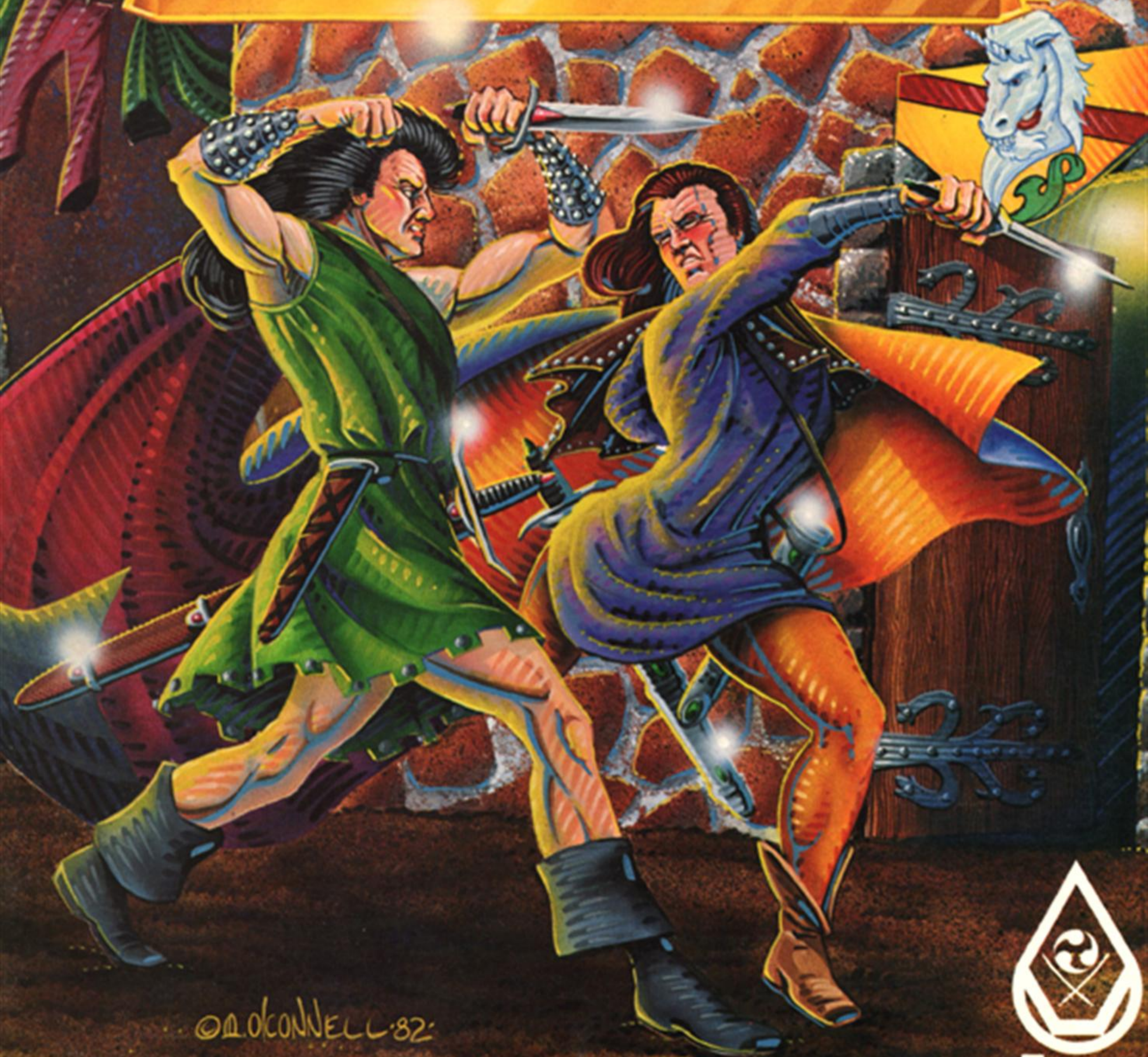


ROBERT L. ASPRIN'S
thieves' world

The Blue Camel

Asprin
From a concept by Robert Asprin. Written by Bill Fawcett



Approved for use with Thieves' World



fasa

The Blue Camel

For the Players and the Judge
(May be read to the players)

The air was cool in the Vulgar Unicorn. As your eyes adjusted to the darkness you noticed that only a few patrons sat in one corner. As usual, times were hard in Sanctuary, and few could afford the luxury of drinking before midday. In an hour there would be more patrons, and One Thumb would begin ladling out the stew he always served.

Carefully placing your back to the wall and your purse in a secure place, you waited for a round of ale. The bitterness would take away the dust of the desert. Mentally, you calculated how long the few silvers earned by guarding the caravan would last. It was just too befouled peaceful; a good war and scarcity would drive up the fees a sell-sword could earn.

Before One Thumb could bring the drinks, a hooded stranger had called him to the edge of the bar. Looking startled, One Thumb rushed up the stairs and out of sight. You were just gathering yourself to stir and fetch the flasks on the counter when the hooded figure picked them up and shuffled over to your table, delivered them, and settled into a chair in the far corner. A few moments later One Thumb returned, glowering as he surveyed the room, and stalked over to the hooded man. His anger abruptly evaporated when three coins appeared on the table. In a deft movement One Thumb picked up the coins and spun to return to his counter. As you sipped the nearest flask of ale, a lethargy settled over the small tavern.

The ale tasted even more bitter than ever; One Thumb must have been buying cheaper draughts produced locally. You would have to have a few words with him about it after finishing the flask. Thinking of One Thumb, you noticed that he appeared to be paying careful attention to your party and seemed even less surprised when the hooded figure rose and threw back his hood, revealing the gap-toothed smile of Calept el Hassem. Calept had the dubious distinction of being the least generous fence in all the maze. Still smiling, he approached the table and bowing slightly, he began:

"Please do not do anything rash. I am sorry to have to say this, but I have poisoned two of your drinks."

All of you stood at once, weapons sliding from their sheathes. "There is an antidote, but alas, I do not have any on my unworthy person."

Standing, swords at your sides, you realized the import of his words. Looking at each other, all wondered which were the lucky two.

Still smiling, Calept continued: "I apologize for this necessity, but I must have the Blue Camel. A curse appears to have turned my meager luck sour, and I need the Camel to return my luck to its former positive state." At that, his left hand made an intricate gesture reputed to ward off evil influences.

"It seemed the best way to gain your rapid cooperation. In three hours, before the extract of the root can begin to affect two of you, bring to me here the Blue Camel. Then I will tell where the antidote is hidden. After that, only the gods may help."

As he began to back away, the closest of you grabbed his arm and squeezed it, demanding to know which of the flasks were poisoned. Wincing, Calept replied that his back had been turned while you were all grasping the flasks and he had no way of knowing which of you were the unfortunate two. He insisted that he must be gone or he wouldn't be back with the antidote in time. Smiling once more, he hurried to the door and onto the Serpentine. Thinking quickly, one of you tried to follow but returned, disgusted because Calept had vanished before your eyes had adjusted to the noon sunlight.

Arriving at the bazaar, you made a few discreet inquiries as to the nature of the "blue camel". To your dismay, an urchin pointed across the stalls to where, swaying in the noonday heat, a full grown camel stood. It was colored a most eye-catching pale blue. As you stood staring at the creature and gauging the crowd gathered about it, the urchin offered to guide you to a seller of dyes. Your stomach felt queasy and you realized that fifteen minutes had already passed.

CALEPT EL HASSEM

Might 60
Intellect 80
Knowledge 75
Stamina 45
Coordination 65
Appeal 60
Fighter skill 1/Thief skill 2
Human 5' 10" 160 pounds Age 45
Calept has a dagger hidden up his left sleeve.

For the Judge only

Calept is not only the worst paying fence in the maze, he is also the most superstitious. A thief to whom he had given only an insulting pittance of his rightful due had uttered a most ominous curse. In the two days since, Calept has noticed many incidents of "bad luck" and is now thoroughly convinced that the casual curse has taken effect. Because of this he is desperate and on the edge of panic. When the blue camel appeared in the bazaar this morning he latched onto its story of bringing good luck as his only hope. Tricking One Thumb upstairs, he set his trap. Actually there is no poison, but should the party succeed in bringing him the camel he has a flask of vinegar ready to pass off as the antidote.

Should the party choose to try the dyers and create their own blue camel, one hour will be lost and they will discover that there is only enough blue dye in all the city to cover two-thirds of a camel.

The crowd in the bazaar will include many of the bazaar's merchants, a few city guards, and about three dozen shoppers. All are clustered around the camel, discussing the stories about it bringing luck and gawking at the color. Leneib is greedy, somewhat lazy, and planning on making the most from his scheme. The camel seller will be busy selling rides and will be very cautious in dealing with the party.

Riding a camel is very different from riding a horse and should be considered a totally different skill. Characters attempting to ride any camel without prior experience will have great difficulty. Once they get the beast moving there will be a 20% chance of their falling off in a slow walk and a 40% chance each round if the camel is excited or nervous. A nervous camel also has a tendency to bite.

For the Judge only

Leneib am Wilm was tired of camels and tired of being poor. More than relaxed from cheap wine, he pulled a rag from the vat of dye his wife was preparing and threw it at the scruffy beast he had been unable to sell that morning. The three friends sharing his wine laughed heartily as the cloth fell, revealing a patch of camel hair dyed bright blue. Leneib did not share the jest as he was now soundly asleep.

Still laughing at their cleverness, the three dipped cloths in the vat and soon the entire camel was a bright shade of blue. Emerging from the adobe hut, Leneib's wife screeched at the tricksters who hastily retreated towards Sanctuary. With a disgusted glance at the camel she turned away to begin the tedious process of preparing another vat of blue dye to sell to the cloth merchants. When Leneib awoke it was dark, his mouth feeling as though the camels he was learning to hate had walked through it. Crawling into the hut he curled up on his pallet and returned to the comfort of unconsciousness.

The camel seller woke abruptly at the shock of the water his wife had thrown. Head throbbing, he snatched some bread and hurried to lead the one scruffy camel he had to sell toward the town. Leneib pulled up to a painful halt when he saw the poor beast's color. Cursing his companions he turned to go back to the coolness of the hut but there was a burst of screeching from his wife inside and with a shrug Leneib began leading the peculiar beast towards Sanctuary and the Bazaar. Even if there were no buyers the bustle of the bazaar would be more pleasant than a day of acid rebukes.

LENEIB AM WILM

Might 60
Intellect 45
Knowledge 55
Stamina 70
Coordination 65
Appeal 30
Fighter skill 1
Human 5' 7" 145 pounds Age 40

Upon entering the town the unusual camel attracted the fancy of the urchins who regularly wandered the bazaar. Finally Leneib allowed one to ride the strangely colored beast. With the children gathered round he led the animal to his stall. As the child clambered down he let out a small exclamation of joy and diving toward the dusty ground he arose clasping a copper piece. All the urchins took up the cry as they rushed off: "It's a lucky camel."

"Perhaps it is" Leneib murmured.

It took Leneib only a few minutes to convince the bread seller's wife to try a ride. She had seen the child discover the coin and half believed the camel seller's story of his "lucky" camel granted him by Shipri. At the end of the short ride Leneib dropped one of his few coppers and ground it into the dirt. Looking carefully around, the baker's wife spotted the coin and literally pounced upon it. This attracted several more of the bazaar's regulars, and while some like Eplenus the potter scoffed, others were gullible or desperate

enough to believe. This small crowd in turn attracted the first of the shoppers.

Soon the story had gained much in the telling. Leneib had been given a vision. The baker's wife had found a gold coin. A child found a small gem. Leneib smiled and denied nothing. Finally one of the shoppers offered a silver for a ride to "bring him luck". Within seconds several others clamored for the chance to press shiny coins into the camel seller's hands. It was going to be, Leneib decided, a most pleasant day.

GUAQUET JAIK ALI

Might 60
Intellect 55
Knowledge 40
Stamina 45
Coordination 65
Appeal 70
Fighter skill 2
Human 5' 8" 150 pounds Age 42

Jaik was once the trusted lieutenant to a successful desert bandit. His duties often consisted of searching through the booty and making sure the best went to the leader of the gang. One day while checking the pack of a lone merchant slain by the others Jaik discovered a small pouch of pearls, more wealth than the gang normally garnered in a year. Carefully returning the pouch to its hiding place, Jaik made sure that he himself was given the pack when the spoils were divided. That night Jaik stole the best horse in the camp and fled to Sanctuary.

Once in Sanctuary Jaik began to worry that his former comrades would discover his deception and seek revenge. To forestall this happening, he informed the local garrison of the location of their secret camp. When the party that was sent out returned, they boasted of how they slew all but a few who ran, panicking, into the desert. Since then Jaik has lived in fear of his former gang.

When Jaik first arrived in Sanctuary he discovered that there was only one man purchasing stolen jewels. Further, this fence offered merely a pittance for valuable gems. Rather than lose so much of what he had risked his life for, Jaik decided to buy the stall of an ailing jeweler and sell the pearls himself which turned out to be a great success. Further a chance acquaintance with a thief (caught trying to burgle his stall) helped Jaik establish contact with the residents of the maze. Soon the word went out that Jaik paid better for stolen gems and as his trade grew Jaik taught himself how to remount the gems received to prevent embarrassing coincidences in a small city like Sanctuary. By the time the other jewel fence discovered that he had competition, Jaik was able to hire a body-guard. Though a fence, Jaik tries to deal fairly with his sources and is well liked.

LEIPTERUM

Might 55
Intellect 50
Knowledge 60
Stamina 70
Coordination 75
Appeal 60
Woodcarver skill 1/Fighter skill 1
Human 5' 4" 165 pounds Age 33

Leipterum inherited the stall from his father less than a year ago. Before this he had mostly worked at home preparing the wood for his father to work. The father was helping the wood carver from the stall several rows east of this area to cut down a large tree when his hand slipped. He cut himself badly on the saw blade. Though the wound was carefully cleaned by a healer, the sap carried an infection and Leipterum's father died of blood poisoning.

When the accident occurred Leipterum began working the bazaar rather than losing the space. Since his father died he has kept up the family business. The accident also upset the woodcarver who has been giving Leipterum free lessons in his art in an attempt to make up for the loss. Because of this, Leipterum has been able to dress up his otherwise ordinary cabinets and tables with passably good carvings. Pleasant and open, Leipterum is popular with the other regulars.

While resigning himself to being a cabinet maker, Leipterum has always wished he would become a Spy. Who he would work for is less important to him than the excitement and the deception. Unfortunately he is a poor liar (in fact not a very good haggler) and would hardly last a day. Still this has been his dream and any hint that you are someone important and secret will gain his unthinking assistance.

Hakeim, the Story Teller will be in the edges of the crowd trying to determine the facts of Leneib's story and watching for any other events worthy of weaving into the tale. (For details on Hakeim see the Thieves' World anthologies and Chaosium's Thieves'World game.)

FEND CLUTCHPURSE

Might 65
Intellect 80
Knowledge 75
Stamina 45
Coordination 80
Appeal 55
Thief skill 2
Human 5' 4" 160 pounds Age 28

Fend has a stall in the bazaar where he sells the wines produced in the vineyards around the city. Fend inherited this business when his father was placed in prison for the theft of the purse of a Rankan Noble some three months earlier. Fend follows in his family tradition and is not above lifting the purse of a customer who has sampled his wares too much. Before taking over the stall Fend had made a poor living as a pickpocket and runner of odd errands for the more dubious citizens of the Bazaar. He resents authority and is always out for a quick silver piece. Fend will agree to do anything the party requests, but if there appears to be any risk he will quickly disappear.

If the party pays special attention to the blue camel (beyond the stir it is already creating) Fend will approach one member of the party and ask to be "of assistance". He will claim any knowledge or skill the party says it needs, though most likely Fend will have none of these. He definitely cannot ride a camel and has never tried. Fend is tolerated, but not trusted by the other merchants in the bazaar. Fend's father was once a Rankan citizen who fled the city to avoid being imprisoned in Ranke.

THE BAZAAR



* = for more information on these characters see Thieves' World

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It's broad daylight and somehow you've got to get hold of this stinking blue camel in order to get the antidote from that murderous little madman . . .

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