

# Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition

## DARK SUN<sup>®</sup>

W O R L D

Official Game Adventure

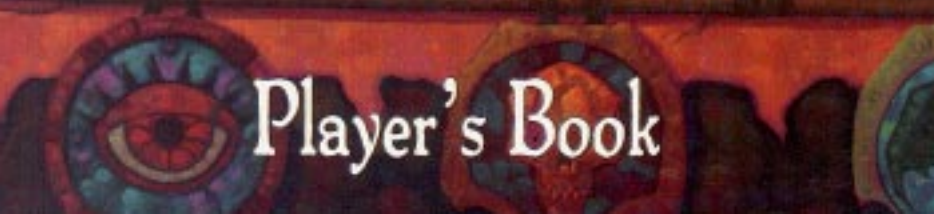
# Merchant House of Amketch

by L. Richard Baker III





**DARK · SUN**  
W O R L D



Player's Book



## Merchant House of Amketch

A DARK SUN® Campaign Adventure

### Player's Book

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## Two: Heroes of the Veiled Alliance



You have wandered into the ancient city of Balic, famed for its olive and orange groves. Your stay has been uneventful—the dictator Andropinis is widely despised by the nobles and commoners, and the people have claimed rights and privileges unknown in the other city-states you have visited.

One afternoon, several of you decide to attend one of the city's open-air plays. The plays are entertaining and skillfully performed, but you have found that many of the Balicites gather to gossip and exchange news at the amphitheaters. About halfway through the performance, someone reaches from behind you and drops a hideous-looking bug in your lap! "Have you ever seen one of these?" a voice whispers in your ear. A hooded elf behind you is leaning close. Fortunately, the insect is quite dead. You have never seen anything like it.

"It is called a shaqat beetle," the elf says quietly. "It has the unusual property of passing some psionic weakness to its victims. For months after they are bitten, they have great difficulty using the Way. I am Maserak, and I represent the Veiled Alliance of this city. We've been watching you, and we would like to ask your help."

You motion for the elf to continue. "The beetles have been turning up in the hands of slavers, templars, and assassins. We have lost several key members already to these creatures." Maserak glances around in a conspiratorial fashion. "We know that you have fought for good. You are new in Balic, and haven't been spotted as Veiled Alliance operatives. We'd like you to investigate the beetle trade. Find out where they come from and who is importing them into Balic. Put an end to it, if you can." The elf rises and adjusts his robe as the players below announce a brief intermission. "Go to House Amketch and hire on with their Red Obelisk caravan. We think there may be a shipment of live beetles hidden in Amketch's goods." Maserak turns and disappears in the crowd.

### Three: Hiring On



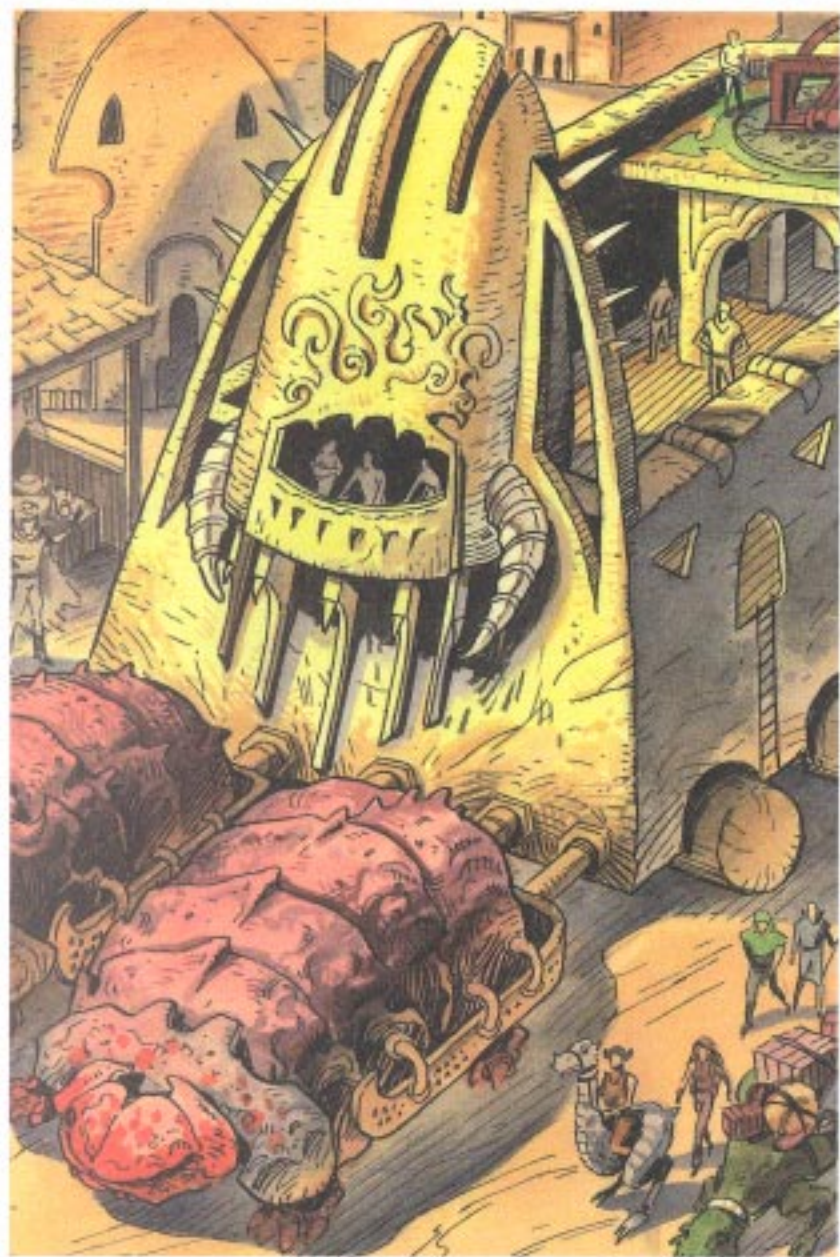
You find the Amketch enclosure on the outskirts of Balic, along the dusty Trade Way. It consists of several warehouses and barracks joined by a common wall. Large livestock pens flank the enclosure, and you can make out the hulking shape of an armored caravan wagon within the courtyard. A banner of three gold coins on red silk flies proudly above the building. Silent muls in lacquered armor guard the gate.

You approach and announce your intention of seeking employment. After some senior agents of the house batter you with the standard questions concerning your past and your skills, you are shown into a large warehouse with rare timber and sacks of grain stacked high. In one corner a short, broad-shouldered human is poring over inventory sheets. Two powerful muls with steel shortswords stand behind him, arms folded. The man turns as you approach and your escort announces your purpose.

"Seeking employment, eh?" The man smiles and strides forward to grip your hand. "I am Marius Amketch, the master of this house. I'm always looking for good help. You've come in at a good time—we've a caravan heading west tomorrow morning, and I was still trying to fill out our guard rosters."

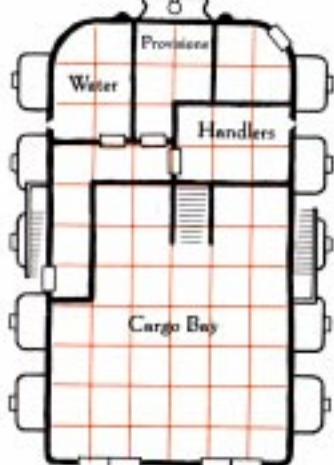
Marius seems to be a likable, confident fellow, and it doesn't surprise you that he has done as well as he has. "Let me be frank with you," he continues. "If you do well by me, I will reward your loyalty and your effort. Slack off or take my rivals' silver, and I'll make sure you live to regret it" He holds your gaze for a moment, and then goes on. "All threats aside, I will warn you that we might see some trouble on this trip. I've been hoarding teak from the forest ridge"—he gestures at the timber surrounding you—"and driving up the prices here in Balic. Normally House Shom owns this trade, and they've got a caravan coming in three days with a load of teak. I plan to sell tomorrow. So, watch out for Shom agents or raiders. They're angry with me, and I expect they'll take action."

Four:  
The Amketch Caravan

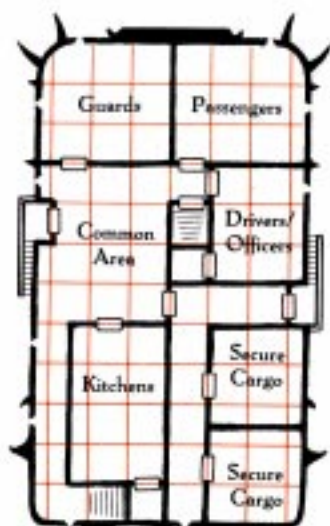


# Five: Map of the Caravan

Cargo Deck

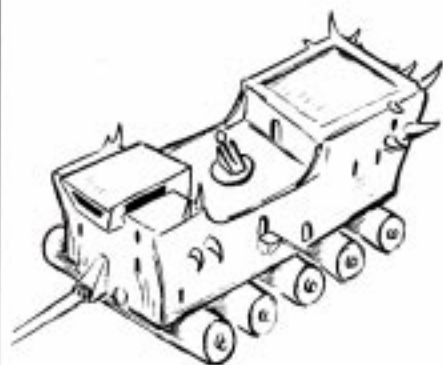


Main Deck



1 square = 5 feet

Upper Deck



# Six: Guard Duty

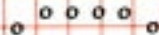
First Outrider  
Area of Responsibility

Second Outrider  
Area of Responsibility

Foot Patrol  
Area of Responsibility

Trailing Outrider Area of Responsibility

- o Outrider
- g Guard
- o Outrider Captain
- 1 square = 10 feet





## Seven: Camp Tales



Each night, the caravan halts as the sun goes down, and the wagon empties as small campfires are lit around the camp's perimeter. Your patrol is required to spend half the night on watch, guarding the camp and the wagon. Most of the caravan's personnel prefer to sleep out under the open stars by the campfires rather than inside the cramped, armored caravan wagon.

Around the fires, freemen and slaves gather to eat their evening meals, pass jugs of cheap wine, and share stories and gossip. During your off-watch, you join in the conversations, keeping your ears open for clues and rumors. You meet some of the following people by the fires:

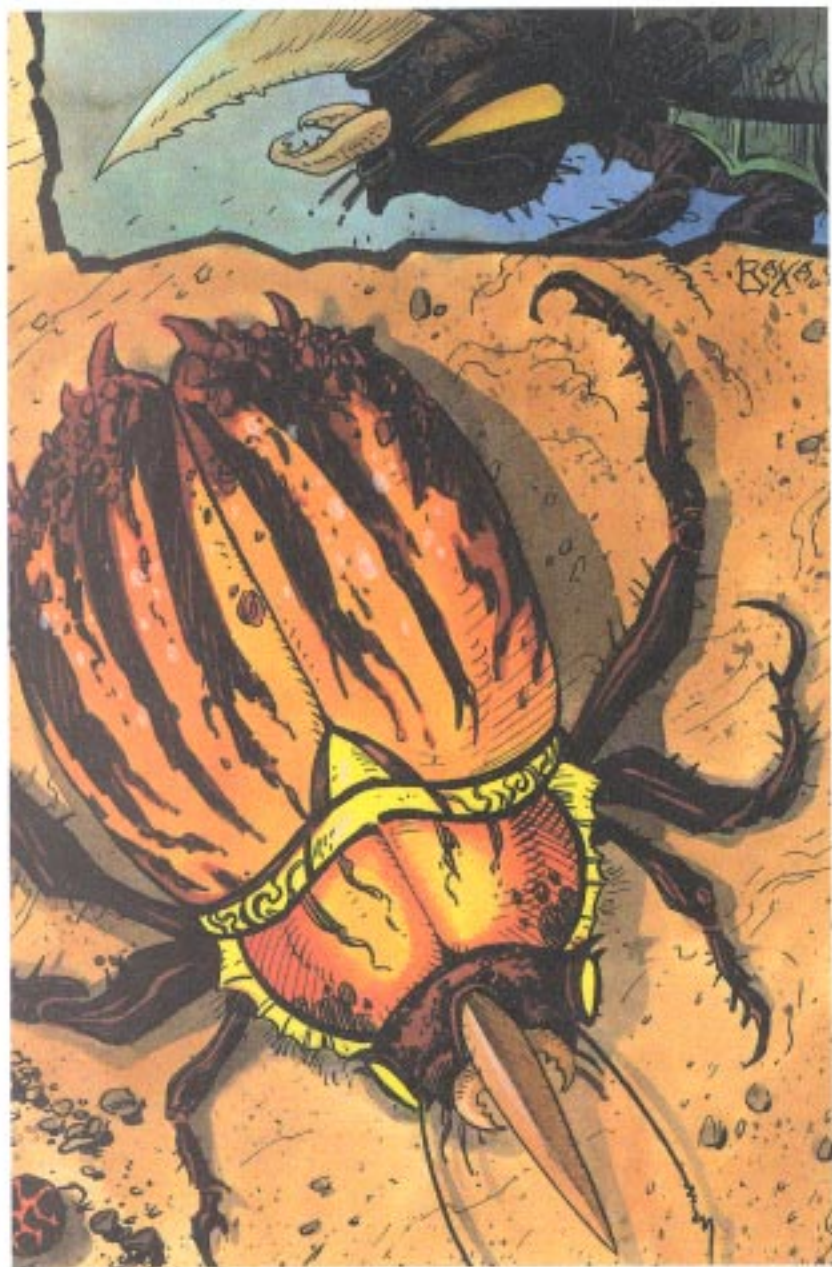
**Dalgra.** A scarred, thick-waisted mul with a shifty look to him, Dalgra is Master of Cargo and oversees repairs and maintenance of the wagon. He spends his time weaving with giant-hair rope or repairing small tools by the fire.

**Vashara.** A leathery old dwarven woman, Vashara is the Chief Driver. She and her junior drivers control the massive mekillots and steer the wagon across the wastes. Vashara silently watches the rest of the group, keeping her thoughts to herself.

**Kwen.** The Master of Provisions is a gaunt old human who keeps to himself. As the evenings wear on, he enjoys a cup or two of broy and warms up to the company with timid jests and a nervous, braying laugh.

**Arrazo the Falcon.** Leader of one of the outrider patrols, Arrazo is a tall, proud man with an arrogant swagger and a sharp tongue. Arrazo gambles constantly, making rounds of the campfire to find someone to throw dice with. Oddly enough, it seems that he wins far more often than he loses, and most people quickly learn not to bet against Arrazo's dice.

Eight:  
Shaqat Beetles



## Nine: Trade Stop



The long day of travel is nearly done. The sun is setting in a blaze of crimson light, and around you in the desert you can hear the hunting cries and rustling of nocturnal predators stirring. Ahead in the scarlet haze you can make out the dusty walls of a small settlement, and as darkness swiftly falls the great argosy rumbles into the village and halts. Your legs ache from the day's march, and you can't help but feel relieved when Holtet Phen comes by your patrol and informs you that you will be off-duty until the morning. "Better not show up drunk," growls the half-giant. "We muster one hour before sunrise." He moves off.

You survey the small square in the center of the village. A number of your fellow guards are heading for a dubious tavern on one side, while others with the first watch grumble and set up a cordon around the wagon. Suddenly, you notice Bezrak sliding off into the dusk, heading into the small town. He glances over his shoulder once or twice, and then vanishes. Do you want to follow him?

Ten:  
Gith Raid



## Eleven: Sold Out



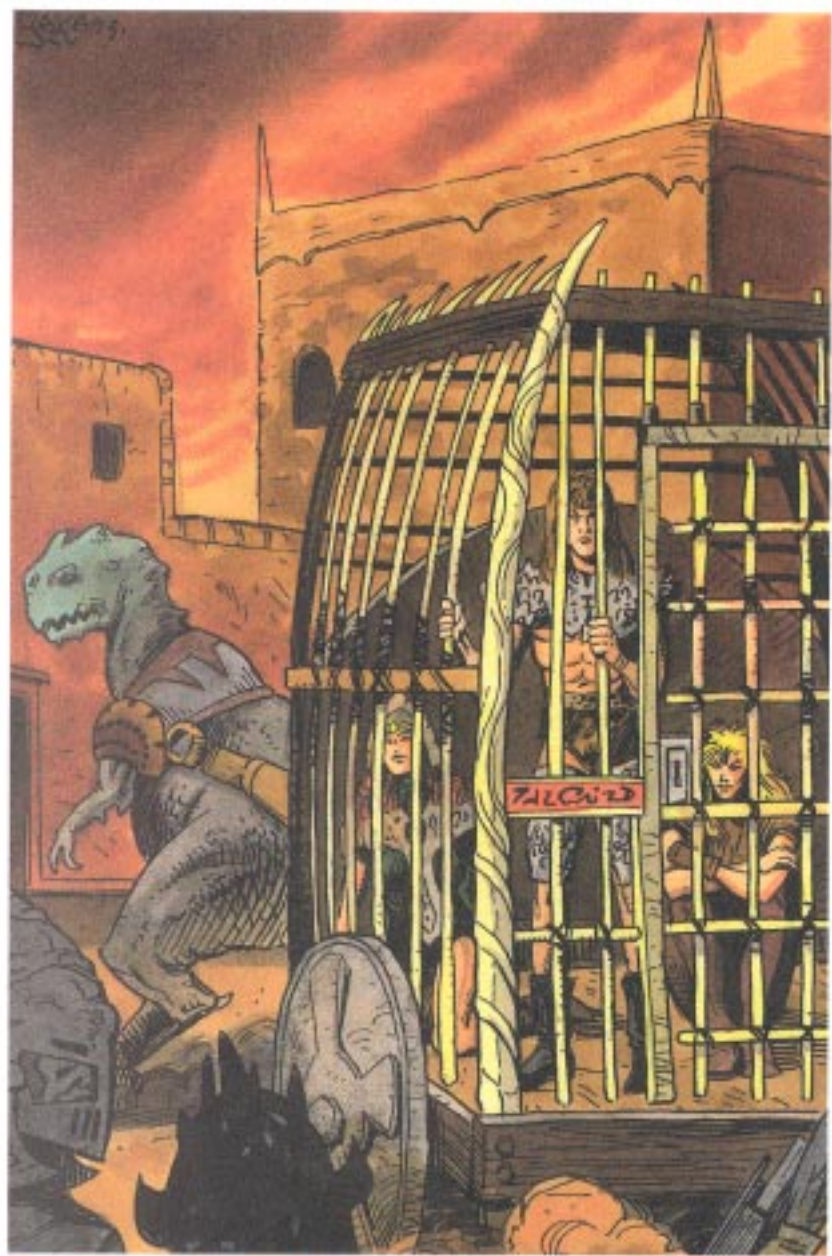
The soldiers and caravaneers enjoy their well-deserved relaxation, drinking and reveling in the village's central clearing. The villagers of Red Obelisk refuse to join in, making a point of staying clear of the rowdy merchants. As the night begins to fall, the cooks prepare a feast over the open campfires by the wagon. Bezrak and Holtet Phen are nowhere in sight.

Everyone seems to be having a very good time—in fact, everyone seems to be having too good a time. Caravaneers who had been entertaining their fellows with songs, dances, or feats of agility are obviously drunk. The songs are slurred, the dances are stumbled and staggered, and jugglers drop their daggers clumsily.

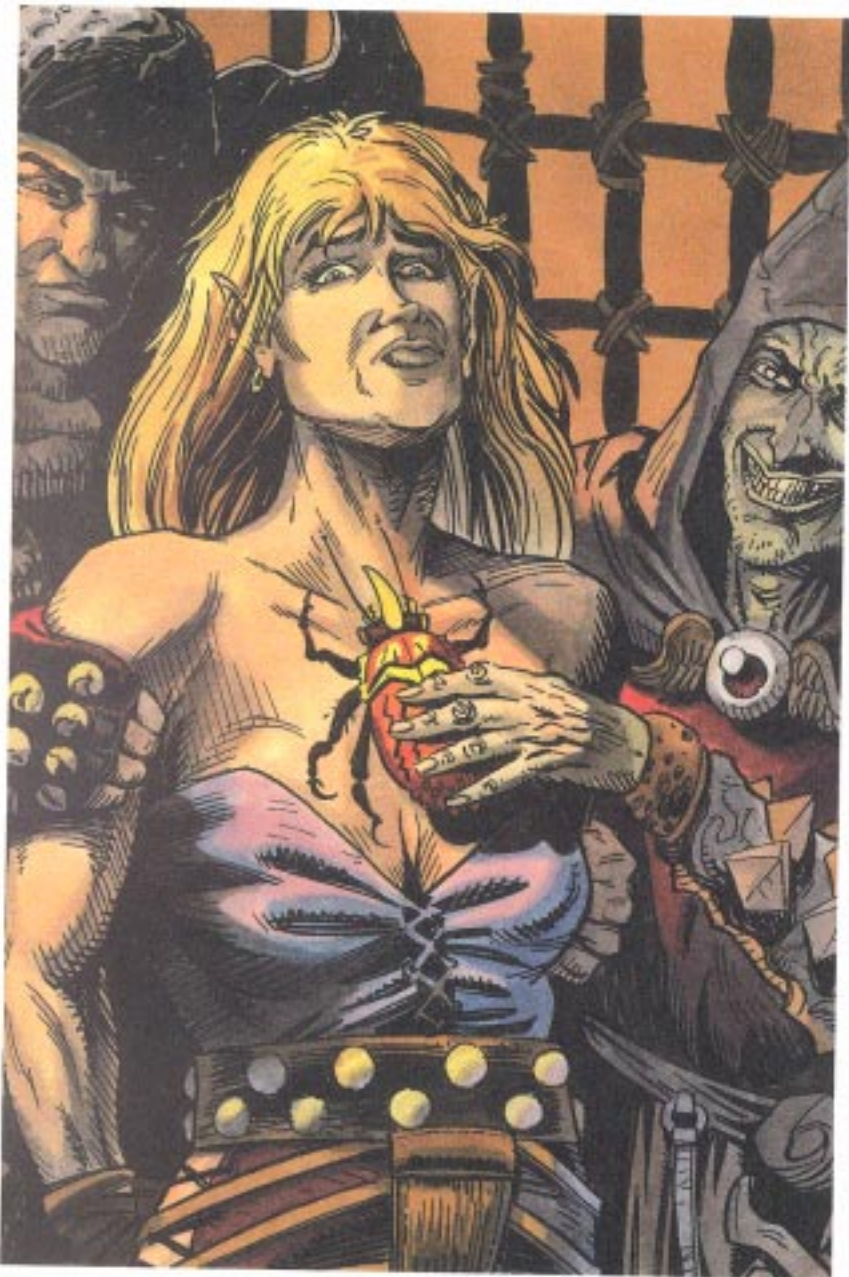
You notice that you are feeling quite good yourselves. Most of you have only had one or two cups of wine, but you realize that you are quite inebriated. Standing up brings a rush of nausea and dizziness. Around you, the Amketch soldiers and wagoners are passing out. They collapse, falling unconscious.

Suddenly, soldiers appear in the clearing! They wear red cloaks with an emblem of three dragonflies—warriors of House Shom. They fall on the sleeping Amketch caravaneers and quickly bind and gag them. Bezrak and Holtet Phen stand to one side, conversing with the leader of the mercenaries. Very few Amketch soldiers remain standing to defend the caravan. You count 30 or more Shom warriors attacking. Will you stand and fight, or will you flee?

Twelve:  
Prisoners



Thirteen:  
Parasites

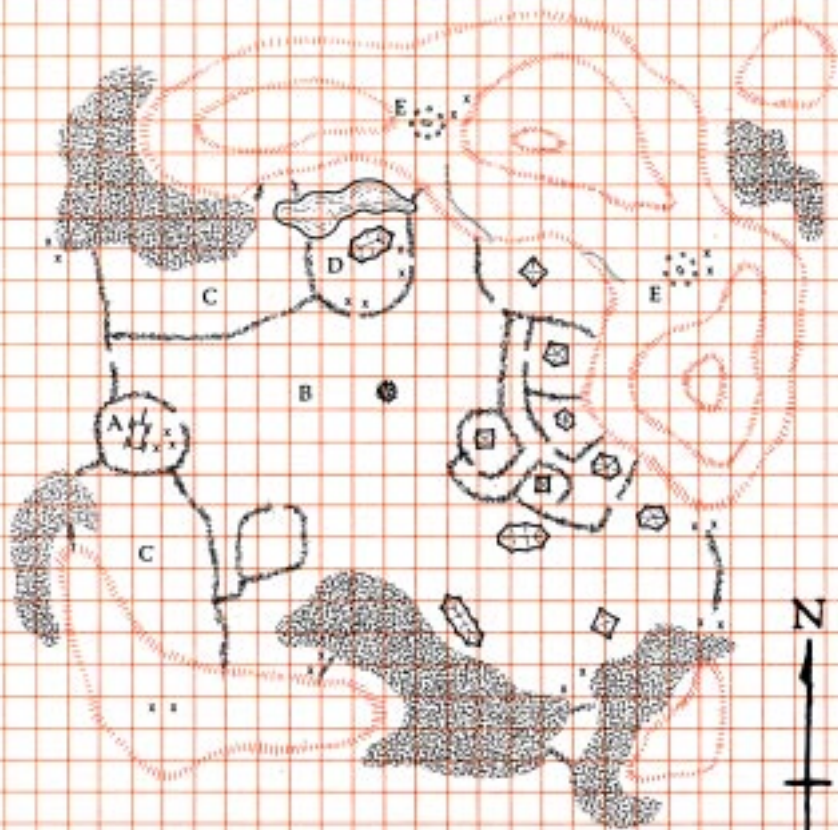


Fourteen:  
Return of the Gith





# Fifteen: Gith Camp



-  Thorny Brush
-  Barbed-wire Fencing
-  Stone Ring
-  Water
-  Beehive
-  X Gith Guard

1 square = 20 feet

Sixteen:  
The Desert



Seventeen:  
Tembo Pack



## Eighteen: The Shom Camp



The wretched slaves are all your former companions from your stint of service with the caravan! The proud Amketch warriors and drivers have been chained together with the few slaves owned by the caravan, and both freemen and slaves have been treated poorly. They croak for water and their emaciated frames are a clear indication of their meager rations.

The powerful mul Dalgra raises his head as you approach. "Free us," he groans. "Free us, and we'll fight for Amketch."

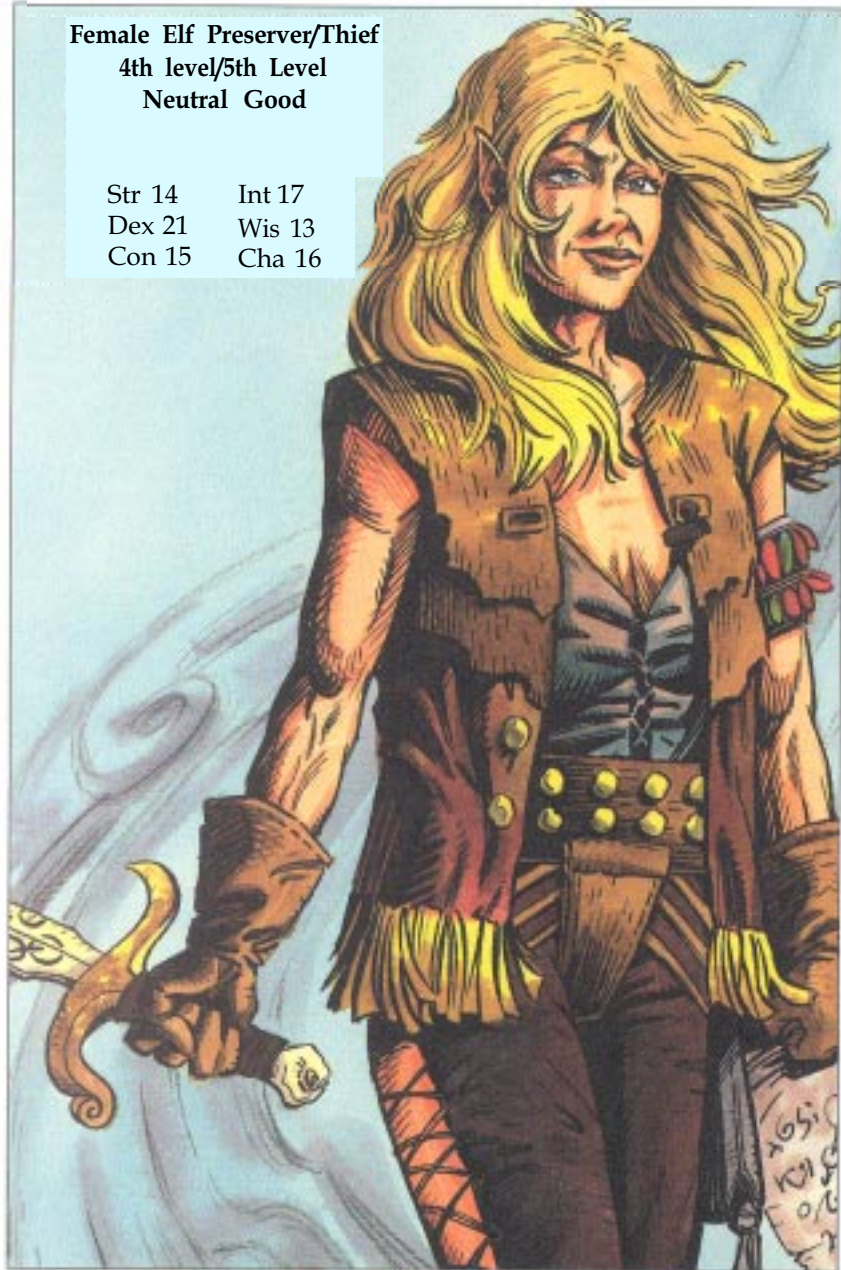
Another slave on the coffle—one of the kitchen servants who had worked for Kwen—chuckles dryly and spits. "Why should I risk my life to fight for those who enslaved me? You'll have me in chains again and I'll be no better off." She glances up to you. "I'll fight if you free me, but I will not be chained again once you do. Freedom is the price for my aid."

The coffle is built to free all those chained to it at once, or none. Will you free the Amketch warriors and slaves?

# Nineteen Rowan

**Female Elf Preserver/Thief**  
**4th level/5th Level**  
**Neutral Good**

Str 14	Int 17
Dex 21	Wis 13
Con 15	Cha 16



Twenty  
Shayira the Earth-Singer

Female Human Earth Cleric  
6th Level  
Chaotic Good

Str 17	Int 12
Dex 13	Wis 19
Con 16	Cha 14



## Twenty-One: Ashathra the Swift

**Female Human Bard**  
**7th Level**  
**Chaotic Neutral**

Str 12	Int 15
Dex 19	Wis 10
Con 15	Cha 18



Twenty-two:  
Stug Two-Blades

Male Half-Giant Gladiator  
5th level  
Neutral ?

Str 22  
Dex 15  
Con 19

Int 13  
Wis 11  
Cha 7

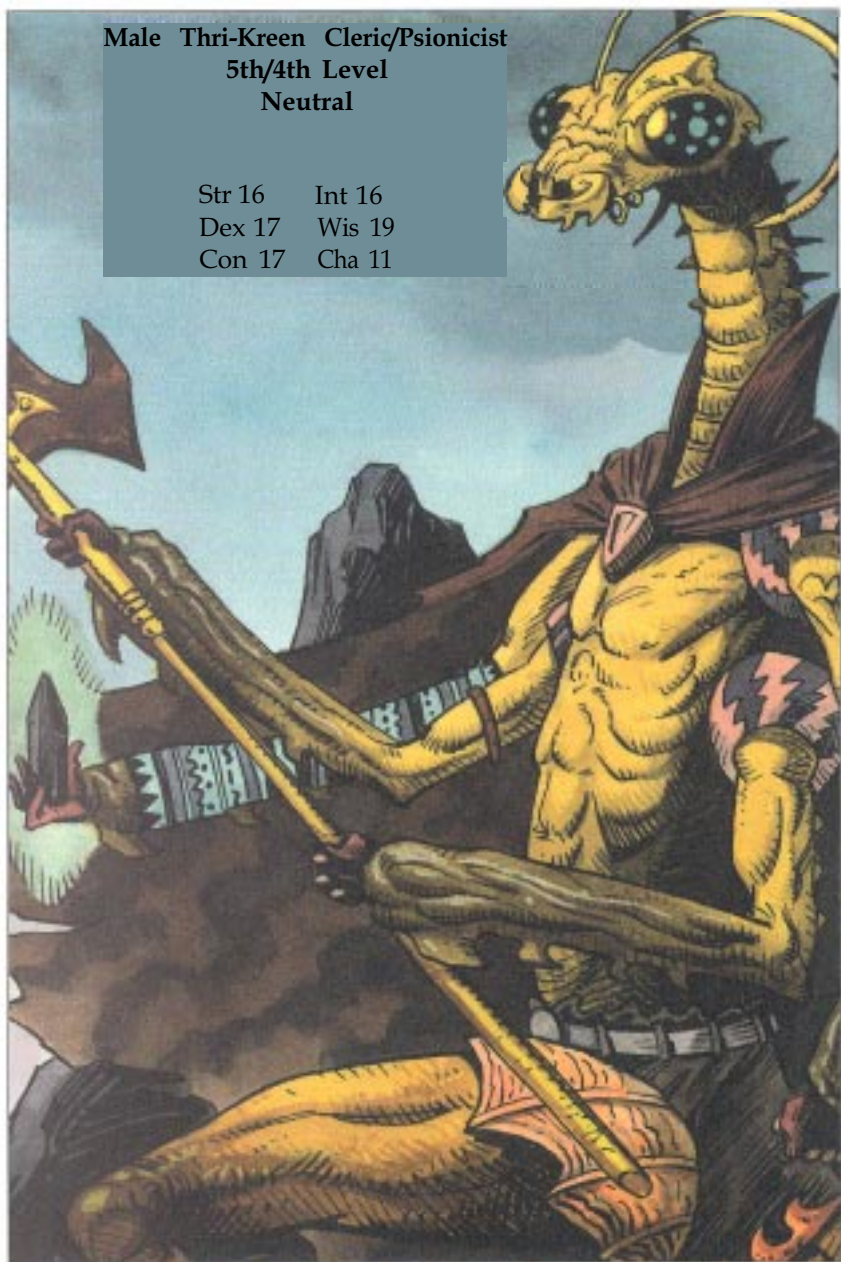




Twenty-three:  
Ka'Cha

Male Thri-Kreen Cleric/Psionicist  
5th/4th Level  
Neutral

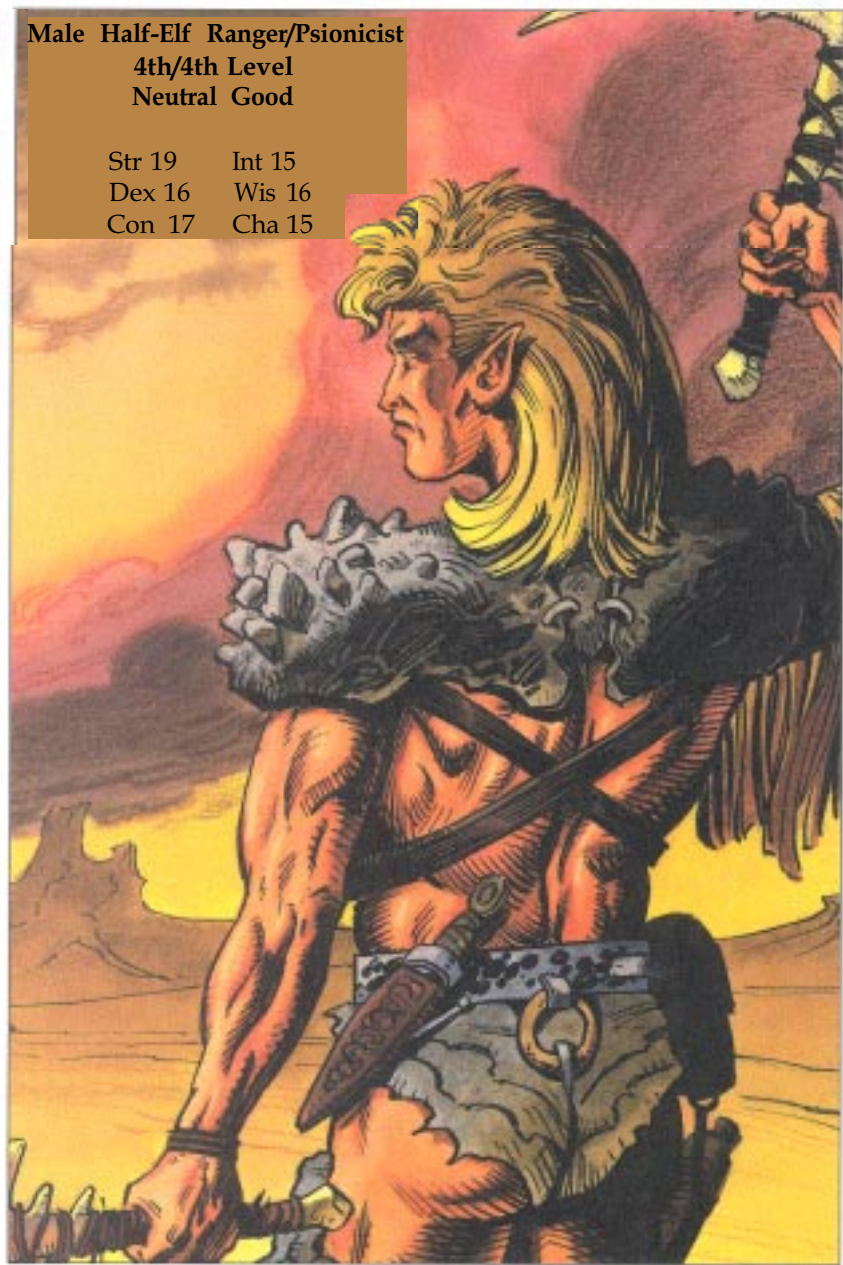
Str 16	Int 16
Dex 17	Wis 19
Con 17	Cha 11



Twenty-four:  
Galek Sandstrider

Male Half-Elf Ranger/Psionist  
4th/4th Level  
Neutral Good

Str 19	Int 15
Dex 16	Wis 16
Con 17	Cha 15



## Galek Sandstrider (Continued)

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise +1  
NPCs +3

**#AT:** 2 with long bow  
2 with impalers  
1 or 2 with daggers

**THACO:** 17

Bone Impalers 15  
Custom long bow 16  
Obsidian *dagger* +1 15 (14 thrown)  
Bone dagger 15

**Damage:** Bone impalers 1d8+6/1d8+6  
Obsidian flight arrow 1d6+6/1d6+6  
Steel flight arrow 1d6+7/1d6+7  
Obsidian *dagger* +1 1d4+7/1d3+7  
Bone dagger 1d4+6/1d3+6

**AC:** 4 in hide armor (modified for  
Dexterity)

**HP:** 38

**Species Enemy:** Dune Freak (Anakore)  
+4 to attack rolls, -4 to reaction checks

### Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SD
13	15	10	16	15

+4 on all saves vs. enchantment/charm spells  
and similar effects (psionist bonus, high  
Wisdom score)

### Background

The life of a half-elf is a lonely existence. You are the child of an elf mother and a human father, and were raised in an elven clan—the Shal-armani, a merchant tribe that wanders from city to city through the vast deserts. As you grew, you learned how to survive and how to fight, because the Shal-armani never accepted you fully. You spent much of your time off alone, hunting and wandering in the wastelands.

Eventually you decided that you would be better off without the elven prejudices and suspicions, and you struck out on your own. As a skilled fighter, you learned that there was always someone ready to pay you for your abilities, and you found work as a caravan guard. This led to your first adventure with your companions, as an evil defiler separated you from the caravan and coerced you into accompanying him to the ruins of Yaramuke.

You tend to conceal your mental talents, preferring to reserve them for an unexpected advantage in a tight situation. Your experiences with your former tribe have made you a loner, cautious to trust anyone. It has been your experience that sooner or later the prejudices of all companions surface, forcing you once again to depart for new territories. You are especially sensitive of Rowan, since she is the only full-blooded elf in the group, but so far she has not shown any arrogance toward you. All the others are your friends, although you can see that some of them do not get along with each other.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Composite long bow, impaler, spear, 1 slot unused

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Heat Protection, Rejuvenation, Running, Survival (Stony Barrens), Survival (Sandy Wastes), Tracking, Water Find

**Languages:** Common, Giant

**Disciplines:** Psychokinesis, Clairsentience

**Sciences:** Project Force (Con-2, 10, na), Telekinesis (Wis-3, 3+, 1+/rd)

**Devotions:** Animate Object (Int-3, 8, 3/rd), Combat Mind (Int-4, 5, 4/rd), Control Light (Int, 12, 4/rd), Control Sound (Int-5, 5, 2/rd), Know Direction (Int, 1, na), Know Location (Int, 10, na), Levitate (Wis-3, 12, 2/rd), Molecular Manipulation (Int-3, 6, 5/rd), Soften (Int, 4, 3/rd)

**Defense Modes:** Mind Blank (Wis-7, 0, 0). Mental Barrier (Wis-2, 3, na)

**PSP:** 57

**Equipment:** Mekillot hide armor, 2 bone impalers, obsidian *dagger* +1, bone dagger, composite long bow (custom-built for strength damage bonus), quiver with 20 obsidian-head arrows and 9 steel-head arrows, backpack (50' rope, clothing, blanket, 2 weeks of food), 4 1-gallon water skins, 2 large belt pouches, small tent

**Magical Items:** *fruit of extra-healing*

# Ka'Cha (Continued)

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise +2  
NPCs 0

**#AT:** 4 claws and 1 bite  
2 with chatkcha  
1 and 1 with gythka and bite  
1 and 1 with quabone and bite

**THACO:** 18  
Chatkcha (thrown only) 16  
Gythka 18  
Quabone 18

**Damage:** Claws 1d4/1d4  
Bite 1d4+1/1d4+1  
Chatkcha 1d6+2/1d4+1  
Gythka 2d4/1d10  
Quabone 1d4/1d3

**AC:** 2 (natural AC 5 plus Dexterity)  
**HP:** 30

### Cleric of Earth Spells:

- Six 1st-level spells
- Five 2nd-level spells
- Two 3rd-level spells (includes Wisdom adjustment)
- *Spheres of Access:* Major to Earth, minor to Cosmos

Turn Undead

Ignore Earth 5 rounds/day

### Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
9	13	10	15	14

+6 to saves versus mind-affecting spells

Immune to *cause fear*, *charm person*, *command*, *friends*, *hypnotism*, *hold person* (high Wisdom score and thri-kreen resistances)

### Background

You are of the Chtik-kek pack from a region known as the Yellow Hills. You are a kilkeket, or seeker. It has fallen to you to go into the world of humans and their kind and learn what you can of their ways. The Chtik-kek were fortunate to have been visited by a tohr-kreen named Klik-chaka'da, who taught you your intellectual pursuits and skills and helped you to develop the powers of the mind.

Your clutch of companions earned your trust during an adventure in the ruined city of Yaramuke. They seem to be more civilized than many of the human barbarians you have dealt with in the past, and at times you believe they might begin to appreciate the thri-kreen ways. You do not trust the insincere Ashathra, who acknowledges your role in the dominance order but does not listen to you. Shayim is a fellow priest of earth and your most trusted friend and ally. Stug and Gelek respect you, and you in turn respect them, but you find the elf Rowan to be weak and a liability to the clutch.

Because of Klik's tutoring, you are more worldly than your old clutch-mates of the Yellow Hills, but there are still many things about humans and other such creatures that you do not understand.

### Thri-kreen Abilities:

Leap 20 feet up or 50 feet forward  
Poison saliva: victim must save vs. paralyzation or be paralyzed (Size S creatures immobilized 2-20 rounds, size M for 2-16 rounds, size L for 1-8 rounds, and size H and larger only 1 round)

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Chatkcha, gythka, quabone (claw and bite)

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Endurance, Rejuvenation, Artistic Ability (Paint), Direction Sense, Psionic Detection, Read/Write Common, Somatic Concealment

**Languages:** Thri-kreen, common, gith, tohr-kreen

**Disciplines:** Psychokmetic, Psychometabolic

**Sciences:** Detonate (Con-3, 18, na), Telekinesis (Wis-3, 3+, 1+/round)

**Devotions:** Adrenaline Control (Con-3, 8, 4/rd), Ballistic Attack (Con-2, 5, na), Control Body (Con-2, 8, 8/rd), Control Light (Int, 12, 4/rd), Heightened Senses (Con, 5, 1/rd), Inertial Barrier (Con-3, 7 5/rd), Levitation (Wis-3, 12, 2/rd), Molecular Agitation (Wis, 7, 6/rd), Reduction (Con-2, varies, 1/rd)

**Defense Modes:** Thought Shield (Wis-3, 1, na), Tower of Iron Will (Wis-2, 6, na)

**PSP:** 73

**Equipment:** Gythka, quabone, 4 chatkcha, leather harness, leather backpack (metal bell, chalk, 50' rope, ceramic whistle), cloak, holy symbol (hunk of obsidian), 1 week's rations, 1 one-gallon waterskin, 3 silver pieces, 22 ceramic pieces

## Stug Two-Blades (Continued)

**Reaction Adjustment:** Surprise 0  
NPCs -1

**#AT:** 3/2 with one gythka  
3/2 and 1 with gythka in each hand  
1 with obsidian harpoon  
1 with bone club  
1 unarmed

**THAC0:** 16

Gythka 11 (11 thrown)  
Obsidian harpoon 14 (14 thrown)  
Bone club 13

**Damage:** Gythka 2d4+12/1d10+12  
Harpoon 2d4+9/2d6+9  
Bone Club 1d6+9/1d3+9  
Unarmed 1d3+10

**AC:** 6 in hide armor  
5 with gladiator ability  
4 with successful Armor Optimization

**HP:** 79

### Gladiator Abilities:

+/-4 Chart Modifier with unarmed combat attacks  
Optimize Armor, -1 AC bonus

**Wild Talent:** Complete Healing

**Power Score:** Con

**Cost:** 30

### Background

A native of Balic, your father served as a guard to an important templar of the city. When you were still a youth, your father's patron was accused of treason and executed. His guards were executed as well, and you were thrown into the gladiatorial arena. There you were taught the skills you know today. Angry and resentful of your unjust enslavement, you became known as a vicious killer with powerful psionic talents. The sight of your paired gythkas flashing in the sun was a favorite with the arena crowds. After a time, you earned enough to buy your own freedom, and wisely left the city before your masters could change their minds.

Once out of Balic you worked odd jobs and kept moving, not really sure what to do with your life. You found employment as a caravan guard, then served as the lieutenant of a defiler, defending his stronghold. You tired of the wizard's harsh and arrogant manner and moved on. You even turned to raiding for a while, leading a fierce band of unruly gith.

You met your friends when you were serving as a mercenary for a dune trader in Raam. An evil defiler manipulated you and your companions into entering the haunted ruins of Yamuke, but you managed to escape with your lives and destroy the creature when he came after you. Galek is a true fighting companion, a warrior after your own heart, while the thri-kreen Ka'Cha commands your respect for his natural fighting ability. Shayira seems cold and distant to you, and Ashathra is a lying schemer who seems to care nothing for any of the rest of you. Rowan's magic fascinates you, and you enjoy being her friend.

**Wild Talent:** Energy Containment

**Power Score:** Con-2

**Cost:** 10, 1/round to maintain

**Wild Talent:** Dimensional Door

**Power Score:** Con-1

**Cost:** 4, 2/round per 50 yards to maintain

**PSP:** 72

### Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
11	13	12	13	14

**Weapon Proficiencies:** All, 1 slot unused

**Weapon Specializations:** Ambidexterity, Two-weapon Style, Gythka Specialization

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Armor Optimization, Blind-fighting, Endurance, Heat Protection, Rope Use

**Languages:** Common

**Equipment:** Inix hide armor, 2 gythka, 6 obsidian harpoons, harpoon quiver, bone club, 3 50-foot coils of giant-hair rope, 6 two-gallon waterskins, 2 week's rations, whetstone, blanket, backpack, flint and steel, lamp, 1 flask oil, 6 silver pieces, 38 ceramic pieces

**Magical Items:** *Oil fruit of feather fall, fruit of healing*

## Ashathra the Swift (Continued)

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise +3  
NPCs +7

**#AT:** 1 and 1 (with daggers)  
2 with blowgun  
1 with light crossbow

**THAC0:** 17  
Pterrax-tooth *dagger* +2 16 (13 thrown)  
Iron dagger 17 (14 thrown) (18 in off-hand)  
Blowgun 14  
Light Crossbow 14

**Damage:** Pterrax-tooth *dagger* +2  
1d4+1/1d3+1  
Iron dagger 1d4/1d3  
Blowgun needle 1/1  
Blowgun barbed dart 1d3-1/1d2-1  
Obsidian-headed quarrel 1d4-1/1d4-1  
Steel-headed quarrel 1d4/1d4  
**AC:** 4 in leather armor (modified for Dexterity)  
**HP:** 35

**Wild Talent:** Ectoplasmic Form

**Power Score:** Con-4

**Cost:** 9, 9/round to maintain

**PSP:** 67

**Thieving Percentages:**

PP	OL	F/RT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL
30	30	30	55	50	25	85	10

**Influence Reactions:** -2 die modifier

**Inspire:** +1 THAC0, +1 to Saving Throws,  
or +2 Morale

**Identify Magical Item:** 35%

### Background

Born in the city of Tyr to a poor potter and his wife, your father was enslaved for indebtedness when you were quite young. He was worked to death in the iron mines of the city. Your mother disappeared soon after his death abandoning you to your fate in the streets of the city.

Quick and agile, you discovered that you could take what you needed as a thief. Your daily meal was stolen from a fruit vendor or snatched from a passing wagon. Your clothes were taken from laundry lines. Everything you needed was there for the taking, and you found that a steady hand and a bit of nerve more than made up for a lack of a home or parents to care for you.

When you were 12 years old, you met a bard who called herself Sandwhisper. She recognized your potential and took you under her wing, teaching you the skills of the bard: how to sing, how to dance, how to fight, and how to kill. But eventually she grew restless and moved on, leaving you to find your own way in the world. You learned that everyone leaves sooner or later, and that the only person you can count on is yourself.

Now you are finding that your cynicism may not be all that you need. Hired on by a caravan as entertainment, you found yourself involved in a perilous adventure. You and your current companions had to work together to survive an expedition into the ruins of Yaramuke and the wrath of an evil defiler-dragon. You keep telling yourself that Ashathra comes first, but in your heart you are not sure whether you still believe it.

**Saving Throws:**

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
12	12	11	15	13

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Dagger, light crossbow, blowgun

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Dancing, Disguise, Etiquette, Jumping, Land-based Riding, Local History, Read/Write Common, Tight-rope Walking, Tumbling

**Languages:** Common, Dwarven

**Poisons Known:**

A (Injected, onset 10-30 min., strength 15/0)  
B (Injected, onset 2-12 min., strength 20/1-3)  
D (Injected, onset 1-2 min., strength 30/2-12)  
E (Injected, onset immed., strength death/20)  
H (Ingested, onset 1-4 hours, strength 20/10)  
I (Ingested, onset 2-12 min., strength 30/15)

**Equipment:** Leather armor, pterrax-tooth *dagger* +2, second iron dagger in hidden boot sheath, light crossbow, case with 12 obsidian-headed quarrels and 9 steel-headed quarrels, blowgun, pouch with 6 bone needles and 6 bone barbed darts, backpack, 1 one-gallon waterskin, 1 week's rations, tinder kit, oil lamp, 1 flask oil, 50 feet silk rope, blanket, 31 silver pieces, 17 ceramic pieces

**Magical Items:** *Fruit of invisibility, fruit of gaseous form*

## Shayira the Earth-Singer (Continued)

**Reaction Adjustments:** Surprise 0  
NPCs +2

**#AT:** 1

**THACO:** 18

Bronze-headed mace 17

Steel dagger 17

Sling 18

**Damage:** Bronze-headed mace 1d6+2/  
1d6+1

Steel dagger 1d4+1/1d3+1

Sling stone 1d4/1d4

Lead sling bullet 1d4+1/1d6+1

**AC:** 4 in rasclinn hide armor

**HP:** 42

**Cleric of Earth spells:**

- Six 1st-level spells
- Five 2nd-level spells
- Three 3rd-level spells (includes Wisdom adjustment)
- *Spheres of Access:* Major to Earth, minor to Cosmos

Turn Undead

Ignore Earth 6 rounds per day

**Wild Talent:** Domination

**Power Score:** Wis-4

**Cost:** Contact, 2x contact cost to maintain

### Background

You were born and raised as a nomadic herder in the foothills of the Ringing Mountains. From birth you were marked as an Earth-Singer, or priestess of earth, by your tribe. The sign of the Earth-Singer—tattooed circles on the backs of your hands—was given to you when you reached maturity. The rock, the stone, the mountains are all sacred to you. As Earth-Singer, you healed the sick and injured while keeping the old ways and observing the honored rites of your ancestors.

During your twentieth year, you were betrothed to a young warrior named Therek the Lion, the Earth-singer of another clan. Therek was a cruel and vain man, and you realized that you could not bring yourself to marry him. The elders were shocked by your refusal to obey, and you were forced to flee. Now you roam the Tablelands, torn between your duty to your tribe and your duty to yourself. Wherever you go, you try to fight for good and help the weak, as you would be expected to do as the Earth-singer of your tribe.

You met your current companions when your wanderings led you to sign on with a caravan near Raam. You shared an adventure into the ruins of Yaramuke at the side of a powerful defiler seeking dragonhood, and witnessed his destruction at the hands of Abalach-Re, sorceror-queen of Raam. Your companions strike you as devious and manipulative at times, Ashathra especially so. Rowan and Galek are good friends, but you find the thri-kreen Ka'Cha to be a true ally. As a fellow priest of earth, he shares a common cause and calling with you. On the other hand, Stug's capacity for violence frightens you and the half-giant's mercurial shifts in attitude make him extremely untrustworthy. You'll have to keep an eye on him.

**Wild Talent:** Mindlink

**Power Score:** Wis-5

**Cost:** Contact, 8/round to maintain

**Wild Talent:** Contact

**Power Score:** Wis

**Cost:** varies, 1/round to maintain

**PSP:** 63

**Saving Throws:**

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
3	13	12	15	14

+4 to saves versus mind-affecting spells

Immune to *cause fear*, *charm person*, *commend*, *blends*, *hypnotism* (high Wisdom)

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Mace, dagger, sling

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Ancient History, Direction Sense, Healing, Fire-building, Singing, Stonemasonry, Water Find

**Languages:** Common, gith

**Equipment:** Rasclinn hide armor, bronze-headed mace, steel dagger, sling, pouch with 20 sling stones, pouch with 12 lead sling bullets, backpack with flint and steel, 6 torches, 1 flask of oil, 1 week's rations, 1 one-gallon waterskin, small glass mirror, quartz crystal, bedroll, 6 silver pieces, 24 ceramic pieces, 1 ruby worth 30 sp

## Rowan (Continued)

**Reaction Adjustment:** Surprise +4  
NPCs +5

#AT: 1 and 1 (sword and dagger)  
2 with bow

**THACO:** 18

Steel long sword 18  
Bone *dagger* +2 17 (13 thrown)  
Bone *dagger* 19 (15 thrown)  
Short bow 14

**Damage:** Steel long sword 1d8/1d12  
Bone *dagger* +2 1d4+1/1d3+1  
Bone *dagger* 1d4-1/1d3-1  
Obsidian-headed arrows 1d6-1/1d6-1  
Steel-headed arrows 1d6/1d6

**AC:** 3 in leather armor (modified for Dexterity)

**HP:** 22

### Preserver Spells:

- Three 1st-level spells
- Two 2nd-level spells

**Wild Talent:** Empathy

**Power Score:** Wis

**Cost:** Contact/1, 1 per round to maintain

**Wild Talent:** Contact

**Power Score:** Wis

**Cost:** varies, 1 per round to maintain

**PSP:** 38

### Thieving Percentages

PP	OL	F/RT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL
60	40	50	70	70	35	90	17

### Background

Born a free elf of the Taga-Elanni tribe, you were captured at an early age by evil raiders and sold into slavery in Draj. Your life in slavery was horrible, but your forced servitude taught you many skills. You learned the arts of stealth, stealing away to avoid your master's lash. You learned to filch what extra food and trinkets you could. And most importantly, you learned magic from an old scribe slave named Arshon. He passed what few spells he possessed to you.

Eventually, your day came. You killed the vain noble who had tormented you for years. With your spells and thief abilities, you eluded pursuit and set off in search of a new life. You have been on the run ever since. In Draj you are a criminal marked for death, but the rest of Athas is your home now. Someday you hope to find the Taga Elanni again, but you have never discovered what became of the tribe.

In your first adventure with your current companions, you journeyed to the ruined city of Yaramuke as the pawns of an evil dragon. You are not sure how much you trust them, but Stug and Shayira seem to be a loyal friends and Galek is courageous and honorable. You enjoy Asathra's company, but find the thri-kreen Ka'Cha to be unpredictable and somewhat threatening.

**Backstab:** +4 to hit, 3x damage

### Saving Throws:

DM	RSW	PP	BW	SP
12	11	11	15	12

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Long sword, dagger, short bow

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Appraising, Dancing, Direction Sense, Disguise, Heat Protection, Herbalism, Read/Write Common, Somatic Concealment, Tumbling

**Languages:** common, elven

### Spell Book (parchment scrolls in bone case):

- 1st level: *Change self: charm person, color spray, detect magic, identify, magic missile, phantasmal force, read magic, sleep, wall of fog*
- 2nd level: *Blur, invisibility, knock, levitate, mirror image, web*

**Equipment:** Leather armor, steel long sword (not of tribal design, +1 to hit bonus does not apply), bone *dagger* +2, bone dagger, short bow, quiver with 12 obsidian-headed arrows and 5 steel-headed arrows, belt pouch with thieves' tools, 50 feet of silk rope, bone grapple, 2 one-gallon waterskins, 1 week's rations, sandals, cloak, 11 silver pieces, 37 ceramic pieces

**Magic:** *Fruit of fire resistance, scroll of protection from poison*



## Thirty-one: Questions and Answers



The half-elf leads you a short distance from the others and then turns to confront you. “You have done well to free us,” she says quietly, “but you’re not much closer to your true goal. I was in charge of the Amketch trading post at Red Obelisk, and these Shom traitors took my post and my men first. I was warned to watch for you when you arrived with Bezrak’s caravan—I had no idea that I would be the one needing help!

She pauses, measuring you. “I have helped the Veiled Alliance in the past, and I have been helping them investigate the trade in shaqat beetles. The last time a Shom caravan came through Red Obelisk, I spoke with a mul named Yarnak who worked as the Master of the Guards. He didn’t like what he had heard about the beetles and was willing to help me. He knows where the beetles are supplied from. He told me that he could be contacted at the *Sandtigers Tail* in Balic.

Aljara turns to gaze out over the windswept dunes. “As an Amketch agent, I have much work ahead to repair the Red Obelisk post. But I also think it’s important to track down and destroy the beetle source. I’ll go with you to Balic, if you want me to join you.

Thirty-two:  
Balic



## Thirty-three: Veiled Alliance Report



Maserak glances about at the mention of the Yarnak's name, and lowers his head in a conspiratorial fashion. "I think we may be able to arrange a meeting," he says quietly. "Yarnak is a marked man. Several days ago, he defected from House Shom and went into hiding. The Shom agents have been combing the city looking for him. They've even hired wizards and mindbenders to locate him. He has been trying to get in contact with those who wear the Veil but we believed that he might be an infiltrator. Your information may clear him."

Maserak excuses himself and goes to speak quietly with a woman behind the bar of the tavern. He is gone for several minutes. When he returns, he nods. "Be at the *Sandtigers Tail* tomorrow at noon. At the bar, ask for a jug of Tyrian wine. They'll take you to see Yarnak."

## Thirty-four: Marius Amketch



Amketch studies you silently for a moment, scowling. "I should have guessed you had an ulterior motive for hiring on with me. I'm not so stupid that I can't recognize rogues and wanderers when I see them." He turns and motions to his bodyguards, who nod and leave the garden. In a moment you are alone with Marius.

"You know that I am engaged in a trade war with House Shom. You've seen that with your own eyes over the last week or two. As matters stand, I'm losing. Shom is far larger and stronger than my house, and I cannot defend myself for much longer. I need to do something to get their attention, find some way to hurt them. You may have provided me with a weakness I can exploit."

"If you can shut down the beetle trade, Shom will lose a very profitable enterprise. It won't be worth their while to compete with me in this area any longer. I will make sure that your efforts are rewarded. For now, you may call on the assistance of any Amketch holding when you need it. Any equipment you need is yours."

Marius steps over to his desk and picks up a heavy ledger. While you watch, he opens a secret compartment in the book's leather cover and removes a small slip of paper. "There is one more way that I can help you. I was recently contacted by a Shom agent who wishes to leave his house. My people have him in hiding in town. He is a mul named Yarnak, and he worked with Shom in the beetle trade. He may have information you can use. He is staying at the *Sandtiger's Tail* in the city. I can arrange a meeting, if you wish."

## Thirty-five: Informant



Yarnak is a tough, weathered mul with circular tattoos on his hairless scalp. Scars crisscross his blunt visage. He eyes you with open suspicion as you approach and seat yourselves. You notice that a loaded and cocked crossbow is hidden behind a chair with a cloak thrown carelessly over it. "You've endangered my life by insisting on this meeting strangers," he growls "Let's make this quick."

"I've been told by some mutual friends that you want to know more about the beetle trade. Very well—I can help you. You've all seen Shom's emporium in this city. Its the large trading compound on the Silt Road, a small fortress really. Hundreds of men guard it. But it won't do you any good to look there. The senior agents know that most people don't care for their price-less beetles and they pretend that they have nothing to do with trading parasites."

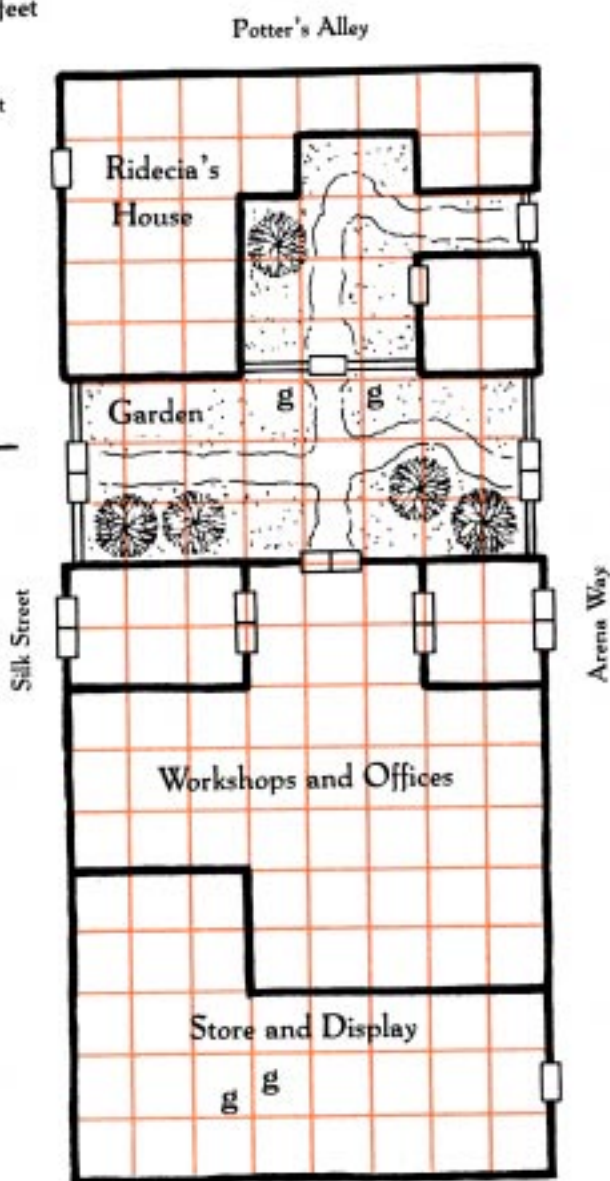
Leaning forward, Yarnak smiles cruelly. "Shom maintains a secret warehouse in the Merchant District. It's beneath the workshops and store of Ridecia, the trader of pottery and glassware. Ridecia runs his business as a front to hide the Shom operations there—he's really the senior agent in charge of the entire operation here in Balic. You'll want to be careful; the place is well-guarded. I can't tell you anything more than that."

Standing up, Yarnak drains his mug and wraps his cloak around himself.

# Thirty-six: Ridecia's House

1 square = 10 feet

-  Door  
 Guard Post



## Thirty-seven: Shom Correspondence



Selected journal entries:

...Received 600 sp in return for delivery of 100 beetles by the 65th day of the Year...

...Cieracan, Templar in charge of the 6th district and Chief of District Investigations, was gifted with 30 beetles in return for considerations...

...I find it necessary to journey to Fort Melidor to examine the latest generation of beetles. Problems may have arisen with the bonding process and Shasares is uncertain of how to proceed...

...An anonymous buyer placed an order for 300 beetles in Nibenay. Our representative there believes the buyer may be a front for the Shadow King. We will have to double our usual shipment from Melidor to meet this unusually large order...

...Received news that Fort Melidor was raided by a band of elven warriors, but managed to fight off the attack. Fortunately, our shaqat beetles were not compromised by the raid and no serious damage was done. We should receive the next beetle shipment as usual, although the caravan guard will be doubled...

Thirty-eight:  
Assassins





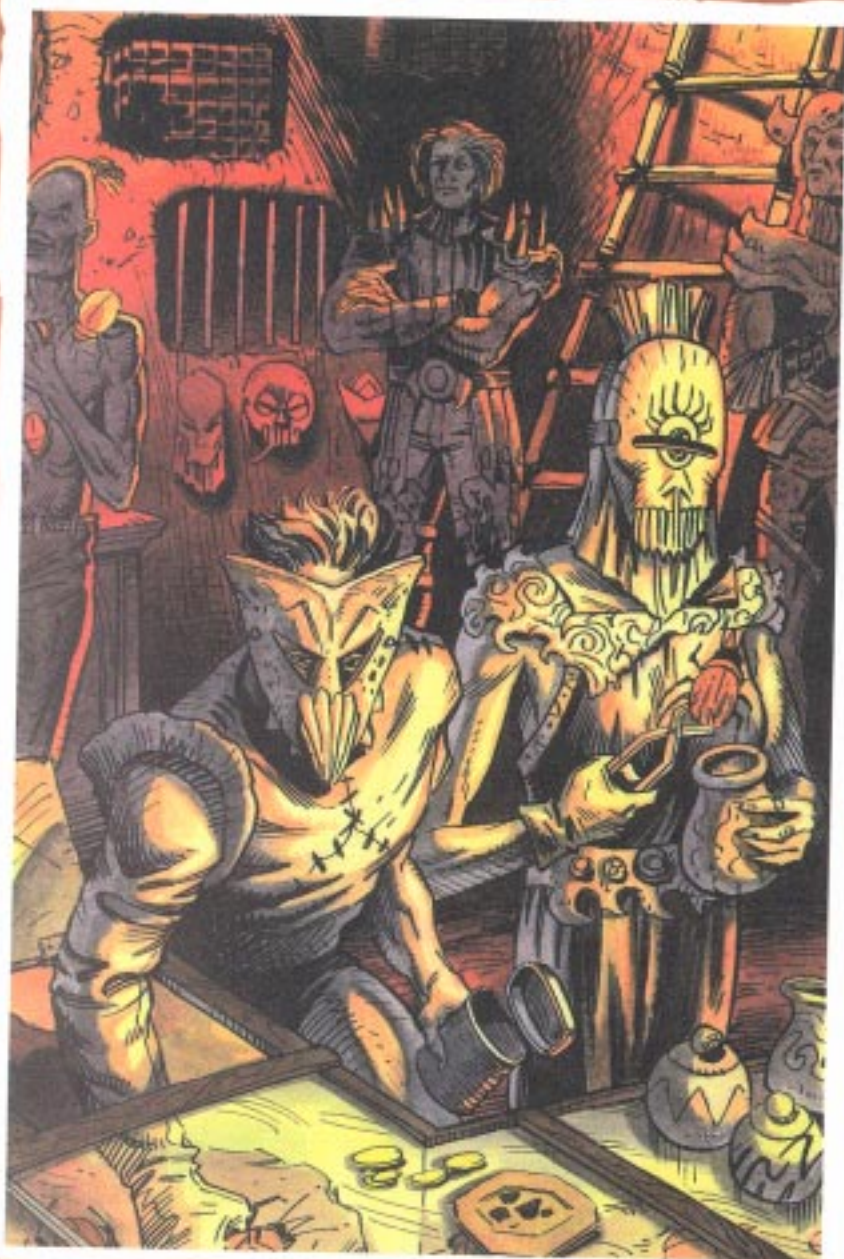
## Thirty-nine: Templars



Your hearts sink as you realize that a templar patrol is heading directly for you. Glancing around for an avenue of escape, you find none—the templars waited until you were in a narrow portion of the street and surrounded you. Half a dozen of the dictator’s servants and two hulking half-giants approach cautiously.

A senior templar at the head of the patrol steps forward, scrutinizing you for a moment. She is a lean, muscular woman with the look of a starving wolf. Frowning, she speaks. “Stug Two-Blades? Ka’Cha? Shayira? I have been directed to take you into custody for the attempted murders of several citizens. You are wanted for questioning and may consider yourself under arrest. Drop your weapons and surrender, or we will use whatever force is necessary to bring you in.”

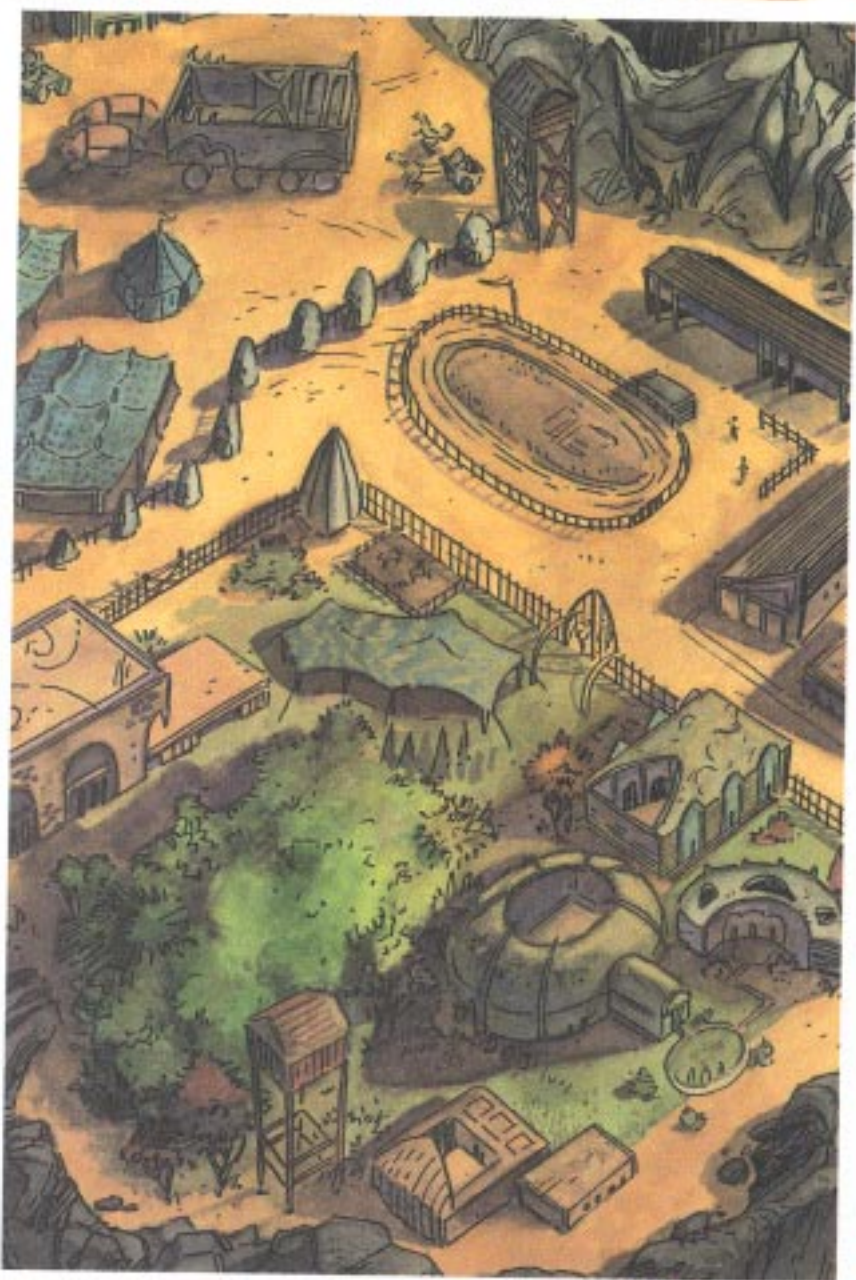
Forty:  
The Secret Warehouse



Forty-one:  
Mothgar



Forty-Two:  
Fort Melidor



## Forty-Three: Shom Warriors



As you watch the fort, you notice a plume of dust to the south. Crouching behind some thorny brush, you wait and watch. Eventually the dust plume approaches, revealing a large party of Shom warriors. You count about thirty of the soldiers, marching in precise rank. In the center of their column, ten of the warriors carry odd caravan boxes slung from shoulder-held poles. A brawny mul with a gleaming vest of steel mail leads the small company into the gates of the fort.

Your elevation allows you to see over the fortifications, and you continue to watch. The company marches through the lower compound of the fort and into the Shom barracks and warehouses. The porters carefully lower their burdens, and a number of Shom agents swarm around the boxes, carrying them into a plain warehouse.

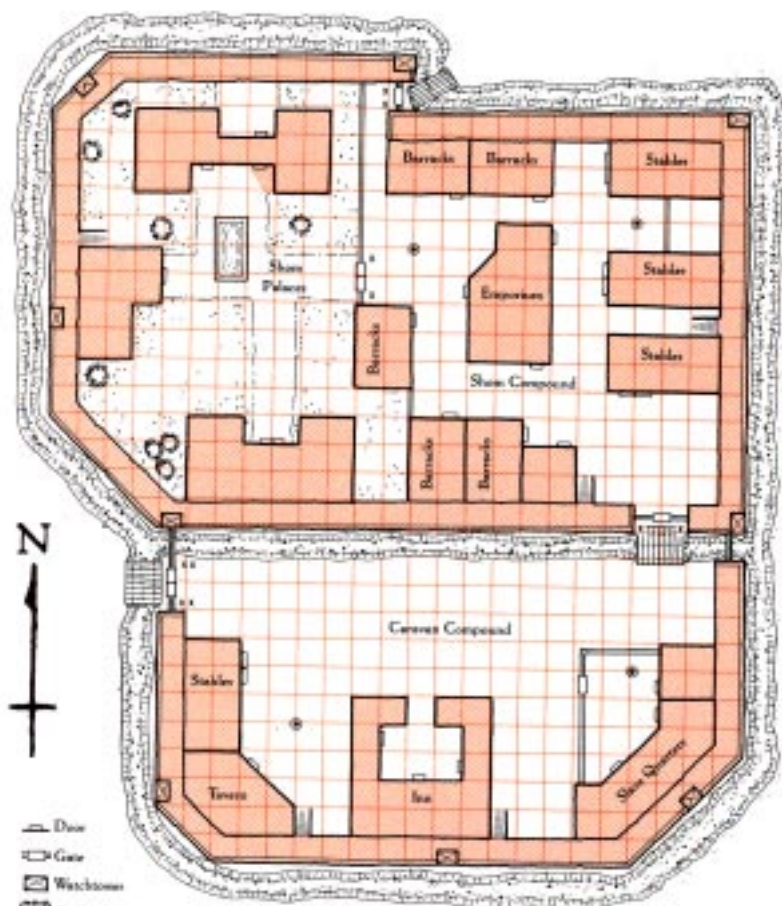
After a short time, 10 kanks carrying sealed urns and other cargo are led out from the same warehouse. A caravan is quickly organized as a small party of elves appear and take possession of the kanks. The elves lead the kanks out of the fort and turn east, setting off at a rapid pace.

The company of Shom warriors remains in the merchant compound for about an hour, resting and watering, and then they fall into ranks and march out of the fort again. They head back the same way they came, slowly disappearing into the dust and haze of the deserts to the south.

Do you want to follow the elves, the soldiers, or enter the fort?

# Forty-Four: Fort Melidor

1 square = 10 feet



- ⌵ Door
- ⏏ Gate
- ⊠ Watchtower
- ⌵ Bridge
- ⊙ Well
- ⊙ Garden
- ⊠ Ditch
- X Guard

Forty-Five:  
Kalidnay

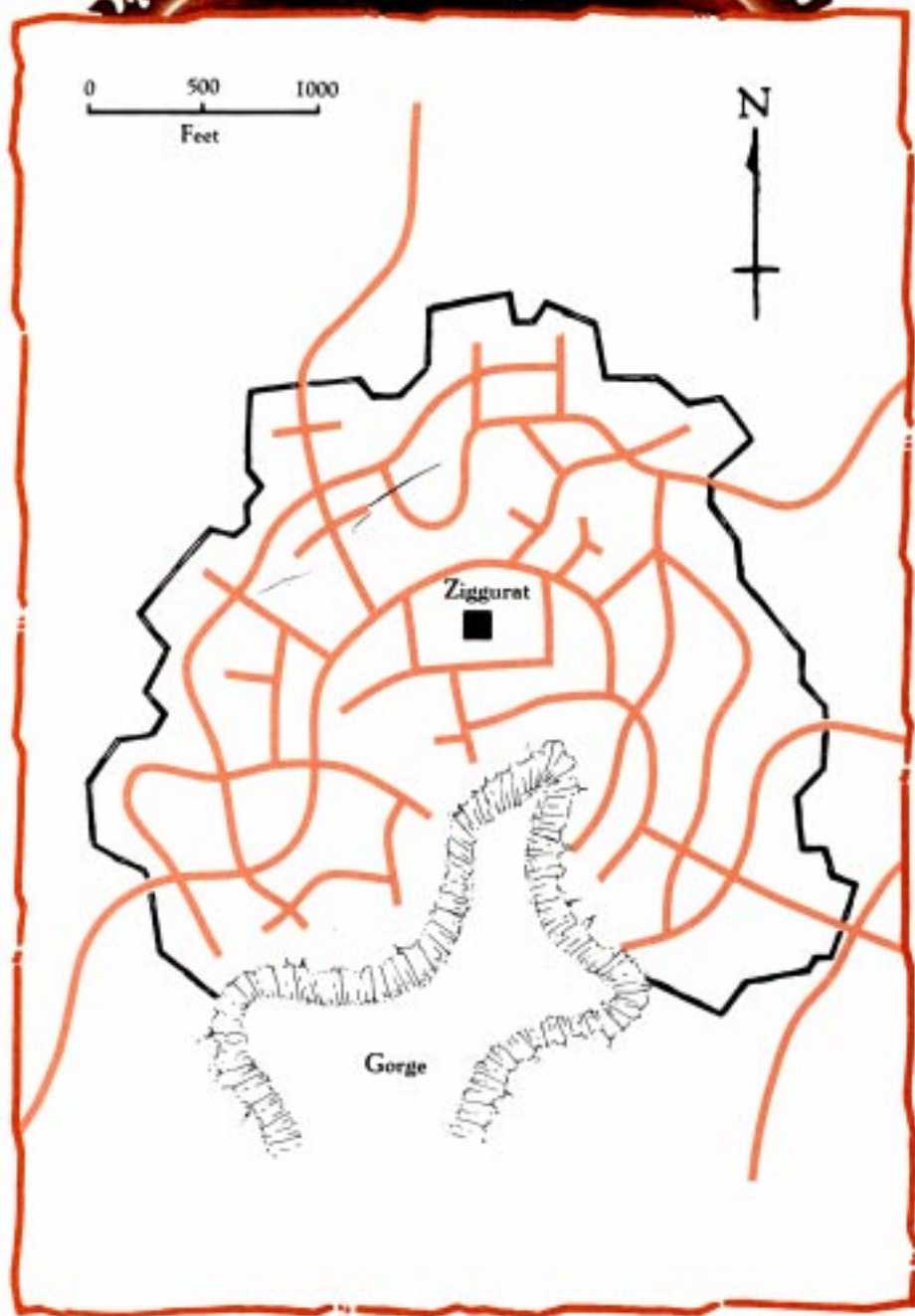
0 500 1000  
Feet



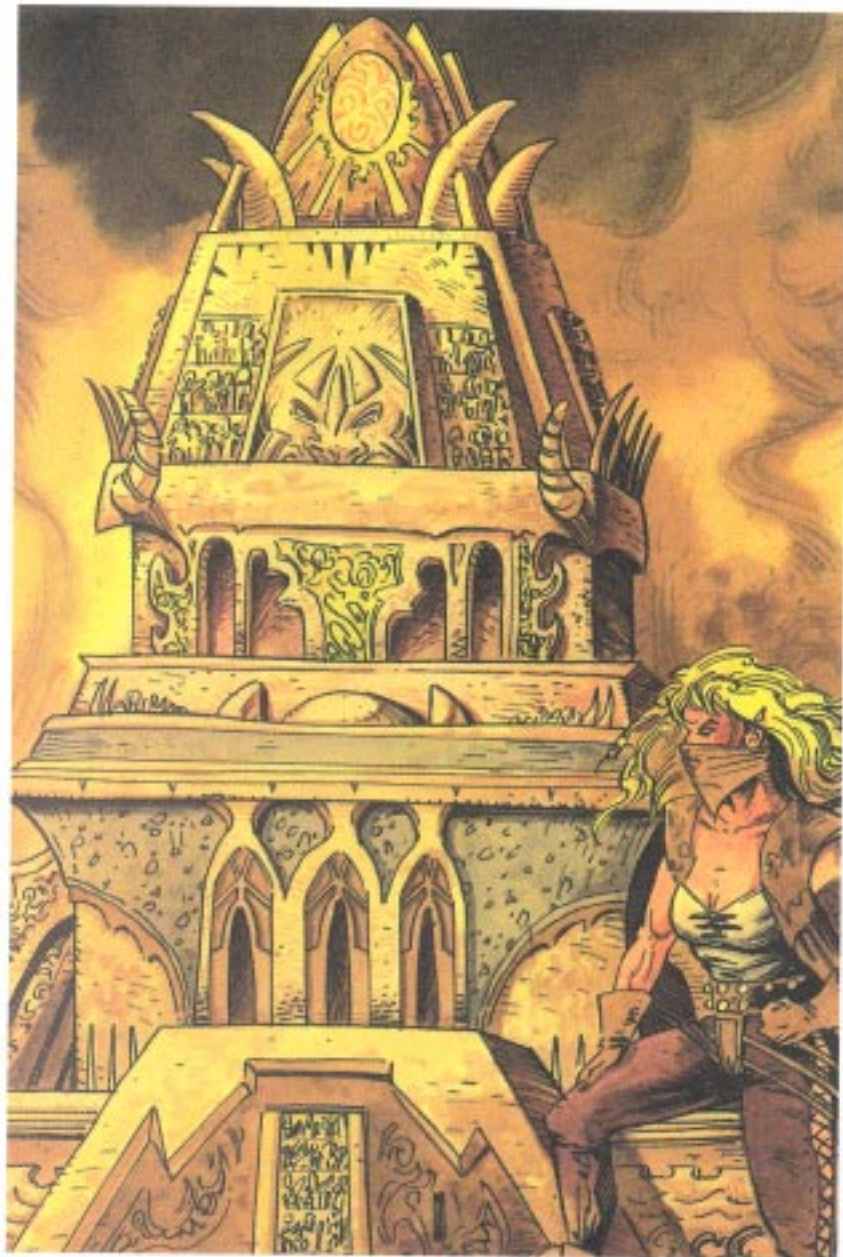
Ziggurat



Gorge



Forty-Six:  
The Ziggurat





## Forty-Seven: The Ziggurat



The room before you is a large chamber in the center of the ziggurat. Cages full of shaqat beetles line the walls. A number of guards vigilantly watch the room. In the middle of the room, half a dozen Shom agents are at work on a great table. Crouching in the shadows, you watch them perform some strange operation.

Two agents operate a simple apparatus contained within a glass box. The center of the apparatus is a large cylinder of ancient, rune-carved metal. The agents pass shaqat beetles into the box, position them beneath the cylinder, operate the device, and then remove the beetles carefully and place them in a new cage. It takes about 10 minutes for each beetle to undergo the process. You notice that one wall of this chamber holds about fifteen additional metal cylinders, and that there are three empty spaces on the wall which probably held similar containers.

Supervising the whole operation is Tethrades, the defiler who assisted the Shom warriors in the attack on the Amketch caravan. The wizard constantly checks and rechecks the glass box surrounding the canister. It appears that you have not been detected yet.

Forty-Eight:  
Tethrades







# DARK • SUN

W O R L D



DUNGEON MASTER™ Book



## Merchant House of Amketch

A DARK SUN® Campaign Adventure

## DUNGEON MASTER™ Book

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## Part One: Starting the Adventure

*Merchant House of Amketch* is the second flip-book module in the *Black Flames* module series. You can play this adventure as part of the series, or you can play it as a stand-alone adventure. *Merchant House of Amketch* is designed for four to six player characters of levels 4 through 7. The player characters are approached by the Veiled Alliance and asked to help put an end to the illegal trade of shaqat beetles, rare parasites used by unscrupulous templars and slavers to control people with psionic powers. The heroes soon find themselves entangled in a web of deceit, treachery, and violence as they experience first-hand the trade wars of Athas.

**Materials Needed to Play.** In addition to this module, you will need the AD&D® 2nd Edition rulebooks, the DARK SUN® boxed set, *The Complete Psionics Handbook*, and MC 12, the DARK SUN *Monstrous Compendium™ Appendix*.

The DARK SUN accessory *Dune Trader* is a useful complement to this adventure. *Dune Trader* describes many of the methods and personalities of the great merchant houses of Athas. While the house of Amketch has been invented for this adventure, the house of Shom is described in great detail in *Dune Trader*.

You may also want to read the Prism Pentad novel series, which is set in the DARK SUN game world. The events of *Merchant House of Amketch* are independent of the novels' events, but the books are an enjoyable introduction to the world of Athas.

**Preparing for Play.** Decide whether you will use the pregenerated characters in the *Player's Book* or have the players use their own characters. If you played *Black Flames*, you will recognize some of these pregenerated characters. They have gained a level or two to reflect the experience from the previous adventure. Optionally, you can use the pregenerated characters to replace characters who died in *Black Flames* or as extra NPC villains for the players to encounter. It's easiest to simply remove pages 19-24 of the *Player's Book* and hand out the pages to the players.

Make sure that each player understands all the information on the character sheet. If you are unused to playing with psionics, it is also a good idea to take a few minutes to review some of the basics of psionics with your players.

**The Setting.** The events of *Merchant House of Amketch* all take place in the south-central area of the Tyr region, from the city of Balic to the ruined city of Kalidnay. However this is not necessarily where the adventure has to be. If you don't mind doing a little map work, you can change the setting of the adventure while keeping the plot and sequence of events intact.

For example, your players may be familiar with Urik from the *Road to Urik* and *Arcane Shadows* flip-book adventures. You can change the starting point to Urik and run the Amketch caravan to Raam or Altaruk. All you need do is place the climax of the adventure in the ruined city of Yaramuke and adjust a couple of maps, and you're ready to go.

**Getting Started.** The next page, **How to Use this Booklet**, describes the flip-book format and encounter organization. On page 4 you will find the **Overview of the Adventure**, which summarizes the plot line. The adventure begins with the encounter **Heroes of the Veiled Alliance** on page 5.

## Part One: How to Use this Booklet

The DARK SUN® flip-book adventure organization is unusual and can be confusing at first. *Merchant House of Amketch* is an event-driven adventure; depending on which actions the players take at different times, they could end up playing through one of several possible storylines. Monsters and NPCs do not wait for the characters to find them, and the story does not unfold in a set A-B-C pattern. Of course, some events will occur no matter what the players do.

You will find that this is a very challenging adventure to referee. While we have tried to design *Merchant House of Amketch* to include all reasonable courses of action that the players may take, it is possible for your players to “go off the map,” in a manner of speaking. It is important that you avoid trying to force them back on track. If they’re wasting time, let them waste time—they’ll eventually realize that they are off track. If your players have had a flash of insight and are pursuing a valid lead, then make the effort to work their deviation into the module’s storyline.

**Customizing this Adventure for Your Group:** You should feel free to design your own encounters to work into the plot. If there is a monster you want your characters to meet, find a good place to introduce it. Check through your stable of NPCs and see if there are any old friends or old enemies due to make an appearance. If you played the *Black Flames* adventure, the heroes may have special NPCs they wish to keep in contact with. Let them! A valued NPC adviser is a great way for you to get the players hooked into this adventure.

However, you should be careful not to make your additions or deletions too extensive. You don’t want your players to become completely sidetracked.

**Adventure Organization:** *Merchant House of Amketch* consists of a number of short, linked encounters. It is a good idea to read the *DM™ Book* cover to cover before you start play. Many of the encounters in the *DM Book* are keyed to illustrations, maps, or scenes in the *Player’s Book*.

The information you need for each encounter is organized into several sections.

**Setup** briefly describes the encounter and lists materials or extra preparations you may need. *Player’s Book* references will be found here.

**Start** sets the scene for the encounter, frequently with a passage you can read to your players.

**Encounter** is the heart of the event, describing the general course of action.

**Role-playing** provides notes on the behavior and attitudes of major NPCs.

**Dialogue** that can serve as starting points for role-playing encounters is often included in this section.

**Reactions** describes how the NPCs may respond to the player characters’ actions during this encounter.

**Statistics** lists information on NPCs or monsters or tells you where to find the numbers. Special note: several major NPCs are described in detail in the 16-page story booklet included in this folder.

**Next** tells you which encounter follows this one. In some cases, you are provided with a number of choices.

You will find that no random monster or wandering monster encounters are included in *Merchant House of Amketch*. As noted above, you should include these wherever you feel they are appropriate. The DARK SUN *Monstrous Compendium™ Appendix* contains the appropriate tables. Finally, the *Background Book* contains some additional pages that detail useful NPCs for this adventure.

## Part One: Overview of the Adventure

Few things in the world of Athas are considered too dangerous to openly trade in. Even the most honest dune traders occasionally carry contraband, risking heavy fines or imprisonment for the high profits of illicit trade. Now, a new kind of contraband trade has arisen: the trade of shaqat beetles. Each beetle is worth five silver pieces—or even more—in the elven markets of the Tyr region.

At first glance, shaqat beetles are unremarkable little creatures. They are parasites, clinging to animal hosts with powerful claws while they live on their host's blood. The beetles would be nothing more than a nuisance except for the strange effect they have on psionics. Any human or demihuman bitten by a shaqat beetle suffers from some strange disorder that makes the use of psionics extremely difficult. The beetles have been turning up in the hands of slavers, assassins, and templars all over the area—their unusual psionic-draining properties make them very useful for subduing and controlling people who rely on the Way.

The adventure begins as the player characters are contacted by the Veiled Alliance of the city of Balic. The Veiled Alliance desperately wants to find out where the beetles are coming from and how they can put an end to the illicit trade. The Veiled Alliance has observed the influx of beetles into the black markets, and managed to correlate the beetles' appearances with the arrivals of caravans of the house of Amketch. The heroes can help solve the puzzle by infiltrating the Amketch caravans.

Merchant houses are always looking for capable guards and outriders, and the PCs will have little trouble in joining an Amketch caravan. A few discreet inquiries and a little exploration turn up a secret cache of smuggled beetles aboard the caravan wagon. The master of the caravan, a human trader named Bezrak Sandfist, insists that he had no knowledge of the smuggled beetles. Unfortunately, he is the smuggler, and when the caravan arrives at the Red Obelisk oasis, Bezrak betrays the heroes and sells them into slavery.

Bezrak is actually in the pay of the merchant house of Shom, a powerful and decadent house based in Nibenay. The heroes learn that he is one of the masterminds behind the smuggling operation, as well as a traitor to House Amketch. With a little luck, the heroes soon escape their incarceration, and set out in pursuit.

The trail leads back into Balic, there the PCs find that the beetles were loaded on to the caravan by Shom agents working out of the Shom emporium in the city. The emporium is well-defended, and the Shom agents are after the heroes for interfering in the beetle trade. One more piece of the puzzle is hidden within the emporium: evidence that the beetles were shipped from the western outpost of Fort Melidor. There is no other supply source for the shaqat beetles.

Again, the player characters journey across the desert. At Fort Melidor, they find that the beetles were somehow altered or changed with the aid of an ancient magic in the ruined city of Kalidnay. In their natural state, they are virtually harmless. The final answer of the mystery lies in the ruins of Kalidnay, south of the fort.

The armories of the vanished sorcerer-king of Kalidnay contain a biological weapon of Athas's earlier days—cerebral parasites, creatures previously unknown in the DARK SUN® game world. In the ruins of Kalidnay, the creatures are bonded to the shaqat beetles. Of course, the secret operation in the ruins of the empty city is well-guarded by the warriors of House Shom. The player characters will need all of their courage and resourcefulness to put an end to the trade in parasites.

To start the adventure, go to **Heroes of the Veiled Alliance** on the next page.



## Part One: Heroes of the Veiled Alliance

**Setup.** In this section, the heroes are contacted by the Veiled Alliance of Balic and asked to investigate the beetle trade. Have the players turn to page 2 of the *Player's Book*, **The Veiled Alliance**.

**Start.** Read the text in the *Player's Book* entry to start this encounter. The Veiled Alliance summons is only one method of several that you can use to get your players into the adventure. If the party has had no dealings with the Veiled Alliance, you can have Marius Amketch contact them instead. Other options: templar PCs might be ordered by a superior to break up the smuggling ring by infiltrating House Amketch; psionist PCs may be asked by a mentor to investigate the beetle trade; or very desperate PCs may back into the adventure by simply looking for work and hiring on to the Amketch caravan.

If the party has never visited Balic, you should also think up a reason why they are there. The PCs may have acted as couriers from Tyr's Veiled Alliance to Balic's, or they may have hired on as miscellaneous caravan guards. Parties who survived the *Black Flames* adventure may be on the run from the forces of the sorcerer-queen of Raam, Abalach-Re.

**Encounter.** However the characters get involved, your goal in this encounter is to present the players with a clear set of instructions in the voice of an NPC they respect. This first encounter is written with the assumption that at least one of the PCs belongs to or has worked with the Veiled Alliance—but it would work just fine if Maserak were a senior templar, respected mentor, or an agent of Marius Amketch asking the heroes to meet with him.

**Role-Playing.** Maserak is a very intelligent, thoughtful half-elf with a serious manner. He goes to great lengths to keep the meeting secret, and wants the heroes' help badly. He is willing to offer them a significant amount of silver plus one or two minor magical items in exchange for their service, but will initially try appealing to their sense of duty.

**Reactions.** Most players should recognize the adventure hook and agree to sign on with an Amketch caravan. However, players can be unpredictable. They may decide to try to learn more about House Amketch before signing on, or even try storming the Amketch emporium in Balic looking for answers. On the next page you will find a brief description of the house, its assets, and its guards.

Note that signing on with an Amketch caravan will be difficult after storming their warehouse and offices. If your players insist on doing things the hard way, you may want to try capturing them and placing them in the caravan wagon as slaves. Balic's templars and any mercenaries Amketch can hire would be more than happy to go after the PCs. You could then continue the adventure in Part Three.

**Outcome.** The heroes should arrive at an agreement with Maserak to investigate the beetle trade. Maserak will point them toward Bezrak's caravan in the next encounter.

**Next.** Turn to Hiring On. Refer to House Amketch if the players decide to do any checking up on their PCs' prospective employers.

## Part One: Hiring On

**Setup.** The heroes hire on with a caravan of House Amketch in this encounter. Have your players turn to page 3 of the *Player's Book*, **Hiring On**.

**Start.** Run this encounter whenever the PCs decide to hire on with House Amketch. The PCs may have followed Maserak's request without hesitation, or they may have investigated the house on their own. Either way, they should come to the conclusion that the next step is to join the caravan. Read the text in the *Player's Book* to start the encounter.

**Encounter.** Marius Amketch is looking for a few good men, and the PCs are just the answer to his troubles. He is an experienced trader, and he can tell at a glance that the heroes are a cut above the usual caravan guard. Marius is willing to pay as much as 2 sp per day for the PCs' services, plus a 10% cut of the caravan's profits.

Marius knows that he has a trade war brewing with House Shom and expects trouble on this trip. He asks the PCs to watch for signs of sabotage or possible attempts to bribe or subvert Amketch employees. When he has struck a good deal with the adventurers, Marius tells the heroes to return at sunrise the next day and report to Bezzrak, ready to travel.

Your goal in this encounter is to make sure that the PCs decide that it is in their own best interest to join the caravan and hire on as guards. However, you should not force the PCs to do this—there are other alternatives that would work, too. Wealthy characters may insist on traveling as passengers to avoid guard duty and assure themselves of good treatment. Others may want to travel as a separate party, shadowing the caravan, or they may even prefer to attempt to stow away.

If for some reason your players refuse to cooperate, you'll want to get the adventure back on track. You could have House Shom agents attack and capture the PCs, selling them to the Amketch caravan as slaves.

**Role-playing.** Marius Amketch is a confident, self-made man. He is extremely intelligent and has a knack for reading people. As owner and operator of his own small trading house, he comes across as a busy but forthright man. During the interview, his employees occasionally interrupt to ask him questions or bring him reports. A pair of tattooed muls silently guard Marius at all times.

**Dialogue.** "I'm not looking for brainless automatons to guard my caravans. I need tough, smart people who can think on their feet. Danger might come from any quarter and I need to know if I can count on you."

**Statistics.** Marius is described in the *Background Book*. His bodyguards are found on the Master NPC Table under Elite Mul Guards. If the PCs decided to pick a fight here, there are 1d4+2 elite mul guards and 3d6+6 house employees within earshot.

**Outcome.** The heroes should be hired by Marius and informed of where and when to report for duty. Marius will also inform the PCs that a trade war is brewing.

**Next.** Turn to Part Two, **The Caravan**, on page 8.

## Part One: The Merchant House of Amketch

This page provides background information for the Dungeon Master. Some players may insist on checking out House Amketch by asking around town or by spying on their operations.

**History.** House Amketch was founded eight years ago by the human trader Marius Amketch. Marius was an employee of House Inika, and served skillfully and loyally. He also was an adventurer of some note, and rumors persist that the capital he started his business with was recovered from some ancient ruin in the Tablelands. Marius speaks little of his days with Inika or any adventures he may have had.

Early in Amketch's history Marius was hard-pressed by House Inika and House Shom. Inika was angry with him for leaving to start his own house, and set up competitive routes against him. House Shom also tried to keep Amketch weak and small. Fortunately, Marius struck a deal with House Wavir and convinced the merchant house of the city of Balic to finance him in a masterful venture where he cornered the market on grain for a brief time. Inika and Shom both took heavy losses and backed off, while Marius returned Wavir's investment with interest.

Since that time, Inika has let its rivalry drop and Wavir has been a staunch supporter and ally. Marius is careful to stay on Wavir's good side, and often rents space on his caravans to the larger house at excellent rates. However, House Shom never forgave Amketch, and has been an enemy ever since.

**Routes.** Amketch is still a small house. Marius owns two armored caravan wagons and several dozen smaller animals. He is an opportunist and has avoided establishing regular routes in favor of responding to immediate market demands—something of a weakness. However, Amketch does regularly transport grain from Balic to Altaruk, and returns to carry copper from South Ledopolus to Balic. Livestock, particularly kanks, and livestock products such as chitin, honey and leather, are often herded to Altaruk for trade in the markets of that town.

**Assets.** The major base for House Amketch is on the outskirts of Balic. Small trading posts are also maintained in South Ledopolus and Altaruk. Marius runs two major caravans at a time, each centered around a mekillot-drawn argosy. He often runs smaller caravans of 15 or 20 pack-kanks in addition to his major ventures.

The Balic post consists of four large warehouses, offices, barracks, and livestock enclosures. House Amketch employs 15 to 20 agents, a dozen or so animal handlers, about 20 guards, and 20 to 30 slaves at the Balic post. Marius is relatively enlightened and insists on treating his slaves well and giving them some responsibility. These numbers can double or even triple when one of the major caravans passes through.

The smaller trading posts are staffed by about 10 employees, including animal handlers and guards. Statistics for animal handlers, guards, and agents appear on the Master NPC Table on the inside box cover.

**Defenses.** At least 10 guards are on watch at all times. When especially valuable materials are being kept in the Balic warehouses, Marius often hires on as many as 15 extra sellswords. Marius also employs Ushandra Kellt, a talented wizard, to assist in household security matters. Ushandra is described in the *Background Book*.

## Part Two: Encounter Summary

In Part Two of this adventure, the player characters journey from Balic to the oasis of the Red Obelisk as members of the Amketch caravan. The heroes may try to search the caravan or draw various people aside to question them. Run the encounters in the order the players decide—don't hold them to a rigid order. Handle the players' efforts when they occur, and use the encounters presented here as events to punctuate the journey. In particular, run **Smuggler's Cache** whenever the heroes find the time to search the wagon.

**The Caravan.** The next two pages describe the caravan, its contents, and its guards and personnel. On page 10 you'll find a diagram of the caravan's customary marching order, as well as a map of the interior of the great mekilloth-drawn argosy. In **The Departure**, the heroes report for duty and meet Bezrak Sandfist, Master of the Caravan. Observant players may also notice Bezrak's handling of a templar "customs inspection." The **Guard Duty** encounter introduces the PCs to Holtet Phen, the powerful half-giant who acts as Bezrak's guard captain. The heroes have probably arranged to be hired as guards, and will be required to pull guard duty if they want to maintain any semblance of a cover.

**Camp Tales** can be run any time the heroes try to question one of their fellow caravan employees. The various NPCs of the caravan and any information they may be privy to is noted here—as well as the information's price. **Smuggler's Cache** can be run when the heroes search the wagon. Dozens of shaqat beetles are cleverly hidden aboard the argosy. The heroes' explorations will not go unnoticed, and Bezrak confronts the PCs. He claims to know nothing about the beetles, but will overlook the PCs' "indiscretion" for a small gratuity. The **Shaqat Beetle** page is an abbreviated *Monstrous Compendium*<sup>™</sup>-style entry describing the psionic parasites.

In **Trade Stop**, Bezrak reports to House Shom on the progress of his caravan. He also makes arrangements to sell off the Amketch caravan and to betray the PCs. Of course, smart PCs may be able to catch wind of Bezrak's plots. The **Gith Raid** occurs after Shom agents contact a tribe of gith and hire them to sack the Amketch caravan. Of course, no one has counted on the PCs...

At the end of Part Two, the caravan is **Sold Out**. Arriving in Red Obelisk, Bezrak drugs the guards and personnel of the caravan and delivers the argosy and its contents to the Shom agents. The heroes will probably be captured and sold into slavery at the hands of the Shom agents. The adventurers finish Part Two as captives of the treacherous caravan master.

**Following the Script.** Fortunately, players are not a predictable bunch. They will do their best to upset your best-laid plans, usually without even realizing it. This adventure is designed to be flexible, and you should feel free to abandon any portion of it that you need to. For example, the PCs may never make a thorough search of the wagon before it is sold off by Bezrak. If that happens, skip the **Smuggler's Cache** encounter. The PCs will find some beetles in Part Three.

Some players may immediately identify Bezrak as a villain and try to beat answers out of him. Bezrak always has guards nearby, and is the absolute master of the caravan and its personnel. The PCs are far more likely to get themselves fired and left behind than they are to bring down Bezrak in his own caravan. If the heroes leave the caravan early, they can still complete the adventure by trailing the wagon to Red Obelisk or by returning to Balic and trying to determine how the beetles were placed in the caravan.

## Part Two: The Caravan

**Setup.** This is not a real encounter, but a description of the contents and personnel of the Amketch caravan. On the next page you will find a detailed map of the caravan. You can find a less-detailed diagram suitable for player reference on page 5 of the *Player's Book*, and an illustration on page 4.

**Composition.** The Amketch caravan centers around the colossal mekillot-drawn argosy. This fortress on wheels creeps along at a maddeningly slow rate, and carries tons of cargo. On occasion smaller pack-kanks or inix accompany the armored wagon, but this time the argosy is the only cargo carrier. It is drawn by two mekillots.

**Outriders.** The caravan's first and most important line of defense is the group of scouts and skirmishers who accompany the wagon. There are a total of 20 outriders mounted on kanks. They usually divide into three groups of six, with two officers remaining near the wagon to receive reports. Outriders are described in the NPC Master Table.

**Guards.** Twenty guards on foot accompany the wagon. One-third march outside, and the rest ride inside manning the various arrow slits and weapon platforms. The guards are described in the NPC Master Table.

**Cargo.** Over 100 50-pound sacks of grain are carried in the main bay of the wagon, as well as 20 bushels of oranges, 30 100-foot coils of giant-hair rope, six trunks containing 144 erdlu-claw daggers, two cases, each filled with 100 obsidian-headed arrows, 24 five-gallon casks of lamp oil, two 20-gallon casks of cheap wine, 600 pounds of cured kip leather, and 200 pounds of cured kank chitin.

The secure cargo area contains 20 bolts of spun silk, six steel shortswords, 16 2-ounce jars of rare spice, and 25 5-lb reams of rice paper. The secure cargo is locked and guarded at all times.

**Personnel.** The caravan is commanded by Bezrak Sandfist, the Master of the Caravan. He is described in the *Background Book* Beneath Bezrak is Holtet Phen, the half-giant commander of the guard contingent. Several other people of note are included in the caravan's personnel.

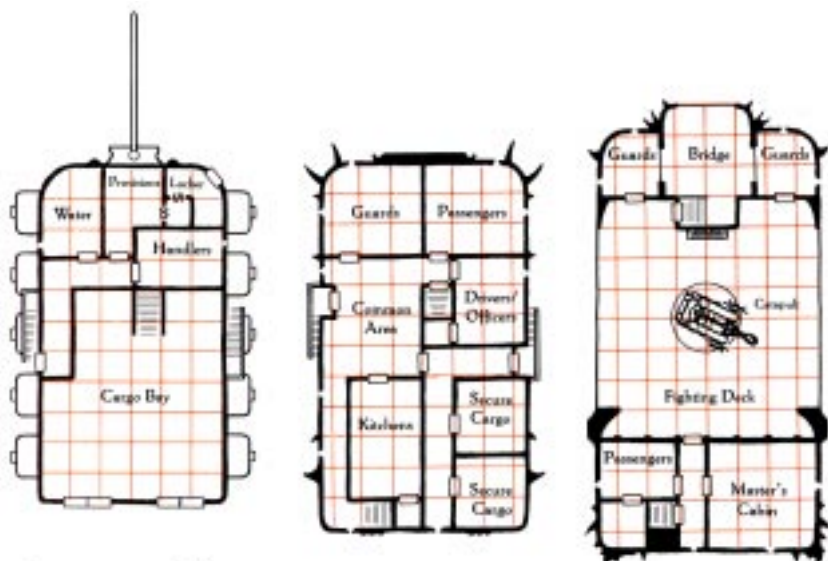
- Vashara the Old, a female dwarf is the caravan's Master Driver. Two junior drivers work beneath her, as well as five handlers. Vashara and the junior drivers stand watches on the bridge, mentally guiding the mekillots. The handlers feed and water the mekillots and the outriders' kanks.

- Kwen, an emaciated scarecrow of a man, runs the kitchen. He is the Master of Provisions, and monitors stocks of food and water. Kwen oversees five caravan slaves who cook, clean, and handle menial labor.

- Dalgra, a scarred mul, was once a formidable gladiator. Dalgra is the Master of Cargo, and supervises stowage and securing of all loads carried by the wagon. He supervises a crew of three slaves who maintain the wagon, greasing the axles, painting the sides, and performing small repairs as necessary

- Arrazo the Falcon, a proud and boastful half-elf is the Captain of Outriders. He flaunts his independent command, and constantly finds little ways to test Holtet Phen. Arrazo officially answers to Holtet, but believes the half-giant doesn't know the first thing about scouting or skirmishing. He constantly disregards Holtet's orders.

## Part Two: The Caravan



1 square = 5 feet

The Amketch caravan travels from before sunup to after sunset, halting in the heat of the day to rest. Each night, the argosy stops. The animals are fed and watered, a simple dinner is served, and the guardsmen establish a secure perimeter around the camp. One patrol of seven outriders sweeps the nearby area, and 10 guards stand watch at a time.

**Cargo Bay.** This large hold contains the bulk of the cargo. It is very full now.

**Handlers.** The animal handlers bunk here. Most prefer to sleep by the campfire.

**Water.** Twelve 50-gallon casks of water are kept here. Not counting the mekillots, the people and animals of the caravan consume about 100 gallons of water each day.

**Provisions.** Basic supplies of gram, salted meat, and fruit are kept here.

**Locker.** This small room contains materials for cleaning and repair, including tools, spare rope and leather, and harnesses. The secret door leads to the Smuggler's Cache.

**Common Area.** Several tables and benches are scattered in this open room. Caravan personnel and passengers usually dine here. It doubles as extra bunk space for guards.

**Kitchens.** Kwen is the lord of this area, and keeps hot stew and bread ready for the various shifts of guards going on or coming off duty.

**Secure Cargo.** These cabins are secured with iron locks and contain rare or valuable items.

**Drivers/Officers.** Dalgra, Vasharo and her two junior drivers, and Arrazo bunk here.

**Fighting Deck.** A light catapult is the centerpiece of the wagon's defenses. To either side of the bridge are armored fighting platforms.

**Bridge.** One driver is always on duty here, psionically directing the mekillots that draw the wagon. Bezrak can often be found here.

## Part Two: The Departure

**Setup.** Have the players turn to page 4 in the *Player's Book*. An illustration of the Amketch caravan appears here.

**Start.** If the PCs report for duty as requested, read the text below:

*You return to the Amketch post in the cool pre-dawn darkness. Dozens of lamps and torches burn in the courtyard, where the great argosy is being loaded and the caravan guards are mustering for duty. Animal handlers are leading the colossal mekillots to their traces, slaves are loading sacks of grain in the cavernous cargo bay, and carpenters are performing last-minute repairs to the wagon.*

*Off to one side, a towering half-giant consults a parchment and bellows. "Guards muster over here! Guards muster! Come on, you lazy renks!"*

**Encounter.** The half-giant is Holtet Phen, the commander of the caravan's guard contingent. He is described in the *Background Book*. When the player characters present themselves, he notes their arrival with a mark on his parchment. "About time," he grumbles. "Stay here. You'll be marching this morning and off this afternoon. Can any of you ride a kank?"

You may want to run **Guard Duty** and then return to this point.

*As the sun rises, the chaos of the scene rapidly diminishes. Almost before you know it, the doors of the caravan bays are winched closed and secured, you are mustered into a cordon of 10 guards on foot, and the kank-mounted outriders lead the way into the desert. One of your fellow guards points out the caravan master, a lean human trader named Bezrak. He glances over the wagon and the guards (including you) and gives the sign to move forward.*

*The first hour or so of your march is uneventful, as the spires and towers of Balic fade into the haze behind you. Then you are overtaken by a patrol of templars riding crodlus. The chief of the templars orders the wagon to halt, and asks to speak to the master. In a moment, Bezra appears and strides past you toward the templar. "You and you, come with me," he says, pointing to two of you. The chief templar dismounts. "Routine customs inspection," he says, his face flat and expressionless. Bezrak draws him aside.*

Ask the PCs if they want to attempt to eavesdrop, or if they want to stand their ground. If they eavesdrop, they overhear Bezrak bribing the templar not to inspect the wagon, and notice silver changing hands. If they choose not to eavesdrop, they miss the exchange, but a moment later Bezrak returns and orders the wagon to continue as the player characters rejoin the ranks.

If the PCs did eavesdrop, Bezrak growls, "Next time, I suggest you control your curiosity. Keep your nose out of my business and you'll still be employed when we return to Balic, guards."

**Role-playing.** The templars are imperious and arrogant. Bezrak is businesslike and somewhat annoyed—he had hoped to avoid paying a bribe before leaving. Holtet strikes the heroes as intelligent and short-tempered.

**Outcome.** The purpose of the encounter is to describe the departure of the caravan and clue the PCs in that Bezrak may not be their friend.

**Next.** Turn to **Guard Duty**, on page 12. If you have already run **Guard Duty**, run **Smuggler Cache** or **Camp Tales** as appropriate.

## Part Two: Guard Duty

**Setup.** Have the players turn to page 6 in the *Player's Book*, **Guard Duty**. The map shows the general formation of the caravan guards and outriders.

**Start.** You should run the first part of this encounter before the caravan leaves, as the guards are assigned their posts. Read the text below to the players.

*The half-giant towers above you, noting your names and studying your faces. "Good to have you with us," he grunts. It doesn't sound like he really means it. "I am Holtet Phen, and you work for me. I say jump, you ask how high. I catch you slacking off and I'll fire you on the spot, and I won't care how close the nearest oasis is. And if I get any attitudes from any of you, well..." The half-giant grins and flexes his fist. "I think you'll regret it. Just do what you're paid to do, and we'll get along fine."*

*Holtet kneels and shows you a crude charcoal sketch of the caravan, with marks for the locations of outriders and foot patrols. "We've got three patrols of outriders and three patrols of footmen. By day, two outrider patrols scout ahead while one rests, and one foot patrol keeps watch while the others rest in the wagon. At night, it's reversed. You all came in together, so I'll put you in one foot squad. You get to march this morning, rest in the afternoon, and stand the second watch in camp tonight. Any questions?"*

**Encounter.** The purpose of this encounter is to let the PCs know what their duties will be while they are working as caravan guards. Some characters may prefer to avoid serving as guards—for example, a character who wants to travel as a passenger with no assigned duties, or a bard who will earn her keep by entertaining everyone else with her campfire tales and singing. Don't force players to accept roles their characters would refuse, even if it means you have to be a little more creative in refereeing this adventure.

**The Journey.** The caravan wagon covers 18 miles per day on the road, and 9 miles per day in the deserts. At the end of the third day of travel, the caravan reaches Fort Glamis, a House Wavir outpost. The caravan spends the fourth day watering the mekillots and restocking supplies. On the fifth day, the caravan travels from Fort Glamis to South Ledopolus. The sixth, seventh, and eighth days are spent traveling to the oasis of Red Obelisk.

**PC Duties.** Any PCs serving as guardsmen are part of a patrol. Each patrol has a strength of six or seven guards, so if there are less than six PCs normal caravan guards will make up the balance of their patrol. The PCS' patrol spends half the day marching outside the wagon, half the day riding in the wagon, half the night standing watch, and half the night resting.

**Statistics.** Holtet Phen is described in the *Background Book*.

**Random Encounters.** As caravan guards, the heroes stand an excellent chance of having a random encounter during the course of their trip. No specific encounter charts are provided, but you may want to consult the DARK SUN® *Monstrous Compendium*™ or the DARK SUN *Rules Book* encounter tables. Be careful to keep the encounters small; you don't want to change the focus of the adventure.

**Next.** Return to The Departure or continue with **Camp Tales**.



## Part Two: Camp Tales

**Setup.** Turn to page 7 of the *Player's Book*, **Camp Tales**. It is possible that the PCs may not question any of their traveling companions. Do not give any of this information unless they talk to somebody. Skip past this to **Smuggler's Cache** or **Trade Stop** if you have to.

**Start.** Run this encounter any time the PCs decide to question their fellow travelers or listen in on the nightly campfire talk. Refer to the text in the *Player's Book* for general rumors and information.

**Bezrak.** The caravan master is smuggling the beetles and knows all about them. He also plans to betray the caravan to House Shom. Of course, he won't share any of this information with the PCs. If questioned by a common mercenary, Bezrak tends to be arrogant and brusque. He claims to know nothing of smuggling.

**Holtet Phen.** Holtet is completely loyal to Bezrak. He does not know of the smuggling, but does suspect that his master is up to something.

**Dalgra.** The mul knows of the cache, but has been silenced by Bezrak's silver. His knowledge of the cache's location can be bought by the PCs for 20 silver pieces.

**Kwen.** The master of provisions knows of the secret compartment, but does not know that it is currently occupied. He will freely tell the PCs how to find the compartment, but will also tell Bezrak that they were asking about smuggling.

**Arrazo.** The outrider has his own contacts in House Shom and expects the caravan to be betrayed. He has arranged for his own safety in such an event. Arrazo plans to blackmail Bezrak, but knows nothing of the beetles or smuggling. If approached in secret, Arrazo will offer the PCs the chance to be his "friends," selling them protection against the betrayal for 20 silver pieces each. Unfortunately, Arrazo will anger Bezrak by his demand for money, and Bezrak has more powerful friends in Shom than does the half-elf. Arrazo will be killed by the Shom people, and his friends will receive no protection at all.

**Vashara.** The dwarven driver knows of the beetle trade and can explain the exact effects of the shaqat beetles on psionics. She suspects Bezrak is involved, and does not hesitate to express her dislike of the master, but cannot prove anything.

**Ekargga.** A stout, stooped woman of middle years, Ekargga is one of the menial slaves who works for Kwen. The heroes see her occasionally, serving a meal or cleaning some part of the wagon. She can tell the heroes that Bezrak is not honest, and can show them the beetle compartment. Her price is high: freedom. Ekargga can be bought from Kwen for 10 silver pieces.

**Anyone else.** Most other people have no information of value. They have all heard of smugglers, but very few have ever heard of shaqat beetles, and none suspect that there are some on the caravan.

**Next.** Return to the encounter sequence as appropriate.

## Part Two Smuggler's Cache

**Setup.** The beetles are illustrated on page 8 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** Run this encounter when the PCs discover the secret compartment on the argosy's lower deck. This encounter is important to the adventure, and you should steer the players in this direction if they are having a hard time. They may not realize that their guard schedules leave them time to snoop around, or even that they should be searching for smuggled goods.

If your players are stymied, Dalgra might approach the heroes and offer to sell them information. Arrazo might approach the PCs with his offer of "friendship." As a last resort, the slave Ekargga could secretly approach the heroes and volunteer information to get them on the right track.

The smuggler's hold is a secret compartment between the provisions storeroom and the locker. Thorough searches of either of these areas reveal sliding panels in the walls that lead to the compartment.

*The panel slides aside, revealing a hidden compartment! Inside, you can make out the dim shapes of wicker cages or baskets carefully stacked. You notice a strange clicking sound. Opening the door further, you see that the cages are full of small, orange beetles, clicking and humming to each other!*

*You hear a sound behind you and whirl to find Bezrak Sandfist standing in the doorway, Holtet hulking behind him. Several other guards stand behind the master. "Well, it seems that we've discovered our smugglers," Bezrak growls. "Tell me why I shouldn't leave your beetles to die in the sun. How much are they worth to you?"*

**Encounter.** Bezrak is the smuggler, but he wants to put the heroes on the defensive and convince them that he knows nothing of the beetles. The tactic he uses is fairly simple—he pretends that he believes the heroes are the smugglers, and demands money to keep him quiet. This encounter should serve to make the PCs suspicious of Bezrak and perhaps a little afraid of him, but you should not try to force a fight. If the PCs decide to attack Bezrak, three guards arrive per round and a patrol of outriders shows up once every seven rounds.

**Role-playing.** Bezrak is furious that his cache has been discovered. In the back of his mind he is already planning the party's demise. He vehemently protests his innocence; he does not want it known that he is using Amketch's caravans for smuggling, and thinks he can throw suspicion away from himself by a quick, aggressive accusation of the player characters.

**Statistics.** Guard stats can be found on the NPC Master Table. Bezrak and Holtet are described in the *Background Book*.

**Reactions.** If the heroes wish to destroy the beetles or otherwise interfere, Bezrak snaps something to the effect of, "It will be taken care of," and orders Holtet to remove the beetles. Bezrak later orders Holtet to retrieve them and place them in his personal cabin in the wagon. If the heroes attack, Bezrak defends himself and forces the PCs to leave the caravan immediately.

**Next.** Continue with **Trade Stop** or return to the previous encounter.

## Part Two: Shaqt Beetles

CLIMATE/ TERRAIN:	Scrub plains, mud flats,	THAC0:	20
FREQUENCY:	Rare,	No. ATTACKS:	1
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary	DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day	SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Jump
DIET:	Carnivorous	SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)	MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
TREASURE:	Nil	SIZE:	T (6" long)
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral	MORALE:	Average (8-10)
NO. APPEARING:	1d3+1	XP VALUE:	35
ARMOR CLASS:	8	PSIONICS SUMMARY:	Special
MOVEMENT:	3, Ju 1	HIT DICE:	1d3 hit points

Shaqt beetles are natives of the grasslands and mud flats of Athas. In their natural state, they are annoying pests. However, the shaqt beetles encountered in this adventure have been altered by House Shom to carry and transmit *cerebral parasites*. (Refer to the *Complete Psionics Handbook* for a description.) Each altered beetle transmits 1d6+6 parasites the first time it successfully hits an opponent in combat or even comes into contact with the exposed skin of the victim.

Shaqt beetles are about 3" across, with long, barbed legs designed to cling to animal hosts. Their mandibles house a powerful proboscis that can pierce a human fingernail, and their carapaces are bright orange with black stripes. An illustration of the beetle appears on page 8 of the *Player's Book*.

**Combat:** Shaqt beetles lurk near paths and watering holes. Their legs can hurl them in a 10 foot leap, and they gain a -2 bonus to surprise when they attack by jumping out of concealment. If a beetle hits, it sets its barbs in the first round, inflicting 1 point of damage. If the beetle is pulled off after its barbs are set, the victim takes 1d4 damage. After its barbs are set, the beetle gains a +4 bonus to attack rolls as it tries to insert its proboscis. A hit inflicts 1 point of damage, and the beetle drains 1 point of blood that round and for the next 1d4+1 rounds following.

The beetle drops off after it is sated, or it can be forced to let go by burning it off. In that case, the victim takes the same damage as the beetle. If killed while it is still attached, the beetle's barbs remain set and must be pulled out.

**Ecology:** Shaqt beetles prey on all other animals. A single beetle is an annoyance, but two or three can easily kill a human being. Most creatures are unable to detach the beetle once it has set its barbs.

**Cerebral Parasites:** These tiny specks are nearly invisible and cannot be attacked by normal means. Each parasite consumes 1 PSP each time a psionic power is used. A psionist who is infested with 7 parasites uses 7 extra PSPs every time he activates or maintains a power. When a parasite has absorbed 6 points of energy (in other words, the victim has activated or maintained powers 6 times) it divides into two parasites. The only way to get rid of the parasites is by a *cure disease* spell, or by refraining from using psionic powers for a prolonged period.

Cerebral parasites can only be detected by the psionic powers of Aura Sight, Life Detection, and Psionic Sense, and magical spells that detect invisible or hidden items.

## Part Two: Trade Stop

**Setup.** Have the players turn to page 9 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** This encounter can be run in Fort Glamis on the third or fourth day of the trip, or in South Ledopolus on the fifth. If your players are stumped, this is a good time to offer them some friendly guidance by arranging for a Veiled Alliance operative to pass them a message. In this encounter, the heroes learn that Bezrak is double-dealing House Amketch. Begin with the text in the *Player's Book*.

**Encounter.** Assuming the PCs follow Bezrak, read the text below:

*You follow Bezrak through a couple of dark streets. He finds a small alehouse on the edge of town, and enters. Creeping closer, you peer through the curtained doorway. The caravan master is speaking to a pair of hulking half-giants. You see the glint of silver changing hands. The half-giants leave through a back door. Bezrak turns and heads for another table with a cloaked figure flanked by two bodyguards and takes a seat. They speak for a short time, and then the caravan master rises and heads for the door. You flatten into the shadows. He passes, heading back toward the caravan, and then the cloaked man and his guards exit. For a moment the cloak brushes aside, and you note the glint of an emblem. It looked like three silver dragonflies on a red background.*

**Reactions.** The heroes may take several actions during this encounter. They may magically or psionically listen in on Bezrak's conversations or try to read the trader's lips. (A thief's detect noise ability would work as well.) Bezrak gives the half-giants the PCs' descriptions and tells them to kill the heroes. He then speaks to the cloaked figure, an agent of Shom named Ramistes, and sets the time for the Gith Raid. Ramistes offers Bezrak a position with Shom for his help.

If the heroes follow the half-giants, they go to the caravan and start searching for the heroes. If they cannot find the PCs in an hour, they give up and decide to come back during the morning muster. The half-giants are brothers named Yarag and Bolg, and they stop to ask passersby about the PCs constantly. If the PCs follow the half-giants, they'll miss the conversation with Ramistes. If the heroes follow Ramistes, he returns to a small House Shom trading post. Bezrak returns to the caravan. Confronting the villains will bring a fight with Bezrak, Ramistes, his guards, and the half-giant enforcers.

Any number of people can identify the emblem as that of House Shom.

If the heroes avoid the half-giants (intentionally or unintentionally), they return to pick a fight before the morning muster. The half-giants are not very subtle and may simply club down the first PC they see, claiming that they were "insulted."

**Statistics.** Yarag and Bolg are listed on the NPC Master Table. Use the Senior Agent stats for Ramistes and the Elite Mul Bodyguard stats for his guards.

**Outcome.** You may need to remind the players that they still don't know where the beetles came from or where they are going to. Bezrak will avoid a fight until he returns to the caravan, where he can count on the guards to defend him. The caravaners are loyal to Bezrak and will not turn on him unless faced with incontrovertible, physical evidence that the master plans to betray them.

**Next.** Continue with **Gith Raid**, or skip to Part Four if the caravan disbands.

## Part Two: Gith Raid

**Setup.** This encounter can be run using the BATTLESYSTEM™ Skirmishes Rules. Divide the players into teams for the gith and the caravan, and convert the PCs into Skirmish system statistics. Have the players turn to page 10 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** This encounter takes place as the caravan crawls toward Red Obelisk. Read:

*The wagon rumbles behind you as your watch drags on. Your squad is marching this morning, and the heat is unbearable. You are startled from your reverie by a shout in the near distance, and the clash of weapons. The outriders are under attack! Dozens of gith warriors are sweeping down on the caravan! The mekillots bellow as the wagon shudders and halts. Guards man the weapons decks and hatches slam shut as the caravan prepares for battle.*

*Beside you, your squad-mates waver. "There are too many!" one cries.*

**Encounter.** If the PCs flee, the caravan will be captured after a short, bloody fight. Bezrak will remove the beetles and accompany the gith as they leave, burdened with loot. Offers of negotiation or surrender will be ignored as the bloodthirsty gith try to slaughter anyone they can catch.

There are 50 gith in the attacking force, plus two 5 HD leaders, and the chieftain Kugrisht. Opposing them are the 13 outriders, led by Arazzo; the PCs' own squad on foot; and the other 13 guards and 7 resting outriders inside the wagon, led by Holtet Phen. Caravan slaves are locked into the kitchen when the fighting starts.

**The Fight:** The gith sweep forward and attempt to board the wagon. The arrow slits are too narrow to enter, but the first- and second-level doors can be forced with an open doors check. A gith can climb one level of the wagon's exterior per round. Ten gith, including Kugrisht, hold back from the assault to guard their fellows' backs. A gith defiler in this command group will cast spells to assist in the attack.

Unless the PCs rally them, the outriders and the foot guards flee the scene. The guards and caravaneers inside man the arrow slits and the fighting deck, pouring out a withering hail of fire against the gith. Bezrak and Holtet Phen stand aside.

**Statistics.** Gith, guards, outriders, and caravaneers are all described in the NPC Master Table. Note the special entries for BATTLESYSTEM Skirmishes Rules. The sub-leaders have psionic abilities as per a psionist of equal level; one is a psychokineticist, and the other a psychometabolist.

**Gith Sub-leaders (2):** AL CE; AC 6; MV 10; HD 5; hp 26, 24; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (obsidian spear, +2 for Str) SA Psionics, jump; SZ M; ML 14.

**Gith Defiler:** AL CE; AC 8; MV 10; HD 5; hp 18; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d4/1d4; SA spells, jump; SZ M; ML 14. *Lightning Bolt, web, invisibility, magic missile, burning hands, shield.*

**Kugrisht, Gith Leader:** Refer to the *Background Book*

**Outcome.** The heroes should be able to break the back of the gith assault. When half the gith have fallen, the leader orders a retreat. The gith will return to the **Gith Camp** (see Part Three) after the battle, victorious or not.

**Next.** Go on to **Sold Out**. If the caravan was destroyed, skip to Part Three.

## Part Two: Sold Out

**Setup.** Page 11 of the *Player's Book* complements this encounter, but don't let the players see it until it's too late!

**Start.** The caravan reaches the small village of Red Obelisk late in the afternoon, dusty and exhausted. Read the text below to the players:

*Red Obelisk is a tiny oasis at the edge of a white salt pan. An ancient rune-covered monument of red stone marks the site of a clear, cold spring. About 70 or 80 dwarves and humans eke out a living in the small fertile area, but there is little of interest in the village itself: However, Red Obelisk is regularly visited by the deep desert tribes, who come here to trade. Their hides, feathers, livestock, and gemstones command high prices in the city-states, so several merchant houses maintain small outposts here to trade with them.*

*Bezrak surprises everyone by announcing that the task of unloading the wagon's wares can wait until the next day, and orders a cask of wine opened to celebrate the caravan's safe arrival. He goes out of his way to praise you for your heroism in defending the caravan from the gith. As the sun sets, the guards and caravaners relax and enjoy a well-deserved rest. The caravan is to remain in Red Obelisk for three days, trading with the villagers and the nomads of the open desert.*

**Encounter.** Bezrak betrays the caravan to House Shom. The cask of wine is drugged, and the majority of the caravan's personnel will be sleeping soundly within an hour of drinking the wine. Important: unless a player states specifically otherwise, his character is assumed to drink, and will be required to make a saving throw versus poison at a -2 penalty or fall unconscious for 1d6+6 hours.

When the Amketch personnel have been drugged, 30 Shom warriors led by Agristes, Tethrades, and four elite mul bodyguards emerge from the Shom post and take possession of the caravan. Holtet Phen and Bezrak will assist. All Amketch employees are taken for slaves. The beetles remain onboard—they are headed for Nibenay, with the rest of the captured goods. The argosy itself is re-manned by Shom personnel, loaded with Amketch slaves, and driven off the next day.

The Shom warriors try to beat resisting characters into unconsciousness, but will not hesitate to kill if the resistance is too tough. Anyone who flees the scene can get away, but Red Obelisk is not safe for Amketch personnel after this encounter—as far as Agristes is concerned, Shom bought and paid for the new slaves.

Allow the players to read the text in the *Player's Book*, and then have them make their saving throws and begin the battle.

**Statistics.** Use the Guard and Mul Bodyguard stats from the NPC Master Table for the Shom warriors. Agristes and Tethrades are described in the *Background Book*.

**Outcome.** The adventure assumes that at least some PCs will be captured here, but don't make it impossible to get away. Good players should be rewarded for keeping their wits about them by retaining control of their characters.

**Next.** If some or all of the PCs are captured, go on to Part Three. If the heroes avoid capture and don't know what to do at this point, you may want to hint to them that following the captured wagon is a good idea. The PCs still need to find out where the beetles came from, and the only way to do that is to get the information from Bezrak, Agristes, or a House Shom senior agent.

## Part Three: Encounter Summary

In Part Three of this adventure, the player characters find themselves prisoners of Bezrak, who has sold his allegiance to House Shom. They must escape and pursue their mission to end the beetle trade. The first four encounters of Part Three should be run in order, but after that the players' decisions may take them to one of several different encounters. By the end of this part of the adventure, the heroes should decide to return to Balic and begin searching for the source of the shaqat beetles.

**Prisoners.** Some or all of the PCs may be captured in the **Sold Out** encounter. As Bezrak's prisoners, they learn of the caravan master's treachery and House Shom's plans to disband the caravan and sell off its personnel as slaves. Worse yet, Bezrak orders that shaqat beetles be attached to the heroes in **Parasites**. However, the PCs learn that House Shom is secretly masquerading the beetle trade. In **Return of the Gith**, the raiders arrive at Red Obelisk while the party is being held and reveal that they were in Bezrak's pay when they attacked the caravan. The Shom agents sell the heroes to the gith raiders, who carry them off into the desert.

Of course, the PCs will soon find a chance to **Escape**. They may choose to fight their way out of the **Gith Camp**. Once free, they may can track down the stolen caravan wagon or make straight for Balic. Use the **Desert Journey** encounter to referee treks across Athas's wastelands. In **Pursuit** and **Caravan Attack**, the heroes may choose to follow Shom raiders and free the Amketch agents. If the PCs can free the other prisoners, they meet a NPC named Aljara who can give them valuable information and assistance in **Questions and Answers**.

**Return to Balic** describes the PCs' journey back to the city of Andropinis as they begin their quest for the source of the beetles.

**Following the Script.** Your players are going to kick and scream over the possibility of being captured at the end of Part Two. Several will probably find ways to avoid getting captured. If some of your PCs escape and some don't, it sets up a very dramatic rescue mission for the free player characters, while giving the imprisoned characters a chance to learn a lot of important information. If all of your PCs manage to stay out of Shom's clutches, you'll have a harder time giving the players the clues they need to solve the mystery of the beetles.

If all of your PCs managed to evade capture, the best scenario for you is to convince the players that the logical next step is to follow the captured caravan wagon and look for a chance to free the Amketch personnel. After all, the beetles are still in Bezrak's possession, and Bezrak is still with the caravan. You can pick up the adventure in progress by skipping to the **Pursuit** encounter.

**Meeting Aljara.** You should make a point of placing Aljara, the NPC from **Questions and Answers**, in the path of the adventure. She may be found as a prisoner in the captured Amketch wagon, as a prisoner in the gith camp, or as a free wanderer if the party strikes out across the desert or returns to Red Obelisk.

## Part Three: Prisoners

**Setup.** Have the players turn to page 12 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** Player characters who were taken prisoner in the **Sold Out** encounter awaken in the early morning of the next day. Characters who eluded capture may have a busy night escaping from Red Obelisk and laying plans to free their friends. You should encourage free PCs to make their plans and rest up before trying to assault the village. This will ensure that captured PCs have a chance to gather some information before they are rescued by their comrades. Read the text below to the players:

*You awaken with a massive headache to find the early-morning sun glaring in your faces. Your limbs ache, and you still feel dizzy and weak. You are in a small, wheeled slave wagon. Sturdy bars of mekillot bone lashed together with rawhide prevent your escape. You also find that you are bound with rawhide thongs and gagged. You have been stripped down to sandals and undergarments.*

*Four warriors and an agent in the colors of House Shom stand guard around your cage. Nearby you can see the Amketch caravan surrounded by Shom warriors and traders. The Amketch emblem has been painted over with the triple dragonfly insignia of Shom. The Amketch soldiers and caravaneers sit behind the wagon, their hands chained to a stout wooden coffle. Most of them look as bad as you feel.*

**Encounter.** The day will pass without event, unless the party manages to work on freeing themselves. In the afternoon, Bezrak and Holtet Phen will visit for the **Parasites** encounter which follows this one.

While imprisoned, the captured PCs learn from their captors' conversations that Bezrak poisoned the cask of wine he gave to the Amketch caravaneers. They also learn that the wagon will be taken back to Nibenay. The common guards know nothing of the beetles and do not mention them. However, they speculate that the taking of the Amketch wagon will lead to a trade war and that the Amketch prisoners will be sold as slaves in Urik or Raam.

The cage is about 10 feet wide by 20 feet long. It sits in the center of the village clearing, about 100 feet from the Amketch agosy.

**Escaping.** It should be very difficult for the PCs to make a successful escape attempt at this point. They would be better off to wait and find a more opportune time. The agent in charge is a psionistic, Tsarana. The guards have all been told that the PCs are extremely dangerous, and they will not fall for any tricks. At noon, the cage will be opened long enough for two guards to give a pint of water to each character.

The rawhide thongs can be snapped with a Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll, but inflict 1-3 damage before giving way. The bars of the cage can be snapped with another roll, or the door can be forced with an Open Doors roll (treat as locked). The guards will happily pepper the escaping prisoners with missile fire and poke spears and swords at them until they desist in their attempt to escape.

**Statistics.** The guards are standard guards from the NPC Master Table. There are 20 more guards and 10 outriders within the immediate area. Tsarana is a 6th-level human psionistic, described in the *Background Book*. She will watch the heroes closely for signs of psionic activity.

**Next.** Once the players have enjoyed their characters' situation, run the **Parasites** encounter.



## Part Three: Parasites

**Setup.** Refer to the shaqat beetle monster description on page 15 of this book for the effects of the shaqat beetle's bite. The illustration on page 13 of the *Player's Book* accompanies this encounter, but you should wait until Bezrak dramatically reveals the beetles before telling the players to turn to the illustration.

**Start.** Bezrak and his Shom allies spend the day after the caravan's capture preparing for the journey to Nibenay. The captured PCs are guarded for the entire day. Free PCs find that most of the farmers and craftsmen of Red Obelisk return to work, going about their business as normal. Some sell food or other supplies to the Shom personnel preparing the caravan. Read the following to the players:

*Bezrak and Agristes (the Shom leader) use the captured Amketch personnel as slaves to load the argosy, and the Shom warriors supervise their efforts. There are only about 10 warriors actually on guard in the square, but the rest are nearby. Apparently, they plan to leave soon. You have overheard your guards speaking of Nibenay, the home city of House Shom.*

*About an hour before sunset, Bezrak, Holtet Phen, Agristes, and the defiler come over to your cage. Half a dozen guards accompany them, two carrying sealed clay pots reinforced with bronze bands. Bezrak smiles. "Regretfully, you will not be able to interfere with me any longer," he says. "I wanted you killed, but Agristes here convinced me that selling you into slavery would be sufficient." He nods at the soldiers, who bring the pots forward. Bezrak undoes the clasps and carefully opens the jar to reveal clicking shaqat beetles! "These will make sure that you are amenable to the sale," he sneers.*

*Agristes smiles. "We've found the beetle trade to be very profitable, but somewhat risky. It wouldn't do for House Shom to be associated with such a sordid activity. You are fortunate that you are in good health and might bring a good price on the block—otherwise we would have killed you for your meddling."*

**Encounter.** The guards enter the cage to attach a shaqat beetle to each PC. There are 10 guards by the cage, in addition to Bezrak, Agristes, Holtet Phen, Tethrades, and Tsarana. Characters who resist are bludgeoned by the guards. A bound PC has little chance of eluding the beetle at this point. About the only way to overpower the guards and escape during this scene would be a coordinated effort by free and captive PCs, and even then it would lead to a hard fight with little or no equipment.

The shaqat beetles automatically hit helpless characters. The total damage from the attachment, bite, and blood drain will be 1d4+3 over a similar number of rounds. More importantly, each character bitten becomes infested with 1d6+6 cerebral parasites. Have the players turn to the illustration as their characters are suffering from the shaqat beetle bites. Once each character has been bitten, Bezrak, Agristes, and the additional guards leave and return to preparing the caravan. Tethrades takes his leave and departs for Kalidnay.

**Role-playing.** Agristes and Bezrak are both arrogant, cruel men. They would rather sell the heroes into slavery to line their own pockets, but it is possible for a PC to talk himself into a shallow grave in the desert by insulting either villain.

**Statistics.** The guards and mul bodyguards can be found on the NPC Master Table. Agristes, Bezrak, and Holtet are described in the *Background Book*

**Next.** Go on to the following encounter, **Return of the Gith.**

## Part Three: Return of the Gith

**Setup.** This encounter is illustrated on page 14 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** At dawn of the next day, the caravan is ready to go. The PCs' cage is hitched behind the armored caravan wagon, and the Shom warriors form in a phalanx surrounding the argosy. Most of the Amketch personnel are chained in the wagon's slave hold. The caravan heads off into the desert, crossing the salt flat and traveling north towards Grak's Pool. After Red Obelisk is an hour or two behind the caravan, begin this encounter by reading the text below to the players:

*The sun blazes mercilessly. Bound and gaged, you are barely conscious. Your limbs ache, and your breath comes in ragged gasps. Your misery is abruptly disturbed by the wagon's halt. Straining to see what is happening, you catch a glimpse of a number of gith warriors loping towards the wagon. The Shom warriors form a battle line, weapons at the ready, but the gith pull up short of attacking. One scarred, powerful marauder steps forward from the gith rabble. "We talk now," he hisses. "These are Kraalshag sands. What give you for safe passage here?"*

*Bezrak, Holtet Phen, and Agristes stride out across the sands to speak to the gith. They argue with the gith for a time, but eventually strike an agreement. Agristes gestures in your direction, and the nearby warriors unhitch your wagon from the argosy. Immediately, dozens of gith swarm over and seize the traces, dragging you away by sheer weight of numbers. In the chaos, Bezrak appears by the cage. "We had planned to sell you in Nibenay," he says. "But our gith friends here feel that they weren't compensated for their attempt to take the caravan and expressed an interest in you. You killed quite a few of their friends, didn't you?"*

**Encounter.** The gith spend the rest of the day dragging the PCs back to their lair, a cave in the barrens southeast of Red Obelisk. The gith torment their captives, poking them with spears, throwing stones at them, and abusing them in numerous ways. There are a total of 35 gith warriors in this party, led by Kugrisht.

Free player characters may follow the gith as they return to their lair. If the heroes try to ambush the gith, five warriors will remain behind to guard the prisoner wagon while the rest join in the fight. It is possible for clever players to simply buy their companions' freedom or to trick Kugrisht into freeing their comrades. Steel weapons, magical items, or a significant amount of silver could convince the gith to part with their prisoners. However, a display of wealth without the strength to defend it would invite an attack from the marauders.

If none of the heroes were captured in the **Sold Out** encounter, the gith meet the wagon and take half the Amketch slaves instead of captive player characters.

**Role-playing.** The gith continually taunt and jeer at the PCs. If asked where they are going or what they will do, the gith tell the PCs that they are being taken to Three Rocks and that they will be killed and eaten at the feast of the Ghost Moon, two days from now.

**Statistics.** Use the gith entry in the NPC Master Table for the gith warriors. Kugrisht is described in the *Background Book*. If he was killed in the **Gith Raid** use the stats for a typical 5 HD leader.

**Next.** When the gith arrive at High Rock, continue with **Escape**. If the heroes escape during this encounter, proceed to **A Desert Journey, Pursuit**, or **Return to Balic** as appropriate.

## Part Three: Escape

**Setup.** During this encounter, you may want to improvise a few gith taunts, challenges, or attacks. The gith may drag one character out and tether him to a post to dodge javelins for a while, or simply beat a character into unconsciousness. Don't seriously injure the PCs, but let them know that remaining captives of the gith will end in their deaths.

If your players are completely lost, you may want to borrow the NPC Aljara from **Questions and Answers** and introduce her as a fellow captive of the gith. In a similar fashion, players whose characters have died can introduce new characters.

**Start.** After dragging the PCs' wagon to Three Rocks, the gith prepare for their celebration of the Ghost Moon feast. This will be the heroes' best opportunity to escape their captors. Read the text below to the players:

*The afternoon lasts an eternity as the gith drag your cage across the salt flats, jeering and tormenting you the whole day. The evil marauders head toward the southwest, and as the shadows grow long in the evening they leave the flats and enter a barren wasteland of stone and sand. A triple crag of black rock seems to be their destination and, as darkness falls, you find yourself in the middle of a torch-lit gith camp beneath the brooding crag.*

*You guess that there are about 80 gith in this tribe. The warriors drag your cage off to one side of the camp, and begin building a great bonfire in the center of their village. All of the marauders go to join in, but a sub-chieftain curses and cuffs three into staying to stand guard by your cage. Meanwhile, the rest of the warriors breach a stolen cask of wine and set about the task of heaping anything that will burn on the fire.*

**Encounter.** If the PCs still are in captivity by this point, you may need to hint to them that this is one of the best chances they may get to escape. As the evening progresses, more and more of the gith will collapse into a drunken slumber. Eventually, one of the guards will sneak off to steal some wine and bring it back. The guards will proceed to get drunk themselves.

As noted in the **Prisoners** encounter, the heroes are bound and gagged with rawhide thongs. The rawhide can be parted by a Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll, but will inflict 1-3 points of damage before giving way. Very dexterous characters can be allowed a chance to wriggle free or dislocate joints equal to a Bend Bars roll for a Strength score equal to their Dexterity score. Once free of the bonds the heroes can try to snap the mekillot ribs that form the bars of their cage with another Bend Bars roll, or they can try to force the locked door with an Open Doors roll.

None of the gith standing watch are psionic, so characters may be able to initiate psionic powers without being noticed. Remember the effects of the cerebral parasites that may infest the characters.

**Role-playing.** The gith are cocky and careless—after all, they've just spent the whole day tormenting their captives and expect that there's not much fight left in them. The guards cheerfully inform the PCs that the bonfire will be stoked for two days, after which they'll be thrown in.

**Next.** When the characters free themselves, go on to **Gith Camp**. If the PCs haven't managed to escape, you may need to give them a little more help by introducing fellow prisoners as NPCs or having a tribe of elves attack the gith camp. Otherwise, the gith throw them in the bonfire at the feast.

## Part Three: Gith Camp

**Setup.** A map of the gith camp can be found on page 15 of the *Player's Book*. If your PCs are not likely to pursue the Amketch caravan, you should remove Aljara from **Caravan Attack** and place her in the camp at building x for the **Questions and Answers** encounter. This encounter may begin with a successful escape, or the heroes may trail the gith here and decide to enter the camp.

**Thorny Brush:** These thickets are nearly impassable. Characters attempting to move through these areas suffer 1d3 points of damage per round and are limited to a movement rate of 1.

**Brambleweed Fencing:** Ranging in height from 4 to 7 (1d4+3) feet, the brambleweed is anywhere from 3 to 10 (1d8+2) feet thick at any given spot. Incidental contact inflicts 1d6 attacks of 1 point each; full contact, such as an attempt to move through, inflicts 2d20 attacks of 1 point each.

**Tents:** Each tent contains 0-4 (1d6-2) gith, who will generally attack intruders or at least try to raise the alarm. Tent D is described below.

**A. Prisoner Enclosure.** The wagon is parked in the center of this area. Three gith guard the PCs, as described in *Escape*. Roughly 50% of the PCs' belongings are heaped on the ground here; the rest have been claimed by gith and are scattered throughout the camp.

**B. Common Area.** Roughly 50 gith can be found here. Most are asleep, but a couple are still staggering around the bonfire in a drunken haze. The PCs will have to be careful when they move around in this area, or they will awaken the gith.

**C. Animal Pens.** The northern pen contains a flock of about 60 erdlus, while the southern pen contains a herd of 25 banks. Saddles and riding harness for five kanks are heaped carelessly on the ground beside the pen.

**D. Chieftain's Tent.** The gith chieftain Kugrisht and his two defilers can be found here, along with any NPC prisoners you wish to introduce. Four guards keep the chieftain safe at all times. This tent contains the bulk of the tribe's treasure, including two trunks with 133 sp, 380 cp, a pouch with 8 gp and two gems worth 30 sp each, and a decorative shield worth 25 sp.

**E. Sacred Sites.** These two stone rings are ancient holy places of the gith. Each surrounds a worn altar of black basalt, stained with the blood of hundreds of sacrifices. The gith priest can be found in either location, along with four gith warriors who act as acolytes and bodyguards.

**Stats.** The gith are listed on the NPC Master Table. The defilers are described in the **Gith Raid** encounter, and Kugrisht is described in the *Background Book*.

**Gith Priest (1):** AL CE; AC 6; MV 10; 5th-level priest; HD 5; hp 31; THACO 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (obsidian mace); spells *cause blindness, hold person (x2), trip, command, cure light wounds, entangle*; SZ M; ML 15; XP 350.

**Next.** When the PCs leave the camp, go on to **A Desert Journey**.

## Part Three: A Desert Journey

**Setup.** This is a brief summary of overland travel and hazards in Athas. You may want to refer to this page whenever the heroes find themselves trekking across the desert. You can prepare for travel episodes by reviewing the overland movement rules in the DMG (page 124) and the DARK SUN® *Rules Book* (page 87).

You may want to prepare a couple of “random” encounters in advance; travel time is perfect for inserting your own special distractions or random encounters into the adventure’s plot. Page 16 of the *Player’s Book* is an illustration of the desert.

**Movement.** The PC party can move at the speed of the slowest member and stay together. Movement Point allowances for the different character races are listed on page 87 of the DARK SUN *Rules Book*. These allowances are for a 10-hour march period—note that thri-kreen and muls are able to make two marches in one day if they so desire. Movement Point allowances for common Athasian mounts can be found on page 88 of the *Rules Book*.

Characters can increase their MP allowance by declaring a Force March, but suffer the penalties described on page 120 of the *Player’s Handbook*. If mounted, they can drive their mounts to higher speed using the rules on page 123 of the DMG.

As the party moves, they expend their Movement Points according to the type of terrain they are crossing. The Terrain Costs for overland movement can be found on page 88 of the DARK SUN *Rules Book*. When the party runs out of Movement Points, it is assumed that they have marched for 10 hours and must stop and rest.

**Encounters.** The Frequency and Chance of Wilderness Encounter Table on page 101 of the DMG can be used to check for random encounters during travel. Use the Desert row for Stony Barrens, Sandy Wastes, Salt Flats, and Boulder Fields; the Scrub/bush row for Scrub Plains; the Hills row for Rocky Badlands; and the Mountains row for Mountains. In most cases, you will check for encounters three or four times per game day.

If an encounter is rolled, you can use the encounter tables in the DARK SUN *Rules Book*, page 79-81, or you can use the tables in the DARK SUN *Monstrous Compendium*™. Be careful; there are some very deadly monsters on the tables, and you should avoid killing off the adventurers in random encounters.

**Food and Water.** If a party makes one 10-hour march per day, their resting hours can be assumed to be used in gathering food and locating water—they need not take time out to forage. Have the PCs attempt their survival, hunting, or water find rolls each night. If the party is force-marching, they make all proficiency checks with a +2 penalty. If they double-march, skipping their rest, they do not make any checks.

Successful use of the survival proficiency only yields enough food for the character using it, but a successful hunting use provides the PCs with game that will provide 1d12 man-days of food. Keep track of the PCs’ water supply. Rules for water consumption can be found on page 86 of the DARK SUN *Rules Book*.

**Next.** The next encounter depends on where the adventurers are going. They may choose to **Return to Balic**, **Pursue** the Amketch caravan, or trail Kugrisht and his raiders back to the **Gith Camp**. If the PCs decide to return to Red Obelisk, they’ll find that everyone is long gone, but they can proceed from there to any of the other encounters in this part of the adventure.

## Part Three: Pursuit

**Setup.** When the tembo attack, turn to page 17 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** Run this encounter if the heroes choose to pursue the stolen Amketch caravan. Generally, there are two possible starting points: the gith camp (assuming the PCs were taken along with the caravan and subsequently given to the gith) or Red Obelisk (assuming the PCs were not with the caravan when it was taken, or managed to escape the attack). Read the text below when the PCs pick up the trail:

*It isn't hard to follow the Shom warriors and the stolen argosy. Bezrak and Agristes are not retracing the normal caravan routes, but are instead cutting across the desert to the north. The dragging footsteps of the mekillots and the tracks of the great wooden rollers cut a wide swath through the desert. The argosy seems to have had difficulty crossing the open country—you come across several places where the wagon must have bogged down in the sand and had to be shoveled free.*

*On occasion, you can hear the terrifying howls of a hunting tembo pack in the distance. You press on and try to avoid the loathsome creatures, but you find the howls growing closer and closer as the day passes. Soon you notice flitting shadows behind you, scurrying from rock to rock or brazenly watching you a moment before disappearing in the brush. Your legs ache from the pace you are setting, and your hearts sink as you realize that you will have to turn and make a stand against the tembo.*

*Ahead, you sight a rocky outcropping several hundred yards away that looks defensible. Do you want to make a sprint for it?*

**Encounter.** While following the caravan wagon, the adventurers find themselves pursued by a pack of voracious tembo. Keep the players in the dark about the number and strength of their pursuers. If the heroes run for the high ground, the tembo will instantly leap to the chase, but the adventurers can make it by a hair. The PCs will gain a +1 to melee attack rolls for being on higher ground than the attacking tembo pack.

If the PCs do nothing, ignoring the tembo, the creatures will begin darting in to make one or two quick attacks and then retreating into the rocks and scrub. They will keep up the attack for hours, rushing from several directions as the party grows weaker from the attacks. Several tembo will race ahead and use their *chameleon power* psionic devotion to set an ambush for the heroes.

When three tembo have been killed or incapacitated, the last withdraws. They are fearless, but they are also smart enough to know when they have been beaten.

**Stats.** There are a total of four tembo in the pack. Refer to the monster description in the *Wanderer's Journal*. Tembo are extremely intelligent and possess a number of powerful psionic abilities and unusual attacks.

**Tembo (4):** AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 26, 22, 20, 17; THAC0 17; #AT 5; Dmg 1d4 (x2)/1d6 (x2)/1d8; SA drain level, psionics; SD dodge missiles; MR 10%; Size M; ML 20; xp 975.

**Next.** After the heroes defeat or drive off the tembo pack, they'll be able to pick up the trail again. Continue with **Caravan Attack**.

## Part Three: Caravan Attack

**Setup.** Page 18 in the *Player's Book* complements this encounter. Use it when directed in the **Encounter** section below. You can also use the wagon diagram from page 4 of the *Player's Book* if the PCs decide to attack the argosy.

**Start.** Bezrak and Agristes have driven the caravan hard, but mekillot-drawn wagons are still slow. The adventurers should overtake the wagon, regardless of how much of a head start they allow the Shom warriors. For convenience's sake, assume that the PCs catch up to the wagon at dusk, when the caravan must stop to rest for the night.

*You climb a small bramble-covered ridge and find yourselves looking down at the stolen wagon, surrounded by Shom soldiers. They are making camp, and most of the warriors are gathered around the cooking fires. Handlers are carefully feeding the massive mekillots that draw the wagon. Behind the argosy, a long coffle of slaves—the Amketch traders and warriors who were betrayed by Bezrak—finally collapses in relief the terrible march finally over for the day.*

*You count about 10 warriors outside the wagon, plus several scouts mounted on crodlus.*

**Encounter.** The PCs will probably want to attack or infiltrate the camp. If for some reason they do not want to take on the Shom warriors, you may want to remind them that the caravan will eventually reach Nibenay, where House Shom has a powerful citadel and the protection of the sorcerer-king. This may be their best chance to take revenge for Bezrak's treachery and wring some answers out of the Shom agents.

The argosy is halted at the bottom of a bowl-shaped valley about 500 yards in diameter. Four pairs of scouts on crodlus randomly patrol the valley. Heroes creeping up on the camp have a 1 in 6 chance of encountering one pair of scouts. Ten guards are standing watch over the camp itself with 10 more inside the wagon. Bezrak, Agristes, Holtet Phen, and four elite mul bodyguards are inside as well. There are a total of 15 Amketch slaves in the coffle behind the wagon; if they are freed and given weapons, they will fight. Use the *Player's Book* illustration if the slaves are freed and led into the fight.

**Role-playing.** Bezrak is nursing a grudge against the heroes and will order them killed at first sight, but Agristes doesn't have anything against them and is willing to negotiate. Of course, the merchant only negotiates if he thinks the PCs have something he wants. Under no circumstances will he voluntarily reveal anything about the beetle trade—it is a critical secret of House Shom.

**Stats.** Refer to the NPC Master Table. Use the outrider stats for the crodlu-mounted scouts, and the Shom warrior stats for the caravan guards. Bezrak, Agristes, and Holtet Phen are described in the Background Book.

**Outcome.** The heroes may attempt to kidnap Bezrak or Agristes, they may simply assault the caravan, or they may sneak in and set the slaves free. The beetles are still on board the caravan, in Bezrak's quarters.

**Next.** If the heroes free the slaves or manage to capture and question one of the major NPCs, go to the **Questions and Answers** encounter. Otherwise, the heroes will be at a dead end and may decide to **Return to Balic**.

## Part Three: Questions and Answers

**Setup.** Have the players turn to page 31 of the *Player's Book* when they meet Aljara.

**Start.** If the player characters pursue and destroy Bezrak and the Shom warriors, they will find that there are several pieces of the puzzle in the stolen Amketch caravan. The adventurers will find a number of answers in this encounter and get a tip on which way to go next in their war on the beetle trade.

While it may not be possible to re-introduce NPCs like Bezrak or Agristes if the PCs do not pursue the wagon, you can insert the meeting with Aljara in a number of places in Part Three. Her information is vital to the success of the adventure and you should make sure that no matter where your players decide to go, they will eventually encounter Aljara.

When the PCs have defeated the Shom forces, read the following:

*At last the battle is over. You strike off the bonds of the Amketch agents enslaved by the Shom warriors, and arrange for some of the surviving slaves to begin an inventory of the wagon and set up a watch over the captured guardsmen. Dalgra the mul is the senior Amketch prisoner, and he quickly thanks you and invites you to help yourselves to the Shom paychest. "We're shorthanded, but we can make Ledopolus in a day and a half from here," he tells you. "We've got a small post there and we'll be able to hire more guards and reprovision."*

*Dalgra begins to get the caravan ready to move again. As he walks away, a graceful half-elf walks up to you, rubbing her wrists. She was one of the Amketch prisoners, but you know that she wasn't with the caravan when you traveled here from Balic. "My name is Aljara," she says quietly. "Can I have a word with you alone?"*

**Encounter.** Unless the PCs are incredibly rude, go ahead and let them read the text in the *Player's Book*. In addition to Aljara's information and assistance, the PCs have several other people they can question.

- **Bezrak:** The merchant will make a formidable target for interrogation. If questioned with the promise of freedom and money, he will reveal what he knows of the beetle trade. Bezrak knows that the beetles are received in Balic at a secret Shom stronghold, but doesn't know where they originate. He does know that the beetles are smuggled from Balic to Nibenay on the caravan of other houses to minimize Shom's risk. The plot to take the Amketch caravan was a coincidental attack on a rival house—Shom planned to use the smuggled beetles as planted evidence to convince the templars of Nibenay to seize the Amketch holdings and assets there.
- **Agristes:** Extremely loyal to House Shom, Agristes can't be bought, but he can be intimidated. He can tell the PCs everything that Bezrak can, and can also tell the PCs that the beetles are very rare and only arrive in Balic once a month or so. The beetles are distributed from the Shom fortress in Nibenay.
- **Holtet Phen:** Holtet can't be intimidated or bought, but he can be tricked into revealing information. He has supervised security at the secret Shom warehouse in Balic and can tell the PCs where it is, but he knows little of the beetle trade.

**Next.** The PCs should get enough clues to point them toward a **Return to Balic**. Between Aljara's information and the information they may get from Shom prisoners, it should be clear that Balic is the next step in ending the beetle trade.



## Part Three: Return to Balic

**Setup.** Refer to **A Desert Journey** for information on refereeing an overland trek. You may also need to refer to the *DARK SUN® Rules Book* or the *DARK SUN Monstrous Compendium™ Appendix* for random encounter tables. On page 32 of the *Player's Book* there is an illustration of the city of Balic.

**Start.** The adventurers may decide to head back to Balic at any time. Obviously, there are a number of possible starting points for the return trip. You can run any diversionary adventures or red herrings that you want to while the PCs are journeying back to the city.

**Encounter.** This is an excellent opportunity for you to give the players another chance to learn information they may have overlooked. If they are lost, you could have them coincidentally encounter Aljara as a free wanderer. You could invent new NPCs with information to sell or trade to the PCs and make sure that the party has a “random” encounter with them.

As a secondary encounter, you can set up a meeting with some of the PCs’ old enemies or villains. Look for an action in the PCs’ past that would have left them with enemies or have other unexpected repercussions. Some possible encounters based on events so far might include:

- A war party of gith tracks down the PCs and attacks their camp, looking for vengeance for the tribesmen cut down by the heroes during their escape. If the PCs were especially sloppy in getting away from the gith, this is a good way to reward their carelessness.
- A party of mercenaries or assassins hired by House Shom ambushes the heroes. If the heroes recaptured the stolen caravan wagon but allowed some Shom agents to escape, word will eventually get back to Shom’s bases.
- Marius Amketch and his bodyguards track down the heroes and demand some answers from them. This encounter is appropriate if the PCs have decided not to pursue the caravan, or do not intend to report back to Marius when they return.
- A meeting with any old enemy or villain from a previous adventure who might have a score to settle with the player characters.

When the heroes finally reach Balic, you can show them the illustration of the city from the *Player's Book*.

**Next.** The PCs can pursue several courses of action once they have returned to the city. Go on to the **Encounter Summary** in Part Four.

## Part Four: Encounter Summary

In Part Four of this adventure, the heroes will have the chance to track the beetle trade back to its source and destroy it forever. There are several ways the players can begin this last section:

- If they tricked Holtet Phen into talking, the PCs may already know where the Shom base is and will be able to proceed directly to **A Visit to House Shom**.
- Bezrak and Agristes may have revealed that a secret Shom base exists, but neither knows its location. If the players have this information but don't know anything else, they will have to locate the base through the **Veiled Alliance** or **Amketch**. You will probably proceed to **Veiled Alliance Report** or **Amketch Report** next.
- Aljara knows a base exists, but doesn't know where. She does know of Yarnak, the Shom defector in **Informant**, and can steer the PCs to that encounter.

**The Beetle Trade.** The first section of Part Four briefly describes the shaqat beetle trade and the path the heroes must follow to end it forever. When the heroes return to Balic, they may decide to see Marius Amketch (**Amketch Report**) or to seek out their **Veiled Alliance** contact. These encounters will lead to the PCs' meeting with Yarnak, the Shom **Informant**.

House Shom is not helpless and will be keeping an eye on the PCs. Meetings with the people described in the previous encounter will bring a response from Shom as the PCs are attacked by **Assassins** and later troubled by **Templars**. If the adventurers persevere, they'll eventually learn the secret base's location.

Attacking or infiltrating the Shom base is covered in **A Visit to House Shom**. There, the heroes will be able to destroy a distribution center for the beetles and learn that the beetles are shipped to Balic from Fort Melidor, far to the west. **To Melidor** covers the journey to the beetles' source. Characters who do not bother to mask their involvement in the raids on the base will meet **Mothgar**, a giantish mercenary hired by Shom to punish the PCs.

At Fort Melidor, the heroes find that the beetles are created in the ruins of **Kalidnay**. The defiler Tethrades has discovered the sorcerer-king's armory, the location of the ancient secret that allows the manufacture of the beetles. The ruins are guarded by a contingent of Shom warriors.

**Following the Script.** The adventure is generally linear from this point on. All the clues the players have received so far will point them at Fort Melidor, and the Fort Melidor encounters will point them to Kalidnay. If your players have seized on the idea of Shom holdings and want to go to Nibenay to attack their strongholds, you may want to dissuade them by having more clues "turn up" to put them back on the right track.

**Next.** Read up on The Beetle Trade on the following page. Then proceed with **A Visit to House Shom**, **Informant**, **Veiled Alliance Report** or **Amketch Report** as appropriate.

## Part Four: The Beetle Trade

**Note:** This is privileged information for the Dungeon Master only! Don't reveal the details of the shaqat beetle trade until the players have actually uncovered them.

**Kalidnay.** Cerebral parasites are extremely rare on Athas; they never developed naturally in the world of the Dark Sun. Ages ago, the sorcerer-queen Kalid-Ma developed the creatures as a biological weapon to use against her enemies. It seems likely that she journeyed to another plane where they are common and contrived a way to capture the tiny creatures and transport them back to Athas.

Fortunately, Kalid-Ma possessed the wisdom to never unleash the parasites. She preserved them in magical cylinders of brass, and kept them deep in her secret armories. She also enchanted the cylinders so that the parasites they imprisoned (and all their descendants) could be recalled and re-sealed by the use of a powerful spell. Kalid-Ma intended to use the cylinders to create a psionic plague that she could end whenever she wanted to—but she never got the chance. The mysterious destruction of Kalidnay swept her and her people away, leaving the cylinders behind.

Several years ago, a party of adventurers led by Tethrades was exploring the ruins of Kalidnay when it discovered the armories and the cylinders. The defiler carefully identified the ancient weapons and came up with the idea of using the cerebral parasites to control psionicists when necessary. Shom guards the ruins now, removing cylinders as needed to keep up with the demand for parasites. The ancient traps and guardians of Kalid-Ma are also a deterrent to casual exploration of the ruined city.

**Fort Melidor.** This outpost appears to be a normal trading post, but it is used as a staging point for the Shom operations in Kalidnay. The beetles are smuggled onto caravans and shipped out from the fort.

Since a number of people come to Fort Melidor to trade, Shom has decided to use secrecy rather than strength to guard their sordid cargo. A casual tour of Fort Melidor will reveal little out of the ordinary.

**Balic.** The major distribution point of the beetles, a secret warehouse in Balic receives the smuggled beetles and in turn ships them out. About half the beetles are sent on to Nibenay to be distributed from there, and the rest are distributed locally in the Balic area. Again, there are too many prying eyes in Balic for Shom to ward off investigations with a show of force; instead, they rely on hidden facilities and the use of other houses' caravans to keep their secret safe.

**Distribution.** In various places, the beetles are quietly sold to middlemen, such as unscrupulous bards, elf tribes, or human fences. These people then sell to those who make use of their unique abilities. Slavers and templars are regular customers.

**Next.** Go on to the appropriate encounter indicated in the **Encounter Summary**.

## Part Four: The Veiled Alliance Returns

**Setup.** Refer to the illustration and player text on page 33 of the *Player's Book* when called for in **Encounter**, below.

**Start.** Allow the players to initiate this encounter. If the PCs return to Balic and want to try to contact the Veiled Alliance, you should feel free to arrange a couple of clandestine “contact” encounters. A short chain of people to talk to—a beggar on a street corner, a tavern keeper, the owner of a small shop—will soon lead the adventurers to an elven water merchant who tells them to meet Maserak at a tavern called *The Wounded Lirr*.

**Encounter.** Maserak the half-elf will be at *The Wounded Lirr* at the appointed time. Maserak is a cautious individual and will have his fellows sweep the area thoroughly to make sure templar or Shom spies aren't around.

When the PCs enter the tavern, he motions them over and asks them to sit down at his table. Before going any further, Maserak asks for a complete report on the success or failure of the heroes' investigations and a detailed summary of the events at Red Obelisk. Occasionally he will interrupt to ask questions such as, “Did you recover or destroy the beetles?” or “Do you know where Tethrades went after he left Red Obelisk?”

Once Maserak is satisfied with the PCs' account of themselves, he will ask how he can be of service. Presumably, the heroes will ask about Yarnak or about the secret Shom warehouse. When they do, refer the players to the text on page 33 of the *Player's Book*.

**Role-playing.** Maserak is a very careful, controlled person who is suspicious of everything and everyone around him. If the player characters have done well so far, he will not hesitate to recognize it and praise them, but if they have missed obvious clues or left things undone, he can be sharply critical as well.

**Outcome.** The PCs should ask Maserak to arrange a meeting with Yarnak, the Shom defector. If the players miss this opportunity, they may be able to arrange a meeting through Marius in **Amketch Report**.

If the heroes find a reason to draw blade in *The Wounded Lirr*, they will find that there are about six Veiled Alliance warriors in disguise throughout the tavern. Treat them as caravan guards. A powerful psionicist and a mid-level wizard complete the Alliance guards.

**Next.** Continue with **Amketch Report** or with the **Shom Informant** as appropriate.

## Part Four: Amketch Report

**Setup.** Refer to the illustration and text on page 34 of the *Player's Book* when indicated in **Encounter**, below.

**Start.** Unlike the Veiled Alliance, Marius Amketch is easy to find. He spends most of his time in the same emporium where the player characters met him. Unfortunately, Marius has not heard of Bezrak's treachery yet, and he will be quite surprised to see the PCs. Read the text below to the players.

*The Amketch warehouse is as busy as you remember. A small caravan of about two dozen burden-kanks is mustering in the courtyard, and various agents and guardsmen are shouting orders and working to finish loading the insects. You are required to state your names and business at the front gate, and a warrior goes off to announce your arrival to Marius Amketch. You are surprised at how quickly he returns.*

*In a few minutes, you find yourselves standing before a small, comfortable villa within the compound walls. Lush green trees and shrubs isolate you from the rest of the Amketch base. Marius is waiting for you, with four tough muls standing by his side. He speaks quietly with the guard who escorted you, and then dismisses him. "I hadn't expected to see you here," Marius begins. His expression is cold "Is there any particular reason you are not with the caravan I hired you to protect?"*

**Encounter.** At the beginning of this meeting, Marius is furious. He thinks that the PCs have ignored their half of a verbal contract, and is amazed that they would have the gall to meet him face-to-face after cheating him.

However, Marius is basically a reasonable and compassionate fellow, and given half the chance he will believe the heroes' story. If the player characters made no effort to trail the Amketch wagon after the Red Obelisk disaster, or if they left Amketch personnel as prisoners when they could have freed them, Marius will want nothing more to do with the party and will have them escorted out directly. Otherwise he will want to know why they did not remain with the caravan once it was freed again.

If the PCs ask Marius's assistance in tracking down the next link in the beetle trade, allow the players to read the text in the *Player's Book*. Special Note: do not repeat the offer to meet Yarnak if the PCs have already set up the meeting with the Veiled Alliance.

**Role-playing.** Arrogant or disrespectful PCs can easily push Marius over the edge, especially if the players don't bother to come up with explanations for their actions. When Marius spoke with the escorting guard, he told him to make sure that a contingent of warriors was standing ready outside the courtyard. The merchant will not hesitate to call for his troops if he feels threatened or insulted.

**Dialogue.** "You say Bezrak was a traitor. How can you prove it? Where are your witnesses? I'd like to believe you, but you've given me no proof"

**Statistics.** If your players manage to make a fight out of this, there are about 40 caravan guards and 20 outriders who can assist their master within 1d3 melee rounds.

**Next.** Go on to **Shom Informant** if the PCs came clean with Marius and persuaded him to help them. Otherwise, this may be a dead end for the heroes, and they may need help to realize that the Veiled Alliance is their only alternative.

## Part Four: Shom Informant

**Setup.** Show the players the text and illustration on page 35 of the *Player's Book* when they meet Yarnak in the **Encounter** section. You can also prepare for this encounter by mapping out a floor plan of the *Sandtiger's Tail* tavern.

**Start.** The player characters can easily learn that the *Sandtiger's Tail* is a rather disreputable tavern in one of Balic's poorer areas. You can allow the players to find a decent inn to rest up and regain spells before they begin this encounter. When the heroes go to the *Sandtiger's Tail* for their meeting, read the text below:

*Near the center of the city of Balic is the dark, dangerous neighborhood known as the Maze. The grand public buildings shine pristinely in the distance, but here the Balicites are desperate folk who groan beneath the heel of the tyrant Andropinis. All manner of thievery, swindling, and vices can be found in the Maze's dark alleyways and crumbling buildings.*

*You find the Sandtiger's Tail at the end of a filthy alleyway, after bribing a street urchin to show you the way to the tavern. Inside, you find a dim, smoky room filled with oppressive heat and stench. It is hard to believe that people like to spend their time here. You follow your contact procedure, and the barmaid's eyes narrow before she nods at a hooded man in one corner.*

**Encounter.** Yarnak is a battle-hardened mul in fear for his life. He knows the price of defection from House Shom, and he did not wish to meet with the players. Refer the players to the text and illustration in the *Player's Book*.

When Yarnak finishes, Shom assassins strike. They've been keeping their eyes open for Yarnak, and his meeting with the PCs has given him away. The assassins are led by an evil defiler who strikes by summoning a powerful gehreleth to attack Yarnak.

*Suddenly, the door bursts open. A cold wind blows out the guttering oil lamps, filling the room with shadows. In the doorway, a hulking, monstrous figure crouches, its mouth filled with dozens of needle-sharp teeth. "Yarnakkkk," it hisses. Then it leaps for you!*

The gehreleth will single-mindedly attack Yarnak, its only desire to slay the mul and fulfill the conditions of its summoning. The customers and passers-by flee for their lives at the first sight of the creature. The assassins flee the scene once the gehreleth is released. After 12 rounds of combat, a squad of templars will show up and attack the fiend, afterwards arresting everyone left in the bar. If the heroes can defeat the gehreleth before the templars arrive, Yarnak can show them a secret way out of the tavern that will help the party evade the templars.

If the heroes abandon Yarnak and flee, the gehreleth will not pursue them.

**Stats.** Yarnak is the equivalent of an elite mul bodyguard. If the heroes find a way to pursue the assassins, there are four Shom guards plus a 7th-level defiler with a discharged spell scroll. The gehreleth is described in *MC 8: The Outer Planes Appendix*.

**Gehreleth, Farastu (1):** AL CE; Int Average; AC -1; MV 15, Fl 30 (C); HD 11; hp 56; THAC0 9; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6+1/1d6+1/3d4; SA battle frenzy, adhesive; SD adhesive, +1 weapon to hit; MR 50%; Size M; ML 15. The farastu description can be found in *MC8: The Outer Planes Appendix*. If you do not own this accessory, substitute a high-level thri-kreen gladiator as a paid killer.

**Next.** Yarnak's information will point the heroes toward **A Visit to House Shom**. At your discretion, you may want to have the **Assassins** strike again.

## Part Four: A Visit to House Shom

**Setup.** The exploration of the secret Shom warehouse is described in three pages. On the next page, you will find a keyed map of the Shom warehouse. A similar map without the key is provided on page 36 of the *Player's Book*. Allow the players to refer to the map in the *Player's Book* as they proceed through this set of encounters.

**Start.** Read the text below to the players:

*Yarnak's directions lead you to a large, prosperous pottery and glazier shop. This is the busy merchant district of Balic, and by day Arena Way is crowded with throngs of vendors and passers-by. The shop is divided into three parts: a cool, quiet display area where nobles and wealthy merchants scrutinize the wares; the pottery and glazery itself, manned by a dozen or more craftsmen sweating in the heat of their kilns and crucibles; and off to one side, the comfortable walled home of the merchant who owns the works.*

**Encounter.** The Shom operations are carefully concealed. Characters who try the direct approach—asking about House Shom, or demanding to search the warehouse—will get blank looks for answers. If the party makes a nuisance of itself, the templars will be summoned to deal with them. The heroes have a slightly better chance of succeeding with subterfuge, such as arriving with a fake delivery or asking to hire on in the workshop.

**1. Emporium.** This is a well-kept storefront, with even shelves displaying numerous examples of pottery (including jars, urns, plates, and jugs) and glassware (mostly bottles of different types, with rare crystal pieces or mirrors.) At night, the outer door is barred and locked, and two night watchmen (actually Shom guards) stay in here. If attacked, they will call for help from area 4.

**2. Offices.** Several desks occupy the center of this room. No Shom documents are kept here—only Ridecia accounts. The secret door is behind a bookcase.

**3. Storeroom.** Crates of earthenware and packaged bottles are kept here, ready to ship. This room is more cluttered and dirty than the storefront. The door is tied shut with a complex knot. The secret door is in a large wooden crate.

**4. Workshop.** Several large kilns fill this room. Four Shom guards led by an elite mul sergeant stand watch in here, ready to respond to any intrusion. They try to remain out of sight and only respond to serious threats.

**4a through 4c.** These rooms are used to store materials for the potters and glazers. Fuel for the kilns, clay, sand, and barrels of water can all be found here. The outer doors are secured by stout wooden bars from inside.

**5. Courtyard.** This alleyway is used as a courtyard by the Ridecia family and is open to the sky. Two private bodyguards (actually Shom guardsmen) usually stand watch here, making a pretense of warding the Ridecias. The outer gates are barred.

**6. Ridecia's House.** Ridecia, a Shom senior agent, lives here. He pretends to be an independent maker of pottery and glassware. If questioned, Ridecia knows that the beetles arrive from Fort Melidor. His "wife" is a bodyguard with stats equal to those of an elite mul. Ridecia's house is quite comfortable, and is filled with various art objects and luxuries. Two more bodyguards (again, Shom guardsmen) usually remain in the common area. The outer doors are locked and barred at night.

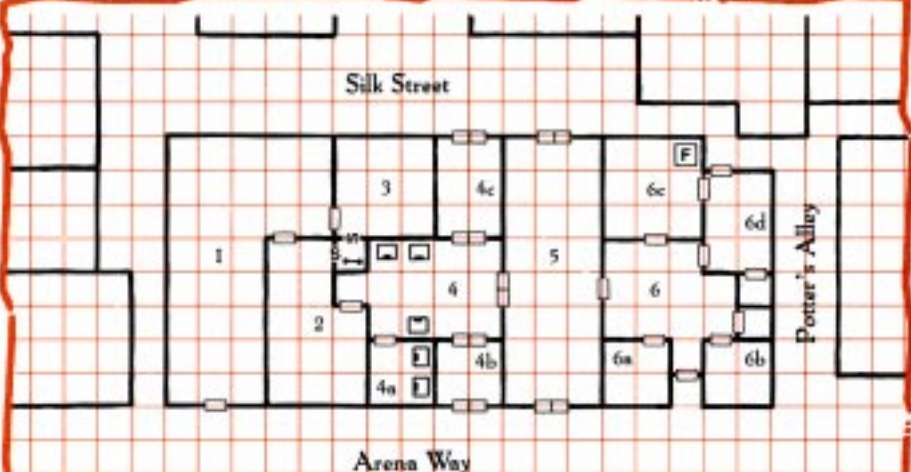
**6a and 6b.** These rooms are comfortable bedchambers.

**6c.** This is a den or dining room. The secret trap door is under a rug.

**6d.** Jars and urns containing foodstuffs line the walls of this kitchen.

## Part Four: Shom Warehouse

Silk Street

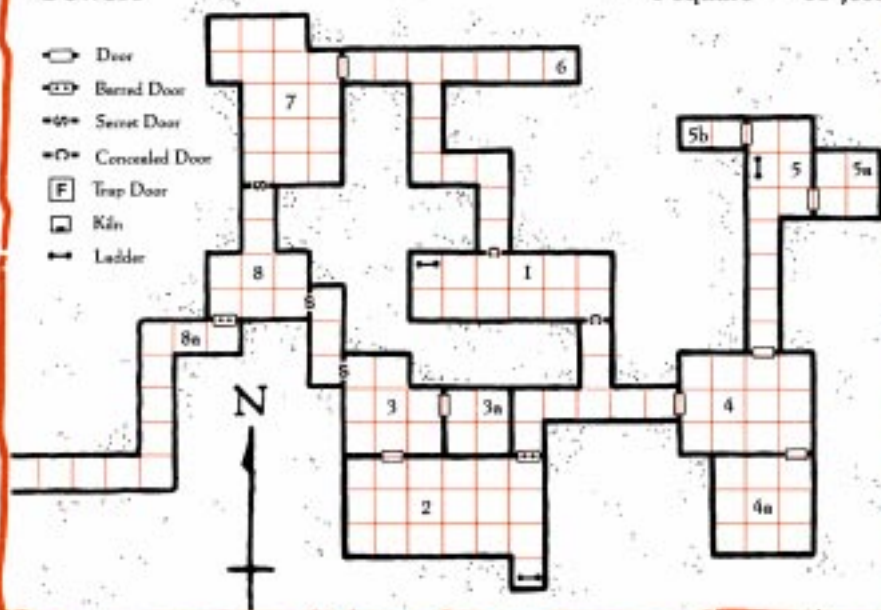


Street Level

Sewers

1 square = 10 feet

- Door
- Barred Door
- Secret Door
- Concealed Door
- Trap Door
- Kân
- Ladder





## Part Four: A Visit to House Shom

**Setup.** There are two secret ladders from the workshop above down to the underground warehouse. The heroes' next clue to the beetle trade is hidden in the secret warehouses and offices. Pages 37 and 40 of the *Player's Book* supplement this page; refer to them as noted in the text.

**1. Cellar Storehouse.** The ladder from the office leads to a long, narrow cellar filled with a number of useful supplies and foodstuffs. Ridecia makes sure that this area resembles a normal cellar against the possibility of a templar search, but observant PCs will note that there are several barrels of drinking water and a couple of cases of various bone and obsidian weapons here. The concealed doors have sacks of grain piled carelessly in front of them.

**2. Beetle Chamber.** This room is guarded by a locked bronze-bound door of mekillot bone. Sturdy wicker cages filled with shaqat beetles line the walls of the room. Show the players the illustration on page 40 of the *Player's Book*. Shackled to one wall are half a dozen weak erdlus, food for the beetles. There are four agents, four guards led by an elite mul, and a Shom psionist (use Tsarana from the *Background Book*.) The agents in area 3 will respond to trouble here.

**3. Secret Offices.** These chambers are used as offices to record the movements of beetle shipments. There are two agents, a senior agent, and an elite mul here. A search of the office reveals several important ledgers containing encoded names of buyers. Show the players the text and illustration on page 37 of the *Player's Book*, **Shom's Correspondence**.

**3a. Paychest.** This room is locked and guarded by a *fire trap* which does 10+1d4 damage. Inside are a couple of heavy wooden chests with 250 cp, 440 sp, and 10 gp. A small coffer is hidden behind a loose stone in the wall and holds a pouch of 6 diamonds worth 30 sp each and a *wand of magic missiles* with 18 charges.

**4. Barracks.** Six off-duty guards are sleeping here and suffer a -4 penalty on any surprise checks. If roused, the guards require one round to wake up and one round to equip themselves. There are a total of 15 small bunks in this crowded room. Each bunk also has a trunk at its foot that contains various personal effects.

**4a. Sergeants' Quarters.** Four elite muls bunk here, but only two are here now. They are engaged in a game of dice, and can equip themselves and respond in one round. The chests with their personal effects contain 35 sp and 120 cp.

**5. Secret Cellar.** A ladder goes up to a secret trap door in Ridecia's house. Extra supplies and water are stored here, but this room is otherwise empty.

**5a. Storage.** Wicker baskets and clay urns are kept here.

**5b. Trapped Room.** Opening the door releases a trip wire, firing a bank of four heavy crossbows at the doorway. Anyone in the way is attacked by four bolts with a THACO of 15. Each bolt does 1d4/1d6 damage.

**6. Trapped Corridor.** The door at the end of the hallway is false. Beneath the door is a concealed pit trap, 10 feet deep, with wooden spikes. Victims take 1d6 damage from the fall and must save vs. death or take 2d6 damage from the spikes.

**7. Agents' Quarters.** Comfortably furnished, this room is used by the Shom agents. Two agents are sleeping here now. Several personal belongings can be collected from the various chests and trunks, totaling 230 cp and 110 sp.

**8. Escape Tunnel.** Weapons and supplies are stored in this secret chamber.

**8a.** The doorway leads to the sewer system beneath Balic. It is made of rusty, ancient iron and is locked, barred, and *wizard locked*.

## Part Four: Assassins

**Setup.** An illustration of the assassins' attack can be found on page 37 of the *Player's Book*. Show the illustration to the players when cued in the text.

**Start.** This is a free-floating encounter that you can run at any time. Eventually, House Shom will learn that the PCs are in Balic. Shom psionics can quickly relay a warning from Bezrak or Agristes about the PCs to the Shom operatives in Balic. Even if the PCs cover their trail, their actions in Balic (i.e. speaking with the **Informant** or raiding the **Shom Warehouse**) are likely to draw Shom's attention.

This encounter occurs during the day when the heroes are moving from one point to another. They may be returning to their inn, or setting out to meet with the Veiled Alliance. Read the text below to the players:

*The streets of Balic are hot and crowded as throngs of people make their way from one place to another. Vendors hawk their wares, beggars appeal for money, and arrogant templar patrols beat their way through the crowds. Suddenly, there is a flash of steel and the unpleasant tingle of another presence in your mind! You are under attack!*

**Encounter.** The assassins strike from several directions at once. First of all, a thief trailing the party through the crowds attempts a backstab on one of the rear characters. Secondly, a psionist hidden in a carpet merchant's stall strikes at another character with a psionic attack. Four thugs rush the front of the party, emerging suddenly from a dark alleyway. Have the PCs make a surprise check with a -2 penalty when the ambush is sprung.

There are several ways the attack can be anticipated:

- A character with the alertness or trailing non-weapon proficiencies has a chance to spot the tail or the ambush, negating the assassins' surprise bonus.
- A character with a psionic talent such as danger sense or precognition may receive advance notice of the peril, negating the assassins' surprise bonus.
- If the assassins are surprised by the party, they are still preparing for their ambush and are simply standing in the middle of street when the PCs arrive.

The psionist will use id insinuation and ego whip at first to try and keep as many characters off-balance as possible before moving in to attack with his psychokinetic devotions. The assassin attempts to backstab, and then moves to melee with any spellcasters or psionics in the rear ranks.

If captured, only the psionist and assassin are actual members of House Shom. The thugs are merely hired muscle. None of the attackers knows anything about the beetle trade; they were just told to kill the PCs.

**Stats.** Use the stats from Tsarana's description in the *Background Book* for the Shom psionist who leads the attack. The thugs are the equivalent of Shom guards, except they wield clubs and daggers. The thief is described below:

**Assassin:** AL NE; AC 4 (carru leather plus 18 Dexterity); MV 12; 7th-level thief; hp 33; THAC0 17 (13 with wrist razor); #AT 1 short sword and 1 wrist razor, Dmg 1d6+1/1d8+1 (iron short sword, 16 Strength) or 1d6+2/1d4+2 (wrist razor); SA backstab at +4 to hit for triple damage; ML 10. Note that a backstab attack negates the victim's Dexterity and shield modifiers to armor class

## Part Four: Templar Troubles

**Setup.** This encounter is accompanied by page 40 of the *Player's Book*. Use the *Player's Book* when cued in **Start**, below.

**Start.** This is another free-floating encounter that can be played at any time while the heroes are in Balic. It is especially effective if used after **Informant**, **Assassins**, or **A Visit to House Shom**.

Once the heroes have done something to anger the Balicite members of House Shom, high-ranking senior agents will bribe a templar patrol to find and arrest the heroes on whatever charges are appropriate. If the adventurers are lingering in town or have not made any efforts to conceal their whereabouts, this encounter occurs as the templars arrive at their inn. Otherwise, the templars appear when the PCs try to leave the city. Show the players the text on page 40 of the *Player's Book* now.

**Encounter.** If the heroes allow themselves to be arrested by the templar patrol, they're in deep trouble. House Shom will manufacture dozens of witnesses who will accuse the players characters of murder, arson, and worse. The testimony will be keyed to whatever event drew Shom's attention—the raid on their secret warehouse, the gehreleth summoning, or the fight with the assassins. Unless the players come up with some miraculous defense, the templars will quickly find them guilty and sentence them to slavery in the city's fields. (On the bright side, escaping from the fields as convicted criminals would be an exciting diversion.)

The player characters may choose to avoid arrest when they confront the patrol. There are several ways to do this:

**Flee:** The templars will attack with missiles and spells to try and prevent the party's escape. The heroes stand a good chance of outrunning the templars and losing them in the dark alleyways of the city, but they become wanted criminals. Every templar in the city will be keeping an eye out for them.

**Attack:** The templars try to kill or capture the PCs. When half the patrol is down, the rest will retreat, and the PCs will become wanted as above.

**Deceit:** Fast-talking characters have a slim chance of convincing the templars that they've got the wrong guys, or that the matter has already been cleared up, or even that the party is under the protection of a powerful patron.

**Bribery:** Since the templars were bribed to arrest the adventurers, a hefty counter-bribe can convince them to leave well enough alone. The charges are severe and it would require about 150 to 250 sp worth of treasure to bribe the templars.

**Magical or Psionic Influence.** A dangerous course, since the templars will interpret this as an attack if the spell or discipline fails.

**Stats.** There are six 2nd-level templars, two half-giant guards, and a templar leader in the patrol. The low-level templars and half-giants can be found on the NPC Master Table. The templar leader is described below:

**Templar Leader (1):** AL NE; AC 5 (mekillot hide armor, shield); MV 12; 5th-level templar, hp 31; THACO 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (iron long sword); spells *flame blade*, *hold person*, *cause fear*, *detect magic*, *command*; Size M; ML 15.

**Next.** Pick up the storyline and return to where the heroes were after the templars have been dealt with.

## Part Four: To Melidor

**Setup.** The journey to Fort Melidor involves a lot of overland travel. You may want to refer to the material in **A Desert Journey** to prepare for this part of the adventure. You can present several different diversionary or random encounters during the course of the journey. For example, if the PCs fought their way out of the city of Balic, a templar patrol may pursue them. A war-party of gith led by Kugrisht may have tracked the PCs to Balic and is waiting for the heroes to leave. Be creative, but try to tie the encounters into the story.

The encounter described below is meant to be a nuisance, and should serve to remind the players of the dangers of traveling in the Athasian desert.

**Start.** Choose one of the nights that the characters are camping along the road to run this encounter. Read the text below to the players:

*After another long day of travel, your muscles ache for food, water and rest. Your clothes and bodies are caked with sweat and dust. As the sun begins to set before you, you begin to search out a safe campsite for the night. To one side of the road, a small hillock crowned with cacti offers shelter and a ready source of fuel for your campfire. Wearily, you drop your pack and collapse in the deep shadow of the rocky outcropping.*

*Suddenly, you are stung by a long needle of bone, attached to a thin, sinewy tendon. With horror, you realize that the cacti above are firing their needles at you!*

**Encounter.** In the cactus patch at the top of the hillock there are four spider cacti. The campsite is about 15 feet below the predatory cacti, at the bottom of a rocky escarpment. If any character advances within range of the spider cacti before the others, the lead person is targeted first. Otherwise, the cacti fire their needles at random characters or party mounts.

If a player states that his character is examining the cactus from a safe distance, there is a small chance that he or she may recognize the spider cacti for what they are. Rangers, druids, and characters with the survival (stony barrens) proficiency may check against their Wisdom on 1d20 with a -4 penalty. If the character succeeds, he can easily warn the other PCs and move the campsite to a safer location.

**Stats.** Spider cacti are described in the DARK SUN® *Monstrous Compendium™ Appendix*. Each of the cacti has five sets of needles, and only attacks one victim at a time. Two cacti may attack the same individual. When the cactus has speared a victim with one or more of its needles, it draws the needles back at the rate of five feet per round with a Strength of 17.

**Spider Cactus (4):** AL N; Int Non; AC 7; MV 0; HD 3; hp 16, 14, 14, 11; THAC0 17; #AT 8 needles or 1; Dmg 1 per needle, or 2d4+AC; SA paralysis; SD special; Size M; ML 10; XP 270

**Next.** Resume the overland journey to Fort Melidor. The next encounter during the trip is **Mothgar**, on the following page.

## Part Four: Mothgar

**Setup.** Mothgar is illustrated on page 41 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** As the characters are continuing toward Melidor, they find themselves crossing an extensive region of sandy wastes. Read the text below:

*About halfway across a stretch of flat sand, you find yourself heading toward a small hill that lies along your path. Melidor is only another couple of days' travel away, and your arduous journey has strengthened you for the tasks ahead. It is getting close to noon, and you plan on stopping for a couple of hours to let the worst heat of the day pass.*

*Something doesn't look right about the hill you've been steering by. It is about three or four hundred yards away, and you stop in amazement as the hill groans, rumbles, and rises to its feet. It's a giant! The colossal creature stands up, stretches, and folds its great cloak up. Donning a great helmet, he picks up a huge ballista and catches sight of your band. Slinging the war engine over his shoulder (it's no more than a heavy crossbow for this fellow), the giant strides purposefully toward your band. "Ho there!" he booms. "I've been looking for you little people! Are you Stug Two-Blades?"*

**Encounter.** Mothgar is a giantish mercenary of the Silt Estuary. A few days ago, he was contacted by an agent of House Shom in Ledopolus and offered a contract against the PCs. Remarkably cruel and greedy, even for a giant, Mothgar quickly accepted and thundered off to find the heroes.

If the players are rash enough to answer Mothgar's question honestly, the giant responds with a hearty "Good!" and loads his ballista, obviously intending to attack the PCs. However, Mothgar is not very bright. Any simple ruse, deception, or even a bald-faced lie will throw the mighty giant into fits of confusion. With a black scowl, he mumbles, "Haven't seen 'em, huh? Well, let me know if you do," and lumbers off in a random direction.

If the PCs misdirect Mothgar and send him away, they'll travel another day or two without event. Then Mothgar will catch up with them again, pushing hard to overtake the little people who tricked him. Unfortunately, Mothgar cannot be fooled a second time and will not listen to anything the heroes say. When he gets in range, he'll open fire with his ballista.

Mothgar fancies himself a sharpshooter, and will stand back firing at the party until he runs out of bolts. (Of course, if the PCs close to melee, Mothgar will happily drop his ballista and wade into the fight.)

**Mothgar:** AL NE; Int Low; AC 4 (2); MV 15; HD 15; hp 92; THAC0 5 (7 with stone mace, 13 with ballista); #AT 1 (1/2 with ballista); Dmg 3-18+16 (giant stone mace) or 3-30 (heavy ballista bolt); SA hurl rocks, knockdown; SD resist psionics; Size H; ML 17; XP Value 9,000.

Mothgar carries six 30-gallon casks of water and eight live erdlus in a sack slung over his shoulder. His ballista is a discarded siege engine that was modified for him by a dwarven engineer; its ranges are 10/20/36, and he has a quiver of 12 iron-headed javelins to fire. Mothgar protects his legs with extra braxat hide armor, improving his AC vs. melee attacks from man-sized opponents to 2. He carries a small pouch with 330 cp, 110 sp, and a small statue of bronze worth 85 sp.

**Next.** Continue with **Fort Melidor**, on the next page.

## Part Four: Fort Melidor

**Setup.** Refer to pages 42, 43, and 44 of the *Player's Book*. Page 42 is an illustration of Fort Melidor; page 43 includes an illustration and text to be shown to the players during this encounter; and 44 is a diagram of Fort Melidor and its area.

**Start.** When the adventurers reach the fort, show them the illustration on page 42. Read the text below to the players:

*Melidor is a sleepy little outpost on the edge of the verdant belt north of the Lost Oasis. Earthen ramparts and a ditch filled with deadly brambleweed protect the fort from attack. Inside, the compound is divided into three areas: a large, dusty square for visiting caravans, a cluster of barracks and Shom offices, and a lush garden with a palatial manor in its center. Several wooden watchtowers rise above the earthworks, and you can see several patrols of Shom soldiery going about their business.*

**Encounter.** Fort Melidor is an open trading post, frequented by various nomads and elven tribes. The Shom personnel who run the fort have no reason to antagonize the PCs unless the heroes announced their destination to Shom agents before leaving Balic. (Of course, the players may not realize this.)

While the player characters are observing the fort from outside, a patrol of Shom soldiers stationed in Kalidnay will appear. Refer to page 43 of the *Player's Book*. After the patrol departs, PCs may decide to enter Melidor in an attempt to learn more of Shom's operations there.

The Shom buildings and the garden are off-limits to outsiders, but the outer compound of fort is open to anyone who wanders in. A small tavern named *The Broken Tankard* caters to the various caravans and desert people who come by. Inside, the PCs can find several people to question:

**Thera**, a scarred female mul who tends bar. She knows beetles are smuggled into and out the fort by House Shom, and knows that they come from Kalidnay. She only parts with this information for a bribe of 10 sp or more.

**Jarvi**, an elven bard and wandering storyteller. He can tell the heroes that Shom brings sealed packages from the ruins of Kalidnay, but doesn't know what they are. Jarvi will give away information for a drink, but he will then tell the senior agent in charge of the fort who will warn Tethrades at Kalidnay.

**Ridorn**, a Shom guardsman in his cups. Ridorn can tell the heroes that they bring beetles from Kalidnay but doesn't know why. After the PCs question Ridorn, he will suddenly sober up and loudly demand to know who they are and why they are asking him about the beetles. Fortunately for the PCs, no other Shom employees are around to notice, but Jarvi will relay the warning to Tethrades.

**Outcome.** The PCs may decide to infiltrate the Shom offices and warehouses in Melidor. There are a total of 50 warriors and 10 agents in the fort. Twenty of the warriors are detached on mounted patrols in the surrounding area, and of the remaining 30, half are on-duty at any given time. The warehouses and offices are filled with normal trade goods, but the quarters of the senior agent of the fort contain incriminating records describing the Kalidnay operation.

**Next.** If the PCs follow the elves, continue with **Elven Caravan**, on the next page. If the heroes follow the soldiers, go on to **Kalidnay**. If the heroes investigate Melidor, they will probably want to continue by exploring **Kalidnay**.

## Part Four: Elven Caravan

**Setup.** You may prepare for this encounter by sketching a diagram of the elven caravan and the locations of its scouts and guards.

**Start.** If the heroes follow the elven caravan but do not attempt to interfere, the elves head back toward Ledopolus at a grueling pace. The entire caravan moves with an effective speed of 36 MP, although the elves have to carefully tend the kanks to avoid exhausting the animals. Read the following to the players:

*The elves are experienced traders and desert runners, keeping up a murderous pace. The 10 kanks from Melidor are kept in the center of their loose formation, led by a group of six or seven elven children who drive the insects along. Around the kanks, 12 elven women and another four or five young elves carry the simple household goods of the tribe—light tents, a clay pot or two, and a few basic rations. Ten elven warriors surround the main body of the tribe, alert for any trouble. From time to time you catch glimpses of far-ranging scouts and advance runners, perhaps six to eight altogether.*

**Encounter.** The Tula-kai will halt at sundown at a small well and set up camp. By sunrise they will be gone again. If the heroes try to sneak up on the elves or openly assault them, the Tula-kai will naturally assume the PCs are hostile and defend themselves to the best of their ability. The fast-moving scouts have a 1 in 3 chance of spotting the adventurers before the heroes get close to the main body.

If the PCs approach the Tula-kai in peace, avoiding provocative actions, the elves will halt to talk to them. They have been instructed to let no one inspect the kanks' load or know where they are going. (The elves inspected the cargo and discovered the beetles, but they don't care what they may be used for.)

Characters who insist on examining the kanks' load or ask too many questions will rapidly wear out their welcome. The elves will attack instantly if they feel the tribe is threatened. However, characters who offer a suitable bribe to the elves will be permitted to inspect the cargo.

The cargo consists of iron nails, rare nuts and spices, and broy beans. The packages are all designed with clever false bottoms and secret compartments, concealing about 200 shaqat beetles. The Tula-kai can be bribed to reveal that they were hired by House Shom in Melidor to carry the beetles to Ledopolus. They can also tell the PCs that no beetles are kept in Melidor; they are all brought there from Kalidnay.

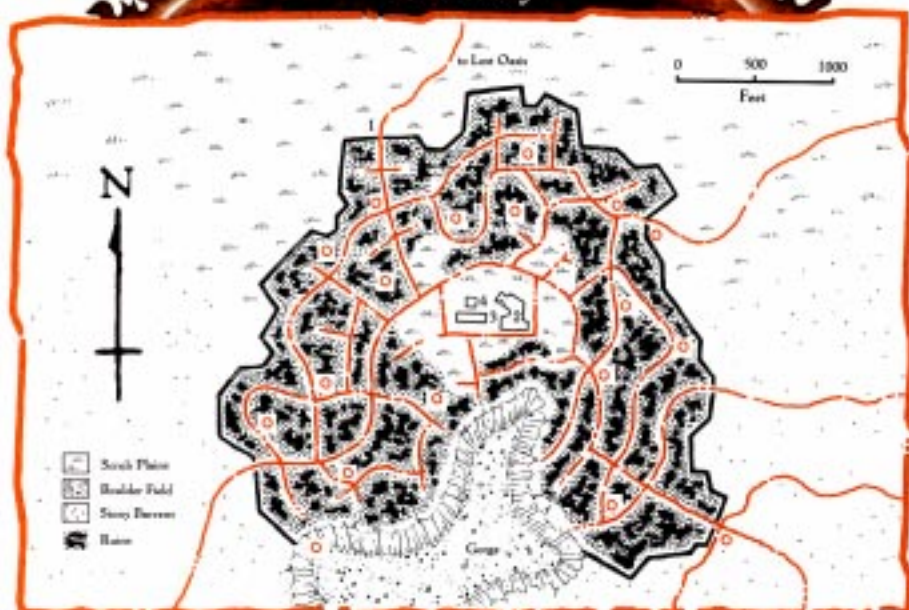
**Stats.** The Tula-kai elves are listed on the NPC Master Table. There are 22 adult elves in the main body, plus six scouts who can return to assist the tribe in 2d4 rounds. The 12 children do not fight, but clear out at the first sign of trouble.

**Chief Brand:** AL N; AC 3 (leather armor, high Dexterity); MV 12; 6th/7th level fighter/defiler; hp 33; THAC0 15 (13 with bone long sword +2); #AT 1; Dmg 1d8+1; spells *magic missile, sleep, charm person, color spray, stinking cloud, invisibility, web, lightning bolt, suggestion, fear*, Size M.

**War-leader Tarana:** AL N; AC 3 (hide armor, shield +1, Dex); MV 12; 6th-level fighter; hp 41; THAC0 15 (13 with iron long sword); #AT 1, 3/2 with long sword; Dmg 1d8+5; specialized with long sword; Size M.

**Next.** Continue with **Kalidnay** or return to **Fort Melidor**.

## Part Four: Kalidnay



### Ziggurat

1 square = 10 feet

- |             |         |
|-------------|---------|
| Door        | Shelves |
| Secret Door | Table   |
| Statue      | Rubble  |



Ground Level



Apex



## Part Four: Kalidnay

**Setup.** The next four pages describe the ruined city of Kalidnay. On page 44 of this book, you will find a map of the city. A similar map without the key is provided for the players on page 45 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** Kalidnay is 10 miles south of Fort Melidor, near the Lost Oasis. The city was destroyed mysteriously hundreds of years ago, and none but the sorcerer-kings know how the city was brought down. Read the following to the players:

*The skeleton of Kalidnay looms before you in the reddening dusk, surrounded by blowing clouds of dust. You have already passed ruined buildings and small fortifications, the ancient fields and defenses of the city. Scattered along the weathered road are the skeletons of hundreds of people—soldiers, merchants, slaves and craftsmen, tools and weapons. In one inn you find dust-filled bowls and plates laid out for a feast, with the revelers slumped in their seats. Whatever happened to Kalidnay struck swiftly and without warning.*

*The city is almost completely ruined, but you can still make out the looming shape of a dark ziggurat in the center of the city.*

**The Ruins.** Most of the buildings in Kalidnay are piles of rubble, but some structures still remain intact. In the ruined areas, one out of every four or five buildings still retain their original shape. Most of the streets and alleyways are rubble-choked, and only the major avenues are still passable. (Of course, the rubble can be climbed over, but it is a tedious and somewhat dangerous way to travel.)

The city walls still stand, but there are several collapsed areas. At its highest, the wall is 40 feet tall and 25 feet wide. The center of the city has been reclaimed by choking weeds and scrub, with the exception of the palace and ziggurat complex.

**A. Denizen.** The ruins are the home of a small number of scavengers and predators. At each marked location, check for a random encounter (1 in 10 chance) using the second alternate Stony Barrens chart in the DARK SUN® *Monstrous Compendium*™. Ignore results for sentient creatures or drakes.

**1. North Gate.** If Tethrades received warning, 10 Shom warriors, a defiler, and a psionicist (use Tsarana's stats) will be waiting in ambush here for the PCs. Otherwise, no encounter occurs. The gate is carved into the shape of two crouching lions.

**2. The Palace of Kalid-Ma.** While this structure is still intact, hundreds of years of looting has removed anything of value. The winding corridors and empty chambers would make an excellent place to camp and rest, though.

**3. The Arena.** While the arena has been destroyed, the great structure still provides secure shelter. The Shom camp is set up here. Sixty Shom warriors, 10 agents, five slaves, and Tethrades are quartered here. Fifteen warriors are on guard in the ziggurat and five watch over the camp at all times. The slaves are never allowed to leave with knowledge of what happens in Kalidnay, and would be anxious to assist the PCs in any way they can.

**4. The Ziggurat.** Tethrades supervises the creation of the shaqat beetles in the ziggurat's hidden chambers. The ziggurat is illustrated on page 46 of the *Player's Book*. Continue with **The Ziggurat**, on the page 46 of this book.

## Part Four: The Ziggurat

**Setup.** The map on page 44 of this book shows the interior of the ziggurat. Show the players the illustration of the ziggurat on page 46 of the *Player's Book*. A second illustration and some text for the players appears on page 47 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** There are three ways into the ziggurat: the main doors at ground level, a secret door on the top of the ziggurat, and the great crack in the center of the structure. The secret door is concealed in the side of a large stone altar.

**Inside the Ziggurat.** The main doors open into a large hall of statues and honorary plaques, covered with dust and defaced by graffiti. This is room 1 in the ziggurat diagram. From this hall, a propped-open secret door leads to the armory, room 2. A second secret door leads to the winding staircase that climbs through the ziggurat to the secret door in the altar. (Area 3.) The crack in the ziggurat's face leads directly into the ancient armory.

**The Great Hall.** There are six Shom guards led by an elite mul in this chamber. This number will be doubled if Tethrades has been warned about the PCs. The guards will attack all intruders on sight, but one will step through the secret door to summon help from the armory

**The Armory.** Refer to the text and illustration on page 47 of the *Player's Book*. There are eight guards, two elite muls, and six agents in this chamber. The agents are involved in bonding the beetles with the cerebral parasites, and will require 1-3 rounds to join any fighting in the ziggurat. Tethrades is here, supervising the operation. He will hang back, attacking with spells.

If the heroes enter through the crack, one of the guards in this room will step into the great hall to summon reinforcements. The guards in the hall will respond immediately, while one of their number runs to the Shom camp in the arena to sound an alert. Fifteen more warriors will arrive on the scene in 1d6+6 rounds.

When half the armory warriors fall, Tethrades retreats through the secret door and flees up the internal stairs.

*You finally feel like you are beginning to get the upper hand. Suddenly, the leader of the Shom agents seizes one of the weird metal canisters and retreats to one wall. He presses a concealed latch, and a secret door opens! Winding stone stairs disappear into the darkness. "Keep fighting!" he orders his warriors, and then he drags the heavy canister into the stairwell and vanishes. The mul bodyguards follow behind him.*

**Stats.** Tethrades is described in the *Background Book*. The muls and Shom warriors can be found on the NPC Master Table.

**Reactions.** If the heroes find a way of preventing Tethrades' flight, the **Tethrades** encounter occurs now. Otherwise, they will have to pursue the agent to the apex of the ziggurat before they can confront him.

A search of the facilities in this chamber reveals a large cage with hundreds of unbonded shaqat beetles, plus four empty cylinders and three unopened cylinders. Tethrades' notes are here as well.

**Next:** When the heroes pursue **Tethrades**, go on to the next encounter.

## Part Four: Tethrades

**Setup.** This encounter is illustrated on page 48 of the *Player's Book*.

**Start.** Run this encounter immediately after the fight in the ziggurat. Read the following text to the players:

*The stairs wind upwards in a dark, tortuous spiral through the heart of the ziggurat. The cataclysm that wracked this city took a toll on this stairway—in places, the passage is choked with rubble or the stairs are buckled and cracked. With effort, you manage to force your way through the difficult areas, and find that the stair ends in a tiny chamber about 10 feet long and five feet high. A small door leads out.*

*Cautiously, you open the door and step through. You are standing on the summit of the ziggurat, emerging from a concealed door in the side of the altar. A quiet whisper of steel warns you of attack!*

**Encounter.** Tethrades and his two mul bodyguards will fight fiercely to defend themselves. If the heroes allowed any Shom warriors to escape and warn the camp, 15 more warriors will be arriving soon at the base of the ziggurat and climbing up to assist their leader.

When Tethrades feels that he is in immediate danger of being killed, he quickly turns to menace the remaining cylinder.

*Backing away from your fierce attack, Tethrades stumbles against the metal cylinder. Instantly, he seizes the container and holds it overhead. "Stop, or I'll throw it down," he cries. "The parasites will be free to drift with the wind, and all Athas will never be free of them again! Will you accept that as the consequences of your actions?"*

The cylinder is sturdy enough to resist the fall down the ziggurat, but Tethrades doesn't know that. If the heroes agree to surrender, Tethrades orders them to throw their weapons down and to wait for the Shom warriors to arrive. Once the PCs are disarmed, Tethrades sets the cylinder down near the edge where it can be sent hurling to the ground with a single kick. If the PCs allow themselves to be captured, Tethrades has them placed in a cell in the ancient arena to await execution.

If the heroes battle on or attack after Tethrades sets the cylinder down, the defiler hurls it down the ziggurat's side. It bounces and spins with a horrible amount of noise, but does not break open. Once Tethrades has exhausted this threat, he will seek to escape by any means possible.

**Descending the Ziggurat.** The steep-sided ziggurat is composed of 11 10-foot steps. It takes one round to climb one level. If a character is leaping down, he must make a Dexterity check (or a saving throw vs. death for characters without a Dexterity score) or suffer 1d4 damage from the drop. A character who stumbles has a 50% chance of continuing his fall for 1d3 additional steps, sustaining 1d6 damage for each step fallen. A character can climb down a number of steps in one round, but each step after the first imposes a cumulative -2 penalty on his check.

The stairs are much faster, allowing an ascent or descent equal to one-half a character's base movement rate. However, any character who is hit or who fails a saving throw while on the stairs must save vs. death or fall all the way to the plaza below, sustaining 1d4 damage per level fallen.

**Stats.** Tethrades' guards are elite muls, listed on the NPC Master Table.

## Part Four: Conclusion

**The Shom Camp.** A number of Shom warriors and agents may still be in the camp or wandering in the ruins of Kalidnay when the PCs confront Tethrades. You can be generous and tell the heroes that most of them fled when they saw Tethrades slain on top of the ziggurat. However, you can also expand the adventure by sketching a map of the camp in the ruined arena and giving the players the opportunity to mount one final raid against House Shom.

**The Ziggurat.** After Tethrades' defeat, the PC are temporarily masters of the ziggurat. If they did not allow anyone to summon help, it will be 1d4 hours before the change of guard (a party of 12 warriors and two elite muls) arrives from the Shom camp. Otherwise, the PCs will only have 1d6+4 rounds before reinforcements arrive and attempt to storm the ziggurat.

**The Cylinders.** The cylinders can be safely disposed of in several ways. A *heat metal* or *cure disease* spell will sterilize the containers and kill all the parasites inside. More drastic measures such as *disintegration* work as well. The cylinders are resistant to physical damage.

If the PCs are foolish enough to open one of the cylinders without the precautions used by Tethrades, they will find that themselves smeared with a reddish wax. The cerebral parasites are invisible to the naked eye, and immediately infest all characters within 10 feet. In addition, a plague of parasites will eventually spread over the Tyr region, creating quite a bit of trouble for psionicians of all types. The heroes would be wise to avoid mentioning *that* piece of work when they return.

**The Beetles.** The cerebral parasites are far more vulnerable to physical attack once bonded with the shaqat beetles. Any number of methods can be used to destroy the beetles in the ziggurat. However, characters who allow their unprotected skin to come in contact with a beetle may become infested.

Fortunately, the bonded beetles are not self-perpetuating, and the parasites delivered by their bite do not spread normally. Tethrades designed his enchantments this way so that House Shom would be able to remain the sole source of parasites—buyers would not be able to breed their own beetles. This also means that with the ultimate source nullified, the bonded shaqat beetles will eventually die out. Of course, there's no telling how long a beetle might live in captivity. The PCs may see bonded beetles in use for a long time after this adventure..

**Where Next?** This concludes *Merchant House of Amketch*. The heroes should have a number of places to head for after this adventure. Marius Amketch is still looking for a few good men, and the Veiled Alliance can always use skilled operatives. All of Athas lies before the player characters.



# The Gambit

by Simon Hawke

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"Tribe?" asked Sorak. "Why do you call us that?"  
"You are many who form a tribe within one body,"  
said Varanna, "a 'tribe of one. . . .'"

*That had been the beginning of Sorak's true awakening. Gently, and with great care, Varanna had told him the truth about himself, a truth he had, up to that point, not even suspected. And as she spoke, the Guardian gently eased Sorak's anxiety and apprehension. In the coming weeks, the Guardian gradually allowed Sorak to discover more about his multiplicity. Initially, this strange learning process took place for the most part while Sorak slept and dreamed. Eventually Sorak experienced the gradual emergence of his other personalities without suffering lapses, but remaining conscious on some level while they were dominant in his body. However, it was a slow process, and one that was still unfolding. In time, he had met many of those who made up this tribe, though not all: the Guardian, Eyron, Kivara, the Watcher, Lyric, Kether, the Ranger, Screech. . . .*



Sorak had never seen anything even remotely like the warrens before. Long accustomed to the peaceful solitude and open spaces of the Ringing Mountains, he found the noise and crowded conditions of the



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market district shocking. He was not prepared for where the guards led him in the warrens.

The streets grew narrower and narrower until they were little more than zig-zag dirt paths. These paths led through a maze of two-, three-, and four-story buildings constructed from sun-baked brick mortared together and then covered with a reddish plaster that varied in hue. The colors were a patchwork of earth-tones, muted reds and browns, and many of the walls were cracked where the outer coating had flaked off with time, exposing the bricks underneath.

The buildings were square or rectangular, with rounded edges at the corners. The front of almost every building had a covered walkway, with arched supports made out of plaster-covered brick and a roof of masonry or wood. Often, the roof would extend along the entire length of the building front, providing some shelter from the blistering sun. Some of these walkways were paved with brick, some had wood-plank floors, but most had no floors at all. In the shade of many covered walkways, filthy beggars crouched, holding out their hands in supplication. In others, scantily dressed women struck provocative poses.

All of Sorak's senses were assailed as never before. The smell was overpowering. The people here simply threw their waste and refuse into the narrow alleys between buildings, where it was left to rot and decay in the intense heat, creating an eye-watering miasma of oppressive odors. Flies and rodents were everywhere.

As he was escorted through the narrow streets by Captain Zalcor and a contingent of the city guard, people rushed to get out of their way. There were many unusual sights in Tyr, but this was the first time anyone had ever seen a tigrone in the city streets. Even for the warrens, a squad of city guards escorting an

elfling with a psionic mountain cat by his side made an unusual procession.

"Well, you said you wanted to find the cheapest accommodations," Captain Zalcor said to Sorak as they halted outside one of the buildings. "This is it. You won't find cheaper rooms anywhere in the city, and when you see them, you'll know why."

Sorak gazed at the three-story inn. Its plaster coating had flaked off in many places so that much of the old brick was exposed, and the walls were veined with cracks. The smell here was no less offensive than anywhere else in the warrens, but that wasn't saying much. Scrofulous beggars crouched in the dirt beneath the covered walkway, which ran the length of the entire building. A number of women with heavily painted faces and lightly clothed bodies lounged by the entrance, gazing with interest at the group.

"I suppose this will do," said Sorak.

"Are you sure?" the captain asked. "The council bid me to escort you to an inn. They did not say it had to be the worst one in the city."

"But it is the cheapest?" Sorak asked.

"It is that," said Captain Zalcor. "Look, I can understand your desire for frugality, but there is such a thing as taking practical virtues a bit too far. I thought that when you saw this place, you would change your mind, but as you seem intent on holding your purse close, regardless of the inconvenience, I should caution you that you may well lose it altogether here. This is a dangerous neighborhood. The elven market is just down the street there, and even I would hesitate to venture there without a squad of guards to back me up."

"I appreciate your concern, Captain," Sorak said. "However, my means are limited, and I do not yet know how long I shall be remaining in the city. I need to hold on to what money I have for as long as possible."



"Then I would suggest you keep one hand firmly on your purse, and the other on your sword hilt," Zalcor said. "And stay away from that place."

Sorak looked in the direction the captain had indicated and saw a large, three-story building where the street ended in a *cul de sac*. This structure had been better maintained than those around it, and had a reasonably fresh coat of brown plaster over its bricks. Unlike most of the other buildings in the area, it had no covered walkway in front of it, but a wall that extended out into the street, creating a paved courtyard that held some desert plants and a small fountain. An arch over a bone gate in the wall provided access to the courtyard, and a paved path led to the building's entrance. Sorak noticed a steady stream of people wandering in and out. Above the gate, mounted on the archway, was a large iron spider, plated silver.

"What is that place?" asked Sorak.

"The Crystal Spider," Zalcor said. "And, trust me, my friend, you do not want to go in there."

Sorak smiled. "You did not seem so concerned about my welfare when we first met."

"In truth, I was more concerned about your pet eating our citizens," replied Zalcor, with a grin. Then his face grew serious. "But if I feel better disposed toward you now, it's because I heard what you said back there in the council chamber."

"You believe me? The members of the council seem to have some reservations," Sorak said.

Zalcor gave a small snort of derision. "They're politicians. Except for Rikus, who was a gladiator, but then again he's a mul, and muls have never been the most trusting sorts. When you've been a soldier for as long as I have, and a commander in the city guard dealing with criminals of all stripes each and every day, you develop an instinct for whether or not someone speak the truth. You didn't need to come forward

with your information. You have no vested interest in the security of Tyr."

"But I do have a vested interest in the reward," said Sorak.

"I do not begrudge you that," said Zalcor. "I was born and raised in Altaruk, and I know something of the marauders of Nibenay. I have a feeling you know how to use that fancy sword of yours. The marauders are formidable fighters, yet you not only survived an encounter with them, but managed to extract information from one of them, as well."

"Some of the council members seem to find that suspect," Sorak said. And then he hastily added, "I could see it in their eyes."

"And what I see in your eyes tells me that you spoke the truth," said Zalcor, "although not the entire truth, I think." He gave Sorak a level stare. "You are no herdsman, my friend. You lack the gait for it, and your skin has not the look of one who spends his time on the windblown plains out in the Tablelands."

"All good reasons not to trust me, I should think," said Sorak.

"Perhaps," said Zalcor, "but I am a good judge of character, and my instinct tells me you are not an enemy. I do not know what your game is, but I suspect it has little to do with Tyr itself. And if such is, indeed, the case, then it is none of my concern."

Sorak smiled. "I can see why you have been made an officer," he said. "But tell me, why should I avoid the Crystal Spider? What sort of place is it?"

"A gaming house," said Zalcor. "The most notorious in all of Tyr."

Sorak frowned. "What is a gaming house?"

Zalcor rolled his eyes. "If you do not know, then believe me, it is the last place on Athas you should be. It is a house of recreation, or at least that is what they call it, where games of chance are played for money, and other diversions are offered to those with





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the means to pay for them.”

“Games of chance?”

“Where have you lived all this time?” asked Zalcor, with amazement.

“In the Ringing Mountains,” Sorak said, seeing no reason why he should tell him.

“The Ringing Mountains? But, there are no villages up there, not even a small settlement, except for . . .” his voice trailed off. He shook his head. “No, that would be impossible. You are male.”

“You were telling me about games of chance,” said Sorak.

“Forget about it,” Zalcor told him. “You might win a few small wagers, but the odds will turn on you, for they always favor the house. Nor are the games always honest ones. If you were a gambler, I would merely caution you, but as you know nothing of such things, then I urge you most strongly to stay out of that damned place. You would lose everything you have, and like as not be knocked on the head or drugged and lose your sword, as well. A blade such as yours would fetch a high price in the elven market. You would stand about as much chance of surviving in there as I would in a den of tignons.”

“I see,” said Sorak.

“You are going anyway,” said Zalcor, with resignation. “I can see that. Well, do not say I did not warn you. Remember, that is the elven market district, and the guard does not trouble to patrol there often. We barely have enough men to keep the crime down in the warrens. If you go there, you are on your own.”

“I thank you for your advice, Captain,” Sorak said. “I shall consider it.”

“But you probably won’t take it.” Zalcor shrugged. “Suit yourself. I just hope you live long enough to collect whatever reward the council decides to give you, for it is probably all you will take home with you from Tyr.”

He rejoined his men and they turned to march back to the central market district. Sorak stared up at the dilapidated inn for a long moment, then gazed down the street, looking toward the gaming house.

“Why ask for trouble?” Eyron said. “You heard what the captain said. We stand to lose everything we have.”

“On the other hand,” said Sorak, “we might also win.”

“Zalcor said the games are not always honest,” Eyron added.

“True, he did say that,” Sorak replied. “However, we have certain advantages in that regard, do we not, Guardian?”

“I could detect dishonesty,” she said, “and we will not find the Veiled Alliance by sitting in a room, alone.”

“My thoughts, precisely,” Sorak said. “And if the city guard does not patrol the elven market district, then what better place to find them?”

“I want to go!” Kivara said. “It sounds like fun!”

“It sounds dangerous, to me,” said Eyron.

The others kept their peace, leaving Sorak to decide. He thought about it only for a moment, then started walking toward the Crystal Spider.

As he approached the gates, Sorak ignored the beggars, who whined pitifully and held out their hands toward him, and he ignored the women who posed seductively and beckoned to him. Instead, he walked purposefully toward the gaming house, wondering what he would find inside.

The gatekeeper’s eyes grew wide when he saw Tigr. “Stop!” he said, quickly retreating behind the safety of the gate. “You cannot bring that wildcat in here!”

“He will harm no one,” Sorak said.

“Am I to take your word?” the gatekeeper replied. “Forget it. The beast stays outside.”

“He goes everywhere with me,” said Sorak.



"Well, he is not coming in here!"

"I have money." Sorak jingled his purse.

"You could have the entire city treasury for all I care. You are still not coming in with that creature!"

"What seems to be the trouble, Ankor?" asked a sultry, female voice from the shadows behind the gatekeeper. Sorak saw a cloaked and hooded figure approaching from the inner courtyard.

"No trouble, my lady, merely a herdsman trying to get in with his beast," the half-elf gatekeeper replied.

"Beast? What sort of beast?" The cloaked figure approached the gate and looked through. "Great Dragon! Is that a *tigone*?"

"He is my friend," said Sorak, perceiving by the gatekeeper's attitude that this woman was in some position of authority here. "I have raised him from a cub, and he obeys me implicitly. He would not harm anyone, I assure you, unless someone attempts to harm me."

She pulled back her hood and stepped up to the gate to get a better look at Sorak. He, in turn, got a better look at her, and saw that she was a striking, half-elf female, as tall as he was, with long, lustrous, black hair framing her face and cascading down her shoulders, emerald-green eyes, and delicate, sharply pronounced features. Her eyes widened slightly when she saw him, and she gave a tentative sniff, after which her eyes grew wider still.

"Halfling *and* elf?" she said, with astonishment

"Yes, I am an elfling," said Sorak.

"But . . . elves and halflings are enemies! I have never heard of elves and halflings mating. I did not even know they could!"

"It would seem that I am proof they can," Sorak replied wryly.

"How fascinating! You must tell me more," she said. "Ankor, let him in."

"But . . . my lady . . ." the gatekeeper protested.

"Let him in, I said." Her voice was like a whip crack and the gatekeeper obeyed at once, keeping the iron gate between himself and Tigra as he swung it open.

"You are certain you can control the *tigone*?" she asked.

"Quite certain."

"You had best be," she replied, looking at Tigra warily. "Otherwise, I shall have the creature killed and hold you responsible for any damage it may cause to my establishment."

"You are the owner, then?"

"Yes. I am called Krysta."

Sorak smiled. "The crystal spider?"

She smiled back and took his arm as they walked down the paved pathway leading through the courtyard to the entrance of the gaming house. "What are you called, elfling?"

"Sorak."

She raised her delicately arched eyebrows. "And do you?"

"Always walk alone? Not entirely. I have Tigra."

"Tigra," she said, and the beast looked up at her. "He knows his name," she said.

"Tigones are psionic cats," said Sorak. "They are intelligent and quite perceptive. He can read my thoughts."

"How interesting. A shame he cannot speak, for I would ask him what you are thinking now."

"I am thinking that I was cautioned against coming here," said Sorak.

"Indeed? By whom?"

"By a captain in the city guard."

"Would his name, by any chance, be Zalcor?" Krysta asked.

"Yes, you know him?"

She laughed. "I have been arrested by him on numerous occasions in the past. I have known Zalcor



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since he was a mere guardsman, but he does not condescend to visit me these days.”

“Why not?”

“As a captain in the city guard, he must keep up appearances. It would not do to have him paying regular visits to my gaming house, even if those visits were entirely innocent and in the line of duty. People might suspect that I was bribing him. The city guard is also rather overextended these days. It is all they can do to keep the mobs under control in the market district and the warrens. No one of great importance resides in the elven market, so they tend to look the other way in this part of the city.”

They reached the front entrance and a footman opened the thick and heavy wooden doors for them. They came into an elevated entrance alcove, with stone steps leading down to the main floor of the gaming house. The entire first floor of the building was one cavernous room in which people of all descriptions mingled, moving among the gaming tables. There was a long bar at the back, extending the length of the entire room. Behind and in front of the bar were a number of elevated stages, where female dancers without a single stitch of clothing gyrated provocatively while musicians played. The pungent odor of hemp smoke hung thickly in the air, and there were excited shouts and woeful cries coming from the tables, where coins were won and lost as quickly as the dice were thrown.

“So, what do you think of my establishment?” asked Krysta, giving Sorak’s arm a gentle squeeze.

Sorak felt apprehension among the others of the tribe, all save Kivara, who was thrilled by the palpable energy that permeated the room. “*What sort of games do they play here?*” she asked, excitedly. “*I want to try them! I want to try them all!*”

“Patience,” Sorak counseled her, silently. Then, aloud, he said, “I have never seen anything like it.”

“There is a great deal more here than what you see,” said Krysta in a tone that promised tantalizing revelations. “Let me show you around.”

She removed her cloak and handed it to a footman. Beneath it, she wore barely enough for modesty. She had on a pair of low, black boots made from the shiny hide of a z’tal. Her long legs were bare all the way up to the short, black, wraparound skirt she wore, made from the same skin as the boots and cut slanted, so that it came down to mid-thigh on one side and left the other leg completely bare almost to her waist. A matching black halter top barely covered her breasts, leaving her entire back bare. Around her waist, she wore a belt of gold coins interconnected with fine links of silver chain, and several necklaces and amulets adorned her throat, as well as gold circlets around her wrists and arms. As she handed her cloak to the footman, she watched Sorak for a reaction. A flicker of puzzlement and then annoyance passed over her features briefly when he did not react as most males did. The footman lingered a moment, but when he saw that Sorak did not intend to remove his cloak, he backed away.

Clearly, Krysta enjoyed making an entrance, and this time she could make it on the arm of an exotic-looking stranger with a full-grown tigone at his side. As they descended the stone steps, many of the patrons turned to point and stare at them, but others were so intent on their games, they didn’t even notice. As they made their way between the tables, patrons hastily moved back, and not a few of them cried out and dropped their drink at the sight of Tigra. Krysta was enjoying every minute of it as she escorted Sorak toward the bar.

“May I offer you a drink?” she asked, snapping her fingers. An elvish female behind the bar instantly moved toward them.

“Thank you,” Sorak said.



"Bring us two goblets of our best spiced mead, Alora."

"Yes, my lady."

A moment later, she set two tall, ceramic goblets on the bar before them. Krysta took one for herself and handed the other to Sorak. "To new experiences," she said, with a smile, and raised her goblet, touching it lightly to his. As she drank, Sorak brought the goblet up to his lips, sniffed tentatively, and took a taste. He made a face and set the goblet back down on the bar.

Krysta looked surprised. "It does not meet with your approval?"

"I would prefer water."

"Water," Krysta repeated, as if she wasn't sure she heard correctly. She sighed. "My friend would prefer water, Alora."

"Yes, my lady." She took the goblet back, and came back with one filled with cool well water. Sorak sipped it, then took a deep gulp, emptying half of it.

"Is that more to your liking?" Krysta asked mockingly.

"It is not as fresh as mountain spring water, but better than that sticky syrup," Sorak said.

"Spiced mead of the rarest and most expensive vintage, and you call it sticky syrup." Krysta shook her head. "You are different, I will say that for you."

"Forgive me," Sorak said, "I did not wish to offend."

"Oh, you did not offend me," Krysta said. "It is simply that I have never met anyone else quite like you."

"I do not know if there is anyone else quite like me," Sorak replied.

"You may be right," said Krysta. "I have never even heard of such a thing as an elfling before. Tell me of your parents."

"I do not remember them. As a child, I was cast out into the desert and left to die. I have no memory of anything before that."

"And yet you survived," said Krysta. "How?"

"I somehow managed to make my way to the foothills of the Ringing Mountains," Sorak said. "Tigra found me. He was merely a cub then. He had been separated from his pride, so we were both abandoned, in a sense. Perhaps that is why he formed a bond with me. We were both lost and alone."

"And he protected you," said Lysta. "But there is still only so much a tigone cub could do. How did you manage to survive?"

"I was found by a pyreen, who cared for me and nursed me back to health," Sorak said.

"A pyreen!" said Krysta. "I have never known anyone who has actually met one of the peace-bringers, much less been raised by one!"

"Take care, Sorak," said the Guardian. "This female asks much, yet offers little in return."

"You have still told me nothing of yourself," said Sorak, noting the warning.

"Oh, I am sure my story is nowhere near as interesting as yours," she replied.

"Nevertheless, I would like to hear it," Sorak said. "How did a young and beautiful, half-elf female come to be the proprietor of such a place?"

Krysta smiled. "Would you like me to show you?"

"Show me?"

"After all," she said, "you did not come to a gaming house just to talk, did you?"

She took him by the arm and led him toward one of the tables. Sorak saw how the people at the table instantly made room for her. He also saw a number of large, armed guards spread out around the room, watching the tables carefully. And the ones nearest them never took their eyes from Krysta.

The table they approached had a sunken surface, with sides of polished wood. The flat surface of the table was covered with smooth, black z'tal skin. A game lord stood at the table with a wooden stick that



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had a curved scoop at the end. As the gamers tossed dice onto the table, he announced the scores and then retrieved the dice by scooping them back with the wooden stick. Sorak saw that the dice were all different. One was triangular, made in the shape of a pyramid with a flat bottom. Three numbers were painted on each of the four triangular sides, in such a manner that only one would be right-side up when the die fell. Another die was cube-shaped, with one number painted on each side, while two others were shaped like diamonds, one with eight sides and the other with ten. Two more dice were carved into shapes that were almost round, except that they were faceted with flat sides. One of these had twelve sides and the other had twenty.

"I have never played this game before," he said to Krysta.

"Truly?" she replied, with surprise.

"This is my first time in a gaming house," he said.

"Well, then we shall have to educate you," said Krysta, with a smile. "This game is really very simple. It is called Hawke's Gambit, after the bard who had invented it. You will note that each of the dice is different. The number of sides they have determines the wager. Each round of play consists of six passes. On the first, only the triangular die is used. It has four sides, therefore, the wager is four ceramic pieces, which go into the pot. On the second pass, both the triangular and the square dice are thrown. The square die has six sides, so added to the four sides of the first die, the wager on this pass is ten ceramics, or one silver piece. On the third pass, the eight-sided die is added, so that now three are thrown, and the wager is increased to eighteen ceramic pieces, or one silver and eight ceramics. On the fourth pass, the ten-sided die is added, and now four dice are thrown. The wager on this pass is twenty-eight ceramics, or two silver pieces and eight ceramics. The fifth pass adds the

twelve-sided die, so that now five dice are thrown, and the wager increases by twelve to a total of forty ceramics, or four silver pieces. And on the final pass, the twenty-sided die is added, so that you throw all six dice together and the wager goes up to six silver pieces. Each time a pass is made, the score is totaled, and the winner takes the pot. If the losers wish a chance to make good their loss, they must risk the amount of the next wager, or else drop out of the pass and wait for the next one to begin."

"What happens if several people get the same score?" asked Sorak.

"Then the pot is divided equally by the number of winners who tie for the highest score," Krysta replied. "The sixth and final pass opens up Hawke's Gambit, where the players can wager not only on the outcome of the sixth pass, but on the final tally of the entire round. The house only takes a small percentage of the winning pot at the end of every round. And that is all there is to it. Simple."

"*Simple enough to lose your shirt,*" said Eyron. "*Four ceramics to begin the game, ten for the second pass, eighteen for the third, twenty-eight for the fourth, forty for the fifth, and sixty for the final pass. That's one hundred and sixty ceramics for each round, or sixteen silver pieces. That amounts to almost two gold pieces per round. Small wonder this female can afford to make a belt of them. She strips the breeches off her customers.*"

"*Perhaps,*" said Sorak, answering Eyron in his mind, "*but not all her customers have the ability to control how the dice may fall. This is not all that different from the psionic exercises we had in the villichii convent.*" Aloud, he said to Krysta, "And one may withdraw from a round at any time?"

"Once the wager had been made, a player is committed to the pass," she said, "but a player is free to withdraw from the round prior to the wagering for any



subsequent pass."

*"It would seem that a wise player would risk wagering only on the first pass, and unless he wins, withdraw until the beginning of the next round,"* the Guardian said. *"To continue wagering after a loss would only increase the risk."*

*"Either way, the house stands to lose nothing, and wins on every round by taking a percentage,"* Eyron said. *"Running a gaming house appears to be a very lucrative profession."*

The game lord announced that a new round was about to begin.

"Would you care to try your luck?" asked Krysta.

"Why not?" said Sorak, and he stepped up to the table.

There were four players, including himself, who elected to game on this round. Krysta stood by his side, watching and holding on to his arm. The game lord cast an uneasy glance at Tigra, lying on the floor at Sorak's feet, but Krysta gave him a nod, and he moistened his lips nervously, then commenced the game.

"Four ceramics to open on the first pass," he announced. "Four ceramics. Ante up into the pot."

Each of the players tossed down four ceramic pieces. The game lord used his scoop to rake them up and then dropped them into the small, black cauldron set in front of him.

"First pass, Player One," he said, pushing the pyramid-shaped die toward a tall, thin, intense-looking human male across from Sorak. He had the look of a merchant, for he was very finely dressed and wore heavy gold and silver rings on several fingers of both hands. He picked up the die and blew on it lightly as he shook it in a loosely clasped fist, then rolled. It came up a three.

"Player One rolls three," the game lord said, scooping up the die. "First pass, Player Two."

Player Two, a young, human female with a hungry look about her, rolled the die between both palms while she whispered, "Come on, come on," under her breath, then cast with a flourish.

"Player Two rolls one," the game lord said, as the woman winced and made a grimace. "First pass, Player Three."

Player Three, a heavysset and balding man who perspired freely, picked up the die and stared at it intently, as if willing it to do his bidding. He took a deep breath and then rolled.

"Player Three rolls two," the game lord announced. The balding man swore softly. "First pass, Player Four."

Krysta picked up the die and handed it to Sorak. "Good luck," she said.

*"Best not to make it look too easy,"* Sorak said, as he slipped back and allowed the Guardian to come to the fore. Casually, she rolled the die.

"Player Four rolls three, for a tie," the game lord said. "First pass winnings, sixteen ceramics, split two ways, eight to Players One and Four. Second pass, ten ceramics to open, ante up, please."

"You see? You have doubled your money," Krysta said, with a smile. "Your luck is good tonight. Why not stay in?"

"Why not?" said Sorak. He put down ten ceramics. The other three players all stayed in, as well.

On the second pass, Player One rolled a four. Player Two beat him with a six, then Player Three topped them both with a ten. The dice came to Sorak.

"Second pass, Player Four," the game lord said. "You need a ten to tie."

"Roll nine," said Sorak.

"Nine?" said Kivara. *"But we can do no better than a tie on this pass, and nine will lose!"*

"Roll nine," Sorak said again. *"It will keep the score up for the final tally, but still give us a loss to*



## The Gambit

*allay any suspicion.*"

"*Very clever,*" Eyron said. "*But we shall have to watch the tally closely.*"

"*I intend to,*" Sorak said.

The Guardian rolled nine.

"Player Four rolls nine," the game lord announced. "Not enough to tie, the win goes to Player Three, forty ceramics. Third pass, eighteen to open, ante up, please."

"What a shame," said Krysta. "But you were only one point away from a tie, which would have brought you winnings. Try again."

On the third pass, the thin, dark merchant rolled an eleven. The anxious young woman rolled an eight, for her third loss. She bit her lower lip and clenched her fists. The heavyset man also rolled an eight, which gave him two losses and one win. The three dice were passed to Sorak.

"Roll ten," said Sorak.

"No!" Kivara protested. "*We need a win!*"

"Not yet," said Sorak. "*Trust me.*"

The Guardian rolled ten.

"Player Four rolls ten," the game lord called out. "Not enough, the win goes to Player One, seventy-two ceramics. Fourth pass, twenty-eight ceramics to open, ante up, please."

"My luck does not seem to be holding," Sorak said.

"But you were still only one point away," said Krysta. "You are not doing badly. But you may quit now, if you wish."

"Not when I am down twenty-four ceramics," Sorak said, tensely.

On the fourth pass, Player One rolled sixteen. Player Two rolled ten, for her fourth loss in a row, and she was beginning to look frantic. Player Three rolled a nineteen and looked well pleased with himself

*"We could use a win this time, to give us encour-*

*agement to continue in the game,"* said Sorak. "*Roll twenty.*"

The four dice fell and the game lord added the score. "Player Four rolls twenty for a win of one hundred and twelve ceramics. Fifth pass, forty ceramics to open, ante up, please."

"You see?" said Krysta, with a smile. "You were down twenty-four, but now you are ahead sixty. And you began with but four ceramics. I told you your luck was good tonight."

"Perhaps it shall get better," Sorak said with a grin as he counted out the coins for the fifth pass.

This time, the thin merchant rolled a seventeen, and snorted with disgust. The anxious young woman rolled the dice between her cupped hands, her eyes closed, her lips moving soundlessly. She rolled a twenty. She took a deep breath and looked uneasily at Player Three, and when he rolled a twenty-four, her face fell. So far, she had lost more heavily than anybody else. The dice were passed to Sorak.

"*We are ahead,*" said Eyron. "*By my calculations, we are leading by three points in the total tally.*"

"*Which means it would be prudent for us to fall behind a bit on the next pass,*" Sorak said.

"*How far behind?*" The Guardian asked.

"*Not too far,*" Sorak said, "*but enough to make for a convincing loss this time. Roll . . . nineteen. That way, at least half the players beat us on this pass.*"

The Guardian rolled the dice.

"Player Four rolls nineteen," the game lord said. "The win goes to Player Three for one hundred and sixty ceramics. Sixth and final pass, sixty ceramics to stay in. Ante up, please."

"If you drop out now, you will still be ahead by twenty ceramics," Krysta said. "If you stay in and lose, you will be down by forty, but you stand to win over two hundred."

"The risk would seem well worth it," Sorak said.



All four players stayed in. Sorak had expected the young woman to drop out. There was no way she could win now, unless she rolled an almost perfect score, but desperation was written clearly on her face. Her hands trembled as she counted out the coins. When all four players had wagered, the game lord called out, "Hawke's Gambit. Place your bets, please."

"I will wager twenty ceramics," Player One said.

The young woman swallowed hard and bit her lower lip. "I shall wager. . . one hundred and sixty ceramics." It was the precise amount she had bet so far, and by the look on her face, it was clear that she was thinking emotionally and not logically. The odds were very much against her.

"Player One, it will cost you one hundred and forty ceramics to stay in the gambit," said the game lord.

The merchant nodded. "I will match the wager," he said.

Player Three was ahead at this point in terms of the final tally, but only by two points. He thought about it for a moment, then said, "I decline."

"Player Three declines the gambit, and participates only in the final pass," said the game lord. He turned to Sorak. "It is up to you, sir."

"It will cost you one hundred and sixty ceramics to match the wager and participate in the gambit," Krysta said. "Or else you may elect to decline and take part only in the final pass."

Sorak glanced at the young woman, who looked as if she had wagered as much as she could possibly afford. If she lost this final pass, she would also lose the gambit, and her losses would be doubled. She did not look as if she could afford it.

"Player Two has increased the wager," Sorak asked. "Do I have the same option?"

Krysta smiled. "If you wish."

"Then I will wager three gold pieces," he said.

The young woman gasped.

"The wager is three gold pieces, or three hundred ceramics," said the game lord. "Players One and Two, it will cost you an additional one hundred and forty ceramics to stay in."

The young woman looked down and shook her head. "I do not have it," she said.

"Player Two declines the gambit and takes part only in the final pass," the game lord said. He turned to the merchant. "That leaves you, sir."

The merchant gave Sorak a level stare. "I will match the wager," he said.

"Betting is closed," the game lord said. "All players to take part in the final pass, gambit for Players One and Four. Sixth and final pass, Player One."

The merchant picked up all six dice, gave Sorak a long look, and rolled. The score totaled fifty. He looked up at Sorak and smiled. The young woman rolled next, and she came up with a twenty-nine. She sighed when she realized what might have happened. She had still lost, but nowhere near as heavily as she would have if she had participated in the gambit, even at the level she had originally wagered. Player Three rolled next and came up with a thirty, which meant that the merchant still had the top score. His smile broadened.

Sorak quickly calculated the merchant's final tally. On his first pass, he had rolled a three. On his second pass, the merchant rolled a four, then eleven on the third, sixteen on the fourth, and seventeen on the fifth. Adding the fifty that he had just rolled, that gave him a final tally of one hundred and one. As of the last pass, Sorak's own final tally stood at sixty-one, and if he lost the final pass, he would be down forty ceramics, but that was not counting the gambit.

"Roll *forty-one*," he said to the Guardian.





## The Gambit

The Guardian rolled.

"Player Four rolls forty-one," the game lord said. "The win for the final pass goes to Player One, for two hundred and forty ceramics, less the house take of ten percent, which leaves the pot at two hundred and sixteen ceramics. Final tally for Hawke's Gambit: Player One, one hundred and one points, Player Four, one hundred and two points. Gambit to Player Four, for six hundred ceramics or six gold pieces. Congratulations, sir. Next round, four ceramics to open, ante up into the pot."

"One point," said the merchant, through gritted teeth. He slammed his fist down on the side of the table. "One lousy point!"

"Better luck next time," Krysta said to him. She turned to Sorak with a smile. "For someone who has never played this game before, you seem to have done rather well. I am curious; could you have stood the loss?"

"Not very well," said Sorak.

She smiled. "You have the instincts of a gambler."

"You think so?" he replied. "Is this the way that you have built your fortune?"

"One of the ways," she replied, slyly.

"Indeed? What are the others?"

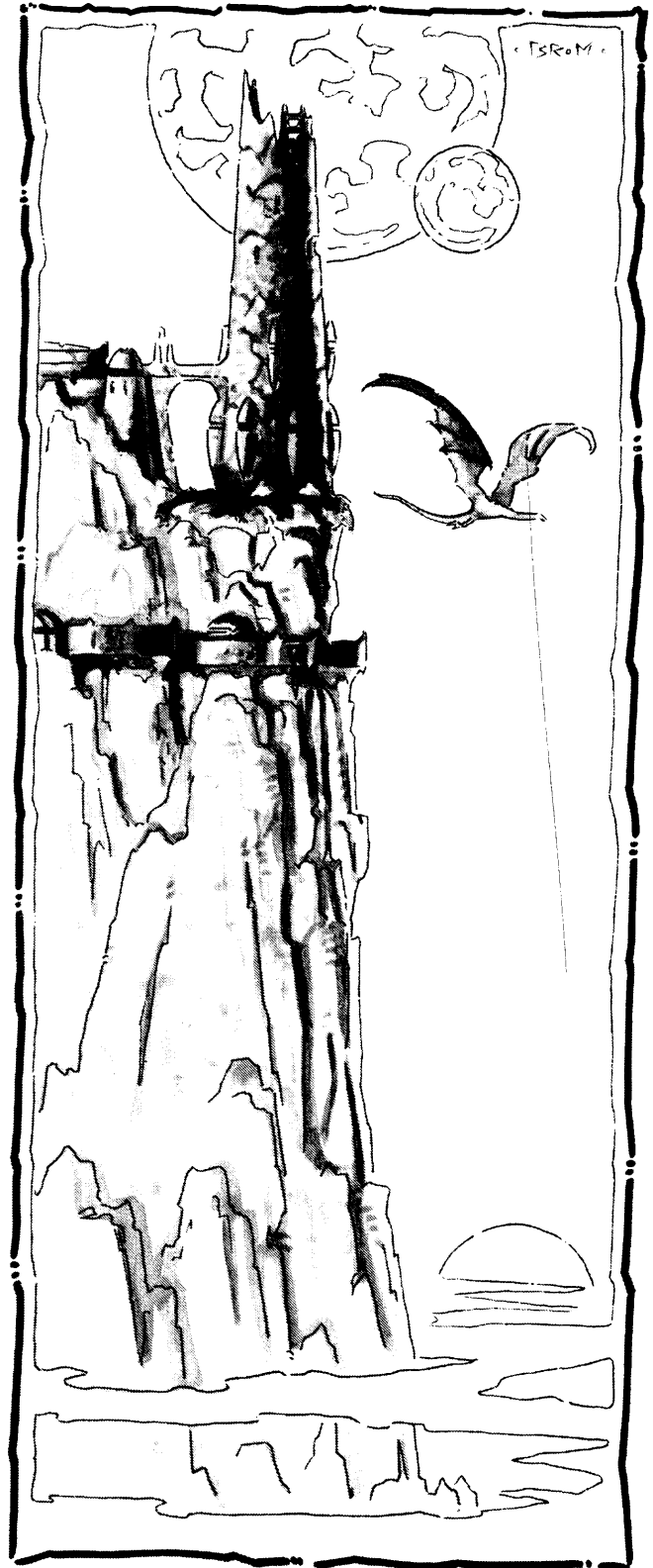
"I am not sure you would possess the same talent for them that you seem to have for gambling," she replied, with a chuckle.

"Then perhaps I should play to my strength," he said. "This time, I shall buy you a drink, and you can help me celebrate. Then I think I will try this game again."

"You may wish to try that table over there," she said. "It has higher stakes."

"Only if you stand next to me and bring me luck," he said.

She smiled. "I will do my best. Now, about that drink. . . ."





The NPCs listed here include both friends and enemies of the player characters. It is very possible for the PCs to acquire long-term allies or powerful enemies during *Merchant House of Amketch*. Feel free to use these NPCs as permanent members of your campaign after this adventure ends.

### Marius Amketch

Male Human Trader  
11th Level  
Lawful Neutral

Str 13      Int 15  
Dex 13      Wis 16  
Con 10      Cha 15

hp: 41

AC: 6 (*leather armor* +2)

#AT: 1

THAC0: 15

Dmg: 1d8+1/1d12+1 (*steel longsword* +1)



A tough, strong-willed man of about 40, Marius Amketch is a former adventurer who has spent the last eight years building a successful trading house. He is an honest man who earned everything he has through hard work, determination, and his own sweat and blood. Most people find him to be a likable person with a sharp wit and plenty of common sense.

Marius is working to transform House Amketch into a strong trading company. He is careful to maintain good relations with the most major houses, but has found himself at odds with House Shom. An incompetent agent high in Shom's hierarchy blames Amketch's competition for his own losses, and the corrupt old house is moving against Marius.

Marius is always looking for talented and capable people to sign on with House Amketch. He believes that if his employees are smart, honest, and self-reliant, the house will do well. He is fiercely loyal to those who work for him, and demands the same loyalty in return.

### Bezrak Sandfist

Human dual-classed  
Fighter/Psionist  
6th/8th Level  
Neutral Evil

Str 14      Int 14  
Dex 11      Wis 17  
Con 16      Cha 10

hp: 55

AC: 4 (*inix hide armor*, *Ring of Protection* +2)

#AT: 1 (3/2 with sword)

THAC0: 15 (14 with sword)

Dmg: 1d6+3/1d8+3 (*iron shortsword* +1)



### Psionic Summary: PSPs 109

**Telepathy:** *Sciences:* Mindlink, Domination, Tower of Iron Will; *Devotions:* Awe, Contact, Ego Whip, ESP, Id Insinuation, Mental Barrier, Mind Bar, Mind Blank, Repugnance, Sight Link, Thought Shield.

**Psychoporation:** *Sciences:* Teleport; *Devotions:* Dimension Door, Teleport Trigger.

**Psychometabolism:** *Sciences:* Shadow Form; *Devotions:* Adrenaline Control, Body Equilibrium, Displacement.

Gaunt and bony, Bezrak's lean frame conceals surprising strength. He is a man who keeps his thoughts to himself, but is capable of exploding into a vile rage if defied. Bezrak appears to be ceaselessly vigilant, obviously trusting no one around him and expecting an attack at any time.

A long time ago, Bezrak enlisted in the service of House Shom as a warrior and quickly rose to the position of bodyguard for a senior agent, Agristes. Agristes saw Bezrak's potential and had him trained as a psionist. At that time, Agristes was taking a beating at House Amketch's hands, and he came up with the idea of inserting a saboteur into the fledgling house. Bezrak has bided his time, rising through the rank and earning Marius's trust.

**Holtet Phen**

Half-giant  
Gladiator  
7th Level  
Lawful/Neutral/  
Chaotic Evil

Str 22    Int 10  
Dex 13    Wis 8  
Con 20    Cha 11

hp: 116

AC: 5 (braxat hide and shield)

#AT: 3/2 (2 with axe)

THAC0: 14 (10 with axe)

Dmg: 1d8+11/1d8+11 (bone battle axe)

A wandering mercenary and arena fighter, Holtet Phen hired on with House Amketch several years ago. He soon fell under the sway of Bezrak Sandfist, who recognized the half-giant's violent and amoral nature, and saw the potential of a useful ally. Holtet is not as dim as most people think, but he is still willing to follow Bezrak and take his orders.

Holtet Phen wears the hide of a braxat that he defeated himself. His arms are tattooed with symbols representing every opponent he has slain in hand to hand combat. The markings now run from his wrists to his shoulders.



hp: 29

AC: 7 (studded leather armor)

#AT: 1 or 1

THAC0: 18

Dmg: 1d6/1d6 (quarterstaff), 1d3/1d3 (light cross-bow)

**Psionic Summary: PSPs: 91**

**Telepathy:** *Sciences:* Mindlink, Mindwipe; *Devotions:* Contact, False Sensory Input, Invincible Foes, Post-Hypnotic Suggestion, Psychic Crush.

*Psychokinesis Sciences:* telekinesis; *Devotions:* Ballistic Attack, Control Body, Molecular Manipulation.

**Clairsentience:** *Devotions:* Combat Mind, Know Location.

Tsarana is an ambitious young woman who has temporarily hired on with House Shom. She knows that her psionic talents are in high demand, and is willing to serve any master for the right price. Tsarana's beauty and ability have not gone unnoticed by Agristes, and the senior agent has become Tsarana's chief patron in House Shom.

Tsarana's stats and psionic powers can be used as a generic psionist template throughout the adventure. Since she plays a relatively minor role, the only thing you need to do to use her as different characters is change her appearance and substitute alternate weapons and psionic devotions.

**Tsarana**

Human Psionist  
6th Level  
Neutral

Str 9    Int 15  
Dex 13    Wis 18  
Con 15    Cha 12

**Agristes**

Male Human Trader  
10th Level  
Lawful Evil

Str 8    Int 17  
Dex 19    Wis 15  
Con 10    Cha 13





hp: 38

AC: 1 (*bracers of defense AC 5*)

#AT: 1 and 1

THAC0: 16 (18 with wrist razor in off-hand)

Dmg: 1d4+2/1d3+2 (iron *dagger* +2) or 1d6/1d4 (bone wrist razor)

Clever, skillful, and avaricious, Agristes is one of the senior agents who run House Shom while the family members drown in debauchery. As the real owners of the company pay less and less attention to Shom's affairs, agents like Agristes find that they are largely free to conduct business as they see fit. Agristes is a balding middle-aged man, but he is still slim, graceful and athletic.

Agristes runs Shom's trading routes in the area south of Nibenay and the Ivory Triangle. He focuses on Altaruk, Balic, and Ledopolus. Unfortunately, his greed has got the better of him, and Agristes skims enormous sums of money from the profits. He also seeks out any kind of profitable enterprise, no matter how sordid, and sinks Shom money into it.

About a year ago, Agristes was approached by the defiler Tethrades. Tethrades had discovered the cache of cerebral parasites in the ruins of Kalidnay and developed a process to bond them with shaqat beetles. He needed the support of a powerful and unscrupulous merchant house to sell the beetles and finance his continued explorations. Agristes instantly recognized the potential returns, and the beetle trade was born.

Agristes will avoid combat, if possible. If forced to fight, he wields a dagger and uses a wrist razor on his off-hand. He smears his weapons with Type B poison (20/1-3, onset time 2-12 rounds.)

### Kugrisht

Male Gith chieftain

Chaotic Evil

HD: 7

hp: 39

AC: 4

#AT: 1 or 2

THAC0: 13

Dmg: 1d6+3/1d8+3 (obsidian spear) or 1d4+2/1d4+2 (claws)



An old, powerful gith warrior, Kugrisht is a vile and cunning creature. If he feels that he possesses superior force, he will not hesitate to use any amount of violence or savagery to achieve his goals. What makes Kugrisht especially dangerous is the fact that he recognizes when he is overmatched, and resorts to tactics of trickery, deceit, or treachery to regain the upper hand.

Kugrisht has been criticized by the elders of his tribe for dealing with humans, but none of the gith can complain about the new-found wealth and respect the chieftain has won for them by serving as head of Agristes's mercenaries. Kugrisht has become enamored of wealth for its own sake, and constantly looks for opportunities to add to his hoard—a potential weakness in this barbaric warrior.

### Aljara

Female Half-elf

Trader/

Preserver

5th/4th Level

Chaotic Good

Str 11 Int 17

Dex 16 Wis 15

Con 12 Cha 14





## NPCs

hp: 17  
AC: 5 (*leather armor* +1)  
#AT: 1  
THAC0: 18 (19 with sword)  
Dmg: 1d8-1/1d12-1 (bone long sword)  
**Spells:** *change self, charm person, color spray, invisibility, Melf's acid arrow*

One of Marius Amketch's loyal agents, Aljara is a skilled trader and magician who uses her magical abilities to stay ahead of her competition. A young and attractive half-elf, Aljara joined Marius about two years ago. She has been suspicious of Bezrak for months and now sincerely regrets not saying anything to Marius about her concerns.

In addition to her duties as an agent of House Amketch, Aljara also keeps in contact with the Veiled Alliance chapter in Balic and the preservers of the town of Altaruk. She has passed messages and occasionally aided fugitives for the Alliance. Marius knows that Aljara is a practicing magic user, but he feels that her talent, loyalty, and common sense more than outweigh the risk of discovery.

### Tethrades

Male Human Defiler  
8th Level  
Neutral Evil

Str 12      Int 19  
Dex 15      Wis 13  
Con 16      Cha 14

hp: 33  
AC: 4 (*armor spell* in effect, *Ring of Protection* +1)  
#AT: 1  
THAC0: 18 (17 with staff)  
Dmg: 1d6+1/1d6+1 (*quarterstaff* +1)



**Spells:** *burning hands, detect magic, magic missile, phantasmal force, mirror image, stinking cloud, web, slow, spectral force, suggestion, fear, shout; stoneskin* in effect

**Magical Items:** *fruit of fire breath, fruit of extra-healing, wand of lightning* (14 charges)

Tethrades was born in the city of Balic to a noble family. As a youth, nothing was denied to him. His sharp mind soon caught the attention of the dictator Andropinis, and for a time Tethrades studied beneath the sorcerer-king. The young defiler rose quickly, becoming one of Andropinis's favorites.

The favor of a sorcerer-king is fleeting at best. Tethrades found himself on Andropinis's bad side, and decided it was time to take his studies abroad before he lost his life. He wandered widely, adventuring and gaining experience, until one day he discovered a hidden armory while exploring the ruined ziggurat in Kalidnay. Inside the armory were metal canisters, containing an ancient plague of cerebral parasites.

Tethrades deciphered the ancient texts and notes left in the secret chamber, and discovered a method by which the parasites could be safely released and bonded to a host animal. Following the procedure, he created the first bonded shaqat beetle and realized that an insect that caused a temporary suppression of psionics by its bite would be worth a great deal in some quarters.

Seeking out patronage, Tethrades eventually found a kindred spirit in the Shom agent Agristes. Between the two of them, they created the plot to manufacture and sell beetles. Agristes handles the distribution, while Tethrades oversees the creation of the beetles. In the meantime, he continues to experiment and explore, hoping to find a weapon powerful enough to allow him to return to Balic and win his place in Andropinis's court once more.



## NPC Master Table

Name	AL	AC	MV	Lvl	hp	THACO	#AT	Dmg	ML	Notes
Amketch Guards	N	6	12	F1	6	20	1	by weapon	10	Studded leather, shield, bone short sword, light crossbow with 20 obsidian quarrels
Amketch Outriders	N	7	15	F2	13	19	1	by weapon	14	Leather, shield, bone light lance, short bow, 12 bone arrows
Kanks (mounts)	N	5	15	2	11	19	1	1d6	14	Outrider mounts
Mul Bodyguards	LN	5	12	F3	22	18	1	by weapon	16	Inix hide, shield, bone battle axe, dagger, (axe specialization, +1 THACO, +2 dmg)
Agent	LN	8	12	0	4	20	1	by weapon	12	Leather, bone short sword
Senior Agent	LN	8	12	T - 4	18	19	1	by weapon	14	Leather, bone short sword, dagger
Caravaneers	N	8	12	0	4	20	1	by weapon	8	Leather, club or dagger
Gith	CE	8	10	3	13	17	1	1d6-1	12	Spring, claws for 1d4/1d4
Shom Guards	LE	5	12	F2	12	19	1	by weapon	13	Mekillot hide, shield, bone spear, obsidian dagger
Templars	LE	6	12	T - 2	10	20	1	by weapon	16	Studded leather, shield, bone short sword, one 1st-level priest spell
Half-giant Guards	Var.	7	15	F3 28	28	15	1	weapon + 8	14	Studded leather, stone mace
Tula-kai Elves	CN	8	12	1	6	20	1	by weapon	12	Leather, bone long sword, long bow
Yarag and Bolg	NE	6	15	F4	55	17	1	weapon + 8	16	Braxat hide, bone morning star

### BATTLESYSTEM™ Skirmish Values

Gith: Hits 3, AC 8, AD 1, THACO 19, ML 12

Amketch Guard: Hits 1, AC 6, AD 1 (melee) or 1 (missile), THACO 21 (melee), 22 (missile), ML 10

Outrider: Hits 2, AC 7, AD 1 (melee), 2 (charge or missile), THACO 20 (melee), 21 (charge), 19 (missile), ML 14

Caravaneer: Hits 1, AC 8, AD 1, THACO 21, ML 8

# Merchant House of Amketch

by Richard Baker III



In the city of Balic, an insidious new threat to the Tyr region has arisen in the shape of a humble beetle. Magically altered to deliver a psionic malady via their bite, the beetles have been used by templars, slavers, raiders, and worse to neutralize the psionic abilities of their captives and render them docile. In desperation, the Veiled Alliance has called upon your characters to track down the source of the sinister beetles and put an end to them. There's only one problem—the



most powerful merchant house of the Tyr region is growing even wealthier from the parasitic trade!

*Merchant House of Amketch* is designed for four to six characters of 4th to 7th levels. Explore the trade routes and intrigues south of the Estuary of the Forked Tongue, in the heart of the Tyr region! *Merchant House of Amketch* can be played as a stand-alone adventure or as the sequel to *Black Flames*.

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