

RAGING SWAN PRESS

GM'S SCREEN #11:
SUN-SCORCHED DESERT



SYSTEM
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GM'S SCREEN #11: SUN-SCORCHED DESERT

Space behind your GM's screen is precious (and limited). You've got dice, figures, the adventure, reference books—obviously a drink and snacks—as well as pencils, pens, a notebook and more! Often times a GM needs to be a juggler to make it all fit. That's why we created the GM's Screen line. Most GM screens focus on presenting the rules. This GM's Screen line is different. Instead of rules, each instalment presents hyper-focused pages of dressing, minor events and more all designed to add depth and flavour to an adventure. (And better yet, you can use the tables without your players realising what you are doing!)

This instalment of GM's Screen comprises three tables designed to bring to life the sun-scorched deserts in your campaign and is compatible with virtually any roleplaying game.

DESIGN CREDITS

Design: Creighton Broadhurst

Development: Creighton Broadhurst

Art: William McAusland. Some artwork copyright William McAusland, used with permission.

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HOW TO USE THIS SUPPLEMENT

Using this supplement is easy. Simply print out page 2 and pin it to the inside of your GM's screen. (You can also print it out and cut it up before clipping it to your screen so you do not obscure vital tables printed on the screen itself).

When play calls for it, roll on the relevant table and use the result to build verisimilitude, detail and flavour into your game. Always re-roll inappropriate results, but consider any given result as a starting point. Describe the situation and see how the players react!

Because words have power, we've also added some flavoursome examples to help you bring the setting alive in your players' minds.

SYSTEM NEUTRAL EDITION

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition supplement. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are wizards, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

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SUN-SCORCHED DESERT

DESERT DRESSING

1. Ahead, two towering dunes form the flanks of a deep valley wreathed in cool shade.
2. A short line of footprints mars the desert sand. They peter out after a hundred yards or so.
3. A dried-out, sand-choked oasis lies at the base of a small dune. Two dead palm trees lie on their sides partially buried in drifting sand.
4. A metal pot helmet—scorchingly hot to the touch—lies on the ground, partially filled with sand.
5. The corpse of a horribly desiccated camel lies in the sand. Two hungry vultures peck and tear at its hard, sandy flesh. If disturbed, the vultures fly off a short distance. They wait for the party to pass before resuming their grizzly feast.
6. Here lies the wind-blasted remains of an ancient battle. The desiccated corpses of two hyena-headed humanoids (gnolls) lie locked in an eternal embrace with a swarthy, now partially mummified, human.
7. Set in a dune's lea, and partially covered in drifting sand, lie the collapsed remains of a large white tent. Lumps in the canvas betray the presence of objects within. The PCs can recover a usable saddle, four empty waterskins and various other odds and ends.
8. The lonely and forlorn, sun-basted skeleton of some vast tusked creature—perhaps an elephant—lies partially buried in the side of a dune.
9. In this section of desert, the wind has blown the sand away from a swath of rippled stone that extends for several miles. Tracking across the stone is virtually impossible.
10. The tumbled remains of an ancient stone wall extend into a dune.

EVENTS

1. On the horizon, a line of tiny black figures trudging along a dune are silhouetted against the deep blue sky. Shortly, they disappear behind the dunes.
2. Far away, through the shimmering heat, a PC spots the hazy image of a stand of palm trees clustered around a pool of blue, welcoming water.
3. A train of hazy and indistinct figures seem to glide across the horizon in front of the party.
4. The sun stands high in the air, and heat shimmers rise from the sun-baked sand. Far off in the distance, black specks circle high up in the air.
5. A gust of wind plucks at the crest of a nearby dune, sending a shimmering cloud of fine sand dancing through the air.
6. Dark clouds—pushed by fiercely strong winds high up in the sky—rush over the party. Far off, they lose their precious water over a range of steep-sided, parched hills.
7. The raucous cawing of birds alerts the PCs to several buzzards perched atop a nearby dune. They watch the party, hungrily. If not driven off, they follow the PCs for the balance of the day.
8. Off to the party's right, the glint of sunlight reflecting off something catches one of the PC's attention. Investigations reveal nothing.
9. The purple-fringed towers and battlemented walls of a city rise above the horizon! Even knowledgeable PCs know of no such city or civilisation, but there it stands none-the-less.
10. A hyena-headed humankind (a gnoll) staggers over a nearby dune before collapsing and rolling down its flank to end up at the party's feet.

UNEVENTFUL DAYS TRAVEL

1. Around midday, a few wispy clouds scud by high up in the sky but provide no shade from the merciless sun.
2. The day's travel is unremarkable except for a broad swath of soft sand. With every step the PCs sink almost ankle deep into its cloying embrace; progress through the area is tortuously slow.
3. A fierce wind blows up from the south. For a few minutes, it seems a sandstorm might be in the offing, but the winds abate as quickly as they came.
4. As the party crest a dune, its peak gives way; unwary PCs find themselves tumbling and sliding down its steep flank.
5. Stirred up by sporadic wisps of wind, dust devils dance about the party for much of the morning. The wind drops to nothing after midday, and the dust devils do not return.
6. High up in the sky some vast winged beast flies over the party, its shadow gliding over the hot sands. The creature does not notice the party.
7. Unrelenting heat is the order of the day. The air is still—almost preternaturally still—all day; around midday the temperature reaches a new high. Travel, without magical protections, is virtually impossible.
8. The party travel through a particularly desolate, empty stretch of desert. For the entire day, they see nothing but sand, sky and each other. It is crushingly quiet and stiflingly hot.
9. Today, the desert is a furnace. Heat shimmers—and nothing but stark, barren sand—surround the party.
10. This day is uneventful except for a few dark clouds slowly sliding majestically across the sky.

WORDS & DETAILS HAVE POWER—USE THEM TO ADD FLAVOUR AND ATMOSPHERE TO YOUR GAME

Barren: desolate, empty, bare, stark, lifeless, waste; **Heat/Hot:** burning, boiling, steaming, flaming, roasting, searing, blistering, fiery, scorching, stifling, torrid, sweltering; **Mirage:** illusion, vision, hallucination, phantasm; **Sun:** sol, daystar, burning, merciless, savage, burning, shimmering, furnace; **Oasis:** watering hole, spring, water hole; **Wind** air, blast, breeze, draught, gust, zephyr; **Windswept:** exposed, bleak, bare, windy, desolate; **Vegetation:** cactus, bush, thorny, desiccated, dying, windblown.

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