

The Other Side of the Coin

An Extended Funnel OR a 3rd Level Adventure for DCC

“The harsh desert has been particularly cruel this year. Unseasonable dust storms have beaten the nameless, tiny oasis town into submission, and every night the hungry yawps of jackals can be heard beyond the oppressive blanket of pitch black darkness.

Your small group has been stranded here for too long and hopes are wearing thin, when the unlikely neighing of tired horses signals new travelers outside the inn. Maybe this is the way out you’ve been waiting for? Or at least a chance to recoup some of your losses through gainful employment...”

Module Introduction

“The Other Side of the Coin” is an extended funnel scenario written for the Atlanta Georgia DCC Playtest group, of which I had the honor of being a part of. As such it was written for the beta-version of DCC and with this re-write a few things have been tweaked to fit in better with the rules as released. I rely on the editorial oversight of my fellow Knights to further tweak as needed!

The idea came to me from one of my very, very first D&D adventures back in the spring of '81. Our smiling GM casually asked if our low level characters would be agreeable to guarding the horses of a higher level party... With bright eyes and no guile the eight of us joyfully agreed! Two of us even got out! Honestly my old mate Colin Hart (the DM of said bloodbath) was a DCC man even if he didn't know it!

The adventure was originally intended for 18-24 0-levels, although you could probably run it with 8-12 characters of 1st level as well. Alternately, you can weave the adventure into an existing campaign at around 3rd level, or use it as an introductory one-shot with premade characters (see *Appendix A* at the end of the document).

Editor’s Note

This is version 1.0 of the adventure. It has been edited and polished in close collaboration within the KitN Lance. Any feedback or questions should be directed to knightsinthenorth@gmail.com.

Adventure Start¹

Play starts in an oasis town in some suitable desert; the geography here is intentionally vague so that the module can be fitted into a world of the Judge’s choosing. The 0-level characters are townsmen of the village or perhaps travelers from nearby settlements.

There have been a lot of unseasonable dust storms of late that have disrupted the usual caravans that come through the village. By the time the adventure begins the locals and any incidental travelers have been stranded in this gods forsaken wilderness for too long.

The characters are bored, half starved (there is only so many ways you can cook figs after all), and desperate for a change; or at least the chance to earn some coin to pay for a trip out on the next caravan to

- Giles Othen

¹ See notes on using the adventure for higher level characters in *Appendix A*.

brave the dune. Luckily, the Sponsors ride into town, offering just that: a chance to alleviate the endless sandy boredom of the oasis and fair pay for a few days work (of course, not everything is quite as simple as it seems at first).

Adventure Structure

This is a point-crawl style adventure through the desert to a small mountain there, and back again. Refer to the map of the desert (Map A) for the basic structure of the trek. The events below are divided into days, with descriptions for the challenges and dangers for each. As mentioned, the Judge should feel free to set the adventure in any suitable location within their own campaign world.

The journey out to the basilisk lair – I mean the *flower bed* – is intended to be heavy on description but fairly bare of actual danger except as noted below in the daily descriptions. It is impressed on the Judge to ham up the fearsome effects of the howling wind, the fervent heat and the eeriness of the desert on the 0-level proto-adventurers. Every hour should feel threatening and oppressive, even though the real dangers are just lurking around the corner.

A Note on Rationing Water

The adventure takes place in a desert, and as such water is an important topic for guaranteed survival. Throughout the module, water is tracked in daily rations. One ration equals to roughly ~2 ½ litres: people require one ration per day, and animals must have two to survive.

Unless the characters act in a completely stupid manner there *should* be enough water available to keep the caravan safe and functional, but Judge's are encouraged to emphasize the dearth of the life saving liquid to keep the players on their toes. Thirsty and

dry characters and animals suffer the effects of exhaustion (suffering -1d to all rolls) before expiring.

Day & Night 0 – The Oasis

Read the following to the group at the start of the adventure:

“The days have been long. It’s been months since the last caravan braved the desert heat and brought either fresh food or news to the small oasis village you call your current home.

Then four strangers ride into town. Three on horseback, the fourth a halfling driving a wagon pulled by two mules, with a pony tethered to the back of the wagon.

The first of these figures is a tall imposing human, heavily armed and armored in black plated mail. His only discernible feature is the spike of red beard that pokes out from beneath his great helm.

The next is a lithe scantily clad elf woman, but as she turns to face you; you see a terrible scar crosses her face down between the eyes and across one cheek. She silently challenges any of you to dare mention her disfigurement...

The last is a young man, his features dark and tanned like any local, who sits easily in the saddle of his horse surveying the crowd of onlookers and urchins that have gathered at their arrival. His armor is supple and gleams in the daylight. It appears to be of leather, but as you look you see it is sewn of tiny lizard skins!

The young man speaks a mumbled word to the halfling in the wagon and they smile as they head to the Inn of Seven Palms and demand rooms.

Later, along with many other curious folk, you find yourself in the common room of the inn hoping to

learn more about these dramatic strangers. Your patience is soon rewarded as the young man in the snakeskin armor puts in an appearance: "Good people! My companions and I are seeking a few hardy souls to guard our mounts as we trek a day or so into the wilderness here. If there are any such in this place I invite you to share a drink with me in the far table! There I may tell you more without straining my voice to such a large crowd!"

With a jaunty smile and a slight bow he slips away to take up the best seat in one of the Inns many semi-enclosed booths."

Judges should pause here to allow the 0-levels to organize themselves and make a plan for negotiation.

Should additional incentive be needed to goad the group onward the Judge can leverage the dire straits of the village: the innkeeper reports that the wine cellar is officially dry! Once the characters choose to bite the lead, transition on to *The Offer* below.

The Offer

The young man, one Sharridin Al-Enber, explains that his group is looking for a rare plant said to grow in the hills about this place. The researches of their elven companion suggest the rocky outcrops nearby may hold such a plant and they wish to investigate, but the rumours about packs of wild jackals, desert centipedes and the like mean that they have chosen to hire additional guards to protect their camp and animals during the trek.

The pay is 2 silver pieces per day² – a fortune to the commoners – plus they will outfit any who need it in desert robes and supply each guard with three extra large water skins (~5 litres each, given the heat of the region this is enough for one person for 6 days

² Judges should fit the pay to their own world economy. The intention here is to offer what is basically double daily pay for a professional guard as initial payment.

in total). They are even willing to provide weapons to fend off the vermin of the desert, and allow the hirelings to keep all of this equipment after the work is complete.

A further a bounty of 1 gp per jackal will be paid to the slayer, and at least double that amount should the guards dispose of other such menaces like the sand centipedes that they have heard of.

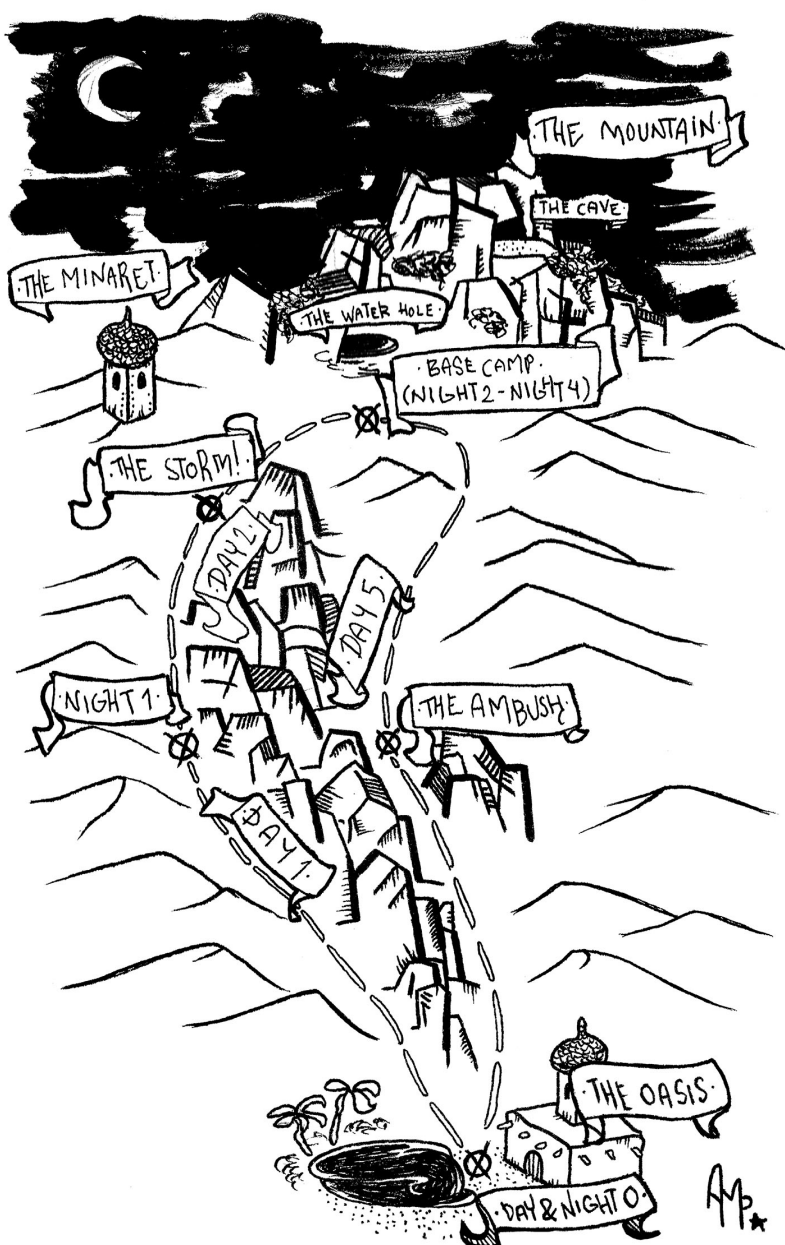
The weapons on offer are 4 short bows with 12 arrows each, 2 small steel shields, 8 curved daggers, and spears for anyone without another weapon. All of the weapons are of average quality, but their upkeep has obviously been ignored for a long while: bowstrings are loose, causing a -1 to hit with the weapons, and both the daggers and spears are rusty and dull, suffering a -1 penalty to damage. 0-levels with suitable occupations or tools can certainly repair these conditions while traveling: all it requires is a little skill, time and elbow grease.

Should the players organize and attempt to negotiate a better price Al-Enber is prepared to offer a bonus of up to 600 gp (or 100 gp per player) to be divided among the guards should the mission be successful. Al-Enber obviously wants to get the best deal possible, but is quite ready to negotiate and haggle, as that is the local custom.

Once a deal has been made, the adventurers withdraw to rest for the night, and suggest the prospective guards do the same. The caravan will move out at first light the following morning.

Judge's Introduction – The Real Deal

The above is simply a cover story of course. There is scarcely a way for the 0-levels to know it beforehand, but the adventuring party's (hereafter known as the Sponsors) actual motivation is a little more complex than they let out.



Map A: The trek through the desert

The Sponsors' wagon contains the petrified body of the party's fifth member Nocli Hartstone the Wizard, along with the his still active, powerful familiar (see below). This brave fellow saved the group by spellburning heavily when a gorgon surprised them a short while ago. His patron has allowed him to communicate his messages through the familiar, and has declared that a serum made from the eye of a basilisk will restore the wizard to health. So, can you guess what lives nearby?

According to the elf's research a basilisk lives a days journey into the wilds from the Oasis. The players' "guards" - while doing just that job - are also considered expendable bait to draw the creature out once the caravan gets near its lair.

The Sponsors' are not totally heartless, and fully intend to honour their contracts with any survivors after the journey. Any losses among the hired guards are simply seen as necessary casualties, and the Sponsors' may even include a bonus for good work for those who make it through the mission.

If the players try and find out more about their prospective employers, they should absolutely be allowed to try! Al-Enber is jovial and friendly, but obviously sly and controlled in what he lets on. Cherenkoff, the cleric of Amun Tor, is dour and pious, and little can be gleaned from his steely manner and Sortayen the Elf is aloof and dismissive of any commoners who approach her. Perhaps the best chance to rub elbows with the Sponsors is through making friendly with Hambol Silkweaver the halfling, who is as partial to the finer things in life as any member of his race.

It should be noted however that all of the Sponsors are fiercely loyal to their petrified friend, and will not intentionally divulge the true goal of their search, although clever players may certainly learn hints that all is not as it seems on the trek.

Both the halfling and the elf keep a careful eye on the groups' covered wagon, and the wizard's familiar remains by its master's side at all times. Any 0-level managing to peek into the wagon is likely to be caught and pressed into silent service either by hook

or by crook. The Sponsors will only resort to killing their prospective guards if no other option seems to be available to them, but will certainly do so should it be necessary to keep their secrets.

Scoundrel, greater wildcat familiar: *Init:* +6; *Atk:* bite +6 (1d4+2) or spell; *AC:* 14; *HD:* 4d4+4; *HP:* 12; *MV:* 40'; *Act:* 2d20; *SP:* sneak + 12; can cast *Ventriloquism*, *Cantrip* and *Color spray* with +4 to the spell check; telepathic link with Nocli Hartstone; *Saves:* Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +3; *AL:* N.

Day 1 – Onwards to Adventure!

The first leg of the journey is still fairly close to “civilization” and thus quite peaceful. The caravan treks along a rocky path only partially covered in sand: this is the only way available as the Sponsors seem intent to keep their wagon with them in the desert. Although not completely covered in dunes, the path is still rocky and difficult, and the wagon gets stuck every so often. The Judge should throw in a few easy (DC 1d10) skill checks to keep the caravan going and to break the monotony – after all, the hired help should earn their keep!

Observant player characters (with suitable bonuses for occupations) may notice a pack of jackals shadowing the caravan towards the end of the day. Hopefully, this will get there guard up for the night to come!

Night 1 – Who Let the Dogs In?

Allow the players to build a camp, settle in and divide guard shifts as they choose. The Sponsors set camp in and around the wagon and expect the 0-levels to handle the tasks related to the upkeep of the animals and camping in general. The Sponsors will not take part in guard shifts, and will generally keep amongst themselves for the night.

At some point a small pack of 15 jackals will attack the group. They will try and strip an animal away from the caravan. The pack will attack player characters if they try to stop them, as the beasts are unusually aggressive due to being under the thrall of a wandering jackalwere (see *Day 5* below for notes on him). Even if driven off they will stay near the camp for the remainder of the night, howling and barking in the night.

Hungry jackals (15): *Init:* +1; *Atk:* bite +1 (1d3); *AC:* 13; *HD:* 1d4; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20; *Saves:* Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +1; *AL:* C.

Day 2 – The Wind and Ruin

At the start of the day, the Sponsors admonish or commend the guards for the previous night's labours – efficient guards can expect a bonus to be paid immediately as per previous description, and the cost of lost animals may be deducted from the pay of particularly lax guards. In any case, the Sponsors explain that the group should reach their destination by midday.

However, as fate would have it, at around 10 AM a sandstorm whips in out of nowhere! Player characters must make DC 12 Ref saves to avoid taking 1 point of damage from the stinging sand or tripping onto rocks as the wind buffets them. Clever reactions, equipment and the use of occupational skills may mitigate this at Judge's discretion.

When the storm passes in about an hour and a half two things that will change the complexion of the mission will have occurred.

Firstly, the shifting winds have uncovered the top of a sunken minaret roughly a quarter mile (~½ km) from where they stand.

Secondly, and more seriously, one of the mules is found to have slipped and gashed open two of the

great water skins it was carrying, reducing the overall water supply of the trip to about 4 days worth. This is not overly serious, as the oasis is but a day or so from the rocky peak where the caravan is headed, but one can never take chances with water in a desert, as we all know.

The animals, especially the mule, will need to be properly looked after and cared for before they can carry on. The Sponsors will suggest that it might be worth looking around the area about the minaret for a water source. If any of the party are feeling particularly bold, the Sponsors will say they are willing to allow up to half of them to go investigate if the other half stays to care for the animals.

The Minaret

Refer to Map B for a cross section of the minaret. Only the top two chambers in the slender tower are accessible without extreme measures. The only visible window is about 14' (~4.5 m) above the sandy ground (fall from here and you only take 1d3 damage due to the soft sand). Once inside, the small tower room is found windswept and empty save for a single dessicated skeleton clad in tatters of fine robes. There is nothing of value in this topmost room apart for the skeleton's single gold tooth (worth 1 gp). A spiral stair leads downwards to the next area.

The lower room is filled 3' (~1 m) deep with very fine sand. Lots of broken items and equipment including swords, bows, arrows, bits of armor and so on can be seen sticking out of the sand. A detailed search will take an hour and yield some sort of usable result, roll a d6 for each person searching:

1. An intact, small silver weapon. Scimitar, mace, dagger or similar.
2. A bronze half eggshell, roughly the size of a soup-bowl. If this result is rolled twice the other half will be found as well, completing the magical artefact (see *Egg of Incubation* below).
3. An ivory scroll case (worth at least 10 gp) containing one 1st level arcane spell chosen at random. Of course, the scroll case is trapped: unscrewing the end causes a spring to puff a blast of very ancient and no longer viable contact poison over the hands of the person opening it (DC 10 Ref save to avoid). Although inert, the poison still has enough kick to cause a disgusting, blistering rash should the save fail.



Map B: The minaret cross section

4. A horn composite bow which always applies the wielder's Strength modifier to the damage inflicted with each shot (in addition to the usual Agility modifier bonus).
5. A rotten quiver with 8 well-made arrows still inside. The arrows are magical (see *Faithful Arrows* below).
6. A large, hanging lamp made of bronze and violet desert glass, worth some 15 gp.

However, per person per hour of searching there is a 1 in 6 chance of disturbing the sidewinder snake that makes its home in this ruin! If the characters take a real good look before they rummage in the fine sand they should be able to see its curious, rippling tracks here and there and be forewarned. The snake will try to bite at least once when startled, slithering to safety if threatened. Judges should also keep track of the time spent here: this is a side path, and the 0-levels should return to the caravan soon, lest it continues on without them.

Sidewinder snake: *Init:* +5 (see special); *Atk:* bite +3 (1d3 + poison); *AC:* 12; *HD:* 1d4; *HP:* 3; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20; *SP:* always surprises targets; poison DC 15 Fort save or 2d6 STA damage, if STA brought to 0 target dies; will attempt to flee and hide if attacked; *Saves:* Fort +0, Ref +5, Will +1; *AL:* N.

The Egg of Incubation: A bronze egg, roughly the size of a man's head. The artefact has a few uses, most of them not inherently apparent.

- Any owner of the artefact will find that when the halves are brought together, the egg conjures a small animal (up to housecat size). The owner of the artefact has no control over the conjured critter, although only 1d5 critters can be conjured per day.
- If the summoned creature is used as part of a sacrifice to cast a spell, it provides a +2 bonus to any spell cast.
- Extended study will allow an arcane caster to learn the spell *Find familiar* from the intricate magics woven into the eggshell.

- Should the Egg be used as a spell focus for a *Find familiar* ritual, the caster may choose the type of familiar they gain from the casting.

Faithful Arrows: A well-made set of eight magical arrows.

- The arrows return to the quiver of their owner when shot, unless the attack is a critical success.
- If the arrows crit, they remain in the wound causing 1 HP of additional damage per round until removed or the target dies. After this they return to the shooter once more.

Night 2 – The Water Fight

The rest of the day is uneventful, and as the sun is setting the caravan arrives at the base of a rocky outcrop approximately some $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile (~1 km) in diameter. The small mountain is some 150' (~45 m) high, with rocky paths and scrubby plant life crisscrossing its sides.

At one end, a small wellspring pool is discovered half hidden under an overhang. This pool can supply 24 rations of water per day. Humans, elves, dwarves and so on need 1 ration per day, and animals require 2 each for convenience. Basically, it's not quite enough to keep the whole group self sufficient but would greatly ease their dependence on their carried supplies.

The Sponsors will point out that all sorts of wild animals will no doubt come to drink for this pool at night, and especially as their own water reserves have been depleted they demand that the pool be defended to make sure the caravan survives.

The Sponsors will set up their base camp just a stone's throw away from the pool, where the guards from either the pool or the main camp can be swiftly reinforced by the other if needed. The party must

decide who is stationed where to keep watch through the night.

Sometime in the night 6 sand centipedes will erupt out of the ground and charge for the water hole. They can consume one days ration of water in two rounds. They will not attack anything until one of their number is killed and will concentrate on drinking first tonight. If left unmolested they will each drink for 2d3 rounds (potentially consuming 6-18 rations of water in total) then burrow back into the sand.

Sand centipede (6): *Init:* +3; *Atk:* bite +1 (1 + poison); *AC:* 13; *HD:* 1d3; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20; *SP:* poison DC 10 Fort save or 1d6 STR damage, if STR brought to 0 target dies; will attempt to flee and hide if attacked; *Saves:* Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; *AL:* N.



Day 3 – Picking Flowers

No encounters will occur during the day. The Sponsors will supposedly spend some time looking for plants and suggest the player characters also comb the area for blue flowering shrubs. In actual fact they hope the party will stumble across the lair of the Basilisk for them!

If the party search then they will find some small scrubby trees and plants (never any blue flowering

ones, curiously enough). If the summit of the rocky hill is climbed then near the top a small cave opening will be discovered on the far side of the mountain, just a few feet from the path leading to the very peak. Should the characters traverse the rough regions nearby, Judges should have any 0-levels with suitable professions roll checks for noticing the tracks of a large creature with razor sharp claws. (The DC of the check should be reduced for detailed searches, and returning here on further days will of course increase the chance of finding the cave mouth.)

The Basilisk's Lair

Refer to the map of the cave (Map C) for details of the lair. The rock of the lair is shot through with dirty veins of quartz, and a detailed search in any area may yield a purer crystal that could fetch up to 10 silver (only one such will be found in any given section).

Any dwarves entering the lair notice the sultry tang of gold on their nose: this cave could become a gold mine of decent yeild, should it be mined with proper dwarven rigour!

Area 1: The Entrance:

This passage is very small, only about 4' (~1.2 m) high and wide

until Area 3. Any combat or other violent maneuvers here could risk injury to taller characters. In such situations make a DC 12 AGI check or be knocked unconscious.

Area 2: The Pool:

This small seepage pool is one reason the basilisk doesn't come out of its lair every night. The pool contains enough water to account for one day's ration in total, and refills each night. When even a

single mouthful of its water is drunk it has some peculiar effects on those so doing: upon the first drink on any given day each player must roll 1d4 (drinking again on another day has additional effects, see below):

1. Imbiber permanently loses -2 STR, but gains +2 INT as a trade.
2. Imbiber permanently loses -2 AGI but gains +2 STA instead.
3. Imbiber's eyes take on a silvery hue and they become permanently immune to the basilisk's gaze and other similar effects.
4. Imbiber vividly hallucinates of a Sleeping God, who rolls over each night and lifts the

sun into a blue sky in the morning. Judges should ham up the description each time this happens to imply the deity is becoming more restless the more times folks "dream" of it...

If a character drinks multiple times on the same day the water has no further effect, but the magic changes each day: a second drink on *another day* permanently removes any other effect AND is treated as result 4. If a character drinks a third time on a different they may get a different effect but any effect they lost can't be restored and is instead treated as result 4.



Map C: The basilisk's cave

Basically, the best bet is to drink once and leave it at that. At most the players will be at the mountain for three days, so they can have multiple shots if they must. Naturally if they come back after this adventure is over there may well have been a rock slide or something to cover the magic pool up...

Area 3: The Scratching Post

Shards of crystal litter the floor at this point. An examination of the nearby rock will reveal that deep furrows have been scratched in the stuff fairly recently by long talons.

Area 4: The Lost One

A petrified human thief lies slumped against the wall here. His arms are held up in front of his face and one hand is clenched around a 100 gp diamond: the poor fellow had decided to hide his stolen loot in a MUCH worse location than the local jail ever could be!

Although petrified, he still hears, sees and feels, and if the characters decide to break his hand to get the gem then... Ouch! Maybe he'll revive one day and come looking for the people who destroyed his livelihood!

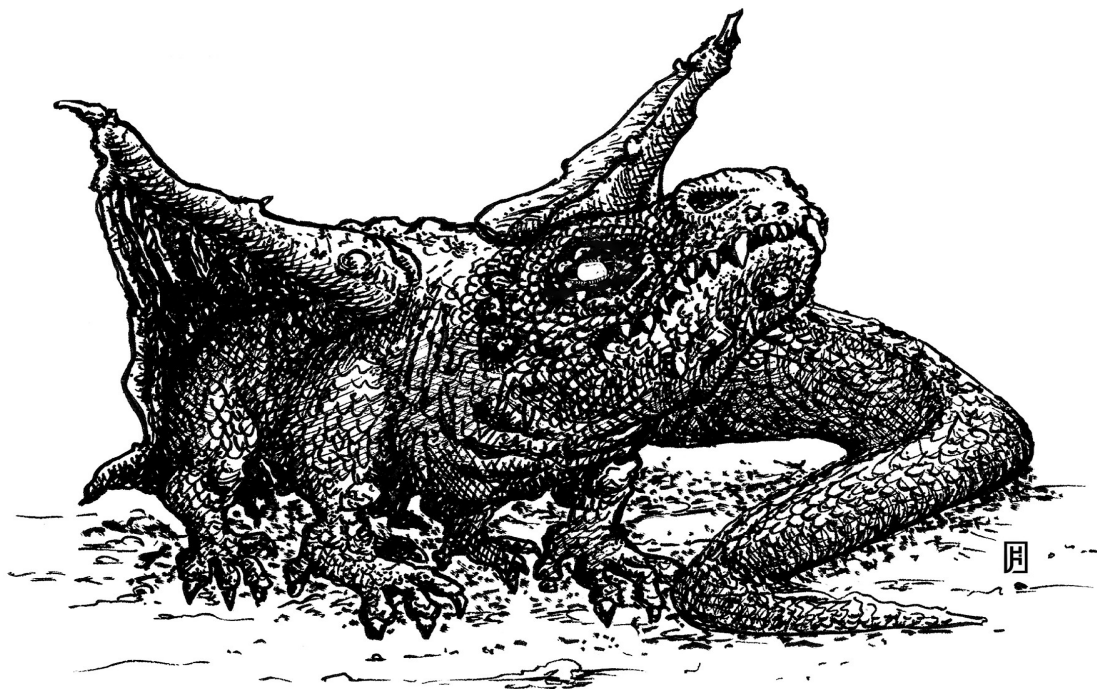
Area 5: The Lair!

To the party's dismay, a greater basilisk lies here half asleep!

The creature's gaze is particularly powerful. Should its gaze attack be successful, the target character must roll a save (on their best save modifier) or be paralyzed. Next round on the action of the basilisk they must roll a further save (Fort DC 15) or be permanently petrified due to the foul magics of the basilisk's gaze!

Petrified characters can only be returned to a fleshy form by an unguent brewed from the eyes of this creature (or a basilisk of a similar stature), but if they pass the save they are free to act as normal.

The Greater Basilisk: *Init:* -1; *Atk:* bite +2 (1d10) or claw +5 (1d3) or gaze +6 (special); *AC:* 16; *HD:* 5d8; *HP:* 30; *MV:* 40'; *Act:* 2d20; *SP:* perfect darkvision; gaze DC 15 save on best mod, petrified/paralyzed; will gaze + claw until a target is paralyzed and then bite the paralyzed target; if dropped below half HP will become frenzied and just bite and claw; *Saves:* Fort +7, Ref +1, Will +2; *AL:* C.



Area 6: The Hermit

Still lying in a stone niche bed is the original "owner" of these caves. Clad in tattered robes and dessicated flesh, the remains of the nameless hermit cleric are very threadbare. The corpse lacks a jaw and has obviously suffered the toils of the arid desert air for a very long time.

Despite its mummified appearance, the creature is simply an animate skeleton. However, this should not be readily apparent to most inexperienced would-be adventurers, and Judges should feel free to keep the players guessing when it comes to the nature of this undead apparition (suitable occupations and backgrounds should certainly help in the identification of the creature).

If disturbed the skeleton will NOT immediately attack, but instead will stand gesticulating at those who have trespassed on him and keep pointing towards the way out stridently!

Under ther remains of his pillow is half a torn open book. This will yield TWO random spells of level 1-3 (can be treated as a scroll) if translated and studied well. Notes on the past of this rocky outcropping as a bulwark against the deep reaches can also be gleaned from the ruined book, should it be studied in enough detail.

If attacked or the gong goes off in Area 7 the skeleton will awaken and charge to attack. If the only the basilisk is attacked the hermit will not awaken unless personally disturbed by something.

If "destroyed" the bones will slowly crawl back together in 2d4 hours and reassemble. Each time they do this they lose 1 hp permanently. When the skeleton loses its last hp the poor old thing is finally gone. Until that the Judge should feel free to use the returning undead monstrosity to add extra tension in the camp.

Skeleton of the Hermit Priest: *Init:* +0; *Atk:* claw +2 (1d4 + 1 pt STR damage); *AC:* 14; *HD:* 1d8; *HP:* 8; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20; *SP:* half damage from piercing and slashing weapons; reassembles after destroyed (see above); *Saves:* Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +4; *AL:* L.

Area 7: The Chapel

This room is very old and dusty but holds all the trappings of a shrine to those that dare poke around in here. A total of seven square plaques of what will be discovered as electrum are attached to the walls by deep screws. The plaques are 5' in diameter (~1 ½ m) and as a collection are worth 175 gp with each one being about 25 gp in value. They have star maps etched into them but have no magical or occult power, unless the Judge wishes to utilize them as a quest hook for further adventure. For more materialistic delvers getting the plaques through the cave's tiny entrance undamaged is a much more pertinent challenge, as is carrying them to civilization safely. Hacking the metal to bits requires suitable tools and considerable effort, and will devalue the treasure by at least half.

On the altar stone made of the best quartz in the cave lies the hermit priest's old ceremonial robe. This is made from a gold-embroidered cloth and is worth a fortune to the correct dealer. In theory the robe has a value of 350 gp but that's IF you could find the right buyer. Locally, the best you could get would be one tenth that.

In the pocket of the robe is a vial of holy water that has distilled itself into a tincture of healing. The potion will restore 4d2 points when drunk, or it can instead be sipped for 1d2 points 4 times.

All this treasure is great, but not quite unguarded due to the animated skeleton and basilisk lurking nearby. Adding to the party's trouble is a large brass gong, carefully balanced on the robes so that a DC 15 AGI check is needed to lower it without making a

great noise which will surely bring the basilisk and the skeleton a-running!

The skeleton hermit may try to fight the monstrous basilisk first if it is not molested by the party. Naturally, the skeleton can't be turned to stone or paralyzed. In the unlikely case it survives the basilisk it will continue to attack anyone still in the area.

Finally, behind the altar is a secret panel with some more treasure (finding it requires a detailed search or a DC 18 check). In it, 10 platinum pieces of an ancient and unknown design lie behind a poison needle trap. The poison has long since gone off, although the players obviously don't need to know this.

“Poison” needle trap: DC 18 perception check to notice if searching for traps; when sprung causes 1 point of damage along with stinging pain, DC 18 Ref save to avoid.

Area 8: Sinkhole.

This deep ragged shaft seems to go on forever, although a ledge some 20' below reveals that it has been previously used as a privy for basilisk, and possibly the hermit before it.

Falling in will cause 2d6 damage for landing on the ledge, and a further DC 5 Ref save to avoid falling down into the yawning chasm. Additionally, the ledge is covered in the highly corrosive droppings of the basilisk: anyone falling in will have all of the clothes and other worn equipment made of soft materials entirely destroyed (this includes items of leather and wood). Climbing up (or down) requires a DC 5 AGI check as well to avoid falling further down.

The bottomless pit itself stretches way down into the underworld below the desert, to the subterranean reaches from which the basilisk originally rose to terrorize the region. Judges should feel free to use this entrance to the deep reaches as a future adventure locus. Should anyone fall in, well... They're dead.

There is nothing to find on the ledge, and absolutely nothing good can come out of rummaging around in the basilisk's privy, but adventurers are nothing if not inquisitive...

Night 3 – The Quiet Dark?

Tonight nearby creatures will again visit the waterhole. Roll d6:

1. Everything is quiet in the night. Nothing happens.
2. Scoundrel, the greater wildcat familiar of the petrified wizard (see *Judge's Introduction* above) will sneak to the waterhole to drink and clean itself. If accosted it will flee and disappear into the night, sneaking back to the wagon to guard its owner. In the unlikely situation that it is noticed it will defend itself or entreat with the characters as the situation merits. In any case, the tracks of a large cat will be found near the waterhole in the morning.
3. Like the previous night, the sand centipedes return (see *Night 2* above).
4. A pack of 8 hungry jackals (see *Night 1* above) tries to drink at the waterhole or attacks the pack animals in the camp (50/50 chance).
5. The unlucky dead claimed by the desert stir in the vicinity of the camp. Three weather beaten skeletons appear quietly near the guards, and sluggishly gesticulate for the characters to leave the mountain. If left well enough alone the revenants will recede back into the desert before dawn, if disturbed the creatures will attack (use the stats for the skeleton hermit in *Area 6* above; these skeletons have 3 HP each and will not reassemble after being destroyed).
6. The basilisk itself comes out to drink! The great beast (see *Area 5* above for details) will not attack unless accosted, and will simply

meander to the waterhole, drink its fill and leave. Characters would do well to rouse the Sponsors before disturbing the creature!

Day 4 – Picking MORE Flowers

The day begins much like the previous one. If the party has not found the cave yet they will be strenuously encouraged to explore the top of the mountain for “blue flowers”. If the Sponsors are made aware of the cave they and they will also show up this time, suggesting that a trap is set for whatever beast lairs in the tunnel. If characters volunteer to go in they won't stop them, but they will not go in themselves, as they know what's most likely in there!

Judges should allow the players to plan their trap as best they can. The Sponsors will show some interest in the proceedings, although they won't deign to join in any manual labour: they are paying the work after all. Unless somehow driven from its lair during the day, the basilisk will come out the following night.

Night 4 – The Showdown

If the basilisk has not yet been dealt with then it will come out to the water hole tonight. If this happens, a pack of 6 sand centipedes will opportunistically join in the melee (see *Night 2* above). If the party has prepared a trap near the cave mouth things may go differently: in this case, resolve the trap and figure out the events of the remaining night using the notes for the previous one (see *Night 3*; should the basilisk result be rolled it appears at the water hole, eluding the trap somehow).

The Sponsors will actually lead the attack on the “rock lizard” as they call it, but will make sure any missile wielders in the party support them. The party's melee fighters will be tasked with defeating the centipedes then joining in the fight with the lizard-beast.

This will certainly be a battle royal, and Judges should recall at all times that the Sponsors will be playing it very safe and trying to get the hired help to do the dangerous stuff.

The Sponsor cleric Cherenkoff will try and save anyone that is hurt (Sponsors first, of course). Sortayen the Elf immediately gets to work to make the anti-petrification serum (as the basilisk eyes must be fresh for this to be possible). She can generate 1d3 doses per harvested eye. She may be open to try it out on a petrified character if enough doses are created, and may also restore particularly well-performed characters with any surplus doses once Nocli Hartstone has been turned to flesh first.

Day 5 – The Last Turn of the Screw

Once the basilisk has been dealt with, the Sponsors will hasten home back towards the oasis. Depending on the party's attitude and performance, they may be open to offering bonus pay to the survivors, and as described above may even offer to save petrified 0-levels should the situation allow.

Despite being turned to flesh, Nocli Hartstone is still recuperating from his previous spellburning efforts. He will not leave the wagon, nor will the Sponsors reveal his presences to the characters. Whether the Sponsors give any explanation beyond “obviously we were mistaken, there are no rare flowers here” is left up to the Judge.

As the party will get back to their home oasis by nightfall, the last event of this adventure depends on what they did in the first encounter.

Optional Ending 1:

If the party slew all the jackals in the first encounter (see *Night 1* above), Wadi the jackalwere will not be prepared for them. He will accidentally stumble across their camp in human form, and being a consummate actor, will go into a big showy

expression of thanking the gods that somebody found him as his own camel was supposedly just lost in the recent sandstorm.

Wadi will beg hospitality from the camp, to which the Sponsors will agree to with some reluctance. He will single out a person in the camp (at Judge's discretion this may be a Sponsor rather than a player character) and attempt to get them away from the group alone. If he succeeds in this ruse, he will attempt to use his sleep gaze upon the poor fool, and carrying them off to eat later. If he cannot do this he will simply shrug and disappear into the night rather than risk a full scale battle.

Optional Ending 2:

If even a single jackal escaped the first encounter (see *Night 1* above), then the jackalwere will have had some days to prepare of the group's return.

A few miles out of the oasis town, in a natural choke point, the ground will open up to a 20' pit, and the first rider (random Sponsor) will fall in. Both rider and horse take the usual damage, and are unable to get out without help.

A double sized pack of 30 jackals will then attack from all sides and attempt to panic a horse to drive it off for running down later. While the jackals are doing that the jackalwere will pop up from cover in human form, shooting poisoned arrows at the defenders, targeting one at a time. Between shots he will duck down out of line of sight and using his powers shape shift into jackal shape to move to another location for a new shot. If a defender closes in with him he will use his gaze to try and sleep them and carry them off for later devouring, leaving the fight. Similarly, if he gets to below half HP or half the jackals are killed he will abort the attack.

The jackalwere is a murderous magical beast, able to take a human form to further effect mischief on the world. He is immune to damage from all sources

apart for fire, magic and cold iron. He can change between human and jackal form at will. Note that due to the powerful magical nature of the were-beast, the chances are the Sponsors will need to intervene in this fight as it is very unlikely that the surviving 0-levels can stand up to the jackalwere!

When attacking, the jackalwere is equipped with a shortbow and 20 poisoned arrows. He carries a mere 30 silver on him, but if his lair (a decrepit tent some half a mile distant) is found it holds an additional 500 cp and stolen goods to the value of 200 sp.

Hungry jackals (30): *Init:* +1; *Atk:* bite +1 (1d3); *AC:* 13; *HD:* 1d4; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20; *Saves:* Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +1; *AL:* C.

Wadi, murderous jackalwere: *Init:* -1; *Atk:* bite +3 (2d4) or bow +3 (1d6 + poison) or gaze +4 (special); *AC:* 14; *HD:* 4d4; *HP:* 12; *MV:* 40'; *Act:* 1d20; *SP:* perfect darkvision; gaze DC 10 Will save or fall in deep natural sleep; 20 poison arrows, DC 15 Fort save or 2d6 STR damage, if STR brought to 0 target dies; only suffers damage from fire, magic or cold iron; may change form at will; *Saves:* Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2; *AL:* C.

Epilogue

After the jackalwere attack, one way or another the party (or such as survives of it) are home free. All rewards promised will be duly given to the survivors. Depending on performance the Sponsors may offer further employment or suitable training to 1st level (see *Appendix S* below for the details of the Sponsors).

As this adventure was originally the springboard to a new campaign these connections provided a decent enough justification to get the surviving characters up to speed for further adventures.

APPENDIX A:

Alternate Adventure Start

Although the module is originally intended as a funnel adventure for poor, unlucky gongfarmers, it can be utilized as a 3rd level adventure for seasoned delvers. In this case, replace the group of sponsoring adventurers with the player characters, with the Judge (or mayhaps a new player) running the 0-levels.

In this case, the leveled adventurers have been promised a reward for saving the petrified wizard (see *Judge's Notes* at the beginning of the document). He has communicated his plan to them via his familiar: travel to the desert, hire a group of villagers to help finding the basilisk, kill it, and complete a ritual to concoct an antidote for the wizard's condition.

The catch here is that the ritual requires a certain number of chanting voices, and the basilisk eyes must be used immediately after harvesting lest they spoil. The hiring 0-levels function as assistance, bait and ritual choir all in once. Should enough of them survive the trip, that is: the ritual to make the antidote for petrification requires at least 12 chanting voices to repeat a certain phrase during the brewing of the antidote, and careless Sponsors may find their best designs foiled by the cruel winds of the desert.

Finally, the module can also be used as a one-shot introductory adventure for 4-6 3rd level characters. Pre-made character sheets for the four Sponsors mentioned in the module, along with two additional bonus Sponsors, are included in *Appendix S*. If ran in this fashion follow the above notes for higher level play, although if running the module for inexperienced players it may be astute to leave the swarm of gongfarmers at the oasis and forego the challenge of keeping them alive for the dangerous trek through the desert.

In either case, the basic structure of events remains the same and any further modifications to the challenges below are left up to the Judge's discretion.

APPENDIX S:

The Sponsors

The cynical band of adventurers at the root of the adventure is deliberately left a bit vague. Ideally, they should be used as the deus ex machina if the party gets in too deep. Despite setting up the locals for a disagreeable mission they are not evil, and will attempt to do "the right thing" over all. Below you can find the descriptions of the Sponsors if used as NPCs for a standard run of the module. On the following pages there are full character sheets of all of the Sponsors (along with a couple of extra characters), for use if running the adventure as a 3rd level DCC one-shot.

Sharridin Al-Enber, the Desert Warrior: *Init:* +5; *Atk:* scimitar +2+d7* (1d7+1+d7) or thrown dagger +d7* (1d4+1d7) ; *AC:* 14; *HD:* 5d12; *HP:* 39; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20+1d14; *SP:* has a d7 Deed die, as per the DCC warrior rules; *Saves:* Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +2; *AL:* L.

Sortayen the Elf: *Init:* +0; *Atk:* poisoned dart +2 (d4+poison); *AC:* 12; *HD:* 3d6; *HP:* 12; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20; *SP:* poisoned darts, DC 10 Fort save or 1d6 extra damage; casts at +5, knows *Invoke patron: Azi Dahaka, Cantrip, Magic missile, Snake trick, Phantasm, Mirror image*; *Saves:* Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +0; *AL:* L.

Hambol Silkweaver, a halfling: *Init:* +0; *Atk:* dagger (melee or thrown) +3 (1d4); *AC:* 12; *HD:* 4d6; *HP:* 18; *MV:* 20'; *Act:* 1d20 OR 2d16 in combat; *SP:* can share Luck with others, +2 per point, 16 Luck to use during adventure; *Saves:* Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +5; *AL:* C.

Cherenkoff the Cleric: *Init:* +0; *Atk:* battleaxe +3 (d10) OR spell (see below); *AC:* 17; *HD:* 3d8; *HP:* 20; *MV:* 30'; *Act:* 1d20; *SP:* casts at +4, knows *Blessing, Darkness, Detect Evil, Detect magic, Food of the gods, Holy sanctuary, Divine symbol, Lotus stare, Restore vitality*; *Saves:* Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +3; *AL:* N.
