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VILLAGE BACKDROP:
HULW'MA



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: HULW'MA

Clustered about a remote oasis hidden in the deep desert, the village of Hulw'ma is a welcome sanctuary from the stifling heat of the shimmering sands that seemingly stretch endlessly in all directions. Sanctuary is not always to be had in the village, however, for here the followers of the Living Water worship their divine lord and levy a toll on travellers drinking of his sacred body. Danger also lies without the village for the ruins of a fallen city pierce the nearby shifting sands and within dwell the bandits of the Naji Su'ad who prey on villager and traveller alike.

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Thank you for purchasing *Hulw'ma*; we hope you enjoy it and that you check out our other fine print and PDF products.

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HULW'MA AT A GLANCE

The village of Hulw'ma (which means "Sweet Water" in a nearly forgotten local dialect) encircles a large oasis in the deep desert. While not often visited, its water makes it a valuable stop for those crossing the sands. However, what makes the village unique is its patron: Musheer the Living Water. Believed by locals to be the divine avatar of the life-giving water, this corrupted marid has inspired a church of devoted followers that demand a tribute from all travellers partaking of the holy water and drive away those who blaspheme his holy demand for donations.

Despite the strength of the theocracy of the Living Water, resistance to its rule grows. Hiding in the ruins of the forgotten city of Xa'niphan and calling themselves the Survivors of Fortune, or Naji Su'ad, the exiles rob both passing caravans and the citizens of Hulw'ma alike.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Zaahir Amaal, Speaker of Tranquil Waters

Government Theocratic autocracy

Population 67 (58 humans, 8 half-orcs, 1 orc)

Alignments CN

Languages Common, Orc

Corruption -5; **Crime** -3; **Economy** -3; **Law** -2; **Lore** -2; **Society** -3

Qualities Holy Site, insular

Danger 0; **Disadvantages** Hunted

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Brave Brak Gloomaxe (location 6; CG male orc fighter 4) Brave Brak is the leader of the Bloody Blades mercenary company that has recently come to Hulw'ma. Brave Brak smells profit in Hulw'ma for his band of soldiers for hire, but he is beginning to suspect the theocracy may not have the best interest of the populace at heart.

Farraj Al'Usaim (location 7; CN male human fighter 2/rogue 2) Farraj leads the Naji Su'ad, who lurk in the lands surrounding Hulw'ma, robbing caravans, exploring the ruins and fighting against Musheer's tyranny. He is known for his daring exploits, walking the streets of Hulw'ma in disguise and stealing water directly from the sacred oasis.

Musheer (location 2; CE male marid) Corrupt and evil, Musheer is a capricious monster who has set himself as a deity to gather wealth and power. He attracts worshippers by offering magical "blessings" or wealth, taken from tributes previously passed on to him. However, with a foul craving for the flesh of sentient creatures it is not uncommon for some supplicants to simply disappear.

Shakib Al'Amin (location 4; N male human expert 3) Shakib deals in used items; with no questions asked about their origin. Whether Zaahir offers him items collected from the tribute that were not worth giving to Musheer or the Naji Su'ad are

fencing items taken from travellers, they end up in Shakib's market stalls, polished and ready for resale.

Wayfiyah (location 5; NE female human commoner 2) The beautiful daughter of a local spice merchant, Wayfiyah believes herself to be the chosen one of Musheer and has begun a secret relationship with him that not even Zaahir knows about. In order to please her divine lover, she uses her charms to lure young men to the oasis that they might be offered up to her consort as living tribute.

Zaahir Amaal (location 3; CN male human druid 9) The Speaker of Tranquil Waters is the high priest of Musheer and the earthly ruler of Hulw'ma. He is utterly devoted to the marid, believing him to be an avatar of the water, and will brook no questions to his master's desires.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Isle of Tribute:** Offerings to the Living Water are delivered to a tall obelisk inscribed with prayers to Musheer on this small island, barely larger than a wagon.
2. **The Oasis of the Living Water:** The oasis and its water are the focus of daily life in Hulw'ma. It is also Musheer's home.
3. **Temple of Serene Ripples:** Topped with a broad onion dome, the temple is the centre of Hulw'ma's religious and civil authority. Services are given by the Speaker of Tranquil Waters every dawn and dusk.
4. **Bazaar of Rediscovered Delights:** The offerings in the market are always varied, but Shakib and his wares are a staple.
5. **Halifa Spices:** The Halifa family spiceworks dries, grinds and sells a number of rare desert spices to those who pass through Hulw'ma. What is not sold here is shipped to larger cities when the caravans are able to escape the raids of the Naji Su'ad.
6. **Welcome Lantern Inn:** The Welcome Lantern is the only place in Hulw'ma for visitors to find food and comfortable lodging.
7. **Ruins of Xa'niphan:** The ruins of a forgotten city pierce the sands, offering refuge to those who seek to escape the theocracy of the Living Water.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Divine relics, resale goods, spices, water
Base Value 400 gp; **Purchase Limit** 2,500 gp; **Spellcasting** 5th;
Minor Items 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** –

When the PCs arrive in Hulw'ma, the following items are for sale in the Bazaar:

- **Potions & Oils** cure light wounds (25 gp), endure elements (50 gp), remove disease (750 gp)
- **Scroll (Divine)** cloak of shade (25 gp), endure elements (25 gp)

VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) may know some information about Hulw'ma. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Hulw'ma is a small village that has sprung up around one of the few oases available to those attempting to cross the desert.

DC 15: Visitors to Hulw'ma must provide a tribute to the local religious authority in order to draw from the village's water supply.

DC 20: Stories say the oasis is inhabited by a divine spirit that can grant wishes to those who please it by offering lavish gifts.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Natives of Hulw'ma have black hair, brown eyes and tanned skin. Hair is usually worn straight and is generally longer for women than men.

Dress Given the temperatures and brutal sun, clothing is usually loose fitting and lightweight. Veils and turbans are common, as is gold jewellery.

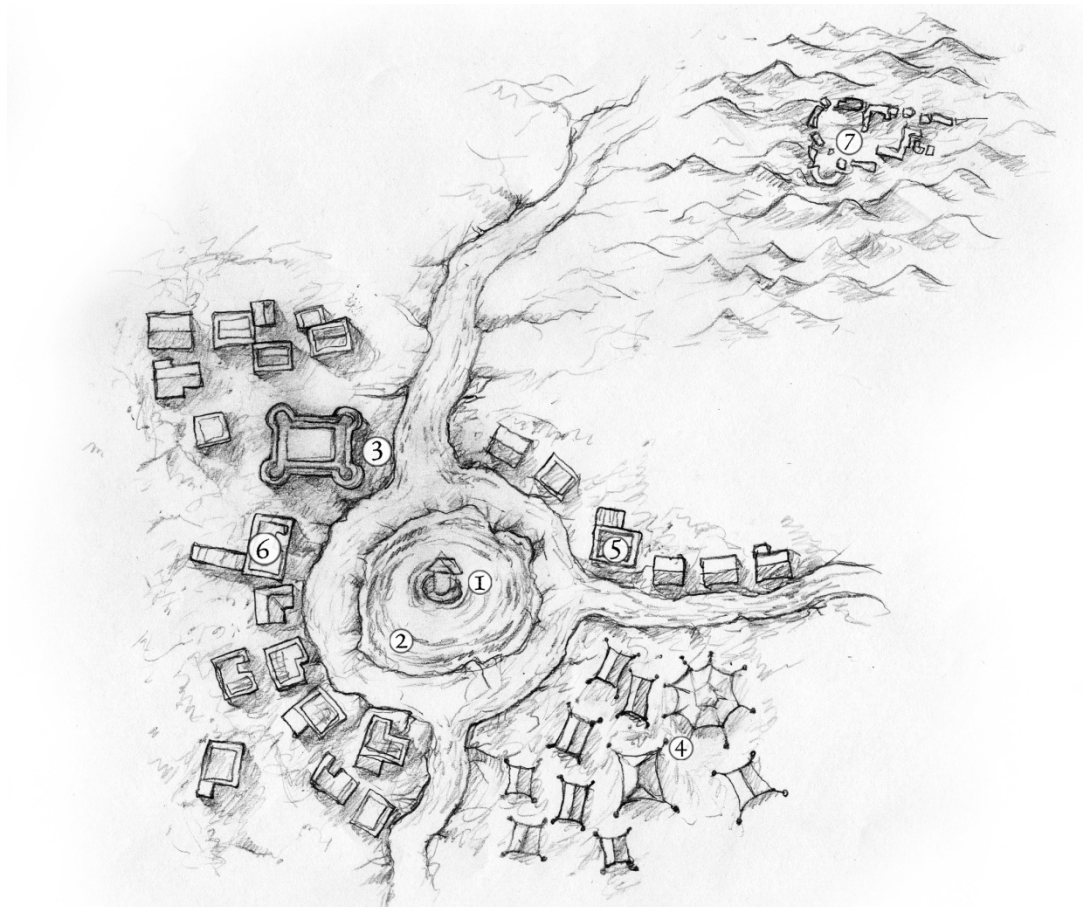
Nomenclature *male* Abdul, Fariq, Nasir; *female* Lunah, Rasha, Ulfah; *family* Al'Amin, Al'Aziz, Halifa, Zayan.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about the village and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A character exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1*	The Naji Su'ad worship a fire demon from the deep desert. It grants them immortality but drives them insane.
2	The Bloody Blades can be hired for just about anything, but they have refused several jobs offered them by the Temple of Serene Ripples.
3	Several lone pilgrims have disappeared from Hulw'ma in the night.
4*	Supplicants to the Living Water can earn their fondest wish if they please him enough.
5*	The bazaar is filled with secret booths for those in the know or the very lucky, where one can buy magical artefacts recovered from the ruins of Xa'niphan.
6	Beware travel to Hulw'ma. The temple of Serene Ripples demands a tribute and has been known to forcibly take all of your belongings if they feel your tribute is not worthy of the Living Water.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: ISLE OF TRIBUTE

In the centre of Hulw'ma rests the Oasis of the Living Water, and in the centre of the oasis is the Isle of Tribute. Two palm trees and a tall, pearlescent white obelisk painted with prayers of supplication to the Living Water stand upon the small island. Every day the followers of Musheer use a raft to approach the island and pile up the tributes offered for the use of the oasis in between his appearances.

The obelisk radiates faint abjuration magic (*detect magic*, DC 16), the result of an *alarm* spell that notifies Musheer if anyone tampers with the treasure here. If the alarm is triggered, Musheer swims up under the cover of *invisibility* to see who dares steal from him. At any time, 2d6 gp worth of coins or art objects plus 5d6 gp worth of trade goods can be found piled around the obelisk.

2: THE OASIS OF THE LIVING WATER

The village of Hulw'ma would not exist but for the life giving waters of the oasis that makes everything in the village possible. The water feeds the spices grown here, attracts the caravans and other travellers crossing the dunes and is home to Musheer the Living Water (CE male marid). Using his *change shape* ability to appear as an extremely attractive, and barely clad, blue-skinned human man rising from the waves, he comes to the shore roughly once a week to offer his grace, divine wisdom and to receive the worship of his followers.

All water in the village is drawn from the oasis under the watchful eye of guards from the Temple of Serene Ripples (human warrior 2) and at least one acolyte (human druid 1) who levy a tax for sampling the precious resource. Depending on the mood of the acolyte and the apparent wealth of the petitioner, a skin of water can usually be had for approximately 5 cp worth of coin or goods.

Unbeknownst to all but Musheer himself, and his current paramour Wayfiah bint Halifa, Musheer lives in an air-filled cave at the bottom of the deep oasis. Popular myth in the village holds that Musheer is the water of the oasis and all who drink from it take him into themselves, explaining why the temple and its followers are so zealous in their defence of the oasis.

Over the last few decades, Musheer has developed a taste for the flesh of humanoids pickled in brine, though he dabbles in other preparation methods on occasion. He is particularly fond of halflings and dislikes the taste of orcs. Deciding that he required a steady stream of ready meals, he convinced the people of Hulw'ma he is their god and they in turn shower him with wealth and power...and the occasional snack. In order to attract more riches and repasts he has further spread the rumour that the god of the oasis grants petitioners their fondest

wishes if they prove their deserving heart with significant generosity towards himself and his temple. Using his *charm person*, *limited wish*, *minor creation*, *persistent image*, and *wish* spell-like abilities, along with several magic items gathered over the years, Musheer grants just enough blessings to keep his reputation well-known. When choosing which supplicant upon whom to bestow his grace, he is most likely to choose those offering lavish tribute, or those whose heart's desire can be twisted to cause the most strife and pain. He tries to reserve his *wish* for a trustworthy follower whose request benefits the theocracy of the Living Water or Musheer directly.

3: TEMPLE OF SERENE RIPPLES

Four shining blue and white minarets and a central brilliant brass coloured dome dominate the small skyline of Hulw'ma. The temple space inside is much too large for a village the size of Hulw'ma and could easily seat one hundred worshippers; a sign of the temple's wealth and aspirations. Every surface inside is painted white with blue swirls, reminiscent of ripples on the surface of a pond. At night, brass hooks sport bright lanterns on the exterior walls, so the flames cast undulating shadows over the whitewashed clay.

The Temple of Serene Ripples houses the druidic clergy of the Living Water, led by Zaahir Amaal, the Speaker of Tranquil Waters (CN male human druid 9). Motivated by a thirst for power and wealth, Zaahir has latched onto the ruthless and greedy religion offered by Musheer and zealously dominates the village forcing others to follow his master's whims.

In well-appointed private rooms beyond those open to the public, Zaahir lives with two acolytes (human druid 1) and eight guards (human warrior 2). The clergy spends most of their time either leading services to their false god in the temple or supervising those who wish to draw water from the oasis. All of them are fervently dedicated to the Living Water and value the wealth and power their position gives them.

4: BAZAAR OF REDISCOVERED DELIGHTS

A quarter of the village is given over to a ramshackle collection of tents, stalls and meagre carpets; all with a wide selection of well-used treasures. Originally conceived of by Shakib Al'Amin (N male human expert 3), the Bazaar of Rediscovered Delights specializes in reselling those items or goods recovered from the Ruins of Xa'niphan or donated to the Temple of Serene Ripples.

There is no order to the Bazaar and while mostly filled with standard trade goods, personal items or dusty pottery from the ruins, the lucky sometimes uncover a unique treasure for sale.

While several other merchants have joined Shakib in the Bazaar, he remains the largest and wealthiest; in large part due to his willingness to purchase from, and sell to, anyone.

Extremely useful to adventurers with a less than ethical streak, Shakib is not concerned about a few holes or bloodstains in that used suit of armour. Shakib also has a stash of potions he might be willing to sell, or trade, to those who offer protection against Naji Su'ad raids.

5: HALIFA SPICES

While the power in Hulw'ma may reside in the hands of the temple, most of daily life moves in and out of Halifa Spices. The Halifa family owns a large spiceworks, where rare desert plants are carefully tended and eventually processed into spices to be traded across the world. Fazoun Halifa (LG male human expert 3) owns the spiceworks and manages the business with the help of his large family.

More than half of the village is employed here. Between the processing floor, the greenhouse and the fields, the business is filled with activity all day and night. The greenery requires a significant amount of water and so Fazoun has brokered a deal with the Temple in exchange for a percentage of his production; along with occasional gifts of coin or imported art. In addition to their pay, Fazoun allows all workers water from his allotment while they work, as well as the ability to take home whatever they can carry. His generosity has made him extremely popular with his workers and he is well-loved.

Fazoun's favourite child is his treasured daughter, Wayfiyah (NE female human commoner 2); a dark-haired beauty with an even darker secret. She is secretly involved in a relationship with Musheer. Wayfiyah believes the marid's protestations of love and enjoys the black games he encourages her to play. She begins when her eye alights upon a lonely traveller who will not be missed. Flirtation and drink eventually leads to a moonlight stroll along the oasis shore where Musheer awaits to claim the unsuspecting suitor as his prize. So far Wayfiyah believes herself a equal partner and does not truly understand what happens to the tributes pulled below the otherwise still waters. What happens when Musheer tires of her, or she discovered the true fate of the men, remains to be seen.

6: WELCOME LANTERN INN

Large and comfortable, the Welcome Lantern is a quiet place but swells with visitors roughly once a month when a caravan arrives to deliver supplies to the spiceworks and take the processed spices across the sands. Run by Suizel Terronmah (NG human male expert 2) who mostly keeps to himself, prices are affordable, the atmosphere is relaxed and the wine cellar ample. Fortunately the temple zealots rarely visit.

Currently the only guests are the Bloody Blades, a mercenary company of 17 (CG male or female half-orc warrior 1) lead by Brave Brak Gloomaxe (CG male orc fighter 4). The Bloody Blades came to Hulw'ma more than a month ago as caravan guards and

started taking jobs as guards for the spiceworks and slowly exploring the Ruins of Xa'niphan as they chase stories of buried riches. So far they have avoided going after the Naji Su'ad due to Brave Brak's distrust of Zaahir Amaal, but as Zaahir raises the size of the reward with each passing raid, soon the Bloody Blades may turn their attention to the rebellious exiles.

7: RUINS OF XA'NIPHAN

On the horizon, a clump of rocky outcroppings rising from the sand can be seen from Hulw'ma; all that remains to mark the now forgotten city of Xa'niphan. Centuries ago, this city was home to a thriving populace and several wells. History does not record what tragedy resulted in the city's death. It is common for treasure seekers to search the ruins for remnants of the past and occasionally they unearth a piece of pottery or the door to an overlooked tomb; just frequently enough to keep alive stories of vast halls filled with treasures and dangers untold.

More dangerous for treasure seekers than any trap-filled tomb is the Naji Su'ad. Having found a well that has not quite gone dry, Farraj Al'Usaim (CN male human fighter 2/rogue 2) and his band of exiles lair in the ruins. Farraj chafed under the theocracy of Living Water and has accepted exile from his village in order to fight against the tyranny of Musheer and his priesthood. Attracting likeminded villagers, mostly hot-headed young men, the Naji Su'ad robs, raids and forages to keep themselves alive. They do not give visitors a chance to announce their attentions before attacking any they encounter.

NAJI SU'AD RAIDER

CR 1/2 (XP 200)

This warrior wears flowing robes over dusty leather armour.

Human warrior 2

N Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; **Senses** Perception -1, Sense Motive -1

Speed 30 ft.; **ACP** 0; **Ride** +6

AC 13, touch 11, flat-footed 12; **CMD** 12

(+2 armour [leather], +1 Dex)

Fort +4, **Ref** +1, **Will** -1

hp 18 (2 HD)

Space 5 ft.; **Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +3

Melee scimitar +3 (1d6+1/18-20)

Range shortbow +3 (1d6/x3)

Atk Options Mounted Archery

Combat Gear arrows (20)

Abilities Str 13, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 9

Feats Mounted Archery^B, Mounted Combat

Skills as above

Languages Common

Gear as above plus belt pouch, 2d4 cp, waterskin

LIFE IN HULW'MA

Daily life in Hulw'ma tends towards quiet subsistence, punctuated by a flurry of excitement and festivities when a caravan or other travellers arrive.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Hulw-Ma has three primary industries. Water selling is entirely the province of the Temple of Serene Ripples and no others may draw from the Oasis of the Living Water without permission. In the Bazaar, there is a thriving trade in the reselling of items given in tribute, supplemented by the occasional relic from the ruins. However, the vast majority of the common folk work for the Halifa family's spiceworks.

LAW & ORDER

Law in Hulw'ma is capricious and brutal. The followers of the Living Water dictate how best to please the Living Water; usually that means tributes of gold, silver, food or anything the temple might need or desire. The smallest slight might provoke a demand for tribute but when Musheer deems it time to show himself, the size of the required tribute grows. The word of the Living Water is life and death and in his absence, Zaahir Amaal, the Speaker of Tranquil Waters, acts in his name.

EVENTS

While the PCs are in the village, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	At dawn, the remnants of a caravan stagger into town. They have been attacked by the Naji Su'ad and been left penniless. They are dying of thirst and many are injured, but the temple offers them no succour until they deliver a tribute for the Living Water.
2	The Bloody Blades return from searching the nearby ruins with tales of a tomb protected by a golden door they could not breach.
3	A young pilgrim, Erith Ulstan, disappears during the night. He was known to have an affection for Wayfiyah and was last seen in her company.
4	Musheer, the Living Water, rises from the water at dusk to hold court. The temple declares a holiday and demands all bring gifts to shower upon their lord. Visitors are expected to give lavishly.
5	Farraj Al'Usaim stages a daring daytime robbery of the Bazaar. As he and a half-dozen of the Naji Su'ad ride away, Zaahir Amaal angrily offers a large reward to anyone who returns with the bandit's head.
6	A sandstorm can be seen on the horizon. Hulw'ma is thrown into chaos as the villagers prepare for its fury closing shutters, locking doors and tying down wagons and other belongings.

MUSHEER, THE LIVING WATER CR 10 (XP 6,400)

This blue-skinned giant has blue eyes and pearlescent teeth.

Male marid

CE Large outsider (extraplanar, water)

Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Perception +17, Sense Motive +17

Speed 20 ft., swim 60 ft.; **ACP** 0; Acrobatics +4 (+0 jumping), Climb +6, Stealth +15, Swim +29

AC 24, touch 15, flat-footed 19; **CMD** 34

(+1 deflection [*ring of protection* +1], +4 Dex, +1 dodge, +9 natural, -1 size)

Fort +12, **Ref** +10, **Will** +12

hp 114 (12 HD)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.; **Base Atk** +12; **CMB** +19

Melee 2 slams (Power Attack [-4/+8]) +17 (1d8+6) or

Melee +1 *trident* (Power Attack [-4/+12]) +19/+14/+9 (2d6+10)

Atk Options Combat Reflexes

Special Actions change shape (water elemental, humanoid, or giant; as *alter self*, *elemental body III*, or *giant form I*), vortex, water mastery, water's fury

Vortex (Su; [standard, 1/10 min.]) While underwater, Musheer can transform into a vortex of swirling water once every 10 minutes; 10-50 ft. tall, 1d8+4 damage, Reflex DC 22.

Water's Fury (Su; [standard]) Musheer can release a 60 ft. line of water that deals 1d6 damage and blinds the target for 1d6 rounds (DC 20 Reflex halves the damage and negates the blinding effect).

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th; concentration +15 [+19 casting defensively or grappling])

Constant—*detect evil*, *detect good*, *detect magic*, *water walk*

At will—*create water*, *Quicken invisibility*, *plane shift* (willing targets to elemental planes, Astral plane or Material plane only), *purify food and drink* (liquids only), *quench*

5/day—*control water*, *gaseous form*, *minor creation*, *obscuring mist*, *water breathing*

3/day—*charm person*, *see invisibility*

1/day—grant 1 *limited wish*, *persistent image* (DC 18)

1/year—grant 1 *wish*

Combat Gear *wand of dispel magic* (8 chgs.), *wand of mage armour* (18 chgs.)

Abilities Str 23, Dex 19, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 16

Feats Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative^B, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-like Ability (*invisibility*), Spell Bluff

Skills Bluff +18, Craft (jewellery) +17, Spellcraft +15, Use Magic Device +18

Languages Aquan, Auran, Common, Ignan, Terran; telepathy 100 ft.

Gear as above plus *rod of rulership*, *lyre of building*, and 3d100 gp worth of jewellery.

Variant Marid (+1 CR) Musheer is a unique creature and has different feat and skill choices from the common marid, as well as additional spell-like abilities.

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