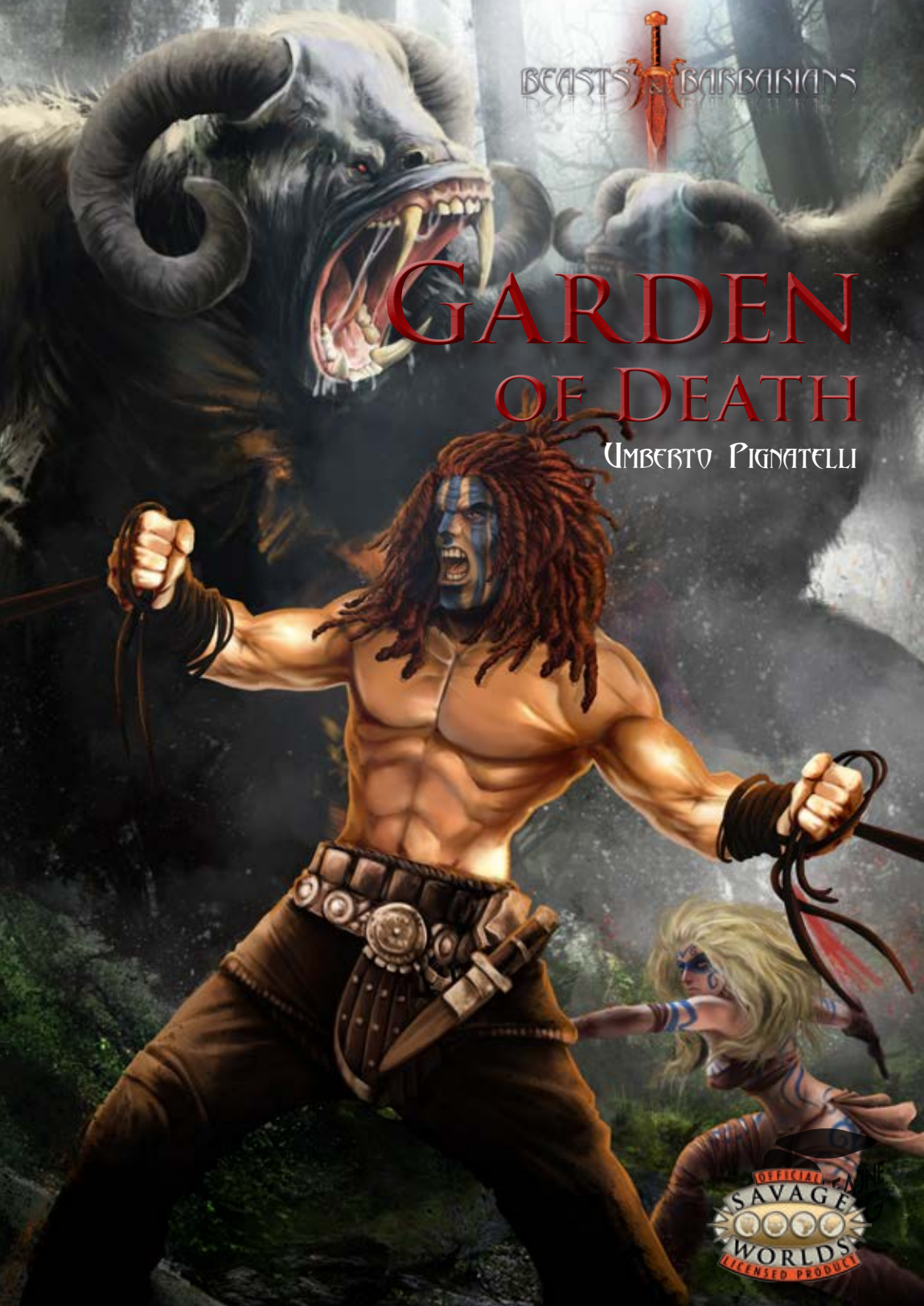


BEASTS & BARBARIANS

GARDEN OF DEATH

UMBERTO PIGNATELLI



OFFICIAL
SAVAGE
WORLDS
LICENSED PRODUCT

BEASTS & BARBARIANS

A Sword and Sorcery Savage Worlds setting

By UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

GARDEN OF DEATH

A SWORD AND SORCERY SAVAGE WORLDS ADVENTURE FOR A PARTY
OF FOUR VETERAN CHARACTERS

EDITING: ANDY SLACK, PIOTR KORYS

PLAYTESTERS: DANIELE BONETTO, LUCA COERO BORGIA, MANER SAMUEL, PAOLO BOIERO, PIERPAOLO FERRARI, GLAUCO GUERRIERI, MARCO BELTRAMINO.

COVER: ANIA JARMOŁOWSKA

ART: ANIA JARMOŁOWSKA, LUIGI CASTELLANI, MIGUEL SANTOS, EARL GEIER, JOYCE MAUREIRA, JACOB E. BLACKMON, CHRISTIAN HOLLNBUCHNER, MACIEJ ZAGORSKI, SOME IMAGES COPYRIGHT ERISIAN ENTERTAINMENT, USED WITH PERMISSION, SOME ARTWORK © 2015 DEAN SPENCER, USED WITH PERMISSION.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

There is a place, among the dreaded mountains of the fallen Realm of Keron, where those dead before their time wake up, alive, to enjoy a new life.

It is a place of forbidden marvels, exotic beauties and obscure terrors. A place which is difficult to enter, and almost impossible to leave.

The mysteries of old Keron await the heroes in the seventh installment of the Beasts & Barbarians adventure series!

Dare you enter the Garden of Death?

Bonus Content. *This scenario includes an extensive Book of Lore dedicated to the Fallen Realm of Keron, its many dangers and forbidden secrets.*

This game references the Savage Worlds game system, available from Pinnacle Entertainment Group at www.penguin.com. Savage Worlds and all associated logos and trademarks are copyrights of Pinnacle Entertainment Group. Used with permission. Pinnacle makes no representation or warranty as to the quality, viability, or suitability for purpose of this product.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 5

PART 1:

THE FRUIT OF VICTORY 8

PART 2:

THE GARDEN OF DEATH 16

PART 3:

BLACK SEEDS IN THE WIND. 40

PART 4:

THE FATE OF ZURA 60

THE END 73

CREATURES AND NPCs 73

APPENDIX 81

BOOK OF LORE – THE FALLEN KINGDOM OF KERON 84

A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

To save space, several abbreviations are used in this book to refer to other books of the *Beasts & Barbarians* line. They are listed below:

GE: Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition

BOD: Beasts of the Dominions

JCT: Jalizar, City of Thieves

TB: Tattered Banners

TLD: Tricarnia, Land of Princes and Demons

Characters and enemies are defined in the text as follows.

(E): Extra

(H): Henchman

(RH): Right Hand

(WC): Wild Card

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Garden of Death*, the seventh adventure of the *Beasts & Barbarians* Savage Words setting!

To play this scenario you need a copy of the Savage Worlds core rules and *GE. TB* is not essential, but you'll find it useful, because there are several mass battles in this story. If you don't own it, simply use the Battle Value rule (see box at page 6) and ignore the Edges, Hindrances and other advanced stats of the various fighting forces.

This scenario is for a party of four Veteran heroes, with some experience (50-55 Experience Points is the optimal level), but it can easily be modified, following the Golden Edition instructions, for parties of different size and experience.

You can play it with characters of your own, or download for free a party of pre-generated heroes from the same store where you found this product, or you can customize the archetypes found in the *Archetypes of the Dominions and Jalizar* free supplement.

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

Parts in *italics* are intended to be read aloud or paraphrased by the Game Master to the players.

Now, if you intend to play this scenario, stop here: the following sections are reserved for the Game Master.

Otherwise, if you plan to run this adventure, go on, and prepare to venture into the Dominions!

CHARACTERS REQUIREMENTS

This scenario presents very different situations: the heroes will have to lead men in battle, cross dangerous lands, investigate ancient mysteries and then organize and lead a whole rebellion all on their own!

For this reason, characters with the Knowledge (Mass Battle) skill will have a real chance to shine. A good number of the scenes are on horseback, so having a decent level of Riding will be very useful, as will the presence of a specialist in Survival and Stealth.

A skilled magician isn't necessary to successfully complete this adventure, but having one present will certainly make things easier for the party.

Although all these skills are useful, none of them is essential to successfully complete the scenario.

BACKGROUND FOR THE GAME MASTER

It is commonly believed that Tricornians, and even more so their Keronian ancestors, are cold-blooded, emotionless beings, incapable of normal human feelings.

But this is not true, as the tale of Prince Ashak reveals: Ashak, lord of Nal Ashaka, a powerful city of ancient Keron, had a wife, Shakara, who he loved dearly. But she was frail of health, and the cold hand of death took her in her prime despite the efforts of the best healers of the kingdom.

And not even the powers of a Priest Prince of Keron can undo the work of death.

But if death cannot be defeated, she can be courted: one night, when the moon was red as blood, Prince Ashak walked down into the small garden of the palace, which

Shakara loved so dearly, and chanted old forbidden spells.

When the last echo of his words faded, something in the garden was subtly changed; the shadows were longer, somewhat darker and the light of the stars was dimmed and slightly different. But, more important, Shakara was standing in the garden again.

"My beloved," Ashak asked, with trembling voice, "Are you alive?"

"Nay, my love," Shakara answered "I am not. Neither I am dead. We are in the Garden of Death, where life and un-life have no meaning."

Ashak hugged her and said: "If you cannot be the Princess of Nal Ashaka in life, then you shall be so in death!"

From that day the Priest Prince daily visited Shakara in the ensorcelled garden, enjoying every moment together as time robbed from death itself. If Ashak noticed how dark the Garden had become, he

BATTLE VALUE?

This scenario uses this new rule extensively.

The Battle Value is a new stat introduced in TB, to handle the absolute strength of armies in an abstract way, summarized below.

During mass battles you calculate the number of Battle Tokens of two armies using Battle Values in this way:

- 1) The army with the higher Battle Value receives 10 Battle Tokens*
- 2) The army with the lower Battle Value receives a number of Tokens equal to $(10 \times \text{Lowest Battle Value}) / \text{Highest Battle Value}$. The result is rounded down.*
- 3) Losses influence Battle Value in the same way. If for example an army lost one Battle Token out of six, its Battle Value is reduced by $1/6$.*

decided to ignore it, full as he was of love for his wife.

Nobody, except Ashak, dared enter the enchanted garden, due the strange atmosphere emanating from it.

Then, suddenly, the Dread Star fell, bringing the end of Keron in a single night.

Nal Ashaka, being in the Keronian Range, survived, but was totally depopulated. Decimated by climate change, illness and famine, the few survivors escaped from its crumbling walls, but they brought with them the memory of the Garden which, despite the dust and darkness after the cataclysm, continued to prosper, untouched, as if protected by death itself.

Over the centuries the legend of the Garden of Death grew; if you pay heed to the rumors, people meeting a premature, unfair death sometimes don't really die, but are reborn in the Garden, where they join the court of the Princess of Death, the ruler of this place, serving her forever.

Over the centuries, people have tried to find the Garden, but of the few madmen who did, nobody is still around to tell the story.

THE SAD KING

King Varias of Zura, the Verdant, is the ruler of a prosperous Independent City south-west of Hillias. An enlightened man, he has made his kingdom a place of riches and prosperity, irrigating large areas of the desert, becoming very popular among his people, but hated and despised by the Red Desert Nomads, who were dispossessed of their grazing lands.

But the gods don't love the lucky; ten years ago, Varias's son, Kithaso, died of a sudden fever, and Varias, previously a merry man, became sad and gloomy. Deprived of his beloved child, he dedicated himself to his kingdom, but the memory of his son never abandoned him; it is a black shadow always in his eyes.

ADVENTURE HOOK: AT THE KING'S SERVICE

Zura's war against the Desert Nomads is stalling. The nomads have found a charismatic leader, a mysterious masked warrior called Hutani Gar, the Desert Jackal, and they are razing and pillaging the kingdom with hit-and-run tactics, retreating into the desert before the Zuran army can engage and crush them. The chief of the Zuran army, General Talasco, a former imperial officer, wasn't getting any real success, so the King hired a group of foreigner mercenaries to defeat the nomads: the heroes.

The adventurers were quickly noticed for their skills and they climbed the command ladder, till one of them (select a suitable hero, who from this moment on is called the Commandant), become an important officer, second only to General Talasco himself.

In few months the Commandant and his friends took the rabble of the army, green troops, bandits and so on, and forged them into a strong fighting unit, called the Black Hawks due to the emblem they wear. The Commandant also found a reliable man, the young but reliable Tark, to act as his second in command.

Till today the Black Hawks haven't yet been tested in a real battle and they are eager to taste their first blood...

PART 1: THE FRUIT OF VICTORY

THE COMMANDANT

The character chosen for this role should be a warrior-type, if possible with the Knowledge (Battle) skill. If he doesn't have the proper skill, he permanently gains it at d4, for free, but begins the game with one Bennie less. In addition, the Commandant is considered to have the Noble Edge, while he is in Zura. As a payment, the Commandant gains the Vow (fidelity to the Black Hawks) Hindrance till the end of the scenario.

The caravan is very rich, and despite the number of guards, an alluring prey for the dreaded Desert Jackal, the bandit lord ruling over the greatest tribe of marauders.

"Better the gods had cut my nose off than I accepted your offer!" he curses to you (the Commandant), the man in charge of the caravan guards.

"We are approaching the Zirakan Hills, and I feel the eyes of the Desert Jackal on my neck!" he adds, his long nose shivering.

WHEN HAWKS AND JACKALS MEET

The adventure begins *in media res*, without explaining too much to the players. Split the party in two: the Commandant and half of the party are in the caravan (see below), while the others will appear soon.

The text below is for the Commandant and his companions.

The caravan snakes, slowly, across the sun-scorched desert: the heavy carts, dragged by horses and camels, aren't the best way to cross this land, but only they can carry all the precious cargo from Hillias to Zura and then to far Caldeia in the south.

The people of the caravan are nervous: everybody knows that the region is troubled by the attacks of the Desert Nomads and nobody is more jumpy than the caravan master, the long-nosed Jalaaro of Jalizar.

Jalaaro is right: this place is the most dangerous of all the journey. South there are the dunes of the Red Desert, south-east the rocky Zirakan Hills, and north the Badlands of Hillias, full of ravines and sinkholes. If the caravan is attacked now, it will be on an open plain with no way to escape...

Jalaaro grew up in Jalizar, the City of Thieves, and has a knack for spotting danger, or maybe he is only a very unlucky merchant, because at that very moment you spot the first nomad on the top of the dunes. The light of the sun shimmers on his blade and his weirdly shaped helm; you recognize him, he is the Desert Jackal, the nomads' chief! He drops the blade and, from behind the dunes, a horde of nomad warriors swarms out, charging the caravan!

This is the moment you have been waiting for the last few months. This is your chance!

Tark, the freckled lad acting as second in command, watches you from under his caravan driver disguise, ready to pass the order to the men.

This is the moment to reveal something more to the players: they aren't simply caravan guards, but soldiers in the service of the King of Zura. The whole caravan is bait, made to lure in and destroy the Nomads forever!

In the carriages, concealed under the tarpaulin, there are no wares, but the archers of the Black Hawks, the military unit trained and leaded by the Commandant, ready to taste their first blood!

Shoot! This first part of the battle uses the Mass Battle rules, playing a single round. The focal point is deciding *when* to uncover the archers in the wagons: too early and the marauders will turn back, too late and the caravan will be slaughtered. Describe the scene intensely, adding detail while the enemy advance. Depending on the moment they choose, the heroes' side will have a modifier to the battle roll, as shown in the table below. Note that the Black Hawks are also considered to be in Prepared Positions and Cannot Retreat (so they gain +4 to Morale rolls).

Moment	Battle Roll Modifier (Plan)
"First only a mass of men is seen..."	+1
...then their blades are visible...	+2
...then the whites of their eyes...	+4
...and now it is too late!"	-2

Brace for Impact! After the volleys of arrows the Black Hawks must draw their swords and fight in melee. They are still outnumbered, but this is part of the plan. Hidden in the Zirakan Hills is the rest of Zura's army (and the other PCs), under the orders of General Talasco, with the heavy cavalry ready! When the nomads

are fully locked in melee with the Hawks, the Commandant (or another PC with him) must tell Tark, the second in charge of the Black Hawks, to sound the horn, this is the order for General Talasco to start the second part of the plan.

BLACK HAWKS

Battle Value: 400

Commander: The Commandant hero

Band Edges: Battle Hardened

Band Hindrances: None

RED DESERT NOMADS

Battle Value: 800

Commander: Houtani Gar, the Desert Jackal (Knowledge (Battle) d6, Spirit d8)

Band Edges: Mobility, Skirmishers

Band Hindrances: None

IN THE MEANTIME...

Read this to the other part of the party, the ones who aren't with the caravan.

Hidden among the rocky hills, under the merciless sun, you hear the sounds you are waiting for: the clash of blades, curses, and cries of the wounded. You are at the head of the Zuran cavalry, dozens of heavily-armed warriors on big horses, side by side with General Talasco, the commander of the army.

Finally Tark's bronze horn blows, this is the moment you are waiting for! General Talasco will give the order to charge soon, but...

"Wait," Talasco says, stroking his grayish beard. "We must be sure all the nomads are engaged, or they'll escape again."

Zarimo, the pale blonde man acting as his lieutenant, nods.

In truth, Talasco's motivations aren't clear. As any character can understand with a Smarts roll, Talasco feels overshadowed by

the Commandant's quick advancement in the army and wants to have this victory for himself. He waits till he is pretty sure that he will save the day (and hopefully the Commandant will be killed by a raging nomad).

The heroes must convince (Persuasion) or threaten (Intimidation) him. Otherwise one of them can snatch a trumpet from a trumpeter and sound the charge himself.

For each moment of waiting, the Commandant must fight another mass battle round, without the modifier for the surprise.

After three rounds, Talasco declares the attack, but by this point the situation will be very ugly for the Black Hawks (and the heroes with them).

From this moment on, it isn't necessary to continue the Mass Battle, and you can go on with the tabletop rules.

THE DESERT JACKAL

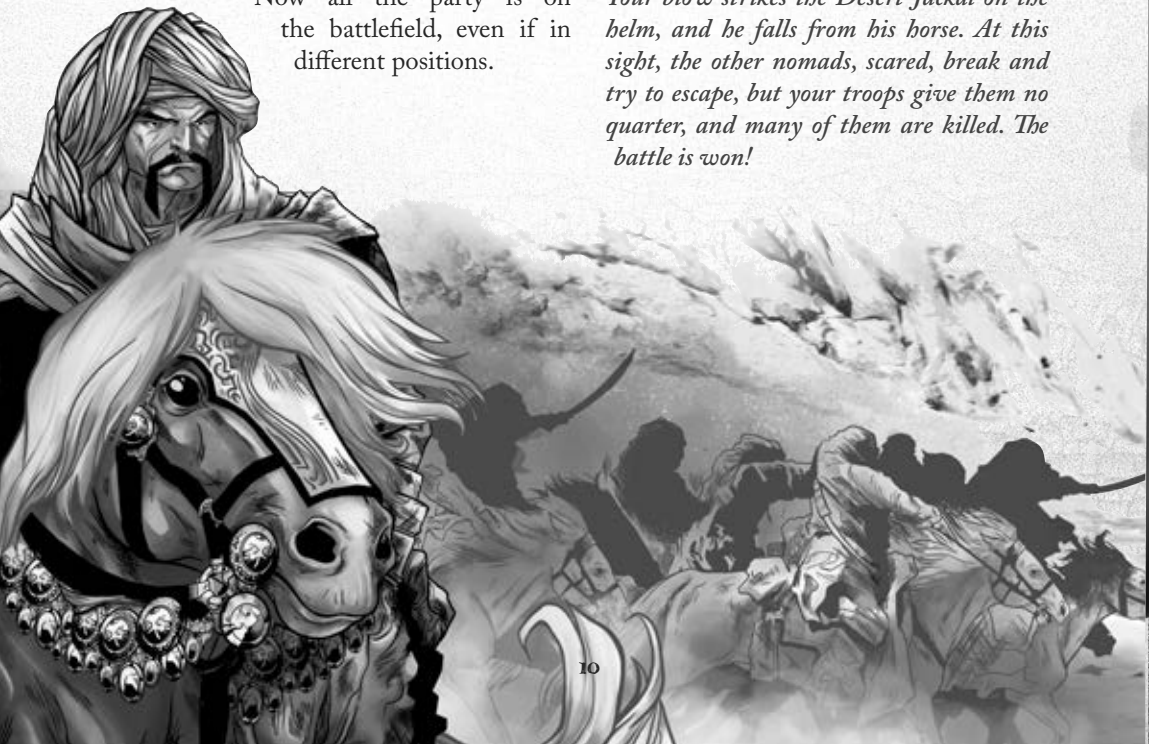
Now all the party is on the battlefield, even if in different positions.

You are in a nightmare of dust, whinnying horses, crying wounded and entrails. Your arm raises and lowers mechanically as you try to survive the madness of the battle. You hear someone shouting your name, and finally rejoin your comrades. The battle's outcome is still very uncertain, the Nomads are fighting as cornered wolves, but suddenly you see in front of you the Desert Jackal, their chief, surrounded by his personal guard! If you manage to kill him, victory will be yours!

The battlefield is 12" by 12". The heroes, all on horseback, are positioned on the southern edge, while the Desert Jackal and his guards are on the opposite one. The problem is that to reach him, the heroes must wade through a mass of soldiers and nomads, locked in melee (see below)! The Desert Jackal and his guard fight to the last man, but when the marauder lord is defeated, ignore the real result of the damage roll and read the text below.

Remember that the battle, unless the heroes dismount, is on horseback.

Your blow strikes the Desert Jackal on the helm, and he falls from his horse. At this sight, the other nomads, scared, break and try to escape, but your troops give them no quarter, and many of them are killed. The battle is won!



You dismount, and crouch to see the face of the man who caused this war: the Desert Jackal. Your blow, luckily, broke the helm in two, only stunning the person inside. By the gods, he isn't a man, she is a girl! And a fair one!

(E) Red Desert Warrior (1 per hero+2):

They are the Desert Jackal's personal bodyguard. Raise Fighting by one die step. They use the Fanatics Setting Rules, but only to protect the Desert Jackal. See page 77.

(WC) Desert Jackal (1): Use Darketa's stats. See page 73.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

• **In the Battlefield:** The entire battlefield is considered Difficult Ground, due the mass of persons on it. In addition every round a character is dealt a black card, he must make a Riding (-2), if on horseback, or Agility (-2) roll to avoid falling down or being hit by someone, suffering 2d6 damage. Ranged attacks are possible, but at -4.

ABOUT ZURA

The heroes are allowed a Common Knowledge (-2) or Knowledge (Red Desert Area) roll to check what they know about Zura.

Every entry below includes the previous information. So a character who scores a raise also receives the information in the success entry, and so on.

Failure. *Zura is a small Independent City south west of Hillias, not far from the Keronian Range, which owes its name to the fertile river Zur crossing the land. Ruled by King Varias, a former Kyrosian noble, it has enjoyed a great expansion in the last fifteen years, because Varias ordered extensive irrigation works around the Zur, transforming large barren areas into luscious farmlands. By doing so, Varias became vastly popular among the farmers, but was hated by the Red Desert Nomads, who were dispossessed of their ancestral grazing lands.*

Success. *King Varias actually retired from leading the army some years ago, and gave a lot of power to General Talasco, a former Iron Phalanx officer. But General Talasco isn't getting any real success against the nomads.*

Raise. *King Varias' semi-retirement dates from when his beloved son, Kithaso, died of a fever. From that day, he was a different man.*

Two Raises or more. *Lord Noramon, the King's counselor is the person really keeping the kingdom working. He is absolutely loyal to Varias, but the same cannot be said of Talasco, who is said to have connections with Hillias...*



A KINGLY GIFT

Your entrance into the city of Zura is magnificent. You ride at the head of the Black Hawks, surrounded by two wings of cheering people. The citizens throw flowers at your feet and sing songs in your honor.

Next in the column, in chains, are the Nomads captured after the battle, the few survivors.

Then, the regular army follows, led by an impassive General Talasco and his best man, Zarimo.

The column ends with a closed carriage, heavily guarded. It contains the girl, the Desert Jackal.

Darketa is her name, and she is more a cat than a Jackal; last night you tried to talk with her, but she hissed and scratched, calling you unrepeatable epithets. You only discovered that she is the daughter of a famous nomad

chief, Tavarok. Capturing her is even better than having her killed, because she will be a very useful hostage...

Your meditations end when you reach the royal palace: King Varias himself welcomes you, with his best advisor, Lord Noramon, at his side. Lord Noramon is smiling, and even the normally grim-looking King seems to have a hint of happiness in his eyes.

You bow in front of your lord, who makes you stand up and says (addressed to the Commandant).

"You did a great thing for Zura. I appoint you second general of Zura. May the gods bless you!"

The whole court cheers and claps, while you are led inside, to your personal quarters. Tonight a great banquet will be held in your honor.

If someone is explicitly looking towards General Talasco when the Commandant

is appointed general, he'll see a very hateful expression, but only for a moment. The heroes have now time to rest and to be checked by the palace's physician, so they recover all the Wounds and Fatigue suffered before.

master, who entertains the tables with witty stories of his Jalizaran homeland. Chained at the bottom of the table, like a rabid dog, there is also Darketa, who vehemently refuses to behave in a civilized way, trying to bite the king's hand, who tried to feed her.

THE BANQUET

In all the months you have been in the service of King Varias, you have never seen such a lavish banquet. The tables are groaning from the weight of food and beverages, the royal singers are at their best, and the dancers very pretty. For the occasion, all of you sit at the royal table, with Lord Noramon, General Talasco and various notables, including Jalaaro, the caravan

The players have some time to role-play with the courtiers and the other diners. In the Banquet Chat Table are listed some personalities, with their role and a typical phrase they might say, to be freely expanded in a full conversation. In particular the GM should role play Melanconio (who is a supporter of General Talasco and will betray Noramon in Part Four). After all the players have had time to chat a bit, go on with the next scene.

BANQUET CHAT TABLE

Character	Attitude/Description	Phrase
King Varias	A polite, but quite distant, man, with a long, trimmed beard.	"Your work is much appreciated, (name of the character)." He pensively strokes his beard.
Lord Noramon, Royal Counselor	An old, but still vigorous man, the most important counselor of the King.	"Now we have Darketa, the daughter of Tavarok, in our hands, we finally have some leverage on the Nomads. If the gods help us, this war will end soon and civilization will finally shine in the desert."
General Talasco	A strongly built, athletic soldier, of Faberterran origin. He smiles, but never with his eyes.	"I am a man that rarely admits my errors, but I was wrong in the battle today. I should have attacked earlier. I am very happy you saved the day. Count me as your friend." (He lies)
Vador the Banker	An enormously fat man, who gorges himself with food.	"Have you tasted this pork? It is delicious."
Countess Jimarra	A not-so-young, but yet attractive noblewoman	"King Varias, poor fellow. Always so grim. He should marry again. I well... I know the right person for him." (She blushes and waves her fan)
Melanconio the Poet	A weirdly dressed, grim looking poet	"King Varias is sad today, and we all know the reason: he lost his only son, Kithaso, this very day, many years ago. He isn't a good king, but luckily we have General Talasco, he saved the kingdom many times." He caresses his harp.

The banquet goes on till Jalaaro, the caravan master, stands up to speak.

"My king" he says. "A man of my caravan would like to offer you a gift, as sign of eternal gratitude for saving us from the marauders."

The king briefly rouses from his melancholy. "Of course." He smiles.

Then an old man, is introduced in the room. He walks with some difficulty, and holds something in the hands. It is a strange fruit, the like of which you have never seen.

It looks like a pomegranate, but it is slightly bigger, very smooth, as if covered in molten copper.

The man bows deeply in front of the king and says: "Please Majesty, accept this humble gift from Old Dulak, for saving my life and that of my daughter Jagara. This fruit, whose name I know not, comes from far away. It never withers and it is destined for the table of a King, not of a mere commoner like me."

All the court looks with interest at the strange gift, and the King takes a knife to cut it, but Lord Noramon stops him.

"Nay, my King, it could be poisoned. Let the royal taster cut, and taste it."

The royal taster is called. He is a bald, common-looking man, and all the court watches as the strange fruit is cut. The peel is very thick, but when the blade cuts it a cloud of smoke, or maybe spores, come out from it, engulfing the whole room!

Ask the players for a Vigor roll. It has no importance, but keeps the tension high.

The smoke is cold and odorless. Incredibly, there is something, a sort of vision, in it: a

garden, with tall, shady trees, among which a solitary figure, a boy dressed in gray, wanders. For a moment the boy seems to stare directly into the king's eyes, then the smoke fades and the vision ends.

"Kithaso!" the King shouts, standing up.

The boy in the vision was the deceased King's son. The old man, Dulak, is immediately questioned and, trembling, reveals what he knows; he had the fruit from a desert hunter, who assured him that it came from the Garden of Nal Ashaka, but it is a name that means nothing to Dulak.

"The Garden of Nal Ashaka!" whispers someone in the court. "The Garden of Death!"

"There is a legend, in the Red Desert, which speaks of a Garden, owned by Death himself, where people dead before their time wake up, safe. But it is only a legend. This place doesn't exist and nobody knows where Nal Ashaka is."

At this point, a voice is heard.

"I know."

It is Darketa.

PACTS AND PROMISES

"Nal Ashaka lays in the depths of the Fallen Realm of Keron. The road to reach it is long and dangerous," the former Desert Jackal says.

"My grandmother, who was a healer and a witch, took me there once to gather special healing herbs near the city. But we never entered the city, it is a cursed place."

In no way will Darketa reveal the location of the fabled city, and cannot be forced to do this: she prefers to die.

"I make you a proposal, woman," King Varias says "Lead my men to that city and I'll grant freedom to you and your men lying now in the dungeons."

A Jackalish snarl briefly crosses the face of the girl, who answers: "I don't trust your words, stealer of land, but I have no choice. I accept."

Obviously Lord Noramon and General Talasco argue strongly against this; with Darketa free, the Nomads will rise up again.

But the King is adamant: he will do anything to get his son back.

His only thought, now, is finding the right people for this mission, and the heroes are the best choice.

He speaks directly to the Commandant.

"[Name of the hero], in front of the whole court, I entrust you with this mission: go to cursed Nal Ashaka and bring back my son Kithaso from there. Do this, and you will be made commander of all the armies of Zura."

The court is astonished by this order, and nobody is more astonished than General

Talasco, even if he manages to hide his emotions well.

Suspensions. Lord Noramon speaks with the party in private, before they set off for the mission.

"Many people in the court, myself included, aren't happy with his Majesty's decision. But I am particularly worried about General Talasco. I want your men, the Black Hawks, to guard the King's person. Is Tark, your second in command, a trustworthy man?"

As the Commandant knows, Tark is very faithful; he won't be happy to leave his commander to go on this mission alone, but he will obey orders.

Preparations. Darketa is obviously close-mouthed about the details of the trip. She asks for good horses and provisions for two weeks. She only tells the heroes they "will ride westward" but she doesn't tell more. She also asks to be freed and armed and swears to not escape (a promise the party can trust: Darketa's men are still in the dungeons).

The party leaves Zura at dawn, headed toward the cursed land of Keron. But they aren't alone; a few hours later, a number of cloaked men leave the city gates: General Talasco and a band of his most dangerous men.

PART 2: THE GARDEN OF DEATH

STONES AND SAND

The trip to Keron is divided into two parts: the first consists of reaching the borders of that cursed land, and the second will be crossing the place itself. Below are described some encounters that will happen. The GM is free to add others to make the trip more challenging.

TALES AROUND THE FIRE

The first three days of travel are quick and without any problem. Your horses are the best the king's stables have and you ride very lightly. Darketa rides at the head, near to you, cloaked in grim silence, and you cannot avoid looking with admiration at her black-haired profile. After three days of riding, at

dusk, you arrive at the village of Valzu, on the border of the farmed lands. Beyond this point, you know, the desert and the lands of the nomads begin.

Valzu is a small village on the road, surrounded by a white adobe wall. It isn't particularly rich, but it is good enough to restock food and water. If the party stops in the sole inn of the village, Etu's Bell, they can hear some news and gossip (with a Streetwise or Persuasion (-2) roll. The nomads, it seems, are in total disorder now that their warlord, the Desert Jackal, has died, and won't be a problem for a while. Darketa clenches her teeth but she says nothing.



The morning after, the trip continues, into the desert. The sun beats down on your head, and there is absolutely nothing around you, except the howl of the wind in the sand. Darketa stops to cut some dried bushes. "Take as much as you can," the desert woman says. "Nights are cold in the desert, especially under the shadow of Keron." She points eastward, where the mountains of the Keronian range, black as a bad dream, stand. You feel a sense of uneasiness when you look in that direction.

At evening the party stops. They build a fire and huddle around it, in an unnaturally cold night.

"This night evil spirits roam the land," Darketa says, smelling something you didn't perceive in the desert air. "They are hunting for the souls of men. We must keep them away from our fire."

If the heroes ask how, she looks at them as if they were fools and answers.

"By telling stories, of course."

This is the right moment for an Interlude. Every player must tell one story, so that the night passes. Darketa is the last one, and she will tell the Story of Bar-Ishim (see sidebar).

THE STORY OF BAR-ISHIM

Bar-Ishim was a man who made a bet with the One-Eyed Djinn, betting his soul against the life of his daughter, who was on her deathbed. Bar-Ishim bet that he and his horse, Joorva, could outrun the sunrise and from his tent in the desert, reach the Oasis of Mar Sal before the first sunrays could touch his daughter's bed. He came close, very close, but nobody could outrun the sun. Bar-Ishim was transformed into the fresh wind of the desert, which blows in the hours immediately before sunset, and his daughter became a palm tree, which gives shade to travelers. Nobody knows what happened to his horse, Joorva, but sometimes, at night, the echoes of his hooves can be heard among the dunes...





THE STONEBRIDGE

Your long ride eastward seems to be endless, but finally you reach the dreaded Mountains of Keron. A mass of black basalt, towering over you with malevolence. But there is a problem; the path is blocked by a vast chasm, several hundred yards wide, separating you from the mountains.

Characters with a learned background understand that such a fissure was one of the effects of the Dread Star fall, millennia ago.

"This chasm is called Narikh Mar, the Black Vein," Darketa says. "It can be avoided but this will require a long detour. But we'll take a different road. Look there, at that big arch crossing the chasm. It is the Stonebridge. We will pass over it."

The party can see the arch Darketa is talking about: a thin passage of black stone, probably of natural origin, which

allows passing over the chasm. It isn't far away...

But while you are pondering what to do, suddenly you hear the sounds of hooves, and, from behind a dune, a band of crimson dressed warriors fall on you!

"Ukar's blade!" Darketa curses. "They are Red Nomads, not of my clan!"

The Red Nomads are the most dangerous and xenophobic of the desert dwellers; in addition they consider the land of Keron holy, and for this reason they guard the Stonebridge. The party must fight for their lives. The battleground is 24" by 24". The western side is the Black Vein (see below), while the eastern 12" by 24" area is filled with rough hills.

Place the heroes roughly in the middle of the battlefield, but 6" away from the eastern frontier, while the Red Nomads are placed, in a sparse formation, in the

hills. They must be at least 10" from the adventurers.

Both the heroes and their assailants are on horseback and the adventurers must roll for surprise.

The Nomads' tactics consist of shooting arrows while charging the heroes, and then engaging them in melee. They fight to the last breath.

But the fight's end only means greater troubles are coming!

(E) Red Nomads (2 per hero): Use Red Desert Warrior stats, adding the Berserk Edge. See page 77.

(WC) Darketa (1): See page 73.

TERRAINS, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

• **Rolling Hills:** The hills slope downwards, so if you are running from west to east (as the Red Nomads do), you increase the running die by one die step (horses usually roll a d8, so it becomes a d10), but if a 1 is rolled on the running die, it means the horse trips, and Riding (-4) roll is required to avoid being thrown out of the saddle. For characters going the other way, it is considered Difficult Ground.

• **The Black Vein:** Characters Shaken or Wounded within 2" of the edge of the Black Vein must roll on Agility, otherwise they fall in the chasm! Extras automatically die, screaming while they plummet to the black waters, hundreds of feet below. Wild Cards instead can cling onto the edge and try to regain solid ground, with a Strength (-2) roll, which can be cooperative. In the case of failure, they fall down, screaming. The hero is apparently lost, but the GM

is free to make him appear again, alive, in the Garden of Death. From this moment on, you can have that player use Darketa.

RUN FOR IT!

The first nomad hasn't yet fallen to the ground, when from behind the hill, a larger war party comes out. There are at least three dozen of them, red blurs riding toward you with shining blades in hand, eager to taste your blood.

"We cannot fight!" Darketa shout "We must head for the bridge!"

The warrior woman is right. The nomads are too numerous to be fought, at least in open battle. If the group manages to reach the Stonebridge, they could have more chance of a successful defense.

The scene is a Standard length Chase, based on Riding. Ignore the normal complication rules, instead every round a scripted event happens, as described below.

The nomads are divided into three groups of twelve. When there is the chance of attacks, only 2d6 of them can shoot (the others are in a poor position).

(E) Red Nomads (2 per hero): Use Red Desert Warrior stats, adding the Berserk Edge. See page 77.

CHASE EVENTS TABLE

Round 1 – Go for It! The ground in front of the party is flat as the belly of a dancer in a Jalizaran tavern! Ask the players how much they want to spur their horses (0, +2 or +4). They obtain the same bonus on the Riding roll, but, if they roll 1 on the Riding dice (if they chose +2), or 1-2 (if they chose +4) the horse trips and they are

unhorsed! Ignore this effect for the Red Nomads.

Round 2 – Crumbling Ground. The heroes are riding very close to the Black Vein's edge, and there the ground is friable! Each character acting on a Clubs card feels the ground shatter under the hooves of his horse; he must immediately roll on Riding (-2) or fall into the Black Vein (see The Black Vein above). For Red Nomads, simply consider that 1d6 of them fall in the chasm, screaming.

Round 3 – Dust! The horses raise a lot of dust, and nobody can see anymore! This round, use Notice as the Chase skill, instead of Riding. No ranged attack is possible, but melee attacks are possible at -2, with any card equal to or greater than 8.

Round 4 – On the Bridge! The heroes finally reach the Stonebridge! Darketa incites the party to cross it, but it is very narrow, and the horses buck and rear! This round, the heroes (only) use Spirit as their Chase skill, with +4 if they have the Beast Bond or Beast Master Edge. Due to the narrowness of the bridge, halve the number of Nomads that can attack in melee during this round.

Round 5 – The Other Side. The adventurers are climbing over the highest part of the bridge! Behind them, the Red Nomads have stopped. They don't dare pass into Keron, but shoot all the arrows they have! During this round, use Agility as the Chase Skill. Only ranged attacks are possible, but

the Nomads receive +2 to their Shooting rolls.

You did it! You passed the Stonebridge! You hear the Red Nomads scream and curse on the other side, but they don't move a step to follow you.

"They won't come," Darketa says. She shows you a narrow path going in the deep, black mountains.

"There begins the Arsha Karun, which means Forbidden Path in the desert tongue."

"We are in Keron, now." She watches you with worried eyes, then turns her horse and takes the path.

THE ARSHA KARUN

The party is in the Fallen Realm of Keron now. It is a desolate place, made of black stone, cut by deep canyons and ravines. The mountains are relatively young, being created by the Dread Star's fall, and it seems that life hasn't managed to colonize them in a mere two thousand years.

Darketa leads the heroes along the snaky path with caution and frequent pauses; after all, the last time she went there with her grandmother was ten years ago, and she doesn't remember the route very well.



Below are several encounters the heroes have during this leg of the trip.

GRUMBLES AND FANGS

You are crossing a deep ravine, when suddenly the ground shakes! It is an earthquake! You may be scared, but the horses are terrified! They whine, buck and go wild!

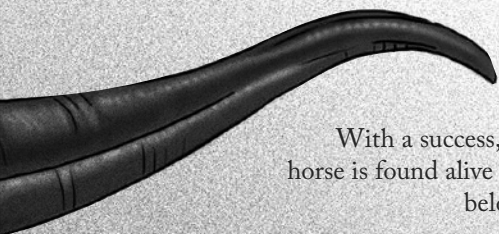
Earthquakes are very common in Keron; the land is still moving after all this time. Every hero must make a Riding roll to avoid being unhorsed. But that's not the real problem.

The last horse of the group, the one you packed with all the provisions, devoid of any rider, breaks its reins and runs wildly off down a side passage, at full gallop! Stupid beast!

If the characters want to eat something in the next few days, they must track down and recover the lost horse.

The animal, scared, is running at full gallop, so it quickly disappears. The adventurers must rely on a Tracking roll (which can be cooperative) to find where it went in the labyrinth of ravines, with Darketa cursing their misfortune.

With a failure, when they find the horse it is too late and it is already dead, with a couple of Snappers feeding on it (see below).



With a success, the horse is found alive (see below).

With a raise not only is the horse found alive, but the adventurers also find strange lizard-like footprints, which Darketa

identifies as Snappers; they don't have to check for surprise in the following encounter.

You finally find the stupid beast, frothing from the long run, in a dead end: a small ravine, full of rocks. The beast whinnies quietly, waiting for you to recover it. You approach, and suddenly the horse starts whinnying again. You understand the reason: slowly advancing among the rocks, there are a number of bipedal lizard-like creatures, which attack you with lightning-fast ferocity.

"Snappers!" Darketa says, unsheathing her blade.

The fight is staged in a vaguely round area, 8" in radius. The party arrived from south, while the other three "sides" are delineated by the walls of the ravine. The whole area is scattered with boulders (see below).

Place the horse 3" from the northern wall. The beast is petrified with fear and won't move unless a character takes the reins and leads it away. Place the heroes within 3" from the center of the battlefield, in a loose formation, while the Snappers are scattered around them, at least at 3" from any hero and behind the Cover granted by a boulder.

Unless the adventurers discovered the tracks earlier, they must check for Surprise.

The beasts attack viciously, moved by hunger; their first target is the horse, but a tasty adventurer is also a good option. This place being a dead end, they fight to the death.

Empty Bellies. If the heroes flee, leaving the horse behind, they are without provisions from now on, and must rely on the Survival skill to find food and water,

with -4 to rolls due to the desert-like environment.

(E) Snapper (2 per hero): See page 77.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

- **Boulders:** The area is strewn with massive boulders. Each of them is 1" by 1" on the battlefield and grants Medium Cover. Place at least sixteen of them in the battlefield.

HOT DEATH

Nights in Keron are cold as a miser's grave, as you've soon learned. But today the temperature is becoming hotter and hotter while you advance, and soon you are sweating copiously. You are at the bottom of a wide, flat valley, filled with bad-smelling vapors.

"Careful," Darketa says. "I remember this place. My grandmother called it the Plain of Death."

As if in answer to her words, a geyser of hot water springs from the ground, not far away from you.

"You understand the reason?" the warrior woman says.

Passing through the Plain of Death isn't easy, but there isn't another option; the Arsha Karun crosses there.

Darketa knows a way. She tears a piece of her dress to make a bandage, and puts it over her eyes.

"We must protect our sight from the hot water," she explains "And in this place we must trust our ears, not our eyes." At this point she dismounts from horseback and cautiously leads you across the plain.

The scenario supposes the heroes cross the plain following Darketa's instructions. The geysers' origin cannot be seen, but a distinctive sound is heard before a spray, allowing the adventurers to cross the valley.

Mechanically, this is handled as follows: draw five cards from the Action Deck, keep them covered and line them up on the table. Each round, reveal a card and check the table below. Each geyser has a Spot Value, which indicates the number of successes (and or raises) in Notice (-2) rolls the party collectively needs to recognize the right moment to pass over it. Characters with the Deaf Hindrance cannot roll.

All the heroes can roll (clockwise around the table); when the Spot Value is reached, tell the current player his character spot the geyser. At this point he can declare "Go!" and every character (including himself) crossing the geyser is safe. If the total isn't reached or if a player decides not to go, he suffers the damage indicated in the Damage Column.



GEYSER TABLE

Card Drawn	Spot Value (*)	Damage	Agility Roll
2	1	3d10	0
3-6	2	3d8	0
7-10	3	3d6	-1
J	4	2d10	-1
Q	5	2d8	-2
K	6	2d6	-2
A	7	3d4	-4
Joker	No Geyser!		

(*) Spot Value: This number is for a party of four players. Add or reduce by 1 (minimum 1) for parties of greater/smaller size.

Trusting Darketa: During the third round, something happens. Darketa (who doesn't roll) suddenly shouts "Go!" at what is clearly the wrong moment (too early). Following her or not is a matter of trust. She is right, and every hero following her order will be safe, while the others suffer damage as if the Spot Value was missed. The first player declaring he is going should also be rewarded with a Bennie (at the end of the scene).

THE BROOCH

You've marched enough for today. Both the horses and you are tired and the sun is fading behind the mountains. It is time to rest.

"We aren't far away," Darketa says.

You find a good spot to camp: a cluster of old ruins, probably an ancient Keronian palace. It is a location strangely beautiful and repulsive at the same time; the few columns still standing are elegant and slender as the legs of a savannah woman, but some of the engravings on them are so alien that they make you shiver.

"Mind what you do around these stones," Darketa grumbles. Then she drops her backpack and falls asleep immediately.

THE KERONIAN BROOCH

This ancient item of Keronian workmanship has survived almost three millennia, untouched by time. This is strange, and in fact the item is magical; usually made in pairs, it is a Seal Bond, an amulet that Keronians used to exchange between family members. The owner of a Seal Bond immediately feels if the person wearing the other is well.

This one belonged to Thaal, a soldier who left his brother Nargal in Nal Ashaka, millennia ago. When Nargal felt the death of his brother, he poisoned himself, but didn't really die: now he is entrapped in the Garden of Death and the heroes will have the chance to meet him later.

The Keronian Brooch grants some "insights" to the wearer, bestowing the Danger Sense Edge. If the character already has it, he gains +2 to the roll.

This place was a fortress in the past, destroyed in one of the petty wars between Nal Ashaka and her neighbors. No bodies or skeletons can be found, but if the heroes set up guard shifts, pick one of them at random. The lucky fellow finds something in a fissure in the floor. It is a silver brooch, representing a scarab. It is quite precious and has a story (see sidebar).

During the morning of the fourth day, the party finally reaches Nal Ashaka.

IN THE CITY OF NIGHT

Nal Ashaka was a big city, heavily walled, on a plateau. But millennia of earthquakes and changes in the mountains sank it in a very deep, dark valley, which is almost in perpetual darkness.

"The Red Nomads call it the City of Night," Darketa says, and you wonder how a garden of any type can survive in such perpetual dusk.

A snaking path goes down the vale, and it is the only one the heroes can take to reach the city.

While you approach, you notice, from your elevated position, that despite sinking the city, the earthquakes left it strangely intact, as if protected by some supernatural

power... Going down into the vale, the air becomes moister, and when you reach the eastern walls of the town you notice herbs and mosses growing upon it.

"These are the herbs my grandma and I came to gather," Darketa says. "I never ventured farther than there, and we always departed before nighttime."

The herbs on the wall are certainly of interest to a Lotusmaster (see below), but sooner or later the party will try to enter.

The only access you find to Nal Ashaka is a massive gate. The two enormous doors, ajar, are made of bronze darkened by age, engraved with ancient, almost unrecognizable scenes: sorcerers, slaves and inhuman creatures.

You wonder how these doors can be moved, because there are no visible mechanisms.

BLACK LOTUS OF THE HEART

This very rare Lotus grows only in darkness, and in proximity of ancient Keronian ruins. It is a large, heart-shaped flower, black as night, with an intense, overripe smell. Voices say it can be used to heal any sort of illness, but at the cost of part of the soul of the user. In game terms, if a dose of it is used for the healing Power, it has the same effects as the greater healing Power, with the drawback that the imbiber loses a die step in Spirit. After each moon, the user can roll on Spirit (-2) to recover this. If dried and eaten in massive doses (at least three) the Black Lotus of the Heart can also be used to destroy the barriers between present and future: the eater can use the divination Power, rolling on Spirit (+4), but, after each use, he is so shocked that he loses a Spirit die step (which can be recovered as above).

Alternatively the Black Lotus of the Heart can be used by a Lotusmaster who knows the slumber or stun Power, to create a concoction called the Lotus of False Death, which makes the imbiber fall into a state of false death for a whole day. This could be very useful later in the scenario (see page xxx).

Recovering the Lotus requires a roll using the lower of Climbing and Lotusmastery (because the flowers grow on the walls); for each success and raise, the character finds one dose (up to three). Lotus doses can be sold to warlocks and Lotusmasters for the princely sum of 1000 Moons per dose.

The city is similar in design to a Tricornian citadel, if the heroes have ever visited one (even if the analogy should be reversed: Tricornian citadels resemble Keronian cities). It is a maze of connected halls, courts and corridors, rather than clearly separated buildings. It is also quite difficult to navigate without knowing the proper directions.

The heroes can simply wander, hoping to find the garden, or, if they want, they can head toward a tower in the center of the city, which is tall enough to give a clear vision of the whole complex.

Below are described several encounters and locations the party can stumble into.

GALLERY OF STATUES

You are in a domed corridor, the ceiling is made of broken, reddish glass. Your steps echo as you cautiously advance. There are niches on both sides, from which tall, severe statues, watch you: they are princes and princesses, priests, lords and even gods.

Suddenly you hear a low muttering, and you freeze on the spot. Toward the end of the corridor, you see a peculiar scene; there

is a figure, you cannot tell if it is a man or a woman given that it is swathed in rags, which stands still, contemplating a statue. You briefly a glance at it. It represents a couple; a tall man, with a scepter and a jeweled crown, in the company of a bald, but nevertheless very beautiful woman. Unlike the other statues you've seen in this place, the expression of the man is strangely caring toward the woman.

The huddled figure seems totally lost in watching the statue.

The heroes have stumbled on one of the few dwellers in this cursed place. The last statue represents Ashak, Prince of Nal Ashaka in company of his wife, Shakara, the Lady of the Garden, who the party will meet later.

Approaching the figure is easy; he is so lost in contemplation that a simple Stealth (+2) roll is enough. But unless the adventurers grab him (as the text below supposes), he will escape.

You put your hand on the arm of the figure, who turns, startled. He is a man, dirty and with a long, whitish and unkempt



beard. He is old, very old, but his violet eyes shimmer with vitality. Or maybe is it madness?

"You!" The man whispers, trying to break free from your hold. "Who are you? You escaped from her, too? Yes, I did!" He chuckles.

"I love her no more and I fooled her! The suns! Remember! The suns in the mirror!"

The man seems really crazy and the heroes cannot obtain much more from him. Do some roleplaying, before the madman suddenly stops in place, eyes wide with fear, and says.

"Silence! They found me! They are here!"

Suddenly, from the gate at the end of the corridor several shrouded figures emerge. They are dressed in dirty, red garments, and move in a crouch, with the dangerous elegance of beasts of prey. Their heads are concealed by deep hoods, but you hear them whisper in a sibilant, unknown language. They hold curved daggers in hand and strange, small blowguns.

"Etu's teeth!" Darketa curses, unsheathing her blade. "They are the city's guardians!"

Let the heroes check for surprise (unless one or more characters explicitly said they were on guard).

Then the fight begins! The combat area is a rectangle 6" by 18" with the long side on the east-west axis.

On the eastern side there is the gate (4" wide), from whence the Guardians came. Place them within 3" of the entrance.

On both the long sides of the corridor there are several niches with statues (see below). Place the heroes within 6" and 9"

of the east gate, too. Place the madman near them.

The Death of a King. The Guardians armed with daggers charge into melee, the first of them concentrated on the madman (Parry 4); they want to kill him, and will do so. Then they attack the party.

The Guardians armed with blowguns use them until they exhaust their ammo, then charge into melee. They fight to the death.

(E) Guardian of Nal Ashak (2 per hero+2): One third of them are armed with blowguns. See page 74.

(E) Ashak of Nal Ashaka a.k.a. the Madman: He has Parry: 4 and Toughness: 4, all Attributes are d6 and he won't survive the fight.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

• **Statues:** The corridor hosts eight statues (four per side), each of them occupying a niche in the wall the size of Small Burst Template. Each statue is 5" tall on the battlefield, has Toughness 9 and grants Heavy Cover. A mighty hero can try to pull one down, with a Strength (-4) roll, which can be cooperative. In the case of success, any character in the path of the falling statue must make an Agility (-2) roll or suffer 3d6 damage.

LAST WHISPERS

The last Guardian falls to the ground, moaning, and you run to help the old man. The wound is deep, in the chest, and he has lost a lot of blood. You have seen your share of battles, and know that he won't survive. Pale as it is you notice something you missed earlier; his

features, under the dirt and the beard, are the very similar, no, they are the very same as the man of the statue! But how could this man be the same King who lived millennia ago?

This man is indeed Prince Ashak of Nal Ashak. The lifespan of Keronians is extremely long, and Ashak belonged to one of the purest bloodlines. After the destruction of the city, he found shelter, for a while, in the Garden of Death, but after several millennia his wife, Shakara, changed, and he fled, starting a life of a hermit in his own city. His mind is almost shattered, but he has still something to say.

"Hear me! She is not human anymore! It is that place! Don't enter, but if you do, remember that I fooled her: the suns! The suns are the door!"

This info will be very useful later, as the party will discover. In the meantime the danger isn't over yet.

One of the foul men you killed isn't really dead. With his last strength he brings something to his mouth, a sort of crude whistle, and blows it with a shrieking sound.

"Son of a dog!" Darketa swears, kicking him in the face and granting him a quick death.

But the damage is already done. On the opposite side of the corridor, the one you came from, you see several hunched shapes approaching. There are other Guardians, a number of them, and they are led by a hulking brute armed with a crude battle axe.

The leader raises his weapon, and the others charge!

There are a very large number of Guardians, eager to drink the blood of the heroes, so the best thing to do in this case is run away! If the heroes don't propose this, Darketa does.



The Chase is of Standard length (5 rounds) and based on Agility. Unlike normal Chases, ignore Complications. Instead, every round a scripted event happens, as described below.

The enemies are divided into three groups; the first of them is led by the High Guardian. Until round 3, Darketa is considered "attached" to a randomly selected hero.

(E) Guardian of Nal Ashak (4 per hero):
See page 74.

(WC) High Guardian (1): Use the Guardian of Nal Ashak stats, raising Strength, Vigor and Fighting to d10. He also has the Command and Sweep Edges.
See page xxx.

CHASE EVENTS TABLE

Round 1 – T-Junction! The corridor the party is running into suddenly divides in two: the left passage seems more used, the right one is full of webs. Each character must pick one, *very* quickly (count down from five to zero). Characters who took the left corridor use Agility as their maneuvering Trait, those who took the right one roll on Spirit (due to the instinctive uneasiness caused by webs). The corridors rejoin later in a large room with a dried-up fountain.

Round 2 – Steep Stairs! The heroes are running up a very steep, monumental stair. It is very tiring: this round Vigor is the maneuvering Trait.

Round 3 – Corridor of Darkness! The Chase leads the heroes into a pitch black corridor! During this round, the maneuvering Trait is Notice, with a -4 penalty if the party has no source of light available (the same penalty applies to attack rolls). There are several side corridors and passages.

Round 4 – Darketa! The characters are almost out of the dark corridor! Run the Chase round as normal, but, when it is the turn of the last player character, read the text below.

You are almost out of the tunnel, when you hear a cry at your back. It is Darketa, who was last!

Give the player *exactly* ten seconds (counting from ten to zero) to decide what to do. If the player decides to go away, he hears Darketa crying again, and then nothing. The character loses a Bennie for un-heroic behavior (two if he is Heroic). If he runs to help her, give him a Bennie, and then let him fight for two combat rounds

against the Guardians, in Darkness (-2). After the fight Darketa cannot be found! Maybe she is lying dead somewhere or she took a side passage? Whatever the explanation, another group of Guardians arrives, so the hero should leave now.

Is the bold warrior woman dead? The heroes will discover this later...

Round 5 – On the Bridge! The party is now on a sort of catwalk, where they run as fast as they can. But it hides a danger: after many centuries it is slowly crumbling and will shatter under the feet of the heroes! Run the Chase as normal, but if the hero is acting on a Club (or a Joker) a section of the bridge shatters under his feet and he must jump over it (with a Strength roll)! In the case of failure he does not fall, but grabs the edge on the other side, and can be helped to safety by his friends. Extras, instead, automatically fall and die screaming. With a Joker the same happens, but the hero doesn't need to roll, as the bridge shatters behind him. If other characters find themselves behind the collapsing section (because they drew a lower card), they must roll on Strength (-2) to jump over it, otherwise they must stop to face the pursuers.

The Guardians will not jump over the bridge (even if they draw a card before the bridge shatters, consider them behind, not at the head of the Chase), giving the party a chance to shake the pursuers off.

TOWER OF SAGES

You catch your breath after this narrow escape, leaning over a wall. May the gods curse this damned place!

The players, at this point, will probably try to go back, looking for Darketa. Explain to them that this is very difficult; first, they must find another way to the collapsed

bridge (which after a while totally falls down). Second, they ran without paying attention to the direction they took, so they haven't the faintest idea where to go. If a hero is very vocal in his desire to go back and save Darketa give him a Bennie.

At this point go on with the following text.

While you are talking, you suddenly see, not far away, the tall tower you spotted before. It is on the opposite side of the small plaza where you are now.

The Tower of Sages, as it is called, is the tallest building remaining in the city. Elegant and slender, it resembles a coiled reptilian and gives the players a sense of uneasiness. The entrance is closed by a black, metal door, which can be pried open with a Lockpicking (-2) roll or bashed down (Toughness: 9).

Inside, the tower is almost untouched by time. There are three floors worthy of being explored, not counting the ground floor, which is empty.

First Floor – The Map Floor. This large room is totally empty, because, on the floor, there is a large mosaic showing the world as it was before the Dread Star's Fall. The GM should describe it as he sees fit. The first player understanding what he is seeing should be rewarded with a Bennie.

Second Floor – Ancient Library. This little floor is literally crammed with bookshelves full of scrolls, earthenware tablets and other, even weirder, reading implements. In a small niche, there is also a stone coffer, decorated with a particularly elaborate lock.

Ransacking the Books. The library is a paradise for any scholar, with lots of books, all written in Keronian (a character must be fluent in Tricarnian to read them).

Characters interested in ransacking the library can do this, if they can read the books and have plenty of time to spend. For each hour spent rummaging among the books, make an Investigation roll. For each success and raise, gain a Library Token (up to 5) and check the table below. Each Library Token weighs 15 pounds and can be sold, to the proper persons, for up to 1000 Moons. Note that if the Investigation die is 1, regardless of the Wild Die, it means the character is convinced he has exhausted the resources of the library and stops. If a critical failure is rolled, the situation is worse: skimming the books he triggers one of the many intellectual traps put in them (in this case an unnerving revelation on the nature of the universe), and the reader must make an immediate Fear Check (-4). Whether he fails or not, the incautious reader must stop.

LIBRARY RESEARCH TABLE

Library Tokens	Effect (*)
1-2	<i>Broken Pieces of Knowledge.</i> The character gains +2 to a single Knowledge (Arcana) or Knowledge (Legends and Lore) roll.
3	<i>Fragments of Knowledge.</i> The character permanently gains one die step in Knowledge (Arcana) or Knowledge (Legends and Lore).
4	<i>Mysterious Knowledge.</i> The character gains a Wild Die (or raises it by one die step) in Knowledge (Arcana) or Knowledge (Legends and Lore).
5	<i>Forbidden Lore.</i> As above, and if the character has Arcane Background (Sorcery) he permanently gains 3 Power Points.

(*): The character, to receive the effects below, must study the books during the After the Adventure phase, and must make a Smarts (-2) roll. If he fails he can do it again after the next scenario.

The Stone Coffer. The coffer seems (and is) very sturdy (Toughness: 11). It has a golden lock on it, very elaborate, which resembles a snake. There is a small inscription on the snake's body (a Notice roll is required to spot it and it is written in ancient Keronian): "The Snake That Crawls Under the Skin". Any sorcerer character can recognize this as a demon's title. The "lock" is in truth a sorcerous trap (no key is required) and the coffer is clearly magical to the *detect arcana* Power. Whoever touches the coffer without saying aloud the true name of the Snake That Crawls Under the Skin (see below), suffers from its effect. A small, finger-sized, supernatural snake, crawls under the skin of the victim's hand, "swimming" to the heart! When it reaches it, the character dies! Once the process starts, there are only three rounds of time to stop the snake, stabbing it with a dagger or something similar: the first round the victim suffers 2d6 damage, the second round 2d8, and the third round 2d10. This damage *cannot* be soaked. At the fourth round, the poor sod automatically dies (but this isn't a big problem, see sidebar).

The true name of the Snake That Crawls Under the Skin is Tyvor-Vayas, and only a Tricornian sorcerer might know it (with a Knowledge (Arcana) (-4)) roll. The name can also be found in the library, with one hour of time and an Investigation roll.

Inside the coffer, in a leather satchel, there is a very precious treasure: the Tirain Cubes (see sidebar).

Third Floor – Personal Study. This small room, on the top of the tower, has four windows, which allow seeing in all directions across the city. This was a personal study of some sort, probably of King Ashak himself. On a small table, there is a large book, a sort of chronicle of the city.

It is written on a strangely soft vellum (it is human skin, as any character who played the *Skinner of Syranthia* Heroic Tale can automatically understand). Unluckily it is damaged by time and moisture; only two pages are still readable. It is in Keronian, but a character fluent in Tricornian can read it.

One of them, in the middle of the book, tells the history of the Garden of Death (see Handout 1 – The Diary). The last one, instead, was scribbled by another hand, a trembling one, probably with blood. It is only a small note, saying:

"There is no place like the Garden. It obeys its own laws and has its own master. I must pay attention: the new life inside it has a price..."

Through the windows the heroes can see what they are looking for: the Garden.

There is a small, enclosed courtyard, not far away from there. It is very dark now, and the eye cannot pierce the thick mass of foliage covering it. For some reason, you feel a shiver on the back of your neck.

GM TIP: DYING IN THE CITY OF NIGHT

Usually the death of player character has a bad effect on the party (and on the players). This adventure is particularly unforgiving in some places, and it is very likely that one of the heroes won't survive.

But this isn't a great problem; due to the uniqueness of the hero and the proximity of the Garden of Death, is very likely that the character will return to life in this ensorcelled place (see later).

This narrative expedient can create a great climax to the adventure, but you should be careful not to leave the dead character's player idle for too long; ideally, if he dies in mid-session, he should "recover" his character by the end of it...

THE LAWS OF THE GARDEN

One may wonder: if the gate of the Garden is open, why can people not simply leave? It isn't that simple.

There are laws in the Garden, and the main one is that if you are reborn there, you cannot leave it, unless someone coming from outside leads you off.

The second law is that if you belong to the Garden, sooner or later, the Garden will reach out to you and make you return home.

The third law is that time in the Garden flows differently than outside. In some cases it is slower, in others much faster, as the heroes will discover later...

TIRAIN CUBES

A set of nine black marble cubes, engraved with arcane, almost hypnotic patterns. Each cube has six patterns (one per face) and by putting them side by side, to form a three by three square, countless greater patterns can be created. Many of these patterns make no sense at all, but some of them hide secret sorcerous mysteries, if you have the patience and skill to unravel and learn them. The legend says it was the Demon Lord Tirain (see TLD, page 45), Master of Doors and

Cages, who gave it to the royal line of Nal Ashak, in exchange for some unknown favor.

A warlock character can learn a lot by studying the cubes, and investing in them some of his powers, but this is very risky.

At the end of each adventure, a character with the Arcane Background (Sorcery) can study them, making a Smarts (-4) roll and spending 1 Power Point, which is permanently lost.

Check the table below:

TIRAIN CUBES MYSTERIES TABLE

Result	Effect
-3 or less	"Trapped!" The hero is sucked away into one of Tirain's pocket dimensions! He misses the next scenario (or maybe the whole party is sucked with him, leading to a new, interesting scenario).
From -2 to -1	"I have seen things..." The hero, thanks to the Tirain Cubes, has spied other worlds. He permanently gains a Phobia or Quirk of some sort, decided by the GM.
From 0 to 1	"The sign of fear!" The hero has had a glimpse of another world, he must immediately make a Fear check (-4).
Success	"I see things others don't see". The character learns the detect/conceal arcana Power.
Raise	"The Mark of Tirain is in my mind!" The hero permanently gains a die step in Sorcery, but he loses one point of Charisma, because he perpetually sees, with his mind's eye, the Mark of Tirain.
Two Raises	"Things... things move in the interstices." The hero permanently gains the burrow (moves through shadows) Power.
Three Raises	"Futures... futures unravel in front of me!" The hero permanently gains the divination (vision of possible futures) Power.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Reaching the Garden is not difficult, once you have located it from the top of the Tower of Sages, it is quite near..

The garden isn't very large; little more than a grove, but it is surrounded by tall walls, and the sole access seems to be an elegant gate of metal bars, open like a gaping mouth. The city around you is dark, but a faint, yellowish light comes out from the garden.

If the heroes check the garden from the outside, they determine it is round-shaped, more or less fifty yards in radius, and with a single entrance. If they decide to climb the wall instead of using the gate, they can do this with a Climbing (+2) roll. This is possible only while the gate isn't sealed (see next scene). The text below supposes the party enters the Garden from the main entrance.

When you pass through the gate and enter the garden you are immersed in a sort of thick jungle, full of ancient trees, the better part of them unknown. This place hasn't been tended in a while, and the millenary plants are overgrown with vines and other parasitic plants. A subtle but persistent smell of overripe vegetation lingers in your nostrils.

Almost concealed among the vines, there is a small path, like the ones used by animals, which goes deeper into the garden.

The scenario supposes the heroes follow the path; if they do otherwise, be prepared to rework some of the encounters detailed below.

TREE OF BRONZE FRUITS

You walk for a while, following the path, and suddenly realize something; judging by

how long you've been walking, you should have reached the opposite side of this place a while ago, but instead you are still in the thick of it.

The Garden of Death, from inside, is much bigger than from outside, because it is in effect a pocket dimension. Even the sky, if a character looks at it, is completely different when seen from the inside. Let the players puzzle a little bit about this discovery, before going on.

The path sides a small crumbling wall, and on the opposite side of it, you see a strange thing. A big tree, from whose black bark and blood-red foliage hang strange fruits, similar to bronze pomegranates, like the one brought to the court of King Varias!

The fruits seem riper than the one brought to the King, and emit a slight lemon smell. If the heroes want they can pick one or more of them. They look savory...

If a character cuts one, it happens what follows.

If it is cut in the Garden. The fruit has a pulp similar to an apple, but it is crossed by a network of bluish "veins". If eaten, it is quite good, even if the taste cannot be defined. The problem is that it belongs to the Garden of Death, and eating it has some effects on the hero: from this moment on, the character receives -2 to all opposed rolls to resist the powers of the Lady of Death (see below) and any magical effects connected to the garden's magic. On the positive side, Death is now acquainted with the hero's soul and he permanently gains +1 to all Incapacitation rolls.

If it is cut outside the Garden. The fruit's peel is very thick, and as happened at the King's court, it releases a cloud of spores,

in which a vision of the GM's choice appears, usually connected to dead people. This fruit can be sold to very particular customers for up to 1000 Moons. Keeping it too long brings misfortune: a hero conserving it for more than one adventure suffers from the Bad Luck Hindrance.

THE LOST PRINCE

The path goes on, deep into the foliage. The more you advance, the more you feel a sense of strange urgency; this place, for some reason, unnerves you, and you feel watched by a malevolent eye. You are pondering on this when suddenly you hear a human voice, coming from nearby!

If no hero died during the adventure, there is only one voice, singing a sad song. If one of the player characters died, there are two voices, talking together. The text below supposes the first situation happens.

You cautiously advance along the path, discovering a small clearing. There, sitting on a fallen column covered in moss, there is a young boy, around fourteen years old. He is dressed in a simple gray tunic, and he is the mysterious singer. You recognize him: he is Kithaso, the King's son!

If a hero died, the scene is slightly different: Kithaso is busy talking with the dead hero, who recently awoke in this place and stumbled across him! The revived hero has no memories after the moment of his death.

"Who... who are you?" the boy asks, hesitantly.

The boy looks fine, although a bit absent-minded, and a little pale. He remembers he has been in the garden for a while, but he doesn't know how long. He can be

easily convinced to follow the party, but this troubles him.

"Going away, you say? She... she won't be happy..."

If asked who is "she" he answers "the Lady", but he doesn't say anything else on the topic.

The best thing to do at this point is leave the garden.

You are leaving the garden, almost dragging Kithaso, when you hear a sound from deep in the wood. It is a horn blowing, followed by several growls.

"The Lady's Hounds!" Kithaso pales.

The heroes aren't far from the gate, so the best thing to do is run as fast as they can.

TRAPPED!

You finally reach the garden's gate, puffing, while the growls behind you grow closer every moment. You are almost through the gate, when some people emerge from the shadows, blocking it.

"Stop!" a harsh voice barks. A well-known one. It is General Talasco, in the company of a good number of grim-faced cutthroats, his personal bodyguards, and by his side, his omnipresent lapdog Zarimo. They have swords unsheathed and bows raised, with arrows pointed at your hearts.

"My lord," Talasco says, in a soothing voice, addressing Kithaso. "I have passed through great perils to save you. You remember me. We played together when you were young, do you remember? Don't trust these men, they are traitors!"

Give the players the chance to speak and retort, but not to *act*.

The boy stands still, undecided, when suddenly the foliage behind you explodes, as a mass of black, furry creatures jump out, charging you!

"Come on, my lord!" Talasco says.

And the boy, finally convinced, runs toward him, while you must fight for your life!

The heroes' prize is going to be stolen from them, and they must fight for their lives too! The battleground is a square 12" by 12" in front of the Garden's gate. Consider the northern side as being the border of the plants, while the southern one is the Garden's wall, with a 4" wide gate in the center of it.

Place the heroes in the rough center of battleground, but within 6" of the gate.

The Garden Hounds, in truth a sort of horned ape hybrid, have a free turn, the characters being automatically surprised. They charge into melee, and fight with reckless abandon.

Robbed and Trapped! Talasco and his men are outside the battlefield. The boy reaches him immediately after the Garden Hounds turn up and Talasco's men close the gate behind them! Then the General evilly waves at the heroes, and leaves with the boy.

The battle goes on for four rounds, or until all the Hounds are killed.

(E) Garden Hounds (2 per hero + 2): See page 74.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

• **Climbing the Wall:** Crafty heroes wanting to escape this damned place will try to climb the wall. It is very smooth, so a Climbing (-2) roll is required, but, once on the top of it they can see only a terrible darkness beyond. Jumping into the darkness means an eternal wandering a thousand times worse than any death...

• **Ensorcelled Gate:** Once closed from outside, the Garden's gate cannot be opened in any manner. The two doors simply melt into a single metal grate.

• **Ruins:** Near the gate, there are three 1" by 1" blocks of stone, covered by vines (the remnants of an old statue), which can be used to gain some tactical advantage (+1 to Parry and Fighting rolls, due to the elevation).

THE MASTER OF THE HUNT

If the fight hasn't ended by the beginning of the fifth round, the horn sounds again and the attackers stop (see below). Read what follows.

It looks like your troubles aren't over yet: you hear the horn blowing again, very near this time.

And then, from the path you came from, comes the sound of hooves, mixed with growls, and a man on horseback emerges. He is tall, brown-cloaked and hooded, and holds a great hunting horn in his hands. His mount, a stallion black as night, stares at you with malevolent eyes. He isn't alone; a dozen more ape-beasts, like the ones who attacked you, are with him.

The creatures quickly surround you, with drooling mouths and a deep hunger in their eyes, but they don't attack.

The man removes his hood, showing a bald, beardless face. Small ornamental metal rings hang from the right side of his face, shimmering in the twilight.

"Strangers," the man says in an almost casual tone. "You have two options now. Lower your weapons and follow me. Or face them..."

You see the ape-beasts getting tense...

The characters have two choices: surrender (this being the most logical thing to do and the scenario assumes this) or fight against Tasir the Kennelmaster and his minions.

In the case of battle, use the same battlefield as above, adding the following opponents.

(E) Garden Hounds (3 per hero): See page 74.

(WC) Tasir the Kennelmaster: See page 78.

THE GARDEN'S LADY

The heroes are allowed to keep their weapons and gear, but they are surrounded by a pack of Hounds, which watch them closely. Led by Tasir, the strange fellowship goes back into the thick of the Garden.

If they try to talk with the Kennelmaster, he will be very close-mouthed. They only thing the characters can pry from his lips is "The Garden's Lady wants to meet you."

The trip is quite long, several hours. The party returns to the clearing where they found Kithaso and goes further, deep into this enchanted place, following small, almost invisible paths. The night slowly turns into a pale twilight, which is what passes for day in the Garden of Death.

During the trip, they can experience one or two Strange Vistas (see box on page 39).

After delivering the characters to their destination, the Hounds quickly disappear into the woods, but they aren't far away; in case of need, they'll arrive on the scene in 1d4+2 rounds. Tasir dismounts, gives the horse to a sergeant and bows deeply to his queen.

In the end you reach a vast clearing, where there is a ruined palace, partially overgrown by plants, which break the decorated tiles of the flooring with their roots. Among the plants and the ruins there are several people: very tall or very short, some of them almost deformed. They are all quite pale, dressed in diaphanous if rich garments, and look at you with open amazement.

Any character who has visited Tricornia recognizes the robes of these people as belonging to that distant land, while a true Tricornian understands they are Keronian. He also notices some resemblances to certain slave castes of the Land of Princes, but cannot exactly place these people in any of them.

The place is lit by an eerie light, probably a luminescence of the moss, and the light is focused on an elegant stone throne, upon which is sitting a woman pale as the moon. She is totally bald, but this makes her even more beautiful. Behind her there is a large stone window, in which a large fragment

of glass, black as the night, makes a strange contrast.

“You robbed me of one of my guests. Nobody has left the Garden in a long, long time,” the woman says, and you understand you are talking with the Garden’s Lady. “But I see you brought me another one.”

Pick the hero with the highest Charisma, he is referred to in this scene as the Slave.

“He/she stinks of sand and horses. And I don’t like those smells,” the pale lady says, with a frown.

A couple of pale servants take the Slave away, to be cleaned and properly dressed. If the heroes, or the Slave himself, try to react, Shakara uses her powers to stop them.

The Garden’s lady, in her kingdom, can control the dead and the living. In game terms she can use the *puppet* Power at will (without spending any Power Points) with arcane skill d12. If the heroes are hostile she uses it, plus her other powers, and she summons the Hounds (see above).

If the heroes are courteous, Shakara is chatty, and, apparently, very civilized; she asks of the world outside, makes polite questions about the heroes’ identities and deeds, but she doesn’t have a real interest in them.

Actually, she is only a cat playing with a mouse.

When the Slave returns, he is dressed in pale Keronian silks (with a rather ridiculous effect if he is male), but Shakara seems pleased at what she sees. The Lady asks him (or forces him with the *puppet* Power) to sit at her feet, like a slave, while

the rest of the court quickly brings tables and dishes to serve a grandiose meal.

The Slave’s gear lies, discarded and forgotten, near the Lady’s throne, if the need arises to recover it.

When all is ready for the banquet, the heroes are offered seats, while Tasir stands still on the side of his lady, motionless like a stone statue.

The Window Reddens. When the banquet starts, there is a subtle change in the area: the dark window behind the Lady’s throne becomes gradually less dark, and touched by red at the corner, as if the sun might rise behind it. This is a very important fact, and the GM must remember to tell the players, even if in a casual way.

The Cursed Brooch. During the banquet, if one of the heroes has previously found the Cursed Brooch, read the text below.

A small, pale man with sad eyes approaches you. “Forgive my lack of manners, stranger, but I feel you have something that belongs to me. May I ask where you found it?”

The man is called Nargal and he is the brother of the soldier who had the Cursed Brooch. Nargal killed himself after his brother’s death, but he hasn’t found peace, because he was reborn there. He doesn’t want the brooch back, he only wants to know where the adventurers found it. Deep in his heart, he hoped that his brother was still alive (he doesn’t know several millennia have passed). If the characters tell him an honest story, Nargal sobs, thanks them and, before leaving, whispers:

“You are in grave danger in this place. You must get away as soon as possible.”

If asked for more information on this topic, he says.

"Only one person has managed to leave this place. He was Prince Ashak. Look for the door which isn't a door."

And then he goes away, because he cannot say anything more.

The Game of Pain. The banquet starts and the heroes are served food, wine, and other refreshments. The Lady is the only one making conversation (the rest of the court remains in deep silence), and she is rather jovial. She frequently pats and ruffles the hair of the Slave, and answers every question courteously. The only topic which angers her is asking about Prince Ashak and how he left the Garden. She doesn't answer, but her black eyes turn to agates and the offending player is automatically chosen as the Sufferer (see below).

During the banquet, the window behind the throne becomes even redder: at the upper right and lower left corners appear two round shapes, similar to suns, which seem to be destined to meet slowly in the center of the window.

At the end of the banquet, pick the hero with the highest Vigor. He is called the Sufferer from now on.

"I enjoyed your company so much, my friends," Shakara purrs. "But I think you could entertain me and the rest of my court even more."

She moves a hand, and you, (pick the Sufferer) are forced against your will to stand up and move to the center of the clearing, in front of the throne.

"You look strong," Shakara says. "But are you strong enough to pass the Trial of Four Pains? You'll entertain all of us!"

She claps hands and four tall and lanky servants approach, holding long silver whips in their hands, encircling you (the Sufferer).

Without any warning, two of them lash at your arms with unerring precision, while the other two hit your legs! In few heartbeats you are bound! And then they start pulling, in four different directions! They are strong, stronger than any man, and you feel they can literally tear you apart!

You (the other characters) try to move, but suddenly realize you cannot! All your muscles are frozen, as if commanded by a superior will!

And now Shakara laughs. A cold, emotionless laughter, while she watches you die! Behind her head, the two suns on the glass behind her are almost perfectly joined, creating a sort of crown around the bald queen's head.

Shakara's will is doing two things in the same moment; with part of it she is forcing her servants to slowly tear the Sufferer to pieces, while also keeping the rest of the party paralyzed, forcing them to watch the death of their comrade! For this reason her grip is weaker and can be broken...

This scene isn't properly a combat, but can be clearer if played on the battlefield. The whole area is a square 15" by 15". Place the throne, with Shakara, in the center, but 5" away from the northern border. Standing near her are Tasir and the Slave.

The Sufferer is placed 5" south of the throne, with his four executioners disposed in a rough square, 2" away from him. The rest of the party is placed, seated

and paralyzed, 5" south of the Suffering One.

Behind the throne is the window. It is 6" wide, and placed on the northern border.

Breaking Free. The heroes (including the Slave) can try to escape from Shakara's paralysis with a Spirit (-2) roll. They must gather at least two successes (a raise counting as an extra success) to become capable of moving again.

Resisting Pain. The Sufferer is in a *very* bad position. Every round, he must make a Strength (-4) roll (+1 per defeated slave, see below). If he fails, he suffers a Wound, two if he rolls 1 or less. The slaves tearing him apart are almost mindless and won't attack in any manner, but continue pulling the whips until killed. The hero can try to break free by winning an opposed Strength (-2) roll against the Slaves, which make a cooperative roll.

Breaking the Spell. There is a way to break both the restraining spell on the heroes and the mental command controlling the slaves with the whips at the same time, and it is attacking the Lady of Death. Remember that in her kingdom (see her stats), she cannot be wounded but can be Shaken. When this happens all her spells automatically fizzle out.

Escape! Once the heroes are free, they have a few heartbeats to decide what to do. Shakara will quickly recover, the court servants surround them, and the Guardian Hounds will arrive soon. But right behind the throne something is happening.

The glass window is red as blood now, and the two suns reflecting in it are almost overlapping. You see a faint vibration in them. Wait a moment, there aren't two suns anymore, just a round hole!

This is the escape route Ashak told them about with his last breath! The heroes must jump into it to escape this place. This is the last chance they have...

(E) Garden Hounds (up to 3 per hero): See page 74.

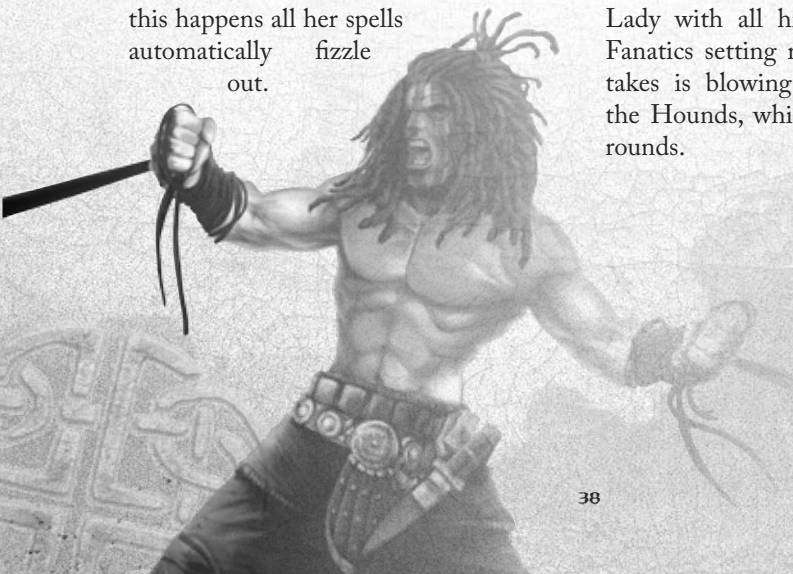
(WC) Queen of Death: See page 76.

(WC) Tasir the Kennelmaster: See page 78.

(E) Whip Slave (4): See page 79.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

- **The Kennelmaster:** Tasir defends the Lady with all his might. He uses the Fanatics setting rule. The first action he takes is blowing his horn to summon the Hounds, which will arrive in 1d4+2 rounds.



GM's TIP: STRANGE VISTAS

The Garden of Death is a weird place. The heroes won't have the chance to explore it fully (unless something goes terribly wrong), but you can communicate to the players some of the uniqueness and weirdness of this place simply by describing to them some vistas they pass during their trip to the Lady's court. Simply roll a d6 and check the table below.

STRANGE VISTAS TABLE

D6	Vista
1	Scavengers in the Ruins. "There are some old ruins nearby, and you can see, among them, the silhouettes of several people scavenging among them. At your passage, one of them raises his head, and you clearly see a pair of long horns on the head, and a glimpse of a long tail."
2	The Three Legged Ibis. "In a small marsh, you see a big ibis watching you with human-like intelligence. Then he puts down a third leg in the water, opens a third eye in his forefront and flies away."
3	Emerging Statue. "You are passing near a gigantic statue, or at least, near its head, emerging from the ground. Even under the moss, you recognize it: it is almost identical to the Guardian of Askerios. How did it come to be here?"
4	Singing Flowers. "You pass near a meadow full of lavender-colored flowers. A gentle gust of wind sweeps them and you hear a strange melody, as if haunted by a chorus of far-away voices. You suddenly understand the flowers are singing!"
5	Ghastly Bats. "You are crossing a very dense wood, silent and shrouded in deep shadows. But the silence and the darkness are broken by a flurry of wings. A swarm of white, translucent bats fly through the wood. They approach you, and you instinctively raise your hands to protect your face, but they pass through your body. Are they ghosts?"
6	Moon of Memories. "A great, pale moon, raises in the sky. It is somewhat different from the customary one, and you are puzzled to see strange reflections on its face: you see a great city, a fiery mountain of doom falling from the sky, and then death and destruction. Are you witnessing the fall of the Dread Star? Or are you living the dream of a mad god?"

PART 3: BLACK SEEDS IN THE WIND

THE DROUGHT

The passage is immediate and disorienting: one moment you are in the Garden, the next you are leaning against a rocky hill. It is hot and dry, but you inhale that familiar air like a thirsty man drinks water.

You don't know where you are, but you are in the Dominions again.

Where Are We? The heroes are somewhere in the Red Desert, but they haven't the faintest idea of their position. They are safe from the Lady of Death, but there are more immediate problems; they have no horses, and very little (if any) water and food.

The rocky hill where they appeared is non-descript, but with a Notice roll the characters see some old engravings on it (it was an old Keronian ruin).

The party must leave, but first they must choose a direction. With a Survival roll, they understand that the best direction is north. If they fail, consider they walk for some time in another direction, before deciding on moving north (add an additional day to those below).

The march is hard and the sun, high over your heads, is hot as the burning iron of a smith. But you know you must go on or you are doomed to die.

Desert March. The heroes must walk in the desert for one day. As per the Heat rules of *Savage Worlds*, they must make Vigor rolls each four hours or suffer a level of Fatigue, which can lead to Exhaustion

and even death. If they have less than half a dose of water per day (see below), they roll at -2, or -4 if they have no water at all.

Finding water in the desert requires a Survival (-2) roll, which can be cooperative. A success finds water for a single person, a raise or better provides water for up to five people.

The further north you go, the less you like the place where you are: there is something bad in the air, a sort of foul smell you cannot identify, like carrion hidden somewhere to rot. The land is rocky, but dotted with clumps of hard, spiky, vines. You are thirsty, very thirsty... but, wait a moment, isn't that the sound of gurgling water?

Poisoned Spring. The heroes are right: in a slight depression in the ground they find a small spring. The water stinks, and there is a dead goat nearby. Characters drinking the water immediately recover all the Fatigue they suffered from thirst. A character who suffered two levels of Fatigue from thirst must roll Spirit (-2) to avoid drinking the water, even against his will.

The water is obviously poisoned, and after an hour, everyone who drank it must make a Vigor (-4) roll or become very ill, suffering a level of Fatigue (two if the roll was 1 or less), which can lead to death. This Fatigue lasts for two days.

Despite the water being bad, the heroes can rest safely in this place. They can also ask questions about this poisoned spring; usually Desert Nomads mark such places in some way, but there is no sign of that

here. The reason is simple, this spring was good till one year ago, when all this started, as they'll soon discover.

Finally, the day ends, but during the night, you can see something strange; the clouds, yellow as the smoke of a funeral pyre, run fast across the sky, and you smell again the strange odor, like death and corruption.

The Abandoned Village. At dawn the heroes start moving again.

You spot something northward! Patches of green! You must be near farmed fields or something similar! You are safe!

The heroes are close to farmed land, but when they approach they have a bad surprise.

The fields around you are clearly abandoned: the plants are dying and the land is gray as ash. Definitely these aren't the rich fields you saw in Zura only a few days ago. If King Varias knew of it...

You musings are interrupted, as you see a group of houses not far away. It is a village, and looks strangely familiar. You recognize the place: it is Valzu, the village you passed some days ago, headed to Keron. You'll surely find food, shelter and information there.

Reaching Valzu is simple: nobody stops the party. In fact the heroes don't meet anyone. The fields surrounding the village are deserted, and there are no puffs of smoke or sounds coming from the village.

In fact the place is deserted. When they heroes enter, they find an abandoned place; the houses are empty, abandoned long ago, the road overgrown with desert herbs, and the only sound is the inn's sign, shaken by the desert wind.

There are no people in the village, but there is still a well in the small plaza in the center of it, and luckily this isn't dry.

You catch the smell of fresh water even before seeing it. You throw the bucket in the well and draw it up full of water. You drink enough to fill your belly and feel well for the first time in many days.

The heroes recover all their Fatigue (apart from those caused by poisoned water) and can relax a bit. But it is only a short respite.

Suddenly you hear a sound of hooves. You turn, to see the small plaza invaded by a band of Desert Nomads! Seeing you, they unsheathe their swords, and charge!

There are half a dozen Nomads, their faces covered by the desert hoods. Ask the players what they want to do, but don't hand out Action Cards yet.

The first nomad is in front of you, sword raised to kill, when he suddenly reins the horse and stops. She removes the hood and watches at you with open surprise. She is Darketa.

"You!" She hisses.

"Shall we kill them, Houtani Gar?" one of the other nomads asks.

You'll never know the answer because in that moment, from the road behind, a second group of riders arrives. They are soldiers, wearing the blue and black of Zura, and they charge the nomads wildly!

The heroes find themselves in the middle of a battle! The battlefield is a round plaza, 12" in radius, with the well (see below) in the middle. There are two ways into the plaza: two roads, 3" wide, one on

the northern edge and the other on the southern one.

Place the heroes within 1" of the well, and the desert nomads, on horseback, within 3" of them. The Zuran soldiers, also on horseback, enter the battlefield from the northern road (they are running) and charge directly into the plaza.

The Zuran soldiers attack everyone, nomads and characters alike, while the nomads attack the heroes only if directly attacked.

The scene supposes that the party sides with the nomads, and ends when all the Zuran soldiers are dead.

(WC) Darketa: See page 42.

(E) Desert Nomad (5): Use the Red Desert Warrior stats. See page 77.

(RH) Zuran Officer (1): Use the Zuran Soldier stats. He is a cavalryman, so raise Riding by one die step. See page 80.

(E) Zuran Soldier (12): They are cavalymen, so raise Riding by one die step. See page 80.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

• **Among the Horses!** The heroes are on foot in this fight, surrounded by trampling horses. It is not a nice situation. First, the air around them is filled with dust, raised by the beasts (count this as Dim light). Second, every attack from horseback against an opponent on foot is made at +1. Third, if a person on foot draws a Club card as his first Action Card, he must make an Agility (-2) roll at the beginning

of his turn, or be hit by a random horse kick for d10+d4 damage.

• **Into the Saddle!** Smart heroes will use the fight to dismount (or kill) an opponent, and leap into the saddle! Given that the beasts are wild from the fight, this can be done with a Riding or Agility (-2) roll. The first hero getting into the saddle should be rewarded with a Bennie.

• **The Well.** The well can be represented with a Small Burst Template. It has Toughness 9 and grants Medium Cover. A hero climbing on the well is considered at the same height as an enemy on horseback, but if he suffers damage in this awkward position, he must roll Agility (-4) to avoid falling in the well (suffering 2d6 damage). The water bucket has a length of chain and can be used as an Improvised Weapon (Str+d4, Reach 6) or for entangling-based Tricks at +2.

A SHOCKING REVELATION

The dust of the battle dies down and you see Darketa, eyes burning with anger, searching for you. You don't know what she is going to do or to say, because at that moment other Zuran soldiers arrive.

You understand the group you fought was only a vanguard.

"Let's go!" the warrior-woman says. "We'll talk later!"

You grab a horse and ride behind her, while arrows start flying over your heads!

Leaving Vulzu won't be easy, with the Zuran soldiers on their heels. This is a short Chase sequence (5 rounds long), based on Riding. You can run it with the normal rules, but remember that the first

three rounds of the chase are in the village, while the last two are in the desert.

The opponents are divided into three groups.

(E) Zuran Soldier (3 groups of 6): See page 80.

When the Chase ends, go on with the following text.

When in the desert, Darketa spurs her white mare, and you do the same. The stronger, heavier horses of the Zuran soldiers are no match for yours, and you finally shake them off. When you are sure you are safe, Darketa orders a stop, to rest the horses.

The heroes, if they want, have some time to ask Darketa what is happening. Tell them that the woman seems slightly older than the day before: there is some white hair among her dark curls, and a couple of sorrowful wrinkles around her eyes.

Darketa answers the heroes' questions evasively, but there is an important phrase that she should say.

"How did all of this happen in a day, you ask? Are you mad? A whole year has passed since I left you in Nal Ashak, and many dark things have happened during that time!"

And so the players discover another of the unknown laws of the Garden of Death.

The heroes will be probably shocked by this information, and will ask further questions, but Darketa cuts them off.

"The Zuran soldiers are everywhere, hunting for us. Come with me, and tonight we'll talk." She turns her horse and goes deeper into the desert.

A Useful Piece of Info: The Commandant and any other character who actively served

in the Zuran army is also allowed a Common Knowledge roll (-2). With a success, now they are calm, understand an important thing: the soldiers they fought, despite wearing Zura's colors, weren't Zuran (neither were they part of the Black Hawks). With a raise they recognize their armor and accent as coming from Hillias, the powerful Independent City east of Zura. But what does it mean? The heroes will discover this later...

GM'S TIP: A YEAR AFTER...

This scenario brings a great twist into your campaign: during a single night for the heroes, a whole year has passed in the Dominions!

This can be a very interesting thing to do in your game: characters have friends, enemies, long-term goals.

What will happen to them? A wife or loved one might mourn a hero as dead? Maybe she found another love? An enemy can think that his hated nemesis is finally defeated: he could lower his guard (or worse, he can further his evil agenda).

The possibilities are countless...

Remember that "one year" is the best-suited time for this scenario. Feel free to alter it to suit your campaign needs (but we suggest no less than two months and no more than five years).

THE HIDDEN OASIS

You ride at a good pace all day, stopping only to let your mounts rest. At dusk, you are in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by sandy dunes, where nothing grows.

If a characters ask what to do now, read the following text, or reword it.

Darketa laughs and answers: "In the desert, don't trust your eyes, but your nose!"

The girl is right. There is a smell of water in the air. You walk past a dune and see a magnificent oasis, green as an emerald in the crown of a savannah king.

"Behold!" Darketa says, in a rather proud tone "This is Talaskavaka, which means 'Secret Home' in our tongue."

"And it is the last oasis my people has." She adds with a frown.

You enter the oasis through a path among the trees. Despite there being no walls around it, it is heavily guarded by armed nomads and densely populated. Almost every space, including the central area where a small pool of fresh water stands, is crammed with beasts, tents and people.

Faces are grim and children thin. One of them, a little girl, approaches Darketa and asks "Did you find a scrap of food, great Lady?" The woman saddens, and shakes her head.

If a hero has some food, and gives it to the girl, he should be rewarded with a Bennie.

In the meantime, the heroes' presence is noticed, and they are not very welcome. Several kullah are unsheathed, and more than one man asks for their blood. In particular one of them, a somber man with a long black moustache, advances toward a randomly selected hero.

Let the group role play the situation, before going on.

"Put your blade away, Ragaro," Darketa says. "I am as thirsty for their blood as you are, but their death or life will be decided

by your chief, Tavarok, my father. Till then, any man touching them will answer to me."

Her menace has the desired effect, and the party is left untouched, even if many deadly stares are thrown at them. They are confined, unarmed, in a tent, under strict surveillance till evening, when they'll meet the chief.

Escaping. Leaving the tent is isn't easy; there are always a couple of guards in front of it, plus, in the oasis there are around two hundred warriors, and almost twice as many other Nomads.

FIRE OMENS

When the sun goes down a couple of grim-faced warriors pick you up from the tent and bring you to the great fire, where all the tribe is gathered. Tavarok, the tribe's chief arrives after the heroes. He is an old man, with something wrong with his legs, because two men help him walk to a seat. Darketa stands on his right, facing all the tribe, while a heavily garbed and hooded man is at his left.

Characters who have spent a lot of time in the Red Desert are allowed a Common Knowledge roll now (desert nomad characters pass it automatically). With a success they remember that crippled persons, among the nomads, are left to die in the desert, so as not to be a burden for the rest of the clan. If he is tended and helped, he must be an exceptional person.

"Father," Darketa says "I bring you the men who caused the doom impending over us! They defeated us in battle with guile, then they brought back from death those who must remain dead!"

At these words all nomads make a sign against bad luck.

The heroes are allowed to speak, and they'll probably ask what is happening.

"Almost a year has passed since General Talasco brought back Kithaso from the realm of death to his father's palace. The King, full of joy, named Talasco commander of all the armies of the kingdom. But this wasn't enough for the general, who quickly overruled the King, naming himself regent the city, and locking him and his son in the royal palace. And he revealed himself to be a tyrant ten times worse than the king. But this is only the least of our problems: a vile drought struck the land, killing our herds and the crops of the farmers alike."

"Even the skies and the waters are tainted. And there is only one reason: what is dead must remain dead."

Darketa ends her speech: "Father mine, I say: Let's sacrifice these men to the Sun God so that let's will be appeased and will help us in the dark night that is to come!"

The other warriors cheer, but a voice thunders.

He is the hooded man at the chief's side. "Stop! No man can speak on behalf of the Sun God!"

Silence falls immediately, as the man removes his hood, revealing a deeply scarred man, with blue eyes burning with fanaticism.

If the heroes played *B&B* #1 – *Death of a Tyrant*, they recognize him: he is Tul, the Desert Prophet, who they met before their battle with Ulasha!

"I ask pardon, holy Tul," Darketa says, bowing her head.

"Let's hear the voice of the god!" Tul continues, ignoring the warrior woman. He approaches the bone fire in the middle of the area and throws a pinch of powder in it. At this, the flames roar and grow, tall as a house, and engulf you!

All the characters must make a Spirit (-2) roll: whoever fails suffers 2d6 damage, and if he rolls 1 or less, in addition to the damage, the fire is particularly vicious, and leaves him a permanent scar, which causes -1 to Charisma, -2 versus the nomads, who recognize in this the displeasure of the Sun God.

Read them the following.

The flames lick you like the tongue of an enormous dragon. It is hot, burning hot, and you feel an intense pain, but not as terrible and biting as it should be. There is something, in the fire, a sort of scene.

You are in the throne room of Zura, sword in hand, in front of King Varias and his son, Kithaso. The King is speaking but you cannot understand what he says and you raise your sword...

Quick as it started, the vision fades, as the fire dims to burning ashes. From the startled expression of the nomads, you understand all the people saw it.

Tul speaks again: "The Sun God spoke! Nobody will touch these men: the same hand which brought doom upon us, will relieve it!"

The nomads grumble, but all accept Tul's word, including Darketa, who seems quite pissed off, but a character with a Notice (-4) roll understand she is secretly relieved she doesn't have to kill the heroes. Maybe that under that gruff face is she interested in one of the heroes?

This could be the start of a romance subplot.

This is the good moment for a player to propose a sort of alliance: maybe the vision means they must help the Nomads overthrow General Talasco's regime? Or that they must simply reach the throne room of Zura and kill someone (but whom)? And how to do it?

The city is protected by the Zuran's army, which is strong. Talasco uses it to extort heavy tolls from the citizens and farmers alike. The population is so upset that it could rise up against the new ruler, but the traitorous general reinforced the army with foreign soldiers, so nobody dares to rebel.

In particular, a large army is deployed in Zura, to "protect" the King and his son from external influences, because Talasco is in truth a pawn of Hillias, which wants to make Zura a satellite state.

A battle plan must be made to enter the city...

WAR DRUMS IN THE DESERT

The following part of the scenario is rather free-form.

The players must reach the king, and free him from the prison he is kept in by General Talasco. But this means they must organize the Desert Nomads, and find other allies. What they do depends entirely on them, but below are several Actions they can try. Each action has a Hook you can use to introduce it to the players

Between one Action and another, an Event happens: this is independent of

the players' deeds, caused by the evil forces unleashed by Kithaso's escape from the Garden of Death. By default, each action requires one week for preparation, scouting, and getting in place.

Nomad Forces. Tarevok's tribe, initially, is quite weak, and the goal of the heroes, in this part of the scenario, is to increase their strength, so they can attack Zura and do what they must to save the kingdom. Many scenes include an increase in the tribe's power as a reward.

Recovering. If you have access to *TB*, use those rules to handle recruiting and replacing casualties week after week. If you haven't, simply consider that the nomads' forces increase by 25% after each week (this simulates fresh warriors from other clans joining the cause, wounded ones recovering and so on).

Command: At least at the beginning, Darketa is in charge, during the battles, but she is open to the heroes' suggestions, and, if one of the heroes is better suited than her to lead the men in battle (i.e. has better skills), she steps back and acts as second in command, without resentment.

TAREVOK'S TRIBE

Battle Value: 300 (100 nomad warriors)

Commander: Darketa, the Desert Jackal (Knowledge (Battle) d6, Spirit d8)

Band Edges: Mobility, Skirmishers

Band Hindrances: None

GM'S TIP: A WAR DRUMS IN THE DESERT CAMPAIGN

This part of the scenario is designed to allow some sandboxing without losing the tension of a strong plot, so you'll basically find six long scenes to play.

If you want, you can expand it to the level of a whole campaign, even a Conquest Point Campaign as described in TB. The fight against Talasco the Usurper can become months long, with several missions/side adventures. Below you'll find several ideas to be fleshed out, but we recommend keeping a close eye on your players: if they start being too distracted by secondary plots, it is time to advance to the end...

WAR OF DRUMS ADDITIONAL IDEAS

+Hillias may be the enemy, but other friends and allies can be found: other nomad tribes, the Kyrosians...

+Terrible monsters are appearing in the desert, are they all fruit of the corruption caused by Kithaso's escape from the Garden of Death?

+The heroes get lost in the desert and find a strange tomb, where, protected by ancient traps, is the Blade of the Sun, a powerful artifact of the past.

+The Zuran farmers and the Desert Nomads have always been enemies: but today they have a common enemy, Talasco the Usurper. Could the party find a way to end this hate?

+There is spy among the nomads to be found and rooted out

+Darketa is kidnapped and must be rescued.

A CAST OF NPCs

Unlike other Beasts & Barbarians adventures, this scenario has a broader scope, and the heroes will meet a large cast of NPCs. The GM and the players must decide what each of them brings to the various parts of the adventure. To save space, these additional NPCs aren't listed for each combat, but are instead detailed in the NPCs and Creatures section. They are: Darketa, Lord Noramon, Tark, Tul the Prophet and Jalaaro.

These characters can also be good replacement characters if a hero dies in the course of the adventure.

EVENT: TUL'S WARNING

While the heroes and the nomads plan what to do, the Sun God prophet takes the heroes, Darketa and Tarevok aside.

"I didn't want to say this in front of the warriors," he whispers. "But I didn't leave my self-imposed exile from the desert just to come here. I had a vision, where I saw something terrible will happen during the next full moon."

If the heroes ask what he saw, the prophet answers as follows.

"I saw a shroud of darkness falling upon this land, something so thick that even the sun cannot disperse it. And I heard souls screaming for all eternity."

Characters must make a Spirit roll, at -2 if they have the Fear of Magic Hindrance or are very superstitious. If they fail, they immediately lose a Bennie.

"It will be full moon in three weeks," These are described below.
Darketa says.

"And it will be exactly a year since Prince Kithaso came out from the Garden," Tul adds.

ACTION: THE CARAVAN

Hook

The nomads are starving, because their grazing lands and many of the water springs in the desert were destroyed by the drought or poisoned by the strange sickness spreading through the land. They are reduced to pillaging what they can, but it isn't enough.

While the heroes are at the Hidden Oasis, Valdejo, a nomad scout, arrives, his horse foaming, saying that he saw a large caravan, coming from Hillias headed for Zura. It is probably filled with grain and other food, because the drought is taking a heavy toll on the farmers too, causing a famine in the city. If the nomads could take the caravan, they could have enough food to sustain themselves and have a great impact on the morale of their enemies...

THE CARAVAN'S PATH

By a twist of fate, the caravan is following a similar route to the one used by the bait caravan led by the party at the beginning of the adventure, but this time the sides are reversed.

Darketa quickly draws on the sand a rough sketch of the path, identifying a place where they can ambush the caravan (North of the Zirakan Hills). The heroes can make a Knowledge (Battle) (-2) roll, with a success they find another suitable place, two with a raise.

North of the Zirakan Hills. This is the same place where the previous caravan was attacked. It doesn't offer any particular advantages to an attack, but the enemy cannot retreat.

The Pillars of Jatu. These tall rocks mark the border of the Zirakan Hills. There is a narrow valley, almost invisible, near them. Hiding there, the nomad cavalry could take the caravan by surprise and in the flank, with a potentially lethal attack. The drawback is that if they survive the first assault, they could easily escape, because the road is very good and with a slight decline there.

The Pox Plain. This area is a large plain, dotted by craters, which resemble exploded pustules on the skin of a sick person. There is a legend about them, based on the death of the old Stone God, but the important fact is that you can easily conceal dozens of men in these holes, very close to the caravan's path. The drawback is that they must be on foot, because using horses effectively in this place is impossible.

The heroes should choose the best place to attack (with the aid of Darketa).

CARAVAN COMPOSITION

The caravan is composed of ten wagons and twenty camels loaded with wares. Valdejo reports there are around six dozen people in it, and he is quite accurate. The caravan is composed of thirty Caravan Members and forty soldiers, veteran Hillias cavalymen, led by an old acquaintance of the party: Zarimo, the lieutenant of General Talasco.

(E) Caravan Member (30): See page 73.

(E) Hillias Veteran Cavalryman (40):

Use the Zuran Soldier stats, raising Fighting and Riding by one die step and adding the Combat Reflexes Edge. See page 80.

(WC) Zarimo (1): See page 80.

An Old Friend. The caravan master is Jalaaro, an old friend of the party. He isn't at all fond of Zarimo, Talasco and all the stuff going on in Zura (as will be clear below). If the heroes manage to contact him before the battle, or during the battle (this happens when a hero is dealt a Joker as Action Card), he can be persuaded to keep his men out of the fight, or, if the party is *very* convincing, to side with the nomads!

ASSAULT!

The exact outcome of this scene greatly depends on how the players planned the battle. There is no real "better" place to choose, but the trick is exploiting the advantage of the chosen assault spot. The scene can be played in two different ways, with the Mass Battle Rules or with the normal tabletop ones (skipping the battle). In both cases, the heroes should play out on the tabletop the final fight, with Zarimo.

Mass Battle Version. Run the battle as usual, but when the Caravan Guards are reduced to 2 or less Tokens, play The Lapdog scene below. According to the place the heroes chose to make the attack, they may receive a bonus (see below).

**MASS BATTLE MODIFIERS TABLE**

Attack Location	Modifier
Zirakan Hills	The caravan cannot retreat (because there is nowhere to escape to).
Pillars of Jatu	The first Nomads' attack, if a cavalry charge, receives +2 to the Battle roll, and the Caravan suffers an extra Token lost. From the third round of battle, Zarimo can try to disengage his troops with a Knowledge (Battle) roll (-2).
Pox Plain	Make a group Stealth roll for the heroes' army. If successful they receive +2 Battle modifier for battle plans (+4 if they scored a raise). The bonus drops by one every round.

ZARIMO'S CARAVAN GUARDS

Battle Value: 200/150*

Commander: Zarimo (Knowledge (Battle) d4, Spirit d6)

Band Edges: Battle Hardened

Band Hindrances: None

(*) 50 BV points are the Caravan Members

Tabletop Version. The heroes must face three fights, briefly sketched below. If they devised a proper plan for the location they chose, you can skip (and simply narrate as very successful) the third fight.

First Combat – First Clash. The two sides start 18" apart. Both sides are on horseback (unless the heroes are on Pox Plain).

(E) Caravan Member (1 per hero): See page 73.

(E) Hillias Veteran Cavalryman (1 per hero): Use the Zuran Soldier stats, raising Fighting and Riding by one die step and adding the Combat Reflexes Edge. See page 80.

Second Combat – in the Thick of Battle. Every round, two randomly selected heroes are targeted by archers (Shooting d8, medium range, 2d6 damages) from off the battlefield. The fighters start 6" from each other and the fight is on foot (unless the heroes are at the Pillars of Jatu, in which case it is on horseback).

(E/RH) Hillias Veteran Cavalryman (1 per hero): Use the Zuran Soldier stats, raising Fighting and Riding by one die step and adding the Combat Reflexes Edge. Half of them are Right Hands. See page 80.

Third Combat – Resistance Group. One group of enemies has regrouped around a strong-willed sergeant. They must be defeated as soon as possible. The two sides are at 10" of distance, the enemies are positioned in a square formation, with the sergeant in the middle (in Near Total Cover), and with shields raised. At the end of every round while the sergeant is alive, draw a card from the Action Deck; if it is a Heart, 2 more Cavalrymen enter the battle. The fight is won when the sergeant is dead (the other soldiers break). This fight is on foot.

(E) Hillias Veteran Cavalryman (1 per hero+2): Use the Zuran Soldier stats, raising Fighting and Riding by one die step and adding the Combat Reflexes Edge. See page 80.

(H) Hillias Sergeant (1): Use the Zuran Soldier stats, raising Fighting and Riding by one die step and adding the Combat Reflexes Edge. He is an officer (a Henchman, not a simple Right Hand). See page 80.

THE LAPDOG

When the battle is almost won, randomly choose two heroes. They can make a Notice (-2) roll to see Zarimo, the commander of the caravan guards, escaping with a couple of soldiers! To reach them, the adventurers must win an opposed Riding roll, and can then engage in a fight. Zarimo isn't very bold, and when he suffers two or more Wounds, he surrenders.

Once captured, Zarimo can be executed (when the news spreads, +50 BV of new men join the cause), questioned and kept prisoner (he can give useful info on Talasco's plans and forces at the GM's discretion), or, a very sword and sorcerish thing, sent back to his master to report the

heroes are back! In this case the adventurer sending the lapdog away gains a special additional Bennie at the beginning of every session, called the Revenge Bennie, till the end of the scenario!

(E) Hillias Veteran Cavalryman (2): Use the Zuran Soldier stats, raising Fighting and Riding by one die step and adding the Combat Reflexes Edge. See page 80.

(WC) Zarimo (1): See page 80.

AFTERMATH: SPOILS OF WAR

"You again!" Jalaaro says with a big smile. "I would haven't bet a Jalizaran coin on your life! The caravan is yours, take whatever you want. All this stuff belongs to that bastard sitting now on the throne of Zura!"

The caravan contains enough food to sustain Tarevok's people for at least three months, if used sparingly. In addition, when the word of the deed spreads, other desert warriors join the ranks, and the tribe gains +200 BV.

In addition, from this point on, Jalaaro will remain with the tribe (he hasn't got a caravan any more and cannot go back to Talasco). He knows a lot of things, in particular about the fate of the Black Hawks and of Lord Noramon, King Varias' most trusted counselor, which leads to the two next Actions. See the Jalaaro Speaks Event.

EVENT: JALAARO SPEAKS

It is a night for feasting at the Hidden Oasis: the battle was won, and, for the first time in many months, a flicker of hope is shimmering on the horizon.

You are dining and drinking with Jalaaro, in Tarevok's tent, in company of Darketa

and the stone-faced Tul. The Jalizaran merchant is at ease among the nomads, as he was at King Varias's banquet, months ago, and speaks freely, while gorging himself with food.

"After the return of General Talasco and your disappearance Tark, your second in command, spoke out in front of the king, accusing him. But by then it was too late: the day after, Talasco crowned himself regent. Luckily Tark, who was no fool, led his men out of the city the same night. From that moment on they have been actively fighting Talasco with guerrilla tactics in the northern lands, but I heard that they were recently trapped at Rak's Mouth, a valley in the north. They have been besieged there for three weeks. They haven't much food and water, so they probably won't last long."

After a long gulp of wine, Jalaaro goes on.

"Tark wasn't the only one rebelling against Talasco. Do you remember Lord Noramon, the old counselor? Well, he was accused of high treason one month ago, while he tried to reach Teyerana, with a letter from the king. Talasco's spies caught him and now he lies in prison at Guthra, a fortified town in the east. He will be beheaded there in ten days. I have heard that Talasco wanted to have him killed in Zura, but he is still very popular among the citizens, and his presence could create an uprising."

At this point the heroes have several options: free the Hawks, rescue Lord Noramon or both?

THE HAWKS' NEST

HOOK

Jalaaro told the heroes that Tark and the Black Hawks rebelled against the usurper and now are besieged in a valley in the

north, where they'll die of hunger and thirst.

A BAD SITUATION

The party needs two days of riding to reach Rak's Mouth. The text below supposes that they stop and go scouting the situation from distance.

Rak's Mouth is a dead end vale in the northern part of the Zirakan Hills. Barren as a crone's loins, this place is an unconquerable fortress, but a deathtrap at the same time. The hills there are almost mountains, very tall, steep ones, and the valley has a single access, a twenty yard gap, where the Black Hawks built a barricade of stones and debris. From there, the ground slowly descends to a plain, where the Zuran army is camped, with tents and wagons. The assailants must attack from lower ground too, making their task even more difficult.

"Probably they tried," Jalaaro says. "Look at the corpses in front of the barricade."

"And they failed," Darketa adds.

"Aye," the Jalizaran merchant nods. "But they soon stopped. All they have to do is sit in front of the barricade and watch the Hawks die of hunger. There isn't much to eat in that valley; it is emptier than the heart of a priest."

The Zuran army camped in front of the vale is a rather big one (see below). Even if the heroes brought their entire fighting force with them, it will be an uncertain battle at best, even with surprise.

Two factors can change this state of things: creating a diversion and coordinating their attack with the Hawks' sortie. Only at this point could an attack be successful. Both are described below.

Split the Party. This part of the scenario supposes that the characters will split: some will create the diversion, others will alert the Hawks and still others will stay with the nomads to lead the attack. To keep the game fast-paced and avoid downtime, we suggest keeping these scenes short and quick, but if possible, play them in another room, to add some uncertainty: after all the heroes with the nomads don't know what happened to their friends sneaking behind enemy lines...



A DANGEROUS TRICK

Starting from the Commandant's player, and going clockwise around the table, ask the players to roll on one of the following (their choice): Knowledge (Battle), Notice (-2), Survival (-2).

The first character scoring a success sees something interesting. On the steep hills on the right of the valley's mouth, at the top, there is a big cluster of rocks. With some strength and skill, someone could create an avalanche, which will slide down the slope in front of Rak's Mouth and into the Zuran camp, creating mayhem.

The problem is that reaching the rocks is a job for a spider: the hillside is very steep, only a skilled climber can do it, and, as an added complication, the climb must be done at night, without any source of light.

Preparation. Three persons are needed to start the avalanche, of which at least one should be a player character. The other two can be nomad warriors with Climbing d8. As they must be very stealthy and must bring with them long bars to start the avalanche, they are limited to a single rope, which each climber can use, once during the climb, to gain +2 to a roll (the bonus can be used *after* seeing the roll).

The Climb. The actual climb is divided into three stages, described below. The rolls must be made in the order shown. If you have access to *JCT*, we suggest using the Cliffhanger Falling Rules on page 144.

The **Beginning** is quite easy; it only requires a Climbing roll. In the case of failure the climber only suffers from Bumps and Bruises, unless he scores a critical failure, in this case he *also* suffers 2d6 damage.

The **Middle** is treacherous, because it contains a hidden danger: a steep passage made of very brittle stone, which will likely shatter! The climbers are allowed, in their climbing order, a Notice (-4) or Survival (-2) roll. If the roll is a success, the character spots the danger in time and can take an alternative path. He only needs a Climbing (-2) roll (in the case of failure he falls, suffering 3d6 damage).

If nobody spots the danger, things can turn ugly. Every climber must pick a card from the Action Deck before rolling; if a black card is drawn, the wall shatters under him! He suffers 2d6 damage and must make an Agility roll (-4) to avoid falling (as above). In addition, every climber under him must make a Spirit (-2) check to avoid being hit by the deadly rain of splinters and their falling friend and suffer the same effects.

Once the wall shatters, the climbers must take the alternative path described above.

The **End** is the most dangerous part: an inverted wall, where the climber must go up upside down.

It requires a Spirit, a Strength and a Climbing roll: the characters must succeed on at least two of them. If they succeed at only one they are frightened, take a level of Fatigue and can retry after five minutes, while if they miss all of them, they fall down for 4d6 damage.

Once the climbers are on the top, they can create the avalanche (see Camp Attack! below). They will need ten minutes to prepare, but only one to start it. Getting down is easier, but the climbers will only reach the battlefield on the third round of the mass battle.

The heroes completing this daunting task should be rewarded with a Bennie.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

The heroes could decide that alerting Tark of their presence could be vital to making a combined attack against the Zuran. This means sneaking very close to the enemy camp, crossing the no man's land full of unburied corpses and reaching the barricade, hopefully without being shot by the Black Hawks.

This is a task for a single person, probably the most silent of the group, and must be done by night.

The whole scene is handled with a slight variation on Dramatic Tasks, and it is based on Stealth.

The scene is divided into two parts.

Near the Camp. During the first three rounds the character must pass dangerously near the Zuran soldiers. The infiltrator must score at least three successes in three rounds, otherwise the camp's sentinels see him and a patrol is sent! In this case run the last two rounds as a chase, while the now-spotted character runs toward the barricades of the Black Hawks.

(E) Zuran Soldier (6): See page 80.

If the hero is captured by the guards he will be retrieved, battered and bruised (with two Wounds) from a tent after the battle (in this case also ask the player to make a Spirit (-2) roll, if he fails the tortures he suffered made him spill the beans, eliminating any bonus the attacking army could have).

No Man's Land. The fourth and the fifth round, the hero must sneak among the corpses of the fallen to reach the mouth of the valley, without being shot by the Black Hawks, who cannot distinguish friend from foe in the darkness! The character

must make two more Stealth rolls. The first time he fails, he is spotted by a Black Hawk sentinel, armed with a bow, who shoots him (Shooting d8, Damage: 2d6; he Aims, negating the Darkness penalty). At this point the hero can try to be recognized (with a Persuasion roll), otherwise the next round d4 archers try to hit him!

If the hero manages to sneak to the barricade without being noticed, he can show himself (startling the sentinels!), and will be admitted inside and brought to Tark.

The lieutenant isn't the freckled lad of a year ago anymore, but a man hardened by the war, and is more than happy to order a sortie to crush the assailants.

The character who managed to pass behind enemy lines should be rewarded with a Bennie.

CAMP ATTACK!

When some (or all) the preparations above are complete, the nomads, led by the heroes, can attack the Zuran troops, hopefully breaking the Black Hawks' siege.

This is a mass battle, run with the standard rules, with the following modifications.

Surprise! If the heroes' side attacks by night, they gain +2 to their Battle Plan modifier during the first round of battle.

The Avalanche! If the heroes caused an avalanche, before the battle starts roll 4d4x10 (the dice can ace). This is the BV lost by the Zuran Besieging Army from the rain of stones. In addition, extend the surprise bonus above to the second round.

The Black Hawks. If the party managed to alert them, they'll attack in coordination with the nomads from the first round (simply add their battle value to the heroes' side). If they aren't alerted, after each battle round, draw a card from the Action Deck. The first time they'll join the battle with a Club card, the second one, with any black card, the third time with any except apart Hearts, and the fourth round they'll join the fight automatically.

ZURAN BESIEGING ARMY

Battle Value: 500

Commander: General Gresio (Knowledge (Battle) d6, Spirit d6)

Band Edges: -

Band Hindrances: None

BLACK HAWKS

Battle Value: 350

Commander: The Commandant hero or Tark (Knowledge (Battle) d6, Spirit d6)

Band Edges: Battle Hardened

Band Hindrances: None

AFTERMATH: A FEW GOOD MEN...

The fire spreads through the tents, while the few survivors escape across the plain. The Black Hawks, stupefied, look at you (the Commandant) as if you had come back from the grave. They also throw sidelong glances at the nomads, who respond in the same way. They might have fought together today, but they haven't forgotten that only a year ago, one murdered the other with.

Despite this, once rescued, the Black Hawks will follow the Commandant to hell and back.

Add the Black Hawks' BV (and the Battle Hardened Edge) to the nomad forces.

If you are playing with *TB*, consider Tark as a Lieutenant Personality (*TB*, page 24).

General Gresio. If the GM decides (or if the players explicitly look for the enemy commander during the battle), they can capture General Gresio. He is a middle-aged nobleman with a long, black moustache. A year ago he was the third in the line (after the Commandant and General Talasco), but he was promoted. He is quite faithful to Talasco, but can be convinced to reveal the number of troops actually defending Zura and other military details decided by the GM.

EVENT: WINDS OF SICKNESS

While the Nomads are returning with their new allies to the Hidden Oasis, they camp for the night in a grazeland.

You are outside the tent, savoring the warm air of the desert before the biting cold of the night starts. Suddenly you feel a tepid wind coming from the west, from Keron. It brings a small, dark powder, like very fine sand, which makes you cough.

If there is a Lotusmaster character in the party, he is allowed a Lotusmastery roll. If he is successful, he recognizes what this powder is: the Seeds of Death, whose terrifying effects the party will see below.

In few hours, under your incredulous stare, the seeds blossom into weeds two feet tall, with pale flowers, a sea of them.



UMBERTO PIGNATELLI

At dawn, at the first touch of the sun, they wither and crumble to dust, leaving a barren, dead land.

Darketa and the other nomads curse, saying "This is what happened to our best grazelands and the farmers' fields, when the dead Prince came back from his grave."

ABOUT GUTHRA

The heroes are allowed a Common Knowledge (-2) or Knowledge (Red Desert Area) roll to check what they know about Guthra.

Every entry below includes the previous information. So a character who scores a raise also receives the information in the success entry, and so on.

Failure. *Guthra is a medium-sized town, subject to Zura, on the border of the desert.*

Success. *Guthra holds an important market, once a week, which is vital to the local economy. Executions are usually made during this.*

Raise. *Jagro, Guthra's Governor, is Talasco's brother-in-law, and a former soldier himself. He is known to be a very strong-willed and capable man. Guthra is far from Zura, but very faithful to the Usurper.*

ACTION: FREE NORAMON

Noramon is held prisoner in Guthra, a fortified town east of Zura. The garrison is numerous and wary. With the forces of the heroes a frontal assault is possible, but it will cost a lot of lives, with a very real chance that Noramon will be killed before being freed. The best way to achieve the result, this time, is using stealth and guile.

DESCRIPTION OF GUTHRA

Governor's Palace (and Prison). A squat military building, with thick walls, heavily patrolled. Guthra was born as a military outpost, and the "palace" is in truth a fort. There is a single gate, always guarded by four guards, and the windows on the outside are all too narrow to let a man pass. During daytime, the Palace is accessible, and someone with an official matter to discuss with the Governor or one of his counselors can be admitted inside (with a Persuasion roll). Noramon is kept in the dungeon, which is heavily guarded by two strong sentinels (raise Fighting, Vigor and Strength by one die step). The palace permanently hosts twenty veterans, Governor Jagro's personal guard.

(E) Governor's Guard (20): Use Zuran Soldier stats, raising Fighting by one die

step and adding the Combat Reflexes Edge. See page 80.

Madiya's Luck. The local inn and tavern, it owes its name to the former owner of the place, a widow, who got married to a wandering minstrel, and left "looking for a better place". The name stuck even if now it is run by a surly fellow called Magaro and his two daughters Lynia and Vanya (pretty girls who aren't shy about entertaining the customers). The place also has half a dozen rooms, usually occupied by merchants or other rich fellows, while farmers and other poor people sleep on benches in the common hall. The night before the execution (see below), Zakharo the Executioner and his two hirelings are lodged there.

(WC) Zakharo the Executioner: See page 80.

(RH and H) Executioner's Assistants (2): One of them is a Right Hand, the other one is a Henchman. See page 74.

Market Place. A quite large plaza, where, once a week, a market is held, with merchants coming even from far away villages. It is also the usual place for executions and other similar forms of "entertainment". On the tabletop, it is a square 24" by 24", with two access roads, one going northward to the Governor's Palace and another one going south to the town gate. Both roads are 4" wide. There are also other four 1" wide alleys (two on the east side and two on the west).

Walls and Gate. Guthra is surrounded by a stone and wood wall, and there is a single access point, a wooden gate, large enough to let a cart pass inside. Usually the gate guard is two sentinels, and it's doubled when expecting trouble (for example, the day of the execution and the two days before). On the walls, and in the town, there are several patrols, usually

organized in groups of four guards. If there are problems in the town, guards will arrive in 1d6+2 rounds.

In total the city guard (which is also the local militia) consists of 40 soldiers and 4 officers.

(E) Guthra Guard (40): Use Zuran Soldier stats. See page 80.

Water Tower. Situated near the marketplace, this tall wooden structure (15" tall on the tabletop) has a large water tank on the top, which collects the rare rain of this area. The tower isn't usually guarded (to check, draw a card from the Action Deck, if it is a club there are two Guthra Guards stationed near the Tower for 2d6x5 minutes). The tower can be climbed by means of a ladder, which can be easily removed; in that case three Climbing rolls are required.

On the top of the tower, there is a clear view over the marketplace. An archer placed there is in an advantaged position; consider the range of his weapon doubled.

"WE NEED A PLAN"

The scenario supposes that the party infiltrates the town to locate and free Noramon before he is killed. It is a very open part of the adventure, but some firm points are described below.

Getting Inside. There are basically two ways for the party to enter Guthra.

The first one is through the main gate. Going openly about the town causes automatic recognition (attack by the guards and a general alert of all the town). If the heroes disguise themselves a bit, there is a chance they are stopped and questioned. Draw a card from the Action Deck, only characters drawing a club are stopped by the guards.

The guards' questions are quite general, and the entire scene can be handled with some role-play or a single Persuasion roll. Failing the roll means being refused access for some reason (unless a bribe of 5 Moons is offered), while a critical failure means being recognized!

The second way consists of waiting for the night, and climbing the walls. It requires at least one Stealth (-1) roll and one Climbing (-1) roll. In addition, draw a card from the Action Deck, if it is a club, a patrol of guards is passing on the walls at that moment (this danger can be avoided if the party spends some time, hidden nearby the walls, studying the guards' routine).

Investigation. Once inside, the heroes must discover several things, the main ones being where Lord Noramon is held, and when the execution is happening. The written scenario cannot foresee to whom, exactly, the characters will speak, so the information is divided into three groups: Common Talk (the talk of the town, which doesn't require any rolls and incurs no risk), Specific Info (requiring a Streetwise, Persuasion or another similar roll, which may trigger suspicion with a critical failure), and Reserved Info (as Specific, but the roll is made at -2, and triggers suspicion with any failure).

Common Talk

1. "The execution will be tomorrow (on market day)."
2. "The prisoner is held in the dungeons of the Governor's palace."
3. "Usually the convict is brought from the Palace to the executioner's stage, in the marketplace, on a cart, escorted by guards."

Specific Info

1. "The security of the Governor's Palace is very high..."
2. "... but you can enter if you want to buy a merchant stall licence or have other official business."
3. "I have heard they called the Royal Executioner from Zura to behead him."

Reserved Info

1. "Zakhro the Executioner has arrived in town, with his two assistants. He wears a hood during executions and tries not to be recognized, but I am sure it was him, big as an ox and with a sour face..."
2. "... he stays with his assistants at the inn, in the best room."

What Will Happen. If the players don't intervene, this is what will happen. The day before the execution, the Royal Executioner Zakhro, with his two assistants, Jimango and Haro, arrives in town, incognito. He goes to the Governor's palace and briefly speaks with him. Then he lodges at the inn with his two hirelings, eats supper and retires to his room. Jimango does the same, while Haro stays in the common room for a while, flirting with Lynia, one of the tavern girls (the two then retire to Lynia's room, till morning). The next morning Jimango and the assistants prepare, donning their ceremonial red robes and hoods, and go to the marketplace, where, in front of the crowd, the Governor and several guards, Noramon is brought, on a cart pulled by horses. Zakhro takes the prisoner, who tries to speak against the Usurper but he is beaten, and then he is beheaded. This assumes nobody intervenes...

(E) Guthra Guard (20): Use Zuran Soldier stats. See page 80.



(WC) Zakharo the Executioner: See page 80.

(RH and H) Executioner's Assistants (2): One of them is a Right Hand, the other one is a Henchman. See page 73.

A Plan. There are many ways to free Noramon. Below are two of them, but smart players can find others.

Impersonating the Executioners. Extracting Noramon from the prison of Guthra is very dangerous, but there is another way for the party to get their hands on him before he is killed: the three executioners are masked, so if the party eliminates them before the execution and takes their clothes, they can go to the execution, disable the two guards near the executioner's stage, jump into the guards' cart, and drive to the town gate. This

is handled like a standard length Chase, based on Riding.

If the party placed a good archer on the top of the water tower, or finds another way to create a distraction, they can stir the crowd and add more ruckus. Once outside of the town, they can rejoin the nomads. At that point no soldier will dare chase them anymore. If you want to make the scene even more cinematic, you can use the "Different Points of View" Narrative Technique (see sidebar on page 60).

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

- **The Crowd:** If the heroes manage to create panic in the marketplace, people go wild. If you are playing on the tabletop, place 2d4 Crowds on the battlefield. They are LBT, which move 1d6" in a random

direction every round. Characters stuck in one are considered in Difficult ground, and must make an Agility (-2) roll every round to avoid being trampled, suffering 2d6 damage. Crowds can freely overlap. Big characters and scenic elements (like a horse-drawn cart) ignore the Difficult ground penalty, but suffer -2 to Riding rolls when passing through them.

A Fake Death. Another way to free Noramon is making him die *before* the execution. Not actually, obviously. If the heroes are capable of concocting a potion of Lotus of False Death (see page 24), they can try to corrupt a servant to poison Noramon's food with the drug. It is quite difficult (a Streetwise (-2)) roll must be made), and costly (500 Moons), but if successful, Noramon will "die" during the night. Because the Governor cannot avoid a public execution, someone else (an old drunkard with a passing resemblance to Noramon) is beheaded the next day, while the real Noramon is thrown in a common pit outside the town, where he'll wake up 2d6 hours later, ready to be picked up by the characters.

AFTERMATH: THE GOOD COUNSELOR...

You hardly recognize in this beaten old man the well-groomed counselor of King Varias, but when Noramon speaks you understand that, although his body is weak, his spirit is as strong as it was a year ago.

"You?" he says in a puzzled voice. Then he smiles. "I was sure you weren't dead!"

With the help of Noramon the characters can recruit up to 300 BV of troops among the commoners still faithful to the King. In addition Noramon will be a key element to stirring up a rebellion in Zura, as will be clear in the fourth part of the scenario.

EVENT: DARK CLOUDS

While the heroes take Lord Noramon away, the sky over Keron, far to the east, darkens, but nothing happens.

Tul, the desert prophet, mutters something: "It is getting close."

But he refuses to say anything more.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE: DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

Planning the extraction mission of Noramon could be very time-consuming. In addition certain groups are bad at this type of thing. If you want to avoid both these problems, you can opt for a "Different Point of View" narrative technique.

To use this approach, you should end the previous session with the decision of the heroes to reach Guthra to free Noramon.

At this point begin the new session describing the execution's scene (as if witnessed by a local farmer). Try to build up the tension, till the moment when Noramon is on the executioner's stump. At this point reveal that the executioner is one of the heroes, disguised, and let the player choose two other characters as his assistants. The other characters aren't in the scene, but they can enter at any moment, by paying a Bennie.

Now you can let the scene explode...

PART 4: THE FATE OF ZURA

WAR COUNCIL

All you can do, you have done: you have the Black Hawks on your side and you freed Noramon, former counselor of the King. The men under are eager to ride into battle under your command and you know that you must act quickly, because keeping such a diverse army together is very difficult.

What the party must do now is clear: march on Zura, free the King, and kill the usurper. And they must decide what to do with Prince Kithaso, once they find him.

There are two different points of view on the topic: Tul, the Desert Prophet, is adamant that he must be taken back to the Garden of Death, and the nomads support his idea.

On the other side, Lord Noramon doesn't want to follow this line: the Prince is perfectly fine, and the old counselor doesn't want to believe he is the cause of the drought scourging the land.

You can use this conflict to create interesting roleplaying situations, but without pushing it too far: the important thing, for now, is defeating the Usurper and freeing the King.

And this won't be easy.

"Zura is under the control of the Ebon Legion," Tark says "A mercenary army from Hillias. They are extremely well-armed and trained, and won't leave the protection of the city's walls."

A frontal assault, even with the bulk of the nomad's forces, doesn't have much chance of success.

But there is another option.

"The people of Zura have no love for the Usurper," Lord Noramon says, stroking his beard. "If they rebel from the inside on the day of the battle, we'll have some chance. I still have friends inside Zura, who can help us by starting a riot, but they must be contacted."

Noramon asks for scrolls and ink and writes three letters to influential persons in the town: Vador the Banker, Countess Jimarra and Melanconio the Poet (see Part 1).

But who will sneak into Zura to deliver them? The heroes can discuss this a bit with the other members of the war council, but the most logical choice is Jalaaro, the caravan master.

The man isn't enthusiastic; after all, if captured, he'll risk his neck, but in the end he agrees.

"I'll go," he grumbles "But remember, if I get caught, seven lovers in the Dominions will weep for their loss, and countless sons will be orphans."

Jalaaro takes with him a pigeon too, to be used to send back an answer if necessary.

DECISION BEFORE THE BATTLE

Four days pass.

During this time you stealthily move the army, in small groups so as to not be detected by Zuran patrols, to the hills near the capital.

It isn't very difficult, because the greater part of the villages around the city are deserted, the crop fields blighted, and you find almost no patrols.

From this advantage position, you can see Zura. It has very tall walls, and they are heavily guarded.

"The Jalizaran set off three days ago and we haven't heard anything from him," Darketa says, troubled. "And can we be sure he wasn't caught, or, even worse, he didn't betray us?"

Let the players discuss the topic, trying to seed uncertainty, and, if possible, doubt and mistrust.

Your discussion is interrupted by something weird. Distant thunder. You look westward and you see, far away, a sky black as the heart of a priest, crossed by lighting.

"A storm in the desert?" Darketa says "What kind of a portent is it?"

"A very bad one," A raspy voice whispers.

You turn. Tul, the desert prophet, arrived at your back so silently you didn't hear him. "Time is running out. Tomorrow it will be a year since Kithaso's return. We must attack tonight."

When the heroes return to the camp, there is news. Jalaaro's pigeon has returned, with a message. Tark has opened it and is cursing.

Give the players Handout 2 – Jalaaro's Letter.

The meaning of the letter is clear: the three conspirators want to meet Lord Noramon in person before starting a riot.

At this point the war council starts bickering: Darketa says it is a trap, Tark on the opposite side, says the letter must be trusted.

The reality is that, without a riot inside, taking Zura is impossible. And Lord Noramon is very conscious of this.

"Trap or no trap, I must go," the old counselor says. "We need a diversion inside the city."

The problem is sneaking into Zura. Security is very high now.

"I know a way, maybe," the Counselor says. "It is a passage in the old sewers of the city. King Varias' father showed it to me, many years ago. But that was a long time ago, and I know it is dangerous."

The situation is getting complex now: Lord Noramon cannot navigate the sewers alone, not counting the dangers that will entail. On the other hand, the heroes are needed to lead the troops outside.

There are various ways to handle this situation.

The first one is splitting the party: some of the heroes will stay outside, while the others sneak into Zura and start the rebellion. In this case, the best thing to do is physically divide the players, and run the The Night of the Rebellion Scene in another gaming session, to avoid having part of the group idle.

If the players decide not to go with Noramon, the chances of success of this part of the plan are decided by luck (see sidebar).

The adventure at this point splits into two different scenes: The Night of the Rebellion and The Battle of Zura. Then

they rejoin in *The Doom Comes from Keron*.

Before the characters (or Noramon) leaves for the sewers, Tul says.

“Remember, we must attack tonight, tomorrow will be too late. May the Sun God be with us.”

NORAMON ALONE...

If the players leave Noramon enter the Sewers alone, the success of the city's rebellion is in the hands of fate. Draw a card from the Action Card and check the table below. Note that if a club is drawn, one of the NPCs involved is killed...

RIOT TABLE

Noramon is...	Riot Starts With...
...alone.	A King or better
...with Darketa or Tark.	A Jack or better
... with Darketa and Tark.	A nine or better.

they find a small, filthy rivulet coming out from the base of the walls, surrounded by bushes and other vegetation. The problem is that, being directly under the walls, it is exposed to the eyes of the sentinels on the battlements. Reaching it without being noticed requires a group Stealth (+1) roll. In the case of failure the guards raise the alarm, and shoot a volley of 2d4 arrows (Shooting d8, Medium Range, 2d6 damage) at the trespassers. Once the players reach the base of the walls, there is a narrow passage, knee-deep in filthy water, which is abruptly blocked after a dozen steps by a metal grate. Luckily the grate is old and corroded (Toughness 7): it can be bashed or broken by brute force (Strength (-2) roll).

The sewers are a labyrinth of corridors and passages, but Noramon seems to know unerringly what passage to take. You tread behind him, weapons ready and torches high. There is something about this place you don't like...

Below are described three encounters the characters can have in the Sewers. If you need to make this part shorter (because you are playing with a split group) you can easily drop one or two of them, or you can add another couple to make this part of the adventure more challenging.

THE NIGHT OF THE REBELLION

This section details the events if the players lead Noramon through the sewers to the gathering at Wylila's Tavern.

THE SEWERS

The first task the heroes must accomplish is actually finding the sewer access. Noramon knows it is at the base of the eastern city wall. With a quick inspection

Desiccated Corpse. While the heroes are advancing along a corridor, pick one of them at random and ask him for a Notice (-2) roll. If successful the adventurer, while passing near the entrance of a side corridor, has a brief glimpse of something lying at the foot of the corridor wall. On closer inspection, he is a man, apparently sitting with his back to the wall.

The man is dead, but for how long is impossible to determinate: the corpse looks desiccated, as if something or someone has

drained all his body fluids. An unnerving detail, his desiccated face is still twisted into an expression which is a mix of stupor and terror.

A more detailed examination (and a Healing roll) reveals a single wound, an oval hole in the chest, the size of a thumb, which pierced the sternum. The characters have no idea of what could have inflicted such a wound, but they'll meet it soon (see below). The man seems to have been a smuggler or thief of some sort, using the sewers for some illegal business. He has a set of lockpicks, a dagger, a rope and, nearby, a lantern, broken during the fight with the mysterious assailant.

"Something Dwells There". The adventurers enter a large square room, where they find something unsettling.

In a corner of the room you see a large mass of strange oval shaped things, big as barrels. They are covered by a thin layer of gummy substance, as it is the flooring.

"This is definitely strange," Noramon says. "The last time I was here, those things weren't there."

If the adventurers investigate more, they easily understand what the mass is: eggs! With a Survival (-2) roll they can even recognize the type: spiders!

But before they adventurers can decide what to do, they hear a low hiss from behind them, and from a side passage, a hideous creature comes out.

It is a spider, a big, hairy one, the size of a pony, and it stares at you with red, devilish eyes! While the creature runs toward you, you hear a cracking sound behind your back. Oh no, the eggs are hatching right now!

The heroes must pass a Fear Check (-2), with +1 if they found the desiccated corpse before and understood how it was killed. Another +1 is granted if they discovered they are going to fight a spider. The battleground is a room 9" by 9" with four 1" openings, one at the center of each side. The heroes start in the middle of the room, while the Impaler Spider enters from the eastern passage. Its hatchlings begin the combat within 5" of the northwestern corner.

These creatures fight to the death, defending their territory.

(WC) Impaler Spider: See page 75.

(E) Impaler Spider Hatchling (1 per hero): Use the Impaler Spider stats, reducing Size by two and decrease the impaling damage to Str+d6. See page 75.

Slippery Passage. Noramon stops the heroes.

"There is a dangerous passage in front of us," the counselor says. "An abyss so deep that nobody knows where it ends. There is only one way to cross it, a narrow, very slippery catwalk. Don't look down."

The passage is even worse than Noramon said: a large, bottomless abyss, 30" deep on the tabletop, crossed by a 1" wide slippery catwalk. The heroes must make three rolls to cross it: the first one is an Agility roll, the second one is a Spirit (-2) roll to avoid looking down, and the third is another Agility roll (-2) because this part is *very* slippery. If an adventurer fails one of the rolls he trips, and falls! Extras automatically die, screaming, while Wild Cards grab the edge of the catwalk, and can regain solid ground with a Strength (-4) roll, which can be cooperative.

Once they have crossed over this slippery passage the heroes finally find a ladder, leading to the streets of Zura.

The first part of the plan is accomplished!

THE CONSPIRATORS

You cautiously spy outside the manhole. It is night, and there is nobody around.

The manhole leads into a back alley, so the party doesn't run any immediate risks. There is a curfew in the city, so there is nobody around, except for some guard patrols, but luckily the adventurers meet nobody in their short walk to Wylila's Tavern.

You have never been in this tavern, but you have heard of it: Wylila's isn't a very refined place, even by your standards, but tonight the place is really dead. There are no lights from the windows, the door is closed and the place is quieter than a Tricarnian funeral.

The reason for this is simple: there is a curfew and all the shops must shut very early, taverns included. When the heroes knock, some time passes, than the door opens and a hooded figure looks suspiciously at the heroes. He is Jalaaro!

The Jalizaran sees you with open relief and lets a thin smile pass across his face.

"Ranikos' balls! You finally arrived! Come in, get in before someone sees you!"

Jaalaro brings you into the tavern, which now is closed and dark. Near a table three people wait for you, shrouded in long capes. You recognize them from the banquet at the king's place, a year ago. The enormously fat man is Vador, the banker. The woman dressed in elegant clothes who hastily turns to you is Countess Jimarra. You considered her only a

fickle courtesan, but if she is here, there must be some iron in her. Finally, sprawled on a seat, caressing his harp, is Melanconio the poet, wearing his customary sad expression.

The three notables are very relieved to see the heroes, and in particular they are reassured by Noramon's presence. Of the three Vador is the one with the most doubts, and must be persuaded to start the riot. Jimarra is already convinced (she has a crush on the king and would do anything to save him), while Melanconio stays idle, watching the scene. Let the players do some role-playing to persuade Vador.

When you think the situation is settled and the conspirators are fully convinced, something happens.

"So, what do we have there?" an amused voice says.

You raise the eyes and see, on the balcony of the mezzanine, a man.

The text below considers that Zarimo, General Talasco's right hand, is still alive and free. If he isn't substitute him with another officer of the Usurper (you can use Zarimo's stats or create a new profile on your own).

You recognize him: he is Zarimo, Talasco's lapdog! And he isn't alone! On the mezzanine there are a number of archers, bows aimed at you.

At that moment the front door of the tavern bangs open, and more soldiers storm inside.

"We were betrayed!" Noramon says.

Noramon is correct. There is a traitor, and he is one of the conspirers. If the heroes surrender now, they are doomed and they'll end their days in a dungeon in

Zura. The odds are against them, but this is a fight they must win.

The battleground is the tavern main room and the mezzanine. The tavern room is 12" by 12", with a door leading to the road in the middle of the southern side and another door leading to the kitchens in the middle of the eastern wall (from the kitchens reaching a back alley is easy).

The 12" by 2" area on the northern side is occupied by a mezzanine with three doors leading to several rooms. It is accessible through a stair 3" by 2" on the east side. The heroes and the conspirators are placed in the middle of the room, while Zarimo and half his men armed with bows are placed on the mezzanine, and the other soldiers storm in from the two doors.

During the battle, the identity of the traitor is revealed: when the characters start winning Melanconio draws a dagger and tries to stab Lord Noramon in the back! He fights with reckless abandon and cannot be stopped except by killing him.

When defeated he falls to the ground, and whispers his last words.

"King Varias is a fool. Hillias is destined to dominate and Talasco will save us..."

In truth the Poet is only a madman with a distorted sense of idealism. Zarimo, however, isn't mad at all: if things go badly he quickly leaves the battlefield, entering one of the rooms on the mezzanine, blocking the door behind him, and escaping across the rooftops.

Vador and Jimarra do nothing in the combat, apart from screaming and hiding in a corner.

(E) Zarimo's Soldiers (2 per hero +2): Use the Zuran Soldier stats. Archers have Shooting raised by one die step, while the others have Fighting d8. See page 80.

(E) Lord Noramon (1): See page 76.

(RH) Melanconio the Poet (1): See page 76.

(WC) Zarimo (1): See page 80.

TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

- **Assorted Furniture:** The inn is full of furniture and assorted props which can be used in the fight to make it more interesting: chairs (Large Improvised Weapons), tables (2" by 2", Toughness 6, grant Medium Cover), and finally the chandelier can be reached with a jump (an Agility roll) and then used for an Agility Trick (+4) or to jump to any part of the battlefield (mezzanine included).

- **The Hand of Fate:** Lord Noramon, for this scene only, is considered an Extra (ignore this rule if he is actually run by a player).

THE REBELLION STARTS!

When finally the situation is settled, go on with the following. The text below supposes that Noramon survived. If he didn't, change the text accordingly.

Noramon breathes heavily. You understand that the past months, and tonight in particular, have been hard for him; he is, after all, only an old man.

But the King's counselor steels himself and talks to the two remaining conspirators: "My

friends, the night is young and we have work to do. Put your men to work."

At these words both Vador and Jimarra leave the inn. A few minutes later, you hear voices in the roads.

"So it begins," Noramon sighs.

The riot will explode in the city in few hours. In game terms the heroes' army receives a bonus of +300 BV, doubled if Noramon is still alive. The characters should also be rewarded with a Bennie.

THE BATTLE OF ZURA

Sooner or later the heroes will attack Zura! The scene is detailed below.

The time of planning and waiting has ended. Now, the blades will talk. You jump into the saddle, and take the long flaming pole that Tul passes you.

"We'll fight by night. A bad omen. This will help you see," he explains.

And there is no need to say that this will bring the blessing of the Sun God upon you.

You stand in the stirrups, and shout an order. The men behind you raise their flaming poles too, and you see an enormous wave of fire in the night.

It is enough. You spur the horse and gallop toward your destiny, victory or death.

This scene is too complex to be played on the tabletop, so it must be run with the Mass Battle Rules and it is partially scripted. Below are detailed the forces involved and the outcome of the battle. If the Commandant remained with the army, he will lead the troops in battle, otherwise the task will fall to Darketa

or Tark. Only in dire need will Tarevok, Darketa's father, lead the troops. He has Knowledge (Battle) d8 and Spirit d8, but as he is very weak, at the end of every battle round he must make a Spirit roll, if he fails he is killed in action and the army must make an immediate morale roll.

The heroes' side has the best commander available and all remaining BV.

The Rebellion: If the rebellion was successfully started, add BV depending on the outcome (see previous scene). In addition, the enemy won't have the fortifications bonus.

ZURA DEFENDING ARMY

Battle Value: 1000 (Ebon Legion plus city guard)

Commander: Commander Valgon the Black (Knowledge (Battle) d8, Spirit d8)

Band Edges: -

Band Hindrances: None

The battle is run as normal. Unless the players countered this in some way, the defenders are behind fortifications (+2 to morale, -2 terrain modifier to the attackers' roll).

The battle concentrates on the city walls and near the city gate. Even if the heroes are split (some fighting outside the city with the Nomads and the other ones inside with the rebelling citizens) both of them can join in the battle, if they want (use the standard Characters in Mass Battle Rules).

The party will meet up in Horas Plaza in the next scene.

When the defenders are reduced to four Battle Tokens or less, read the following part.

You hear a crash. The gates! The city gates have fallen, and your troops redouble their efforts, trying to swarm inside. The defenders try desperately to stop them, but they cannot! You have almost won!

But at this point Tul suddenly shouts, and his voice is heard on all the battlefield.

"Behold! To the west!"

Go on with the next scene.

THE DOOM COMES FROM KERON

Outside the city, on the plain behind the attackers, a black fog appears. The fighters, on both sides, stop for a moment, to behold the strange apparition.

And then, from the fog, twisted shapes emerge: they are bulky, crouched beasts, big as horses. You recognize them, they are the Guardians of the Gardens. And behind them, you see a single war chariot, pulled by four enormous guardians, upon which stands the Lady of the Garden!

At her side a man stands on a horse. He sounds the massive horn and, at this command, the horde of raging beasts charge.

Tul, near you, says: "The doom is finally upon us! The Lady of the Garden has come to retake what is hers!"

Ask the heroes outside the city what they want to do: if they choose to fight, have them make a single Mass Battle Roll (as per the Characters in Mass Battles rules) at -3. If they don't, they can make the Notice roll below.

The assault of the beasts breaks the formations of both sides and the battle turns into a senseless chaos. You raise and lower your weapon mechanically, killing to avoid being killed, but you understand that there will be no winners or losers today, only a pile of unburied bodies, dismembered by alien fangs.

After the fight, ask the characters outside the city for a Notice roll. If they fail, Tul spots what follows, otherwise the heroes see it.

Instinctively, during the battle, you raise your eyes to the battlements: Talasco, the Usurper, is there, surrounded by his guards, pale as a ghost in the night. As if he has seen you, he quickly turns and flees.

The time for the final confrontation has arrived! Talasco is going to the royal palace, where the King and his son are held.



The heroes should follow him, entering the city.

In the plaza near the gate, Horas Plaza, where a vicious battle is raging, the characters of both groups (the ones outside the city and the ones inside) can roll Notice. If at least one of them makes the roll, they spot each other and can finally join up again.

The battle in front of the gate is turning into a massacre: the huge beasts of Keron give no quarter, smashing nomads, Black Hawks and Zuran soldiers alike. In a few minutes they'll storm the gate and swarm into the city.

"There is nothing that we can do there," Tul tells you.

The Last Stand. The desert prophet is right, but if a hero wants to stay there with his men he can; this means almost certain death. Give him a Bennie, and ask him to make a Battle roll every five minutes of real-time, representing him and his men standing their ground.

After three rolls he really understands he is doomed: he can decide to make the survivor retire, or continue to fight.

If he chooses to retire, ask him for a Smarts (or Knowledge (Battle)) roll. For each success and raise four soldiers or nomads (any combination of the two) follow him, but half of them are considered Walking Wounded.

If he still decides to stay, well, continue the Battle rolls every five minutes, but from this moment on at -4, and he'll probably meet a glorious death.

THE KING AND THE PRINCE

The scenario supposes that the heroes follow Talasco to the royal palace. At the GM's discretion, in this final scene of the adventure they can be alone, or with Tul, Noramon or Darketa.

You run through the city, where now fights erupt in every corner, to the royal palace. The doors are unguarded and left ajar, probably the sentinels are either on the battlements, fighting to save the city, or they have fled.

You enter the large corridor that leads to the throne room. There you find Talasco, surrounded by his men. King Varias sits on the throne, with an exhausted face. He looks twenty years older than the last time you saw him.

The Usurper, seeing you enter, turns. Prince Kithaso, the young boy who caused all of this, stands still near him.

"Stay back!" Talasco screams, placing a dagger on the neck of the boy. "Stop all of this, or the bloodline of Zura will die here!"

The heroes are in a serious standoff now: Talasco's guards surround the former general, the King, and his son. There is no way they can get to the Prince before being gutted. Let the players do a little role-playing before going on with the following part.

At this point a soft, feminine voice is heard from behind you. "How can one die who is already dead?"

You turn and see entering the royal hall the Lady of the Garden, accompanied by her stone-faced Kennelmaster and surrounded by a several Guardians, their fangs and

horns still splattered with the blood of the battle.

“You... you there...” Talasco sputters, and steps back, releasing Prince Kithaso for a moment. This is what you have been waiting for!

The heroes finally have the chance to defeat their hated nemesis and save the King and the Prince! The battlefield is the throne room, an area 18” by 18”. In the center on the southern wall, there is the 4” wide main door from where the heroes (and the Lady of the Garden) came. It is currently blocked by the Lady and her retinue (see next scene). On the north wall, there is a 6” by 4” dais, upon which

there is the throne, where King Varias is sitting.

In the northeastern corner of the room, behind a curtain, there is a 1” wide door, which Talasco will try to use to escape when the situation turns ugly.

Talasco is placed within 2” of the dais, while Prince Kithaso is 3” from him. Talasco’s bodyguards are placed in a rough half ring around the Usurper, 6” from him. The heroes are roughly in the center of the room.

Talasco’s men fight bravely and with good discipline: the two archers, which are placed at the farthest extremity of the ring, move onto the dais and shoot at the party from this elevated position, while the rest of them engage the adventurers in melee.

Talasco fights till two thirds of his men are down, then, if not already killed, tries to escape (see below).

During the combat the Lady of the Garden and her retinue don’t interfere, unless someone tries to escape through the main door, in which case the Garden Guardians attack them.

When Talasco dies, his men surrender, but the adventure isn’t over yet.

(E/RH) Talasco’s Bodyguards (2 per hero +2): Two of them are armed with bows. They have Shooting d10, the Marksman Edge and are Right Hands. See page 78.

(WC) General Talasco (1): See page 77.

(WC) Zarimo (1): See page 80.



TERRAIN, PROPS AND SPECIAL RULES

• **Columns:** There are eight very big columns on the two sides of the room, four per side. They can be represented with SBT and grant Heavy Cover (-4). They are really sturdy (Toughness: 12, Heavy Armor) and cannot be moved in any way,

• **The Way of the Coward:** Talasco is a coward at heart. If things go badly, he tries to escape through the small door in the northeastern corner of the room. The characters should follow him. A real chase isn't necessary: Talasco takes a wrong turn and ends up in a turret. He goes up, to the top floor, then he has to fight for his life! The tower is represented by a MBT, but only the 1" on the perimeter can be walked, the rest is occupied by the tower roof. There is a 1" stair leading to the top floor. Fighting on the tower is dangerous: if a character rolls 1 on *any* die roll connected to Agility (for example Fighting) it means he slips! He must make an Agility (-2) roll to avoid falling off! A hero automatically grabs onto the edge (and can regain solid ground with a Strength (-4)) roll, while, if this fate befalls Talasco he falls, screaming, and dies impaled on the spire of a lower tower. Should a hero fall down, he'll suffer 4d6 damage.

THE BITTERSWEET FRUIT OF THE GARDEN

The Usurper is finally dead, by your hand!

"It seems I must thank you another time, my general," King Varias says, in a tired voice, while Counselor Noramon quickly checks him.

But it isn't over yet. The fights in the roads continue. You know that, when the word of the Usurper's death spreads the foreign mercenaries will flee, but what about the monsters of the Lady of the Garden?

The ancient princess look at the scene with cold, emotionless eyes.

Then her stare falls on the boy.

"Prince Kithaso," she says. "Now you must go back with me."

Lord Noramon and King Varias vehemently protest, while Tul stays silent, his face a grim stone mask.

"Your place is no longer among the living," the Lady continues. Then she stares at Tul. "Even the land and the sky suffer from your presence there."

The desert prophet reluctantly nods.

King Varias suddenly finds his energy again.

"Kill her!" he shouts. "Kill her and I'll give you whatever you want! Even my throne! Kill her!"

The choice is with the heroes now. There are several ways they can end the scenario, described below.

ATTACK THE LADY

The most straightforward solution, but probably not very wise. The battle is set on the same battlefield as above. If the heroes win the battle, the Guardians in the city will continue to fight to the death, and the city will be saved. But it is only temporary: after exactly one year from today, the Lady of Death will return, with another army and this time *very* upset. She'll try to destroy Zura and take away Kithaso. In

addition, during this year, the land around Zura will become darker: the drought will continue and an unknown plague will kill a many of the population. This could be a great setup for a very gloomy campaign...

(E) Garden Hounds (up to 3 per hero):
See page 74.

(WC) Queen of Death: See page 76.

(WC) Tasir the Kennelmaster: See page 78.

SURRENDER THE BOY

If the heroes decide to surrender the boy to the Lady, this is what happens.

King Varias, maddened, picks a dagger from one of the fallen soldiers, and raises it.

"If you cannot stay with me, I'll stay with you!" He says.

Then, unless a hero stops him (with an Agility (-2) roll, +2 for a Quick Hero).

The king stabs himself, and dies under the horrified eyes of Noramon and his son Kithaso.

The Lady of the Garden watches the king die with her inhuman, Keronian eyes. Then she shakes her head. "Not every soul reaches the Garden. Only those who died before their time. And this is your time, my lord."

Once the Lady has the boy she and her army retreat back to Keron, in the Garden, never to be seen again. The drought ends but King Varias (if still alive) isn't the same anymore, and in few years he'll die, leaving the kingdom without an heir.

EXCHANGING THE PRINCE FOR THE KING

The Lady needs a soul back in the garden, but must it be that of the Prince? Would another be acceptable? If a hero is smart enough to ask this question, he could probably convince the Lady of the Garden to pick a replacement, but this requires a Persuasion roll. If he succeeds, the Keronian princess says:

"Only a person willing to stay in the Garden forever can enter it. Who of you wants to pass eternity with us?"

There is one: King Varias himself, who will follow the Lady into the Garden, to allow his son to live his life. The drought ends and Kithaso is now king of Zura, but he is still a boy of fourteen, with only Lord Noramon at his side. He needs all the help he can find. Maybe the heroes will help him? Or the Nomads?

THE KING ASKS THE LADY TO JOIN HIS SON IN THE GARDEN

If King is saved from his suicidal instinct, he can propose to follow his son into the Garden. It is a very unusual request, but if the heroes support him, talking very fast (with a Persuasion (-2) roll), she can be convinced.

This causes the end of the royal bloodline of Zura. Who will take the throne? One of the heroes? In this case, if he developed a romantic interest with Darketa he could marry the warrior-woman, to unite the nomads and the farmers into a single people. By doing so, they'll have a chance to resist the influence of Hillias, and maybe, in a few years, a powerful new

kingdom will be born in the southern Dominions...

THE END

As described above, there are many ways this scenario could end: from bitter desperation to hope for a new future and the possibility of giving a new direction to the campaign. In addition, remember that a year has passed, and many other plots and events could have been happened in the Dominions.

On the topic of the rewards, if the characters save the kingdom, surely they will receive a noble title in Zura and a position of some kind (the Noble Edge, for Zura only). More materialistic heroes will be instead rewarded with a tidy sum of 4000 Moons, enough to stay permanently drunk for several months.

In addition, the Commandant character has now at his disposal a band of die-hard soldiers, the Black Hawks, who will go to hell and back for him...

CREATURES AND NPCs

CARAVAN MEMBER

This sun-burned man has worked in Jalaaro's caravan for a while. He is skilled with camels, horses, carts, and, if the need arises, he can wield a sword to defend himself.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d4, Riding d6, Shooting d6, Survival d6.

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

Toughness: 5

Edges: Woodsman (see below).

Hindrances: -.

Gear: Bronze sword (Str+d6) *or* bronze-tipped spear (Str+d6, Range: 3/6/12, 2 hands, +1 Parry, Reach 1), dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48), desert robes.



DARKETA

Also known as Houtani Gar, the Desert Jackal, Darketa is a stunningly beautiful,

yet savage, warrior woman. Raven haired and sharp-tongued, she is the daughter of an important chief of the Red Desert Nomads, Tavarok. Fiercely faithful to her people, she hates King Varias of Zura, who dispossessed her clan of their ancestral lands.

Darketa belongs to the Brown Nomads.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Notice d6, Riding d10, Shooting d8, Survival d8, Throwing d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7;

Toughness: 7(1)

Edges: Attractive, Born in the Saddle, Command, Iron Will, Noble, Quick.

Hindrances: Loyal, Mean.

Gear: Bronze saber (Str+d6), kullah – traditional dagger (Str+d4, AP 1, cannot be thrown), light leather armor (+1), Desert Jackal helm (+2), desert composite

bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 15/30/60), desert robes.

Special Abilities

• **Desert Jackal:** Darketa made herself a name as the Desert Jackal, the chief of a large band of nomads marauding the northern part of the Red Desert. Dauntless and strong, half of the marauders are in love with her and the other half will die at her command. Her command Radius is tripled (15") but only for Red Desert Nomads.

EXECUTIONER'S ASSISTANT

This not-very-smart man is one of the assistants of Zakharo, the Royal Executioner of Zura.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Edges: -.

Hindrances: Outsider.

Gear: Bronze dagger (Str+d4, cannot be thrown), cudgel (Str+d4), executioner's robes.

GARDEN HOUND

This hideous beast resembles a sort of gorilla, but is more slender, and equipped with a cruel horn on its forehead and set of razor sharp claws. They prefer to crouch on all fours, but they are perfectly capable of standing erect. They are a race of minor demonic servants, used by the Keronians of the past, and answer to the name of Kravatra. They obey the Lady of the Garden and her loyal herald, the Master of the Hunt, faithfully. When they die, their body melts into a bloody pulp over some minutes, then their bones crumble to dust. Every morning the Lady

can summon another Hound to replace a fallen one.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6.

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

Special Abilities

• **Claws:** Str+d4.

• **Horned Head:** Str+d6. AP 1. The Garden Hound rarely uses its most powerful attack, the horn, in melee (he suffers -2 to the Fighting roll). The only exception is if he hits the target with a raise. In this case the beast automatically delivers an additional Horned Head attack.

• **Uncanny Vitality:** Garden Hounds aren't real demons, but are gifted with a supernatural vitality. They receive +2 to Vigor rolls and to any roll to recover from being Shaken.

• **Size+1:** A Garden Hound is somewhat bigger than a man.

GUARDIAN OF NAL ASHAK

This Red Nomad has the blood of the ancient Keronian slaves, manifesting itself in a grayish complexion and a hunch. For centuries, people like him have been sent to live in the City of Night, to guard it forever. There, they join the other Guardians, and their tongues are cut out, so they cannot taint this holy place with human language. Actually, the Guardians learn to subvocalize sounds, so they can communicate among themselves with hisses and other creepy noises.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Throwing d8.

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

Edges: Quick.

Hindrances: Mean.

Gear: Obsidian dagger (Str+d4+1, cannot be thrown), blowpipe with Guardian Powder (Range: 5/10/20, delivers the Guardian Powder, 3 doses, see below), red rags.

Special Abilities

• **Guardian Powder:** This mysterious Lotus concoction provokes strange, terrible visions. Any target hit by the powder must roll Spirit (-2) or be Shaken. If he rolls a 1 on the Spirit die, regardless of the Wild Die, he must immediately make a Fear Check.

• **Low Light Vision:** The Guardians of Nal Ashak are well-acquainted with darkness, they ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.

• **Hardy:** The Guardians of Nal Ashak aren't common humans, and have an unholy vitality. If they are Shaken, a second Shaken result don't cause them a Wound.



IMPALER SPIDER

This dangerous creature, typical of the Red Desert, dwells in moist areas (typically oases and tombs). Quite furry, it isn't poisonous and doesn't produce webs, but nevertheless is very dangerous: nature gifted it with a particular long "tongue" (in truth a sort of chitin cave spear), which the spider uses to impale its victims and sucks away their bodily fluids. Usually Impaler Spiders grow up to the size of a dog, but this specimen is particularly big.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8.

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities

• **Fear:** An Impaler Spider, especially one of this size, is very scary, and seeing it requires a Fear (-2) check.

• **Impaling:** Str+d8, AP 2, Reach 3. If the Impaling Spider hits with a raise, it means it has fixed its "tongue" in the body of the victim. From the next round, the beast will suck away the body fluids of the victim, causing her 2d8 damage (armor doesn't protect and Soak rolls are made at -2) until she breaks free (by winning an opposed Strength roll and suffering 2d8 damage) or the "tongue" is broken (with a Called Shot (-2), Toughness 6).

• **Size +1:** An Impaler Spider is as big as a large man.



JALAARO

Jalaaro is a wandering Jalizaran merchant who has walked more caravan routes than he remembers. Despite not being the most honest of men, he is a decent person, if you can endure his constant babbling and the occasional "embellishment" to the stories he tells.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d8, Lockpicking d6, Persuasion d8, Riding d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d8, Streetwise d10, Survival d6, Throwing d6.

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

Edges: Connections (merchants), Danger Sense, Watch Your Back!

Hindrances: Big Mouth.

Gear: Bronze saber (Str+d6), bronze dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12), light leather armor under merchant's robes (+1), lockpicks.

Special Abilities

• **A Man of Many Paths:** Jalaaro is a natural-born caravan master. He receives +2 to any Smarts or Survival rolls linked to leading a caravan or for similar logistical tasks.



LORD NORAMON

An elegant man in his late seventies, Lord Noramon is the eldest and most faithful counselor of King Varias. Despite his age, he is still a strong-willed man, ready to do anything to save the kingdom.

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

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

Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7(2)

Edges: Charismatic, Connections (Noblemen), Helper, Iron Will, Noble.

Hindrances: Loyal, Elderly.

Gear: Bronze dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12), robes.

Special Abilities

• **Servant of the Kingdom:** While Lord Noramon is actively working to save the kingdom of Zura (GM's call) he receives +1 to all Trait rolls.



MELANCONIO THE POET

A man in his late thirties, Melanconio is haunted by a sense of desperation deep in his soul, one with no real explanation. This makes him an excellent poet, but also a wreck of a man, and a potential traitor.

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Knowledge (Legends and Lore) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d6, Streetwise d6, Taunt d8.

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

Edges: Charismatic, Poet.

Hindrances: Melancholy.

Gear: Iron stiletto (Str+d4+1), fancy clothing.

Special Abilities

• **Hand of Fate:** Melanconio considers himself the hand of destiny, and in this particular adventure he could be. By spending a Bennie, he can obtain the Drop on a target.



QUEEN OF DEATH

Shakara was a Keronian Princess many, many centuries ago. Revived in the Garden of Death, she has free will, because the spell was woven around her. She was of kind spirit, an unusual trait in a Keronian, and for this reason she was loved by Prince Ashak. She died too soon, but her husband, grief-stricken, conjured a magical place for her to live forever, the Garden of Death. However this place, being the kingdom of death itself, slowly erased any trace of love from Shakara's heart. Today she is almost inhuman, permanently bored and searching for something she cannot find anywhere.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d12+1, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Arcana) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d10.

Charisma: +5; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8/6; **Toughness:** 9(2)

Edges: Bikini Heroine, Binding Ritual (*armor, deflection*), Noble, Very Attractive.

Hindrances: Greedy, Vengeful.

Gear: Jeweled bikini.

Special Abilities

• **Invulnerability (Garden Only):** When in the Garden of Death, nothing short of a Greater Demon or Death itself can wound Shakara, although she can be Shaken. Outside the Garden, she can be wounded and killed normally, but her soul will return to the Garden of Death where she will reincarnate. The process usually requires 2d6 months.

• **Lady of Death:** Shakara is at one with the magic of the Garden, which grants her uncanny abilities. She has 30 Power Points and can use the following Powers, using Spirit as arcane ability: *armor* (invisible barrier), *bolt* (invisible force), *boost/lower trait* (caress of death), *deflection* (I am not here!), *fear* (see your own death), *puppet* (manipulate body), *zombie* (return to life).

• **Queen of Death:** When in the Garden of Death, Shakara has inhuman powers: she can use of her sorcerous powers without paying any Power Points.

RED DESERT WARRIOR

A nomad of the Red Desert. A fierce warrior and a dangerous marauder.

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

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

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6(1)

Edges: Born in the Saddle.

Hindrances: Loyal, Mean.

Gear: Bronze saber (Str+d6), kullah – traditional dagger (Str+d4, AP 1, cannot be thrown), light leather armor (+1), small shield (+1 Parry), desert composite bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 15/30/60), desert robes.

SNAPPER

A sort of bipedal lizard, Snappers have long tails, small, almost vestigial forepaws (which they can use for manipulation with some rudimentary skill) and an elongated head with powerful jaws, capable of breaking the leg of a horse with a single bite. They are very intelligent, for animals, and hunt in packs, showing a capability to coordinate their actions equal to that of wolves. They can run in short bursts, and

use this to charge their prey and eliminate it with a powerful bite.

They are almost exclusively found in Keron. Probably they are the descendants of some type of domestic lizard tamed by ancient Keronians.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8(A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8.

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

Special Abilities

• **Bite:** Str+d6. AP 2.

• **Quick:** Snappers are lightning-fast, discarding and redrawing Action Cards below 6. They must stick with the redrawn card, however.

• **Sprint Attack:** A Snapper which moves at least 4" in straight line against an enemy gains +2 to attack rolls, but suffers -2 to Parry till the next round.



TALASCO

A man in his fifties, General Talasco is a born soldier, and a very good swordsman, too. With a past in the Iron Phalanxes, he is consumed by ambition: he wants to become King of Zura, even if this means being only a pawn of Hillias.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d8, Riding d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d6, Throwing d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9(2)

Edges: Ambidexterity, Block, Command, Dodge, First Strike, Florentine, Improved Level Headed, Noble, Two Fisted.

Hindrances: Greedy.

Gear: Iron sword (Str+d8), iron dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12) medium leather

and metal armor (+2), silver crown of Zura (+1, head only, see below).

Special Abilities

• **The Usurper:** Talasco's greatest desire is to be the usurper of Zura. While he wears the crown of Zura, he receives the Elan Edge. When the crown is removed, he loses all his bennies but flies into a rage (consider him under the effect of the Berserk Edge).

TALASCO'S BODYGUARD

This rugged cutthroat is part of General Talasco's personal guard. Skilled and cold-blooded in any situation, he is a deadly opponent.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Riding d4, Shooting d6, Survival d4, Throwing d6.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8;

Toughness: 8(2)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, First Strike *or* Sweep.

Hindrances: Loyal, Mean.

Gear: Bronze sword (Str+d8), medium leather and metal armor (+2), shield (+1 Parry, +2 Toughness vs ranged attacks) short bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 10/20/40), bronze helm (+2, head only).

Special Abilities

• **Cutthroat:** This man is a stone cold killer. Whenever he gets a raise on an attack, he gains AP 2.



TARK

Only twenty-two years old, the freckled Tark is already a grown man. Of mixed blood, his mother was a courtesan in a tavern of Zura, he was picked as a right-hand man by the Commandant, and he is very faithful to him. He is a good leader of men himself.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Notice d8, Riding d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Survival d4, Throwing d6.

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

Toughness: 8(2)

Edges: Command, Sweep.

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bronze sword (Str+d8), bronze dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12) medium leather and metal armor (+2), bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 12/24/48), bronze helm (+2, head only).

Special Abilities

• **Commandant's Right Hand:** Tark would give his life for the Commandant: he can use the Fanatics setting rule to save him. At the end of the adventure, if he survives, the Commandant can take the Sidekick Edge if he wants, ignoring the normal Rank requirements, selecting Tark as his follower.



TASIR THE KENNELMASTER

This man belongs to a now-lost race of Keronian slaves. He died many centuries ago, but was resurrected in the Garden of Death and became Lady Shakara's right hand, and the master of the Kravatra, the Garden Hounds. He secretly loves her and would do anything to please his lady.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Riding d8, Shooting d8, Survival d8, Throwing d8.

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

Toughness: 7(1)

Edges: Command, Command Presence, Fervor, Hold the Line!

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bronze sword (Str+d8), light leather armor (+1), Horn of the Master of the Hunt (see below), Keronian horse.

Special Abilities

- **Garden Dweller:** This person died and was reborn in the Garden. He can die normally *inside* the Garden, but, if killed *outside* it, will return to life in the ensorcelled grove a day later.

- **Horn of the Master of the Hunt:** This ancient relic was made with the horn of the father of all the Kravatra, granting great powers over them. The wielder will never be attacked by them. In the hands of a skilled user (like Tasir) it can be cast the *boost trait* Power (only on the Kravatra) using Spirit as Arcane Skill and with 20 Power Points.

- **Kennelmaster:** Tasir commands the Garden Hounds, and he is the only one (apart from Lady Shakara) the savage beasts obey. All his Leadership Edges work only with them, and he has a Command Radius of 15”.



TUL, DESERT PROPHET

Tul became a desert prophet by chance. A simple shepherd, he got lost in the desert for an entire week, before his brothers found him, half-starved and raving from sunstroke. Time passed but the raving didn't stop and Tul came to believe the Sun God speaks through him. His brothers were his first followers, but soon many other people joined him, leaving their tribes to hear the words of the Sun God. After the destruction of the Demon Ulasha (see *B&B 1 – Death of a Tyrant*), Tul wandered in the desert for several years, before hearing a calling to reach the nomads of the northern desert, where a black shadow hovered.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d12, Strength d4, Vigor d8

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

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

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Danger Sense, Elan, Inspire, Fervor, Priest.

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

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

Special abilities:

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

WHIP SLAVE

This Keronian slave is tall, thin and very pale. He doesn't look very smart, but there is an incredible strength in his sinewy frame.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d4.

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

Edges: Brawny.

Hindrances: Outsider.

Gear: Keronian silver whip (Str+d4, Reach 5).

Special Abilities

- **Queen Slave:** The Whip Slave, during the banquet scene, is a mere extension

of the Lady of Death's will. He uses her Spirit (d12+1) in place of his own.



ZAKHARO THE EXECUTIONER

A surprisingly well-educated person, Zakharo is a huge man, with arms thick as a bull's legs, and the heir of a long bloodline of executioners. He doesn't like inflicting pain, but is very good at his job, and very proud of ending the lives of his victims with a single chop.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 8

Edges: Brawny.

Hindrances: Outsider.

Gear: Executioner's axe (Str+d10, 2 hands, Reach 1, -1 Parry), bronze dagger (Str+d4, cannot be thrown), executioner's robes.

Special Abilities

• **Merciful Blow:** Zakharo can use the No Mercy Edge, but only against targets on which he has the Drop.



ZARIMO

Zarimo is the right hand of general Talasco. A pale, blonde man with blue eyes, he doesn't have a strong personality, but he is vicious with a blade. He is a former Hoplite who Talasco brought with him after leaving the Phalanxes.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Battle) d4, Notice d8, Riding d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Survival d4, Throwing d6.

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

Edges: Block, Counterattack, Improved First Strike.

Hindrances: Mean.

Gear: Iron sword (Str+d8), iron dagger (Str+d4, Range: 3/6/12) medium leather and metal armor (+2), short bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 10/20/40), bronze helm (+2, head only).

Special Abilities

• **Talasco's Lapdog:** Zarimo doesn't have a strong personality, but the soldiers know he is Talasco's right hand and fear his cold cruelty. He has the Command Edge, but this only applies to Zura's soldiers.

ZURAN SOLDIER

A soldier of the regular army of Zura. Well-trained and armed, this man is a skilled fighter, but not very familiar with fighting in the desert.

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

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

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

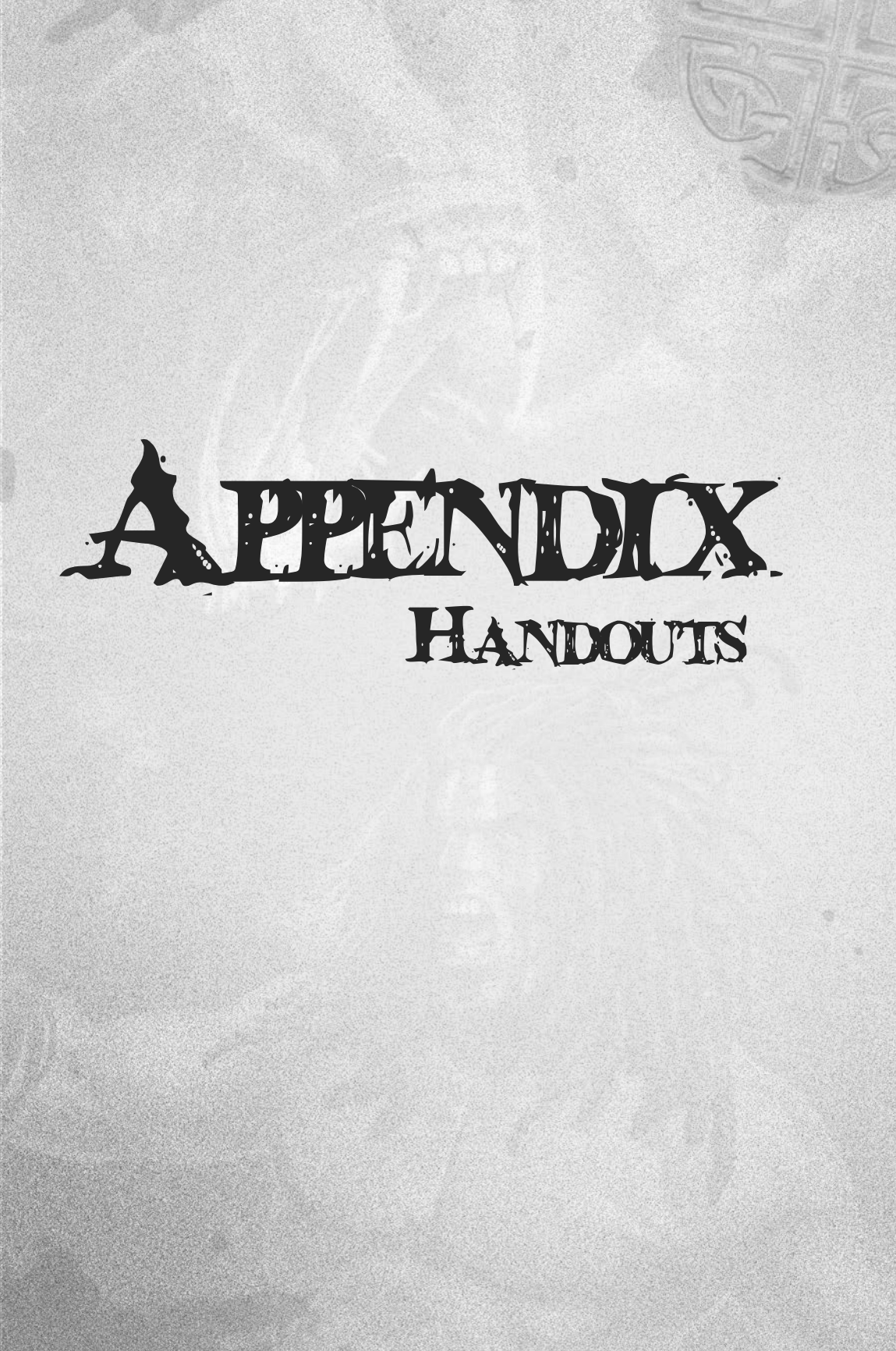
Edges: -.

Hindrances: Loyal.

Gear: Bronze sword (Str+d8), medium leather and metal armor (+2), shield (+1 Parry, +2 Toughness vs ranged attacks) *or* bronze tipped spear (Str+d6, 2 hands, +1 Parry, 2 hands, Range: 3/6/12), short bow (Damage: 2d6, Range: 10/20/40), bronze helm (+2, head only).

Special Abilities

• **Officer:** One Soldier in every twelve is an officer, a Right Hand with Fighting raised by one die step and the Command Edge.

The background features a faint, light-colored illustration of a dragon in the center, with its wings spread. In the top right corner, there is a faint crest or coat of arms. The overall texture is grainy and aged.

APPENDIX

HANDOUTS

THE DIARY

ASHAK, LORD OF NAL ASHAKA, HAD A WIFE, SHAKARA, AND HE LOVED HER DEARLY. BUT SHE WAS FRAIL OF HEALTH, AND THE COLD HAND OF DEATH TOOK HER IN HER PRIME DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE BEST HEALERS OF THE KINGDOM.

AND NOT EVEN THE POWERS OF A PRIEST PRINCE OF KERON CAN UNDO THE WORK OF DEATH.

BUT IF DEATH CANNOT BE DEFEATED, SHE CAN BE COURTED: ONE NIGHT, WHEN THE MOON WAS RED AS BLOOD, PRINCE ASHAK WALKED DOWN INTO THE SMALL GARDEN OF THE PALACE, WHICH SHAKARA LOVED SO DEARLY, AND CHANTED OLD FORBIDDEN SPELLS.

WHEN THE LAST ECHO OF HIS WORDS FADED, SOMETHING IN THE GARDEN WAS SUBTLY CHANGED: THE SHADOWS WERE LONGER, SOMEWHAT DARKER AND THE LIGHT OF THE STARS WAS DIMMED AND SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT. BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, SHAKARA WAS STANDING IN THE GARDEN AGAIN.

MY BELOVED, ASHAK ASKED, WITH A TREMBLING VOICE. ARE YOU ALIVE?

NO, MY LOVE, SHAKARA ANSWERED. I AM NOT. NEITHER I AM DEAD. WE ARE IN THE GARDEN OF DEATH, WHERE LIFE AND UN-LIFE HAVE NO MEANING.

ASHAK HUGGED HER AND SAID: IF YOU CANNOT BE THE PRINCESS OF NAL ASHAKA IN LIFE, THEN YOU SHALL BE IN DEATH!

FROM THAT DAY THE PRIEST PRINCE VISITED SHAKARA DAILY IN THE ENSORCELLED GARDEN, ENJOYING EVERY MOMENT TOGETHER AS TIME STOLEN FROM DEATH ITSELF. IF ASHAK NOTICED HOW DARK THE GARDEN HAD BECOME, HE DECIDED TO IGNORE IT, FULL AS HE WAS OF LOVE FOR HIS WIFE

JALABO'S LETTER

"The three dames are willing to dance with the lord. But they want to meet him before the dancing begins. Bring the old coot to Wylila's Tavern at first dusk tonight — or there will be no dancing."

Your Seven-Lovered Friend

BOOK OF LORE - THE FALLEN KINGDOM OF KERON

This section expands the background information about the Fallen Kingdom of Keron found in *Beasts & Barbarians Golden Edition*. The greater part of it is for the Game Master, but some of it can be shared with the players in the form of wild tales, legends and stories.

GEOGRAPHY

A TREMBLING LAND

The Fallen Realm is a place of suffering. Despite having escaped the direct impact of the Dread Star, this large plateau is continuously shaken by earthquakes, tremors, fissures, geysers and other similar geological activities. The few travelers who have survived a trip through this cursed land say that, especially during nighttime, you can actually hear the earth moaning and shrieking in pain, as if deep under ground, legions of demons are shrieking their anger.

The Sages of Syranthia say this is only superstition, and that these sounds are actually the effect of great land masses grinding one against the other. The Keronian Range, as the mountains around Keron are called, are still being born,

and these shrieks are the sounds that mountains make when they come into the world.

But this rational explanation doesn't cover all the natural dangers of the Fallen Realm. There is a sheer malevolence in this land: geysers seem to explode when people are near them, earthquakes happen while travelers are passing along the edges of cliffs, and sinkholes open under the feet of beasts of burden.

The Red Nomads call this particular type of bad luck *karavakasa*, which can be roughly translated as "the evil eye watching you".

So, if this land is so cursed, why do people cross it?

For the great treasures it hides, of course.

A MAZE OF MOUNTAINS...

The Fallen Realm survived the cataclysm due to the peculiar geography of the land. It was a large plateau, with a number of cities and other outposts built on it, which had great strategic importance in the past. When the Dread Star fell, the plateau was outside the direct impact area, and

even the tsunamis following the disaster weren't high enough to flood it.

But this doesn't mean the land was safe.

The plateau started cracking, like the ice of a frozen lake hit by the hammer of a fisherman. Many of the cities and observatories on top of it fell down into large fissures, made in few hours, while others were isolated by the new geography.

On the southern border of the plateau this effect was even worse, with mountains born in few months. This created a sort of labyrinth of ravines, tunnels, passages and narrow valleys which are, today, the only way to navigate the Fallen Realm.

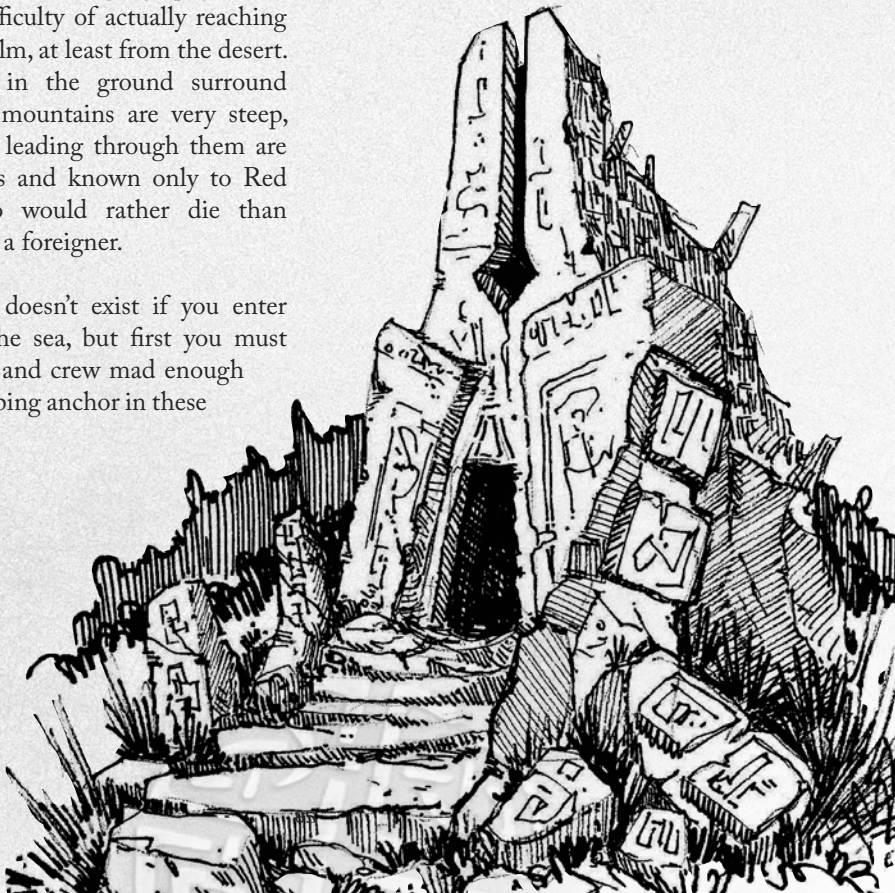
If you manage to survive the dangers lurking in them, of course.

Another issue with the geography of the land is the difficulty of actually reaching the Fallen Realm, at least from the desert. Large cracks in the ground surround the land, the mountains are very steep, and the paths leading through them are few, dangerous and known only to Red Nomads, who would rather die than reveal them to a foreigner.

This problem doesn't exist if you enter Keron from the sea, but first you must find a captain and crew mad enough to accept dropping anchor in these cursed waters.

...AND A NETWORK OF RUINS

In the Fallen Realm the remnants of Keron are more frequent than anywhere else. Cities, observatories, arenas, palaces, towers and other undefinable structures dot the land. A few of them still stand on the top of the plateau, while others are buried, more or less preserved, at the bottom of the various fissures. These are the places where adventurers and other daring souls venture, looking for ancient treasure. But we must remember that a number of Keronian sorceries were based on the energies of the ground, and nobody truly knows what the earthquakes did to the delicate energy patterns lying at the base of some of these evil cities...



GM's TIP:

NATURAL HAZARDS IN KERON

Sometimes the greatest enemies of the adventurers aren't monsters or evil cultists, but the hostile environment itself. Below you'll find several natural (and not-so-natural) hazards typical of the Fallen Realm, very useful to put the players in danger and as plot devices when needed. Note that some of these Hazards can be combined (for example Tremors can precede an Earthquake).

Howling Ground. *This spooky hazard happens only by night. From the depths of the earth, terrible growls, shrieks and other scary sounds are heard. Nobody knows if it is only the earth suffering, or the voices of demons, or of the thousands of people who died during the cataclysm. Rules-wise, characters experiencing a night of howling ground must make a Spirit (-1) roll to rest peacefully. Failure causes a level of Fatigue. If the character scores a raise on the Spirit roll, he is allowed an immediate Knowledge (Arcana) roll, but only if he knows High Tricarnian: on a success, he actually understands and learns something from the howling voices. Write a dot on the character sheet, near the Knowledge (Arcana) skill. At any time the player can cancel the dot to gain +2 to a Knowledge (Arcana) roll. Beasts seem immune to the effects of the Howling Ground, except dogs, which are very sensitive to it and must roll with an additional penalty of -2.*

Tremors. *The ground shakes dangerously under the feet of the heroes! Each character present must make an immediate Agility (-2) to avoid being knocked prone. Beasts, in particular horses, are very sensitive to tremors: they can foresee them 1d6 rounds before they happen and must make a Fear Check to avoid being Panicked by such an event. Tremors usually last 2d4 rounds, and often they precede something worse (like a Fissure or an Earthquake).*

Geysers. *A geyser is a sudden spurt of hot water, capable of boiling a man in his armor like an egg in a ceramic pot. Geysers come in various sizes and intensities. Spotting them, with a Notice roll, can be difficult, but it is always better than trying to avoid it when you tread on it: in this case a successful Agility roll only allows halving damage. Geysers come in many sizes. You can randomly decide the stats of a Geyser by drawing one or four cards from the Action Deck and checking the table below. If you draw a single card, use it for every column, if you draw four, each card defines one of the columns (Notice Roll Modifier, Damage and so on...).*

RANDOM GEYSER TABLE

Card Drawn	Notice Roll	Damage	Agility Roll	Size
2	+2	3d10	0	1"
3-6	+1	3d8	0	SBT
7-10	0	3d6	-1	SBT
J	-1	2d10	-1	MBT
Q	-2	2d8	-2	MBT
K	-3	2d6	-2	LBT
A	-4	3d4	-4	LBT
Joker	No Geyser!			

Obnoxious Gas. *Sometimes filthy, poisonous stench comes out from the ground, some of them putrid as carcasses and others sour and bitter like sulfur mixed with lemon. Characters caught in an area of obnoxious gas must make a Vigor roll each round (from -2 to -4 depending on the concentration of the gas), +2 if they put something on their face, like a wet cloth, to protect the throat. In the case of failure, the unfortunate character suffers a level of Fatigue. This can lead to exhaustion and even to death. Gas outbursts usually last 2d6 minutes and cover a LBT in the open, while in closed spaces they can easily saturate an area.*

Fissure. *A fissure is a sudden crack in the ground, large enough to swallow people or animals, or cause buildings to collapse. In game terms, a fissure is divided into Segments. Each Segment is a Cone Template, laid on the battlefield. Roll a d4 (the Length Die) to determine the number of Segments, then randomly select a point on the battlefield, letting a d12 fall on the gaming table. Mark the point where it falls, and note the number: then place the first Segment on the table, as if it was the hand of a clock, with the die being the center of the clock. The exact position is given by reading the die number as the number on a clock face (so if a 6 is rolled, the cone is positioned on an almost north-south axis). At this point roll the die again, and place another Segment using as center of the clock the point of the previous Segment. Go on in this way till all the Segments are placed. Any character caught under a Segment must make an immediate Agility (-2) roll, to avoid falling into it, suffering 3d8 damage. The same damage is inflicted on buildings crossed by a Segment (consider the damage be caused by a Heavy Weapon). Segments can be jumped over with normal jumping rolls and are permanent. Fissures continue round after round, until a 1 is rolled on the Length Dice.*

Earthquake. *The ground shakes terribly, buildings fall down and the rage of the gods smashes the world! An earthquake is one of the most frightening experiences a person can have. Any character in the area must make a Spirit (-4) roll or be Panicked, running away wildly. In addition, if inside a building, there is a good chance that fallen rocks, debris and other similar things severely damage the characters, while, if outside, sudden crevasses and sinkholes can cause a similar experience. For each character (or group of characters) involved in the scene, draw a card from the Action Deck, and check the suit in the table below: the hero must make an Agility roll with the listed modifier to avoid suffer the corresponding damage. Earthquakes last 2d4 rounds, but seem to last much longer.*

EARTHQUAKE TABLE

Card Suit	Agility Roll Modifier	Damage
Clubs	-4	2d6
Diamonds	-3	3d6
Hearts	-2	2d8
Spades	-1	3d8
Joker	No danger this round! You gain +2 to all rolls during the next round.	

Visions. *One of the weirdest things that can happen to the incautious traveler in Keron is experiencing visions. The causes are uncertain at best: the Sages of Syranthia say they are caused by a peculiar type of fungal Lotus, so small that it cannot be seen by the human eye, but which is very intoxicating, while the Red Nomads say they are the voices of the old Keronian lords speaking. Whatever the truth, having a vision in Keron is seldom an experience one wants to remember. In game terms, draw a card from the Action Deck for each character present, and ask them for a Spirit (-2) roll. With a success they resist the vision, while with a failure they suffer from a specific effect for 1d4 hours. With a critical failure things go very badly: the mind of the unfortunate adventurer is so taxed by the vision that he is hit by a bout of madness and permanently gains a Quirk Hindrance chosen by the GM. Note that good roleplaying of the effect of a Vision should be rewarded with a bennie.*

VISIONS TABLE

Card Suit	Effect
Clubs	<i>Guilt.</i> The character sees something from his past which makes him feel guilty: he suffers -2 to all Trait rolls.
Diamonds	<i>Stupor.</i> The character is immersed in a wonderful world. He completely loses any sense of fear and is incapable of recognizing a danger. He is immune to fear but he must make a Spirit roll to perform any action other than slowly wandering around. Violent actions are totally impossible in this state.
Hearts	<i>Rage.</i> The character sees something that makes him believe that everyone is his enemy! He suffers from the Vengeful and Bloodthirsty Hindrances, but gains the Berserk Hindrance.
Spades	<i>Fear.</i> The character is stricken by sudden terror! Everything, close friends included, is a cause of terror. He must make an immediate Fear check, in addition he suffers from the Yellow Hindrance.
Joker	<i>Future Sight!</i> The hero sees a glimpse of the future, as if he had cast the <i>divination</i> Power! The exact nature of the vision is left to the GM.

CLIMATE

The Fallen Realm of Keron is a remarkably big land, so it is subject to different weather patterns. In the north, the coastal area on the Dread Sea, it is quite mild, with occasional storms which unleash their rage on the land. Despite the water, the soil seems impervious to life, and the water creates large pools of sickening

liquid, which slowly evaporate releasing obnoxious stench.

The southern area, on the opposite side, is influenced by the dry and hot air of the Red Desert, but the Keronian Range offers a certain mitigating effect, diminishing the peaks in temperature.

An important fact to understand is that, given the number of fissures, narrow

valleys and gorges, this land contains a number of microclimates: for example moist valleys or very hot places due to volcanic activity (see below).

But if the Fallen Realm is quite survivable by day, by night it becomes very cold, as in the desert. Nomads say that this is because, by night, the dark soul of Keron seeps out from the wounds of the earth, tainting the air. Luckily the merciful light of the sun dissipates it.

Speaking of “wounds of the earth”, an important thing to remember about Keron is the presence of a large number of volcanos, whose names are known only by Red Nomads. They aren’t as big or imposing as the Mountain of Fire in Norheim, but their continuous smoke frequently taints the air and adds a grayish layer of soot to everything.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Despite its dead and desolate appearance, even in the Fallen Kingdom life manages to cling and emerge. In this paragraph are described some of the amazing plant and animal species found in this land.

PLANTS

As said above, the Fallen Realm of Keron is a harsh and arid place, but where the plants do manage to live, they do it in an amazing way.

Speaking in general terms, the plants you can find most frequently are cacti, of various types, in particular a particularly resistant type of agave, which the nomads

call Birkah (meaning “leather”), for the hardness of the bark. Only wild goats manage to eat it, assimilating the few drops of water it contains.

Another plant, luckily quite rare, is the infamous Rován Herb, an underground plant which grows by creating a thin web of filaments under the sand. Rován Herb is usually nurtured by the few drops of moisture it manages to collect from the sand, but, when it feels the warmth of a living being, it protrudes dozens of needle-like stingers, which first inject a paralyzing poison, then they slowly suck away the bodily fluids of the victim. After these abundant repasts Rován Herb expands, even doubling its size. There are rumors of entire fields covered by Rován Herb, where no living being can pass. They are usually fairly easy to avoid, if you spot the polished bones of the previous victims shimmering under the sun.

But in the old ruins, sheltered by crumbling walls, several other plants can be found, some of them so old that they date back to ancient Keron. The most famous are probably the Keronian Orchids, flowers so beautiful and so perfumed, that can make men die of melancholy, for the atavistic memories they wake in the human mind. Orchids exist in dozens of varieties, because cultivating them was one of the many entertainments of the Keronian nobility. Note that this isn’t innocent as it seems: one legend says that orchids were demonic gifts and many of them hide dangerous secrets, for example the Red Biters, marvelous red flowers which are in truth carnivorous plants, or the Yellow Sorrows, orchids which can make a man completely lose his will to live, if exposed for too long to their sweet perfume.

A man who finds a sack of the seeds of these plants could become rich as a king, if he finds the right buyers.

But orchids aren't the only plants living in the ancient gardens. The Arabak, or Tree of Flesh, is a slender plant, similar to ginkgo biloba, but with a silvery, almost white bark. A very elegant plant, it releases round seeds, the size of peas, totally inert. You can plant them in the ground, water them every day, and they'll never sprout. They need a very particular soil, the open wound of a living being: if put in contact with the blood they'll grow into a full-sized tree in few minutes, literally devouring the flesh of the poor sod. The ancient Keronian lords used these plants on their favorite slaves, when they grew old, so that they could continue – in a certain way – to “live” in their gardens. It is the sort of affection that no decent man would understand today.

The seeds of the Tree of Flesh are almost immortal, and can stay dormant for millennia.

Another environment where you can find strange plants is the bottom of the darkest gorges, where an entire ecosystem dwelling in darkness exists. There are a lot of strange fungi, slimes and mosses growing there, but the one you'll hear mentioned around the fires of the desert nomads is the fabled Barkama Moss. Barkama, if you believe the legend, was a princess of the Blue Nomads, beautiful as the sun in the morning. But she was blind, and her father promised her hand to whoever would be able to restore her sight. Sages of far-away lands, witch doctors of the savannah and priests of Caldeia tried to cure her, but all failed. Then Katush the Scarred, a rough Red Nomad marauder, came to the oasis, bringing with him a patch of moss, found in Keron. He wetted

it with his own saliva and placed it on the eyes of Barkama. When the moss was removed, the eyes of the girl, previously white as milk, were deep blue, and she could see again. But everything comes with a price: Barkama's sight was too powerful, and she could see the invisible spirits of the air and of the dead, and the real faces of men. It was too much for her mind, which shattered in madness. But this didn't bother Katush: the warrior carried his raving spouse off on his horse and rode back to Keron. From that day, blind men always seek Barkama Moss, but the few who find it are very prudent in using its wondrous gifts.

ANIMALS

The Fallen Realm hosts a number of dangerous creatures, plus many more still unknown. On this topic, an important premise must be noted: Keron is in a very particular state, because it is isolated from the rest of the world, so some pre-Dread Star creatures could have survived. In addition, this land was part of the Keronian Empire, and the ancient Priest Princes were known to toy with life, twisting and altering it to satisfy their weird needs.

That said, let's begin a brief exposition of the beasts of Keron.

Snakes, scorpions and insects, of various sizes and lethality abound, especially in rocky areas. In particular Death's Head Mosquitos, so called for the white sign on their back. They are particularly dangerous because they are attracted to blisters and wounds, laying eggs inside, which hatch after some days, causing terrible infections and fevers.

Keronian Jackals, big ugly canids, roam the ruins and the wild lands, living off the few rabbits and some wild Glota (desert goats), which are among the few non-lethal beasts living in these lands. These jackals are very smart, for animals, and they can even communicate between them using a sort of language made of howls and postures. Stories say that they aren't true beasts, but the offspring of a sect of priests devoted to an ancient Keronian deity, which transformed them into animals to guard her temple. A drunken nomad may swear that after he killed one of these beasts, it transformed back into a man; but it isn't clear if the story is true or not.

Speaking of legends, there is more than one story about Big Lizards: enormous creatures, bigger than a Syranthian elephant, which incessantly roam the land, looking for food. They are slow, and very ancient, so sometimes their bodies are encrusted with stones, debris, even plants. But don't be fooled: when their appetite is awakened, they can attack with sudden bursts of ferocity!

Now, it's unclear if these creatures are real, while the existence of Snappers is pretty certain: pony-sized, bipedal saurians, with mouths strong enough to snap off the leg of a horse with a single bite (hence the name). They are quite intelligent, and hunt in packs.

But the most dangerous beast of those living in Keron is surely the Tyrant Lizard. Similar to a large-mouthed, giant salamander, it has skin of various hues, from sand-yellow to fiery-red, depending on its diet and region of origin. But what it really matters are its eyes: big as cooking pots, they have small, mesmeric pupils. If the Tyrant manages to entrap your stare, you are doomed: your body freezes,

paralyzed, and the Lizard starts eating you alive, bite after bite. Stories say that the Tyrant Lizard is the origin of the ancient myth of the Basilisk, but nobody can be sure.

If you watch high in the sky, you can see, apart from several types of vultures, a majestic hawk, black as night, called the Keronian Falcon. It is a beast capable of amazing feats of flying and unlike other falcons, it hunts both by day and by night. No fog, vapor or smoke can protect from its deadly talons. The reason is simple, this beast is totally blind, its eyes atrophied, but can perceive its surroundings with some unknown sense. Keronian Falcons are very fierce, wild, and difficult to tame, but if you find a hatchling and train it, it will be faithful all its life.

The skies of Keron hide other dangers, especially near cliffs, in the Forest of Pillars (see below), or in ruins. These places are the perfect ambush sites for the Tabacha, also known as Flying Frogs. They are pony-sized amphibians, with a special membrane between their legs, allowing them to glide. Usually they position themselves in high places (for example, on rocks) and wait, sometimes for hours, for a suitable prey to pass, and then they jump on it! Some of the stronger specimens can also jump very high, and use this momentum to glide. They have clawed legs, and, most important, very long and strong tongues, which they use to strangle their victims. One legend says these creatures were the guardians of the High Temple of Baachaga, one of the Keronian demon lords (see *TLD*, page 44). The god changed their shape to fit his desires, and as he did so, a little drop of his essence now exists in these animals.

MONSTERS

Generally the Sages of Syranthia don't use the term "monster", because in their language the word simply means "marvelous thing", even if the accepted meaning is monstrosity.

But in Keron, a number of real monsters exist (or are fabled to exist), so it is worth describing some of them, even if their descriptions often come from the uncertain reports of survivors or second-hand stories.

For example, if, while wandering in a ruin, a sudden fog appears, you should find a safe place, possibly a room where you can lock yourself inside, as soon as possible. The fog could be summoned by the Walachi, a race of humanoid monkeys, with long, strong tentacles in place of hands. These hideous creatures will use their slimy appendixes to strangle you to death, if you are a man. If you are a woman, instead, your fate will be even worse, because they'll only make you faint, and you'll awaken in some underground lair, to be used as a mating companion by the whole clan...

If you are terrified by this story don't go on, because the next one is even worse.

In the gorges or ruins, you might meet raven-haired women, usually alone, but sometimes in twos or threes. They are always gorgeous, with deep black eyes. But don't trust them: sooner or later, they'll try kissing you, and if you let them, you'll be doomed, because they are Itrixias, the Daughters of Cylatrix, a demon goddess of ancient Keron. They inherited from their supernatural mother a jackal's head, with a strong jaw, but they are capable of disguising it with a powerful illusion. When they kiss you, in truth, they bite

(and usually kill) you. The only way of seeing through the beguiling is watching them in a reflecting surface, which reveals their true aspect. If you meet an Itrixia, you should kill her as soon as possible, because if she ever escapes, she will hunt you forever, until you or she dies.

There is another creature, dangerous as the jackal woman, which dwells in the ancient ruins: the Oodasha, or Soul Singer. He looks like a very pale man, usually quite muscular and dressed in clothing taken from his previous victims. A Soul Singer doesn't speak. He doesn't need to. Instead he plays a strange flute, always made from the bone of a previous victim. The melody sung is always the same. Very sad and alien at the same time, and capable of literally melting your brain away. First you'll start feeling dizzy, then you'll bleed from the nose, but won't survive long enough to see your brain matter drip on the ground.

Once you are dead, the Oodasha will approach, licking up the gruesome slime from your brain from the ground, and storing the excess in a jar or a water skin, for future repasts.

Finally we should speak of the Crawling Mass: this is a pudding of several animal (and sometimes human) parts, joined together by slimy goo. Almost mindless, it is found crawling in underground complexes, looking for new organic matter to ingest using its long, flail-like pseudopods. Sages debate if this creature has the same origin as (or is a simple variation of) Dread Star Matter (see *GE* page 147), but probably they are two entirely different types of abominations.

HERO'S JOURNAL: SORCEROUS FOCUSES

Sorcery often requires special items to work (in particular Powers with the Object Required Trapping, see GE page 83), but in certain cases an object can be imbued with sorcerous effects by itself, magnifying the power of the wielder.

In game terms, such an item is called a focus and grants +1 to Spellcasting rolls for a specific Power. Extracting one from a fallen prey requires a successful Survival (-2) roll and a Knowledge (Arcana) (-2) roll.

At the GM's discretion, having a focus can also absorb the effects of a Sorcery Backlash: instead of rolling on the Sorcery Critical Failure (GE, page 83), the focus is destroyed, causing 2d6 damage to the warlock. These items are highly prized by sorcerers, and can be sold to the right people for 400 to 800 Moons.

Some examples are described below.

Itrixia's Teeth: *disguise.*

Keronian Falcon Eye: *darksight.*

Oodasha's Flute: *puppet.*

Tabacha's Tongue: *draining touch.*

Tyrant Lizard's Eye: *stun or entangle.*

clans of them. Sages debate if the nomads living in Keron should be referred to as Red or if they belong to an entirely new clan, the Black Nomads, but nobody really cares: if ordinary Red Nomads are dangerous, the ones coming from this cursed place are even worse. Regardless of such subtle distinctions, all Red Nomad clans, both those living in the desert and those dwelling in Keron, consider the Fallen Realm their holy land and ancestral home and will do anything to protect it from foreigners. The following paragraphs focuses on the Black Nomads.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Black Nomads tend to be tall and lean, with a physical frame made to endure cold, heat and a lack of water. They have an olive, or in certain cases almost black, complexion, and narrow, elongated eyes, of various colors, black being the commonest.

Black Nomads divide themselves into low breeds and high breeds.

Black Nomads of low breed are sons of women not belonging to their race, usually kidnapped or bought from other clans of the desert.

Nomads of high breed, instead, have only Black blood in their veins, and are considered the aristocracy of their people.

Both low and high breeds are usually quite attractive, in particular the women are said to be very beautiful, but only in second-hand reports, because they are jealously guarded and often kept segregated.

There are a number of exceptions to this general rule; centuries of inbreeding have taken a heavy toll on this people, so many Blacks are victims of deformities

DWELLERS OF KERON

RED NOMADS OR BLACK NOMADS?

Very few people dare cross the Fallen Realm, but only one race dwells there voluntarily: Red Nomads, and only a few

and other horrid mutations. It is not an exaggeration to say that at least one baby in three is born so mutated that he doesn't survive his first week of life.

Probably inbreeding isn't the only cause of these problems: the very air, water and soil of Keron are tainted, and this curse is transmitted to its dwellers.

In addition we must not forget ancestry; the Black Nomads are probably one of the eldest races of the dominions, along with the Tricarnians. Their blood is probably a mix of old Keronians and surviving slaves, explaining some of their innate behaviors, like their cruelty.

Note that mutations and deformities, unless disabling, aren't a social stigma among the Black Nomads, but a trait of nobility to show with pride; they call them "Marks" and some of them, for example having yellowish, reptile-like eyes, are considered a gift and a sign of distinction.

Despite this, Black Nomads tend to be very private; in presence of strangers, the few times they meet them peacefully, they constantly wear the kballah, the traditional nomad veil. A Black Nomad willingly showing his face to a stranger is granting him an enormous honor, and it means he considers him part of the family.

Black Nomads dress in a very similar way to the other nomad tribes of the red desert; they wear long robes, scarves and the kballah. Some of the Black clans wear black robes instead of red ones, but they are a minority. Their garments are usually made of wool, but some of the clans dwelling in the very heart of Keron use black silks, probably plundered from some ancient city or obtained in other ways.

Men despise any type of ornament, while women are often adorned with rich jewels, the fruit of plundering. This doesn't mean the women are important; in their society, having a bejeweled wife is a sign of power.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND ECONOMY

Black Nomads are organized into clans, like other nomads, each of them a group of one or more families. Consanguineous marriage, as noted above, is quite common, so mutations and deformities are widespread, even if some fresh blood is introduced through kidnapping women of other races.

Clans are ruled by chiefs who are often gifted in the dark arts of sorcery; these are called Yamazi, and are feared by their own people, because they can unleash their powers on enemies or kin alike. Yamazi pass their charge and their secret from father to son, through terrible initiation rites which require vile pacts with the entities dwelling in the darkest shadows of Keron.

Villages are more sedentary than those of the other nomads: they are usually crude huts made of stone or heavy tents of sewn Glota skins. Certain tribes even live in caverns or ancient ruins, but they are a minority.

On the economic side, Black Nomads never go above subsistence.

Women gather herbs and edible fungi around the villages, and build small traps for animals.

Men are herders, and occasionally scavenge trinkets and ancient stuff in the

GARDEN OF DEATH

ruins, but their main source of income is pillaging and raiding.

A man not capable of taking what he wants from another is considered puny and unworthy of life. Pillaging is enacted with equal ferocity against other nomad tribes or against strangers.

Three or four times a year the tribe's warriors leave Keron and, using secret paths, go south into the desert attacking caravans or, in some cases, even outposts or small Independent Cities. Then they quickly retreat back into their land, where nobody dares follow them.

Black Nomad warriors are good riders, if not as good as the Brown, the Blue or the Green, and skilled archers, even if their bows are somewhat weaker and cruder than those of the other clans.

As with other clans, warriors always have with them the kullah, a curved dagger which identifies them as men. For the Blacks, kullahs are even more important than for the other clans; they are often forged in volcanic fire, mixing the blood of the owner with the metal in the forging

process, while chanting ancient, forbidden songs. Stories say that the kullah of a Black nomad can kill with a mere scratch, and in some cases this is true (see sidebar).

RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION

The Black Nomads are wicked people, so they worship wicked gods.

The other nomad tribes simply says the Black worship the Jinni, as they call the evil spirits of the desert, but in truth the situation is more complex.

The tribes dwelling in the Fallen Kingdom worship bastardized forms of the ancient Keronian gods. The most important one is probably the Bleeding Woman, a cruel creature, mistress of pain and vendetta, who weeps thick tears of blood and has a deep cut between her breasts, where you can see her heart beating, amid running blood.

The Bleeding Woman is probably a form of Hordan, as the stories say that on the night of the fall of the Dread Star, all the statues of the demon goddess wept blood.

HERO'S JOURNAL: BLACK KULLAH

These ensorcelled daggers are made by Yamazi, Black Nomad sorcerers, and are vicious, foul weapons.

Evil Blade. *A black kullah is evil by itself: in the hands of anybody except the person for whom it was forged, consider any 1-2 on the Fighting die as a 1.*

In game terms, they deal +1 damage and have AP 1, plus they have one or more of the following powers:

Cold Touch. *Any target hit by this blade, whether the attack exceeds the target's Toughness or not, must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.*

Poisoned Blade. *The bite of this weapon is inherently evil. Any target at least Shaken by it suffers the effects of the poison Power (fast) cast with arcane skill d8.*

Stinger Blade. *When the wielder of this blade is in grave danger, he feels a sting of pain in his dagger hand. He is considered to have the Danger Sense Edge.*

Another important god of the Blacks is Cylas the Trine, a giant jackal-like beast with three heads, always ravenously hungry. Cylas is probably a corruption of the goddess Cylatrix, and - uniquely in Black Nomad society - the priestesses of this cult are always female.

As well as these, many tribes worship minor spirits or local monsters, as the Burning Flame, or The Thing Which Eats at Dusk, with one single exception; for centuries, the clans in the center of Keron have bowed before something they call the Ancient Master. Nobody has ever seen it, but stories say it is a living god, walking on the earth, gifted with tremendous powers, and dwells in "a marvelous palace made of dreams and nightmares" in Ral Vashirya (see below). Year after year, more tribes fall under its nefarious influence, and, if not stopped, in the next twenty years his dark hand could cover all of Keron. At that point, who, or what could stop him?

SURVIVORS OF A FORGOTTEN PAST?

We have talked of Black Nomads, of gods who walk on the ground and of many hideous creatures, but there is a question that more than one Sage asks himself. What about the old Keronians? They were almost immortal, how is it possible that none of them survived the Dread Star's fall?

The answer is simple: nobody knows.

Apparently Keron has been dead as a tomb for dozens of centuries, even if the fate of Kiramas (see *GE* page 43) makes

you think that some power is smouldering under the ashes, ready to burn brightly again when the time comes...

PLACES OF INTEREST

Keron is a strange place. Here follow descriptions of some of its most important locations, useful to create a custom scenario.

FOREST OF PILLARS

There is a place, somewhere in Tricarnia, which seems to have come from another world. It is a large, flat plain, almost entirely filled with tall pillars of stone, probably of natural origin.

They are made of a very peculiar stone, smooth and polished, and some of them even have "branches". According to ancient legends, in the past the pillars were a forest of enormous trees. The very night the Dread Star fell, for some reason all the plants died and were carbonized in an instant. Then, centuries of time petrified them.

The crystal gatherers of Quollaba (see *B&B #1 - Death of a Tyrant*) say these pillars hide incredible treasure in the form of huge, precious crystals, white as milk or red as blood, and one of them is enough to make a man rich for life.

The problem, apart from finding the right path to the Forest, is that this place is full of dangers: large flocks of Tabacha dwell on the top of the pillars, looking for prey, giant scorpions and even worse things lurk among the rocks. Most importantly,

there are rumors of a mysterious wanderer, dressed in rags, who approaches the few travelers to ask them a riddle: if you don't know the answer, he takes your soul.

RAL VASHIRYA

Everybody knows the story of Kiramas' Folly (see *GE* page 43): the ambitious Priest Prince, in 2043 AF, led a massive naval expedition from Tricarnia to the Fallen Realm, intending to reconquer the ancestral land and to create a new Tricarnian base in the south of the world, but he failed miserably; his entire expedition, himself included, disappeared and never came back.

The reason is probably bad planning on Kiramas' part; he decided to land on the northern shore, where the ancient crumbling ruins are, and then go on, by land, toward the center of the Keron, facing terrible threats.

But there is another way to reach the heart of Keron if you are brave enough: there is a narrow cove, the Black Vein, nothing more than a crack in the plateau filled by the waters of the Dread Sea, which allows you sailing to a city, deep inland, called Ral Vashirya. If you pay heed to the stories told around the nomads' fires it has "white domes of alabaster, talking statues and temples with pillars of gold and silver".

But, as any learned man familiar with the Tricarnian tongue knows, "Ral" in ancient Keronian, means "port", and Vashirya was a city in the middle of a plateau. So what is it a "port" for?

In addition there are two other disturbing things about this topic.

The first is that, according to many stories, the mysterious Ancient Master (see page 94) dwells there, in a palace made of dreams and nightmares, plotting and scheming to extend his dominion over all of Keron.

The second is that the waters of the Black Vein are populated by terrible sea monsters: the crew of the Kyrosian ship *Fortune*, which was forced to enter the Vein to escape a storm, was attacked by a tentacled creature of the deeps, and only by chance, and the skill of the helmsman, did it manage to escape.

TAVERN TALES

Here are some stories the heroes might hear in a tavern, or around a campfire...

SILENT HALLS

Varasko is a caravan guard you can find, drinking too much, in any caravanserai on the road from Hillias to Teyerana. If you buy him a round he'll tell you the story of when, lost in a sandstorm south of Keron, he got separated from the rest of the caravan and fell into a ravine. There, luckily, he found an underground passage leading into the heart of the mountains, under the Fallen Realm.

You cannot believe what he found there, and you must buy him another round to hear this part of the story.

There is a buried city there, of polished white marble, untouched by time and plunderers. But the most impressive thing is that its old dwellers are still there, quietly sleeping on elaborate beds! Men and women, tall and pale, of a race you

have never seen. Varasko tried waking them up, but it was impossible. Ravenous and thirsty, he looked for some food, but he could not find anything. Then, passing near a temple, he found something.

At this point Varasko usually feels very thirsty, remembering that day, and asks for another round.

"I heard a bubbling coming from the opened portal," the caravan guard continues. "I entered the temple and I found a small fountain, bubbling with fresh water. I was going to sate my thirst, when I saw someone, a some sort of priest from his garments, sleeping deeply near it, an empty golden cup in his hand. So, do you know what I did?"

I fear that, to know the answer, you must order the tavern lady to bring Varasko *another* drink.

"Well, I picked up the cup, and I ran away, keeping my thirst! I am pretty sure it was that damned water that made all the people fall asleep! Do you want to know how I got away from that place?"

I was really interested, but sadly I had spent my last Moon, so I could not buy Varasko a last tankard.

But this is probably just a drunkard's story, isn't it?

TOWER OF YARAKA

In rare sunny days, when the sky is clear, you can see something glimmering on the top of the highest mountain of Keron, a spike of stone which the nomads call Yar Claw. The glimmering thing is an ancient Keronian Tower, the last remnant of an observatory, which miraculously survived

earthquakes and other disasters. It is the Tower of Yarak, or, in the ancient tongue, Tel Yarak.

There are several stories about this place, each creepier than the next. According to one of these, every twenty years, a human sacrifice of three virgins must be made in it, during the seventh full moon of the year, otherwise a door from another world will open and Yarak, father of all the Yarakans (see *BOD*, page 88) will come, to devour the world. Nobody, among the nomads, knows the true shape of Yarak exactly, nor what a "Yarakan" really is, but the tradition has been kept alive through generations by the Karani tribe, a clan of Black Nomads devoted to the tower.

Jilasco the Thief, a scoundrel famous in Hillias for his daring thefts (and his enormous boasts) told me one night that, several years ago, he sneaked into the tower looking for a particular jewel, the Right Hand of Yarak. He didn't find it, but stumbled on an ancient mechanism opening a secret door leading to a hidden stair. Curious, he followed it, and found a large underground room filled with big, round stones, covered in strange engravings.

They were too big for one man to carry, and obviously not precious, so he left them, went back and closed the passage.

The damned thief didn't want to tell me the exact location of the secret door, but maybe you are luckier: I haven't see him in a while, but I heard he was forced to join the Rover Guard, a mercenary company based on Teyerana, and that his company got lost in the Red Desert...

WELL OF NAO

Among the windswept ruins of an unknown city in western Keron, there is an ancient well engraved with Keronian runes, so old they cannot be read anymore. The ruins of the city are infested by ugly, scaly humanoids, raving for meat, but this isn't enough to stop the wanderers; the stories say, in fact, that there is something, or someone, dwelling in the well, which can answer any question, if you pose it in the right manner and are ready to pay the price, which isn't cheap.

Periodically warlocks or even common people take great risks to reach the well and ask something of the Being of the Well. Some of them even returned, alive, to tell the story, but trust me, it's not worth the trouble: I spoke with some of them and they are detached and aloof, as if they care for nothing in this world.

If questioned in more detail about this, they simply shrug and say "this is the price of Nao".

RUINS AND SECRETS GENERATOR

The Fallen Kingdom of Keron is a perfect place for pure exploration adventures: monsters, traps, puzzles and ancient relics await you among the crumbling ruins. Every step of a journey in this cursed land can uncover an old tomb, stir a pack of predators or maybe both!

If you, the GM, are in a hurry to prepare a memorable encounter, you can use this simple Ruins and Secrets Generator to

create an interesting situation for your players.

Simply draw three cards from the Action Deck, in order, and check the table below. The first card tells you the Place where the encounter is going to happen, the second one describes the Object of the encounter, while the last card details the Event itself.

If you draw a Joker, put it aside and redraw a card. Then, for each Joker drawn, run through the process again, trying to combine the two Encounters.

In the B&B tradition, the Generator is deliberately very generic, giving you only narrative structures you have to fill in. In certain cases, be ready to stretch the concepts to fit your story. Remember, generators are made to help you, so don't feel restrained by them. If you think that your encounter is improved by ignoring or changing one or more cards, do it!

Example. The GM draws a Five, a Deuce and another Deuce, resulting in: "In an abandoned village/camp a statue/object of art speaks ancient secrets." The GM thinks a bit and devises Gharvasha, a small, abandoned village of the Black Nomads where the heroes are forced to take shelter from a desert storm. There, in the chief's hut, there is ancient ebon statue, representing a woman with naked breasts. During the night the party sleeps while the statue whispers to them secret commands to go out and jump in a nearby crevasse, where the former inhabitants already lie dead. The statue represents an ancient Keronian princess, Yashira, and the nightly compulsions will continue till the heroes take the statue to the ruins of the palace where the woman lived, centuries ago...

RUINS AND SECRETS TABLE

Card	Place	Object	Event
2	In a fortress/castle...	... a statue/object of art...	... speaks ancient secrets.
3	In a fissure...	...a race of sub-humans...	... worships evil deities.
4	In a lost ship/caravan...	... a treasure...	... isn't what it appears.
5	In an abandoned village/ camp...	... a mad survivor...	... keeps imprisoned a thing that should never escape.
6	In a tower/temple...	... a trap...	... tries to seduce one of the heroes.
7	In an arena...	... a powerful sorcerer...	... makes you experience his own dreams.
8	In a place of forbidden marvels...	... a weapon of a past era...	... craves human flesh.
9	In a grotto...	... a gorgeous-looking woman...	... makes you travel.
10	In a library/temple...	... a pack of wild beasts...	... gives a great reward for a greater price.
J	In a forest/swamp...	... a tribe of Black Nomads...	... carefully spies before attacking.
Q	In a crumbling ruin...	... a mysterious device...	... takes you for the wrong person.
K	In a perfectly conserved building...	... a ghost of the past...	...hides a puzzle.
A	During a terrible natural event...	... a powerful undead...	... needs help.