

DAVAE BREON JAXON'S

# CINEMATIC ENVIRONS

DESERT WASTES

CRITICAL HIT  
  
PUBLISHING

# CREDITS

**Writing:** Davae Breon Jaxon, Alex Guillotte, Rob Davis

**Rules Development:** Davae Breon Jaxon

**Design & Layout:** Alex Guillotte

**Editing:** Alex Guillotte, Rob Davis

**Art Director & Illustrations:** Alex Guillotte

# INTRODUCTION

The material in this book is intended to add to the energy and excitement that one should feel when adventuring in a dangerous and mysterious environment. While it's true that combat and social interactions make up a sizable and important portion of most role-playing sessions, the exploration of uncharted locations is another critical element of immersive gaming. The intention here is to add to the overall drama of your game by engaging the senses and cranking up the tension with heart-stopping hazards that can help make your world come alive for your players.

The hope is that you enjoy using this “overlay” and are sparked to create even more memories in the years to come.

## THE RULE OF THREE

One of the most important aspects of cinematic role playing is the **Rule of Three**. When adjudicating the dangers presented in this book, be aware of what level of realism you, as a GM, are looking to provide.

In a realistic, brutal setting, allowing only **one** ability check or save to overcome the obstacle is acceptable.

A more adventurous, but still rather gritty feeling is achieved by allowing **two** ability checks or saves before lethal effects befall the heroes. This will give the players a real sense of danger, yet still encourage some heroic stunts.

And for a truly high-action, over-the-top cinematic feel, allow **three** ability checks or saves before the proverbial hammer falls on the characters.

For example, let's say that the party is attempting to climb a sheer cliff face to enter the Black Castle unseen. A deadly setting would see only **one** roll to avoid falling to one's death. In this case it might be that one poor Dexterity check would seal their fate.

A setting that mixes gritty action and heroic deeds would allow **two** rolls before dropping the characters on the rocks hundreds of feet below. In this case, perhaps the climbing roll fails, so an additional strength roll is needed to hold on with their fingertips.

In a cinematic setting of high fantasy and heroic actions, there would be at least **three** potential chances before tumbling

down the rocky mountain wall. In this case, it might be that the climbing skill fails and the strength check fails, but perhaps a Dexterity roll could save the falling hero as she grabs a root dangling nearby.

The **Rule of Three** also applies in the opposite direction when a character attempts to perform a stunt. The more skill or ability checks required to achieve the stunt, the more realistic and dangerous the action will be. In other words, asking for more rolls to succeed will lead to barriers when you want your player group to engage in cinematic action.

For example, suppose a player wants their character to snatch a tapestry from the wall, throw it over an orc guard and then push them out of an open window. In a realistic setting, that player may have to roll to snatch down the carpet, another roll to hit the orc, and yet another roll to knock them over.

In a gritty game, the game master (GM) may ask for a roll to cover the guard and another to knock them prone.

In a cinematic world, a single roll is all that is needed to give the orc a blanket party and send it on its way to oblivion.

It's important that you communicate with your group to decide collectively what sort of game you intend to run concerning the **Rule of Three**. Make sure all are in complete agreement to prevent conflicting expectations in the game.

## USING AN ENVIRON

The following cinematic scenes or hazards are not truly monsters or even lairs. Yet it may be necessary to place the effects of the scene in some form of Initiative order. Pick a system and remain consistent: first, last or pick an average roll and apply that to each combat round. Players may have to be tactical, expending an action to remain balanced or hold on, so be aware if a character does not have a movement or action available to maintain safety.

**Flavor.** At the beginning of each entry, there is a small narrative section that can help set the scene. Although you may certainly read the description verbatim if you wish, it is recommended that you describe the scene in your own words

as appropriate to the encounter and the mood of your game.

Each entry may also include additional options other than those listed below, or it may omit ones that do not apply. Details on their use will be included with each specific description.

**Pressure.** Sometimes your players will suffer from analysis-paralysis. If they are intent on remaining locked up, refusing to move either forward into danger or around the obstacle, these ideas can help to get the story moving.

**If/Then.** Many scenes are dangerous to traverse. The notes here describe which specific actions could cause certain consequences. This can and should give your players pause as they weigh various actions and what that means for them moving forward. Do they run across a frozen lake or walk carefully? Both options will have merit based on the party and their mission.

**Even the Odds.** This is a simple way to randomly pick targets in a crowd. Each target rolls a die. An **even** number means that subject is not targeted, but an **odd** number means suffering the effects of the environment, be it falling through ice, tripping over roots or being smashed against rocks while being swept away by a raging river.

**Changes.** Even a blizzard can get boring after a while. This section is a prompt to wake up lethargic players. Use one or more of these events to jump start the encounter as things change... for better or worse.

**Fumblecrit.** During any extreme activity, whether it's combat or dealing with a natural hazard, some will fumble while others will enjoy a critical success. This table will list a few events that you can either roll for, or choose from, to add to the drama and energy of the scene.

## CONCLUSION

Although not intended to be a book of lairs or encounters, the environs and hazards provided in this book can offer great opportunities to a creative GM, allowing you to include various monsters or non-player characters (NPCs) and introduce new and exciting adventure locations.

## DEFINITIONS

### ADVANTAGE

Having **Advantage** means that you roll a second d20 when you make the roll. You then use the higher of the two rolls. For example, if you have **Advantage** and roll a 17 and a 5, you use the 17.

### BLINDED

A blinded creature can't see and automatically fails any ability check that requires sight. Attack rolls against the creature have **Advantage**, and the creature's attack rolls have **Disadvantage**.

### DEAFENED

A deafened creature can't hear and automatically fails any ability check that requires hearing.

### DESPAIR

Spending enough time under extreme conditions is enough to wear anyone down. After enduring extreme conditions for 3 days + WIS modifier, you must make a successful Wisdom save (DC 10) or lose 1 point of Wisdom. The DC increases by 1 for each level of exhaustion you have suffered.

### DIFFICULTY CLASS

For every ability check or saving throw, the GM decides which of the six abilities is relevant and the difficulty of the task or save, represented by a **Difficulty Class**, usually called the **DC**. The more difficult a task, the higher its **DC**. The table below shows the most common **DCs**.

Task Difficulty	DC
Very Easy	5
Easy	10
Medium	15
Hard	20
Very Hard	25
Nearly Impossible	30

To make an ability check or save, roll a d20 and add the relevant ability modifier. As with other d20 rolls, apply bonuses and penalties, and compare the total to the **DC**. If the total equals or exceeds the **DC**, the ability check is a success, otherwise, it's a failure.

### DISADVANTAGE

Having **Disadvantage** means that you roll a second d20 when you make the roll. You then use the lower of the two rolls. For example, if you have **Disadvantage** and roll a 17 and a 5, you use the 5.

### EXHAUSTED

Some special abilities and environmental hazards, such as starvation and the long-term effects of freezing or scorching temperatures, can lead to a special condition called exhaustion.

Exhaustion is measured in six levels. An effect can give a creature one or more levels of exhaustion, as specified in the effect's description.

Level	Effect
1	<i>Disadvantage on ability checks</i>
2	<i>Speed halved</i>
3	<i>Disadvantage on attack rolls and Saving Throws</i>
4	<i>Hit point maximum halved</i>
5	<i>Speed reduced to 0</i>
6	<i>Death</i>

If an already exhausted creature suffers another effect that causes exhaustion, its current level of exhaustion increases by the amount specified in the effect's description.

A creature suffers the effect of its current level of exhaustion as well as all lower levels. For example, a creature suffering level 2 exhaustion has its speed halved and has **Disadvantage** on ability checks.

An effect that removes exhaustion reduces its level as specified in the effect's description, with all exhaustion effects ending if a creature's exhaustion level is reduced below 1.

Finishing a long rest reduces a creature's exhaustion level by 1, provided that the creature has also ingested some food and drink.

## HALLUCINATIONS

Suffering from hallucinations means having visions of things that are not there and an inability to differentiate between fantasy and reality. All mental ability checks are at **Disadvantage**.

## HYPOTHERMIA

This is a state of deep cold where the body begins to shut down, and the creature's core body temperature begins to drop.

A creature with hypothermia is at **Disadvantage** on all Dexterity and Intelligence checks, and they suffer 1 level of **exhaustion** for minor hypothermia and 2 levels of **exhaustion** for severe hypothermia.

Additionally, the creature's movement rate is reduced by half.

## INCAPACITATED

An **Incapacitated** creature can't take actions or reactions.

## INVISIBLE

An invisible creature is impossible to see without the aid of magic or a special sense. For the purpose of hiding, the creature is heavily obscured. The creature's location can be detected by any noise it makes or any tracks it leaves.

Attack rolls against the creature have **Disadvantage**, and the creature's attack rolls have **Advantage**.

## PARALYZED

A paralyzed creature is **Incapacitated** (see above) and can't move or speak. The creature automatically fails Strength and Dexterity **Saving Throws**. Attack rolls against the creature

have **Advantage**. Any attack that hits the creature is a critical hit if the attacker is within 5 feet of the creature.

## PRONE

A prone creature's only movement option is to crawl, unless it stands up and thereby ends the condition.

The creature has **Disadvantage** on attack rolls. An attack roll against the creature has **Advantage** if the attacker is within 5 feet of the creature. Otherwise, the attack roll has **Disadvantage**.

## RESISTANCE

If a creature or an object has **Resistance** to a damage type, damage of that type is halved against it.

## RESTRAINED

A **Restrained** creature's speed becomes 0, and it can't benefit from any bonus to its speed. Attack rolls against the creature have **Advantage**, and the creature's attack rolls have **Disadvantage**. The creature has **Disadvantage** on Dexterity **Saving Throws**.

## SAVING THROW

A **Saving Throw** — also called a **Save** — represents an attempt to resist a spell, a trap, a poison, a disease, or a similar threat.

## SHAKEN

You are momentarily gripped by fear and doubt. You cannot use your ability score bonuses and have **Disadvantage** to do anything related to that which has shaken you. This condition remains until you take a full round to gather yourself.

Those who are immune or resistant to fear cannot be **Shaken**.

## STUNNED

A **Stunned** creature is **Incapacitated** (see above), can't move, and can speak only falteringly. The creature automatically fails Strength and Dexterity **Saving Throws**. Attack rolls against the creature have **Advantage**.

## UNCONSCIOUS

An unconscious creature is **Incapacitated** (see above), can't move or speak, and is unaware of its surroundings. The creature drops whatever it's holding and falls prone. The creature automatically fails Strength and Dexterity **Saving Throws**.

Attack rolls against the creature have **Advantage**. Any attack that hits the creature is a critical hit if the attacker is within 5 feet of the creature.



# DESERT CONDITIONS

*The gray madman at the last roadhouse had poetically referred to this as the “apotheosis of all deserts,” but we simply call it Hell. The sterile, bone white hardpan extends to the horizon in all directions, our boots sending up small clouds of salt dust with each step.*

*After eight days of travel, we can now make out the vague outline of mountains sketched roughly on the horizon. You would think that this would be a relief, but the awareness of the incomprehensible distance that we have yet to travel as been a hard blow to our spirits.*

*Kane took a measure of the water this morning, and if we manage to keep up our current pace, it should last us until we reach the foothills in another week. As the priest keeps saying, there will be water if god wills it.*

No matter where one travels within a particular environ, there will be aspects that are common throughout the entire region. The following section outlines conditions that are likely to effect the characters no matter where they go.

## REGIONAL PRESSURES

A desert is best defined as a region of land where there is very little rainfall. Many mistakenly think that deserts are always hot, but nothing could be further from the truth. Of course there are indeed stereotypical hot deserts covered in vast shifting sand drifts, other deserts are flat salt plains, rocky plateaus, and even frozen tundras.

Between the extreme variations in temperature and the almost complete absence of drinkable water, even the most experienced traveler will only cross them when there is great need or no other choice.

*Note: This supplement will primarily deal with hot deserts, since arctic and high altitude deserts are covered in other supplements.*

## REGIONAL CONDITIONS

Remember to be consistent and adjudicate your gaming table when situations arrive that hinder the party. Listed below are some possible hazards and minor setbacks that a desert region can offer.

Deserts generally vacillate between extreme heat during the day and freezing cold at night, with each presenting its own unique challenges to the anyone unfortunate enough to find themselves in one.

**Heat.** The desert sun is brutal and unforgiving, with the temperatures during the day reaching as much as 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.

**Heat Exhaustion** – A creature exposed to the heat, even with adequate water, must succeed on a Constitution saving throw every 2 hours or gain 1 level of exhaustion. The DC is 5 for the first 2 hours and increases by 1 every 2 hours thereafter.

Those in medium or heavy armor, or those wearing heavy, restrictive clothing have *Disadvantage* on their save.

Creatures that are adapted to this sort of heat or are resistant to fire have *Advantage* on their saves. Creatures that are immune to fire are similarly immune to heat related desert conditions.

**Heat Stroke** – This condition results from prolonged, unprotected exposure to the desert sun and dehydration. This effects the body’s ability to regulate its temperature, causing a creature’s core body temperature to increase to dangerous levels. The symptoms include a throbbing headache, dizziness, lack of sweat, muscle weakness or cramps, nausea and vomiting, rapid heartbeat, and rapid, shallow breathing.

As the heat stroke worsens, there are behavioral changes such as confusion, disorientation, or staggering followed in the end by seizures, unconsciousness and death.

Once a character has gone without water for at least 12 hours and is exposed to the desert heat for more than an hour, they are at risk of heat stroke. Every hour in the sun, they must make a Constitution saving throw or lose 1 point from Strength, Dexterity or Intelligence (decide randomly). The DC is 15 for the first hour and increases by 1 per hour.

When their Strength reaches 4, their movement is reduced to 0. When their Dexterity reaches 4, they begin to fumble objects, stagger and become incapable of performing the most basic tasks. When their Intelligence reaches 4, they become confused, disoriented, and begin hallucinating.

When any of the ability scores drops below 3, the character falls unconscious. Without treatment, they will begin to have seizures 30 minutes later, and an hour later they will slip into a coma. Once this has happened, they will never be the same if they manage to recover. If left untreated, the character will die 3 hours later.

Heat stroke can be avoided by remaining protected against the sun and heat as much as possible and staying hydrated.

At any point prior to slipping into a coma, the character can recover by getting out of the heat and rehydrating. Once they are in a coma however, the situation become rather grim. Getting them out of the heat and rehydrating them will allow them to come out of the coma in 3d6 days. When they awake however, their Intelligence will be permanently reduced from its previous maximum by 1d4 points. Their Strength and Dexterity will return to normal.

Those in medium or heavy armor, or those wearing heavy, restrictive clothing have *Disadvantage* on their save.

Creatures that are adapted to this sort of heat or are resistant to fire have *Advantage* on their saves. Creatures that are immune to fire are similarly immune to heat related desert conditions.

**High Sun** – This is the 4 hour time period during the day when the sun is at its highest point in the sky, and the effects of the heat are compounded. During this time, the DC of all heat-related saves increases by 5.

**Hot Metal** – Wearing or holding metal objects in direct sunlight will cause 1 hit point of damage per hour during the High Sun hours. Armor must be removed and metal objects, such as swords, bracers, helmets and shields, must be stowed away to prevent damage. Suffering this damage will negate any attempts to have a Short or Long Rest, recover hit points or recover from Exhaustion. The character must restart all resting or healing attempts once they cease taking damage.

**Limited Resources.** Perhaps more than any other environ, deserts lack the most basic resources necessary for life. This means that travelers must plan to bring whatever they need with them, and ration it appropriately.

**Food & Water** – A character needs 2 gallons of water and 1 pound of food per day, though they can make their supplies last longer by rationing. Characters who don't eat or drink begin to dehydrate and starve.

Dehydration will effect the characters first. Those who drink only half of the amount of water required must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC 15) or suffer 1 level of Exhaustion at the end of the day. A character with the Desert Nomad background can go without water for a number of days equal to their Proficiency Bonus before suffering these effects.

Without any water, the character will dehydrate very quickly, suffering 2 levels of Exhaustion per day.

Exhaustion caused by lack of water can't be removed until the character rehydrates.

Every 2 days without food causes the character to lose 1 point of Strength, while eating a half ration can reduce this to 1 point every 6 days.

Once the food is gone, the character can last for a number of days equal to 3 + his or her Constitution modifier before serious starvation sets in. A character with the Desert Nomad background can add their proficiency bonus to this (minimum 1).

Once the character begins to starve, they automatically lose 1 Strength point at the end of each day. A day of normal eating restores their Strength and resets the number of days without food to zero.

**Foraging** – Characters can search for food and water when traveling at a normal or slow pace. The foraging character makes a Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check (DC 20) to determine if they find anything. In rare instances, the DC may be lower in scrub lands or in an oasis, at the GM's discretion.

Multiple characters can forage together, making separate checks. A failed roll finds nothing, while a critical failure finds the searcher in trouble. Check the *Fumblecrit* table to find what event takes place, or generate an encounter.

A success finds the equivalent of 1/2 ration + 1/2 ration per Wisdom (Survival) modifier. For example, a character with a Wisdom mod of +2 finds 1-1/2 rations.

Another forage roll is required to find water. Success means that they find 1/4 gallon of water, or if they succeed by 5 or more, they find a source sufficient to rehydrate the entire party and replenish their stores, assuming they have the containers to carry it.

**Navigation.** Finding a path during the night and day only requires a Wisdom (Survival) check against a DC of 10, when appropriate. The trouble begins when trying to navigate by landmarks and features. After the landscape shifts due to sandstorms, earthquakes, dust devils or other phenomena, the DC increases to 15. If the party has a map, the roll is made with *Advantage*.

**Natural & Supernatural Fauna.** It would be impossible to list every known natural and supernatural creature in the desert. Rest assured that many creatures that inhabit other regions that will have a similar species in the desert.

They will burrow or swim through the soft sand, using tremor sense to track its prey. Coloration changes and markings identify them as native to the desert, which can confuse explorers when confronted with a creature that is familiar and yet completely alien.

**Nighttime Cold.** Once the sun has set in the desert, the temperature drops alarmingly fast. It can go from 100 degrees Fahrenheit to below freezing in just a few hours. Without proper shelter or a heat source, resting can be close to impossible and hypothermia is a very real danger.

**Sun Blindness.** In addition to the obvious effects of the sun's heat, its brightness has its own set of dangers.

After 4 hours without some sort of eye protection, a creature who is not accustomed to the sun must make a Constitution save (DC 10) or suffer reduced vision, giving them *Disadvantage* on all ability checks that require their eyes. This penalty goes away after a short or long rest, assuming that they are able to shade their eyes from the light in some way.

Protective eye wear or a hat that provides eye shade is sufficient to avoid this condition.

**Sun Burn.** To those who are not accustomed to the sun, constant exposure can lead to uncomfortable and even painful burns to exposed areas of the skin. Unprotected skin will begin to burn after 1 hour of exposure, inflicting 1 hit point of heat damage. After 4 hours of exposure, the skin will begin to blister, inflicting an additional 2 hit points of heat damage.

This damage can be healed through the use of mundane salves during a short rest or through healing magic.

Sunburn can be avoided by covering the body in light, loose-fitting clothes and/or wearing an alchemical sunblock.

## SUPERNATURAL OR ALIEN CONDITIONS

Whether your world is steeped in arcane magic or just happens to have planetary conditions that differ from our own, it's important to consider how these things will effect your environs. The following are a few examples that one could add to a desert setting.

**Arcane Cyst.** Not all deserts are the result of natural climate or geologic effects. The Arcane Cyst can be found near the center of deserts that were formed as the result of some catastrophic arcane event.

The cyst itself looks like an open pit approximately 300 feet across. The edge is slightly raised like a crater and is

covered with a black, tar-like ooze the pulses and undulates as if it were a living thing. Tendrils of the ooze extends out another 20 feet in all directions like obscene tentacles.

Anyone brave or foolish enough to get near the cyst can see that the pit goes down at least 80 feet before details are swallowed in darkness. This darkness is utterly impenetrable, even when the sun is directly overhead.

The only other obvious trait is the disgusting smell that emanates from the pit. The odor has been described as a mixture of putrefying flesh and rancid milk, and it is the feature that earned the cyst its name.

Anyone who comes within 10 feet of the black tentacles must make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 15) or become grappled by 1d4 rope-like pseudopods. The grapple can be broken with a Strength check (DC 12), or a tendril can be cut with a successful Dexterity check (DC 12).

In the following round, the tendrils will begin to pull the victim into the cyst at a rate of 5 feet per round. It takes 4 rounds to reach the pit, and the creature will be thrown in on the next round. The creature will then fall for 2 rounds, after which they will plunge into a black, viscous liquid with the consistency of syrup.

It is not syrup of course, and is in fact a kind of digestive enzyme that will dissolve the unfortunate victim. Each round in the cyst inflicts 1d4 points of Constitution damage. The inside walls of the cyst are soft, flesh-like, and covered with a thick, slippery mucus that is impossible to climb. Even with a rope, all climb checks are made at *Disadvantage*.

Adding insult to injury, the mucus has anti-magic properties, making it impossible for an arcane magic to function within the cyst.


Constitution damage is restored at a rate of 1 per week, or can be healed by 1 for every 20 points of magical healing. If the character loses more than half of their Constitution points before escaping the cyst, they will lose 1 point of Constitution and 1 point of Charisma permanently.

**Storm of Glass.** There are some particularly harsh deserts where the elemental forces bleed through into the prime material plane. In rare cases, these forces produce violent storms that swirl in massive cyclones across the landscape.

The most dreaded of these is the Storm of Glass. As the name implies, this storm contains clouds of fine, razor-sharp glass shards that turn a dangerous whirlwind into a deadly shredder of flesh.

These storms are fast moving and relatively short lived. They tend to manifest during High Sun, and travel across the desert at close to 30 miles per hour. The Storm of Glass forms in a matter of seconds and immediately begins to zig-zag its way across the landscape for 5 to 10 miles before dispersing.





When traveling through a desert that is prone to these storms, there is a 1 in 20 chance each day that the party will encounter one. They are roughly a mile in diameter, and if spotted early, the party can move perpendicular to its path to avoid it. In order to attempt this, at least one of the party must make a successful Perception check (DC 12) to accurately determine its path.

Any characters caught in the storm are blasted by shards of glass for 2 minutes (20 rounds). During that time, they must make a successful Dexterity save (DC 18) each round or suffer 1d4 hit points of slashing damage. If they succeed on their save, they take half damage.

The damage can be avoided if the character can manage to get under cover, whether that means into some sort of shelter, a heavy, secure tent, or heavy layers of clothes that cover the entire body.

These can make for a rather intense encounter if a Storm of Glass should happen to show up during a combat encounter.

### ABILITY SCORE LOSS

Unless otherwise stated, any ability score points that are lost as a result of environmental conditions are restored at a rate of 1 point per hour once those conditions have been rectified.

For example, if one is suffering from the cold, then time spent in a warm, dry place will allow the creature to recover.

### FUMBLECRIT

- 1 While foraging for food and/or water, the subject falls into a patch of spiky plants. The victim is impaled by tiny needles, piercing even the tiniest opening to hit flesh. The character must remove the needles, taking 1d4 hours to do so or suffer *Disadvantage* until they are all gone. Medical or Survival proficiency will reduce the time by half.
- 2 The forager stumbles and twists an ankle. Movement is reduced to half until healed or after a long rest.
- 3 Food and/or water is found, but it is poisonous and causes stomach pains. Anyone who ate or drank this meal will be *Poisoned* for 12 hours. If they do not take a Long Rest, they must *Even the Odds* each time they attempt any physical activity. An odd result means that they vomit, leaving them *Stunned* for 2 rounds. A successful Medical skill check using a Healer's Kit can reduce the time of the effects by half. If a character is vomiting, their water requirements are doubled for that day.
- 4 After eating and/or drinking, body waste, including gas, has a noticeable scent. This allows predators to track the party with *Advantage* from the last known location.

# DESERT HAZARDS

The party departed the City of Ember near the end of Blood Moon in the year 6438 of the 5th Age. Artemus Hale and his party of twelve adventurers headed off into the heart of the Cursed Desert.

Their goal was to find a temple dedicated to a deity known only as The Blind God. It was rumored to house one of the greatest libraries dedicated to the arcane arts ever known.

When Hale's party emerged from the desert two weeks later, there were only eight of the original group remaining, including Hale himself. The villagers who first saw them screamed and fled, believing them to be undead, for they were little but bones wrapped in dry, cracked skin.

Artemus and a few others managed to recover from their ordeal, but the rest were never quite the same. Seth Horban had fallen into a coma from severe heat stroke. When he finally regained consciousness, he could barely remember his own family. Needless to say, his life as a master wizard was over.





# DESERT HAZARDS

## FLASH FLOOD

*As we neared the far side of the desert, we descended into an ancient dry river bed that had not seen water in who knows how long. Our guide insisted that we might find water down here to replenish our supply.*

*There is a saying that says “be careful what you wish for” and in this case it was all too true. We had started rationing our water two days ago, and since then, we were all praying to our various deities and spirits for whatever help they might see fit to provide.*

*The guide looked nervously towards the nearby mountains as we heard thunder from the clouds in the distance. “We must hurry!” He shouted suddenly. “Get to the top!”*

*We all began to scramble towards the upper rim of the riverbed, even as we heard a strange rumbling from the west that was not wind or thunder. Just as we reached the upper bank, we saw the wall of brown water roaring through the riverbed, picking up rocks and boulders as it came.*

*Within minutes, what had been a parched canyon had become a raging torrent of muddy water.*

### PRESSURE

The need for water and shade in the desert is a powerful one, and the comparatively cool nooks within a dry riverbeds can be very appealing to the weary traveler.

Flash floods are caused by heavy rains, even from storms that are happening miles away, because the desert ground doesn't soak up water quickly, and so almost all of that water is channeled into the low lands. This can produce flood conditions very quickly and without warning, filling dry riverbeds, ditches and lake beds. The water can be strong and violent, creating a walls of water up to 30 feet high. Remarkably, more people drown in the desert than die of thirst.

### IF / THEN

If the characters are in a dry riverbed, ditch, canyon or dry lake when a flash flood is about to hit, they can make a Perception check (DC 20) early on to notice the storm clouds in the distance. Anyone familiar with the desert will understand the danger, but everyone else can make a Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) check (DC 12) to interpret the signs. If they are successful, they can easily get to high ground in time.

As the flood is about to hit, they can make a auditory Perception check (DC 15) to hear the flood coming. If they succeed on this check, they will have to make a Strength (Athletics) check (DC 15) to get to high ground in time.

The GM can adjust the DCs based on the specific topography of the setting. For example, if the party is in the middle of a vast dry lake, then it may take longer to get to safety, or they may decide to take other actions.

Any characters hit by the flash flood must make a Dexterity save (DC 15) or get pulled beneath the water and are swept away (see *Even the Odds* for details). If they succeed, they manage to stay on top of the water. Swimming along with the current, they manage to avoid drowning for the time being.

## EVEN THE ODDS

Each round in the water requires constantly fighting the current, or else get pulled underwater and get carried away by the force of the muddy waters.

**Chaotic Waters.** Due to the mud, sand and other debris swept downstream by the flood waters, it is nearly impossible to see while underwater. Between that and the constant battering by the current, it can be difficult to determine which way is up. *Even the Odds* to determine if the character knows which end is up while beneath the flood waters, with an even roll meaning success.

**Drowning.** While swimming, each foot of movement costs 1 extra foot (2 extra feet in rough waters), unless a creature has a climbing or swimming speed. At the GM's option, gaining any distance in the flood waters might require a successful Strength (Athletics) check.

A creature can hold its breath for a number of minutes equal to 1 + its Constitution modifier (minimum of 30 seconds).

When a creature runs out of breath or takes water into its lungs, it can survive for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum of 1 round). At the start of its next turn, it drops to 0 hit points and is dying, and it can't regain hit points or be stabilized until it can breathe again.

Consider the additional effects of the force of the water. The subject who swims or gets carried away will move 2d4 x 10 feet downstream, in addition to moving in their desired direction.

Anyone suffering a physical injury must make a Constitution save (DC 15) or begin drowning. The DC is 20 if they sustain a critical hit. A failure means suffering the loss of 1d4 points of Constitution.

**Debris.** In addition to the dangers of drowning, flash floods often carry debris that was picked up along the way. This can include rocks, branches and even the carcasses of dead animals that were killed by the flood upstream.

*Even the Odds* to see if they have a chance of getting bludgeoned by debris. They will need to make a Dexterity save (DC 15 if they are on the surface, or DC 18 if they are below the surface) to determine if they are struck. If they fail, they suffer 2d6 hit points of bludgeoning damage.

If the water is particularly strewn with debris, then the GM can decide that anyone in the water automatically takes 1d6 hit points per round, but only half damage if they succeed on their save.

## FUMBLECRITS

- 1 Something particularly large has been swept downstream by the flood, like a cart, tumbling boulder, or small structure. The victim gets hit by the object, suffering 4d6 hit points of bludgeoning damage. They must also make a Dexterity save (DC 18) or become trapped underwater beneath it. It will require a Strength (Athletics) check (DC 20) to free themselves or they begin to drown.
- 2 Just when you thought you were safe, the water erodes the ground beneath the character, sending them sprawling into the flood waters below. They can make a Dexterity save (DC 10) to avoid an injury. If they fail, they suffer 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage, and of course find themselves swept away by the flood.
- 3 The water sweeps the character towards a rather significant drop (2d4 x 10 feet). Unless the character can stop their movement or get out of the water, they will plunge over the edge and suffer 1d4 points of Constitution damage.
- 4 The victim is knocked unconscious by a stray branch that was caught up in the torrent. Fortunately, their unconscious form ends up on top of the log, and so they are in no immediate danger of drowning. Unfortunately, they are being carried helplessly down stream and could end up miles away. Hopefully the party can find them.





## SALT FLATS

*Yesterday we smelled what we thought was the sea, and were encouraged that we might be reaching the far side of the desert. However, when we breached the last dune of the seemingly endless expanse of shifting sand, we were met by a vast plain of white that stretched before us in all directions. What we first irrationally took to be snow, turned out to be pure salt.*

*We have now walked many miles across this barren crust and our boots are covered in fine white powder kicked up from the ground. I hadn't thought it possible to dehydrate more, but the salt is pulling the moisture from our very pores.*

*Our guide has handed out bags of grease that he recommends we put on our exposed skin to protect against the savage dryness that threatens to turn our flesh into jerky.*

### PRESSURE

Walking across a salt flat is one of the most grueling journeys that a traveler can experience. The blistering sun reflects off the pure white surface to blind characters and reflect even more of the sun's heat.

If a party finds themselves in such an environment, there is only one choice; get out of it as quickly as possible.

### IF / THEN

The only thing easy about traveling across a salt flat is that it's easy walking. There are no significant features, flora or fauna to provide landmarks or resources. About the only thing that the party will not run short of is salt.

The general conditions of the salt flat provide the greatest threat to the characters.

**Deterioration of Gear.** The salt also has an adverse effect on leather and metals. Each day spent on the salt flats will cause any items made from metal or leather to deteriorate unless they are somehow protected or maintained. Metal can be wrapped in oiled cloth or heavily greased. Leather can be kept oiled as well, though it will require daily maintenance.

Maintaining gear to prevent deterioration requires at least 1 hour and a half flask of oil per day. This does not count towards a short or long rest since the process is physically demanding and precludes actually resting.

Unprotected or unmaintained gear will begin to suffer from the effects of the salt. Boots are particularly vulnerable. After 1 day of walking on a salt flat will cause leather boots to begin to crack and weaken. After 4 days, they will begin to fall apart, and by the 5th day will be useless.

Weapons will begin to lose their effectiveness after 2 days as they begin to corrode. Every 2 days, metal slashing weapons gain a -1 penalty to damage. This is cumulative until the weapon can be properly maintained. The weapons can be restored, though this will add 2 hours of maintenance per day to bring them back to their original quality. Bludgeoning weapons also show signs of corrosion, but this doesn't hinder their effectiveness in any significant way.

Armor (whether leather or metal) take a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to the AC it offers every 4 days. Armor that is reduced to an AC of 10 is destroyed.

Leather and metal shields are more resilient, losing 1 from their AC bonus every 10 days. When a shield that drops to a +0 bonus, it too is destroyed.

**Mirages.** On these flat, white plains, mirages are very common. In most cases they appear to be lakes of water, but can look like mountains, terrain features or even distant

travelers. If a character is already suffering from dehydration, their mirages can induce full blown hallucinations.

Every hour of traveling, the characters must make a Wisdom (Perception) check (DC 10) to recognize a mirage for what it is. If they are familiar with the desert or have been fooled by mirages before, they have *Advantage* on their check. If they are dehydrated, they make the check at *Disadvantage*. The GM can also *Even the Odds* to see if the mirage manifests as a hallucination. The form of the vision is up to the player and GM, but it is most likely to be influenced by what the character hopes to see more than anything. In many cases it would be an oasis, but it could be a large caravan, a building, or even dead loved ones.

**Severe Dehydration** – These plains of salt compound the effects of dehydration. All saves versus dehydration are made at *Disadvantage*.

**Sun Glare.** The white salt reflects much more of the sun than dirt or sand. This glare can cause temporary blindness without some sort of eye protection.

After traveling on the salt flat for 1 day without eye protection, the character makes all visual checks at *Disadvantage*. After 5 consecutive days without eye protection, the character's vision becomes blurry, and their vision is reduced to 20 feet.

If they are foolish enough to go without eye protection for 10 consecutive days, their vision becomes permanently impaired, reducing their effective vision range to 10 feet for larger objects, 5 feet to identify faces, and 6 inches to read.

## CHANGES

The deceptively featureless landscape of the salt flats can conceal hidden dangers, beyond those obvious in such a caustic environment.

**Quagmire.** Some salt flats conceal pockets of mud beneath the surface. These can be shallow or deep enough to swallow a caravan wagon.

The mud beneath the surface is most often a slurry of dirt, salt and other minerals. In rare cases, this yellowish slurry can be extremely caustic, eating through leather boots in a matter of minutes.

A salt pan quagmire is almost impossible to spot ahead of time, unless someone has broken through recently. When approaching a quagmire, the characters can make a Wisdom (Perception) check (DC 20) to recognize the danger. Someone with the desert nomad background makes this check with *Advantage*.

The average quagmire is 1d10 feet deep. When first stepping onto the treacherous ground, there will be an

audible cracking that will give the character a Dexterity save (DC 15) to avoid dropping through. If the mud is 1-2 feet deep, the character falls prone and is likely covered with yellow or white sludge. If the mud is 3-5 feet, they are likely to become stuck, requiring a Strength (Athletics) check (DC 10) to free themselves or have someone pull them out. Any deeper than that, and the character will sink below the surface.

If another character moves within 5 feet to assist, they must make a Dexterity save (DC 15) to avoid falling in themselves.

It is not possible to swim in quagmire mud, but if the character remains calm and doesn't struggle, they may be able to keep their head above the surface until rescued. Obviously the GM will have to adjust this information based on characters of different heights.

The shallower quagmires can be a simple annoyance, but the deeper ones can prove lethal. A character can hold their breath for a number of minutes equal to 1 + their Constitution modifier (minimum of 30 seconds).

When a character runs out of breath or takes mud into their lungs, they can survive for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum of 1 round). At the start of their next turn, they drop to 0 hit points and begin dying. They cannot regain hit points or be stabilized until they can breathe again.

Anyone suffering a physical injury must make a Constitution save (DC 15) or begin drowning immediately. The DC is 20 if they sustain a critical hit. A failure means suffering the loss of 1d4 points of Constitution.

Roughly 1 in 20 quagmires will be extremely caustic. If this is the case, anyone in the mud will begin to suffer 1d4 Constitution points of acid damage per round. The character can make a Constitution save (DC 15) to take only half damage.

Any clothing and armor in the caustic mud will be eaten away. Leather items will become useless after 4 rounds and metal items after 10 rounds.

Once extracted from the mud, it will continue to burn until washed off, requiring the use of at least a gallon of precious water or the use of a spell such as Prestidigitation.

Any beast of burden that fall through are likely to be hobbled by the sudden drop, even in a shallow quagmire, particularly if they are loaded down with gear. If they fall into a deep quagmire, there will be little hope of rescuing the poor beast without a significant expenditure of energy, resources and/or magic.

The GM should note that many items made of glass, precious metals, gems and magic items may be unaffected by the caustic mud, and so there may be bits of treasure to be found in these quagmires. Finding remnants of previous victims can not only add depth to the history of the environ, but might encourage them to take risks by delving into these deadly traps. If they do so, some reward for the risk is recommended.



## SAND

*I stopped counting at 368. Each time I struggled up a dune and stood upon the crest, all I could see was more of the same; an endless expanse of pale sand. As the winds shifted, so too did the sands, making navigation all but impossible.*

*Then the sand suddenly gave way! We slid, rolled and stumbled gracelessly to the base of yet another dune. Without a word, we gathered our belongings, uselessly brushing sand from our clothing and began to ascend another mountain of sand. Number 369...*

## PRESSURE

Crossing the desert is a feat that will require a monumental amount of courage and expertise. Give your players a goal, both personal and epic, that will get them moving. Adventures that involve a lost kingdom, buried treasure, exacting revenge, or freeing an enslaved nation are as big and bold as the desert they intend to cross. Allow them to make assumptions that push the adventure forward.

Additionally, tales of gods, djinn, magi and demons clashing and warping reality are such extraordinary claims that the characters will want to see these things for themselves. Any or all of these motivations can overcome the most stubborn case of “analysis paralysis.”

## IF / THEN

Crossing an expanse of sand is considered Difficult Terrain. Players must be reminded that, without full attention, climbing a sand hill, dune or rampart will likely result in sliding, rolling or falling to the bottom of the sand dune.

Actions which require movement, such as a charging, tackling or grappling, could have both attacker and defender tumbling down a hill of gritty, blinding sand.

**Sand Dunes** – Climbing a dune requires the use of hands and feet. A creature’s speed is reduced to half of their normal movement rate. A character that is standing still must spend a Move Action to remain in place by making a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (DC 15) to avoid sliding down the hill 10 to 40 feet. Combat is still possible, but not without at least one hand free to remain stable on the sand dune.

**Sand Fields** – This is an area that is primarily flat. The soft sand allows the feet to sink into it 1 to 4 inches with each step. Walking is slow, reducing movement by 5 feet. Most likely, the area surrounding the fields will have hills, dunes and ramparts, blocking a substantive view from a distance. These valleys or depressions are ideal for large caravans and nomadic tribal outposts.

**Sand Hills** – A hill has a mild grade, slowing movement by half. Scaling a hill may not require the use of hands or

stabilizing item, such as a staff, but care must be taken to assure safety. If any physical activity is done on the hill beyond the climb (including combat), the character must spend an Action to remain in place. Otherwise make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) saving throw (DC 10) to avoid sliding down the hill 10 feet.

**Sand Ramparts** – Scaling a rampart is an attempt to climb a near vertical obstacle. Both hands are required and movement is reduced to 5 feet (10 feet if dashing). The characters must spend 2 Actions remaining in place. Any physical engagement, including combat, requires a Dexterity (Acrobatics) save (DC 20) to avoid sliding 20 to 80 feet down hill.

### EVEN THE ODDS

Each round anyone continues to ascend a hill, dune or rampart, there is a chance they will be Restrained. A sand slide will pour downhill, trapping them in knee to waist-deep sand. It only requires a Movement Action to extricate one's self from the sand, but this will make them vulnerable to being targeted. Anyone who slides down hill must make an *Even the Odds* roll or suffer a Restrained condition until freed.

Someone above a target can create a sand slide effect on purpose. An Intelligence check (or appropriate skill) allows them to take a Combat Action to disturb the sand enough to get it to fall. Use their Intelligence modifier to find out how many targets can be subject to the slide of sand (minimum 1).

### FUMBLECRIT

- 1 The victim is covered in sand and is Restrained. They also begin to suffocate, and so must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 10). Success means they are able to hold their breath for a number of minutes equal to  $1 + \text{Constitution modifier}$  (minimum of 30 seconds). Failure means that they are unable to catch a breath, surviving for a number of rounds equal to his or her Constitution modifier. At the end of that time the victim drops to 0 hit points and begins dying and cannot be stabilized until they are freed and are able to breathe. Digging out of the sand requires a Strength (Athletics) check. If the victim is self-rescuing, the DC is 15, but if they are being dug out by someone else, the rescuer's DC is 10).
- 2 The subject tumbles head over heels, becoming disoriented and Stunned for 1d4 rounds.
- 3 The victim is Blinded for 1d4 rounds as sand and debris enter their mouth, nose, eyes and ears.
- 4 The target tumbles downhill and is Stunned for 1 round while collecting themselves.
- 5 The victim drops whatever is in hand while sliding down hill and lands Prone.
- 6 The victim slides to the very bottom of the hill, no matter how far down it is.



## SANDSTORM

*We tried to last through the storm in our tents, but the winds made quick work out of our feeble cloth and sticks. The sand moved with such force it abraded our skin. Walking forward into the storm was like pushing a stubborn ox. One of our party was snatched into the dark boiling mass above us, never to be seen again. We tied ourselves together and marched towards life. We struggled towards the safety of a rocky outcrop hundreds of yards away. A small man was resting at the base of our salvation. His toothless smile and outstretched hand told us everything we needed to know. We needed a guide and would pay any price asked.*

### PRESSURE

The dark boiling mass of the sandstorm can be seen as a wall of clouds and death stretching across the horizon. Making towards shelter or creating one from current supplies is a must. Those foolhardy enough to wage war or conflict in such weather are more suicidal than brave. Please reinforce how lethal a sandstorm can be.

### IF / THEN

Offer a chance for the party to find shelter or establish a safe zone. Unless the players are totally engrossed in other activities, they should recognize the danger as the sandstorm splits the sky as a wall of darkness. Finding shelter requires a Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence check (DC 20). The distance to get to shelter should be adjudicated using the Rule of Three. A lethal setting would only offer one chance to make it, while a more cinematic feel would allow three chances. Anyone with the Desert Nomad background has *Advantage* on the roll.

**Stage 1** – The winds stir up dust and sand, limiting visibility and sound to 10 feet. Any ranged attacks (including spells) are halved and have *Disadvantage* to hit. Movement faster than half speed may cause one to trip or stumble. If moving faster than half speed, make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (DC 10) or fall prone. If heading for shelter, this could cause a very dangerous delay.

**Stage 2** – As above, but vision is reduced to zero! Touch, memory, guide ropes, or other methods beyond sight, are the only ways to keep track of a path or party members. Stumbling and falling is probable, and using anything light or fragile is impossible. Reading a scroll or map is futile, and a fumble will have the item snatched away by the winds, never to be seen again.

Every 10 minutes in the storm, a character must make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (DC 15). A successful roll means the character stays on his feet and holds on to whatever they are carrying. A failed roll means that they fall down and get pushed 10 to 40 feet in the direction of the wind. Anything light they are holding is blown away. This may mean one step forward and two steps back.

If a character is crawling, they have *Advantage* on their save, but their movement is slowed to half.

**Stage 3** – The sandstorm is so powerful that it can lift mounts, carts, characters and anything not tied down securely. Every item up to 250 pounds is blown hundreds of feet in the direction of the wind, inflicting 4d6 points of structural damage to it. This is enough to break all but the strongest objects.

Other objects up to 2000 pounds have a 1 in 6 chance of being pushed by the storm up to 100 feet depending on its size and shape (GMs discretion).

Characters can use any appropriate ability and skill to resist being blown away if it makes sense. Even if measures are taken to prevent being blown away, those that fail their save will still be lifted off their feet. For example, if the characters are lashed together, one of them can still be pulled into the air and held to the rest by only the rope.

If a character is picked up and thrown by the wind, death is nearly certain. They will be blown 20 to 200 feet (2d10 x 10 feet), suffering 1d6 hit points of bludgeoning damage for each 10 feet launched. Characters can make a Dexterity save (DC 20) to halve the damage. Of course the GM should use their discretion if the players come up with other options to resist the wind.

Those with a flying movement rate can subtract their movement from the total distance thrown to reduce the damage. An Inspiration Point may be spent to re-roll the distance traveled, hopefully reducing the damage suffered.

Finding any objects (or unconscious creatures) in the wake of the storm requires a successful Perception check (DC 20). This can be re-rolled each hour after the sandstorm has passed. Remember that this will affect unprotected mounts, pets and familiars as well!

Under these conditions, the GM will have to decide if a shelter is solid enough to withstand the storm or resist flying debris. Depending on its construction, the shelter itself might take severe damage or even be destroyed completely.

## EVEN THE ODDS

Wind gusts, flying objects, tripping hazards and blinding conditions can randomly effect anyone under the sandstorm's merciless effects.

## CHANGES

Using the above stages can increase the tension of the environment and ramp up any conflicts in the desert storm. Use your discretion when your game needs to add additional difficulty. If there is a need for a random time table, roll a d10 to gauge the number of minutes before the storm winds will increase to the next Stage. For example, rolling a 3 would mean the storm will increase to the next Stage in 3 minutes.

**Dust Devils!** This is a smaller and localized form of the sandstorm. Formed from hot air currents, wind and

pressure, a dust devil is a relatively small tornado of sand and hot air. Use the above stages to detail the strength of the twister, but limit its size. They can be as small as 10 feet across to as large as 200 feet (1d20 x 10 feet) moving 10 feet to 40 feet per round in more or less a straight line.

**Dust Clouds!** This is a minor wind that stirs up vast amounts of tiny particles. The dust cloud remains at Stage 1 but lasts all day, obscuring paths and trails. Opponents could take advantage of the cover and disappear before the dust cloud ends.

## FUMBLECRITS

- 1 The victim accidentally sucks down a lung full of dust and sand and begins suffocating. The victim can survive for a number of rounds equal to their Constitution modifier (minimum of 1 round). At the start of their next turn, they drop to 0 hit points and begin dying. If the victim completely stops and begins clearing their lungs, they can catch a breath, but this will leave them Incapacitated while coughing up sand and dust.
- 2 The victim is Blinded by dust and sand for 1d4 rounds or until their eyes are cleared by water or a cloth using an Action to do so.
- 3 The storm winds yank an object out of a character's hand. It falls to the ground and is immediately covered by layers of sand. They must then make a Perception check (DC 15) to find the object. This search takes a full turn.
- 4 The victim falls prone. A full turn must be spent to stand up and gather one's self, or else suffer *Disadvantage* on any saves for 1 round by standing up too quickly.

### *An excerpt from the Journal of Brother Leeds*

*It has been several days since the sandstorm and we have yet to find half of our gear. We managed to get the party and most of the beasts into the tent before the worst of the storm hit, but one mule is dead.*

*By the greatest stroke of luck the water was not lost, but our food situation is looking rather grim. Well, as my grandmother used to say, 'waste not, want not.' I hope no one has a problem with mule stew for a while.*





## SINKHOLES & SAND RIVERS

*Some may dismiss what I write as heat induced madness, but I swear on my life that today we crossed something that could only be described as a river of sand. It flowed with a force to match any river of water that I have ever seen.*

*Our guide Khem tried to explain these dangers, though we were skeptical, thinking them old tavern tales. We changed our minds quickly however when we came to a flat expanse of smooth sand. Khem wordlessly threw a large rock into a featureless plain. The stone was instantly swallowed up, followed by an area the size of a small ship. A giant sinkhole had opened up beneath plain, and the sand was simply funneled into it, leaving a deep depression in the formerly featureless landscape.*

*Khem turned gravely and said, "In three or four days the winds will fill it, and there will be no trace. The sand river we crossed was caused by the same process. Mark this warning well, my friends."*

### PRESSURE

Going around these hazards would cost valuable time, energy and resources. With careful progression, the party can minimize or even avoid their effects. Attacks by enemies or predators will make this trek doubly dangerous, so pacing and marching speed will be vitally important.

### IF / THEN

Any travel or movement faster than half speed means rolling all Perception and Saving Throw attempts at *Disadvantage*. Remember that slow and steady wins the race when it comes to sinkholes and sand rivers.

**Sinkholes** – These are caused by the erosion of bedrock far below the surface. It usually takes place over a long period of time, leaving a thin crust beneath the sand. This crust can be fairly solid, but more often than not, they are rather brittle, requiring only the smallest weight to cause them to fail. When this happens, the sand pours down into the depths of the earth like the inside of an hourglass.

These hazards are difficult, but not impossible to spot. When passing through an area that is prone to sinkholes, the characters can make Perception checks (DC 16) every hour to notice potential sinkholes.

If the party decides to cross the sinkhole, they will likely want to take things slow, and spread themselves out so as not to put too much pressure in one area. Each character must make a Dexterity (Stealth) check (DC 10) to avoid triggering the sinkhole.

If a sinkhole is triggered, any creature within 10 to 100 feet (1d10 x 10 feet) will have 1 round to act before the sand begins to suck them down. After that, they will need to make Strength saves (DC 15) to resist being pulled down. Each fail means that the sinkhole has pulled them down another 5 feet as the sand slowly funnels into the ground. A success moves them 5 feet closer to the upper edge of the funneling sand.

If they are tethered by a rope to someone outside the sinkhole, they can make their saves at *Advantage*. If they were aware of the sinkhole beforehand, they make their first save at *Advantage*.

Once a character has failed 4 times (meaning that they are now 20 feet down the slope of the sinkhole), they are covered with sand. They now take 1d4 points of Constitution damage per round as they are crushed and begin suffocating. Anyone stuck in the sand is considered to be Grappled.

**Sand River.** Caused by the same phenomenon as sinkholes, the sand river occurs when a large sinkhole opens up and begins pulling sand from more distant areas. The river follows the topography beneath the sand and can run for days and cross many miles depending on the scale of the sinkhole event.

A sand river can be anywhere from 10 feet to 300 feet wide, and move between 10 and 40 miles per hour (1d4 x 10 mph), and as such, are easier to spot due to their movement, though an unwitting party can still stumble into them if they are not paying close attention.

When approaching a sand river, the characters can make a Wisdom (Perception) check (DC 12) to spot it. The GM can adjust this DC at their discretion based on the movement of the party, the surrounding terrain and the speed of the river.

Crossing a sand river can be even more hazardous than a river of water due to the density of the sand. To move across requires a Strength (Athletics) check (DC 15) each round to resist the current. A successful roll means moving 10 feet across and 5 feet down stream. A failure means moving only down stream 20 feet. Two failures in a row means getting pulled under by the current. They now take 1 point of Constitution damage per round as they are crushed and begin suffocating until they make a successful Strength (Athletics) check. Anyone stuck in the sand is considered to be Grappled.

If riding an animal, use an Animal Handling check (DC 18) to guide them across the river safely. If the check is successful, then no roll is necessary for the rider. A pack animal can be lead across using the same check, except that the character leading it will have to make a check as well.

Depending on where they encounter the sand river, it is possible that they could be swept into the sinkhole that created it. The GM will have to determine if that is the case and what effect it will have on the situation.

Anyone wearing medium or heavy armor makes their saves to resist the current at *Disadvantage*.

## FUMBLECRITS

- 1 The victim stumbles backwards, falling headfirst into the sand, leaving them disoriented so they cannot determine which way is up. *Even the Odds* to determine if they move out of the hazard or deeper in.
- 2 The victim starts to fall gracelessly, and they have only an instant to choose whether or not to grab onto the piece of gear that just fell off their person, or stop themselves from falling.
- 3 Sand is cast into the character's eyes, causing minor damage. They are now effectively blind until their eyes are rinsed out with clean water and the damage is healed. This can be done with a Healer's Kit and a successful Medicine check (DC 10), or through the use of any healing magic that restores at least 1 hit point.

- 4 The character's ankle is badly twisted, leaving them a bit lame in one leg. This reduces their movement rate by 5 feet until they have had a long rest and a successful Medicine check (DC 10).

## A letter from Artemus Hale to the wife of Kara Pavick

Dear Lady Pavick,

*It is with the greatest sorrow that I must inform you of the untimely death of your wife, Kara. The circumstances of her demise are unpleasant, but since you were aware of the potential dangers, I feel that it would be a disservice to Kara's memory to tell you anything less than the whole truth.*

*We had set out into the Desert of Kensus in search of an ancient temple dedicated to a deity simply known as The Blind God. Historical documents indicated that a vast library might be found there.*

*The desert turned out to be much more formidable than we had expected. A vast ocean of shifting sand stretching to the horizon in all directions without so much as a rock or clump of scrub grass to be seen.*

*Our party consisted of twelve seasoned adventurers and six mules loaded down with enough supplies for two weeks. For the first few days things went as well as could be expected considering the brutal conditions.*

*On the fourth day however, one of the mules let out a terrible cry as it fell sideways. To our utter horror, it was sucked beneath the sand by a great funnel that just seemed to open up beneath the poor beast. We all watched helplessly as half of our water began to slip from sight. All except for Kara who lunged forward, grabbing the mule's tether. As the sinkhole began to suck them both down, the rest of us desperately tried to save Kara, but she kept refusing our hands, and instead kept passing us more of the precious water skins.*

*The mule must have fallen through into some vast chamber beneath because as Kara passed the last of the water, she was jerked from my grasp. She disappeared beneath the sand, and we saw her no more.*

*I know it is little comfort to you in this difficult time, but you should know that she saved all of our lives that day, for we surely would have been dessicated by that desert without her sacrifice.*



## WASTELANDS

*We emerged from the foothills a few hours ago, and have entered what must be the wasteland that we had been warned about. I must admit that doesn't look nearly as inhospitable as travelers seemed to suggest, though if I have learned anything in my travels, it is that looks can be deceiving.*

*Although clearly a very arid land, it is not nearly as featureless as the salt flat we encountered in our previous expedition. There are strange rock formations with many layers of different hues and textures. There are also a plethora of strange plants that our guide has warned us to avoid. Now I can see why.*

*Every plant in these lands seems intent on defending itself with some sort of spine, barb or razor-sharp edge. Beyond the deadly flora, we are told to be on guard against the many venomous insects and other creatures that call these dry lands home.*

### PRESSURE

In addition to the normal pressures of getting through a desert as quickly as possible, the wastelands have a great abundance of venomous creatures that can make resting at night nearly impossible.

Due to the wide variety of rock formations, ravines, canyons and natural strongholds, these lands are popular with those who are fleeing the law and see shelter where no one in their right mind would follow. Maybe the PCs are fleeing capture, or perhaps they are the pursuers who must catch up to their quarry at all costs.

### IF / THEN

The wastelands are much more dangerous than they might first appear, and it can be easy for a traveler to become complacent enough to make a mistake.

**Falling Rocks.** Whenever walking near a cliff, beneath an overhang, or through some other rock formation, there is a chance that some of the stone will come loose and drop down on the unsuspecting characters.

If they are not actively avoiding these circumstances, there is a 1 in 6 chance each hour that nearby rocks will break loose and fall near the party. This increases to 2 in 6 if the characters are making a lot of noise, 3 in 6 if engaged in combat, and 4 in 6 if someone uses a thunder-based (or similar) spell.

If the party is actively watching for such dangers, then they can easily avoid falling rocks, though it will slow their movement by 5 feet.

If a rock falls near the party, have them make Dexterity saves (DC 12) to avoid it. If any fail, they are hit by the stone or related debris and suffer 2d12 bludgeoning damage. The damage also determines the size of the rock.

Total Damage	Rock Diameter	Additional Results
2-4 hp	6 inches	Stunned for 1 round.
5-8 hp	1-2 feet	Stunned for 1 round and knocked prone.
9-14 hp	2-3 feet	They sustain a lingering injury (see DMG, pg. 272)
15-20 hp	4-8 feet	Pinned by the rock. They must make a Strength check (DC 20) to escape.
21-24	8+ feet	Critical Injury. In addition to the damage, 1 limb is broken and useless. Maximum damage may require amputation (GM's discretion).

**Losing Direction.** The wasteland can be very disorienting, despite having plenty of landmarks. The problem is that many landmarks look very much alike.

When traveling through a wasteland with many tall rock formations, the characters should make a Wisdom (Survival) check (DC 10) each hour to make sure that they have not lost their way in this maze of stone.

Once lost, finding the correct trail can be difficult, requiring a minimum of 1 hour and a successful Wisdom (Survival) check (DC 20) to get back on track.

Those with the Desert Nomad background have *Advantage* on this check.

If the party is only going in a general direction, like due east for example, they are not likely to become lost for long. In this case, a failed check means that they run into dead end or other obstacle that will force them to retrace their steps and lose 1 hour of precious time.

**Venomous Creatures.** There are an alarming number of venomous insects, reptiles and other exotic creatures in the desert wastelands. The characters are unlikely to run into any of them during the day, unless they are foraging for food and water. After all, foraging involves looking in cool spots and turning over rocks, which is where many of these creatures hide during the day.

If a character rolls a Fumblecrit when foraging, they have accidentally encountered a venomous creature and have been bitten or stung.

At night, things become much more dangerous. The party can minimize the risks by taking extra time when setting up camp by clearing away rocks and debris that might be concealing potentially venomous creatures. This process is safe enough if the characters are aware of the danger. If not, treat it like foraging.

During the night, if the area has been cleared and there is a campfire, there is a 1 in 20 chance of a character being bitten or stung by a creepy crawly. If there is no fire and the camp is poorly prepared, there is a 3 in 20 chance.

If bitten or stung, the character must make a successful Constitution saving throw (DC 10) or suffer 1d6 points of poison damage. If their save is successful, the damage is half.

As an option, the GM can have a roll of 1 on their save mean that the venom is a lethal dose, and unless they receive some sort of anti-venom or magical healing, they lose 1d4 hit points of poison damage per hour until dead or healed.

A Healer's kit that is purchased in the vicinity of the desert will have the anti-venom necessary to save the person's life, with no Medicine check necessary. The spell Lesser Restoration will also neutralize the venom.

As a GM you may decide that a lethal bite or sting is a bit harsh, and so you could simply reduce the effect to having the poisoned condition for a day or two.



# APPENDIX

## NEW BACKGROUND

### DESERT NOMAD

Perhaps you were born to a nomadic desert tribe, or maybe you are running away from your past, choosing instead to wander the desolate wastelands. In either case, you are have learned to survive in one of the most inhospitable environments in the world.

You are equally comfortable being alone or in the company of fellow travellers. All nomads understand that good conversation among strangers, spoken over cups of jaav or hookah vapor, is a gift. For that reason, news travels fast in the desert reaches.

Each moment with family and friends is to be cherished, as the memory of these meetings fuels your tired legs and parched mouth.

**Skill Proficiencies:** Athletics, Survival

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Klava and Scimitar

**Languages:** Sandspeak and one more of your choice.

**Equipment:** A simple klava, pouch of jaav beans (2 cups), a set of desert robes which function as a shade or tent, a waterskin filled with sandroot, a small mirror, shovel, 3 vials of spice worth 5gp each.

#### FEATURE: DESERT SURVIVOR

You are experienced enough not to be confused or disoriented by the the absence of landmarks or shifting sands of the desert landscape.

You can assemble a simple shelter from your robes, klava and a few sticks. This is enough shade to keep yourself cool, even during the hottest part of the day.

You are aware of the dangers of traveling during the hottest portion of the day and the freezing cold at night. Given the option, you will naturally avoid these hazards.

You have an intimate and practical understanding of water and its true value. You have no problems cutting your rations and water intake in half when needed. You may add your Proficiency bonus when calculating the effects of starvation or dehydration.

You are an expert in social etiquette when meeting strangers for the first time. Although you may not have any specific knowledge about the strangers, you know how to observe their demeanor and mannerisms for certain visual cues that allow you can approach them in the friendliest manner possible. You can do this up close or from afar.

### SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

The effects of isolation in a landscape that continually reminds one of how insignificant they are can shape the hardest stone heart. The sand will carve a new being out of you... or it will turn you into bones and dust.

#### d8 Personality Trait

- 1 I measure the worth of others based on the sand. Those that cannot learn to survive are a lowly form of life.
- 2 I want others to be remade as the desert sands have remade me.
- 3 I cherish the time spent with others, talking of the past and dreams of the future.
- 4 Exile is the worst punishment. Even I would never banish someone to the wastes.
- 5 I have no need of wealth or riches as it serves only to weigh down my shoulders.
- 6 Any discussion of vast bodies of water fascinate me. I long to see an ocean one day.
- 7 I haggle over the price or trade value of everything. It is a game that builds relationships and tests one's ingenuity.
- 8 Survival requires making tough decisions about life and death. I understand if I am a victim of those choices.

#### d6 Ideal

- 1 **Tradition.** I will always welcome a traveller, even an enemy, for a cup of jaav and conversation. It is the way of civilized people. (Lawful)
- 2 **Justice.** The punishment for crime is exile. Forgiveness comes from surviving. (Chaotic)
- 3 **Survival.** There is no need to waste water on the elderly, infirm or children. (Evil)
- 4 **Charity.** There is no question that I will cut my rations and water to help another. (Good)
- 5 **Rebirth.** Your previous life has no merit or value here. Only your life in the sand matters now. (Neutral)
- 6 **Art.** Outsiders see only an endless expanse of nothing. I see wonders and natural beauty which can enrich the spirit with a single glance. Follow me to uncover this hidden world. (Any)

#### d6 Bond

- 1 My nomadic family and friends meet periodically. I never miss the chance to catch up on long stories and short tempers.
- 2 Ancient temples and crypts dot the landscape, uncovered by time and winds, only to be lost to the sands once again. I intend to protect (or plunder, or destroy) each that I find.

- 3 I am in search of an old enemy. I have no idea if my vengeance will survive this journey.
- 4 I wander the desert seeking redemption. I will not leave until I have found it.
- 5 An oasis finds many veterans and survivors of war gathering in song and dance. I enjoy this place because ancient foes put aside long feuds to talk of life and love.
- 6 I am in search of an ancient tomb. This pharaoh was legendary in his brutality and deprivations. I am a descendant of this dead king's blood.

**d6 Flaw**

- 1 I will never learn to swim. The idea of being underwater terrifies me.
- 2 I never explain my actions.
- 3 I show honor and respect by spitting on the ground. I drink urine when there is no water. Bathing is useless. And I squat in any patch of sand or dirt.
- 4 Even away from the desert I only drink and eat the bare minimum to survive.
- 5 Temperatures below 50 degrees is freezing to me. I will bundle up and gather furs to keep my teeth from chattering and my fingers from going numb.
- 6 I have been lived in the desert my whole life, and so I am naive about the most basic things in the larger world.

## NEW LANGUAGE: SANDSPEAK

Sandspeak is a method of communication primarily over long distances. Sandspeak appears as a series of sharp whistle sounds, waving a flag or klava, and/or quick reflective bursts of sunlight in a small copper mirror.

Simple messages can be sent over many miles to warn of danger, provide directions to shelter, or call for help. A whipping scarf from a caravan may signal a lone traveller that food and water is available. Or flickering mirror can call those to an oasis in an uncharted region.

Criminals and soldiers use this method of communication to hide instructions and orders from strangers and enemies. Sandspeak cannot translate complex ideas or subtle emotional motivations.

## NEW EQUIPMENT & WEAPONS

**Klava.** This is a large well crafted scarf or towel, and is worn around the face and shoulders in various configurations. They come in numerous patterns and colors and are often decorated with tassels, beads, and small stones or metal rings to add weight.

This extremely mundane and ubiquitous scarf is worn in most public places and comes in many levels of craftsmanship

from simple styles worn by peasants to extravagant works of art worn by royalty to rich merchants.

Socially, the design and manner of wearing the klava provides information about the wearer's faith, politics and the organizations to which they belong. Strangers should be very cautious when dealing with another person's klava, since they are very personal objects that may have been handed down through many generations.

Beyond its cultural significance, the klava is indispensable in a desert environ due to its extreme utility, and can be used for the following purposes:

**Clothing** – Used as clothing, it protects the face from harsh desert sands, brutal sunlight and smoldering heat. If there is water available that may not be fit to drink, the water can be used to wet the klava, and so cool the head through evaporation in extreme heat.

**Childcare** – Babies and small children are carried in the nap of klava tied around the body. This has the dual benefits of protecting the child from the harsh environment, but it also leaves the parent's hands free.

**Combat** – The klava is also an effective weapon. It can be used as a net, a whip and an effective defensive tool.

When used as a shield, the klava can be quickly wrapped around the off hand to defend against bites and claws, as well as deflecting or parrying weapons. When one end is held in each hand, the klava can be used to deflect or bind larger weapons or an enemy's limb. In this way, the klava can be used to disarm, blind, trip or even strangle an opponent.

As a net or whip, it is flung out and snapped back with the flick of the wrist.

**Communication** – The klava can be used to signal other travelers at great distances. This is particularly effective if the user is proficient in Sandspeak, though it can certainly be used by anyone as a simple signal flag.

**Shelter** – The klava can be turned into a small shady tent when combined with a few small flexible sticks and some cordage. The shelter is surprisingly robust, and can protect the traveler from any but the most severe sandstorms.

Characters, who are not native to the desert lands, may only use the klava in a manner in which they are currently trained. In other words, to use it as a whip, they must be proficient with a whip. This requires that they practice with the klava to become accustomed to it, and so must spend at least 1 hour per day for a week training with it.

Obviously, the klava can only be used for one thing at a time, so if it is being used as a weapon, it cannot provide protection from sand or sun.

The klava is a fragile item. It is easy to burn, slash or cut. Unlike a true net, it has only 1 hit point. Any fumble will shred the material. Any target that has a corrosive or flammable



touch or skin will destroy the klava on contact, as will sharp spikes or hides that cause piercing damage.

**[Cost 1gp; Damage 1d4 slashing; Weight 1 lb.; Properties finesse, light, reach (15 feet), defense (AC, blind, grapple, trip, disarm, strangle)]**

**Sandroot.** Also called deeproot, this material is harvested from the tough and spiky plants that reach down towards sources of moisture deep in the ground. It is not uncommon to see nomads chewing on these roots to extract a bit of moisture on a long and arduous journey.

A bundle of these roots, while inedible, are able to absorb a vast amount of water. Placing them inside a container will multiply the usable water by a factor of 4. So a traditional waterskin that holds a half a gallon of liquid would instead hold 2 gallons of potable water. Note that this in no way increases the size or weight of the container.

Sandroot lasts 3 months if it remains moist, and 1 week if dry. Someone skilled in Desert Survival may cultivate their own sandroot. The searcher must make a Survival check (DC 20) each day. This roll is made with *Advantage* in the scrublands or near an oasis. Success means finding the appropriate vegetation. It takes 5 hours, minus 1 hour per Strength modifier, to harvest enough of the root.

**Jaav.** This is a dark brown bean that is roasted and steeped water to produce a rich dark brown drink. Small amounts of spice are often added to bring out the flavor. Every nomad has a personal jaav-pour they think is the perfect blend.

Drinking a cup of Jaav has the effect of temporarily suppressing 1 level of exhaustion for 1 hour. This can only be used for this purpose 2 times per day. Drinking Jaav more than 4 times per day will give the character *Disadvantage* on any dehydration checks.

Sharing a cup is honorable and a social norm.

**[Cost 5 cp - 5 sp per 1d4 cups worth of beans, depending on the quality desired. Note that higher quality beans are more likely to impress a true connoisseur of Jaav.]**

**Hookah.** This is an ornate bottle or tube that is heated from the bottom. Inside is a small amount of water and a dried plant with seeds. This results in an aromatic and slightly hallucinogenic or sedative vapor that can be inhaled from hollow reeds in the tube. It is the height of social etiquette to share the hookah over business, diplomacy or seduction.

**[Cost 10 - 120 gp depending on the quality and craftsmanship of the hookah.]**

**Hookah Herbal Blends.** There are many blends of hookah herbs, with a variety of flavors and effects. The most common ones include the following:

**House Blend** – This is the most common type of hookah blend, and is acceptable in almost any social setting. It has

a deep, spicy aroma and has a relaxing effect. It can also induce mild hallucinations that are generally vivid, though not alarming. The smokers will be able to clearly differentiate between hallucination and reality.

One hour smoking this blend will restore 1d4 hit points of damage and give the character *Advantage* on exhaustion related checks for 1 hour afterwards.

**[Cost 5 sp for five 1 hour doses.]**

**Royal Blend** – An uncommon and expensive blend, this is used by diplomats and merchants to impress others during any negotiations. It is also often found in many religious temples and palaces. This blend can also produce mild hallucinations, though these tend to be more auditory than visual, with the smokers often hearing soothing music.

One hour of smoking will have the same effect as the Friends spell except that, since everyone usually partake willingly, there is no residual hostility when the effects wear off. If anyone is unaware of its properties, then they may become hostile afterwards.

**[Cost 5 gp for a 1 hour dose]**

**Healing Blend** – This is a particularly potent magical blend that provides healing effects to those who smoke it. The herbs have a rich, floral scent with hints of honey.

One hour of smoking will heal 2d4 hit points of damage, and remove 1 level of exhaustion.

**[Cost 80 gp for 1 dose.]**

**Djinn Blend** – This extremely rare magical blend will enhance the arcane ability of those who partake of its heady vapors. It produces an emerald green smoke that winds in the air like serpents. The scent is dark and mysterious, with traces of sandalwood, black musk and frankincense.

One hour of smoking will restore 1d4 spell slot levels and allow the arcane smoker to cast their next spell as if 1 level higher, as long as they do so within an hour after smoking.

**[Cost 100 gp for 1 dose.]**

**Sight Blend** – Used primarily by prophets and seers, this blend provides intense visions to those who smoke it. These visions can be about the future, the past, or can provide messages from the spirit world.

One hour of smoking will induce vivid hallucinations that provide useful, though often cryptic, information that is foremost in the character's mind. The GM and players can discuss what the actual visions might be, as well as who shapes them. The GM is encouraged to share this task by perhaps handing the vision narrative back and forth between themselves and the players.

This can be a very useful plot device that can allow the GM to impart necessary information in an organic and cinematic

manner. This can also provide excellent opportunities for players to expand on their character's background or inner thoughts and feelings.

[Cost 50 gp for 1 dose.]

**Night Blend** – Although not terribly rare, this blend is not often used when traveling. It is a smooth, sweetish aroma that induces deep relaxation and an extremely restful, dreamless sleep. Many will only use this at home or some similarly safe space because; under its influence, it is unlikely that anything short of physical damage will wake the user.

One hour of smoking will cause the character to fall into a deep sleep. If they are unwilling, they can make a Constitution save (DC 15) to resist its effects. Anyone who gets a full night's sleep under after smoking this blend will remove 2 levels of exhaustion instead of just 1.

The drawback is that waking up while under the influence of this smoke is very difficult. Even movement or loud noises will wake them. Only pain or a splash of ice cold water will bring them around. Something like a good hard slap will do the trick. If awakened early, the character will be very groggy for about an hour. Their movement will be reduced by half and all actions will be at *Disadvantage* for that hour.

[Cost 60 gp for 1 dose.]

After imbibing any hookah blend, the character gains a level of exhaustion for 1 hour due to the narcotic effects of the smoke. This temporary exhaustion will only go away with time.

These and other blends can be purchased at nearly any city market, though they are popular traveling trade goods as well. Many desert nomads carry a surplus of unique hookah blends to be traded or sold as necessary.

The specific prices can vary quite a lot depending on availability and location. Most desert nomads can make their own blend by finding the ingredients they need in the wild, or buying some of the raw ingredients in bulk.

Each personal blend is as unique as a fingerprint to those who are knowledgeable about such things. In fact, many families guard their hookah recipes carefully.

Klava



## NEW WEAPON PROPERTY

**Defense.** A defense weapon is a versatile item that can be useful in defense, disarming opponents, blinding them, tripping or strangling a subject (depending on the specific weapon).

If used simply for defense, the weapon is treated just like a shield, providing a +2 to AC. While being used as a shield, it cannot be used to attack in the same round, though the wielder could switch between attack and defense from round to round.

If used to blind, grapple, trip, disarm, or strangle, the wielder must make an attack on their opponent. If successful, the opponent can make a Dexterity save to avoid the effect. The DC equals 8 + their Dexterity modifier + their proficiency bonus + any special modifiers. If the opponent fails on their Dexterity save, then they are grappled, tripped (knocked prone), disarmed or grappled around the throat as applicable.

When used to restrain an opponent, the wielder must target an arm, leg or head. For example, if the attacker successfully restrains a leg, the target will still have use of their hands.

Strangulation should be treated like a grapple, except that each round the strangulation is in effect, the victim begins to suffocate. The victim can survive for a number of rounds equal to their Constitution modifier (minimum 1 round). At the start of their next turn, they drop to 0 hit points and begin dying.

The blinding effect is a result of having the weapon impeding the opponent's vision for that round and lasts only until the end of their next turn.



Jaav



Hookah

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# THE STORY OF DAVAE BREON JAXON

DAVAE BREON JAXON, A MASTER WIZARD AND COLLECTOR OF EXOTIC LORE, WAS APPRENTICED TO THE INFAMOUS MORDENKANE IN THE GREAT CITY OF TAL'NAVASHAR IN THE EAST.

AS SOON AS HE WAS ABLE, JAXON SET OUT INTO THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE, SPENDING MORE THAN THREE DECADES TRAVELING THE ROADS AND WILD LANDS OF ANDÜN AND GREATER ARDA. DURING HIS WANDERINGS, HE MANAGED TO AMASS A VAST AMOUNT OF MAGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND AN EXTRAORDINARY NUMBER OF BOOKS. IN HIS LATTER YEARS, JAXON ESTABLISHED THE LARGEST AND MOST RESPECTED LIBRARY DEDICATED TO THE ARCANE ARTS THE WORLD HAD EVER SEEN.

DAVAE BREON JAXON HAS RECENTLY TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE INSTRUCTION OF ADVENTURERS IN THE FINE ART OF SURVIVAL IN EXTREME ENVIRONMENTS, AND THIS BOOK HAS BENEFITTED GREATLY FROM HIS EXPERIENCE.

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