

THE ORACLE'S DECREE

A DESERT ADVENTURE LOCATION BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT AND MICHAEL ATLIN

THE SITUATION

Centuries ago, a prosperous region was claimed by desert sands. The cliff-side fort of Pelaago was the gateway to the heartland, but it is lost within a searing wasteland.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY PLACES

- In lost Pelaago, there is an oracle who knows all secrets.
- Beyond the sands there is a fortress, last bastion against the scaled and treacherous Heelan.
- There is a fortress out in the desert, used as a base by strange, lizard-like bandits.
- In the desert, always carry holy water to sprinkle on your footsteps.

d10	Roll every 12 miles
1	A field of Sand Domes
2	The Rag-Rock Hermit *
3-4	d3 Heelan Bandits
5	The Buried Oracle *
6	The Heelan Hunting Party *
7	The Starsleigh *
8	A Water Shade
9	d6 Sand Sprites
10	Pelaago *

*If re-rolled, substitute d2 Water Shades

IMPRESSIONS OF THE DESERT

Far from a uniform waste, the desert terrain varies considerably.

Chunks of rock protrude from the sand, topped by hardy succulents.

The wind raises brown, gritty plumes from steep-sided dunes.

Shifting sand absorbs the energy of every step you make, never letting you hit your stride.

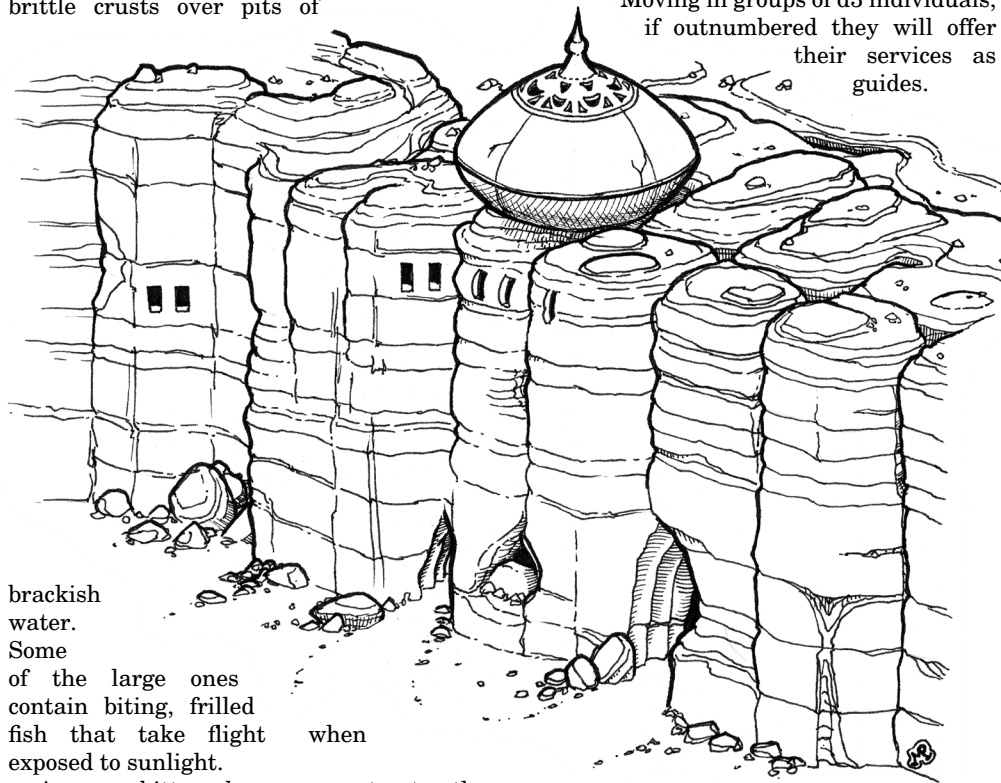
Hard, cracked sedimentary rock flakes up in layers.

The wind howls through a forest of

red standstone that has been carved into undulating shapes by windblown grit.

SAND DOMES

These round, sandy hills are actually thin, brittle crusts over pits of



brackish water. Some of the large ones contain biting, frilled fish that take flight when exposed to sunlight.

Anyone bitten by one contracts the *sinking curse*: for d3 days, the sand no longer supports them. Unless supported, victims will gradually sink in and suffocate.

RAG-ROCK HERMIT

A dirty hermit seated upon a spire of rock offers visitors the secret of drinking dust if they beat him at gambling.

This is difficult, as he is both a master cheater and wears a platinum Vinteralf medallion that brings him good fortune.

His secret is that he has befriended the **sand sprites**, and he dances with them instead of drinking. In return, he is looking

out for someone who can slay **Nirsiesel**.

The **bandits** fear him and will not approach, but he doesn't know why.

HEELAN BANDITS

These stooped, bipedal reptiles are sandy beige with bright blue stripes. They carry crude bronze knives, staves, and favor filigreed gold cuffs and piercings as jewellery.

Moving in groups of d3 individuals, if outnumbered they will offer their services as guides.

They try to lead their charges along 'shortcuts' far away from water sources in order to exhaust them, for Heelan can safely go without for a week. When guiding well-armed parties, they will try to find other Heelan groups 'for safety.'

THE BURIED ORACLE

A giant toad slumbers under the sand, surrounded by a field of dried dung and scraps of book leather. Heelan petitioners may be pouring flasks of water onto it to awaken it; they revere it as an oracle. If awakened, the toad will lash out with its tongue, eating the

first thing it sees. If it eats a book or scroll, the toad immediately pronounces the words in the listener's language. It speaks quickly; it does not repeat itself or pause until the book is done.

From time to time, the toad croaks a random phrase from one of the many works it has consumed, which the Heelans take for prophecies and inscribe carefully. All of the feces in the area contain fragments of scrolls in a variety of dead languages.

WATER SHADES

Water shades are pony-sized with four-fingered 'hands' and a tentril-like tongue. The patrol the desert, following travellers' tracks unerringly.

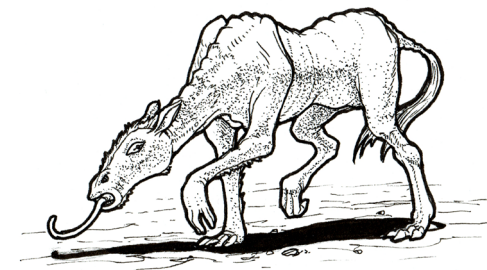
They lick travellers' footprints, which magically steals the life out of those who left them—fresh is best, but an hour old will do.

Anyone pursued by a shade must consume twice the normal amount of food and water or collapse from exhaustion; each shade can affect d2 people.

If spotted and chased, shades will keep their distance. They move as swiftly as dogs, but tire if forced to run for an extended period.

They travel singly, but it's possible to collect more than one if adventurers tarry near Pelaago.

The Heelan are less affected by shade-leeching than foreigners. Heelan shademasters have learned how to lead them to rocky places and snare them.



HEELAN HUNTING PARTY

Gyo-ritt, Heelan proudskull, leads a small band of hunters. Decorative silver bullets

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

have been drilled into his face and wrists. He and his six escorts are mounted on water shades; brilliant jade pennants flap from their spear points.

The water shades are broken and their tendrils removed. They can neither steal life nor run with their heavy riders, but they track as well as hounds and can march in the intense heat for hours without rest.

Gyo-ritt is looking for sport worthy of his honor and reputation as a hunter of champions, but is tired and willing to settle for lesser game.

His spear is a relic of his homeland and causes blood to catch fire as if it were oil.

SAND SPRITES

The whorls of dust that play across the dunes were once undines—water spirits—now exiled to the surface by Nirsiesel's magic. This is what has made the land dry.

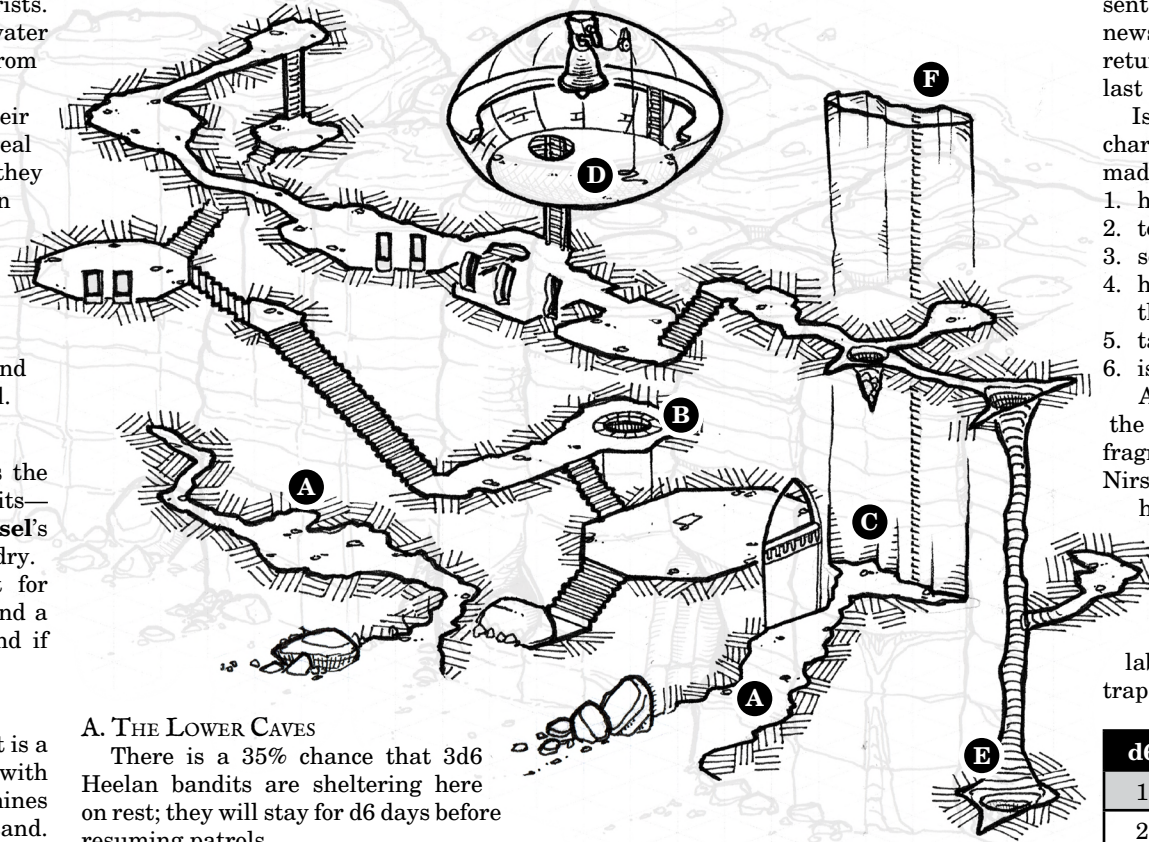
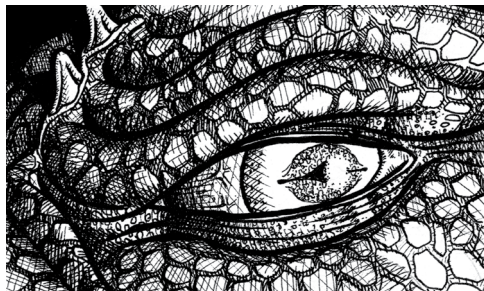
Dancing with them relieves thirst for an entire day. In exchange, they demand a small service or token of gratitude, and if this is not performed, they attack.

THE STARSLEIGH

This crashed Vinteralf zephyr-chariot is a mass of twisted, silvery metal engraved with astrological patterns. If touched, it whines loudly and sinks a little deeper in the sand. If the wearer of the **charioteer's helm** approaches, it hums and rises into the air. It floats magically, carrying up to 4 people in whatever direction the helm points, except north - owing to the damage.

PELAAGO, VINTERALF RUIN

In their original form, the cliff tunnels of Pelaago were part of a Vinteralf Stellarium. The ice has long gone, leaving only the caves.



A. THE LOWER CAVES

There is a 35% chance that 3d6 Heelan bandits are sheltering here on rest; they will stay for d6 days before resuming patrols.

B. THE WELL CHAMBER

Now dry, this 90' well is where the undines once dwelled. They can only approach this site if carried in water. If placed here, they will gradually unravel the desertification within thirty miles of Pelaago.

C. THE LONG CLIMB

Here the cavern opens into a tall, narrow fissure between the eroding rocks. Handholds have been cut into the rock forming an 80' ladder that runs from the desert floor to the top of the plateau.

It is one of the few ways up from the desert floor to the high plateau (F), a wind-swept, waterless realm that is home to the Heelan.

D. THE BELL CHAMBER

This dome of Heelan copper is ringed with a stone ledge. Its iron bell is the centerpiece of Nirsiesel's dessicating ritual, a great

spell that drove the undines from the well, turning the region to desert.

If struck outside the ritual, its baleful sound consumes d6 pints of blood-water from everyone present—most likely an incapacitating injury.

On the ledge are Nirsiesel's personal effects, including dozens of scrolls of his mad ramblings, and the charioteer's helm. Donning this Vinteralf artifact causes the wearer to hear the frozen song of the stars, discordant and piercingly loud. To those few who can tolerate it long enough to attune to it, it is a great boon both to navigation and to magical research.

NIRSIESEL, WARLOCK OF PELAAGO

The Heelan warlock of Pelaago was sent here decades ago to extend the desert, a task he completed soon after arriving. He

sent messengers across the plateau with the news and for further orders, but none ever returned. It has been sixteen years since his last contact with his homeland.

Isolation and long exposure to the charioteer's helmet have made him quite mad. On any given day he will be (roll d6):

1. hurling fire bolts from the fort's windows
2. torturing a wrongly accused Heelan
3. sobbing in the locked bell chamber (D)
4. hurling insults at his distant masters on the plateau (F)
5. talking to prisoners' bones in the pit (E)
6. issuing lunatic orders

A year ago, in desperation, he consulted the buried oracle—by chance it uttered a fragment of Heelan writings on duty, so Nirsiesel resigned himself to his task: he has begun preparations to move the bell, expanding the desert even further.

THE TRAPS OF PELAAGO

Nirsiesel is deeply paranoid, and has labored to fill every room of the fort with traps, not all in good order.

d6	Roll for each room's trap
1	Exploding runes floor tile
2	Hinged trapdoor, 8' spiked pit
3	Brass orb emits weakening rays
4	Chained block falls from ceiling
5	d8 wind-up, knee-high, brass axe-golems leap from wall panels
6	No trap

d6	Roll for each trap's condition
1	Triggers normally
2	Trap is not even armed
3	Trap is armed, but doesn't trigger
4	Fails to trigger once, then works
5	Triggers prematurely
6	Misfires, components fly everywhere

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