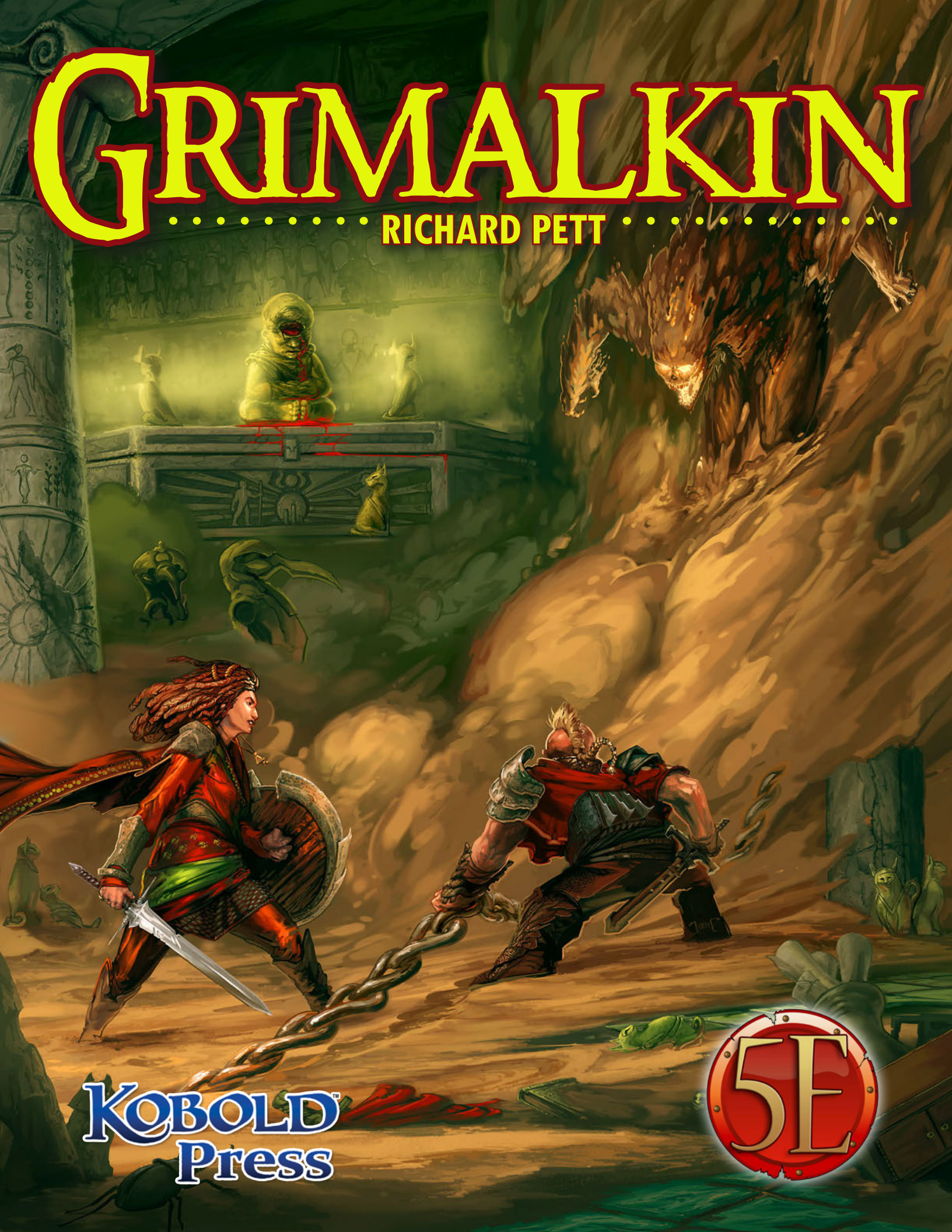


GRIMALKIN

RICHARD PETT



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Press



GRIMALKIN

AN ADVENTURE IN THE CITY OF PER-BASTET IN THE SOUTHLANDS
CAMPAIGN SETTING FOR CHARACTERS OF LEVELS 3 TO 5

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ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Cats are curious creatures . . .

A while ago, a peculiar object slithered out of the River of Sand and caused a minor stir in the Perfume District of Per-Bastet before vanishing, as stories tend to do in the spiced city. (These events are detailed in the 1st-level adventure *Cat and Mouse*, available separately from Kobold Press.) The object—which picked up the name *grimalkin eye* somewhere along the way—granted its owner power over cats. What was missed at the time by everyone involved in the caper was that if there was a *grimalkin eye*, might there not also be a body?

“Princess” **Karima Gamila** doesn’t miss things like that. She might be a gnoll, but she’s an exceptional gnoll; she’s smart, graceful, attractive (particularly to other gnolls, who fall at her feet to get her attention), and cunning. Karima’s mother believed she wasn’t a mortal gnoll at all but some sort of bestial child of Kwansi. This so frightened Karima’s mother that she abandoned her daughter, rather than share a home with a living god, and fled into the desert. Karima was forced at an early age to become independent and resourceful—and she quickly became a devoted worshiper of the very god her mother believed was her father.

When Karima heard about the *grimalkin eye*, her interest was roused. She sought out news and rumors about it and spoke to everyone who had any knowledge of it, paying special attention to where it may have come from. Things like that don’t just appear from nowhere . . .

The truth (which eluded Karima) is intriguing. The eye appeared in the River of Sand after it was stolen by a lowly thief called Hakkam-nis-Afirr, from the city of Per-Bastet. This thief was a tomb robber of minor talent who had a habit of diving in the River of Sand for treasure—a very dangerous hobby. Hakkam discovered, below the river’s surface, the entrance to a long-forgotten catfolk tomb. It had been known (in the years before its existence was forgotten) as the Growling Sanctuary; the name came from the peculiar noises that reverberated through the tomb, caused by the River of Sand scraping past. The Sanctuary was “populated” by the undead remains of catfolk who were faithful to a wicked aspect of Bastet. These undead guarded sacred treasures of the cat god, including the *grimalkin idol*, within which the *grimalkin eye* was originally fixed.

Hakkam, being resourceful, entered and explore the Sanctuary without alerting the guardians, but he was discovered when he stole the idol. During his flight

through the tomb, Hakkam lost his grip on the idol and, when it struck the stone floor, the eye popped out and bounced toward the exit. As Hakkam stared down at the two objects—the heavy stone idol behind him and the small, light, and obviously valuable gem lying in his path toward the exit, with the tomb guardians closing in, Hakkam made the reasonable choice and scooped up the gem on his way out the door.

Alas, it was Hakkam’s last swim, for he suffocated in the River of Sand. The eye slipped from his dead grasp and drifted away in the current of sand until eventually it washed ashore, where it was found by Raheed wa Moi Matiba at the beginning of the adventure *Cat and Mouse*.

Which brings our tale back to Karima. Intrigued by tales of the eye but unable to locate it, she turned to a learned friend, the **Scholar Zubayr**. The Scholar roamed the libraries and antiquaries of Per-Bastet, and though he was human, his knowledge of the catfolk and their history was unrivaled. This was unfortunate in the end, because the Scholar’s research for Karima uncovered an ancient, two-part rhyme that revealed (to a clever reader) both the existence and location of the Growling Sanctuary. The Scholar was nothing if not clever, and the knowledge awoke something new in him—greed. Armed with the location of the entrance to the Sanctuary but no practical experience in such matters, he lashed himself to a post at the side of the River of Sand and descended to the entrance. Once inside, he had time only to gather up a few items of little value before he was confronted by the tomb guardians. Like Hakkam, the Scholar fled for his life, and equally like Hakkam, he lost his life in the River of Sand. Passersby spied his corpse only hours later, pulled it from the sand, and sent it dutifully to the charnel house, as all faithful citizens should do.

These tragic events occurred within the past 24 hours. And so, we come to the present.

Though the items the Scholar took are worth little, their theft still angered the Sanctuary’s guardians. Among these stolen trifles was a *calling cat*, an item that acts like a beacon to the guardians. The undead sent out one of their sacred mummies, **Sister Withering**, veiled and swathed in thick robes, to contact ghastr followers of Bastet in the city and enlist their help in ensuring that all trace of the Sanctuary remains hidden. The mummy and her ghastr consorts are even now in the city, homing in on the *calling cat*.

Beauty and resourcefulness are a blessing and a curse; Karima has many enemies (jilted lovers, and those who

foolishly hoped to be lovers), particularly amongst an arm of the Thieves' Guild known as the Dogs of Per-Bastet. Chief among them is a cunning gnoll/werecrocodile known as **Abdul-Haqq** who *really, really* hates Karima. He spies on her continually and jealously devours any of her lovers that fall into his grasp.

When Karima met with the Scholar, Abdul-Haqq had the man watched. This morning, Abdul-Haqq's slimy henchman **Sweet Hasna**, herself insanely jealous of Karima's advantages, followed the Scholar and saw his body pulled from the River of Sand. Sadly for her, the body was taken to the charnel house before she could search it. In a stroke of insight, Hasna swallowed a *potion of invisibility*, slipped inside the mortuary, and searched the Scholar's body without being noticed. In his pockets, she found two things. First was the curiously alluring *calling cat*, which Hasna foolishly hung around her own neck. Second was half of the rhyme that led the Scholar to the Sanctuary; believing it was complete, Hasna departed to report her triumph to Abdul-Haqq.

Hasna's triumph turned to Abdul-Haqq's anger when he deduced that she'd brought him only half a clue to the location of a forgotten tomb that's no doubt stuffed with treasure. He ordered her back to the charnel house to finish the job instantly—bodies are burned within 24 hours in Per-Bastet, to prevent the spread of sickness. He also sent his pet imp Sharbit to follow Hasna invisibly and make sure she did the job properly.

When Hasna reached the charnel house for the second time that day, she had no more *potion of invisibility* with which to slip inside. She sat, and thought, and struck upon an idea. Drawing out her forgery tools, she began writing . . .

In the meantime, Karima heard about the Scholar's death, and she, too, went to the charnel house, which as fate would have it, is run by another of her enemies, **Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatooor** (who is "Sultan" only because he calls himself that, and none dare contradict him). There are those who say Sultan manages a charnel house because it provides him with a supply of fresh bodies to eat, but such things are said quietly. In truth and in secret, Sultan does lead a small cult that indeed eats human flesh. When the fresh, succulent body of the Scholar arrived, Sultan sent followers to buy potatoes and herbs, and looked forward to a feast later today.

And thus, the stage is set.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

To kick things off, Karima turns to the player characters for aid. She wants to know how her friend the Scholar died, and she wants to secure his body for a proper, respectful cremation rather than leave it to be eaten by Sultan, who she knows (or strongly suspects) to dine

CAT AND MOUSE

Grimalkin is a direct sequel to the adventure *Cat and Mouse*, also from Kobold Press. You and your players might enjoy *Grimalkin* even more if you run that adventure first. Your PCs might even have met the Scholar during that adventure, before his unfortunate death. If they have the *grimalkin eye* from that adventure, Karima has even more reason to approach them now. The climactic chapter of this adventure covers what happens if the eye is reinserted into the *Grimalkin*, and it's a fitting conclusion to the two adventures. Don't worry if you haven't played *Cat and Mouse*, though; it's an advantage but it's not required, to run this adventure.

on the dead. How the characters came to Karima's attention is up to you, but it's always best to play off of their past deeds.

When characters arrive at the charnel house, the cult is getting ready to dine on the Scholar's corpse. Disgusted PCs might attack immediately, or they could try a friendlier approach. The gnolls in the charnel house are keen to preserve their ghoulish secret; several powerful families in Per-Bastet would be very cross if they found out their relatives had been eaten by Sultan (not to mention that the penalty in Per-Bastet for cannibalism is quite harsh).

The fragment of the rhyme that PCs find here is a tantalizing clue, but it tells them only half the story of the Sanctuary's location. Without the second fragment, the Sanctuary will remain lost.

In the meantime, Sweet Hasna is outside the charnel house working on her own plan. Before long, she enters the place in the guise of a grieving relative, complete with papers, pallbearers, and a coffin, demanding the remains of her beloved, fallen kin. There are ample clues on her to lead the PCs back to Abdul-Haqq's crocodile-infested lair at the edge of the Perfume District. There the PCs must choose between an ugly fight against the were-crocodile or what might be an even uglier alliance with him.

And then there is Sister Withering and her ghost followers. Slowly but surely they are closing in on the *calling cat* with only two thoughts in mind—to make a grisly example of thieves and to safeguard the secret of their tomb.

Eventually, PCs should retrieve both fragments of the rhyme. With them, they can enter the River of Sand and penetrate the Sanctuary. Once there, PCs must overcome the encroaching, driven sand and battle the tomb's horrific guardians to claim its greatest treasures.

CHAPTER 1 – THE BEAUTIFUL GNOLL

'Princess' Karima Gamila knows a lot of beautiful, interesting people, and she's always keen to know more—including the PCs. The adventure assumes Karima is aware of the characters by reputation and knows something of their deeds.

If your player characters are unusually secretive about their exploits, that alone is a reason why Karima would find them fascinating. It's not as if she won't hear about them anyway; her network of informants is impressive. If possible, find a way to introduce Karima to the characters as a seemingly minor NPC one or two sessions before *Grimalkin* begins. She can simply be a colorful local character who enjoys meeting adventurers, rather like the stylish hostess of an 18th century salon. This isn't a one-way relationship; although she holds no official office, Karima has tremendous influence in Per-Bastet through her vast network of paramours, friends, social contacts, confidantes, hopeful hangers-on, and paid informants. She can be an invaluable friend, for both the introductions she can make and the strings she can pull. When the events detailed above create a need for Karima to bring in outside help, those interesting and oh-so-capable adventurers she recently met spring immediately to her mind.

If characters are meeting Karima for the first time in this adventure, read the following description.

Here is a curiosity, and a pleasant one; there's something alluringly feral about this female gnoll. She's tall and slim, and has none of the hunched posture typical of gnolls but carries herself with grace and elegance. A long, purple cloak covers her slender limbs, and a yellow headscarf frames a face that is clearly canine and yet exotically beautiful. She has long, dark eyebrows, bright, flashing eyes, and smooth, lustrous fur. Her voice is nothing like the barking of gnolls; it's musical, deep and sonorous and yet undeniably feminine.

Karima has a poetic way with words and a wide, white smile (she obsessively brushes her teeth with birch twigs dipped in wine). To gnolls, Karima is a walking goddess who must be mated with. Even many female gnolls find her arousing. To other races, her grace and perfection may not be sexually exciting, but she is sensual and stunningly graceful—she walks like a ballerina, speaks with eloquence, and intermingles her beautiful singing voice into her conversations.

Beneath this exterior, the gnoll is steely but not hard. She is truly one who wishes to live a life of good

company and excitement. She wishes for fame and fortune in Per-Bastet and the Southlands. She is not wicked, but she is selfish and driven, elemental and wild.

Karima's immediate dilemma is that the Scholar's body is held by Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatoor, who has a famously intense hatred for her. She's scared about trying to sneak into the charnel house as she's heard rumors about the gnoll's eating habits and necromantic talents and doesn't want to be on the menu. So her mind turns to the PCs, and she arranges to bump into them straight away.

Her approach varies depending upon the PCs' immediate reaction and their general approach to problems (are they careful planners or kick-in-the-door types?). Two likely scenarios are described below, along with how Karima deals with both. She is an irresistible flatterer who points out that, in a city full of untrustworthy scoundrels, the characters impress her as both reliable and capable; so much so, in fact, that she believes they're destined for greatness, and she would like to count them among her associates and friends. She praises the PCs' past deeds in glowing terms. None of this is smarmy, cheesy, or manipulative. Coming from Karima, this type of flattery should make the PCs feel proud. At the same time, she stresses that this is a straightforward business arrangement involving nothing illegal. Karima needs a task performed that she finds distasteful, and the characters are perfect candidates to carry it out. As in all things, Karima is deliberate and charming.

HERE ARE TWO LIKELY SCENARIOS.

If your PCs are motivated chiefly by lust for treasure, then Karima tells them that she has just learned that a dear friend, tutor, and de-facto father was found dead along the River of Sand. His body now rests in a charnel house run by a gnoll who despises her and would mistreat the corpse if he knew of its connection to her. She wants to recover the body for proper rites, but if she enters the charnel house, its master, a vile gnoll called Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatoor, will obstruct her wishes and possibly even attack her. If the PCs retrieve the body and bring it to her before tomorrow, she'll pay them 500 gp, no questions asked.

If your PCs are motivated by a desire to be heroes, then Karima is more forthcoming. She tells them that she and a close friend were researching information about a hidden shrine in Per-Bastet. The shrine is said to house a wicked and thankfully forgotten aspect of Bastet's faith, and is guarded by undead. But her friend ("the Scholar") was found dead along the bank of the River of Sand this

morning. She suspects foul play and seeks justice. His body lies in a charnel house run by an evil gnoll who despises her and who is rumored to be a cannibal. She wants her friend's body retrieved from the charnel house before the gnoll defiles it. If she goes herself, the vile gnoll called Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatooor is certain to frustrate her plans out of spite. He might even try to kill her, as payback for her attempts to expose his atrocities in the past. She will pay the characters 500 gp, along with her gratitude and friendship, if they retrieve the body from the mortuary and bring it safely to her house before tomorrow morning. The Scholar was human, so it should be easy enough for the PCs to present themselves as relatives come to claim the deceased.

Of course, Karima has many gnoll friends she could call on—several of whom would happily die for her if she so much as smiled at them—but their infatuation makes them foolish and gets in the way of their effectiveness (see Part 2 for examples of this). She's also reluctant to enlist gnolls for this task because Sultan will easily connect them to her, and that will only complicate the situation.

Ultimately, Karima's aim is simple: she wants to talk to the Scholar via *Speak with Dead*, without getting into a messy entanglement with Sultan. She doesn't bring up her desire to communicate with the corpse unless absolutely necessary to win the PCs' cooperation. As far as they're concerned, she wants only to prevent Sultan from defiling the corpse and to give her friend a proper, respectful burial. She tries to be as truthful as possible with the characters; although she enjoys machinations, Karima is, for the most part, inherently honest. She may not tell them everything there is to know about the situation, but what she says is true. Her interest in the PCs is also sincere; she's always interested in adding strong, reliable problem solvers to her circle of acquaintances. She's no stranger to complications and treachery, either, so after her meeting with the PCs, she gathers another group of cohorts as detailed below in Part 2: Where's the Body?

The Charnel House is just a few streets away from the Arc of the Sun, toward the River of Sand, in the District of the Hyena. She asks the characters to bring the Scholar's body and possessions to her at the southeastern tip of the Great Sand Pyramid (Area 29 in Per-Bastet) at dawn tomorrow. Finally, she sincerely warns the PCs to be wary of Sultan.

Assuming characters accept the job, Karima follows them discreetly to see what happens. Being a consummate stalker, she trails the PCs from a distance, always wary of tricks intended to throw off or detect a tail. If she suspects the PCs have noticed her, she scrambles up and follows them on the rooftops, or uses *Disguise Self* to "disappear."

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE? TOO SUSPICIOUS TO TRUST?

The characters may dislike gnolls, or they might smell a rat when talking to Karima. Some adventurers instinctively distrust anyone who's charming. If PCs make disparaging remarks about gnolls, Karima rebukes them proudly and reminds them that Per-Bastet is a city of civilized gnolls; "We are not all sadists, slavers, and yapping psychopaths." If she believes the characters have a sensitive side, she adds how surprised she is that people with the PCs' reputation would judge someone solely on the basis of her ancestry and the misdeeds of others.

If your characters simply won't take the job, Karima departs. She recruits three besotted males and continues her own exploration. Quickly sneaking into the Charnel House, she and two of her followers are overpowered by Sultan and prepared for desert. The PCs may see one of her frantic, infatuated males beside himself with terror and grief near the Charnel House and learn from him what has happened, or is about to happen . . .

'PRINCESS' KARIMA GAMILA

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Wis +4, Cha +6

Skills Acrobatics +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +8, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Gnoll, Thieves' Cant, Trade Tongue

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blessing of the Trickster. Karima can use an action to grant advantage on Stealth checks to herself or a willing creature she touches. This blessing lasts for 1 hour or until she uses it again.

Cunning Action. Karima can use a bonus action to Dash, Disengage, or Hide.

Invoke Duplicity (1/Rest). Karima can create an illusionary duplicate of herself within 30 feet that lasts for 1 minute or until she loses concentration. As a bonus action, she can move the illusion up to 30 feet as long as it stays within 120 feet of her. For the duration, she can cast spells through the illusion, though she shares no senses with the

illusion. When Karima and the illusion are within 5 feet of a creature, Karima has advantage on attack rolls against the creature.

Rampage. When Karima reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on her turn, she can take a bonus action to move up to half her speed and make a bite attack.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Karima does an extra 3 (1d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of one of Karima's allies that isn't incapacitated and Karima doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Spellcasting. Karima is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Karima has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, true strike*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, cure wounds, disguise self, sleep*

2nd level (2 slots): *hold person, suggestion*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Karima attacks twice with her short sword and bites once, or makes two attacks with her shortbow.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

GEAR

potion of healing, potion of resistance (poison), scroll of enhance ability; studded leather armor, +1 shortsword, shortbow, black wedding veil (to deter would-be suitors),

long purple abaya, yellow hijab, light leather sandals, gourd of fine wine, bundle of birch twigs, carved soapstone holy symbol of Kwansi on hemp thong, assorted rags, silver wedding ring worth 100 gp inscribed "with love to Q.K." in pocket (convenient to wear in public), leather camel purse containing 50 pp and 89 gp.

TACTICS

Before Combat. Karima first tries to charm her way out of trouble, then runs if the odds are against her.

During Combat. Karima is not a warrior. She sticks to the edge of a fight. She's seen too many people die or suffer terrible wounds in fights because they were too proud to run away. She's no coward, but she's eminently practical. One eye is always on the most ready escape route.

Morale. Karima flees if reduced to 20 Hit Points or less, but more important than wounds is the overall balance of the fight. She's likely to judge within the first few rounds whether she's on the winning side, and if not, she sees no reason to shed more of anyone's blood—especially hers—in a losing battle.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE CHARNEL HOUSE?

Per-Bastet has several charnel houses where unclaimed bodies are stored before being cremated. The one run by Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatoor is in the District of the Hyena. It has lapsed into an illicit, horrifying practice because Sultan is a cannibal who leads a small group of gnolls with similar, gruesome tastes. Sultan and his followers consider themselves gourmets of a sort; they eat only fresh corpses, cooked in the mortuary's

INVESTIGATING KARIMA AND THE CHARNEL HOUSE

If characters take some time to ask around about Karima or the charnel house, each character chooses one or the other topic and makes a Charisma check. The result determines what they learn.

RESULT ASKING ABOUT KARIMA

- | | |
|----|---|
| 10 | She's a wild one, that Karima Gamila. Some say she's a princess; she certainly has the poise and fancy words of nobility. |
| 15 | I've seen gnolls fall over their own feet trying to impress her and win her affection. Some say she's a living goddess, an aspect of Kwansi. Her own mother believed it! I don't know whether she is or isn't, but she sure doesn't try to stop the gossip. |
| 20 | Karima may be wild, but she's got a good heart. I've heard how she gives money to the poor and helps other folk out of trouble. Everyone in the city knows her, or wishes they did. |

ASKING ABOUT CHARNEL HOUSE

- | |
|---|
| The Charnel House is run by the self-named Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatoor. It's said he's a formidable spellcaster and that he never forgives an insult. |
| Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatoor isn't just some garden-variety hedge wizard; he's a necromancer. Now you tell me, could there be a more perfect position for a necromancer than being in charge of a morgue? |
| There's something odd about Sultan Shuk'ri Nill Mo Chatoor and his nasty friends. You hear stories about things happening to bodies in his morgue. Of course, nothing's ever been proven, and nothing ever will be. |

crematory oven. Their feasts are held in the cellar, where no respectable citizen goes without the most pressing need. There are rumors in the city about Sultan's practice but no evidence at all. Most people discount the talk as nothing but spiteful attacks against a figure who performs an unpleasant job with more gusto than decorum and who isn't an especially likable person to begin with. Only a few city residents outside Sultan's circle have learned the truth, and some of them have disappeared down the gullets of Sultan's cult.

Karima has seen enough evidence to believe the rumors are true. Sultan already hates her; if he knew how deeply she suspects him of cannibalism, her life would be in serious danger.

When the Scholar's body arrived, Sultan sent word to his gourmet friends that fresh meat is on the menu. By the time PCs arrive at the charnel house, preparations for a feast are already under way. If the PCs observe carefully, they may see vegetables being sneaked inside, and also make the acquaintance of the poorly named Sweet Hasna. How they react is up to them. They could leave the encounter with all the clues, the body of the Scholar, and a small bribe to keep quiet without having drawn a weapon, or the whole episode could collapse into slaughter, especially if the PCs put two and two together when the side dishes appear and are repulsed by what they see.

Before running this location, be sure to read the section "A Woman in Mourning," about Sweet Hasna. She's already broken into the mortuary once and she's keeping an eye on it, looking for a chance to get in again and complete her job. She'll intervene decisively in developing events if the opportunity arises.

CHARNEL HOUSE FEATURES

The charnel house is a bell-shaped, sandstone building. The thick, windowless walls help to keep the interior cool. The building itself is 15 feet tall, and a brick chimney rises another 10 feet above that, giving the whole structure the shape of a handbell. The single entrance has an iron door that Sultan locks at night.

The interior of the building is not what visitors expect. There is no "ground floor." Instead, the main entrance opens onto a 5-foot-square landing atop stairs that wind downward 15 feet into a "basement" level that's larger than the building's footprint at street level. That's where corpses are kept and where they're cremated if no one comes to claim them. Most of the interior is one massive, open space extending from 15 feet below street level to 15 feet above.

Half of the valuables on unclaimed bodies goes to the city and the other half goes to Sultan to pay his expenses and his salary. Sultan is scrupulously honest about these

LEVELING THE ADVENTURE

As written, *Grimalkin* is a good challenge for a 5th-level party of four PCs, and a tough one for 4th-level PCs. If 3rd-level characters tackle it with fewer than five PCs, consider removing a mummy and reducing the number of all group encounters by at least one monster.

transactions; he doesn't want to give the authorities any reason to shine a light on his operation.

The mortuary is in a busy corner of the district where loud noises are fairly common. To draw any kind of attention would require a major disturbance, such as a fireball going off outside or an escaping gnoll running down the street shouting "Help! Murder!" at the top of his lungs.


When Hasna first broke in, she climbed down the chimney to search the room below, where she rifled the Scholar's body before leaving through the main entrance. Although she was invisible at the time, she left dozens of small, sooty footprints and handprints in her wake. Someone who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or Wisdom (Survival) check notices them. Following that up with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check leads to the deduction that someone has already searched the body, haphazardly. The gnolls missed these clues entirely; they have other things on their minds.

RUNNING THE ENCOUNTER

The gnolls who make up Sultan's cannibal cult can be encountered anywhere in the building. Try to focus this encounter on exploring the site and interacting with the NPCs.

When the PCs arrive, **Sultan** is here with **2 gnolls**. They've already lit the fire (CH3), and they have a surprising amount of spices on them, for visitors to a mortuary. Another **2 gnolls** are out at market but should arrive at a suitably amusing point, each carrying a box of sweet potatoes, eggplants, okra, onions, figs, dates, and lots of pomegranates. Be careful, however, not to overwhelm low-level characters with too many additional foes.

The mood to aim for in this encounter is an ever-growing air of odd and suspicious behavior. Sultan is anxious to prove that everything is normal while many small details are anything but normal. The entire charnel house smells more like a spice market (or a restaurant!) than a mortuary; the aroma is inescapable. He explains that the spices are meant to cover the unpleasant smells that accumulate in a building where corpses are stored



and cremated. The boxes of vegetables are snacks; he and his companions eat a few of them to prove his point, if necessary, but anyone who makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check sees that the carnivorous gnolls are nearly gagging on the raw vegetables. However, Sultan and his group have no illusions about what will happen to them if their crime is discovered, and they have no intention of being unmasked. If they believe the PCs have realized what they're up to and intend to inform the authorities, the cultists are more than ready to kill to preserve their secret. PCs may quickly find themselves on the menu if they are overpowered.

Sweet Hasna is outside with her cohorts, and she has her own plan to intervene, which she should do at a most awkward moment for the PCs. This time, she simply knocks on the outer door and enters, sobbing with grief through a veil of mourning. For more details, see the entry on Sweet Hasna below.

Finally, Karima is not far away, either. For now, she takes a back seat and observes. She might intervene if things go badly wrong, but attacking a mourning Sweet Hasna on the street is out of the question. If Hasna appears with the body, Karima simply follows, though she's pretty sure she knows already where Hasna is taking the Scholar's body. Karima reliably appears at the location where she instructed the PCs to meet her the next morning, as described in Part 2.

SULTAN SHUK'RI NILL MO CHATOOOR

The favorite, beloved cousin of the infamous gnoll slaver, merchant, and camel dealer Hakaan-al-Khareen Zmirr Nill Mo Chatooor, Sultan is a troubled soul. He looks very dour, suicidal almost, but his face occasionally erupts into maniacal joy and laughter before quickly retreating into dark thoughts again. He's used to deflecting questions from visitors to the charnel house but his cultists are not, so Sultan takes the lead in any interaction with the PCs. He's very good at name-dropping, and if anyone starts to look suspicious, he mentions the name of his "dearest, closest friend," Master Salwar Bashir, Keeper of the City. In truth, the two gnolls have met only once, but Sultan describes Bashir as a virtual brother. He declares loudly that if any harm comes to a servant of the Council of Sands, those who perpetrated the vile act had best flee the city or prepare to suffer horrible consequences. This is all bluff. Attention from the Keeper of the City is the last thing Sultan wants.

The one thing Sultan is not willing to do is let the Scholar's body be taken away. He and his followers are hungry and despite their veneer of civilization, they're still gnolls; as with most canines, taking food away from

them is almost guaranteed to start a fight. The PCs can subtly explore the mortuary and the bodies therein, and even take things of value, but the "meat" stays here.

Sultan is totally unaware that the Scholar's corpse has any significance beyond his own perverted hunger or that it holds clues to the location of a lost shrine. His interest in it is purely culinary. He's also unaware that Hasna has already been in the mortuary and hastily searched the corpse.

When the PCs first arrive and express their interest in taking away the Scholar's remains, Sultan extolls his sadness over their loss while trying to keep everyone crammed into the tiny reception area (CH 2). If the PCs pretend to be relatives, he asks for proof that they are indeed related; he's not about to give up a free dinner. If proof is not forthcoming, he suggests helpfully that it is usual for relatives or friends to go to the Dome of the Divine Face of Bastet (area 15 in Per-Bastet) and petition the clerics there, who use a *zone of truth* spell to establish whether a family relationship exists. Other than that, any of the Council of Sands advisers can provide the necessary paperwork, though the fees can amount to 100 gp or more. Throughout these exchanges, Sultan uses his familiarity with the costly formal methods of identification used in Per-Bastet to stall the characters and encourage them to leave the mortuary so he and his friends can eat. Unfortunately for the gnoll, the arrival of Sweet Hasna scuppers this plan.

SULTAN SHUK'RI NILL MO CHATOOOR

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +5, Int +5, Wis +3

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +2, Medicine +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Gnoll, Trade Tongue

Challenge 4 (1,1000 XP)

Grim Harvest (1/turn). When Sultan kills a creature with a spell, he regains hit points equal to twice the level of the spell, or three times the level of the spell if it belongs to the School of Necromancy. Sultan does not gain this benefit for killing constructs or undead.

Rampage. When Sultan reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on his turn, he can take a bonus action to move up to half his speed and make a bite attack.

Spellcasting. Sultan is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5

to hit with spell attacks). Sultan has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, mending, prestidigitation, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, shield, sleep*

2nd level (2 slots): *blindness/deafness, misty step, ray of enfeeblement*

3rd level (2 slots): *fireball*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

GEAR

dagger, *scroll of blur*, *potion of greater healing*, bloody apron, loose sandals, keys on a rusty key ring.

TACTICS

Before Combat. All talk and occasional smiles, Sultan tries to bluff his way through anything, but once all else fails, his face falls into an unpleasant, emotionless mask. He always tries to cast *mage armor* before fighting.

During Combat. Sultan casts *fireball* immediately (as it makes him howl with laughter), then tries to blind any spellcasters before attacking with *ray of enfeeblement*.

Morale. An abject Sultan surrenders if cornered, bereft of all gourmet guests, and down to 20 hit points or less. He offers a bribe of the corpse, then half his goods, then all his goods if the PCs will let him flee. He claims to be truly penitent and that he found his taste for human meat as a starving beggar boy in the streets of the District of the Hyena when force-fed it by a wicked step-aunt.



VERY HUNGRY CANNIBAL GNOLLS X4 CR 1/2

XP 100 each

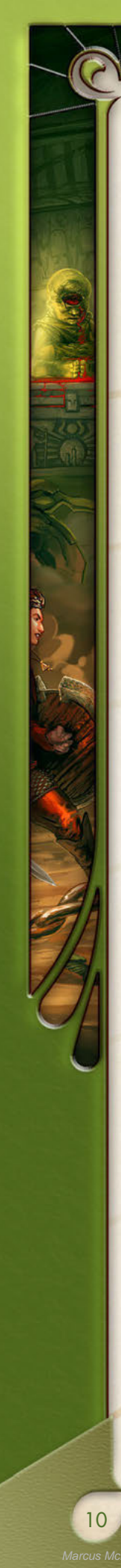
hp 22 each (*Monster Manual*)

The gnolls are armed with poorly-concealed meat-cleavers (treat as battleaxes), and each also has a selection of sharp knives and pots of spices.

1. IRON DOORWAY

A large iron door stands in the lime-washed adobe walls of a bell-shaped, windowless building that rises to a dark chimney high above. A sign hangs over the door stating, "Bashtoor Street Charnel House—Hours of Opening Dawn-Dusk." A bell hangs beside the door.

By night, Sultan locks the door (it can be picked with thief's tools and a successful DC 10 Dexterity check). By day it is unlocked, but the door creaks abominably when opened, drawing Sultan for a meeting in the draped anteroom beyond. The outer walls are smooth, so a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is required to climb them. The chimney is 5 feet wide and its top is 25 feet above street level. If characters arrive at night, the chimney is cold. It can be climbed as easily as a ladder, inside or out. If characters arrive after mid-morning, the gnolls have already lit the furnace, and smoke bellows up the chimney. Anyone climbing down inside the smoke-filled chimney must make a successful DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion from the smoke. In either case, the biggest difficulty they'll encounter is at the bottom of the chimney, which opens out 30 feet directly above the charcoal pit. The inside walls of the charnel house are impossible to climb without pounding in



spikes and attaching ropes to them. If a rope is lowered down the chimney, a person could easily slide down to the cold charcoal pit or swing away from a heated pit. Otherwise, characters can try to propel themselves from the bottom of the chimney to the landing at the top of the stairs (DC 10 Dexterity [Acrobatics] check plus 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the drop) or to one of the chandeliers (DC 15 Dexterity [Acrobatics] check and no damage). Failing the Dexterity check in either case means falling 30 feet to the mortuary floor.

2. UPPER MORTUARY

The door opens into a tiny, draped anteroom barely 5 feet square. The drapes are heavy and somber, and they mask the mortuary beyond. This is where Sultan meets mourners, with everyone crowded into the tiny, 5-foot-square space. If PCs move beyond the drapes, read the following. The text assumes the crematory furnace is burning when characters arrive; adjust the text or paraphrase if characters enter this area before the fire is lit.

The mortuary has an unpleasant atmosphere, and it's more than just the smell of death. There's a cloying feeling to the place that one wrong step might take you through the veil of death yourself. It also smells overpoweringly of spiced meat. The room is lime-washed, spartan, and immense. Most surprisingly, there is no floor at ground level. Instead, the "ground floor" is a mere 5-foot platform inside the main door, leading to a stairway that circles the wall as it winds down 15 feet to the crematory floor. A blazing charcoal pit stands in the middle of that chamber. Heat and smoke from the pit rise up through the room to where the tapering, soot-stained walls channel everything into the open chimney in the center of the domed ceiling, 30 feet above the floor. A trio of wax-encrusted, iron chandeliers hang from long chains so that the chandeliers themselves are level with the top of the stairs.

The chandeliers are very robust; characters can swing and jump on them without any danger that the chandelier will collapse. A character on the landing can leap to a chandelier with a successful DC 8 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, and from there, swing the chandelier and drop to any spot in the circular, main portion of the lower mortuary automatically.

3. LOWER MORTUARY AND OVEN

The lower room is whitewashed, and has a very clean floor with three neat piles of timber. The main feature is a wide fire pit 15 feet across, filled with burning coals and charcoal to the level of the floor. The pit is surrounded by a 3-foot-high wall that has four openings with iron rails leading from them. Each rail has a human-sized mesh cradle on scorched iron wheels.

Arched doorways lead to a second room, while a closed door with a stained glass panel stands in another section of wall.

Corpses are put into the metal cradles for cremation, or for cooking. Any creature that enters the charcoal pit or ends its turn there takes 21 (6d6) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. The pit is difficult terrain, and even though the surrounding wall is only 3 feet high, scrambling across the soot-covered bricks takes a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

Treasure. Two of the piles of wood are just timber, but the third is sandalwood. This fine wood is worth 600 gp and weighs 100 pounds.

4. A TRULY ROTTING CORPSE

The room beyond the pillars is tiled and clean. It splits through arches into five cubicles, each with a stone slab. Bodies lie on two of these slabs. Incense burns in numerous censurs.

The bodies are marked S and R on the map. Both are covered with damp cloths. The body marked "R" is the rotting corpse of a murder victim unrelated to this adventure. However, the body is at a point in its putrefaction that, if the cloth is pulled, the sight and smell of it force everyone in area CH 4 to make a successful DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 5 minutes.

The niche marked S holds the body of the Scholar. If Sultan is nearby when the corpse is uncovered, he involuntarily licks his lips. This is noted by any character who can see Sultan's face and has a passive Perception score of 14 or higher. The Scholar's body is clothed in a heavy white robe, shirt, and trousers fixed by a thick leather belt. He also wears a red headscarf, and a leather satchel still hangs around his shoulder. Sultan hasn't yet catalogued the body's belongings, and the gnoll

The Charnel House



Level One

Basement



S: Scholar

R: Rotting Corpse

cannibals know better than to interfere with Sultan's business matters.

Characters who examine the body can make Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) checks. They'll uncover varying levels of information, depending on the result of the check, as listed below.

- **DC 5 Wisdom (Medicine) or Intelligence (Investigation) check:** The Scholar suffocated—presumably in the River of Sand, since his mouth is filled with sand.
- **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) or Intelligence (Investigation) check:** Something was removed from around the Scholar's neck, as indicated by abrasions and soot. (He had the *calling cat* slung around his neck before Sweet Hasna tore it off.)
- **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check:** His satchel contains three wooden pegs, a hammer, 4 iron spikes, a flint, and tinder. Characters can't fully interpret the significance of these items yet, but it may become clear to them later. The wooden pegs are spares matching those the Scholar used when he paced out the location of the Sanctuary on the riverbank (see Part 3). Characters also note the presence of sooty hand prints on the satchel, inside and out. The prints are those of a gnoll, and they're

much smaller than the Scholar's hands; someone else has poked through the bag, after getting soot on their hands. Characters who climbed down through the chimney have identical soot on their hands. Anyone who takes a good look at Sultan and his companions note that these handprints are too small to have been made by any of them. They were left by Sweet Hasna when she stole the first half of the rhyming clue.

- **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation)**, or automatic if the PCs remove the Scholar's outer clothing: The Scholar wears a silk money-belt—a common enough item in Per-Bastet, but Hasna missed it in her quick search. The belt contains 30 pp, a smaller silk purse made from a pig's face containing three small but very fine jet stones worth 200 gp each, an arcane scroll of *phantasmal killer* sealed with a stylized symbol of Bastet devouring a host of screaming worshippers (the scroll and case were stolen from the Sanctuary), and a battered piece of parchment—the second part of the rhyming clue.

More details on the use of *speak with dead* are given in Part 2. If the PCs have access to this spell and cast it here, consult that section for details about answers the body may give.



5. SULTAN'S LAIR

Sultan keeps his door shut and locked. It can be picked with thief's tools and a successful DC 20 Dexterity check, or the 12-inch glass window can be smashed. A Small character can climb through the window opening easily, but a Medium character can't fit through at all in medium or heavy armor and must squeeze through in light or no armor. The room is guarded by an anubian (see below), which can make an opportunity attack against anyone climbing through the broken window.

Beyond is a large, semi-circular room roughly split into three areas. The first is a bedchamber, the second is a cramped library and reading desk, and the last is a curious museum to necromancy containing skeletons and mummies in a dozen sarcophagi shrouded in sand.

Creatures: Sultan keeps a guardian in the room; an **anubian** lurks in the sand at the foot of his corpses. The creature acts as a guardian for the necromancer when he is in this home, and answers Sultan's call.

ANUBIAN

CR 2

XP 450

hp 44 (*Southlands Bestiary*)

One of the mummies (mundane, not undead) hosts a **swarm of creatures** in its chest cavity. The mummy occasionally twitches from the swarm moving inside, and anyone who listens carefully hears a curious humming from inside the mummy. If the bindings are cut or even a single point of damage is inflicted on the mummy, the swarm within erupts and attacks.

MANABANE SCARAB SWARM

CR 4

XP 1,100

hp 75 (*Southlands Bestiary*)

Treasure: One mummy has an iron and gold-trimmed nurian hook (*Southlands Campaign Setting*, p.70) worth 700 gp hanging on twisted strands of human sinew around its neck. Another grips a silver owl figurine worth 250 gp bound in decayed juniper bark. Sultan's spellbook lies in the library area. It contains all his listed spells plus *blight* and *vampiric touch*. Most of his books are about the preservation and mummification of corpses; the library contains a lavishly illustrated treatise on embalming worth 300 gp, a fine cloth of gold-trimmed map of the Southlands worth 250 gp, and a selection of Ishadia poetry bound in alligator hide with a gold and obsidian buckle worth 300 gp.

A WOMAN IN MOURNING?

Sweet Hasna has been told not to come back to the Dogs without the other half of the rhyming key. She's decided she must take possession of the corpse for a fuller examination, possibly with a *speak with dead* spell. To accomplish this, she has forged papers that "prove" she is the Scholar's niece, and therefore entitled to claim his remains. She's brought along four pallbearers (3 **commoners** hired for this job who have no idea what's going on, and a **werecrocodile** devotee of Abdul-Haqq) with a coffin to bear away the Scholar's body. Characters who examine her papers and make a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check notice that something seems phony about them.

Hasna's arrival should be used to throw an unexpected spanner in the works. It's probably best if she arrives just as the PCs are about to roll initiative for an attack on Sultan. The rogue witch rings the bell courteously, and if no one answers, she waltzes in, along with her pallbearers.

This scene could develop any number of ways. It could become an awkward interaction with plenty of

THE SANCTUARY KEY

The location of the entrance to the Sanctuary was discovered by the Scholar in a two-part rhyming hieroglyphic text written in ancient Nurian. A translation is provided in Appendix A. The location of hidden or secret places was often set down in such keys for those of faith to follow and translate accordingly. Only someone who reads ancient Nurian can translate the document. Characters possessing a translation of one of the two keys and making a successful DC 15 Intelligence (History or Religion) check deduce, as the Scholar and Abdul-Haqq did, that there are two parts to this rhyme.

If the PCs do not have the knowledge to translate the rhyme, scholars within the city of Per-Bastet can be hired to make a translation. Some scholars may be reluctant to translate what is considered a holy text for outsiders; Karima, on the other hand, would have no trouble getting cooperation. You may wish to take this avenue of exploration and interaction into a side trek or a roleplaying encounter.

A character with proficiency in History, or any scholar, knows that a karam is an ancient measure of length equal to 3 feet.

The consequences of following only half of the rhyme are detailed in the section on the Sanctuary.

roleplaying, a three-way fight, or a combination of the two. The PCs might browbeat Sultan into letting Hasna (“the grieving niece”) depart with the corpse, then ambush her to grab it for Karima. The joy of this scene is letting the PCs puzzle out who to side with and what to do. The choice is entirely up to them, but there are consequences for whatever they decide, as covered in Part 2.

If Hasna gets the body, she and her pallbearers bring it straight to the well-defended home of Abdul-Haqq. Suggestions for what happens there are in Part 2. For anyone, but outsiders in particular, to attack mourners who are bearing someone’s mortal remains to their final rest is guaranteed to lead to outrage from local residents and guards.

Finally, Abdul-Haqq’s pet and spy, the imp Sharbit, lurks invisibly in the chimney opening as soon as Hasna enters the scene. It takes no action in any combat and always tries to remain safe. Once it’s seen enough, it flies back to its master and reports what happened. This is expanded on in Part 2.

SWEET HASNA

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +5, Int +3

Skills Acrobatics +5, Athletics +2, Perception +2, Stealth +7

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Thieves’ Cant, Trade Tongue

Challenge 4 (1,1000 XP)

Cunning Action. Hasna can use a bonus action to Dash, Disengage, or Hide.

Familiar. Hasna’s familiar is a parrot named Whispering Hesk.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Hasna deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of one of Hasna’s allies that isn’t incapacitated and Hasna doesn’t have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Spellcasting. Hasna is a 2nd-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). Hasna has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, mending, true strike*

1st level (3* slots): *charm person, burning hands, mage armor*

*One slot has been used to cast *mage armor*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Hasna makes two attacks with her dagger or shortbow.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage, or half poison damage with a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage, or half poison damage with a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw.

REACTIONS

Parry. Hasna adds 2 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, Hasna must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

GEAR

feather token (whip), oil of slipperiness, potion of resistance (fire), potion of gaseous form, dagger, shortbow, black mourning veil, black robe, forged papers stating that the Scholar is Sweet Hasna’s uncle (“signed” by Akman-Sut, Guardian of Coin), goatskin purse containing 52 gp and 43 sp. On an ancient leather cord about her neck is the stolen calling cat; close examination of this curious clay scarab and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check shows that this object has been in sand for some time and its ancient leather cord has recently been broken and re-tied.

TACTICS

Before Combat. Hasna copiously demands justice for her beloved uncle. Before arriving she cast *mage armor*.

During Combat. Hasna hopes to avoid combat, and will let her “brother” bear the brunt of any fighting while she escapes or examines the body.

Morale. If it’s obvious she’s overwhelmed, Hasna flees using her *potion of gaseous form*, but she stays near enough to the charnel house to watch what happens. For more information, see Part 2. If captured, Hasna is keen to point out her story up to this point and that she may be useful to the PCs. Afraid for her own safety, she goes to extraordinary lengths of betrayal and duplicity to remain alive, even if this means helping the PCs assault her boss’s home. Bear in mind that Hasna is cowardly and duplicitous as well as nasty and selfish.

WHISPERING HESK

Tiny fey (parrot familiar), unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 10 ft.; fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Telepathy with Sweet Hasna

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Familiar. Whispering Hesk is Hasna's familiar.

Mimicry. Whispering Hesk can mimic simple sounds, such as words it has heard a person whisper, a baby crying, or an animal chittering. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check.

WERECROCODILE

Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 11 in human form, 12 (natural armor) in crocodile or hybrid form

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft. (swim 20 ft., 30 ft. in crocodile form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +3

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Trade Tongue (can't speak in crocodile form)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Hold Breath. The werecrocodile can hold its breath for 15 minutes in hybrid or crocodile form.

Shapechanger. The werecrocodile can use an action to polymorph into a crocodile-humanoid hybrid or into a crocodile, or back into its true form, which is humanoid. Its statistics, other than its AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). The werecrocodile makes one bite attack and one tail swipe, or two battleaxe attacks.

Bite (Crocodile or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage and the target is grappled (Escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and the crocodile can't bite another target. If the target is humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werecrocodile lycanthropy.

Tail Swipe (Crocodile or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target not grappled by the werecrocodile. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Battleaxe (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

The crocodile appears as a very fat man with an overly broad grin who bears a simple wooden casket. He has a battle axe slung over his shoulder. He sheds copious tears as he bears away the Scholar's body. In truth, he looks forward to getting into a fight today.

COMMONER X3

CR 0

XP 10

hp 4 (*Monster Manual*)

SHARBIT, DEVIL, IMP

CR 1

XP 200

hp 10 (*Monster Manual*)



CHAPTER 2—THE PLOT THICKENS

At this point, the PCs may or may not have the Scholar's body and the rhyming text that offers a clue to the location of the Sanctuary, but they should know by now that there's more to this situation than meets the eye. They may have had to take drastic action to complete this mission or may even have totally failed—possibly deliberately. Whatever happened in the mortuary, Princess Karima is outside watching them, Sharbit (Abdul's pet/spy) probably is carrying the news back to his master, and a third party is about to enter the fray.

You need to be flexible in playing through this second part of the adventure, as the PCs are suddenly the focus of three very different and dangerous groups: the Dogs, Karima, and (if they have the *calling cat*) a party of undead from the Sanctuary who are looking to punish intruders and prevent any further attacks.

The PCs, of course, can trust anyone they please—or go it alone and make enemies of everyone.

This type of situation can be challenging for a GM. It requires you to plan for contingencies, exercise judgment, and think fast on your feet. Be prepared to pause or even stop a session if you want to think things through; that's better than letting the adventure run off the rails! Juggling all of these groups may be easier, however, if you thoroughly understand the following points and keep them in mind.

- The Dogs of Per-Bastet have the first part of the rhyming text, and they want the second part. The Dog's leader, a cunning gnoll called Abdul-Haqq, is used to getting what he wants, and he punishes failure harshly. He expects Hasna to come crawling back with the second part of the rhyme, then he'll feed her to his crocodiles. He knows all about the Princess through his spies, and he's likely to assume that whoever the PCs are, they're just the latest in a long line of her infatuated devotees. Abdul-Haqq is cruel and impulsive, but he's also shrewd and clever. He never acts foolishly.
- The Princess is desperate to find out what happened to the Scholar and find the Sanctuary, but uses her wits more than her sword. She's more likely to try to drip-feed the PCs morsels of information than to fight, or to flee and follow them if betrayed. She knows all about Sweet Hasna and where Abdul-Haqq lives. She also knows he takes security very seriously; she's seen his crocodile harem up close and doesn't want to see it again.

- The third group detailed below are the undead protectors of the Sanctuary that are tracking down the *calling cat*. They are bent on destroying anyone that played any role in stealing it or who placed their hands on it. By day they must move very carefully, but by night they have greater freedom to move around and pursue their goal.

The most likely way for the plot to proceed is with the PCs meeting the Princess, with or without the body, so that's the first event covered in this part of the adventure.

WHERE'S THE BODY?

The Princess follows the PCs after their exploits, watching where they go for the night, but at dawn she's exactly where she said she would be: at the southeastern tip of the Great Sand Pyramid (Area 29 in Per-Bastet). If the PCs don't turn up, she assumes they've betrayed her and swears she'll get even. She heads to Abdul-Haqq's, picking up her gnoll followers on the way, and watches for the rest of the day. If she sees the PCs enter, she waits outside with her lovesick gnolls, who would do anything to impress Karima. When the PCs emerge, Karima's group tails them until they're well out of sight of Abdul-Haqq's place, then attacks. Karima lets her followers do most of the fighting; she always has one eye on an escape route, and she uses it if you ever judge that she's in real danger. Once she gets to safety and heals herself, she can either contact more of her limitless worshipers and set up another ambush on the PCs (at their lodgings, near the Sanctuary, or anywhere else where she can corner them; remember that Karima has informants all over the city), break into their lodgings to determine what they know (or steal items to use against them, or smear poison on their personal effects), or try to locate the Sanctuary entrance on her own.

If the PCs keep their appointment and bring the Scholar's body as promised, Karima pays them as promised. She then heads to a nearby temple and arranges for a *speak with dead* spell, during which she learns about the rhyming text and gleans the very briefest of information about the Sanctuary. At this point, the PCs have performed the job she hired them for, and their employment is done—unless they say something or otherwise indicate that they're suspicious about what's going on. They don't need to be very specific. If Karima believes the characters suspect there's more to this story than she's let on, her enthusiasm and her interest in adventurers gets the better of her and she invites them to aid her through the rest of the escapade. Getting exact information from the Scholar about

distances, precise lengths of rope, and positions along the River of Sand is unlikely, but players are resourceful about such things. Ideally, however, you want the spell to fail to produce vital information, so characters are forced to retrieve the missing portion of the rhyme from Abdul-Haqq.

If Karima has only one part of the rhyme, she suggests to the PCs that Abdul-Haqq may have the other part (if the characters don't already know or suspect that). If she must, she feeds them more information about the Sanctuary—particularly its wealth or evil-tainted objects—and suggests an attack on Abdul-Haqq's headquarters to recover the missing portion of the rhyme. She is cagey about what she knows, but is happy to haggle over the price for the PCs' continued help.

If the characters have none of the rhyme, again the Princess suggests an attack on Abdul-Haqq, suspecting that Sweet Hasna must have brought it to him in two stages.

In any event, Karima is keen to get started immediately, before any more time is lost.

There are, of course, many other ways this portion of the adventure can develop. You know your players better than we do. Listen to their ideas, roleplay, negotiate, consider the situation and the motivations of the NPCs, and always err on the side of what will be most dramatic and most enjoyable. Don't rush to bring all the threads together too soon, and always ensure that Karima doesn't get drawn into a trap. She's too smart for that.

"PRINCESS" KARIMA GAMILA CR 4

XP 1,100

hp 88

GNOLL FOLLOWERS CR 1/2

XP 100 each

hp 22 each (*Monster Manual*)

The gnolls are all infatuated with Karima. They seek to out-do each other impressing Karima, so have fun with their ridiculous displays of bravado. They try dangerous skill checks they've no chance of accomplishing, they laugh and cheer and sing as they fight, they tear their shirts open and howl in a thoroughly gnollish way whenever the Princess is watching.

SINISTER FOLLOWERS

Before we come to Abdul-Haqq, we need to consider a second group that's about to join the action: followers of the Devourers, an ugly aspect of Bastet that's determined to keep its existence a secret. After the Scholar escaped from the Sanctuary, Sister Withering, a mummy, lumbered into the city and contacted a group of ghosts who are followers of this same, debased aspect of Bastet. She commanded them to help her in punishing the defilers of the Sanctuary, and they're now homing in on the location of the *calling cat*.

Sister Withering is a vengeful spirit in this adventure. She seeks out whoever wears the *calling cat* and slays that person or creature and its allies with no regard for collateral damage. The undead are not mindless, however, just single-minded. They act sensibly while focusing on nothing but enacting a horrible death on whoever has the cat. If the *calling cat* falls into the possession of PCs who *identify* its purpose, they might figure out a clever way to use it against the undead (by luring them into an ambush, for example). If they come up with an inventive way to defeat the undead without facing them directly in battle, consider awarding full XP for those foes; a win is a win, after all.


Bear in mind that these undead can't just walk down city streets in daylight. The ghosts know secret ways through the city—alleys, sewers, abandoned buildings, and rooftops—that allow them to reach most places without attracting attention, but those routes might not be as quick as taking the street. On the other hand, in

THE CALLING CAT

wondrous item, rare

This pendant is a simple clay cat figurine with one searching eye in its bloated feline face. It hangs on a dried, ancient leather thong that has recently been snapped and re-tied.

A *calling cat* is part of a matched set of magic items, consisting of up to 13 clay cat figurines and a larger figurine called the *cat's cradle*. All of the figurines must be created at the same time. The *calling cats* can be fashioned as stand-alone figurines, pendants, brooches, or even earrings. The *cat's cradle* is a horrific, feline visage of mangled cat features. Whoever holds the *cradle* knows the direction and distance to all of its linked *calling cats* as though the bearer had cast a *locate object* spell, except that the *calling cats* can be located over any distance, if the two objects are on the same plane of existence.



the middle of the day, some of the ghosts' secret routes might be quicker than a crowded street. They can attack the characters whenever you wish; we suggest that they stage a weak attack as soon as possible after PCs get their hands on the *calling cat* (to reinforce whatever suspicions the PCs have formed), and a stronger one later as opportunity allows.

You might find yourself in the joyful position of the characters having outwitted their enemies and planting the *calling cat* on their foes. In this case, you can play out the combat (letting players control NPCs for a change) or just adjudicate the outcome based on your assessment of the combatants' strengths and what you see as the most dramatically interesting outcome.

If the *calling cat* is reclaimed by the undead and the living defilers who touched it are killed, Sister Withering returns to the Sanctuary under cover of night. The PCs might be able to find the entrance by following her, and save themselves the trouble of having to work out the rhyme. If she returns to the Sanctuary, the mummy is with the other two in area 8 in Part 3.

SISTER WITHERING, CATFOLK (MUMMY) CR 3

XP 700

hp 58 (*Monster Manual*)

Sister Withering has the statistics of a normal mummy with the addition of *Cat's Luck (3/day)*: Three times per day when making a Dexterity saving throw, Sister Withering can choose to make the roll with advantage.

The mummy generally attacks only at night. She's careful to lurk in the shadows by day, slowly working her way toward the *calling cat* and identifying its bearer. When she's located her prey, she orders the ghosts to attack and follows them into the fight but also tries to use them as shields during the battle. Sister Withering focuses her attacks against whoever has the cat; once that person is dead, she's happy to slaughter any of the target's nearby friends or allies, but that's not required if a prolonged fight is likely to end in Sister Withering's destruction.

Treasure: The mummy wears a *cat's cradle* on a leather thong around her neck, fine silk robes worth 120 gp, enamelled gold earrings with floral motifs worth 600 gp, and a gold scent-bottle incised with foliate motifs and lined with glass, worth 600 gp.

GHOSTS x2

CR 2

XP 450 each

hp 36 each (*Monster Manual*)

ABDUL-HAQQ'S LAIR

Abdul-Haqq's lair lies near Jackal's Run in the north of the District of the Hyena. He tries to restrict how much is known about him in the city (he tends to eat anyone who learns too much about him). A PC who makes a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (Investigation) check to gather information about Abdul-Haqq learns that he has a reputation as a gourmet, seems fascinated by crocodiles, and lives in a crumbling townhouse with an elaborately tiled, onion dome roof. And he doesn't like visitors.

The townhouse is a squat, fat-looking building 50 feet in diameter and three stories tall. The lower floor sank years ago. Only a few portions of its once-beautiful mosaic floor remain; the rest is flooded. This suits Abdul-Haqq, who filled this lower area with **crocodiles**. His followers placed wooden planks across the watery gaps between the few intact, dry areas of flooring so they can cross the area in relative safety. Abdul-Haqq keeps a chained harem of larger crocodiles on the second floor. With a flick of his wrist on a lever, he can extend the chains, allowing the always-hungry crocodile "wives" to devour any visitor who displeases or bores him.

All walls of the structure are smooth, lime-washed adobe inside and out, requiring a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to climb.

INTERACTING WITH ABDUL-HAQQ

If characters visit Abdul-Haqq's home, they are greeted by his followers at the door (he was informed by spies they were coming before they arrived) and escorted to the middle of the crocodile-infested ground floor. Abdul-Haqq talks down to them from the floor above. The leader of the Dogs of Per-Bastet is not automatically the PCs' enemy, as he slyly points out to them. He has one part of the rhyme and they have the other (at least, that's the most likely scenario). Neither of them can do anything with their halves alone. Only by pooling what they know can they locate the lost shrine and loot its treasures. Abdul-Haqq is willing to enter into such a partnership, provided the characters don't bring in Karima. The "Princess" clearly has gotten deeply under his skin in more ways than one, and it's impossible for Abdul-Haqq to partner with anyone who's loyal to his arch-nemesis. He will put up with hearing exactly one favorable comment about Karima, and he makes it clear that he doesn't want to hear any more. If characters persist in saying positive things about her or exclaiming their willingness to work with her, Abdul-Haqq releases his crocodiles and orders his followers to attack.

Aside from that one sore spot, however, Abdul-Haqq is very charming. If an alliance is suggested, he accepts.

If Sweet Hasna is alive, he only allows the rhyme out of his house if she accompanies it along with two of his “brothers” (werecrocodiles). If the PCs killed her earlier, that’s not a deal breaker—he never liked her much to begin with—he just sends the two werecrocodiles. In both cases, of course, Abdul-Haqq intends to betray the PCs, who he has followed by an invisible Sharbit. The imp reports back any descent into the river. When PCs emerge from the Sanctuary later, Abdul-Haqq and his remaining followers are certain to be outside waiting for them, if they weren’t dealt with earlier.

1. GREAT GONG DOOR

A great weathered door is wreathed in beads and glass shapes with an inset iron-grilled viewing hatch. A mosaic above the door artistically depicts people being eaten by crocodiles. Nearby hangs a great gong and a padded hammer.

Anyone who rings the gong is viewed through the hatch by a werecrocodile, who politely says that Master Abdul-Haqq is busy. Visitors are allowed entry only if they convince the lycanthrope that they have the second part of the rhyme, in which case the door is opened and planks are rearranged to allow access.

Trap: The door is trapped by a *glyph of warding* that summons a fire elemental when anyone opens it from the outside without the key, which Abdul-Haqq carries. The glyph can be found with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

FIRE ELEMENTAL

CR 5

XP 1,800

hp 102 (*Monster Manual*)

2. CROCODILE TEARS

Beyond the door is a ruined chamber, its floor broken and swamped with murky water. Fragments of mosaics depicting men being eaten by crocodiles litter small sections of the floor. Long planks are stacked against the wall near the door. A large hole opens in the ceiling some twenty feet above.

The water is deceptively deep (8 to 12 feet) and very still. The 12-foot-long planks are laid across the water to allow safe, dry travel from the door to the central “island” or to the ladder. Shifting a plank takes an action and triggers an opportunity attack in combat,

should that situation arise. Crossing a single plank safely requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid falling into the water and riling the crocodiles. Two planks laid side-by-side can be crossed safely automatically. The narrow ledge circling the wall is mossy and slimy; a successful DC 8 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is needed to move along it without falling into the water.

A rope ladder is attached to the floor above, but it’s usually coiled up on the upper floor unless visitors are expected.

The murky water is home to **6 crocodiles**. They attack only if someone falls into the water or if they’re attacked first.

CROCODILE x6

CR 1/2

XP 100 each

hp 19 each (*Monster Manual*)

3. CROCODILE HAREM

The second floor is a wide, dirty chamber. Its only features, aside from matching holes in the floor and ceiling, are three enormous crocodiles on chains.

Abdul-Haqq loves his harem, but he keeps them on 5-foot leashes (which restricts them to the semicircular areas marked on the map). He also loves that the merest twist of his hand on the controls extends those chains to 15 feet, so the crocodiles can reach any point on their floor. These crocodiles attack anyone and anything that gets within their reach, except for Abdul-Haqq and his werecrocodile minions.

If characters are up here, the rope ladder probably is hanging down to the ground level, but it’s usually rolled up on this floor. Because it’s not anchored at the bottom, it’s quite awkward to climb; a successful DC 5 Strength (Athletics) is needed to not get hopelessly tangled in it, requiring assistance to get free.

CROCODILE “BRIDE” x3

CR 1

XP 200 each

hp 33 each (*Monster Manual*)

These particularly fierce crocodiles use the statistics for a normal crocodile except as noted above, and their bite attack does 13 (2d10 + 2) piercing damage.

4. ONION DOME OF WIND CHIMES

This is a curious room, even for the city of Per-Bastet. One section is smothered in silk cushions, while all about the chamber hang hundreds of wind chimes. A slight breeze wafts through mesh-covered openings in the dome, setting up a cacophonous, but oddly pleasing, chiming.

Abdul-Haqq spends all his time here (or in his harem below) and receives most of his visitors here. A metal lever near a coiled-up rope ladder allows Abdul-Haqq to control the chains in the chamber below.

ABDUL-HAQQ

Medium humanoid (gnoll, shapechanger), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12, or 13 (natural armor) in crocodile or hybrid form

Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)

Speed 30 ft. (swim 20 ft., 30 ft. in crocodile form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +5, Int +2

Skills Animal Handling +4, Deception +1, Insight +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +1, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Gnoll, Thieves' Cant, Trade Tongue, Undercommon

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Cunning Action. Abdul-Haqq can use a bonus action to Dash, Disengage, or Hide.

Hold Breath. Abdul-Haqq can hold his breath for 15 minutes in hybrid or crocodile form.

Magic Weapons. Abdul-Haqq's weapon attacks are magical.

Rampage. When Abdul-Haqq reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on his turn, he can take a bonus action to move up to half his speed and make a bite attack.

Shapechanger. Abdul-Haqq can use his action to polymorph into a crocodile-humanoid hybrid or into a crocodile, or back into his true form, which is humanoid. His statistics, other than AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Abdul-Haqq deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of one of Abdul-Haqq's allies that isn't incapacitated and Abdul-Haqq doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only).

Abdul-Haqq makes three attacks: one with his bite, one with his tail swipe, and one with his greatsword, or three with his greatsword or spears.

Bite (Crocodile or Hybrid Form Only). Melee Weapon

Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage and the target is grappled (Escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and Abdul-Haqq can't bite another target. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werecrocodile lycanthropy.

Tail Swipe (Crocodile or Hybrid Form Only). Melee Weapon

Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target not grappled by the werecrocodile. **Hit:** 9 (2d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a successful DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Greatsword (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). Melee

Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Spear (Humanoid Form Only). Melee or Ranged Weapon

Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. **Hit:** 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage, or 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

GEAR

+1 greatsword, 6 spears, *potion of heroism*, *potion of cure greater wounds*, magenta-colored robe.

TACTICS

Before Combat. Abdul-Haqq drinks *potion of heroism* and smiles broadly.

During Combat. Abdul-Haqq is reckless in combat. He likes to hurl his spears at those below, and his imp flits in and out of combat to poison foes. Other followers are expected to fight heroically, though Abdul-Haqq considers them all expendable.

Morale. Abdul-Haqq is a bully, and if faced with real danger, he backs down. If he's reduced to 15 or fewer hit points, he tries to pull back from combat and suggests to foes that anyone who kills him will pay a dreadful price when the Dogs find them. If cornered, he fights to the death, reluctantly but fiercely.

WERECROCODILES x2

CR 3

XP 700 each

hp 58 each

You might need to trim this fight back to just one werecrocodile to make things manageable for characters who may already be weakened from previous fights, especially if Sweet Hasna is present and fighting for Abdul-Haqq.

SWEET HASNA

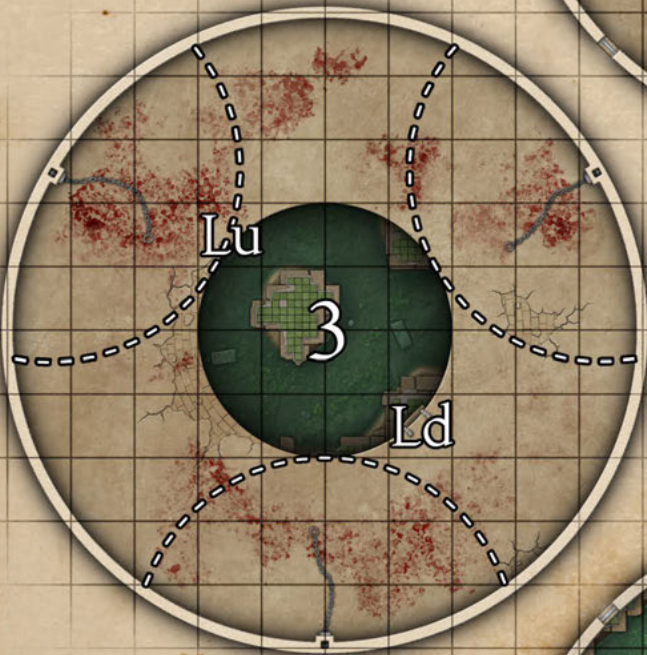
CR 4

XP 1,100

hp 74

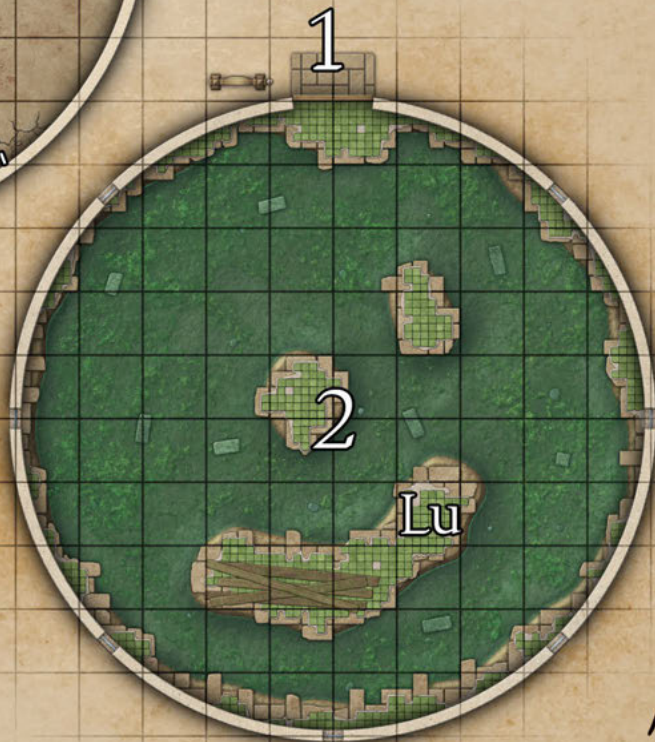
The Dogs of Per-Bastet

Level 3



Level 2

Level 1



Lv: Lever
Lu: Ladder Up
Ld: Ladder Down

SHARBIT, DEVIL, IMP**CR 1****XP** 200**hp** 10 (*Monster Manual*)

Treasure: The wind chimes weigh a total of 47 lbs. All but one are nice but routine. The plain chimes all together are worth 750 gp. One particularly fine set is made of gold-bound chimes with inlaid obsidian

and carved hieroglyphs; this is worth 400 gp by itself. Among the cushions are several small trays and stands, upon which sit a cobalt blue enamelled pitcher depicting cocks fighting basilisks worth 250 gp, a very fine silver-mounted ostrich egg worth 600 gp, 4 warm crocodile eggs, and a carpet depicting Bastet surrounded by attendants worth 1,200 gp.

CHAPTER 3—THE GROWLING SANCTUARY

Once the PCs have access to both parts of the rhyme, they can figure out the exact location of the entrance to the Growling Sanctuary: 303 feet northwest and upstream of the bridge that carries the Way of Bastet. The top of the eye entrance detailed below is 46 feet below the location given for the fixing peg. The figures don't need to be totally exact, but bear in mind the difficulty of swimming in the River of Sand, and the complete lack of visibility in the sand. To save time, however, characters armed with the measurements should find area 1 after a few hours of searching.

A close examination of the ground allows a character to pick out the hole left by the Scholar's peg; the peg itself was subsequently stolen by children.

FALSE ENTRANCE

If the PCs have only the first half of the rhyme and they measure 360 feet along the River of Sand from below the bridge, they find the false entrance 50 feet below the river surface. If the PCs reach this point, read or paraphrase the following description.

You find a circular opening in the riverbank. The River of Sand is kept at bay by the angle between the opening and the flowing river.

The opening leads to a short corridor, which enters a 15-foot-wide circular space covered with stylized images of cats.

Trap: A trigger stone lies just within the door, marked X on the map. Stepping on it triggers a falling stone block trap. Any creature in the marked spaces takes 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage, or half damage with a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. Those that fail the saving throw are sealed inside the chamber by the stone block; those that succeed leap out of the chamber. Lifting the block high enough for characters to squeeze out takes ten minutes and a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check; otherwise, a hole can be cut through in an hour with hammers and chisels.

Those within this foul chamber after the block seals find that the flowing river scraping along the outer walls makes a curiously unsettling noise resembling a deep, satisfied purr.

GROWLING SANCTUARY FEATURES

The Sanctuary sits at a two-way tributary of the River of Sand. As it plays such a significant role in this part of the adventure, it's worth reiterating the rules from the *Southlands Campaign Setting* regarding it.

The River of Sand carries objects and creatures along at 30 feet per round. Those caught in its flow must make a successful DC 5 Strength (Athletics) check each round to remain on the surface. To move 5 feet in any direction (across, with, or against the current) takes a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. A creature with a burrow speed can move in any direction at their full burrow speed. Air-breathing creatures cannot breathe under the river and begin drowning if they're submerged by surprise or stay under longer than they can hold their breath. Spells such as *water breathing* don't help, but you might allow wizards to research a sand-breathing variant of that spell in a few days. The side tributaries are calmer than the main channel, moving at just 15 feet per round, and a successful Strength (Athletics) check allows a "swimmer" to move up to 10 feet in any direction.

In the situation facing the PCs, their best option is to latch onto a submerged wall or bank and pull themselves along it. This requires only a successful DC 8 Strength (Athletics) check instead of DC 10.

Inside the Sanctuary, the sound of the river growling past can be heard everywhere. All Wisdom (Perception) checks related to sound are made with disadvantage because of the noise, but Dexterity (Stealth) checks are made with advantage.

The interior walls are seething with blasphemous carvings depicting the debased aspect of Bastet this shrine is devoted to. Most of the scenes depict felines feasting on living people. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check confirms that this blasphemous worship of the cat-god is shameful to true worshipers of Bastet.

The whole dungeon is enchanted to give undead within it advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

1. THE EYE

An overhanging opening is free from the sand river. The opening has a carved recess resembling a feline eye. A corridor slithers upward from this opening.

The overhanging entrance is a tight squeeze, and a DC 5 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is needed to clamber into the space from the river. Those that fail become wedged and must use an action and make a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to get free.

2. ARCHED BRIDGE

The corridor ahead rises sharply up a set of very steep steps. The air in this corridor is thick with dust.

The steps angle upward at an incredibly steep 60 degrees (about twice the incline of normal stairs). They can be climbed as difficult terrain without risk, but anyone who takes damage while on the stairs must make a successful DC 8 Constitution saving throw or fall to the bottom, taking full damage from the fall and landing prone.

Creatures: Having suffered two incursions into their domain, the elders of the Sanctuary positioned a pair of guardians at the crest of the steps, which is also marked by a pair of cat-headed statues. The 2 **anubians** are able to use the abundant sand around the steps to enable their *sand step* and *haboob* attacks on intruders. They are expecting the return of Sister Withering, so if any of the PCs are dressed as or appear to be the mummy, they don't attack but instead bow in deference.

ANUBIAN x2

CR 2

XP 450 each

hp 44 each

3. OUTER SANCTUM

The steep steps end before an archway formed of carved sandstone panthers facing each other with open mouths. The corridors beyond are crammed with mummies, which seem to form a guard of honor.

Mummies cram every outer wall of this area, creating an eerie watch of figures that slump or stand erect,

guarding the former location of the *Grimalkin* at the center of the chamber. The object rested atop a plinth on a 5-foot-wide, 2-foot-high dais at the center of the chamber.

Creatures: The elders have a duo of guardians here, **imy-ut Ushabti** clockworks that resemble mummies and which stand at the points marked M. Only the two near the walls still function; the third is clogged with sand and paralyzed.

The clockworks only animate if an outsider passes them, at which point they watch their prey. If examined directly, a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to see that they have indeed animated. The clockworks have been instructed not to attack until intruders move into area 4, at which point they slowly move in to attack.



BRYAN
SYME

The Growling Sanctuary



CLOCKWORK, IMY-UT USHABTI x2 CR 3

XP 700 each

hp 97 each

Treasure: A few of the mummies retain personal effects dear to them in life. A DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to locate each in this confusing mass of bodies. The items are an iron *ring of mind shielding* with a jackal-headed crocodile figure on it, a silver and lapis-lazuli ceremonial barb-toothed mouth piece worth 200 gp, a decaying wood and cloth head-dress set with iron figurines depicting the scattered parts of human bodies each with a simple yet fine amethyst feline eye as a soul worth 600 gp, and a crocodile mask with a masterwork punching dagger hidden in cloth inside the face. Hanging from five of the mummies are *calling cats* on leather thongs or hemp twine.

4. THE INVITATION

A low, semicircular opening glowers from knee height here. The opening is part hole, part doorway. A churning mass of sand oozes past; its swift movement has pushed a large pile of sand into the chamber as it passes.



The elders use this access as a link between the various small aspects of the Sanctuary, crossing the river by means of the fixed chain in areas 6 and 8. At each location here, buried by sand, an iron hook is hammered into the stone at the base of the opening. The chain is hooked over here to allow safer access.

The sand beyond is part of the river. Its current affects swimmers as described earlier.

5. GROWLING RIVER

The tributary splits the lesser and inner sanctum. Elders of the shrine can move by use of their iron fetters in Areas 6 and 8.

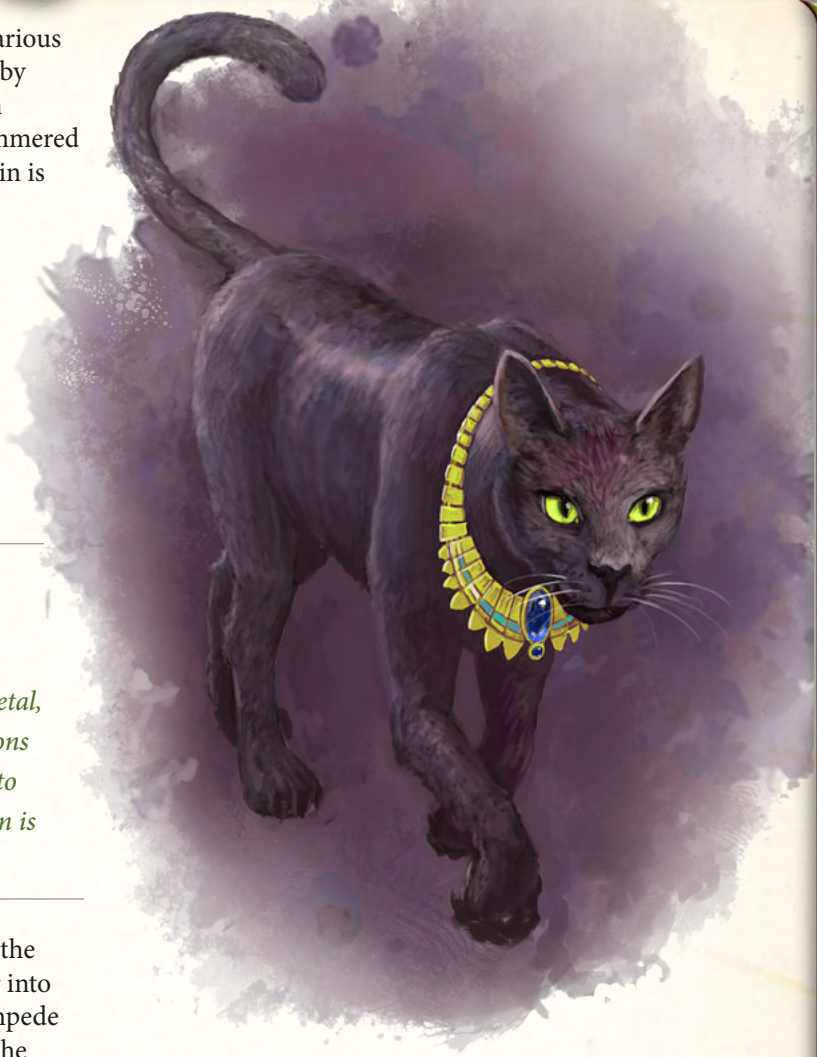
6. INNER SANCTUM

Beyond the sand river, you spill upward through an opening similar to the one you left and into a strange chamber. Every outer inch is covered in cats. Many are mummified, many others are skeletal, and some are horribly stylized statues, the creations of a disturbed mind. The figures spread deeply into the room, all facing away from you. An iron chain is lashed to a ring near the entrance.

This is the new sanctum where the elders moved the *Grimalkin*, the idol sacred to the sub-cult, deeper into the Sanctuary for safety. The cat statues do not impede movement, but crashing through them destroys the objects and stirs up a roiling cloud of **yellow mold**. Characters moving farther than 5 feet per round risk disturbing the mold in every 5-foot space they walk through unless they make a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check. The figures are approximately 4 feet high, so flying characters can easily pass over them. Characters disturbing the figures are exposed to yellow mold; see page 105 of the DMG for details on its effects. More mold can be kicked up after a character moves through a space, regardless of whether the mold was or wasn't disturbed.

The ring has 35 feet of chain and ends in a hook. It is used by the undead to move about the river safely.

Creatures: Amongst the countless cats are 2 **bastet temple cats**. These creatures are cunning and move between the remaining cats, using them as cover as though they had the ability hide in plain sight.



BASTET TEMPLE CAT x2

CR 3

XP 700 each

hp 37 each (*Southlands Bestiary*)

The remaining two elders in area 8 are alert for intruders. If they hear any combat in this area, one crawls along the Throat (area 7) and attacks from behind, using *dreadful glare* to aid the cats. The mummy quickly returns along the linking corridor leaving the guardian there in place.

Treasure: Among the cats is a large, pottery lion decorated with ochre glaze and with gold teeth. The whole thing is worth 250 gp. Inside the lion's stomach is a mummified mouse, and inside the mouse is a *pale blue (strength) ioun stone*. The most direct way to obtain it is to break the lion, but a *mage hand* spell could also retrieve the mouse. There's also a fine brass torch stand with incised illustrations showing mice being swallowed by the moon, worth 400 gp. Set within the cat carvings that make up the whole of the Sanctuary are three pottery tiles inlaid with gold and platinum figures showing cats devouring crocodiles; each tile is worth 120 gp. Two *calling cats* hang around stuffed cheetahs on vine and hemp ties.

A secret door links this chamber to the Dark Feast (area 8) via the Throat (area 7). The opening lies behind a figure of a cat-headed man facing away from the room. The small, semicircular opening is barely 2 feet high; it can be found with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check or a deliberate search of this section of wall. The door pivots centrally into the cramped corridor beyond.

The cat figures all face the Sanctum of Secrets (area 10). The secret door to area 9 also shows a cat-headed human facing away; this one is set into the floor and is a semi-circular trapdoor that opens upward. Below it is a crawlspace with an iron ring similar to the one in area 4.

7. THE THROAT

This corridor is arched and very low, barely two feet high at the top of the arch.

The Throat connects the two outer sanctums and allows the two remaining elders to move between them.

Creature: The linking corridor is protected by a disgusting guardian forged long ago by perverted magic. It is a **ghast**, but its limbs have been dislocated, broken, and reformed so that it now walks on four limbs instead of two. The ghast, called by the elders “the hobbled one,” can move with impunity along the narrow corridor, which it has never left. The pitiful creature recites nursery rhymes and murmurs its terror about what lies beyond its corridor. Its ankles and shoulders still bear the fetters used to break its body into its current shape, and the ghast whimpers painfully when it moves quickly. It’s more pitiful than ferocious, but it assumes any stranger who enters its lair has come to kill it, and it fights for its life. If it can be calmed and released from this corridor, it falls prone and whimpers in terror before crawling away in search of a route out of the shrine.

OPTIONAL ENDING

Consider having the mummies retreat to area 10 to fight a last battle against the PCs using the idol to summon a manticore. This protracted chase through the River of Sand and to the final item might make a more satisfying ending than having the mummies destroyed in area 8. Be careful, however, with how tough this final event would be. It’s best to use against characters who are unusually powerful.

THE HOBbled ONE, GHAst

CR 3

XP 700

hp 36 (*Monster Manual*)

The Hobbled One uses the normal statistics for a ghast but with **Multiattack**: The Hobbled One makes one bite attack and one claw attack.

8. DARK FEAST

Dragging yourself from the sand river via an opening identical to the one behind you, you find yourself in a foul chamber. Rusting manacles and fetters hang profusely from the walls, floor, and ceiling of this grisly chamber. An iron chain lashed to a ring lies near the entrance. The whole space is splashed with dried blood and reeks of decay.

The Devourers desecrated this location in a ceremony scores of years ago by devouring 101 people over thirteen nights. Living creatures that enter this room must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be poisoned (nauseated) while in this chamber. Those that fail can repeat the saving throw at the ends of their turns, ending the effect on themselves with a success.

The elders have made their main lair here, dispatching their beloved third, Sister Withering, to pursue vengeance on the surface. The chain is identical to the one in area 6, and it’s used by the elders to move about the river safely.

Creatures: The 2 **mummies** attack immediately when intruders enter their chamber. This is a tough fight, but characters can use the constricted ground and area 7 to their advantage.

SISTERS FELINE AND LEONINE, CATFOLK (MUMMY)

CR 3

XP 700 each

hp 58 (*Monster Manual*)

Sisters Feline and Leonine have the statistics of normal mummies with the addition of **Cat’s Luck (3/day)**: Three times per day when making a Dexterity saving throw, the catfolk mummy can choose to make the roll with advantage.

Treasure: Among the gnawed and broken bones, stretched sinews, and smashed jaws are a lacquer wristband shaped like a rampaging elephant and set with polished crocodile teeth worth 75 gp, and a bronze ankle clasp carved with hieroglyphs showing the sun being pulled to the ground with ropes by a false king, worth 75 gp.

The secret doors to areas 9 and 7 are identical to the ones in G6, as is the secret door into the Throat.

9. LAST RIVER

This final stretch of the river is dangerous not only because it's the River of Sand; an undead thing lurks within it. The creature, an edimmu, moves through the river with impunity. It can sense living creatures as though it's under a permanent *detect thoughts* effect. The creature prefers hit-and-run attacks; it causes some damage, withdraws to another area, then hits again, playing with its prey like a cat with a mouse. It's supremely patient, and it bedevils the characters for the rest of their time in the Sanctuary, until it's destroyed.

EDIMMU

CR 4

XP 1,1,100

hp 75 (*Tome of Beasts*)

10. SANCTUM OF SECRETS

The two secret doors into this chamber are easy to spot, with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. They're angled at 45 degrees to the floor so that those who move through them (a simple matter of pushing forward) rise into the chamber from below. The iron chain beyond allows safer travel back across the river for the elders.

Beyond the secret entrance lies an area filled with stale air and littered with cat figures. Sand caresses every surface and is heaped along the walls, which themselves hold hundreds of scrolls, tablets, and ceremonial tiles. The largest of these objects—a bloated idol the size of a watermelon—squats on a sarcophagus that fills a large part of the chamber. The idol has a striking feature; where its single, central eye should be on its forehead is instead a large, ugly, bloody hole. An iron chain fastened to a ring lies near the entrance.

Creature: The guardian, a bound undead called a **sand silhouette**, rises from the sand and attacks any intruders.

SAND SILHOUETTE

CR 6

XP 2,300

hp 105 (*Southlands Bestiary*)

Development: Areas marked X are sandy pits filled with a curiously airy sand, which has the same qualities as quicksand. The sand areas are slightly paler than the others, so they can be spotted with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check.

Treasure: The *grimalkin idol* (see New Magic Items) is only one object of note herein. Within are a *scroll of animate dead*, a *scroll of conjure elemental*, a *scroll of ray of enfeeblement*, and a spellbook in the form of a series of bone-bound tablets and scrolls containing the spells *banishment*, *hold person*, *protection from good and evil*, and *vampiric touch*. The other tomes, scrolls, and writings are profane but worth 2,500 gp to the right collector. Also in the room is a *frostbrand* (greatsword), a bronze begging bowl worked with depictions of revelers that allows the owner to *create food and water* once per day, and a Bastet scribe's table decorated with mother of pearl, bone and ebony with a three-partitioned drawer lined with human tongues (the table is worth 800 gp). There is also a fantastically illustrated folding backgammon table complete with warring forces of silver camels and ebony crocodiles and platinum dice, worth 1,100 gp; a wax-sealed jar containing opaque water that is hundreds of years old, in the base of which is a fine diamond worth 800 gp; and a massive pottery tiger stuffed with ancient vine leaves and gold thread worth 250 gp.



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Locating and looting the temple might only be the start of the PCs' adventures near the river. If they made an agreement with Abdul-Haqq (or even if they didn't, but they left him alive), he and his werecrocodile cronies may be waiting to ambush the characters when they emerge from the river. Alternatively, Abdul-Haqq might bide his time and strike the characters at a place of his choosing.

If the characters brag about their haul, they soon come to the attention of more legitimate worshipers of Bastet; namely, followers of the High Priestess Nafrini. A triad of clerics (CN female catfolk **priests** of Bastet) with dozens of **acolytes** under their command take an

interest in the PCs' affairs. If PCs sold the foul objects collected from the Sanctuary, the clerics demand that the PCs get them back so the clerics can destroy them. If the PCs hand over the objects voluntarily, their reputations rise in the city, and they receive the value of the items in credit to use at the many temples in the city. Advisers to the High Priestess seek out the PCs with offers of employment, mostly in the line of removing wickedness in Per-Bastet.

The fate of the *grimalkin* is a different matter. Do the PCs use it, donate it to the church, or sell it? If they try to sell it, how many interested collectors might there be who are keen to possess it without parting with cash?

APPENDIX A: RHYMING TEXT

PART ONE

Great knowledge must secrets necessitate hiding for the learned

*The ignorant may not witness such gifts and be burned
But those who have need should always be able to find
the Secrets*

If they have the gift of wisdom

*A wise man will take a length of rope eighteen karams in
length, and a stout iron stake a karam long*

*For the mistress river sand is fickle and her hungers
always wake*

*The Wise would walk one hundred and twenty karams
from the shadow of the bridge of the Way of Bastet*

*With his back to the sun along the bank of the Sand River
To cast his line and seek the fish of understanding below . . .*

PART TWO

*. . . He would then be wise show his obedience to Bastet
and crawl backward from her sight*

*A wise man would crawl away, averting his eyes from her
holiness and hunger and might*

Nineteen karams back he should crawl

*Then in offering to the goddess, cast a karam of rope into
the river with a prayer*

*That done, he should offer one karam to the goddess of
the river in a stout knot about his stake, the stoutest his
strength can bear*

For the goddess is fickle and hungry and aware

*Make the stake cast a shadow across half its length from
the noon's shadow upon the river's western shore before
securing it with all his might*

*Casting the rope into the river with a prayer, he should
take courage and descend in thought*

That secrets below are his to be caught.



NEW MAGIC ITEM: GRIMALKIN IDOL

GRIMALKIN IDOL

Wondrous Item, artifact
(requires attunement)

A bloated idol designed like a smug cat whose flesh is distended with weight. The head has a stylized space for a single eye, but the socket is empty and bloody.



The *Grimalkin Idol* affects feline creatures: domestic cats, leopards, lynxes, lions, tigers, civits, and any local variants thereof, including giant versions of these animals. Unlike the eye (see below), the idol also affects those creatures that have feline ancestry, including feline lycanthropes, rakshasas, cat folk, and any other type of creature appropriate to your campaign. The idol is unaligned.

The idol has the following powers, which affect felines and feline-related creatures.

- It establishes permanent control over feline creatures within 300 feet as though a *dominate beast* spell had been cast.
- The idol can cast the following spells three times per day: *enlarge* (felines only) and *magic weapon* (cast with a 6th-level spell slot and affecting only the natural weapons of felines).
- Once per day, it can be used to *conjure animals* (two tigers or two lions only).
- Once per week, the idol can cast *enhance ability* (cat's grace) using a 6th-level spell slot.
- If the *grimalkin eye* is reinserted into the *Grimalkin Idol*, then once per day, its keeper can cast the following spells: *animal friendship*, *animal messenger*, and *speak with animals*.

GRIMALKIN EYE

Wondrous item, rare

A black slit, making it appear as a real eye, bisects this fist-sized, spherical, tiger-eye gem. Hanging from a weathered chain, the gem is said to be the magically preserved eye of a lioness that served Bastet while the goddess was mortal.



A *grimalkin eye* affects feline beasts: domestic cats, leopards, lynxes, lions, tigers, cheetahs, civits, and any local variants thereof, including giant versions of these animals. It does not affect any feline creature without the beast type, including creatures such as weretigers and rakshasas, which aren't true cats.

- Once per day, the eye can dominate cats as though using a *dominate beast* spell.
- Three times per day, the wearer can use one of the following spells on cats: *animal friendship*, *animal messenger*, *speak with animals*.

If the wielder does not take one hour each day to re-attune with the eye, then any attempt to use it causes all cats within 50 feet to act as if under a *confusion* spell, and the wielder sees through the eyes of a randomly-selected cat within range instead of his or her own eyes, with no control over where they look. The wielder also cannot use any of the other abilities mentioned above.

If bathed in the blood of a high priestess of Bastet, the *grimalkin eye* turns to dust.

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