

Akhamet

Desert Pearls

By JP Chapleau

In eastern Akhamet, local markets flood with desert pearls. A merchant is gathering an expedition to the depths of the desert that might make every one of its members rich. Or dead.

A 5th edition adventure with an Egyptian flair for characters levels 2-4





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Think of them as ethereal eggs or catnip, the act as beacons for ethereal and if taken to other planes, sow the seeds of doom. When crushed they vanish, leaving nothing but Mists behind. Crushing or breaking a few has no effect, but breaking too many attracts ethereals like locusts to a ripe cornfield.



Akhamet

INTRODUCTION

Read Aloud.

The city of Bastis is known as the City of Cats: minarets, spires, catwalks, balconies, and narrow ledges are crammed with cats of every breed, color, and size. The felines go about their lives, unconcerned by the worries of others. One is always watched by a cat reclining nearby.

Ever-present music plays near and far in an oddly harmonious cacophony. Dance, theater, music, poetry, and acrobatic performances take place at all hours, both in the mansions of the elite and the public squares. Few entertainers grow thin here.

You came at the behest of the merchant Kleoniti who invited you to her palace for a meal and an offer of employment. On a patio overlooking Sun Bay, plush velvet cushions allowed you to sit or recline. An ubasti tapped a gentle beat on a goblet drum. Servants brought sweet berry wine and honeyed figs before bringing in tall crystal hookahs releasing thick, fragrant smoke that lazily danced all around you.

You were quickly joined by other adventurers here for the same offer of employment. Small talk broke out around the food and the smoke of the hookahs.

Allow the PCs to introduce themselves to the others before moving on to the next encounter.

1: IN THE SMOKE

As the PCs are in the room chatting, the room fills with smoke from the hookahs. As they do so, have each PC make a DC 13 Charisma saving throw. PCs with a connection to Bast have advantage on this saving throw.

PCs who succeed receive handout 1.

2: KLEONITI

Read Aloud.

A mature, plump numru woman wearing silks that barely cover her generous curves enters the room, followed by a pair of khemites playing flutes. Despite her size, she moves with a surprising liteness as she skips to the beat with a girlish smile. She wears enough jewelry to crush a grown man under a mountain of beads, gems, jewels, and pearls.

She walks to the middle of you and points to the flutists who join with the drummer in an impromptu concert. The numru eats and drinks generously, during the concert, the food supplies seemingly never-ending.

An hour flies by as you are served tuna dishes, pheasant, honey-soaked cakes, with copious amounts of cream and wine. The musicians take a bow as their mistress applauds them, giving each a gold coin before sending them off.

"There, now let's get down to business. Oh! Who am I kidding? Let's have another quick





bowl of cream before we start..." In a gold vessel, she takes a sip and places the rest on the floor by her cushion where a pair of calico cats appear to lap the cream. "There... look at those lovelies... Let's talk."

"About a month ago, a pair of half-mad adventurers came out of the desert with a collection of pearls, like these." She takes off one of her many earrings and passes it to you. "Look at them, see the gleam inside. They look as if they were made of swirling mists."

"Since then, these pearls have been the biggest craze in town. Everyone wants them, and since the best jewelers and artisans in Bastis work for me, I want to secure as many as I can. I want you to obtain as many pearls as you can lay your hands on. I will pay you for each desert pearl you bring back, however many you can get."

Kleoniti is willing to answer questions as she keeps eating honeyed figs.

How do we gather the pearls? They are found in the desert, typically in dry gullies. I am not sure, to be honest.

What is special about those pearls? If you crush them, they turn to a fine mist, leaving nothing. (She shows them). A good artisan can work wonders with them.

How much are they worth? Each is worth between 3 and 10 silver pieces, however, their real value is in their versatility and use in the hands of a qualified jeweler.

Can you give us an advance? I will provide you with a mule, a small cart and baskets to fill with as many as you can bring back. I will also outfit if with food and water for a week.

When do you want those? As soon as possible... If I can have my jewelers create pieces quicker than my competitors, then I can turn a profit.

Where are we going? In the desert... The map will tell you where to go, I never left Bastis, and have no interest in going out there, I don't like getting dirty and sweaty.

Are there any dangers? I suspect my main rival Sehaslep. The weasel will also send people to steal your desert pearls. Treat them like the dogs they are.

Where can we find them? The village of Djeteke near the Godshield people there should be able to tell you where you can get more.



Once the PCs agree, Kleoniti offers them more drink and food before retiring.

3: INTO THE DESERT

Djeteke is out in the middle of the desert. If the PCs ask about the village, it is a small village built on clay flats where they make colorful bricks year-round. These bricks are then shipped to Bastis. Because of its location, people dislike having to go there for tithing.

The trip from Bastis takes three days with the wagon. If the PCs succeed at a DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check, they find sufficient food and water for that day.

STARVING JACKALS (MEDIUM)

On the second day of travel, the PCs happen upon a pack of jackals. They attack the PCs and their pack animals.

Map Setup: This encounter takes place in the desert.

DIRE JACKAL

3/2PCS

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 19 (3d8+6)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages -

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Keen hearing and smell. The dire jackal has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. The dire jackal has advantage on any attack roll against a creature if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

AFTERMATH

If the PCs search the area, they find 7 (2d6) desert pearls for a total of 10gp worth.





If the PCs search the area, they find 10 (3d6) desert pearls for a total of 12gp worth.



5: DJETEKE

Read Aloud.

The village of Djeteke is surrounded by clay flats irrigated by a complex and extensive network of irrigation channels. An army of workers toils in the sun, making bricks to build the empire. They perform their annual tithe – working one full season for the government in lieu of paying taxes.

At the gate, a goat-headed numru priest of Num asks what your business is here in town. He recommends you find a place at the Drinking Hall on the main plaza, saying it is a tad pricy but perhaps the last place in town with room for travelers. He adds that vagrancy will result in imprisonment and a 50gp fine. He also informs that the temple of Num buys desert pearls.

The PCs may ask questions of the priest if they like. Provide appropriate answers, but he sees nothing wrong with them. He directs complicated questions to the Temple of Num.

Everyone in town is adorned with jewelry made from the plentiful desert pearls. Men wear extensive usekh necklaces. Women use them as beads in their hair. Only the lowest members of society do not display any jewelry.

The priest was right: visitors fill the small village of Djeteke. Looking at them, you guess they came for desert pearls: some gather them, others buy them, some work them, and others beg for them.

In the shadow of the Grand Statue of Num, the eponymous “Drinking Hall” has a full common room. The innkeeper offers you his last room at the ridiculous price of [1gp per PC] per night. He says that he accepts desert pearls at a good price.

The innkeeper accepts desert pearls at the same price as Kleoniti, allowing the PCs to pay for their stay. In fact, most people pay in desert pearls.

Take a few minutes to give the PCs a chance to visit the town and meet with people. While in town, they should become aware of a few things.

- A map of the city appears in Handout #3.
- The desert pearls are plentiful in the desert.



- The local economy is distorted by the influx of this new resource.
- No one knows where they come from.
- They exhibit no particular magical power.
- People find them intriguing, but not overly valuable.

The PCs should roam around town. Shortly after nightfall or whenever the PCs decide to leave the city, proceed to the next encounter.

BARRACKS

The barracks is a walled enclave. The soldiers stationed here are a mix of cavalry units and spearmen whose main tasks are to keep lions, jackals and the occasional monster from the wastes. The soldiers enjoy their work because they collect their desert pearls while out on patrol.

GREAT STATUE OF NUM

A fifty-foot statue of the god Num made of white sandstone stands in the center of Djeteke. Before it, full baskets of offerings contain origami, trinkets, crafts, and many bowls filled with desert pearls. Taking from these offering bowls is a major offense to the god himself. The offerings are watched over by attentive priests, giving disadvantage to anyone attempting to take anything. The offerings are brought to the temple shortly after nightfall every night.

Merchants buy (low) and sell (high) pearls from locals who bring them in from the fields and brickyards. They stay around until nightfall.

Kleoniti's offer is still the best.

TEMPLE

The largest temple in town is the temple of Num. It is decorated with prayers to the Creator. During the day, a collection of artisans huddle by the temple. Many would-be jewelers use the plentiful desert pearls to make cheap jewelry with copper or iron.

The head priest is a hulking numru named Komus. He is wary of this sudden bounty but says he has not found anything strange or dangerous about it. However, he thinks they are a gift from the goddess Bast as destroying the pearls leave no residue, much like a dream.

TOWN GRANARIES

The granaries are domed stone buildings surrounded by a stone wall. The granaries store



Guards patrol the wall night and day. They do not expect any major resistance but take their job seriously.

This encounter triggers either early in the evening or as soon as the PCs decide to leave town.

Panicked shouts reach your ears. The massed people of Djeteke head away from the plaza. Whether it was simple curiosity or a sense for adventure, you pushed against the mob until you reached the central plaza where a naked gebite stands on an allosaurus. His body, painted in dark green, he stands on the beast as a row of guards and priests surround them.

His squeaky voice reaches across the plaza. "Your pitiful works are meaningless! These offerings belong to Sobek! As neither you nor your god can protect them, none shall have them! Glory to Sobek! Hail the Crocodile Lord!"

The gebite cackled maniacally as he casts a shatter spell on the assembled offerings before the statue of Num.

Crafted goods break, baskets rip, glass explodes, wine spill, and the thousands of desert pearls vaporize into Mists.

Then time stops.

The breath that was sucked out of you a moment ago is forced back down your throat

From an unseen hole in the ground, a swarm of grey creatures emerges, falling upon the assembled priests and soldiers. You hear the mad cackle of the gebite as creatures materialize nearby and your focus switches to more immediate threats.

The destruction of so many desert pearls at once brought the attention of a swarm of ethereal horrors. These creatures materialize from the ethereal plane and destroy everything in their path.

The PCs should realize as they are engaged that they cannot fight or stop the entire swarm at once, there are way too many ethereal horrors for that. Although there are priests and soldiers around, none of them has the opportunity to help the PCs.

Map Setup: This battle takes place in town, on the main plaza. The horrors appear all around the PCs.

Tactics: The ethereal horrors fight to the death.

3/2 PCS

See stat block section.

The defeat of the ethereal scarabs presents the PCs with a short window of opportunity to escape. Everywhere they go, they hear screams of terror as the creatures fall upon the populace. This would be a good idea to run, and fight another day.

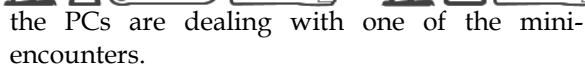
The PCs do not have a chance to take a rest.

These mini-encounters force the PCs to make choices. The goal is to have them do what they can, but the town is lost. At no point should the PCs have a clear idea of the overall situation or exactly where they are.

Try to keep the pressure on the PCs, not giving them too long to think. Use of theater of the mind for combat is encouraged.

If they want to stop for more than one round, 1/3 PCs ethereal scarabs every round until the PCs resume fleeing. Do not add these if





Ahead of the PCs, a pack of dogs blocks their path, growling and threatening to attack. These animals are panicked, unnerved by the situation. A DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check calms them, making them scatter and run. Food does not help. The PCs only have one attempt to calm them.

See *Monster Manual*, under wolf.

Passing by a house, a bloody woman comes crashing out among the PCs, holding a baby in her arms. She asks the PCs for help, crying incoherently as she holds her infant close to her.

One round later, an ethereal marauder follows and attacks the party.

See stat block section.

The woman refuses to leave the PCs, she follows them everywhere. She slows them down, screams in terror whenever she sees anything, cries for the safety of her child, and generally makes a nuisance of herself. No one said being a hero was easy.

As they pass through a street, they find a man lying face down on the ground, with scarabs on top of his body. The creatures are devouring him.

See stat block section.

The man is dead, with many chunks of his body gone forever.

In a cross-street, a priest runs passed. He is being chased by a patrol of ethereal scarabs. If the PCs draw attention to themselves, a few scarabs peel off and attack them.

See stat block section.



Overhead, a serpentine creature resembling a plant with the head of a hammerhead shark floats gracefully. It turns its attention to the PCs when a volley of arrows and sling bullets hit it from the side. The creature turns and floats down to the soldiers attacking it. One instant they are standing, the next, they are little more than dried husks.

This is an ethereal beast, the largest and most intelligent of the ethereal horrors. It is far above the PCs' power level and they should avoid fighting it.

Ethereal scarabs cornered children in a house. They are spitting on the house trying to get in. The scarabs are not the real threat here. The real danger is the structural integrity of the building.

See stat block section.

When the door opens, anyone within 20 feet of it on the outside. Must make a DC 10 Strength saving throw or take 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and be prone and restrained. A successful saving throw halves the damage and negates the conditions.

Rescued children follow the PCs if told to do so. They flee at the first sign of trouble.

The PCs run and reach the walls of the city. As they look for a way through, a massive creature the size of an ogre crashes through, following a band of soldiers. As the creature approaches the soldiers, they collapse only to die a moment later. The creature pursues the soldiers and only attacks the PCs if one of them attacks it.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8+4) slashing damage plus 4 (1d8) force damage.

This is an ethereal hulk. This creature is not appropriate for the PCs to fight at this time, and should best be avoided.

As soon as the PCs are clear the wall, any NPC that were with them, make a run for it on their own. Unless compelled by magic, they make a run for it on their own.



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8: HAVEN

Having made it out of town, the PCs are not safe. The creatures spill out and pursue fleeing people. The city is lost, leaving the PCs to flee across the clay wastes, pursued by a swarm of creatures from another plane.

Read Aloud.

You flee into the dark desert, abandoning Djeteke to the ethereal swarm. Around you, the horrors catch up to some of the people jumping over the wall. There is no organization left in town, no semblance of order. All there is the bottomless hunger of extraplanar creatures.

As you flee through the brickyards, now overrun with more of the ethereals, you see they are devouring everything not made of clay: people and beasts. Those who stop are beset by the swarm and quickly vanish, covered in the spittle.

Up ahead atop a promontory, a single building stands completely ignored by the swarm. Within, the reassuring glow of a fire can be seen in the surrounding darkness.

In the ruins, a bloody gebite feeds a small campfire. As you appear, he turns to you, with a wide grin. "I was beginning to wonder if anyone would be strong enough to make it here! Come, share my fire! Rest a while."

As he spoke, you recognize the gebite who destroyed the offerings to Num on the central plaza, a lifetime away.

The gebite, Siwa, is a priest of Sobek.

Who are you? I am Siwa, priest of He-who-waits-in-Ambush.

Why did you do it? It had to be done. The weak had to be culled. Since they could not protect their goods, their destruction means nothing.

Why should we not kill you right here? Are you telling me Num himself cannot protect what is his? If his priests cannot protect his offerings, what good are they?

Why don't they come here? This is a place blessed by Sobek. These creatures do not dare defy him.

What are these things? I don't know.

Where do they come from? I don't know.

Did you know what would happen? No. I was out to prove how useless the priests of Num are. Did they protect you? No.

Why don't you attack us? I have no reason to. Should I attack you?

Where is your dinosaur? Around.

When the conversation dies off, Siwa retires for the night

SEARCHING AROUND

PCs looking around Siwa's campsite with a passive perception of 11 or more find a shallow cave holding the allosaurus. The dinosaur does not attack but growls threateningly at anyone who comes near. This cave is 40 feet from the campsite.

Siwa sleeps here during the night.

NIGHT VISITOR

Again, around midnight, the ghostly figure appears again. This time, she is more material because of the weakened barrier between worlds.

Read Aloud.

The night is quiet, still, and chilly. As you stoke the fire, you look up to find a woman approaching. Mists fall from her form as she moves. Dressed as a foreigner, her beautiful pale face has empty eyes sockets from which more Mists escape. An open eye tattooed on her forehead seems to peer into your soul.

"Maud! Maud! It's me! Is that you?" She asks

Whatever the PCs answer, she continues.

"You are not Maud! I do not know you, and it does not matter who I am. I am from another plane of existence. You must listen to me. A scar in reality was created and if not repaired or blocked quickly could destroy your world or this one. From here I can a giant goat-man standing over the tear."

Her voice cracks as if she was crying, but only wisps of Mists roll down her cheeks. "If you should meet my Maud... Tell her Sofie is safe, for now. Give her this." As she does, she presents a small locket.

Her body covers with a thousand tiny scarab, not unlike the ones you fought yesterday. She screams for a moment before vanishing leaving behind but a tiny spot of Mists that vanishes a moment later.



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10: BREAKING NUM

The city is quiet and the PCs have no problem reaching their destination: The ethereals are busy elsewhere. Still, the buzzing of the scarabs' wings is heard as they progress. Until they reach the plaza where stands the statue of Num.

As the PCs walk through the streets, they find 11 (4d10) desert pearls, worth 3gp each.

AT THE FEET OF NUM (HARD)

Map Setup. A plaza lined with buildings. At the center of the map is a 20x20ft area filled with a swirling pillar of Mists 10 feet high.

Special. The 10x5ft feet of the statue rise close to the pillar of Mists. If the PCs deal ([number of PCs] x5) points of damage, it breaks and blocks the pillar, preventing any further lair actions.

It has resistance to acid, cold, fire, and lightning damage and is immune to necrotic, psychic, and radiant damage.

ETHEREAL MARAUDER 1/3 PCS

See stat block section.

Lair Action. Every turn, on Initiative 10 that loses all in, the lair can take one of the following actions.

- **Minor Phasing.** One ethereal takes the Disengage action.
- **Summon an ethereal scarab.** Add one ethereal scarab to the fight. There can only be one scarab present in the battle at any one time.

AFTERMATH

The defeat of the ethereals allows the PCs to destroy the statue without a problem. Siwa and his allosaurus show up a moment later, both injured from facing the ethereals.

CONCLUSION

PCS STOPPED THE ETHEREAL

Read Aloud.

The sudden invasion of the ethereal horrors inflicted massive damage on the population and the infrastructure of the region. It is receding and you made quick work of those few creatures you encountered. Small pockets of survivors, huddled around temples and other places of power slowly emerge from their hiding places.

News of the invasion reached Bastis long before you arrived. In the outskirts of the city, you found a military expedition forming under

A pair of priests of Horus asked you what happened in Djeteke and your involvement.

Allow the PCs to give or hide as many details as they want.

Ask the PCs what they wish to do with any desert pearls they gathered. If they turn them over to Kleoniti, proceed to Kleoniti.

PCS FLED OR FOUGHT SIWA

Read Aloud.

The sudden invasion of the ethereal horrors inflicted massive damage on the population and the infrastructure of the region. Tired, bruised and battered you made your way back to Bastis, with ethereals horrors on your tail the whole way.

News of the invasion reached Bastis long before you arrived. In the outskirts of the city, you found a military expedition forming under the command of the church of Horus.

A pair of priests of Horus asked you what happened in Djeteke and your involvement.

Allow the PCs to give or hide as many details as they want.

Ask the PCs what they wish to do with any desert pearls they gathered. If they turn them over to Kleoniti, proceed to Kleoniti.

KLEONITI

Read Aloud.

Knocking on the door to Kleoniti's palace, you are greeted by a servant who asks for the pearls and presents a bag of coins. "My mistress left Bastis because of the trouble in Djeteke. If you will hand me the pearls, this will conclude our business."

The bag contains 100gp per PCs.





EPILOGUE

Read Aloud.

"Ma'am, it is Lady Sofie..." The slave said to the Abbess. The Abbess looked up with a frown. "She... She is speaking again. She is calling out to people."

"And, this is nothing new... she has been doing this since her adventure in the ruins."

"But Mistress... this time those people... I, well, I saw them! She gave them her locket before they vanished."

The color vanished from the jet black skin of the Abbess. "She gave them her locket..." she



repeated for herself. "What did they look like? Tell me everything!"

THE END



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STAT BLOCKS

ETHEREAL SCARAB

As tall as a dog, this six-legged insectoid with makes a loud buzzing noise.

ETHEREAL SCARAB

Small aberration (ethereal), unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 13 (3d6 + 3)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +3, Perception +2

Damage Resistances force

Condition Immunity prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages -

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Combat Spitter. An ethereal scarab can use its ethereal spittle attack in melee without penalty.

Consume life When an ethereal scarab attacks an incapacitated opponent, it deals an additional 4 (1d8) force damage.

Ethereal Fading. As part of its move, an ethereal may shift to or from the Ethereal Plane.

Minor Fading. As a bonus action, an ethereal may take the Disengage action by teleporting through the Ethereal Plane.

ACTIONS

Ethereal spittle. *Ranged Weapon Attack* +5 to hit, range 30/ 100 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) force damage.

ETHEREAL MARAUDER

This two-legged creature moves within a jerking yet graceful motion by swaying its weight from side to side.

ETHEREAL MARAUDER

Medium aberration (ethereal), unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 49 (9d8 + 9)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +5

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3

Damage Resistances force

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Terran (cannot speak)

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Ethereal Fading. As part of its move, an ethereal may shift to or from the Ethereal Plane.

Fast. An ethereal marauder has advantage on initiative checks.

Minor Fading. As a bonus action, an ethereal may take the Disengage action by teleporting through the Ethereal Plane.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ethereal marauder makes bite and two slam attacks or three ethereal spittle attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Ethereal spittle. *Ranged Weapon Attack* +5 to hit, range 30/ 100 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) force damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage.





HANDOUT 1: UNQUIET SLUMBER

As you drift into a peaceful state of mind, wrapped in the comforting and sweet embrace of the smoke. You dreamed of grey mists, great distances, and of shapes moving in the Mists, just out of reach, just too far to be heard.

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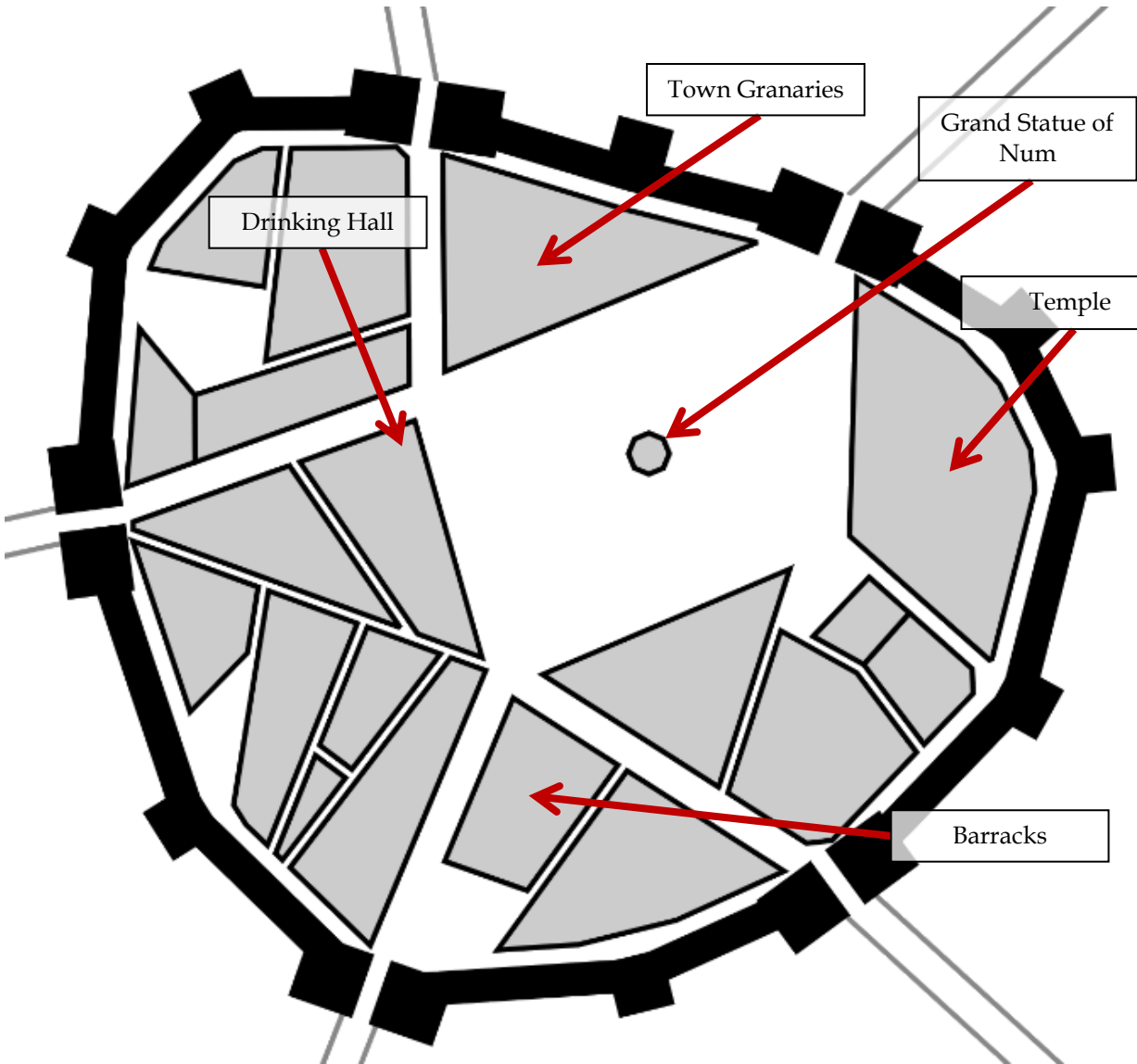
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HANDOUT 3: DJEKETE

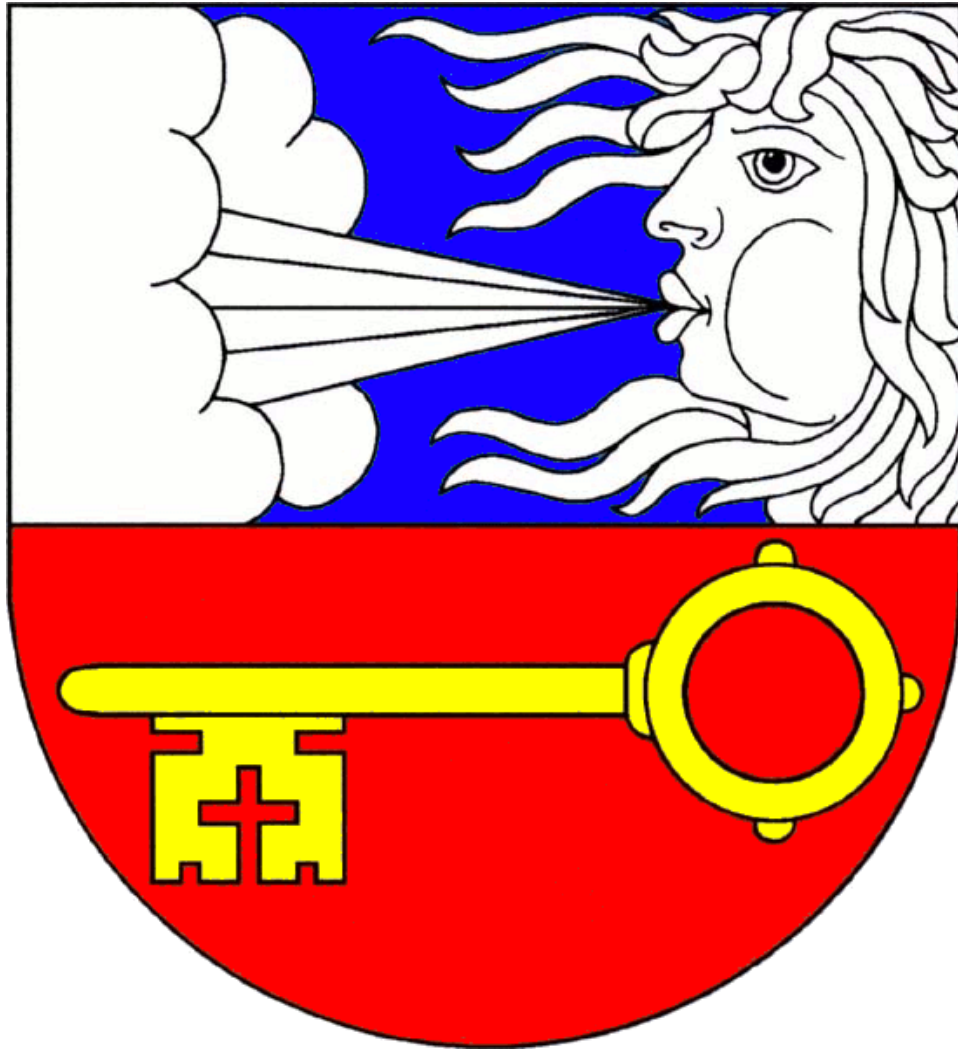


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HANDOUT 4: THE LOCKET

The locket given to you by the spectral woman is made of brass. A heraldic device covers the outside of the locket.

Within is a tiny braid of blonde hair with the following inscription engraved in Khamet (Common) inside. *"Lady Sofie Braulein, Imperial Knight, Slave of House Armana."*





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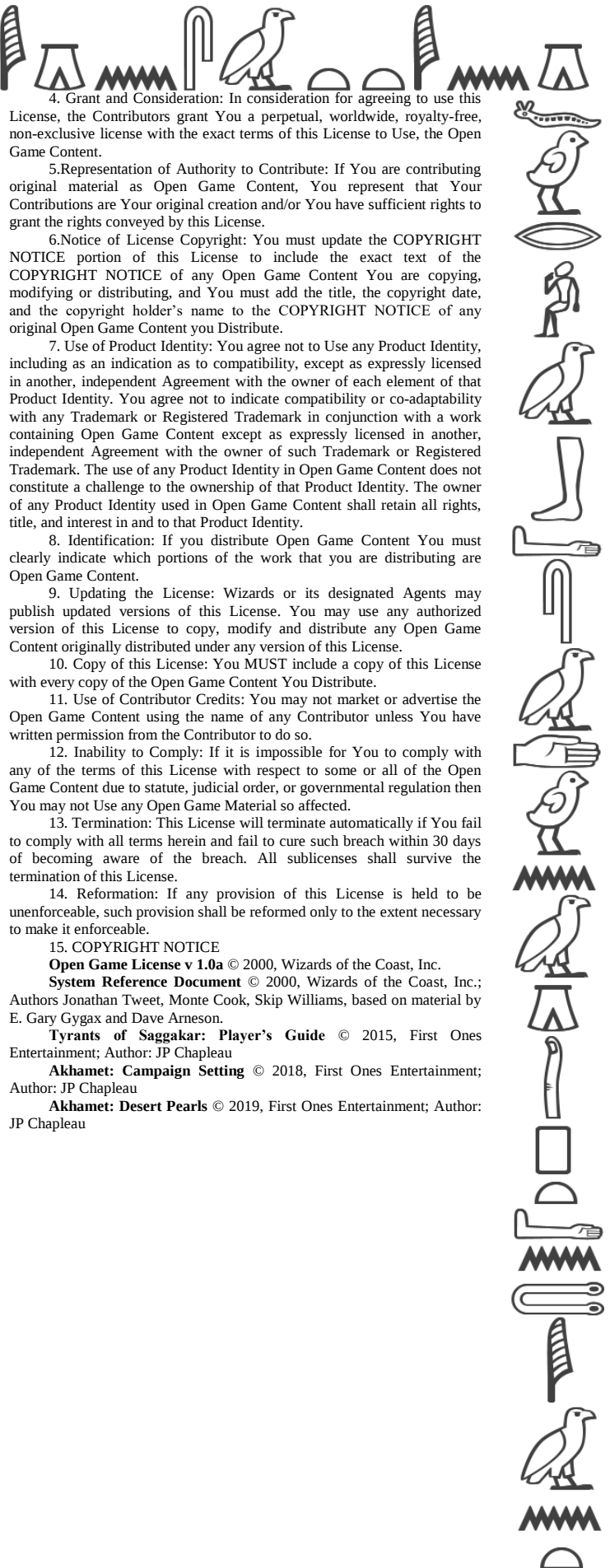
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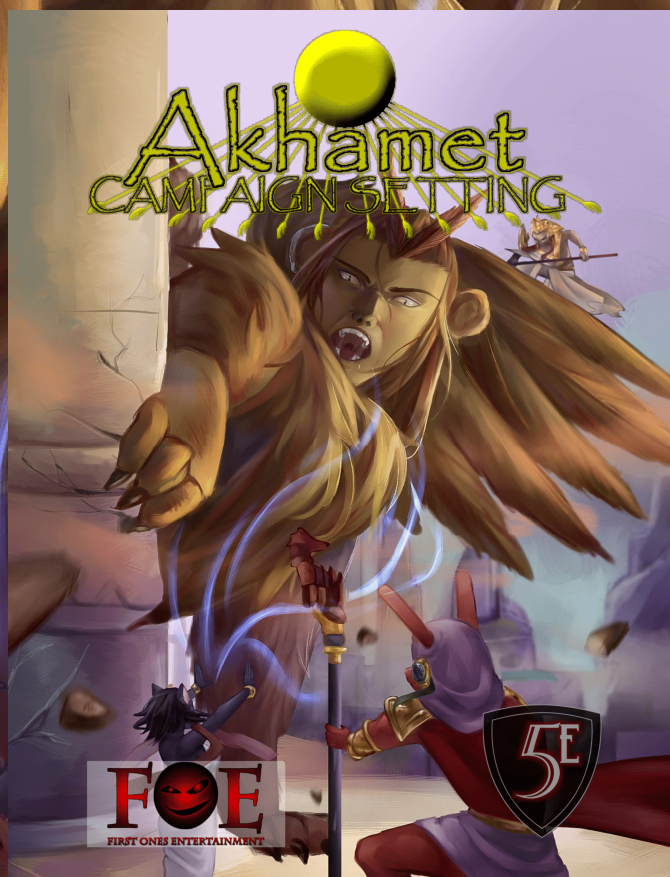
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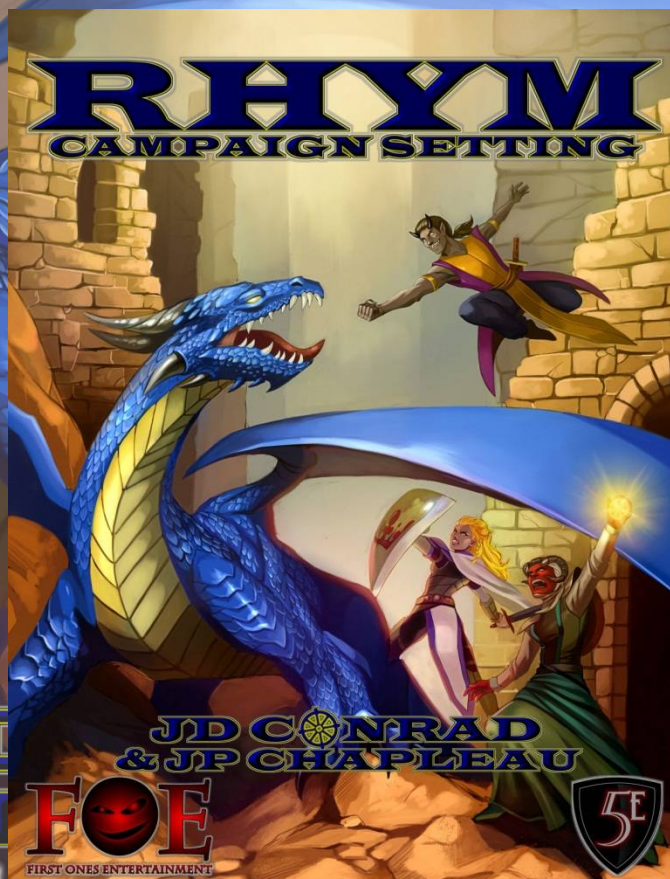


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