d4, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Shooting d4.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: Attractive.

Hindrances: Yellow.

Gear: bronze dagger (Str+d4) or spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, 2 hands), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48, RoF: 1), harem dress.

KASHITI MERCENARY

The Kashiti are an infamous tribe living along the northern border of the Ivory Savannah. They are vicious warriors, ready to sell their services to the highest bidder, but the fear they cause in their enemies has another reason: they are cannibals and often ask to be paid with the bodies of their enemies.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Combat Reflexes.

Hindrances: Mean.

Gear: Bone hand axe (Str+d6), stone dagger (Str+d4), small shield (+1 Parry), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48, RoF: 1).

Special abilities:

- **Cannibals:** A Kashiti Mercenary sharpens his teeth in order to rip off large chunks of meat. He can bite his opponent, dealing Str+d4 damage.
- **Scary:** A Kashiti Mercenary is a frightful opponent, especially when he grins. He has +2 to Intimidation rolls.



NEKERIOS, CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

Nekerios is a handsome man in his early thirties. Originally from Caldeia, he joined the Tyrant's troops several years after the conquest of Quollaba and, thanks to his uncon-

ventional methods, he soon reached a very high rank. But Nekerios is an ambitious man. He wants more: he wants the throne. Some months ago, he had a dangerous affair with Zamira, the First Concubine of the Tyrant. The romance was brief, but Nekerios continued to support Zamira's plans to overthrow the Tyrant. He doesn't care about the girl but wants an opportunity to conquer the city.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Taunt d8.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 8(2)

Edges: Armor Use, Attractive, Distract, First Strike, Quick Draw.

Hindrances: Greedy, Overconfident.

Gear: Iron long sword (Str+d8), iron parrying dagger (Str+d4, +1 Parry if used off hand, cannot be thrown), medium armor (+2), helm (+2).

PRIEST OF ULASHA

This bald man has something reptilian about him, maybe in his thin mouth, or strangely colored eyes, or erratic movements. It is the dark taint of Ulasha, the Devourer.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Fighting d4, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d6, Knowledge (Religion) d8, Notice d6.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 4

Edges: Priest, Strong Will.

Hindrances: Vow (religious duty).

Gear: Sacrificial dagger (Str+d4), ceremonial robes.

Special abilities:

- **Curse of Ulasha:** The priest can cast a terrible curse in a forgotten language (it is an Intimidation Test of Will). Differently from normal Tests of Will, if a character is Shaken for the second time (kinda) by a Curse of Ulasha, he is Nauseated for the rest of the scene.

QUEEN'S EUNUCH

The Tyrant bought four eunuch warriors from Tricarnia to guard his harem and serve Zamira, First Concubine and daughter of the old king. Zamira soon earned their trust and they became her most faithful servants. Only three of them (including Unoch) are still with Zamira. The fourth died on the Night of the Devoured Sun.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Healing d4, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d4.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Block, Combat Reflexes.

Hindrances: Loyal.

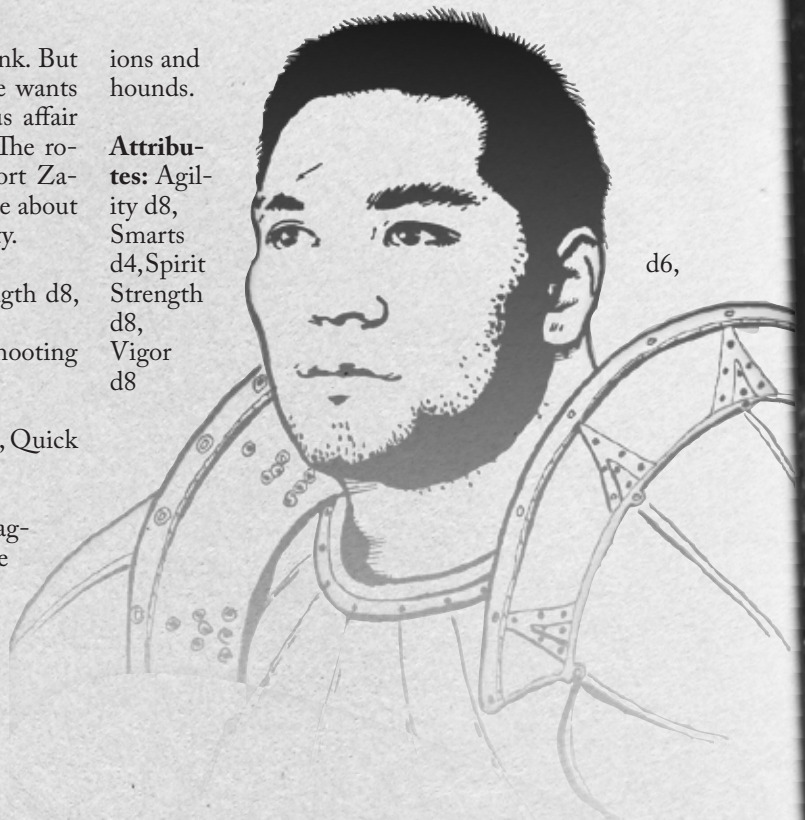
Gear: Curved bronze sword (Str+d8), dagger (Str+d4), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48).

SNAKE MAN

These cruel abominations, half snake and half man, are born of Ulasha's dark magic. While alive, they were the Tyrant's faithful soldiers, and now they serve him as min-

ions and hounds.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8



Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7(1)

Special abilities:

- **Armor +1:** Snake Men have scaly skin and also wear pieces of their old armor.

- **Claws:** Str+d6

- **Numbing Bite:** Str+d4. Any target Shaken or Wounded by a Snake Man's bite must make a Vigor roll or suffer the effects of a mild poison: for the rest of the fight, the target discards and redraws all the Initiative Cards higher than 10.

- **Smell the Blood:** A Snake Man starting his turn within 6" of a Wounded character gains the Frenzy Edge.

SNAKE MAN (WINGED)

These creatures are very similar to snake men, but with two important differences: they have large leathery wings and a cobra-like head. In their past life, they were priests of Ulasha, and the Devourer has now rewarded them with this mighty body. They are also smarter than the average snake man.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7(1)

Special abilities:

- **Armor +1:** Winged Snake Men have a scaly skin and wear parts of their old priest robes.

- **Claws:** Str+d4.

- **Poison Spitting:** These nasty creatures can spit corrosive venom at a distance (Damage: 2d6, Range: 5/10/20, AP 1). They use Agility instead of the Throwing skill. In addition, once per scene, they can spew out a massive dose of venom (Damage: 2d8, Range: 3/6/12, AP 1, Small Burst

Template). This exhausts their supply, preventing the use of the Poison Spitting Ability for the remainder of the scene.

• **Wings:** The Winged Snake Men can fly at a Pace of 8 and have a Climb rate of -3.



TUL, DESERT PROPHET

Tul became a desert prophet by chance. A simple shepherd, he got lost in the desert for an entire week, before his brothers found him, half-starved and raving from sunstroke. Time passed but the raving didn't stop and Tul came to believe the Sun God speaks through him. His brothers were his first followers, but soon many other people joined him, leaving their tribes to hear the words of the Sun God. Tul is usually peaceful but his fear of Ulasha's curse is enough to make him resort to violence.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d4, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d4, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d4, Knowledge (Religion) d10, Notice d6, Taunt d8.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Inspire, Fervor.

Hindrances: Anemic, Bad Eyes, Delusional (thinks he hears the voice of the Sun God).

Gear: Staff (Str+d4, 2 hands, +1 Parry, Reach 1), desert robes.

Special abilities:

• **Prophet of the Desert:** Tul has a charismatic personality and great influence over his followers. For this reason, he has a Command Radius of 15", but only the Desert Nomads benefit from his Leadership Edge. In addition, if Tul is Incapacitated, every Desert Nomad in the Command Radius must make an immediate Spirit roll. If they fail, they become Panicked.

TYRANT'S SOLDIER

This olive-skinned mercenary of Caldeian origins is tough and reliable. Trained as a heavy archer, he is a hardened professional of the bowstring, capable of killing a man without the smallest hint of compassion. The Tyrant brought him to Quollaba and granted him a comfortable, though not rich, life. This is why he will follow his master to Hell and beyond. He can be easily recognized by his metal breastplate emblazoned with a stylized snake and his curious helm, made to resemble a snake's head.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Riding d4, Shooting d8.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7(2)

Edges: Trained Thrower (bow).

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48, RoF: 1), bronze short sword (Str+d6), medium armor corselet (+2), helm (+2).

TYRANT'S OFFICER

A well trained veteran of the Caldeian army, this man is both a fighter and a leader of men.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Riding d6, Shooting d8.

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8 (1); **Toughness:** 8(2)

Edges: Block, Command, Hold the Line!

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bronze sword (Str+d8), medium armor (+2), small shield (+1 Parry), bronze dagger (Str+d4).



TYRANT SNAKE

This creature was once a massive statue in the main temple of Quollaba, now animated by Ulasha's dark soul. It resembles a giant snake, but has a third eye socket on its forehead, which now hosts the very much alive head of the Tyrant of Quollaba, Zanator.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12+3, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Persuasion d12, Stealth d6, Sorcery d10.

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 15 (4)

Special abilities:

• **Armor +4:** Stony hide.

• **Bite:** Str+d4.

• **Large:** Due to its size, attacks against the Tyrant Snake have a +2 modifier.

• **Size +5:** The Tyrant Snake is quite long, at least 20".

• **Constrict:** If the Tyrant Snake hits with a raise while biting, he traps his target in his coils, causing Str+d8 damage each round. The target can break free by winning an opposed Strength roll.

• **Demon:** The Tyrant Snake is a demonic creature, hence immune to poison and illness and has +2 to recovering from Shaken.

• **Sorcerer's Head:** Zanator was a sorcerer and his head still retains some of his terrible might. He has 15 Power Points and can use the following powers: *fear* (glowing eyes), *raise/lower trait* (Ulasha's curse), *smite* (Poisoned Fangs). His Head acts independently of the rest of the body, so the Tyrant Snake can cast a spell and attack in the same round without suffering a multi action penalty.

• **Weakness (Tyrant's Head):** The third eye of the Snake, Zanator's head, is the weak spot of the beast. It has Toughness 6 and no Armor. A Called Shot (-4) is required to hit it. Targeting the head with a ranged weapon is easier, but striking it in melee is more difficult, because the beast is very tall, so a weapon with Reach 1 or more is required. Characters with shorter weapons must spend an action to make an Climbing roll to climb up the beast's back and get close enough to strike the Tyrant's head. During this action, the Tyrant Snake tries to shake off any enemies on his back with an opposed roll between his own Strength and the target's Agility or Strength (target's choice). If the heroes win the roll, they hold their position and can strike, otherwise they are thrown d6" away and must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken.



UNOCH, QUEEN'S EUNUCH

Unoch is the most reliable of the queen's eunuchs. Strong, fast, and bold, he is a born survivor: he instinctively knows

when to fight and when to run, which makes him an invaluable companion in dire straits.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Shooting d10, Stealth d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6

Edges: Block, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Marksman.

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Curved bronze sword (Str+d8), dagger (Str+d4), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48).

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d4, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d10, Taunt d8.

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: Command, Temptress, Very Attractive.

Hindrances: Vow (retake her throne).

Gear: Golden chainmail bikini.



ZAMIRA

This beautiful, dark-haired woman is the daughter of Quol-laba's old king. Forced by the Tyrant to live in submission for many years, she was involved in a conspiracy to kill him and managed to regain the throne.



APPENDIX I

PLACES OF INTERESTS

QUOLLABA, CITY OF THE TYRANT

Government: Tyranny

Ruler: Zanator, Caldeian Sorcerer, Chosen of Ulasha

Population: 2,000

Military Forces: 150 Heavy Archers (foreign, mercenary troops)

Religion: Ulasha's cult (ruling class), polytheism (commoners)

Importations: Luxuries, cloth.

Exportations: Desert Tears

Ancient History. Quollaba was founded four hundred years ago by Kyrosian fugitives around a fertile oasis. The Kyrosians were forced to fight against the desert nomads. This is why, despite being quite small, the city has imposing, thick walls, so that a small garrison can defend it for a long time.

It is placed in the Red Desert wherever the Game Master sees fit, but not far from Kyros.

Quollaba's wealth mainly comes from the Desert Tears, strange gems originating from even stranger crystal formations found in the desert. They are common throughout the Red Desert, but are found in greater concentration around Quollaba.

Recent History. Ten years ago a powerful Caldeian Sorcerer, Zanator, conquered the city, killed the old king and proclaimed himself Tyrant, terrorizing the people with his iron-fist rule. Some of the nobles rebelled but were mercilessly slaughtered. Zanator took Zamira, daughter of the old king, as his First Concubine.

IMPORTANT LOCATIONS

Quollaba is roughly circular in shape, with narrow, shady streets, to provide a cool environment and to be easily defendable in case of attack. The most important locations in the city are described below, both before the Tyrant's death and after it. If the party explores the city, the Game Master can use them to create encounters.

Arch of the Traitors. An old arch built by some ancient king to celebrate a victory. The Tyrant had several metal hooks set into it so that they can be used to hang thieves and other criminals.

After. At night, a single winged snake man is found here, feasting on the bodies of the dead criminals.

Arsenal. This massive tower is connected to the city walls and is used to store military supplies. Access is denied to strange by guards who constantly patrol its entrance.

After. The tower was sacked by the rebels but, with a Notice roll, the heroes can find 1d4 jars of an inflammable alchemical concoction, the Red Lotus of Burning, to be used for siege machines. The jars can be thrown (Range: 3/6/12) and create a pool of liquid the size of Large Burst Template, dealing 2d6 damage to anyone in the Template. Targets can catch fire on 1-3 on d6. Recognizing the liquid requires a Common Knowledge (military characters have +1) or Lotismastery (+4) roll.

Bazaar Street. This street is full of stalls. Despite the number of traders, it is quite calm and constantly watched by guards. The heroes can buy most commodities here. For every hour spent in Bazaar Street, roll a d8. If a 1 is rolled, a hero is pickpocketed, but the thief, a young boy, is swiftly captured by the guards who take him to the Arch of Traitors.

After. On the various stalls the party can find 2d4 food rations every 10 minutes spent searching them. If the dice roll a double, 2d4 snake men appear on the scene.

City Gates. Quollaba has a single gate, wide enough for two carts (12 yards, 6" on the tabletop). It is always guarded by six Tyrant's guards.

After. A makeshift barricade was built by the guards to defend themselves against the rebelling population. There is nothing useful here.

Granary. This building holds most of the provisions of the city. The heroes have no reason to be interested in this place, which is usually poorly watched.

After. The party can scavenge 3d6 food rations in the granary. There are 2d4 snake men in it.

Lepers. Lepers are sacred to Ulasha (their flesh is "devoured" by the disease, so this appeases the evil god). Hence, unlike other cities, Quollaba hosts a small colony of lepers, housed in a few crumbling buildings just outside the walls. The lepers are also admitted into the city on certain days (as the Night of the Devoured Sun). They are fervent followers of Ulasha.

After. A battle must have been fought here and the colony is empty. Quil, the only surviving leper, hides in one of the buildings. He tells the heroes that, the day after the Tyrant's death, a group of terrible looking beings (the snake men) came here and took everyone away. The lepers were used as food for the Tyrant Snake.

The Smithy. Weapons are strictly controlled in Quollaba, so Quasim, the smith, must be convinced with a Persuasion roll to sell his wares to the foreigner heroes, and he always asks for 30% more as hazard pay.

After. The heroes find 1d4 common melee weapons (swords, axes, and maces), 50 arrows, a bow, and leather armor (+1).

The Jewelry Shop. Here the officers of the Tyrant sell the Desert Tears. The party can buy gems worth 10, 50 and 100

Moons respectively. The business is run by Counselor Sulak, so there is 1 chance on a d10 to find him here.

After. A safe (Toughness 14, Lockpicking -4 to pry it open) has been left in the shop. It contains gems worth 3,000 Moons.

Tyrant's Palace. The Tyrant's palace is an imposing building. The entrance is always watched by four guards and, in case of trouble, another twenty are stationed close by.

After. The palace is infested by 2d10 snake men. It still holds many riches (to be determined by the Game Master).

APPENDIX II HANDOUT

THE SELLER OF WATER AND DATES

It was just another afternoon at the bazaar. The voices, smells and colors almost dazed you with their amazing variety. Around you, people of all races invited the customers to look at their enticing wares. The heat was almost unbearable and your throat felt dry as a camel's arse.

Luckily, the market was full of water sellers that day. They are the humblest merchants around but surely they did the most business today. A cup of fresh water was exactly what you needed in that moment.

As if evoked by your desires, an old nomad with dark skin and bright blue eyes approached you: "Here, master, the freshest of waters and the sweetest of dates to quench your thirst and please your palate."

Suddenly many other sellers surrounded you, but the first one continued: "Don't heed these rotten sons of a desert vulture, their water is as hot as camel piss and their dates full of worms. If you choose my wares, I shall give you some of these marvelous date cakes, for free."

The seller smiles, revealing surprisingly white teeth. He seemed likeable, so you bought a cup of water and some dates from him.

"The cakes..." he said, "they are special. Only my cousin, who owns the Snake Inn in Quollaba, bakes them. I am sure that, after eating one, you'll want more. But, noble stranger, you will have to hurry, because he only prepares them for the Night of the Devoured Sun."

The story seemed exceedingly strange, even coming from a desert merchant, and you looked at the cakes more closely. They felt heavy and seem to have something in their center. You cautiously broke one in half and... For all the gods! You found an unpolished gem! You can buy wine for a month or even a good horse with these cakes!

You definitely wanted more cakes.

You lift your head and look around for the merchant, but he has disappeared in the crowd.

Quollaba he said. An interesting place to visit.

BAD DREAMS

You are in the ruins of the Koralon estate. Nekerios and his men are moving toward you. But no, it isn't the Kashiti, it's the Tyrant's guards. They surround you, weapons raised. You are ready to fight them, but suddenly something terrible happens. Nekerios and the soldiers stop dead in their tracks: their skin and faces are changing, they are becoming monsters, the most hideous creatures you have ever seen! But wait, you feel a weird sensation and your skin is changing too! You are turning into a monster!

You wake up screaming!

Note for the player: your character is Nauseated (-1 to all Attribute rolls). This effect will fade when you successfully (Game Master's and rest of the party judgment) tell the other characters about your anxiety and fears. This can be accomplished with roleplaying, or by Smarts (-2) roll. Reward a character with Benny if he roleplays that.



BOOK OF LORE: THE RED DESERT

This section expands the background information about the Red Desert found in the Player Guide. It is mostly useful to the Game Master, but he can decide to share part of it with the players, especially when relevant to their character.

THE RED DESERT

The Red Desert is a vast area extending from the Fallen Kingdom of Keron in the north, to the Ivory Savannah and Caldeia in the south, and to Kyros in the east. Although it is considered a single region by foreigners, the natives know that it is very diversified. Its central part is mainly a sandy desert; the sand is deep red and, in some places, so fine that a man can sink into it as if he were in a sea of blood. In the central desert there is also the biggest concentration of desert crystals, strange formations that contain the precious gems known as Desert Tears. Only a few nomad tribes live here, mainly herding camels and similar beasts. Life deep in the desert is extremely harsh.

The southern part of the desert is a rocky, barren land that gradually blends into the Ivory Savannah. It is the most densely populated area because herds of goats and similar beasts can find enough to eat. It is also rich in coal and

ore deposits, and therefore often disputed, since the desert nomads trespass into the Savannah looking for verdant pastures, while the Black Tribes move north to mine for precious ores.

The northern part of the desert is the least known. It is a vast, desolate expanse offering some truly peculiar views, such as petrified forests. Legends also speak of places where precious stones are as common as pebbles. In truth, very few people, except the dreaded Red Nomads (see below), venture into this part of the desert, since it is tainted by the dark influence of the nearby Fallen Kingdom of Keron.

DESERT PLANTS

The Red Desert might seem totally barren and lifeless to the inexperienced eye, but several life forms, both animals and plants, thrive among its dunes.

Cacti of every form and type are quite common, and they are a source of food and water for those who know how to harvest them.

In the south there are brambles that only goats and camels eat. But for short periods the brambles produce large amounts of juicy thorns that, if gathered while fresh, are tender and palatable. This is a time for feasting, and the women of the desert tribes bake the Bread of Thorns, which keeps for several months.

An evil, black herb, called Madness Herb, grows in the northern desert. Horses and camels become mad and must be killed after eating them. There are rumors that Red Nomads gather and eat this herb, which might explain their hatred towards anyone who is not of their race.



But the desert is famous above all for the Red Lotus, a parasitic moss that lives in symbiosis with cacti and is used in many concoctions and poisons. A particular type of Lotus found in the desert is the Crystal Lotus. This moss is usually no more than a thin layer on the surface of desert crystals. Desert nomad lotusmasters say it is a very powerful but unstable substance, because it combines the magic of the Lotus and that of the crystals.

RED LOTUS



When buying Refined Lotus (see the Beasts and Barbarians Player Guide) in the Red Desert, a character can decide that he has purchased Red Lotus. It is very powerful, so every dose grants 2 Power Points instead of one, but also very unstable, so the concoction generates a critical failure on a roll of 1-2 on the Lotusmastery die, regardless of the Wild Die.

DESERT BEASTS

The desert hosts a variety of beasts, some common, others very odd. The Syranthian sages say that, after the fall of the Dread Star, a great cloud of stardust was blown south and turned the verdant and fertile plains into the bleak land that is now the Red Desert. That's why many creatures found here are twisted and mutated.

Tamed beasts: camels are common among the nomads, especially those living in the central desert, because they need very little water. Riding a camel is not quite the same as riding a horse. For this reason, foreigners who buy a camel and try to mount it are usually quickly unsaddled by the beast, causing great hilarity and mocking by the nomads. In gaming terms, a hero riding a camel suffers -2 to Riding rolls until acquainted with his mount (the process requires a week).

Goats are the nomad's most common cattle. Glota goats, recognizable by their short legs, can eat almost any plant, even poisonous herbs, without negative effects. They are also very resistant to snake and scorpion venom. Glota droppings are gathered and dried, then used as fuel in the cold desert nights.

The nomads also use horses, especially in the northern and southern desert. These beasts are not as tough as the Valk ponies, but are naturally very fast (+1 Pace).

Falconry is rather widespread but, since falcons are extremely rare in the desert, the nomads use vultures of many types. They have become

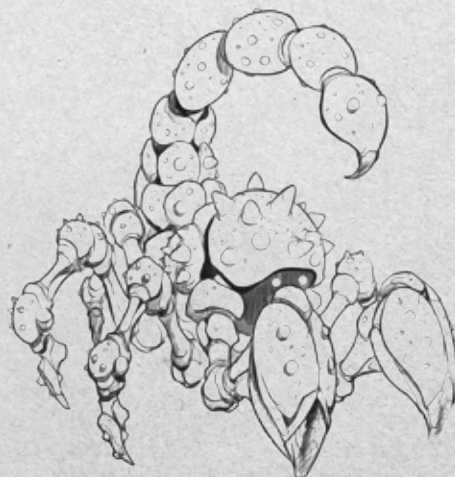
masters in the art of training vultures for hunting and, in certain cases, even for war.

Wild beasts: The most common desert animal is the rattlesnake, which comes in many varieties. The terrible Sand Viper is no bigger than a man's finger, but its poison is strong enough to kill a horse. The giant Stone Cobra, a twelve-yard-long poisonous rattlesnake, can easily crush a human skull with its bite. Luckily, it is rare and its poison quite weak. The nomads also insist on the existence of the fabled Snake King, an amazing creature with two heads, so poisonous that it can kill a man merely with its gaze, but no evidence of its existence is recorded.

Other common desert dwellers are scorpions. The Black Stinger is found extensively in the desert. It is as big as a man's hand, and its venom is very powerful. The problem is that they are rarely alone. If you find one, a nest of at least fifty specimens is bound to be nearby. The best thing to do is to grab your things and move your camp as far away as possible. But the real trouble starts when you find yourself face to face with a Giant Scorpion. It is a very dangerous beast, the desert equivalent of the jungle tiger. Usually the size of a dog, it can get as big as a pony. The Giant Scorpion is a fearsome hunter, and thanks to its thick carapace, has absolute no fear of opponents. If you must face one, aim to the eyes, and pray to your god.

The last type of scorpion is the Sand Bitch, as the nomads call it. As big as a cat, this evil beast is a natural hunter. It hides among stones or brambles and shoots a sort of egg full of poison from its tail. The egg is very thin and it bursts when it hits a target, causing paralysis. At this point, the creature approaches and starts eating its lunch, still alive but paralyzed. Sand Bitches have excellent aim, so the targets are often hit from behind or above and cannot detect the incoming attack.

Canines are represented by jackals. They come in two sizes, normal and giant, and some say that a particular type of two-legged jackal, the size of a man, lives in the northern desert, in the shadows of the Keronian mountains. Only the nomads believe these stories, while civilized people think that they are no animals but just primitive men, like the Nandals. Yet, too little is known about them to determine their nature.



Finally, the most dangerous desert creature is the Crystal Beast. In very rare cases, crystal formations get stuck into the flesh of animals, like jackals, snakes and scorpions. No one knows if the beast accidentally eats the crystal or if the stone simply gets wedged in its flesh, but the two merge, the crystal actually *growing* and expanding through the host's body. These hybrid creatures are usually much stronger than their natural counterparts and develop strange powers, as well as an evil intelligence. Luckily this happens only

to animals, though legends are told of lonely hermits with living crystals inside their bodies.

CRYSTAL BEASTS: DO IT YOURSELF



You can easily create a crystal beast - Just take a normal creature from the Savage Worlds core rulebook or the Fantasy Companion, and follow these steps.

First, add the Construct Monstrous Ability: the creature is partially crystalline now, so it is far more resistant to damage.

Second, add a second Monstrous Ability of your choice and/or give it a Power with 10 Power Points and Vigor, Spirit or Smarts as arcane skill.

Third, raise Smarts by one step or give the beast human intelligence (removing the (A) from the stats).

Crystal Beasts tend to be particular individuals (Wild Cards), though it is not always so.

So, for example, take the Wolf from the core manual, add the Construct ability, the smite Power, and raise Smarts to d8(A). You will create the terrible Darkjaw of the Desert, a very dangerous jackal, with a crystal back and long, sharp crystal teeth secreting corrosive poison...



DESERT NOMADS

GENERAL FEATURES

The Desert Nomads tend to have brown skin, with black hair and eyes, although blue eyes aren't uncommon. They are quite tall, with the southern clans usually a little taller than the others, probably due to occasional mating with the neighboring Black Tribes. Tattoos of various types, often with a religious meaning, are common among them. Many have a stylized sun tattooed on their forehead, to pay homage to the Sun God, or blue tattoos on their cheeks to ensure the benevolence of the Water Lady.

They wear long robes made of wool, with deep hoods that protect them from sun, and leather slippers. Women dress in wool clothes too, but their garments are finer, since having a well-dressed wife is a sign of prestige for a man. The color of the robes is very important, because it identifies the clan an individual belongs to. Hence, there are Brown Nomads, Green Nomads, and Red Nomads.

Despite the men's apparent open mind toward them, women have a very low position in nomad society. They are sup-

posed to obey their fathers and then their husbands without question.

Nevertheless, women are vital to the nomads' economy. They weave, gather Golta droppings, look for food, cook, and do a thousand other little chores that men are too proud to do. So, having a good wife is very important. A man can achieve marriage in two ways, either by buying a woman from her father, if she belongs to the man's same clan, or by kidnapping her, if she belongs to a different clan. For a woman, being kidnapped is a sign of admiration and respect, and a good omen for the marriage. Hence, fake kidnappings are often organized among friendly tribes and they end with a big, happy feast. But sometimes finding a wife can lead to battles, bloodshed, and mourning in both families.

Whatever his relation with his parents in law, the husband pays a dowry to the wife's family after she gives birth to the first child. A man delivering a dowry is considered untouchable, and can enter the camp of his worst enemies without danger.

Nomads are warlike people and the desert is a dangerous place. So, the men are armed with a bow, a curved dagger named Kullah, and a short curved sword, all made of bronze. During war, they also use shields and spears, while armor is quite rare, due to the climate. The Kullah has strong social significance. A boy receives it from his father the day he becomes a man, to show he is now a member of the tribe, and losing it is equal to losing one's status.

The nomads are skilled archers (though they are no match for the Valks), but they prefer close combat. The nomad war leaders' tactic is to shoot at the enemies from a distance with bows, and then charge on horseback. They fight on horseback, but they don't use stirrups.

This can be a winning tactic if the opponent is another nomad tribe or a poorly defended caravan, but it usually leads to heavy losses against the tough infantry of the Independent Cities, equipped with armor, shields, and long spears.



NOMAD CUSTOMS

Here follows a list of the most common customs among the Nomad Tribes. The Game Master can use them to add some flavor to his stories. A character with a nomad background automatically knows these pieces of information; otherwise, a Common Knowledge roll is needed.



Share the Salt. *When two nomads or two clans meet peacefully, the first thing they do is to take out some salt and mix it, then both sides eat the mixed salt. After this ritual no bloodshed is allowed, and it is the typical way to ensure a truce.*

Being Invited into a Woman's Tent. *No respectable woman ever invites a man into her tent. If she does, she is probably a witch plotting something nasty, or she has some hidden, and potentially dangerous, goal. In certain tribes, a widow can invite a man into her tent. If he accepts and shares her food and her bed, the two are married.*

Respect for Story Tellers. *Being an illiterate race, the desert nomads greatly respect story tellers of any race. Having a good storyteller in one's clan is a great honor, just like having a skilled horseman or warrior.*

Headscarf. *The following custom is strictly respected by the Red Nomads, while other clans follow it partially. A nomad wearing a headscarf is ready for battle and he will give and expect no quarter.*



BROWN NOMADS

The Brown Nomads are the most common type of clan in the Red Desert. They owe their name to their light brown, undyed garments. Brown Nomad clans are usually led by a chief. The title is hereditary and usually kept in the same family for generations. On very rare occasions, a chief can be challenged in a duel for power. If he loses, he must renounce his title and he is often killed.

The Brown Nomads are mainly herders, traders, and, occasionally, raiders. They constantly move between uncontested oases and along trading routes.

They are often involved in skirmishes with the Independent Cities, which they see as foreign intruders robbing them of their poor resources, and have mixed relations with the Green Nomads. In some cases they are at open war, because the Green prevent access to the bigger oases, while in other case they have peaceful commercial relationships, exchanging their livestock with the Green Nomads' groceries and other goods.

The Brown Nomads worship a number of gods and desert spirits, but the cults of the Sun God and the Water Woman are the most widespread.

GREEN NOMADS

The Green Nomads are nomads only by name, as most of them live in the few large oases of the Red Desert. They build fortified enclaves to protect their precious retreats. Many are farmers, living off the fertile lands surrounding their dwellings. Herding is practiced, but only as a minor occupation.

The historians say that the fortified oases of the Green Nomads were the forerunners of the Independent Cities. It is true in certain cases, while in other cases the oases became depleted and the nomads took once more to their wandering life.

Their social organization is more complex than that of the Brown tribes. They are ruled by a king, named Ibbam, who rules aided by a caste of warriors and nobles at his direct service. Then come the farmers, herders, and, lastly, the slaves.

The Green Nomads are mostly self-sufficient, and some oases along the trade routes are major trading hubs. In is in their best interest to keep the trade routes safe, so they employ patrols of professional warriors.

RED NOMADS

The infamous Red Nomads are the most feared of the entire desert. They are always dressed in red and, some false legends say their garments are soaked in blood. Red is chosen because it is the most common color of the rocks and sand in the areas where they live, thus providing camouflage. The Red Nomads strictly follow the Headscarf Custom (see sidebar). So, if you find one wearing a headscarf – and most of them do – he will try to kill you without the slightest provocation.

People always wonder about the violent attitude and isolationism of the Red Nomads. The cause of this behavior is found in their religion. They worship the evil spirits of the desert and the ancient, forgotten deities of the Keronians, and their souls have been corrupted by these unholy practices for centuries.

A Red Nomad clan is led by the most powerful male, usually a strong warrior. But the position can also be held by an old, extremely dangerous sorcerer. His rule is not absolute, and disputes, ending with the death of one of the contenders, are fairly common.

The Red Nomads live in the northern part of the desert, directly in the shadow of the Keronian Mountains, but small bands of them travel south, looking for battle, blood, and spoils.

PROPHETS CLANS

A very important figure in nomadic culture is the prophet. Almost always a man, he claims to be speaking on behalf of a deity or particular jinni. People, especially warriors, greatly respect the prophets and many leave their home clan to join the followers of a prophet, who live together as brethren. Joining a prophet's clan is a tough choice, since a man must renounce his Kullah, and symbolically all his family ties. What's more, once the choice is made, going back is impossible.

The customs of these clans differ greatly, depending on the prophet's personality, but they do share some common features.

First, the prophet himself holds absolute power. Second, the followers are fanatics, ready to die for their master. Third, they practice chastity: no woman is accepted into a clan, and many prophets see them as devilish creatures, who divert men from the path of faith. Hence, their numbers only increase when new adepts join the clan.

Moreover, prophets' clans are military forces. The prophets usually have a holy task to accomplish, such as protecting a holy spring or exterminating infidels. Whatever their task, they have a personal band of warriors at their service, which can become as numerous as a small army. This is why the nomad tribes and even the Independent Cities are cautious when dealing with prophets, fearing that their homes will be razed by bands of fanatics.

The life of a prophet's clans is usually short. When the holy man dies, the clan breaks up, unless another charismatic disciple takes the place of his former master.

DESERT GODS

The desert is endless, so is the number of deities worshipped in it, but some of them are more important than others. The following section describes the major desert gods.

THE SUN GOD

The Sun God, Golar Ammon, is probably the oldest deity of the desert nomads. He is worshipped in three different shapes, each representing one of the aspects of the sun: the Dawn Child, the Midday Warrior, and the Dusk Elder.

The Dawn Child, depicted as a young boy, is identified with the gentle caress of the sun that makes plants grow and is the creator of all life. He is a good, peaceful god, worshipped mostly by women and Green Nomads.

The Midday Warrior, also known as the Fiery Lord, is represented as a bold warrior armed with a scimitar. He embodies the destructive energy of the desert sun, capable of mercilessly killing the strongest of men. He is also the god of courage, action, and the active search for knowledge: with his rays he turns away the darkness of ignorance. He is worshipped by warriors and, at times, also by sages.

The third aspect of the god is the Dusk Elder. He represents the sun as the day is waning, when he bestows his last warm caress before the cold night comes. He is the master of wisdom, defender from the dark things that roam the night, and protector of those who suffers. He is worshipped by people of all classes, but mainly by wise man and the sick.

The Sun God rituals vary depending on the lifestyle of its worshippers. In the fortified oasis of the Green Nomads, the Sun God is worshipped in an imposing temple made of stone, while the Brown tribes pay homage to a small statue representing him.

Whatever the rituals, all the statues of the Sun God are made of earthenware, baked under the desert sun.

THE WATER LADY

Even if no desert nomad would ever admit it, the Water Lady is a foreign goddess, probably Etu, the Mother, originally a divinity of the Black Tribes and Kyros. The Water Lady is a woman showing a mature beauty, often depicted while pregnant. She embodies life, water, and prosperity in

general. She is the mistress of the oases, of the desert cacti, and even of the hard brambles that only Golta goats can eat. She has become strongly linked with the Sun God: she is the tender mother of the Dawn Child, the counseling wife of the Midday Warrior, and the devoted daughter of the Dusk Elder.

The nomads live in constant fear of dying of thirst in the desert, so they tattoo the blue marks of the Water Lady on their faces, which grant protection from this terrible fate.

The Water Lady is rarely represented by statues or idols. She is usually worshipped in the form of a spring or pool. Differently from most other cults, the cult of the Water Lady is usually under the control of women.

THE JINNI

While the Gods are far, the Jinni are very much present in the everyday life of the desert people. The nomads use this word to refer to all the minor deities and supernatural beings that inhabit the desert. Civilized men would call them demons, but the Jinni aren't inherently evil, just different and alien. Many of them are invisible and interact with man in subtle ways, for example making a horse go wild, or causing a man to lose his way, while others take a physical form and can be seen and touched.

Hundreds of Jinni are said to exist but, given the nomads' love for legends and myths, it is hard to tell the real ones from those created by an imaginative storyteller.

The following sections describe two typical Jinni, to give the Game Master enough clues to create his own. Note that the descriptions simply report the traditional representations of the Jinni. The Game Master is free to alter them or to decide how much of the myth is actually true. For example, Kaziras could actually be a mysterious sect of women who kill travelers and Ukars powerful Keronian demons unleashed unto the world. The possibilities are endless...

KAZIRA

Kazira is a spirit appearing to people who are going to die of thirst in the desert. She typically presents herself as a pretty nomad girl, but other forms are possible. A Kazira jinni always carries a vase full of cold, refreshing water, which she offers to the thirsty one. Remember, she doesn't give the water right away, first she asks. By accepting, the poor sod is doomed. The water is fresh and sweet, but full of dark magic. In a few hours it fills both stomach and lungs and the unfortunate victim dies by drowning. This is why Kazira is also known as the deity of those Drowned in The Desert.

There is a way to fool a Kazira jinni: refuse her water. If this happens, the evil spirit disappears and the exhausted traveler must use his failing strength to explore the surrounding area. In fact, a Kazira can only appear if a source of water is nearby, usually within a mile or less.

UKAR

Ukar appears as a tall nomad warrior, well-dressed and carrying impressive-looking weapons. He is bronze skinned and has a long, reddish beard. Ukar offers his services to

a person of his choice. He can choose a man or a woman, a good person or an evil one. His criteria aren't like those of men.

Ukar asks the person to make a single wish, which he will fulfill, not immediately or through an act of blatant magic, but through a series of coincidences that, in the space of one year, will make the person's wish come true.

Usually people ask to become rich or powerful, to marry a certain person, or something similar.

Then, exactly after one year, Ukar reappears and demands payment. He always asks for the person's life, who will be taken to his kingdom as an eternal slave. The poor creature is doomed to be not seen again. Many have tried to avoid Ukar's demand, but in the end they have always disappeared.

The only way to escape Ukar's power is to refuse his offer. In this case, the jinni smiles and leaves a small gift, which can be accepted without harm.

TRAVELING IN THE DESERT

TRADE ROUTES

The desert can be crossed only by caravans, because only well-armed groups are strong enough to be protected from its many dangers, among which nomad attacks.

Caravan masters are usually merchants or independent individuals who bring together groups of travelers for safety and to share traveling expenses. They employ trusted nomad guides, the only ones able to lead a caravan in and out of the desert. Caravan masters tend to be very fond of them and pay them well, because they know that, when among the sands, their very lives are in the hands of the nomad guides.

Nevertheless, nomad guides have been known to betray their masters and lead caravans into ambushes. Even if they manage to survive the nomads' attacks, without a guide, the poor travelers are doomed to die lost in the desert.

This doesn't mean that the desert is a completely lawless land. Several trade routes – as the Trail of the Two Seas from Teyerana to Hillias, which goes through some Independent Cities and fortified oases of the Green Nomads – are watched by the militia of the nearby cities and by nomad troops, to ensure the flow of trade across the land.

Another very important trade route is the Southern Path, starting from Hillias, crossing the whole Red Desert, and going deep into the Ivory Savannah. This very long road ends on the banks of the Buffalo River, where an great gathering of the tribes is held every year.

CARAVANSERAI

On the main trade routes, but also on several minor ones, caravanserais are the only real safe place for travelers. Most



typically, a caravanserai is surrounded by a square or rectangular enclosure, with a single gate wide enough for carts or heavily laden beasts. The courtyard is almost always open to the sky, and the inside walls of the enclosure host several stalls, bays, or chambers to accommodate merchants and their servants, animals, and merchandise.

Caravanserais provide water for humans and animals, and in some rare cases, for washing. Some of them even have elaborate baths. They also keep fodder for animals and shops for travelers, where supplies can be purchased or sold.

Many caravanserais of the Red Desert are run by private individuals, but some of them are managed by the Green Nomads. These simple dwellings have, in some cases, evolved into fortified oases and then cities.

TREASURES OF THE DESERT

The desert is a dangerous place, but among its red sands one can find the strange and precious Desert Tears, many of which have strange and unknown powers. When the Game Master wants to give the heroes a very characteristic treasure, he can have them find one of these rare gemstones. Desert Tears are living entities that grant something positive to their owner, but they usually also take something away from him.

As a rule, Desert Tears have Toughness 7 and a market value equivalent to the price the heroes can ask if they want to sell one. Finding one for sale is almost impossible.

To decide the value and effect of each stone, roll a d20 and consult the following table.

Desert Tears Table

d20 Effect

- 1-10 **Precious Tear.** The gem is worth a number of Moons equal to the die result multiplied by 50.
- 11 **Stormchaser Tear.** This semitransparent gem is affected by the changing weather and turns deep red when a sandstorm is approaching. It grants +4 to Survival rolls to forecast storms and other types of extreme weather. As a disadvantage, it somehow lures storms (Game Master's decision) and its owner will often be forced to find shelter or get soaked. Value 300 Moons.
- 12 **Waterfinder Tear.** This cobalt-blue gem has a very useful power: it moves, like a magnet, pointing toward the nearest source of water. It grants +2 to Survival rolls in the desert. On the downside, the gem's owner is constantly thirsty, which forces him to drink double the normal water ration. Value 250 Moons.
- 13 **Stonelord Tear.** This grayish crystal has large copper veins, closely resembling the veins of a living body. It grants the ability to walk through stone, as for the *burrow* Power. It uses the owner's Smarts as Arcane Skill and has 10 Power Points, which recharge as normal. If a 1 is rolled on the Smarts roll, regardless the Wild Die, the hero's joints become stiff and he loses a die step in Agility and all Agility linked skills. This penalty can be eliminated with a natural healing roll. Value 200 Moons.
- 14 **Bloodseeker Tear.** This purple crystal often looks like a razor-sharp shard, roughly the size of a dagger blade, but smaller pieces can be used as arrow or spear tips and bigger ones as sword blades. With a Repair roll and proper equipment (usually a forge), the crystal can be turned into a weapon (a dagger, an arrow, a spear or a short sword). The weapon is exceptionally good, dealing +1 damage and causing d8 (instead of d6) damage on a raise. Yet, ownership of this object stirs a strange lust for violence in its wielder, who receives the Bloodthirsty Hindrance. Getting rid of the weapon is the only way to remove the Hindrance.
- 15 **Falsebeauty Tear.** This glittering crystal has a very strange effect on its owner. If the crystal is kept in plain sight (encased in a ring, sewn on a dress, etc.), it makes the owner appear extremely beautiful. The hero is granted +4 Charisma, regardless of any other modifier. In truth, the gem is sucking the owner's beauty away: the possessor must make a Vigor roll every month or suffer -1 to his "real" Charisma. When it drops to -2, the hero gets the Ugly Hindrance, because all his hair falls out and his skin starts breaking up. Note that, as long as he owns the gem and keeps it visible, this Hindrance doesn't apply, and the hero con-

tinues to use the +4 Charisma given by the gem's magic. Only when the gem is destroyed can the Ugly Hindrance be removed, through a successful Vigor (-4) roll, which can be tried every time the hero gains an advancement. Value 300 Moons.

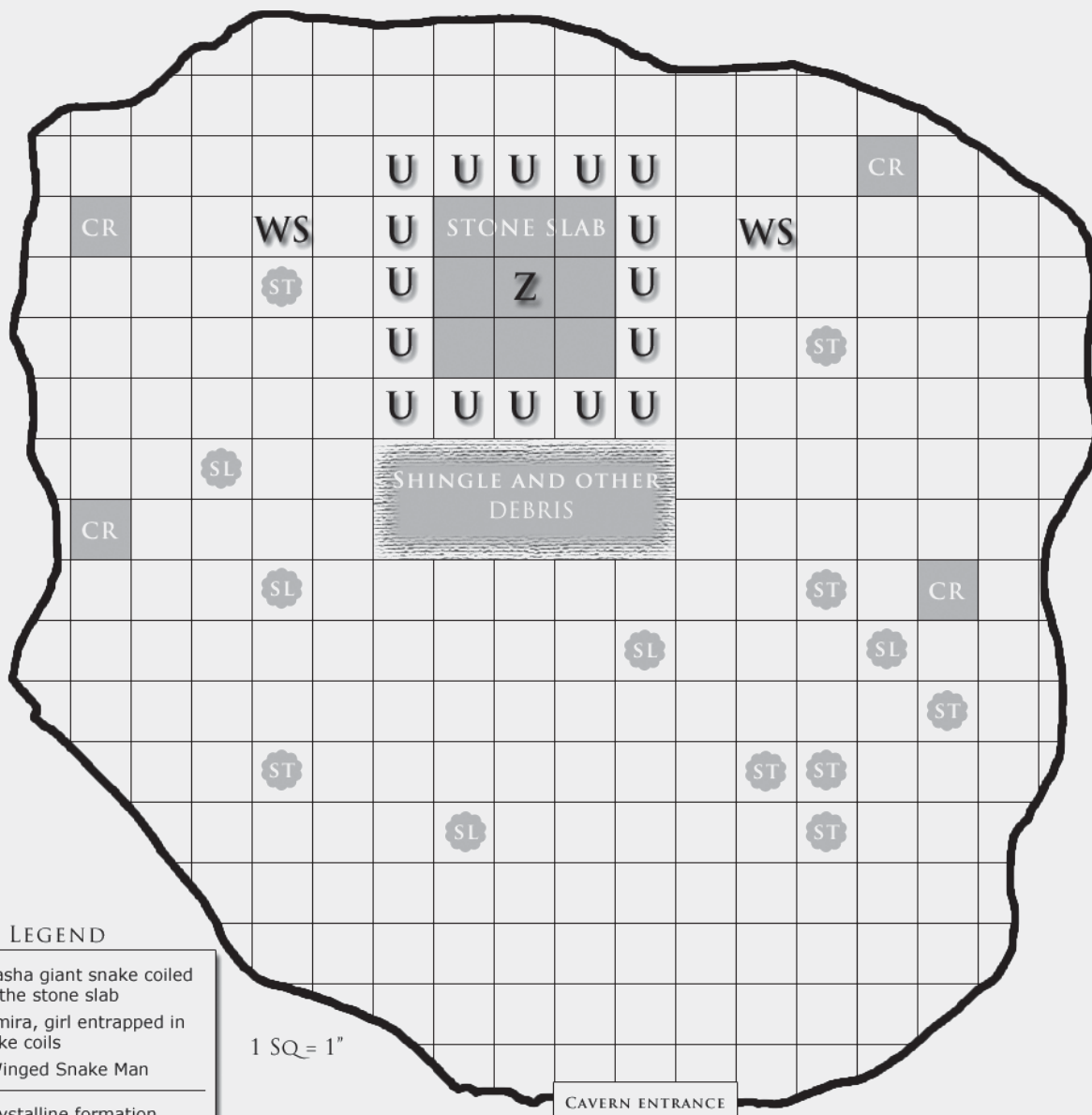
Starsoul Tear. This bright white crystal pulses with strong magical energy waiting to be released. A character can use it to unleash a powerful *burst* spell, with a trapping of white hot light. He uses Spirit as arcane skill. The Starsoul Tear has 15 Power Points, they don't recharge and, when they are exhausted, the stone turns gray and "dies", crumbling into tiny worthless pieces. Value 400 Moons (for a fully charged gem).

Truesight Tear. This violet crystal, usually of circular shape, has a strange power. By looking into it a person can see through any disguise, magical or otherwise, and understand the real essence of what he sees. It counts as the *detect/conceal* arcana Power (*detect* only), cast with skill d12 and with 5 available Power Points, which recharges as normal. As a drawback, this clearness of sight is so strong that the soul of the owner comes under severe strain: he suffers -1 to Fear checks. Value 400 Moons.

Snakecharmer Tear. This greenish crystal grants its wielder great power over reptiles, giving him the Beast Friend Edge, but only toward snakes and similar beasts. On the flipside, the owner's behavior slowly changes and, after a month, he takes on a reptilian behavioral trait of his choice (for example tasting the air with the tongue, hissing and so on) which must be roleplayed by the player, causing -1 to Charisma. Value 200 Moons.

Lifesucker Tear. This blood-red crystal is warm to the touch and seems to pulsate, as a beating heart. It grants its owner the Improved Nerves of Steel Edge, but this comes with a price. The gem steals the owner's life energy, so every week he must make a Vigor roll or be affected by the Anemic Hindrance. In case of a critical failure, he permanently loses a Vigor die step. If Vigor drops below d4, he dies. The only way to recover the lost Vigor or to remove the Anemic Hindrance is by shattering the gem. Value 400 Moons.

Sorcerer Tear. This gem seems to be full of smoke of changing colors. In truth, it hosts a demonic entity. When looking into it, a sorcerer has strange visions of a forgotten past and hears whispers of forbidden secrets. It grants him +2 to Knowledge (Arcana) rolls and the Power Points Edge. On the downside, the evil entity trapped inside the crystal slowly undermines the sorcerer's sanity, so the hero receives a Delusional (Major) Hindrance (Game Master's choice). The Hindrance is removed only when the stone is destroyed. Value 800 Moons.



1. Arch of Traitors
2. Arsenal
3. Bazaar Street
4. City Gates
5. Granary
6. Lepers
7. Snake Inn
8. The Smithy
9. Jewellery Shop
10. Tyrant's Palace
11. Temple of Ullashu
12. Widow Tower

