

# THE SANDS OF TIME ©2003

By Michael Baumann and Matthew Hartley  
For Stormbringer 5th Edition.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Dedication:** Matthew would like to dedicate this to his wife, Carol for her support. Michael dedicates this to the memory of his Mother.

**Play-testers:** Andrew Gilbertson, Michael Mc Coy and Barry Tebon.

The adventure was inspired by a scenario run by Mike's good friend, John Eiler.

## INTRODUCTION

The following adventure is for four to six beginning to moderately experienced *Stormbringer* characters, but adjusting the skill level and/or number of NPC opponents easily increases the difficulty. If the party is extremely skilled, or has several bound demons the Game Master may have to radically redesign the opposition to offer them a challenge. Information to be read to the players is always in *Italics* while Game Master information is in plain type.

*The Sands of Time* is designed to be the first part of a mini-campaign; the second part is the adventure *Shadows of the Past*. Alternate beginnings and endings are provided for Game Masters who do not choose to run the adventures back-to-back.

## GAME MASTER'S SYNOPSIS

The adventure may begin any place the Game Master desires. A ragged-looking girl in her early teens presents the characters with an ancient map to a forgotten Quarzhasaati city. The map promises treasure, magical items and knowledge to lure them into the Sighing Desert. Once the party has determined to undertake the quest to the lost city of Bahlahim they will have to make their way to the city of Savona, in Ilmiora, and hire guides for their journey into the desert. Unbeknownst to the party, while the girl's map is real it is nearly a hundred years old. Watering stops have long since dried up making the journey from Savona to Bahlahim nearly impossible. The party will become lost in the Sighing Desert, be attacked by monsters, endure a sandstorm, and finally be deserted by their nomad guides. As they stumble about slowly dying of thirst, they will discover their goal: a two thousand year-old palace untouched by the ravages of time.

The palace stands amidst the ruins of the ancient Quarzhasaati city of Bahlahim. The players will no doubt be surprised to find it inhabited by a court of decadent nobles and their servants. The palace is actually a powerful illusion maintained by the demon N'urlgaash. This demon, who was summoned to this plane by the sorcerer Qaleb, is now in an unenviable situation: Bound to an immortal master who has lost his will as well as his mind, N'urlgaash pursues his need to cause fear as best he can. A master of illusion, the demon has been able to lure caravans and nomads to the palace where they are literally frightened out of their minds; quickly assuming the roles of the ancient Quarzhasaati who lived here centuries ago. The players must unravel the mystery of the Palace and confront the demon, or be condemned to suffer the fate of the other inhabitants. The destruction of the demon will open a rift in the plane of the Young Kingdoms, and catapult the party to the Shadow Plane where they will begin their next adventure: *Shadows of the Past*.

## **A GIRL WITH A MAP**

The adventure can begin in any city in the Young Kingdoms; perhaps the characters are taking their ease in a tavern after their last adventure. A raggedly dressed girl in her early teens (The Mute Piper) approaches a member of the party. While it should appear random, the Game Master should choose the character with the highest Law Allegiance (or lowest Chaos if no one stands out) and read the following to him:

*You step into the bustling afternoon street with no goal in mind other than to find a more agreeable tavern; a mean-eyed bartender, who served sour ale at an exorbitant price, ran the place you just exited. As you stride down the dusty avenue, you spy a ragged girl approaching you. She appears to be on the edge of her teen years. Her lank, brown hair hangs limply across her dirty face. Her gray, homespun dress is tattered and stained. Most remarkably you notice her eyes are two different colors: one subdued hazel and the other piecing jade. She clutches a cheap-looking musical pipe in her left hand and a leather pouch in her right. The girl thrusts the pouch into your hands, gives a short nod and then runs off. You soon lose sight of her in the crowd.*

Opening the pouch, the character will discover a book wrapped in oilskin. It is the *Logbook of Varlim Sarraber* (see below). If the party is in need of money, the pouch also contains enough coin to allow them to travel to Savona and outfit a caravan into the Sighing Desert.

**The Mute Piper:** In actuality, the girl is no common street-waif, but rather a manifestation of a powerful champion of Law: Anastasia the Hammer of Mirath. Anastasia is currently trapped on a plane near to that of the Young Kingdoms. The coming conjunction of the Million Spheres has allowed her to create the form of The Mute Piper in order to look for help in freeing herself. She has chosen the player characters as agents likely to succeed in this quest and so contrives to see them banished to the Shadow Plane to offer her aid. If the characters don't take action to follow the map, the Mute Piper will appear to them several times a day, looking increasingly forlorn and distraught. The full story of Anastasia is recounted in the adventure *Shadows of the Past*.

## **AT THE REQUEST OF A COUNTESS**

### **An Alternate Beginning**

Game Masters who do not wish to run this adventure with *Shadows of the Past* may use this alternate beginning:

Countess Lamina Gomp, is a collector of antiquities. Her treasures of by-gone eras are amongst the finest in the Young Kingdoms. The pride and joy of her collection has always been the rare pieces of

the Quarzhasaati civilization. She is known to have gone to extreme lengths to acquire artifacts of this ancient culture; rumors of blackmail and black magic are sometimes mentioned in context with her name. Originally hailing from Filkhar, the Countess is a self-proclaimed "citizen of the world" and may be found residing anywhere that is convenient for the Game Master.

*You are taking your ease at a local alehouse, when a lackey in a most peculiar livery disconsolately approaches your table. After a stiff, formal bow he clears his throat and says, "The Countess Gomp would have the pleasure of your company to discuss a possible business arrangement. Please attend upon her within the hour." After another bow, the servant turns awkwardly and exits the tavern.*

A few questions will reveal the location of the Countess' "townhouse", a sprawling mansion in the most upscale portion of the city. If the party attempts to divine any information about the Countess herself allow them Idea rolls to gather information. The Game Master is free to reveal anything he chooses about the Countess to the characters.

*You arrive at the Countess' enormous estate and are shown into a sumptuously appointed hall. Minutes later the Lady herself sweeps into the room and bids you "be seated" on an over-stuffed ottoman or settee. The Countess is a handsome woman. Time has lined her patrician face and streaked her raven hair with gray. She is dressed in a gown that would do no shame to a queen and her hair is so elaborately piled and coifed that she looks as if she is ready to attend upon the Emperor of Melinboné himself, rather than bargain with a band of adventurers. She begins pacing the hall as she talks, occasionally punctuating a sentence by slapping a small book her gloved hand.*

*"Gentlemen, it is so good of you to come. I have been following your careers most carefully, and you seem to me to be the perfect candidates for the adventure I propose.*

*"I hold in my hand one of the logbooks of Varlim Sarraber. This Sarraber was an explorer, famous in his own time, who traveled the Young Kingdoms nearly a century ago. The book in my possession is undoubtedly authentic, and I believe it to be the only copy in existence. It contains a tale of his sojourn in the Sighing Desert whilst looking for a lost Quarzhasaati city. The book ends with the adventurer finally discovering this lost metropolis. I have seen fit to make a copy for your perusal if you accept my proposal.*

*"As you may well know, I am a renowned collector of antiquities, and those of the Quarzhasaati are the ones that I hold most dear. I should like you men to act as my agents in tracing Sarraber's route to this lost city and bringing back the choicest artifacts for myself. I will undertake to provide sufficient funds to allow you to travel to Ilmiora and outfit a caravan for the Sighing Desert. Upon your return I will, of course, be the sole proprietor of the artifacts and will pay you their due worth as determined by an independent party of our mutual choosing. This adventure is sure to complete my collection and make you wealthy men. Do I have your interest?"*

The Game Master can be as detailed as he wishes to be with the monetary aspects of passage to Ilmiora and the outfitting of a caravan, or he can simply skip to the adventure and assure the players that they have just enough money to cover their expenses.

## **THE LOGBOOK OF VARLIM SARRABER**

The book is a small, leather-bound volume of the type that might be used to keep a journal or diary. It appears to be ancient; an Evaluate roll estimates it at one hundred years old. The book is written, in a clear hand, in an archaic version of the Common tongue (-10% to Read). Readers will discover that it is one of the Logbooks of Varlim Sarraber.

Any player who makes a Young Kingdoms roll will know that Varlim Sarraber was a Lormyrian adventurer who lived nearly one hundred years ago. A famous explorer, he is said to have visited every continent in the Young Kingdoms, penetrated the mysterious Forest of Troos and even journeyed into the Unknown East. He meticulously documented all of his journeys in a series of logbooks, the originals of which are found in the Royal Library at Iosaz. A critical success will reveal that although Sarraber often embellished his tales his information and maps were always reliable. It is said he disappeared on his last expedition.

*The narrative begins in Bakshaan with Sarraber's retelling of a nomad legend: "The Haunted City in the Sands". It is clear that he believes this city to be lost Quarzhasaat a city supposedly drowned in sand after defying the Melnibonéan Empire. The Lormyrian lost no time in traveling to Savona to outfit an expedition to "The Haunted City". His reasons are made quite clear in the following passage:*

*'Fair Quarzhasaat with her alabaster towers and golden palaces was now my destination. I burn to see the remains of the city where the meanest peasant ate from silver plate and jewels were so common that they were given to children as toys; the city that was inundated with sand for her effrontery in opposing the might of Melniboné; the city that was destroyed by the Demon Isle, but never looted by her troops.'*

*The entries continue as Sarraber describes his sojourn in the Sighing Desert. Apparently desert life did not agree with the Lormyrian and many of his pages are devoted to cursing the blazing sun, the omnipresent gnats, the ungainly camels and the odious guides. Apart from his trials, the explorer also carefully documents his progress through the shifting sands, noting oasis and providing a detailed map sketched in the leaves of his log. When he reaches his destination he writes:*

*'I looked down on the ruins spread below me with mixed feelings of dismay and elation: Dismay, for surely the pitiful wreckage that lay before me could not be bejeweled Quarzhasaat, and elation at the fact that the palace of this far-flung enclave of the Quarzhasaati was as pristine as the day it was built. Surely some powerful magic had preserved this place in all its magnificence. Surely the treasures inside would more than repay me for the hardships of the desert.'*

*Here the narrative ends. It appears that the tale is to be continued in Sarraber's next journal, but sadly that tome is not in your possession.*

**Game Master's Note:** It is assumed that the logbook promises sufficient adventure and reward to motivate the characters to outfit an expedition to the lost city. The Game Master may wish to play up Sarraber's description of the palace's exterior - its golden dome or gem-encrusted doors for example. The lure of knowledge or sorcery can also be dangled before the party, after all if a magician can preserve such a palace against the ravages of time, imagine what other secrets his Grimoire may contain. If the party is still reluctant to get started he may introduce a patron (see Countess Gomp, above) who agrees to outfit the group for a share in the profits gained from the expedition.

## **AMONGST THE BEDU**

Sarraber's began his trek to Bahlahim in Savona, so getting the party to this city is the Game Master's first goal. He may improvise the trip, or simply state that the characters arrive in the Ilmioran city safely. Once they have arrived, he should encourage the party to find guides and trade for camels before continuing into the desert. Any player that succeeds in a Natural World skill check will realize it is folly to travel in the Sighing Desert without native assistance.

While seeking camels in Savona, the characters will discover that the only camel breeders in the town produce very expensive racing animals. Pack camels and riding beasts are obtained from bartering with the desert tribes who bring in their surplus stock to trade for foodstuffs, cloth and metal goods. Such a tribe is in town at the moment. They are known as the Bedu.

The adventurers will quickly learn that bartering with the Bedu is a difficult procedure. They are a proud people and trade must be conducted according to their customs and traditions, or not at all. Characters can find out the correct trading procedures by paying for the information from local merchants (reliable but expensive) or talking in the inns (cheaper but error-prone). Game Masters are encouraged to role-play the dissemination of this information otherwise a successful Charisma or Fast Talk roll will reveal one item of information in the lists below:

### **Trading:**

Traders should approach the Bedu camp in daylight only. No women may accompany the trading group.

Eat the salt and bread presented to you on arrival. It is a sign of peace and hospitality. If a full meal is offered to you it is a sign that the Bedu are in a generous mood.

Ask to speak to the tribe's chief or Sheik. Give him an expensive but practical gift (a jeweled dagger, for example), and exchange pleasantries for an hour or more, before discussing business.

Do not attempt to haggle with the Sheik. It is a great offense to try.

The Sheik is interested in obtaining foodstuffs (mint tea, goat meat, flour, salt, dates and figs), bronze cooking items, metal arrow tips, medicinal herbs, and gold coins. He is not at all interested in oxen, horses or other livestock, no matter how good.

### **Information on the Bedu themselves:**

Bedu women dress "modestly" in long robes that hide their figure and headscarves that may be drawn over the face when talking to strangers.

Bedu men are very protective of their wives and daughters "honor".

Never physically attack a Bedu. To attack one is to attack the whole tribe.

The Bedu won't fight to the death, but if they escape, you'll never sleep safely again.

The Bedu always take revenge.

The items wanted by the Sheik are discussed above. The party will need to convert their livestock, gear or coins into goods that the Bedu want by trading with city merchants. Depending on the characters Bargaining skills, they will only receive between 30 and 80% of the nominal value from the merchants. The value of the goods demanded by the Sheik will depend entirely on how well the adventurers follow the Bedu trading customs. The Sheik is no fool and cannot be easily tricked by people attempting to pass off shoddy or fake goods (or cash) on him. If the characters really foul up the negotiations they can hire the services of a city merchant to approach the Bedu on their behalf.

Needless to say, they will get a very poor bargain. If the players ask, the Sheik will provide some desert guides, led by a man named Yassuf. As payment for guiding (in advance) the party must provide each guide with some jeweled item of modest value and the Sheik with a jeweled item of greater value. These Bedu won't guide for free. Assuming that the characters have not offended their hosts, once the trading for camels and guides is completed successfully they will be invited to stay overnight in the Bedu camp.

The Bedu camp is a noisy but joyful place. The tribes-people appear relaxed around each other. The characters will be invited to stay around the fire of the bachelors. Any Female characters could rejoin the party at this point, if appropriately dressed. The Bedu are great storytellers and tales will be told late into the night, accompanied by fermented camels milk (which actually tastes better than it sounds). Young unmarried women are permitted to join the bachelors' fire group, so long as they have stories to tell or songs to sing. This is the only opportunity young people have for flirting in Bedu culture, so it is a popular evening pastime. The songs and the stories are mostly religiously themed parables, but by listening attentively, observing closely and asking a few questions the players can learn many useful facts about desert survival. An Idea roll can be made for each piece of information.

### **Bedu Survival Tips:**

You need to drink a gallon of water a day in the desert (a goatskin full).

You should wear loose robes but make sure all of your skin is covered from the sun.

Mix grease and soot together and smear this under your eyes - this prevents sun blindness

Never wear metal armor unless you are about to attack.

Cover all shiny objects in rags- the glint of metal can be seen from miles away

Only travel at night if you are low on water.

If you are lost in the desert bury yourself in sand during the day. The lower layers of sand are cooler.

If you stop at night, always light a fire. The night is as cold as the day is hot.

If you stop, always hobble your camels.

If you are lost and come upon a trail, always follow it. Trails that survive in the desert invariably lead to waterholes or oases.

When attacking an enemy, always move through his hobbled camels to attack the camp. Camels always make lots of noise and thus won't alert the guards.

If a nomad helps you always reward him. If he refuses the reward for himself, always insist on giving it to him anyway "for his relatives".

Never trust a talking animal, it is likely a demon in disguise.

**Camel Riding:** For entertainment value alone the Bedu will be happy to teach anyone the basics of camel riding. Characters may initially use one half of their Ride skill when mounted on a camel. This will improve by 5% per day, up to the Character's normal Ride skill, until they have become used to the motions of the beasts.

**Additional Supplies:** Before the characters journey into the desert, the Game Master should allow them to purchase any additional supplies they might require in Savona, or from amongst the Bedu. Characters who purchase nomad garb will fare much better in the Sighing Desert, allow them Idea rolls to realize this fact.

## **BEDU WISDOM AND JUSTICE - A MURDEROUS INTERLUDE**

**Game Master's Note:** This mini-scenario has nothing to do with the main plot, but is an interesting insight for the players into Bedu culture. It can also be used as a stand-alone scenario at a later date if the Game Master wants to get on with the main storyline.

### **Storytelling**

*You are sitting round the bachelors' campfire enjoying the evening storytelling, when a young woman, modestly dressed in Bedu robes, joins the group. Catching sight of her face you see she is a great beauty. You quickly learn that the woman is named Hannah and that she is the daughter of the Sheik's brother Yacob. Hannah is a skilled storyteller and entertains the group with a number of heroic tales of Wahieb and his loyal camel Yasser.*

Hannah seems very much at ease in the group and will only cover her face with her scarf if the strangers (i.e., the characters) show her immodest attention.

*Hannah is obviously a great favorite around the bachelor's fire, and it is clear that a number of the young men are smitten with her. One in particular, Bin Ali, can't keep his eyes off her.*

Players who make Insight rolls will also see that the Sheik's son, Abdul Bin Saleh, gives a black look to anyone who pays Hannah too much attention. Bin Ali is obviously ignoring Abdul Bin Saleh's displeasure.

*As Hannah is finishing a particularly humorous story, an old woman appears by the fireside. She is obviously enraged, and starts berating Hannah, in the tribal tongue, then pushing and shoving her about. Hannah fiercely defends herself, hurling abuse back at the crone, whose name is Sanaa. The men round the fire are taken back by the commotion, but Bin Ali jumps to his feet and pushes Sanaa away. Abdul Bin Saleh rises, shouting something incoherent, and appears ready to attack Bin Ali, but Yassuf the guide quickly springs between the combatants and says in a voice so edged with steel it threatens to cut the very night air, "Enough! You disgrace yourselves and the tribe before these outlanders."*

*The four participants freeze at the sound of Yassuf's voice and glance sheepishly in your direction. Bin Ali looks as if he is about to speak, but is silenced by an icy stare from Yassuf. By now the camp is aroused and the married men have come to see what is going on. Yacob, Hannah's father, takes the shaken girl back to the family tent.*

The exchange between Hannah and Sanaa took place in the Bedu tribal tongue, so the characters will have no idea what was said. If they ask a tribesman what is happening have them make Fast Talk or Charisma rolls. Success garners an explanation from the wily tracker Frashid.

*"As is the custom of the Bedu, Hannah was betrothed to her first cousin, Abdul Bin Saleh, at birth. He begins." It is well known that she has no love for our Sheik's son.*

*"The wind tells us that her heart belongs to the fiery, young Bin Ali; although she will happily flirt with the other bachelors around the campfire." He says wistfully. "According to our traditions, Bin Ali may only marry Hannah if Abdul Bin Saleh agrees to give up his claim on her and it is clear he has no intention of doing so.*

*"Sanaa, a foolish and bitter old woman, has accused Hannah of the great crime of adultery with Amjad, her elderly husband. The spirits have touched Amjad's mind, in his old age, so the accusation is laughable. My feelings are that Sanaa, a great beauty when young, has never quite reconciled herself to old age. Seeing Hannah must be like sand under her tunic.*

*"These accusations are like the last heated stone that brings a simmering cooking pot to a boil. The Sheik's son has now accused Hannah of adultery with 'everyone' and threatened to kill her. If Hannah is an adulteress, she can indeed be put to death under Bedu law."*

After some time, the camp settles down for the night. The characters are welcome to sleep around the bachelors' campfire.

### **The Body in the Sands**

Before dawn a random character will feel the "call of nature" and will leave camp to slip behind a sand dune.

*Rounding the edge of the dune you spy a Bedu woman lying face down in the sand. No tribeswoman would sleep out under the stars, and the fact that she hasn't stirred since you came around the dune warns you that something is amiss. Approaching with caution, you squat down and roll over the body. It is Hannah. A single knife wound mars her olive throat. Clearly, she has been dead for some hours.*

A Search or Tracking roll reveals that there are no sign of a blood trail or any indication that the body has been moved. There are occasional tracks of sandaled human feet in the sand which lead back to the camp, however it is quite impossible to identify the killer from the tracks.

The best course of action would be for the character to go straight to the Sheik and inform him of the slaying. Failing that he should at least raise the alarm in the camp. If the character does nothing, the body will be found again within half an hour. Someone in camp will have seen the character going behind the dune earlier and he will have some explaining to do (see below). If the adventurers decide to leave the camp secretly the Bedu will assume they are guilty and will pursue them. They will not give up until all the party members are dead.

*The discovery of the body causes uproar in the camp. The whole tribe crowds around the corpse. Hannah's mother and aunts are hysterical with grief. Their mournful shrieks are carried on the desert wind throughout the camp. Her father stands in shock. Many young men, including the obviously distraught Bin Ali, swear bloody and horrible revenge on the murderer. Abdul Bin Saleh looks on darkly before retreating to his tent. The Sheik calms the crowd and orders everyone back to camp. He instructs that Hannah's body should be wrapped in a burial shroud and that a grave should be dug. He then returns to his tent.*



## The Interviews

As the camp prepares breakfast, the characters are summoned, one by one, before the Sheik. Each of them will undergo a similar interview. The Game Master is encouraged to conduct these sessions individually to heighten the tension. The adventurer that discovered Hanna's body is interviewed last.

*The Sheik appears calm and composed. He gestures for you to take a seat amongst his pillows and cushions. "You will take tea?" he begins, signaling a serving girl who brings you a scalding cup regardless of whether or not you said yes. "We of the Bedu are a strong and noble people who do not fear death, but the events of last night are most troubling. Murder such as this is unheard of amongst my tribe. The wind brings me tales that [insert the name of the character who found Hanna's body] was looking on my niece with immodest interest." His voice trails off in a whisper.*

*"I am a man of honor and I have never broken the laws of hospitality. It pains me to ask this of a guest, but what were your movements last night?"*

The best thing the characters can do is to be entirely truthful. The Sheik can and will crosscheck their stories. He will tell the characters nothing and will not engage in speculation about either motive or murderer. An Insight roll will reveal that finding the murderer is his utmost concern and he doesn't feel that discussing the issue with outsiders will help matters. A critical success reveals that the Sheik does not consider them suspects. When the adventurer has answered the Sheik he will nod and say,

*"Very good. Please wait outside my tent. I will have need of you later."*

When all the characters have been interviewed individually, they are invited to return to the Sheik's tent. If they told the truth in the interview (or at least didn't entangle themselves in too big of a lie) he invites them to stay during the remaining interviews of Sanaa, Bin Ali, and Abdul Bin Saleh. If they stay, they will witness the following interviews. The Sheik will not however prevent them from wandering about if they wish. He will however ask them not to leave the camp.

**Sanaa:** The first suspect brought before the Sheik. She looks as though she has aged 20 years since this morning and you can see the lines of tears in her lined face. She is clearly terrified and her testimony is punctuated by sobs and moans.

*"Sanaa, wife of Amjad." The Sheik begins, "Last night you were heard to accuse Hannah of adultery with your husband. Today my niece lies dead. What can you tell me of this?"*

*"Oh my Sheik!" She wails dropping to her knees. "I did not kill the little flower... I am an old and bitter woman... A demon took my tongue last night and made me speak those horrid things... Please my Sheik, you must believe me." She collapses on the floor and begins sobbing again.*

Any player who makes a Search roll will notice that Sanaa seems to be hiding her left hand in her robe. If asked to see her hand, she will reluctantly show the bandaged member. A Physik roll tells the player the wound is recent. If asked about this she mumbles,

*"While I was preparing breakfast... the spirits took control of my husband again. He struck me... while I was cutting up dates... I cut my own hand with the knife."*

**Bin Ali:** The second suspect is clearly still distressed. He approaches the Sheik with his head held high and a look of fire in his eyes. A successful Insight roll will show the he is seething with anger, but has no outlet for it.

*"Bin Ali." The Sheik says, fixing his cool gaze on the warrior. "This morning Hannah was found dead in the sands. What do you know of this?"*

*"Nothing my Sheik." The young man growls.*

*"Bin Ali. It is well known that you desired this woman. It is also well known that you could never have her. Your fiery temper was demonstrated again last night when you struck Sanaa at the bachelors' fire. Perhaps you killed the girl to prevent Abdul Bin Saleh from having her?"*

*Bin Ali's face contorts with rage. "You are mad if you think such a thing of me." He says. "I loved Hannah with all my heart and I would never harm her in any way. I swear by all the gods that I will hunt her murderers to the ends of the earth." At this point he turns and storms out of the tent.*

**Abdul Bin Saleh:** The final suspect brought for questioning is the Sheik's own son. Insight rolls will show that the man is in a black mood and resents being called before the Sheik on this matter. He also appears remarkably self-composed for a man who just lost his fiancé. Any action or interruption by the characters will cause him to storm out, saying: *"It is not the place of outlanders to question the son of the Sheik!"*

*"Abdul Bin Saleh." The Sheik says fixing his son with a hard stare. "Last night you were heard to accuse your betrothed of adultery and threatened to slay her with your own hands. This morning her body was found cooling in the sands. What can you say of this?"*

*The young man casts an angry look in your direction and then says. "I do not deny my actions last night. Hannah's licentious behavior caused my blood to boil and I spoke with haste. I know nothing of her murder."*

If the characters think to ask any of the suspects their whereabouts last night, all three will say that they went to bed following the argument last night. With the exception of Sanaa (whose husband is not reliable) none have any witnesses to corroborate their story.

*When the last interview has concluded, the Sheik says. "I will meditate upon these things. You are welcome to remain or go into the camp. Please do not leave, I wish for you to be here when this matter is resolved."*

The Sheik stays in his tent meditating for most of the day. If the players attempt their own murder investigation they will find out little, although they have great opportunities to offend people. The Bedu will be reluctant to talk to them and will see their interfering as an insult to the Sheik. Any attempt to use magic would make the Bedu very angry and the Sheik will have to intervene to stop the magician from being attacked. Like the party, most of the tribe just went to bed after the argument and knows nothing. Anyone will be able to confirm what Frashid said about Hannah, Bin Ali, Abdul Bin Saleh, and Sanaa.

## **The Riding Dead - Bedu Wisdom**

*Late in the afternoon the Sheik emerges from his tent. He walks over to Hannah's body, lying wrapped by the graveside and motions for one of the Bedu to bring along a camel. When the camel*

arrives, he forces it to kneel and turns to you saying, "Help me tie the body of Hannah to the back of this beast."

Together you (or Frashid if the characters refuse) tie Hannah's body upright on the camels back. The Bedu are astonished at this and a crowd quickly forms. The Sheik makes the camel stand and leads it off round the camp. Seeing the body on the camel causes pandemonium in the camp. Everyone watches aghast. Many angry words are directed at the Sheik. It is clear that only his position of authority stops him from being lynched on the spot. It takes the Sheik about half an hour to lead the camel around the camp before returning to the graveside. The Sheik then sets out around the camp again. He repeats this journey a total of 6 times. With each passing of the camel, the crowd thins. Disgusted or just confused, individuals return to their tasks. On the final circuit of the camp only one watcher remains: Hannah's father, the Sheik's brother, Yacob. The Sheik stops the camel by the grave and removes Hannah's body from the camel. The Sheik goes over to his brother, places his hand on the man's shoulder, and speaks quietly to him in the Bedu tongue. Yacob says a few words, nods and goes to his tent.

The Sheik now signals you to come over and begins, "I knew by the way she was murdered that Hannah could have only been slain by another Bedu. I also knew that only the murderer would feel so guilty at what he had done that he would watch as I paraded the body of his victim around the camp six times. The murderer was Hannah's father, Yacob."

If the characters ask why, he will continue,

"Hannah's behavior was reprehensible. Her continual liaisons with Bin Ali and contempt for my son brought dishonor on her family and lowered her bride price.

"I have passed my judgment on Yacob and the sentence will be carried out at sunrise tomorrow."

### **My Brother's Keeper - Bedu Justice**

As dawn breaks Yacob appears in front of the Sheik's tent. He is dressed in a robe of the brightest white. He looks somber but resigned. The Bedu gather round him in a circle, though none stand closer than ten yards to the condemned man.

The Sheik emerges from his tent, armed with a long straight-edged sword. As he approaches, Yacob falls to his knees. He holds his head proud and erect, facing the dawning sun. Silence pervades, even the insects and camels know that this is a moment of utmost solemnity.

The Sheik strikes a single blow. His brother's head lies in the sand.

### **INTO THE SANDS**

You guide your ungainly beasts along a road that runs through the rich wheat fields of Ilmioria. Little, besides the gnats, disturbs your traveling. During the next few days, the fields of grain give way to fields of bunch grasses. Occasionally you spy the ruins of a farmstead in the distance. As the grasses begin to give way to sand, Yassuf declares you are on the border of Ilmioria. That night you camp in the ruins of an ancient farmhouse. It takes some work to fill your skins with the brackish water from its disused well.

**The Water Problem:** Up to this point water has been relatively plentiful. As the characters venture into the desert this will not be the case. Find out how they are dressed. Uncovered metal armor will

be almost unbearable in the desert, but even leathers will be quite hot. The caravan carries 60 man/days of water. The Game Master should begin to calculate the party's expenditure of water during their sojourn in the desert. When the water begins to run out, the characters will begin to suffer the effects of dehydration:

Double water rations	+2 STR/Day
Normal water rations	-0 STR/Day
Half water-rations:	-2 STR/Day
Without water	-6 STR/Day
Wearing nomad garb	+1 STR/Day
Wearing barbarian armor	-1 STR/Day
Wearing leather armor	-2 STR/Day
Wearing metal armor	-4 STR/Day
Traveling in the day	-2 STR/Day
Traveling at night	-0 STR/Day
No Traveling	+1 STR/Day

STR can never be raised above the original score of the character. When STR is reduced to \_ normal, reduce the character's DEX by 5, and MOV by 1. When STR is reduced to 0 will he will die of thirst.

## SAND STORM

**Days 1 to 3:** *The next few days drag on beneath a blistering desert sun. By the third day, the road has become little more than a swale in the sand, and at times it is difficult to even make out that much. Your nomad guides are proving invaluable in the situation and seem to have an uncanny ability to relocate the ancient track. In the evening you camp in the shelter of a dune and listen to the nomads chat in their musical tongue.*

**Day 4:** *The following day your progress is much slower. The road has become nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding desert and it takes time to follow the right course.*

Near noon have all the characters make Search rolls. Those that succeed can see a dark smudge on the horizon. A successful Natural World roll determines that it is a storm of some kind.

*Yassuf and his men stop in a low area between two dunes, force their camels to lie down, and begin to unbundled tarpaulins.*

If the players inquire as to what they are doing Yassuf simply points towards the horizon and says, "Sandstorm. Continue and, you will die."

The nomads quickly build themselves shelters and take cover, leaving the rest of the party to fend for themselves. If the characters attempt to copy the nomad shelters they may attempt a Repair/Devise roll in order to construct an adequate shelter before the storm hits. Sheltered adventurers will take no damage during the storm. Those caught unprepared must make a CONx5 roll: success indicates 1D4 damage; failure results in 2D4 damage inflicted over the course of the sandstorm (Armor will not protect against this damage).

*The storm rages for the rest of the day and all through the night. You can do little but huddle beneath your tarpaulin and pray that Lassa's sons will soon cease their play. When you finally awaken, it is to a clear sky. The nomads are already awake and have begun to pack up the camels. They look little worse the wear for their experience in the storm.*

## A SURPRISE FROM BELOW

**Day 5:** *By mid morning you have dug your way out of the drifted sand and are again traveling. You are making little progress, and any sign of the ancient road has been obliterated by the storm. By noon Yassuf suggests halting the caravan to send out scouts to look for the road.*

The pack beasts are left with some of the party to allow the scouts to travel lightly. Several of the nomads and any characters that volunteer may scout for signs of the trail. The remainder will wait behind with the caravan. Have the scouts make Track rolls and pretend to note the results. No sign of the trail can be found at this point and the scouts will not be able to participate in the following encounter.

**Sand Dragon:** Unbeknownst to the characters, they have been scented by a hungry Sand Dragon. When the characters with the pack beasts have waited for about an hour, call for Listen rolls. Those who succeed will be able to react the first round that the Sand Dragon attacks. The creature will burst from the sand and attempt to drag one of their pack-camels back down with it. Even if the adventurers manage to kill the beast, it should smash open some of the water barrels in its initial attack.

Again, the purpose of the encounter is not to kill the party, but to further inconvenience them by stripping them of badly needed water. The aftermath of the fight will show that the characters have lost about 5 man/days of water. Depending upon how much they have rationed prior to this point they may have less than a day's water left to them.

## BETRAYAL

*The nomads (and any characters) return to report no sign of the road can be made out. When Yassuf is told of the Sand Dragon attack and the loss of water he will say, "We are dead men."*

That night the nomads begin to make camp as always. Have all the characters make Idea rolls. Those that succeed will notice the guides leap onto the back of their camels and head off into the desert with most of the other beasts in tow. They have most of the remaining water with them! Those who made their Idea rolls will be able to react before the nomads have galloped off. If the whole party fails, they will have to attempt to catch the nomads on camelback. Either way, Yassuf and his men will not give up without a fight.

## WANDERING

**Day 6 to Day?:** By this time the party has become fairly well lost in the Sighing Desert. The Game Master can call for the occasional Navigate roll, but by and large this portion of the scenario is designed to cause the party to use up their remaining water. The players may come up with clever rationing schemes in order to stay alive. The Game Master can reward this ingenuity by throwing another sandstorm at them to retard their progress. The point is not to have the party die of thirst, but to weaken them for future encounters. The characters should be desperate by the time you run the next encounter, or they may not act upon it.

## MIRAGE

It should be dark when you run this encounter. Have a character collapse from exhaustion if necessary. When the party has been resting for some time call for Listen rolls:

*As you lay resting in the ruined tower, the wind carries a high-pitched, reedy sound to your ears. It takes a moment for your dulled senses to realize that it is actually the sound of a flute or pipe.*

Undoubtedly the party will cast about for the source of the music. Have them make Search or Idea rolls. Any who succeed will see a line of camels, silhouetted against the dunes, some miles away. It appears to be a caravan of some type, but the characters do not seem able to attract its attention. The caravan is heading east, away from their current position. The only alternative seems to be following it.

The party will follow the caravan through the rest of the night. They always seem to be getting closer, but can never quite catch it. If any character attempts a Track roll, they will discover no trace of the caravan's passing. Have all the characters make CONx5 rolls to continue to push themselves through the night. Those that fail will begin to fall behind in pursuit of the caravan. If any character falls out to help other members of the caravan out award them a Balance point. Needless to say, the party will not lose the caravan even if all fail their CON rolls.

*The gray light of predawn is upon you. Over the next rise is the caravan you have been chasing through the night. You can hear the braying of camels and the clank of harness; you must be close now. As you crest the rise the morning sun begins its ascent. Your attention is immediately drawn to a building in the valley below. It appears to be a sprawling, summer palace made out of a brilliant, white limestone. Golden domes cap its slender towers. The ruins of a fair sized city surround this gleaming structure. It can only be Bahlahim.*

Have the characters make Search rolls. Those that make a critical success will see the caravan they have been following through the night vanish as it approaches the gate of the city. Those that fail or make an ordinary success will assume the caravan has gone into the city gates, although no trace of it can be seen beyond.

## **THE RUINS OF THE BAHLAHIM**

The former Quarzhasaatim city is split into two parts: The palace and the city proper. The city is almost entirely submerged in sand. The adventurers can see a few buildings, in poor shape, and lots of odd lumps in the ground, but their attention is always drawn and held by the palace, which appears to be in pristine condition. Both palace and city are discussed in more detail below.

**Background:** Over two thousand years ago Bahlahim was a small thriving city of the Quarzhasaati Empire. The lords of the city aped their former Melinbonéan masters in their worship of Chaos and their casual cruelty.

The chief sorcerer of the city was a dark and handsome man known as Qaleb. When he entered service with the lords of Bahlahim his powers had already grown to undreamt of heights. He could command the Elementals with ease and he had mastered incantations to keep himself safe from all forms of assassination. A score of demons were at his beck and call, his favorite being the protector of the court, N'urlgaash. As time passed, Qaleb came to realize that while there was no stopping his accumulation of magical power, eventually his mortal body would betray him. A confirmed hedonist, he did not relish the thought of transforming himself into a Liche or Mummy and continuing to practice his dark arts from beyond the grave as many of his brethren had.

He then hit upon an ingenious idea: He petitioned the god Slortar for everlasting life. The ancient god was pleased by this mortal's audacity and granted his request. His price: the souls of every man,

woman and child living in Bahlahim. 'After all,' the god had said, 'if you demand ten thousand lifetimes it is only fair that I have ten thousand lives in return.' The sorcerer quickly agreed, but he didn't reckon with the deviousness of Slortar. When the appointed night came to conclude their pact, Slortar slaughtered the entire population of Bahlahim. No one was spared, least of all Qaleb. The god visited each death upon the wizard as if they were his own. Seemingly murdered thousands of times over in thousands of different ways, Qaleb quickly lost his mind. He did not, however, lose his life. The shattered sorcerer wandered through the former palace, protected from death by age, thirst or starvation, no longer having the volition to do anything else.

And so things may have stood until Bahlahim was buried beneath the shifting sands of the Sighing Desert but for one thing: N'urlgaash. Forced to defend the court of the city by terms of his binding, Slortar condemned the demon to continue to serve Qaleb even though the sorcerer no longer had any will or desire left in him. This infuriated the creature. His one desire was to cause fear, and that desire could no longer be pursued in a city devoid of life. N'urlgaash began to use his powers of illusion to lure passersby into the abandoned city and keep them there. At first this tactic was very successful, but soon the Quarzhasaati learned to avoid the "haunted city". Later still, when the Empire was inundated with sand, the influx of victims slowed to a trickle. Still the demon perseveres. The few lost and desperate souls that he manages to attract to the palace are tormented each night with a recreation of Slortar's night of terror.

**Running this encounter:** This encounter takes a free-form approach. Much of what happens will depend upon the players and their interactions with the non-player characters in the palace and city. If the characters begin to explore the palace and city they may find N'urlgaash quite quickly. If they are content to lounge around the palace and partake of its delights, the Dweller in Darkness will come upon them in the night visiting upon them the most horrific visions. In either case, the Game Master is advised to have the party encounter Qaleb and see the Crystal Heart before the showdown with the demon. It would also be wise to become familiar with the non-player characters of the palace and the city.

**The Terror at Night:** The palace and city described below are as they appear during the daytime. At night, N'urlgaash begins to play. The whole palace undergoes a transformation into a chamber of horrors. The Dweller in Darkness re-enacts the night that Slortar came to wreak havoc on Bahlahim. The characters are quickly caught up in these horrifying events, and take the roles of the poor unfortunates whom the Chaos Lord took in payment for Qaleb's gift of immortality. Those who succeed in a POW x5 roll will be able to brave the terror. Those who fail the roll will flee mindlessly about the place, shrieking in fear.

The effects of the illusions are insidious. Once a character has succumbed to the initial onslaught, the demon will have gained an insight into his deepest fears. Draw on past experiences, failures and enemies to frighten him. His friends and lovers will begin to appear as victims in the parade of terrors. Drop the POW multiplier by 1 per night he misses the roll. When it reaches 0 the character will have lost touch with reality, assuming the role of a servant or minor functionary of the palace. Those in the city will fair somewhat better than those in the palace. N'urlgaash's powers are not as strong outside the palace. If the party is in the city at night, they still must make a POW x5 roll to suppress their fears, but this multiplier will only drop if they fumble this roll.

## THE CITY IN THE SANDS

Before Qaleb's activities, Bahlahim was a thriving settlement of some ten thousand people. The city was built on a grid plan with four broad, palm-lined avenues leading from the palace to the low city walls. Beyond the walls, natural springs fed wide, shallow reservoirs. Through an elegant system of

locks, the reservoir water was channeled through the city by a series of canals and cisterns. With the exception of the palace and several of the temples, buildings in the city were all one story high, with an open flat roof accessible by external staircases from enclosed shaded courtyards. Buildings are made of sun-dried mud brick on a sandstone block base. The size of individual dwelling varied with the wealth of the occupants and their professions. Most family life was conducted on the roofs, with the rooms in the building below being used for storage and business.

Slortar's orgy of destruction devastated much of the city of Bahlahim and the ravages of time did the rest. The city now is little more than ruins that are periodically buried and then uncovered by the shifting sands. During the massacre of Slortar, the soul of every inhabitant was sundered from its mortal shell to feed the insatiable god. When it was over, no creature was left alive in the ruins except for Qaleb. Over the years, a few wanderers have settled in the ruins. These are the rare individuals who have managed to escape the palace grounds.

### Encounters in the City

The Game Master should encourage the players to search the city of Bahlahim. Emphasize the desolation represented by the ever-present bodies, crumbling structures and the opportunities for loot. The encounters can be introduced at the Game Master's discretion when the players appear bored or frustrated with their search.

D8	Encounter
1	Bodies
2	Wealth
3	Slortar's Temple
4	A Boy and his Lamps
5	The Demon Loom
6	Legion of the Dead
7	The Mute Piper
8	The Watcher

**Bodies:** Any investigation of the city will turn up bodies, lots of bodies. The corpses of the former inhabitants of the city have been desiccated and preserved by the desert winds. Each building and each street will reveal a montage of daily life frozen dry in death. The corpses will be found in the positions in which they died. The scenes the characters discover can be banal (a baker by his ovens, or a shopkeeper amongst his wares), darkly humorous (a corpse on the toilet, or a pair copulating), or tragic (a mother with baby in a crib).

**Wealth:** Metal items, jewelry and occasionally fine ceramics can be found in the ruins, but Evaluate rolls should be made to separate the antiques from the trash. The amount of loot that the characters take out of the ruins is up to the Game Master. Encourage the players to load up on priceless items only to have them discard them in the desert as they attempt to trek back to civilization.

**Slortar's Temple:** A dark and imposing building, clad in sandstone with beautiful carved limestone friezes around the doorway and on the internal walls. The friezes depict numerous scenes of wanton hedonism, wild orgies and excess. A successful Idea roll by a player will reveal this to be the temple of Slortar. The temple lies just to the side of one of the main avenues, close to the Palace. Uniquely, not a grain of sand has penetrated this building. Investigations will reveal the desiccated corpses of the priests and few followers who unsuccessfully sought sanctuary from their god in his sanctum. The Priests are horribly disfigured, as befits their calling and the whims of their god.



**A Boy and his Lamps:** The characters will encounter a wild-eyed urchin boy scrabbling through the dirt. If questioned, the boy will be guarded with his response. Only a Fast Talk or Oratory roll will get him to reveal that he is searching for brass lamps. If asked why, he will look tearfully at the adventurers and explain that he once found a magic lamp and the demon in it brought him to this place. He wants to go home (his place of origin is left to the Game Master and could provide the start of a new adventure). If the characters follow the boy, he will lead them to a ruined house crammed full of spotless brass lamps. The boy is indeed the victim of a cruel demon. There are no demon lamps in the city and the boy's search for one has nearly driven him mad.

**The Demon Loom:** In one of the more intact buildings a man sits at a loom weaving. The fiber for the loom is provided from the heads of his wife and three children, who sit chained to benches by the loom. If questioned, the weaver will say the loom is magical and the carpet that he is making will take him and his family to safety. No, he is not making a flying carpet. The loom is indeed magical and is producing a map of the desert from the hair of the family. The loom will produce a map, centered on the current location of the loom, from human hair (which must still be attached to living human heads) that is woven on it. To get a useful map will take many years of hair growth during which time the hair providers cannot detach themselves from the loom. If they do so, the map will stop and the process must start again. The current carpet-map should be sufficient to get the characters out of the desert (just).

**Legion of the Dead:** Not all of the inhabitants Bahlahim went to their deaths without a fight. The crack guards of the ancient city turned out against the chaos lord, even though they knew the contest had already been decided. Amused by the Legion's attempt to engage him in combat, Slortar caused several of their number to continue to serve their city after their deaths. The characters encounter 2d6 of these skeletal guards. The undead will attack only if the party attacks them first, or if they appear to be looting the city. Otherwise the leader of the patrol will motion for them to move along.

**The Mute Piper:** The adventurers hear the mournful notes of a pipe coming from amidst the ruins of a building. If they investigate, they will find a young girl, in a dusty homespun dress, playing a pipe. It is the same young lass who delivered the logbook into their hands so many weeks ago. She stops playing as the characters approach and with a short nod begins to jog off through the ruins. If the party follows her she will lead them to the palace and go inside. They will be unable to find any trace of her within the walls of the palace.

**The Watcher:** Standing in the center square of the city is a twelve-foot bronze statue of a powerful, armed warrior. If the party has been to the palace and met the court, they will recognize the features of the Caliph Osimund awkwardly imposed upon this athletic body. The statue appears to have suffered little for the ravages of time even its alabaster eyes are intact and seem to watch the party intently. As they leave the square have the players make Idea rolls. Success indicates that a character looks back as he leaves only to see that the statue has turned to watch them go. The statue will never move while the party is watching, and appears to have no mechanism for turning or otherwise shifting its position. The truth is that it is an enchanted device of Qaleb the magician. Somewhere in the Caliph's Suite, in the palace, stands a mirror that reflects anything the statue sees.

## **THE PALACE IN THE RUINS**

On arrival at the Palace, the Vizier will meet the characters. The laws of hospitality demand that, having turned up as strangers, they are housed and fed at the Caliph's expense. If they can convince him they are people of importance (Fast Talk, Oratory or Charisma roll), they will be shown to the Guest Suite, otherwise they'll be invited to stay in the Servants Hall.

The palace has a powerful glamour cast over it to make it appear untouched by the ravages of time. N'urlgaash has cast this illusion over nearly everything in the palace: The inhabitants appear to wear the finest clothing; the furniture and appointments are of the most exquisite taste. The palace itself appears to be strong and whole, its walls covered in frescos of the most intricate and lurid detail. When the players look out of a window in the Palace, or out from the terrace, they will see the city of Bahlahim as it was two thousand years ago: bustling, splendid, and vast. This is another effect of the glamour. When they are outside the palace, the illusion will vanish, replaced by the time worn ruins of the city. This should cause the players a modicum of confusion. Characters who cast the Witch Sight spell will see through the illusion to the ruin that lies beneath. The reality is that the inhabitants are wasted wretches dressed in rags and the palace is little more than an eroded shell swept by the desert sands. There are three things in the palace that are not affected by N'urlgaash's illusions: The Crystal Heart, the altar, and Qaleb.

The Palace is quite vast and N'urlgaash can only maintain the illusion of grandeur, not the fabric of the building that has thoroughly decayed. In order to prevent accidents, the demon has arranged his glamour so that people moving from one room can only go to other safe rooms. The Demon immediately constructs an illusionary passage avoiding any obstacles for any persons who leave a room. Illusionary walls block real doors or passages to unsafe rooms. Each passageway created by the demon only leads to one other safe room. Being a demon from another plane, N'urlgaash is inconsistent about where a passage will lead. For example, a person can leave The Kitchen by the large doors near the oven once and end up at the Tower, but the next time they leave the kitchen by that route they'll end up at the Guest Suite. This trickery has not helped the sanity of any unfortunate visitors. Whenever the Party leaves a room, roll 1D10:

<b>D10</b>	<b>Room</b>
1	Altar Room
2	Audience Chamber
3	Courtyard
4	Caliph's Suite
5	Guard Tower
6	Guest Suite
7	Kitchen
8	Servants Hall
9	Terrace
10	Watch Tower

If the die roll indicates the room that the party just came from the Game Master can do one of two things: Have the characters emerge outside in the ruins of Bahlahim, or roll again for another room. If N'urlgaash is actively watching the characters, he can guide them to any room he pleases. For the most part, the servants and members of the court can move freely to their destinations. During the Nights of Terror, no one may escape the palace.

**Altar Room:** In the center of this large, square room stands a black, onyx altar. The craftsmanship is similar to the fountain in the courtyard, and it is covered with the same intricate geometric patterns. Any character who makes a Search or Tracking roll in this room will notice that the floor near the altar appears scuffed, as if the heavy altar can be shifted. It requires a STR -vs.- 60 resistance roll to move the altar, but up to 4 characters can participate. Once the altar is moved the party will find a passage leading into the basement of the palace (see The Dweller in Darkness, below). N'urlgaash will notice his lair has been uncovered, if the Altar is moved, and will summon 2D6 of the "servants" to attack the characters.

**Audience Chamber:** This is a long rectangular room, with a magnificent throne on a dais at one end. On either side of the dais lie ornate tables, one with a long bench for scribes to sit and the other laden with refreshments. Along one wall a dozen high-backed chairs are arranged in a row. The walls appear covered in sumptuous tapestries, celebrating the (dubious) achievements of the Caliph and his ancestors. A pair of grand doors stands opposite the dais, and a smaller door immediately behind it.

Whilst the Caliph holds court, or during evening entertainment, four guards will stand around the dais and another two will be positioned by the double doors. Half a dozen Servants will be on hand at all times. The Caliph and the court are most often found in this room conducting the business of state. During an audience, or entertainment, chairs will be provided, if the guests are of sufficient importance, otherwise they'll be expected to stand.

**Courtyard:** A fountain, gurgling water, lies in the center of the courtyard. It is carved from a single piece of black onyx and covered in an intricate geometric pattern. The workmanship is exquisite. If suffering from the effects of thirst, the characters require a POWx2 roll to avoid rushing immediately up to it for a drink. The water of the fountain has healing properties and when a character has quenched his thirst he will regain 1D6 STR and 1D4 Hit Points. The Game Master should decide how much of this water he will let the party carry away, and if it retains its properties outside the fountain.

**Caliph's Suite:** Extensive and apparently fabulously appointed series of rooms including the Caliph and his wife's bedrooms, bedrooms for the royal children, the Vizier's room, dressing rooms and separate bathing rooms for all, and a grand morning room. The suite also includes the Caliph's library (sadly none of the texts now survive) and a study. The suite may be entered and exited only through the morning room. N'urlgaash maintains the illusions in all the rooms of the suite. Moving between different rooms in the suite does not cause the players to reappear elsewhere in the palace.

**Guard Tower:** A lone man stands guard in this tower. His lacquered, scale armor and polished brass helm indicate he is a Quarzhasaati officer. A bow is clutched firmly in his left hand. He does not acknowledge the characters if they hail him. If anyone climbs into the tower they will notice that the man is completely blind.

**Guest Suite:** Large and apparently luxuriously appointed series of rooms including bedrooms, dressing rooms and separate bathing rooms and an impressive morning room. The suite may be entered and exited only through the morning room. N'urlgaash maintains the illusions in all the rooms of the suite. Moving between different rooms in the suite does not cause the players to reappear elsewhere in the palace.

**Kitchen:** The Kitchen is a huge room (apparently) deep in the bowels of the Palace with numerous pantries and storerooms leading off from the main area. Immense tables line the walls, a vast oven stands at one end and a series of roasting spits and cauldron fill the middle area. A splendid array of pots, pans and kitchen utensils hang from the walls. Large double doors stand near the oven (nominally to the audience chamber), plus doors that in the past led to the servants' quarters, the Caliph's Suite, the Guest Suite and the Terrace.

**Servants Hall:** Another large room, containing rows of beds each with a locker at the foot. Some beds have been curtained off for married servants. There are a few tables with ongoing games of cards or dice. The furniture appears functional rather than comfortable.

**Terrace:** Each terrace contains 1D6+6 revelers. They recline on cloth-of-gold divans, smoking from magnificent, enameled hookahs. The western terrace is arranged around a delicate, marble basin filled with quicksilver (mercury). Floating in the middle of this basin is the Crystal Heart of N'urlgaash. A Ward protects the basin, so Qaleb will be informed and thus appear a few minutes after the characters cross the barrier.

The Crystal Heart is a multifaceted sphere is nearly one foot (30 cm) in diameter. Most of the time it can be found floating in a pool of mercury on the terrace of the palace. Any player who makes an Evaluate roll will determine it to be worth several thousand bronze pieces. The Crystal Heart is actually the binding object for the demon N'urlgaash. If a character examines the crystal and succeeds in a Search roll he will notice the flicker of a dark shape within the facets. The Rune of Death's Embrace (see new magic in Appendix 2) protects the Crystal Heart. The crystal is hard, but also quite brittle. It will shatter if cast to the ground forcibly or under a single blow that causes more than 5 points of damage.

**Watch Tower:** The tower stands over 50 feet in height. A rickety, wooden staircase winds up the inside wall. When the characters enter have them each make the higher of a Search, or Idea roll. Success reveals a man hanging from the rafters high above. Of course he will also become visible if they climb the stairs. If any of the nomad guides escaped the characters it should be one of them hanging here (preferably Yassuf).

The preceding rooms are the only ones safe for the characters to enter. The others rooms are rubble strewn, with holes in the floors and walls, although still glamoured to look splendid. If a character manages to enter one of these rooms he must make a Dexterity roll each turn to avoid falling. The length of the fall is up to the Game Master to determine.

## **Denizens of the Palace**

**The Caliph and Court:** Some of the populace (all the nobles of the court and the Vizier) had already pledged their souls to other dark gods. Their souls remain as ghosts on the plane of the Young Kingdoms while the Lords of the Higher Worlds decide who rightfully owns them. The ghosts possess the bodies of travelers when their old ones have worn out. Their choices are not particularly appropriate - most of the women currently inhabit the bodies of stray (male) desert nomads. Fortunately N'urlgassh maintains the illusion of their former appearances, however a character with Witch Sight or one who gets too close to the flirtatious Aunt could be in for a shock. Of the original court the following survive:

**Caliph Osimund:** appears as a short, excessively fat man. A life of debauchery is written in the features of his pudgy face. Callous, and totally self-absorbed he will not talk directly to the characters but will whine incessantly to the Vizier.

**Princess Angela:** The wife of Osimund appears as fading harem beauty, all too aware that her attractions are dimming. She is sour, spiteful and rude if spoken to.

**Prince Osman:** is a handsome youth - clearly inheriting his charms from his mother. His eyes however reveal the latent cruelty and wantonness of his father. He will be eternally whispering of plots against his uncle (whom he despises) and the Vizier (whom he fears) to the courtiers and characters.

**Prince Tyfik:** An even viler version of his brother, the Caliph. Free of the (limited) responsibilities of Court, Tyfik gave over his entire existence to self-gratifying excess. He will attempt to cajole the characters into joining him in an orgy.

**Princess Serria:** Wife of Tyfik, she debased herself long ago in pursuit of the pleasures of her husband. Serria is grossly obese, self-obsessed and stupid.

**Princess Casiopha:** is another product of the harem. Her looks have faded, but less than that of the Caliph's wife. Gossipy (about fashions and court romance) and flirtatious she will quickly attach herself to the male character with the highest Appearance.

**The Vizier:** A tall, lean hollow cheeked man. Prior to the calamity, he was truly the power behind the throne. He will question the characters obsessively about political happenings outside the city; oblivious to the decline of the Empire he so faithfully served. He is utterly mad and believes that only by sticking to the routines of Court will the Empire survive. He may mutter about Qaleb bringing disaster on the city, but won't go into details (such as who Qaleb is, though he may be able to recall who the sorcerer is if pressed).

**Functionaries of the Court:** The dozen fops and hangers-on are an ill-assorted and unimpressive bunch of toadies. They are as worthless now as they were in life. Dressed outrageously, they will agree sycophantically with everything said by their betters, whilst gossiping cruelly and inanely amongst themselves.

The Caliph and his court are obliged by protocol (which they follow precisely, under the every watchful eye of the Vizier) to follow a rigid routine of activities throughout each and every day. Nothing interrupts this routine. It is exactly the same every day:

Wake at dawn  
Bathe  
Breakfast  
Hold Court (but nobody ever comes) until noon  
Bathe  
Lunch  
Recline on the Terrace until dusk  
Bathe  
Dinner  
Entertainment in the Audience chamber (but the entertainers never appear)  
Evening on the Terrace  
Bed

The Caliph and Court are pretty insensible and distracted most of the time. Unlike the servants, all of the Court actually experienced the destruction of the city. Particularly careful questioning will eventually reveal the basics of the plot: Slortar, at the behest of Qaleb the sorcerer, destroyed the city.

**Qaleb:** The Quarzhasaati sorcerer is responsible for the destruction of Bahlahim. What will set Qaleb apart from the other inhabitants are the state of his clothing and appearance. Qaleb is unaffected by the demon's illusion and thus appears in tattered rags with wild, unkempt hair. He is now only loosely in touch with reality. While he can see and interact with the characters, he is usually so detached that he appears mindless. The only time he shows any signs of lucidity are when either he or the Crystal Heart is threatened.

**The Staff:** There are some thirty staff members: visitors, who have been absorbed into the household. These are divided amongst ten guards (who generally stay where they are, except for the occasional visit to the Servants quarters) and twenty menials who shuffle around on errands for the court.

The guards and servants are not possessed by spirits, but rather have gone out of their minds with fear. Each night N'urlgaash replays the night of fear when Slortar took the city. People who have been lured to the palace receive a chosen role in this horror from the demon. As their sanity slips away they gradually assume this role during their waking hours. For the most part, the inhabitants of the palace will completely ignore the adventurers because they are not part of the demon's illusion. Callously slaughtering the inhabitants should earn the characters plenty of Chaos points, and possibly wake N'urlgaash early.

Some of the staff may be lucid enough to actually get a bit of information out of, most will think themselves Quarzhasaati servants, a couple might think the characters are monsters and attack. If the players question a member of staff, roll a D10 on the table below to determine the staff member's reaction:

<b>D10</b>	<b>Result</b>
1	Attacks characters.
2	Rolls on the floor screaming about "the demons".
3-6	Ignores characters.
7-8	Attempts to be helpful by giving (useless) directions to a room or exit.
9	Mumbles about "not being from here" or how he "wants to go home".
10	Looks at the characters in terror and screams, "Run now, whilst you still can!"

## **THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS**

The climax of the adventure is to encounter and defeat N'urlgaash. The Dweller in Darkness spends the day in the basement of the palace, which can only be reached from below the Altar Room.

**What N'urlgaash Wants:** N'urlgaash doesn't particularly want to stay in the current plane bound to an insensible master. Equally he has no desire to die. Ideally, from the demon's point of view, the adventurers will smash the Crystal Heart, thereby freeing The Dweller in Darkness to kidnap Qaleb back to his own plane for an eternity of horrible torture. If the characters kill Qaleb, then at least N'urlgaash gets to go home. However the theft of the Crystal Heart by the party would be a disaster as he would still be bound and less able to escape. N'urlgaash will use his abilities towards scaring the characters in the hope they will see either the Crystal Heart or Qaleb as the source of the problem and destroy one or the other of them. N'urlgaash is however bound by the terms of his original summoning to defend the Caliph and Court. If the characters attempt any physical or magical harm to any of them, N'urlgaash must manifest himself and attempt to kill the party.

**Defeating N'urlgaash:** The Dweller in Darkness is a nasty demon and the adventurers will have to be lucky, tough or crafty to beat him. There are basically three ways of killing the demon:

1. Best him in combat: Only a powerful or lucky party will be able to accomplish this. Characters armed with demon weapons will surely be able to destroy N'urlgaash in a fight.

2. Kill Qaleb: Slaying the summoner of the demon will break the binding and allow N'urlgaash to return to his plane. This may be troublesome for characters without magical weapons due to the sorcerer's defenses.

3. Destroy the Crystal Heart: By destroying the binding object of the demon the characters can again banish N'urlgaash back to his own plane. With any luck the players will be able to divine that the crystal is what the demon is bound to and be able to destroy it.

The fight with N'urlgaash should be memorable for the characters. The demon is more interested in frightening them than in actually harming any of them. For the initial portion of the fight, N'urlgaash will fight only haphazardly. Use half his skill and do not add his damage bonus to attacks. After several rounds of swatting the characters around (the Game Master should judge when his players are getting frustrated), Qaleb will appear holding the Crystal Heart in his hands. N'urlgaash will draw back and snarl:

*"Hah, here comes the old fool! Now, shatter that crystal and set me free!"*

Oblivious, Qaleb continues towards the combatants. If the characters do not attack the sorcerer, N'urlgaash will stop toying with them and begin to fight at full strength. If the players are smart, they will use the opportunity to slay the sorcerer or destroy the crystal while they have the chance.

If Qaleb is slain, the crystal will slip from his nerveless fingers and shatter against the stone floor. The destruction of the binding object releases an explosion of dark energy powerful enough to knock the entire party unconscious.

## **BANISHED TO THE SHADOWS**

Slortar is a petty god. He has always enjoyed the particular doom he laid upon Qaleb and will be quite upset with those responsible for releasing his soul "early". When the Crystal Heart is shattered, the oldest god will channel the life force of N'urlgaash into creating a temporary rift in the Multiverse. He will cast the interloping adventurers through this rift, stranding them on the Shadow Plane. The adventure *Shadows of the Past* details the party's exploits in their attempt to return home.

## **THE JOURNEY HOME?**

### **An Alternate Ending**

If the Game Master does not wish to use this adventure as a springboard to *Shadows of the Past* this alternate ending can be used:

*Consciousness returns with the realization that every muscle in your body seems to be strained. With an effort, you force your battered body to rise and survey your surroundings. The other members of your party are stirring nearby, and soon you are all on your feet.*

*The body of the sorcerer lies where he fell. His body, face and hands are blackened as if he had suffered a severe frostbite. The expression on his face is one of pure terror.*

*Rising amongst the ruins of the palace you notice its walls are broken and pitted. The relief's and frescoes eroded away. The explosion of the crystal could not have caused this devastation. This place appears to have been abandoned centuries ago. You watch as the wind forms rivulets of sand*

*in the ancient courtyard. The desert is re-burying this place. With luck it will never see the surface again.*

The Game Master should decide how many of the non-player characters survived the destruction of the crystal. Once the players have taken stock of the situation they will undoubtedly want to move away from the palace. He can be as cruel as he desires to the characters, perhaps having them wander about the desert for days and suffer the effects of dehydration again. Eventually the party will happen upon a caravan or a band of nomads. They will take the adventurers to an oasis or encampment where they can re-equip themselves and begin the journey back to Ilmiora.

## **APPENDIX 1: THE NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS**

### **YASSUF, age 39, Leader of the Guides**

Yassuf is the leader of a small band of nomad guides hired to take the party into the desert. He is tall and thin with an olive-colored complexion. His face is pitted and scarred from years in the desert. He seldom speaks, and when he does it is always in short, clipped sentences. He is loyal to his men and does not care to see them die for the adventurers' misguided purposes. When things start to look bad, he will betray the party making off with as much water as possible.

#### **Chaos 17, Balance 06, Law 12**

STR 14      CON 17      SIZ 14      INT 13      POW 14  
DEX 15      APP 09                              HP 16

**Damage Bonus:** +1D4

**Weapons:** Scimitar 104%, damage 1D8+1

Small Shield 98%, hit points: 20

Desert Bow 105%, damage 1D8+1D2+2

**Armor:** Barbarian Armor (1D8-1)

**Spells:** None

**Skills:** Bargain 78%, Craft: Bowyer/Fletcher 35%, Dodge 76%, Evaluate 52%, Hide 67%, Listen 89%, Move Quietly 72%, Natural World 98%, Navigate 86%, Oratory 62%, Physick 50%, Ride 116%, Search 54%, Track 92%, Trap 43%

## **DESERT GUIDES**

Yassuf's men are members of the Bedu tribe. They tend to remain by themselves and are want to shun any friendly approaches by the characters. They are quite loyal to their leader.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
STR	12	16	16	09	16
CON	12	10	13	17	13
SIZ	08	09	13	13	13
INT	14	10	14	10	14
POW	04	10	10	13	10
DEX	17	16	13	13	13
HP	10	10	13	15	13
DB	-	+1D4	+1D4	-	+1D4

**Weapons:** Scimitar 53%, damage 1D8+1

Desert Bow 64%, damage 1D8+2

**Armor:** Roll 1D6. 1-2: Barbarian, 3-4: Leather, 5-6: None

**Spells:** None



**Skills:** Jump 50%, Listen 35%, Natural World 25%, Navigate 25%, Ride 70%, Track 35%

## THE SAND DRAGON

See page 17 in *The Unknown East* supplement.

STR 24      CON 17      SIZ 22      INT 3      POW 14  
DEX 20      MOV 10                      HP 20

**Damage Bonus:** +2D6

**Weapons:** Sand Explosion\*-- Special

Bite 65/35% 1D10+4

**Armor:** 6 pt skin

**Skills:** Dodge 15%, Scent/Taste 85%, Sense Vibration 105%

## THE LEGION OF THE DEAD

The brave Legion of Bahlahim has been cursed to continue to serve their city after their deaths. These skeletal warriors now wander the streets of their ruined city keeping a peace that is rarely disturbed. See page 222 in *Stormbringer* for notes about Skeletons. Reuse these statistics as necessary.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
STR	10	12	10	12	11	12	11
SIZ	12	15	09	10	10	11	09
POW	01	01	01	01	01	01	01
DEX	14	14	12	11	11	10	09
HP	06	08	05	05	05	06	05
DB	-	+1D4	-	-	-	-	-

**Weapons:** Short Spear DEX x3%, damage 1D6+1

Shortsword DEX x3%, damage 1D6+1

Small Shield DEX x3%, Hit Points: 12

**Armor:** Corroding Bronze Scale Mail (1D6-2)

**Spells:** None

**Skills:** Notice Looter 60%

## QALEB, age unknown, Mad Sorcerer

Qaleb is skeletally thin. He is dressed in what once must have been ornate ceremonial robes, but are now mere tatters. His black hair and beard are unkempt and matted with sand. His eyes are a piercing blue color, yet they never seem to focus on anything properly. It is as if he is looking beyond this world and into the next.

**Chaos 36, Balance 10, Law 19**

STR 07      CON 09      SIZ 13      INT 18      POW 24  
DEX 14      APP 08                      HP 11

**Damage Bonus:** None

**Weapons:** None

**Armor:** Demon Armor (3D10)

**Spells:** None (Qaleb will no longer cast spells)

**Skills:** Detached Demeanor 98%

**QALEB'S LESSER DEMON ARMOR:** A black, onyx brooch inscribed with the sign of Chaos. When Qaleb is attacked, the brooch engulfs him in a startling electrical discharge.

INT 8 POW 15

**Abilities:** *Demon Armor*, adds 3D10.

**Need:** to be polished or rubbed for an hour each day.

## CAPTIVE SERVANTS OR GUARDS

These wretches have wandered into the palace throughout the years and are kept captive and tormented by the Dweller in Darkness. Driven mad by the illusions of the demon, during the day they enact the roles of servants from a bygone age. At night they are subjected to the terrors of the demon. If any of the Nomad Guides survived the Betrayal encounter the Game Master should have the characters find them amongst the captives. Reuse these statistics as needed.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
STR	08	11	08	11	10	10
CON	12	15	10	06	08	11
SIZ	12	07	10	11	11	11
INT	11	14	14	09	11	14
POW	15	11	10	13	08	10
DEX	15	14	13	13	11	10
HP	12	11	10	09	10	11
DB	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Weapons:** Roll 1D6.

1-2: Scimitar 25%, damage 1D8+1

3-4: Cudgel 30%, damage 1D6

5-6: Brawling 35%, damage 1D3

**Armor:** None

**Spells:** None

**Skills:** Stare Listlessly 90%

## N'URLGAASH, The Dweller in Darkness, greater demon, breed unknown

N'urigaash is cloaked in a sphere of darkness from which an occasional tentacle snakes out to make an attack. If the characters manage to slay him they will discover that his true form is little more than an intertwined mass of ropery coils.

STR 27	CON 34	SIZ 30	INT 18	POW 24
DEX 18	MOV 10			HP 32

**Damage Bonus:** +3D6.

**Abilities:** *Darkness*, treat as total darkness in 3-yard diameter.

*Demon Armor*, tough, rubbery hide, 5D10.

*Fear*, as Terror spell, 5-yard diameter.

*Glamour*, create illusions (see New Demon Abilities).

*Scent Emotion*, detect emotions at 20-yard range.

*See Sound*, see in darkness by echolocation, 100-yard range.

*Tentacle* x4, 1D8.

**Skills:** Common Tongue 36%, Own Plane 25%

**Need:** To cause fear and panic.

## **APPENDIX 2: NEW MAGIC**

### **New Spells and Runes:**

RUNE OF DEATH'S EMBRACE (3) -- Range is touch. Chaotic. This spell is the Runic version of Death's Embrace. See *The Bronze Grimoire*, p. 21.

### **New Demon Abilities:**

FEAR (varies) -- The demon projects an aura of fear so intense that even the stoutest heart may quail. It affects an area equal to the magic points invested in the ability, yards in diameter. This ability is treated as the spell of Terror. See *The Bronze Grimoire*, p. 37, but it does not cost the demon Magic Points to use it.

GLAMOUR (10) -- The demon is able to create complex illusions. The demon can project an illusion covering an area equal to its POW yards in diameter and lasting its POW in minutes. These illusions are real enough to fool most observers, but have no actual substance. Sorcerers who cast Witch Sight or succeed in an INTx1 roll will be able to perceive the truth. The illusion cannot do direct harm to any being, but can be used for purposes such as disguising a pit. The Game Master is the final arbitrator on what the ability can be used for.

**Game Master's Note:** N'urlgaash has a much more potent version of this ability.